



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2020/17/46
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Glor na nGael
Speaking Points

- Thank you for your letter of 23 August which I of course read very carefully. I note the positive things you say - both in your letter to me and in your letter to Glor na nGael - about the Irish language and the assistance which you and Dr. Mawlinney have given to efforts to promote the language. I readily acknowledge this and, as you know, we are very supportive of your work with Ultach and the Cultural Traditions Group.
- It is against this background that I find the withdrawal of funding from the West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael particularly difficult to understand. I am obviously very anxious to hear the considerations which led to your decision. As of now, I have to say that the clear message we have from people knowledgeable about the situation on the ground in West Belfast is that the Glor na nGael Committee does not have paramilitary links and is not in any way a conduit for funds to the IRA.
- This is not to say that there are no Sinn Fein supporters or sympathisers among the members and activists in the organization. Indeed, it is almost inevitable that there would be some Sinn Fein supporters among the membership of any Irish language organization in West Belfast. The real question, I would have thought, is whether there is any institutional connection with Sinn Fein or the paramilitaries or any likelihood of leakage of funds. As I have said, the very widespread belief is that this is not so.
- I have been struck, as you must have been, by the coalition of support which has developed on Glor na nGael's behalf. It includes a range of people who are utterly and unreservedly opposed to the IRA. In the absence of evidence being produced, I have to say it is difficult to see these people being convinced that Glor na nGael is in

any way a 'front' organisation for the IRA.

- The real beneficiaries of the present situation, it seems to me, are Sinn Fein. They are delighted with this propaganda weapon and the opportunity to portray the British Government as anti-language and by extension, anti-nationalist. They will undoubtedly get as much mileage out of it as possible, particularly in the U.S.
- [If the Secretary of State mentions the arms find in Norfolk Parade: Yes I had heard of this arms find and that one of the residents in the house is an ACE worker with Glor na nGael. But I do not see this incident in itself as proving anything. Presumably the man in question was receiving an ACE worker's salary from Glor na nGael and no more. Or do you have reason to believe otherwise?].
- Let me say, finally, that I was disappointed at the manner in which we heard about these decisions. As you know we heard of the initial withdrawal of funding the day after the letter issued to the West Belfast Committee. As to the appeal decision, it was only after we heard through our own sources that an announcement was imminent, that we succeeded in getting a briefing through the Secretariat.

WSO81

Glór na nGael

Briefing Note

Background

1. On 23 August, the West Belfast branch of Glór na nGael was notified that its government funding would be terminated as of 31 August (the funding amounted to £80,000 which was used to employ workers at seven Irish language nursery schools in Belfast.) In the official letter of notification, the only explanation given was a reference to a Parliamentary Statement in June 1985 by the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in which he stated that government grants would not be given in situations where "community groups, or persons prominent in the direction or management of (these) groups, have sufficiently close links with paramilitary organisations to give rise to a grave risk that to give support to those groups would have the effect of improving the standing and furthering the aims of a paramilitary organisation, whether directly or indirectly".
2. The West Belfast Committee has vehemently denied any links with paramilitary organisations; it points out that a prominent Sinn Féin councillor in fact resigned from the committee three months before the decision was taken to withdraw NIO funding. The Committee's claims to be essentially apolitical are widely supported by those knowledgeable about the situation on the ground in West Belfast - Patsy McGlone, for example, the General Secretary of the SDLP knows the Chairperson and committee members well and is quite confident that there is no paramilitary connection. There is very significant support for Glór na nGael within Northern Ireland, from the British Labour Party and from Irish-American politicians.
3. The matter was raised by the Minister at the Conference on 15 September; on that occasion Mr. Brooke did not share any information as to what had led the NIO to the decision; however, he did make clear at the Conference and the

subsequent press briefing that it was open to Glor na nGael to appeal the decision and that in the past, a number of such appeals had proved successful. Subsequently, the NIO wrote to Glor na nGael and the Committee replied with information which it hoped would lead to a reversal of the decision to withdraw funding.

Present Position

4. On 22 October Mr. Brooke wrote to the Chairperson of the West Belfast Committee conveying a negative decision. He again indicated that the decision to stop funding was in the context of the 1985 policy position; he stated that a review of the original decision was carried out but that he was "satisfied that the circumstances are such that public funding should continue to be withheld from the West Belfast Committee." He explained at some length that the decision was not aimed at Glor na nGael as a whole, nor at Irish language support activities generally. He implied that the nurseries and their employees might be Governmentally funded in some other way; if this offer was not taken-up, the existing funding would be used on other West Belfast projects. (Text of letter at Annex A.)

5. On 23 October, the Secretary of State wrote to the Minister on the matter (text at Annex A). The letter repeats much of the contents of the letter to Glor na nGael; it implies continuing links between the West Belfast Committee and the IRA without providing any concrete evidence. Mr. Brooke states: "you will appreciate that I have not taken this decision lightly, not least because of your own representations." [It is noteworthy that the British failed to give us any advance notice of the initial decision to withdraw funding and we were informed of the appeal decision only after we told the British that we were aware from other sources that an announcement was imminent.]

