

FROM: PS/Secretary of State (B)
17 June 1993

cc PS/SofS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Atkins (DOE,DED&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Mr Fell - B
Mr Mackenzie, DOE
Mr Hamilton, DOE
Mr Quinn - B
Dr McCoy

1752
21 JUN 1993

D J Watkins - B

DR BRENDAN MURTAGH

Thank you for your minutes of 5 May and 14 June (not to all), which preceded the Secretary of State's meeting this week with Dr Murtagh. You and I were also present. Dr Murtagh began by pointing out that religiously segregated areas have always been a feature of Belfast. At times of heightened tension these have been more clearly defined and there has been greater movement of population into them as a result. Survey statistics had shown that higher levels of segregation were now the norm, save for some middle class areas, such as Malone, which had doubled its Roman Catholic population in recent years.

2. Dr Murtagh explained that most of his work had been done in interface areas, where there was now a higher pressure on housing in Roman Catholic, than in Protestant districts. There were a number of factors contributing to this, not just higher birth rate on the Catholic side, but some element of a natural movement of population with quality of life decisions, where people moved up in the housing market in a natural social progression. He also described - 'voice and exit' - where anxieties were expressed, notably by Unionist politicians, and there followed a movement of population out of that particular area. He believed that the de-population on the Protestant side, particularly in the Shankill area, which was blamed on Government policy, was for a variety of these reasons. Also of significance in this area, he said, was a deeply ingrained psychological feeling of vulnerability (rather than threat).

3. Continuing his theme, Dr Murtagh said experience had shown that, where communities of roughly equal size came together for a mutual interest issue, then they could develop understanding and gain respect. He cited the Springvale project as an example of this, where an effort had been made to structure the two communities to come together by setting up a cross-community liaison group, sponsored by DOE. He suggested that such cross-community liaison did not just develop but had to be encouraged to do so. This may not lead to mixed living or a reduction in violence, but could lead to better understanding. He agreed that the Springvale experiment had to some extent fallen apart, not least because of the tensions caused by peace lines and particularly Lanark Way.

4. Cross-community work of this type was often from a small base, short term and prone to attack by other interest groups from within the respective communities. He was concerned that contacts were not currently being sustained and argued that what was necessary to make them more enduring was a definite link with the various Government agencies responsible for housing, planning, economic development, all perhaps under the umbrella of community relations. He said that a co-ordinated and focussed plan for the thirteen interface areas, with their diverse characteristics, was required. CR was not an add-on optional extra. He cited the case of some cities in the United States where project officers were appointed in racially mixed areas with community relations responsibilities. He also made the point that some limited survey work which he had done had shown that there was more contact than perhaps is currently believed between and across existing peace lines.

5. The Secretary of State thanked Dr Murtagh for coming to see him and for explaining his thoughts on the development of cross-community contact and understanding between separate camps, rather than on the basis of encouraging mixed living. He said he had found the discussion very helpful indeed, though clearly more research needed

to be done, particularly in the specific 13 or 14 interface areas in Belfast. Dr Murtagh agreed to assist in further studies into problems in these areas and to share his research findings with those in Government, lead by Central Secretariat, who were currently taking forward studies on peacelines.

Signed

W K LINDSAY
Private Secretary

LMcI/SOFS/14448