

THE EUROPEAN BUREAU FOR LESSER USED LANGUAGES

UNITED KINGDOM COMMITTEE

To the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland,
Stormont,
Belfast.

PROPOSALS FOR THE SECURING OF EQUALITY OF
RIGHTS FOR IRISH-SPEAKING PEOPLE IN NORTHERN
IRELAND.

ADOPTED by the Northern Ireland Sub-Committee of the
United Kingdom Committee on the 12 day of March 1986.

FOREWARD.

These proposals are drawn up to assist the Northern Ireland Office in selecting the obvious areas for action and for assistance from the Exchequer where such is absent or inadequate in Northern Ireland. It is a broad outline of the Problems facing Irish Speakers in Northern Ireland to-day and is not intended to be exhaustive: other areas which are not mentioned will come to light on closer examination.

THE PROBLEM

The Whole of the population of Northern Ireland, inclusive of its Irish Speaking Community, is approximately 1,500,000. The Irish-Speaking Community is estimated on the best estimates as 60,000 who would answer a "Language Question" on a Census of Population in the affirmative. It is estimated that 20,000 would say that they "had some knowledge of the language", 20,000 would say that they "had a working knowledge of the language" and 20,000 would say that they used the language daily.

The Whole Population of Northern Ireland are subject to the laws and Parliament of the United Kingdom.

Taxation is levied in Northern Ireland at exactly the same rates and under the same legislation as in the other parts of the United Kingdom.

United Kingdom expenditure is not paid out even-handedly throughout

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the United Kingdom, and certain sections of the population are not treated fairly when compared to other sections of the population.

The Irish-Speaking Community in Northern Ireland do not receive equality of treatment from the Exchequer.

THE LANGUAGE QUESTION IN THE CENSUS OF POPULATION

Alone among the indigenous languages of the United Kingdom Irish has not been made the subject of a question in the Census of Population. This may not seem important at first sight, yet this is crucial to this problem in the view of the Committee. All Government financial planning and economic strategies are based on the figures for the population and the sub-groups within the population revealed by the Census of Population. Without this information the Government cannot plan how it should fairly divide "the National Cake" among the various groups claiming a share. In the case of Irish, no such question has been asked since the Census of Population of 1911. It is therefore a priority that such a question should be asked, commencing with the Census of Population of 1991, to ensure that the Irish-Speaking community obtain their fair share of "the National Cake" .

THE STATUS OF IRISH UNDER THE LAW

Alone among the indigenous languages of the United Kingdom Irish is prohibited by law in two spheres of Public Life:-

- i) By the Public Health and Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 1949 the use of any language save English in the naming of Streets by local authorities is prohibited in Northern Ireland.
- ii) By the Administration of Justice (Language) Act (Ireland) 1937 the use in the Courts of Law in Northern Ireland of any language save English is prohibited.

These areas may not seem very important at first sight but they clearly establish Irish, and those who speak it, as "Second-Class". Since they are at first sight unimportant, then there ought to be no difficulty in repealing these pieces of legislation which are offensive to Irish Speakers. Repeal does not commit each local authority or each Court of Law instantly to become Irish-speaking. It removes the force of law from such forum, leaving it to the various local authorities, or the various parties to litigation, to consider the matter of language and deal with it as they wish.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE QUESTION IN THE CENSUS OF POPULATION

FUNDING FOR IRISH LANGUAGE CULTURAL EVENTS AND LITERATURE.

The Arts Council of Northern Ireland is the only medium at the moment for the granting of financial assistance towards Irish Language cultural events and literature. Too narrow a budget and too narrow directives seem to be in operation between the Government and the Arts Council. It is not sufficient for a festival or literary work to be suitable for the Irish Community. At the moment the Arts Council seems to look at the event or work with regard to the intrinsic artistic merit of the same vis-a-vis the totality of its applications and its available funds. The consequence is that for many years now no event or work has received financial assistance from this body. These criteria do not apply in other parts of the United Kingdom. Equality with other parts of the United Kingdom demands that a separate budget for Irish Language events and works, reflecting the number of persons within the Irish Speaking Community, be made available through the Arts Council or through a separate sub-division thereof.

In this context, the dearth of cultural events and literature in Irish due to neglect over the last 60 years would seem to justify an initial payment in excess of the normal commitment.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.

The Department of Education have taken the "first step" towards equality of treatment in funding the Bunscoil Ghaelach at Shaw's Road, Belfast, and the Irish Stream at Steeletown Primary School in Derry. For many years now the Irish Language has been taught in Secondary Schools as requested by individual school managers. Irish has for some time now been available as a subject through Technical Colleges both in day and night classes.