6. The West Belfast Committee has now decided to take court action in an effort to have funding restored. It had earlier been contemplating such an action but had held off pending the outcome of the appeal.
7. We also heard on 23 October, privately through the SDLP, that the security forces the previous day had made an arms find in a house in Norfolk Parade in Belfast and that one of the residents of the house was an ACE worker with the West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael. The man involved is presently being held with no decision taken as to whether he will be brought before the Courts. Mr. Brooke may refer to this incident during his discussion with the Minister at the Conference. The Minister might indicate that we are aware of the incident but would not see it in itself as providing a basis for withdrawal of funding from the Committee.

Anglo-Irish Division
October, 1990.

W4950

26:14 23 Oct 1990

Amstrad FX9600AT

Page 2

Annex A

24 OCT '90 16:51 S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 01 2106722

P.1



Secretary of State

Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast BT4 3STMs Noirin ui Cleirigh
Chairperson
Glor na nGael
West Belfast Committee
145 Falls Road
BELFAST

22 October 1990

Dear Chairperson,

Thank you for your letters of 7 and 18 September 1990, and your further letter of 5 October about the withdrawal of public funding from the West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael. I have particularly noted the information contained in your letter of 18 September and the other representations made on behalf of the West Belfast Committee.

As you are aware from earlier correspondence the decision to withdraw funding from the West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael was taken in terms of the policy set out in the Parliamentary Statement of 27 June 1985 by Mr Mudd. The policy is designed not only to protect public funds against direct abuse but also to ensure that public funding would not otherwise have the effect of improving the standing and furthering the aims of paramilitary organisations either directly or indirectly. It does not provide, as some have suggested, for a system of "political vetting"; political belief is not an issue. In the light of the representations received I have reviewed the application of the policy to the West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael but, after careful consideration of all the information currently available to me, I am satisfied that the circumstances are such that public funding should continue to be withheld from the West Belfast Committee.

Some people have misinterpreted the decision to withdraw funding from the West Belfast Committee as applying to Glor na nGael at large and as being directed against the Irish language and culture. Any such allegations are demonstrably untrue and I reject them utterly.

24 OCT '90 16:52 S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 01 2106722

P.2

The aims and objectives of Glór na nGael as a language and cultural movement are not in question. Indeed, the Government clearly recognises and respects the importance of the Irish language and culture to many who view it as an integral part of their tradition. This is reflected in the curricular structures announced for schools as part of the recent education reforms and the substantial public funding for the teaching of Irish through the statutory school system in Northern Ireland, including teaching through the medium of Irish where a sufficient demand exists. Alongside this the Government will continue to support efforts to enhance the awareness and appreciation of the Irish language within its Cultural Traditions Programme and additional resources have recently been made available for this purpose. These are initiatives to which I, and Dr Mawhinney as the Minister responsible, attach great importance. However Government is not prepared to support what are otherwise wholly desirable activities where the circumstances described in Mr Hurd's Statement prevail.

As you know the Training and Employment Agency has already made it clear that it is prepared to consider alternative arrangements to ensure that the ACE employees and the nursery activities previously supported through the ACE scheme managed by the West Belfast Committee are not disadvantaged by the decision to withdraw funding. This offer still stands but should it not be taken up the Government will ensure that the funds available for that purpose will not be lost to West Belfast.

I realise that this decision will be a disappointment to you. It is, of course, subject to review should circumstances change.

L. Sweeney
Min. Brooke

PB

CONFIDENTIALAnnex B

Gerard Collins Esq TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs
Department of Foreign Affairs
Iveagh House
DUBLIN

Manage received
by me 23 October 1980.
Signed letter to follow.

At our last meeting on 14 September there was some discussion on my decision to withdraw funding from the West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael. Others also wrote to me on the same matter, including the West Belfast Committee itself which asked me to reconsider the decision.

I have carefully considered all the representations received, and the information recently provided by the Committee at my request. However I have concluded, on the basis of all the information currently available to me, that public funding should continue to be withheld. I thought it important that the West Belfast Committee should be told of my decision as soon as possible and this is now being conveyed to them.

As you know the decision to withdraw funding was taken in accordance with the policy set out in Douglas Hurd's Parliamentary Statement of 27 June 1985. The policy is designed not only to protect public funds against direct abuse but also to ensure that public funding would not otherwise have the effect of improving the standing and furthering the aims of paramilitary organisations either directly or indirectly.

You will appreciate that I have not taken this decision lightly, not least because of your own representations. The decision, which remains subject to review if circumstances change, applies only to the West Belfast Committee of Glor na nGael and not the organisation at large, whose work I fully respect. There is no question either of this decision signalling any weakening in our respect and support for the Irish language and culture, which is an important part of

CONFIDENTIAL

412/

the recent curricular reforms and the Cultural Traditions Programme supported by the Central Community Relations Unit. These are initiatives to which both I and Dr Mawhinney attach great importance.

// As is customary in such matters we will be making every effort to ensure that the ACE workers and the nursery group activities affected by the decision do not suffer. The Training and Employment Agency has been in touch with those concerned but the offer of discussion has not been taken up. Should this remain the case the Government will ensure that the money available for that purpose will not be lost to West Belfast.

PB