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c.c. Mr. ~~Canavan~~<sup>C.3</sup>

You may be interested.

In this ~~paper~~<sup>g.3/8</sup>.



e-mail:

The Central Secretariat  
The Government of Northern Ireland  
Stormont Castle  
Belfast

15 July 1995

Dear Sir / Madam

I enclose an article to be published in 'Flagmaster', the bulletin of the Flag Institute of the UK. I would be grateful if you could bring this to the attention of whoever is responsible for consideration of new regional symbols as part of the ongoing process of evaluating the government of the province.

Yours faithfully,

Martin J. Ball (Dr)

*Ms Kaye  
24 July 95  
Mr. Canavan 9/2*

38/8

11 AUG 1995

*Mr Seaton*

*Very interesting  
file with identifying  
papers - Mr. Canavan may want  
to see a return*

*AC  
15/8*



## A New Flag for Northern Ireland?

*Martin J. Ball, Ph.D.*

### Introduction

With the peace process in Northern Ireland continuing, now is the time to start considering future structures of government that might achieve the allegiance of all sections of the community within the six counties. Not least of such considerations are the symbols of government, such as logos used by the official and legal bodies, and of course the flag.

### Unionist Flags

Since direct rule in the early seventies, Northern Ireland has lacked any official flag other than the Union Jack. The flag of the Stormont parliament (the red cross on white, bearing the red hand on a crowned six-pointed star), is still widely flown within Northern Ireland (usually without the crown), but is seen as a symbol of loyalist areas (see Figure 1). Such areas also fly Union Jacks, the Stormont flag with a Union Jack in the Canton (both with and without white fimbriation), and flags connected with the Orange Order and the Royal Black Institutes. The Stormont flag, then, has by now been thoroughly associated with one section of the community, and would be unlikely to command the respect of the population as a whole. As a flag to express protestant identity, it will no doubt continue and be of worth to that group, but we must look elsewhere for a new flag to express the new direction for the province.

[figure 1 about here]

The Union Jack also has been associated with a monocultural view of the six counties; moreover, as the flag of the United Kingdom as a whole, it is unsuited to represent as well a smaller unit that is currently part of that whole.

### Nationalist Flags

The most commonly seen nationalist flag is the Irish tricolor. While one explanation for the green-white-gold (or orange) arrangement of colours is that they stand for the nationalist and unionist populations united in peace, it has to be admitted that this flag too is viewed as a badge of exclusivity, and would not in any similar incarnation be acceptable to the unionists. Also, as in the case of the Union Jack, the flag of the Irish Republic as a whole is not suited to express the identity of an area that many consider should be part of that republic.

Nationalists also sometimes fly as flags heraldic banners drawn from the arms of the four provinces of Ireland: Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connacht. In the case of Ulster, this gives us a flag of yellow, with a red cross, with a red hand on a white escutcheon over the centre (see Figure 2). However, the fact that these provincial flags are normally displayed by republicans, makes a direct adoption of the provincial flag controversial. It also has to be noted that Northern Ireland only contains six of the historic nine counties of Ulster, so that the provincial flag in any case would be inaccurate as a representation of the country as currently constituted.

[figure 2 about here]



## Other Irish Flags

There are other flags that might be considered for Northern Ireland. A banner of the arms for Ireland (*azure*, a harp *or*) is one such possibility. Unfortunately, from the British viewpoint, this would be the personal property of the sovereign, whereas from the Irish viewpoint it is the flag of the president. (The harp on green is also used in the Republic as the naval jack.)

Another possible flag is the red saltire on white, often termed St Patrick's cross (see Figure 3). This, again, is representative of all Ireland, rather than a part, and further, has had limited currency within Ireland as a flag. However, modified with some device to represent Northern Ireland, a flag based on this design is a possibility.

[figure 3 about here]

## A Proposed Flag of Northern Ireland

It appears to the author that any proposal for a new flag for Northern Ireland will only command broad allegiance if it has some historical connections with the area (when we consider what part historical considerations play in political life in the province), and if it avoids the clear partisanship of many of the flags considered above. For the historical side of the equation, we see that a red hand in the centre of the flag is found on both unionist and republican flags of Ulster, and that a red cross is common to both the old provincial flag and the old Stormont flag.

Other aspects of the design are, however, more controversial. The six-pointed star cannot be adopted for, while it represents the six counties, it is used exclusively on loyalist flags, and is an overt reminder of partition. As noted above, the provincial flag places the red hand on an escutcheon, and while this is not particularly controversial, it may be best to avoid either the star or the escutcheon in any new design.

