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MACBRIDE CAMPAIGN

NOTE OF A MEETING AT NETHERLEIGH ON 24 SEPTEMBER 1990

Present: Mr C Gowdy - DED (Chairman)
Mr R Spence - Central Secretariat
Mr R Smartt - DED
Mr M Bohill - IDB
Mr J Ritchie - IDB
Ms P McAlister - DED
Ms J McIver - SIL NIO
Mr A Henderson - British Embassy Washington
Ms P Thompson - DED

Activity in State Legislatures

Following Mr Gowdy's introduction Ms McAlister gave an overview of the Campaign and its effects up to the present and Mr Henderson provided a report from the US perspective and presented a paper (attached). It was agreed that 1990 has been our best year yet with none of the 10 State Bills having passed, although the legislatures were still in session in Pennsylvania and Ohio. However it was evident that the campaign has by no means run out of steam. There are strong indications that activity will be stepped up again in 1991. It seems fairly certain that at least 10 (and as many as 18) States will face MacBride Bills, with possible attempts strengthen existing legislation in New Hampshire and Vermont by including divestment provisions. In California and Maine where Bills have been stopped in the past by Gubernatorial veto, Governors will change and Bills re-presented in 1991 will stand a much better chance of passing. Changes in the balance of power in several other States could also affect the position. We are currently in a honeymoon period with regard to the Fair Employment Act which is having a positive influence on the open-minded, but this advantage might well end when monitoring information becomes publicly available. Life could become even more difficult at that point if we are unable to demonstrate swift action to punish apparent wrongdoers and correct imbalances. Furthermore, the wide range of information available could be used selectively by MacBride proponents.

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Foreign Agents Registration Act

It seems likely that the Foreign Agents Registration Act will not become a problem until next Spring at the earliest. There is a strong likelihood that the decision will be in favour of NI lobbyists registering although there remains some possibility that (unpaid) NI witnesses might be able to avoid registration.

Lobbying Activity

The selection of professional lobbyists in the US is something of a lottery but by and large we have obtained good value for money and a number have provided an exceptionally good service. Co-ordination among NI lobbyists and witnesses, professional lobbyists and the Consulates has been generally good.

The Hassle Factor

It remains difficult to quantify the hassle factor of the campaign. Reactions vary but most of the larger companies now seem fairly relaxed about their ability to handle the situation. However the possibility remains that some of those more recently targeted, with small undertakings in Northern Ireland, could decide to rationalise, move to the Republic or set up a franchise operation. There is no firm evidence to demonstrate that companies have not invested in Northern Ireland because of the MacBride Campaign, but it is recognised that it is difficult to prove a negative. The IDB is currently surveying potential investors, using a questionnaire containing 2 questions relating to the effect of violence and political instability on their decision-making process. IDB will advise us of the results which should be available by mid-October but it seems likely that the main reason for not investing in Northern Ireland is security followed by economic considerations, with political considerations next and MacBride well down in the order. (Action: Mr Bohill)

IDB considers that there is still a need to maintain contact with companies affected by the campaign and to provide support.

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Social Responsibility Pension Funds

It is recognised that a problem is presented by the introduction by investment institutions eg Prudential Bache, Fidelity Bank, Harvard and TIAA-CREF, of funds which specifically bar investments in Northern Ireland companies which have not adopted MacBride. Mr Henderson confirmed that the Embassy would maintain close contact with TIAA-CREF in view of their promise to ensure that the Fair Employment Act rather than MacBride would be their main guide. (CREF launched a social fund account in early 1989 which does not invest in companies which (a) have economic ties to South Africa; (b) have operations in Northern Ireland which have not adopted the MacBride Principles or have not conducted their operations in a manner consistent with those Principles and in compliance with the 1989 Northern Ireland Fair Employment Act; or (c) have significant involvement in the manufacture of weapons, nuclear energy, alcoholic beverages or tobacco). However Mr Bohill advised that Mr Ashley Ray who is responsible for targeting the insurance and pension fund sector in IDB, had not come across any problem in this area.

Winning Hearts and Minds

It was difficult to know how to cope with activity in the Colleges where speaking engagements involving such people as Bernadette McAliskey, Father Des Wilson, Oliver Kearney, Inez McCormack and other US MacBride activists are on the increase. It was agreed that BIS would endeavour to accept as many invitations as possible in this field and that it might be possible to supplement this with speakers from Northern Ireland. It was doubtful whether a specific visit from Northern Ireland to speak at one of these engagements provided value for money but these might where possible be fitted in with other engagements. Articles placed by HMG in College magazines would probably do little more than raise the status of the issue and provide a basis for long drawn out counter arguments.

MacBride in Canada and Europe

It was felt that neither Bombardier nor Mr Olsen were likely to be put off by the Campaign but there was some merit in ensuring that the various Consulates in

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Europe and other relevant areas are advised to keep an eye open for MacBride activity. The most probable future targets are Holland, Germany and Belgium. It was agreed that a copy of the new Greyband on Fair Employment should be circulated to appropriate Consulates, advising them where to get in touch if the issue surfaced in their area.

(Action: Ms McIver)

Evaluation of Fair Employment Legislation

Representative groups in Northern Ireland will shortly be asked for their views on the fair employment legislation. The process of evaluating the legislation and the results of that evaluation will be of considerable interest in the US and the manner of presenting these topics will therefore be important. The unemployment differential will, whether we like it or not, continue to be a major focus of attention among Irish Americans: future statistics could cause added problems in this area. The Secretary of State will announce towards the end of the year, that targetting social need will become HMG's third economic priority in Northern Ireland. It was agreed that the announcement would need careful handling to prevent HMG's opponents making capital from a selective use of the information provided with the announcement.

Future Tactics

It is clear that the MacBride campaign will continue to be with us for some considerable time to come and it was accepted that HMG's opposition to it could not be called to a halt at this stage. The companies continue to oppose the campaign, but consider that the battle must be conducted by HMG and look to it to provide them with support. To leave the field to the local political pro MacBride lobby, Sinn Fein, could damage the standing of Mr Hume.

HMG has a fairly good early warning system in those states where professional lobbyists are or were employed and we must mount opposition in future by lobbying as early as possible. We must continue to consider possibilities depending on circumstances for amending/softening legislation by, for instance, substituting the NI fair employment legislation for MacBride.

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Northern Ireland Witnesses

It was recognised that there is a need to expand the panel of Northern Ireland Witnesses and also to consider extending our panel of Northern Ireland lobbyists (action: Mr Spence).

FCO Staffing

It was noted that Mr Henderson would transfer from his present post end May/beginning June, that Mr Cowper-Coles would transfer about 6 weeks later and that there would also be a change in Ambassador around that time.

Mr Henderson's post is not a permanent one and he will not necessarily be replaced automatically. It was fully agreed that it was most important that a successor should be appointed and that the person should if possible have a Northern Ireland background (action: SIL to follow up).

cc Secretary
Mr Spence
Mr Smartt
Mr Blackwell
Mr Bohill
Mr Ritchie
Ms McAlister
Ms McIver
Mr Henderson