

K G DONNELLY - SIL
23 October 1989

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NORTHERN IRELAND
OFFICE

BURNS

cc PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Fell
Mr Hopkins
Mr Chesterton - B
Mr Thomas - B
Mr Blackwell

NORTHERN IRELAND UNIT

After the meeting on Thursday, you suggested that I should circulate a "negotiating brief" for your meeting with Sir Antony Acland this Thursday. What follows is an attempt to meet this remit, but I am sure you would be glad of any other comments copy recipients may make to you.

2. The main aim of your meeting with the Ambassador is to achieve a working Unit in some form of other. This means going as far as possible to meet any concerns he may have, and in particular using as our current game plan the suggestion of a feasibility study in Fall's last letter.

3. However, there are certain key features which, from our point of view, a feasibility study must have if it is to meet our own concerns. These needs can, I think, be summarised as follows:-

- (a) The feasibility study should be activity-based rather than a desk study: in other words, the people carrying it out should themselves attempt to do the sort of thing that we feel that Unit should do, and base their conclusions on that, rather than simply draft further papers;

cc Mr Cashe

Mr Lavery

No mention of who is
to conduct this feasibility
study!

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- (b) Given the likely period of the study it would perhaps be unrealistic to expect examples of economic pay-backs, and the conclusions of the study would have to be based on the scope for potential contacts which are not currently being reached, and some assessment of the likely prospect of economic return upon the work;
- (c) In order to test the concept properly, it would be necessary to establish a separate identity for the Unit: this will involve a PO Box address, a separate telephone line, separate calling cards, etc; a key factor in the idea is that we see whether there is any truth in the notion that Irish Americans will respond more favourably to NI if the British aspect is played down;
- (d) Since the study will be action-based, it would be necessary for the seconded officer to be absent from the office for much of the time; because of this, it appears sensible to us to ensure that there is back-up there to take telephone enquiries, to deal with paperwork etc; our view, therefore, is that at least two people from NI would need to be seconded in order to ensure an effective feasibility study.
- (e) The two people involved would be full time on the feasibility study, and would not represent in any way spare capacity or resources for other Embassy activities (even NI related activities).

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1. Apart from these basic requirements, there are some other desirables:-

- (a) We assume that the feasibility study suggestion is being made in good faith, and that the Ambassador will be able to give a commitment at the end of that study to reaching a decision quickly on whether or not there is scope for a fully fledged Unit;
- (b) The feasibility study should be fully underway by January 1990, and should (perhaps) run for the next 6 months;
- (c) We would submit terms of reference for the study, in the expectation that these could be amended and cleared quickly by the Embassy;
- (d) The people carrying out the feasibility study should be able to, as Fall's letter suggests, draw as necessary (within reason) on the help of other posts in the pursuing contacts in their areas.

5. The desirables are a matter for discussion, but I would suggest that the needs must be met if we are to have a sensible study. As regards what your reaction should be if the Ambassador suggests that some of these needs cannot be met, it seems to me we really only have two options:-

- (a) To give up the idea: you could make the point that this should be unfortunate because it would lead NI Ministers to believe that the Embassy was not placing NI high enough on its list of priorities (the meeting

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on Thursday allows us to reinforce this view); although NI must take its place among the other work on which the Embassy is engaged (eg Hong Kong, burden sharing, 1992, etc), it is the only one of these in which people are actually dying, and therefore merits some additional attention; it also true that the courting of Irish Americans may only encourage "a better class of criticism", but we are confident that we can handle constructive debate on the NI situation, and raising awareness may have the additional benefit that when something does hit the headlines, opinion formers will have a better context into which it can be placed, and may therefore be more circumspect in their reaction;

- (b) ~~Attempt~~ to bring Ministers in directly: this could have drawbacks if Ministerial correspondence began to be more widely copied, since there would be risk of intervention from other Departments (eg Scottish and Welsh Offices), and the precise way in which this ~~was~~ done would need to be carefully considered.

6. The main aim should therefore be to get the Ambassador's agreement to the feasibility study proposals as amended. If this

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it would be probably be more effective to go back to the drawing board entirely, and seek to come up with some new mechanism which involved the Embassy less closely, but which still made provision for doing the type of work that the Unit is expected to do: this would probably involve giving further consideration to IDB operations in the US as the "carrier" for the Unit.

(Signed)

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23 October 1989
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