The main field of the flag also needs to be chosen. The traditional provincial flag has yellow, while the Stormont flag used white. Rather than go for a totally new colour (and break the heraldic ban on colour placed on colour), a solution might be found by using both yellow and white as the field for the flag.

The proposed flag is as follows: the field is yellow in the upper fly and lower hoist, and white in the lower fly and upper hoist. (Yellow is given precedence as being derived from the older flag). Over the centre of the flag is a white circle to represent the desire to forge a peaceful, united and equal society, with the red hand of the province displayed in the circle. The proposed flag is shown in Figure 4. Clearly, arms and other symbols could be adopted from this flag in due course.

[figure 4 about here]

## Conclusion

I hope this short article might stimulate a debate in vexillological circles as to how one can create a symbol system for a society as divided as that in Northern Ireland. The suggestion given above is one possible way, but it may be that a South African-type solution is needed, that is to say where the colours reflect the different traditions, but the arrangement is wholly novel. Figure 5 shows one such possible flag: here, the colours are those of the two different traditions, arranged in such a way as to avoid as much as possible giving one set precedence over the other.

[figure 5 about here]

As in the case of this article, maybe other contributors to this debate should forward copies of their articles to the Government of Northern Irish, Stormont Castle, Belfast.



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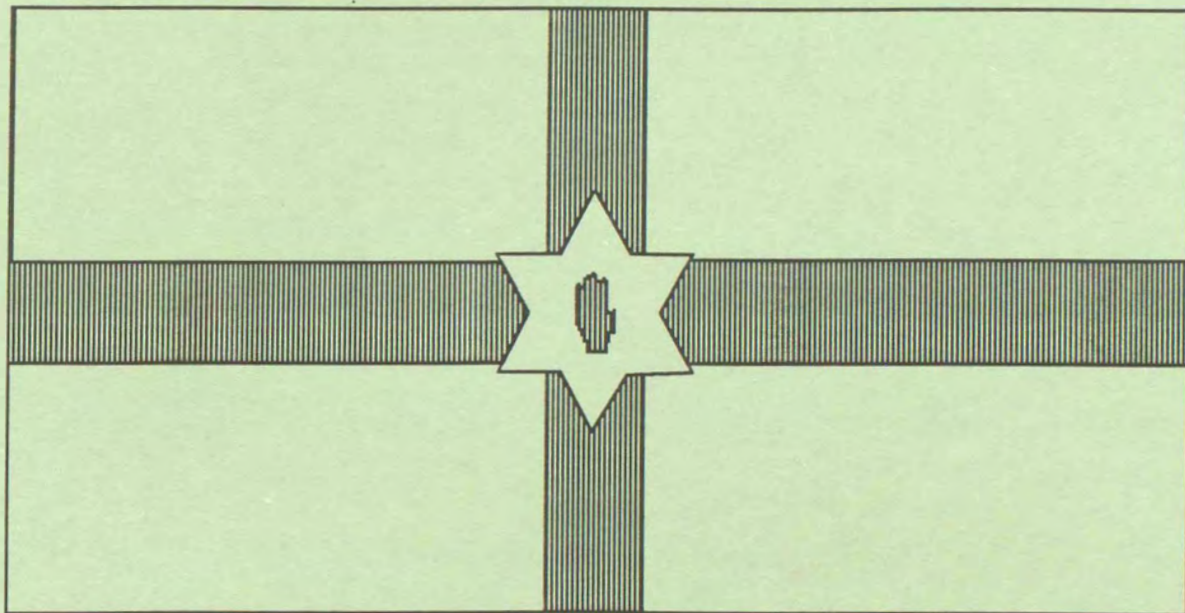
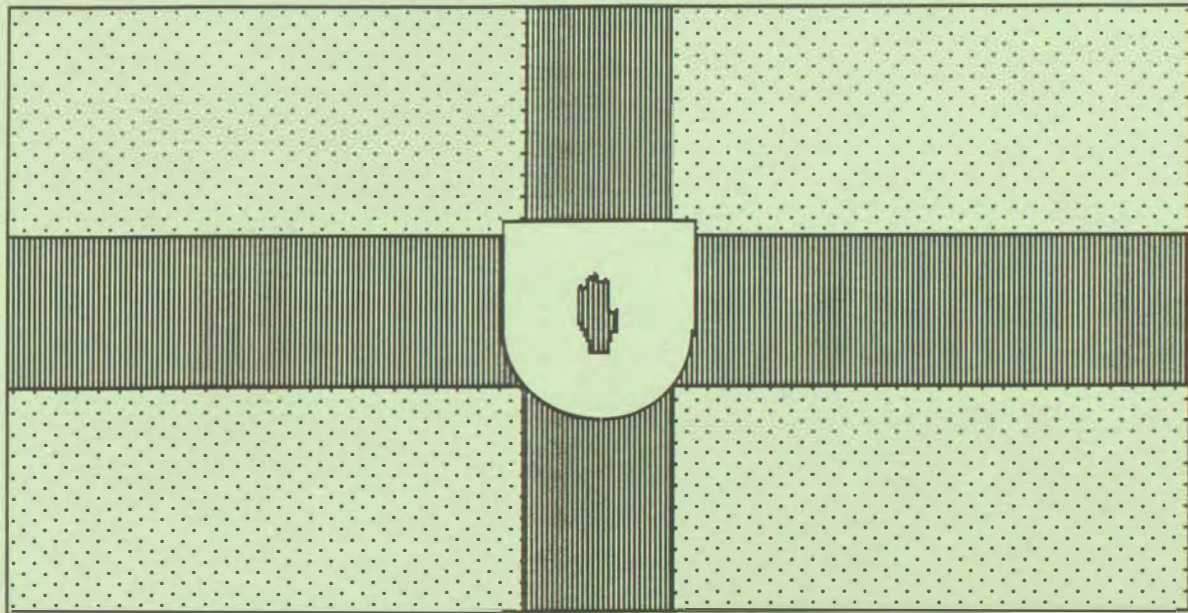