Yet much remains to be done to obtain equality of treatment.

- i) Many more Irish Speaking Primary Schools and Irish Language Streams in primary schools will be required to service adequately the growing young population of Irish Speakers. Applications for such will have to be dealt with promptly as soon as a clear need is shown in any area.
- ii) Secondary Education after Primary Education is the next logical step. Accepting that Irish Speaking children have special educational needs, then the establishment of appropriate streams in secondary educational institutions is an unavoidable conclusion to satisfy such needs.
- iii) Nursery education is relatively new to Northern Ireland. Over the twenty-odd years since it was first introduced here, no assistance has been available to any Irish Speaking Nursery School. Some of the limited funds available for this brand of education should be spent on Irish Speaking Nursery Schools.

iv.

iv) Educational bursaries and scholarships ought to be available in Northern Ireland as in other parts of the United Kingdom. Here finance to assist children speaking Irish and children learning Irish is needed to enable them to attend Gaeltacht Colleges to improve the standard of the language.

THE IRISH LANGUAGE IN THE MEDIA.

Of all the various elements that go to make up the Media today, only the British Broadcasting Corporation receives direct Government Funding. If the BBC is to represent truly the total population, then its expenditure on local programmes should reflect all the minority languages.

Praise is due to the BBC for the fact that they have taken the "first Step" in the introduction of Irish Language Programmes for Irish Speakers and learners on radio. The view is widely held here that the amount of money spent on the production of Irish Language programmes could approximate more closely to the actual proportion of Irish speakers in the community. In the absence of a positive statement from the BBC on comparative expenditures it is difficult to answer the question of whether or not the BBC is discharging its obligation of equal treatment towards the Irish Speaking Community. The suspicion does exist in the minds of many Irish Speakers that they are not.

SUMMARY

Following the division of topics in the Arfe Resolution, the Northern Ireland Sub-Committee would recommend that the following matters should receive early Government attention:-

1. In the Field of Public Life and Social Affairs.

- 1.1 The Government should declare immediately its intention to include a "language question" in the Census of Population of Northern Ireland in 1991.
- 1.2.1. The Government should immediately repeal the offensive legal prohibitions on the use of Irish in public administration.
- 1.2.2. The Government should make funds available to local authorities which might wish to erect public signs in the Irish language.

- 1.2.3. The Government should make funds available to the Arts Council of Northern Ireland earmarked specifically for the encouragement of cultural events and literature in the Irish language.
- 1.2.4. The Government should make funds available through the Local Education and Library Boards or through a new Board for the provision of educational bursaries to improve the standard of Irish language and the learning thereof outside of the classroom.
- 1.3. The Government should encourage the Irish Speaking Community to use Irish in its daily dealings with the members of the civil service and the police who are fluent in Irish by encouraging those members of the civil service or police who are fluent in the Irish language to display a symbol such as the "fainne" as a sign of fluency.

2. In the Field of Mass Communications.

The Government should make the necessary funds available to the BBC to achieve equality of treatment for Irish Speakers. Co-operation between BBC-NI and BBC-Scotland could help to conserve funds.

3. In the Field of Education.

- 3.1.1 More primary schools and primary streams in the Irish Language are needed to cater for the demand for such education throughout Northern Ireland.
- 3.1.2. Consideration should be given to the provision of an Irish Language Stream in a Secondary School at a suitable central location.
- 3.2. Funds should be made available to provide nursery schools in the Irish Language and to assist in the better conduct of those already in existence without Government help.



The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages
Le Bureau Européen pour les Langues moins répandues

UNITED KINGDOM COMMITTEE

NORTHERN IRELAND SUB-COMMITTEE,

c/o Séamus de Napier,
Quoilequay House,
Quoile,
Downpatrick,

12th March 1986.

T Pearson, Esq.,
Central Secretariat,
Stormont Castle,
Belfast BT4 3ST

Dear Sir,

At the request of the Sub-Committee I enclose a copy of "Proposals for the securing of Equality of Rights for Irish-Speaking People in Northern Ireland" adopted this day by the Sub-Committee.

Yours faithfully,

Seamus de Napier
Seamus de Napier

Northern Ireland Representative.

Home. I spoke to Mrs Hamilton
SOS office and asked her that we
had received this correspondence and
would prefer to deal with it at
official level.

18/3/86

Mr. Cairns
The proposals in the attached paper
have all been made before on separate
occasions and responses have been
formulated. The assertion that Irish
speakers in NI are second class citizens is
rubbish - they are no more so than French
or Latin speakers. I believe the Govt has
a reasonable story to tell on its assistance
towards Irish. We would need to prepare a
formal response to this paper. May I discuss it?
Y.P.
13/3/86