



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Irish Street Names  
Speaking Points

- You will recall I wrote to you on 7 August on this matter. I set out in my letter the arguments we see in favour of repealing the relevant provision of the 1949 Act which prohibits the use of Irish street names in Northern Ireland. I suggested you might consider the repeal of this provision as part of your planned changes to the NI local Government system.
- It seems to me hard to argue against a case that, where the majority of the local population so wish, there should be provision for the erection of street signs in the Irish language. For many nationalists, this is an important symbolic issue and I believe that a removal of the current prohibition would be very widely welcomed.
- Removal of the prohibition would also - and as you know this is always an important consideration for us - remove another propaganda weapon from Sinn Fein. The sad reality at the moment is that Sinn Fein has this propaganda weapon and seeks to win the esteem of the nationalist community by going ahead and erecting signs in Irish despite the prohibition in the legislation.
- You mentioned at the October Conference that you were carrying out a review of the situation; I wonder are you now in a position to let me know how your thinking is developing.

## Irish Street Names

### Briefing Note

It was agreed at the last Conference to return to this item in November. We have been told in the Secretariat that the Secretary of State "is very close to formulating a view" but wants to share a politician's assessment with the Minister on what he views as very complex issues.

#### Background

The Northern Ireland Public Health and Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1949 provides that street names in the North can only appear in English. In 1987 we pushed for the deletion of this provision on the basis that it is seen as symbolising governmental hostility to the Irish language and, by extension, to the cultural identity of the nationalist community. The then Secretary of State decided against taking action to repeal the provision on the basis that implementation would fall to local Councils; he argued that the inevitable refusal to Unionist controlled Councils to allow Irish language street names would worsen sectarian divisions.

#### Present Position:

In June this year, the British side indicated to us informally at official level that it might be worthwhile to raise this matter again at the Conference. On 7 August, the Minister wrote to Secretary of State Brooke on the matter (copy of letter attached) suggesting that work currently in hand on amending the NI local government system might provide an opportunity to repeal the relevant provision of the 1949 Act. At the October Conference, Mr. Brooke indicated that a review of the current situation was underway. He asked to be allowed to "report back" at the November Conference.

Anglo-Irish Division  
29 November, 1990



OIFIG AN AIRE GNOTHAÍ EACHTRACHA  
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS

BAILE ATHA CLIATH 2  
DUBLIN 2

7 August, 1990.

CULT SA/2.

The Rt. Hon. Peter Brooke, M.P.,  
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Dear Peter,

I thought it might be helpful and timely to write to you about the issue of street names in the Irish language.

This is a matter on which there are strong feelings within the nationalist community and on which we have been seeking progress since the signature of the Agreement. As you know, our basic position is that we consider the present prohibition on erection of street names in any language other than English - as set out in the Northern Ireland Public Health and Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1949 - to be at odds with the spirit of the Agreement and the Review (paragraph 8 of the latter, for instance, refers to the "central importance in the implementation of the Agreement of measures to accommodate the rights and identities of the two traditions in Northern Ireland"). We are also concerned of course that this issue could be used by subversive groups to try and undermine our common efforts under the Agreement to make progress in relation to issues of importance to the nationalist community.

The position on your side to date has tended to be that repeal of this provision of the 1949 Act would be somewhat controversial - I understand that there has been particular concern about the likely impact on the atmosphere in local Councils. Given that, in certain Councils at least, there has been some improvement in the atmosphere over the last year or so, I would very much hope that you might now be prepared to reconsider your position on this issue. If you could see your way to doing so, it occurs to us that the legislation which you are currently preparing on changes in the system of local government in Northern Ireland might well be an appropriate vehicle for repeal of the relevant provision of the 1949 Act.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

  
Gerard Collins, T.D.,  
Minister for Foreign Affairs.