Figure 1. Loyalist Flag for Northern Ireland

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Figure 2. Provincial Flag of Ulster



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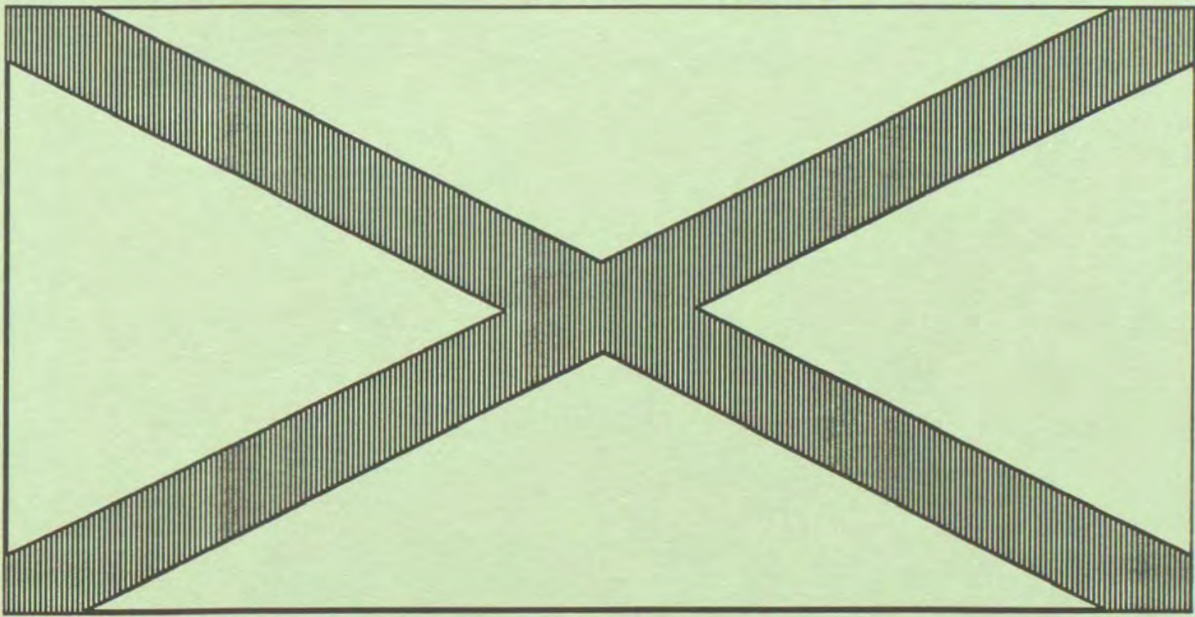


Figure 3. St Patrick's Cross

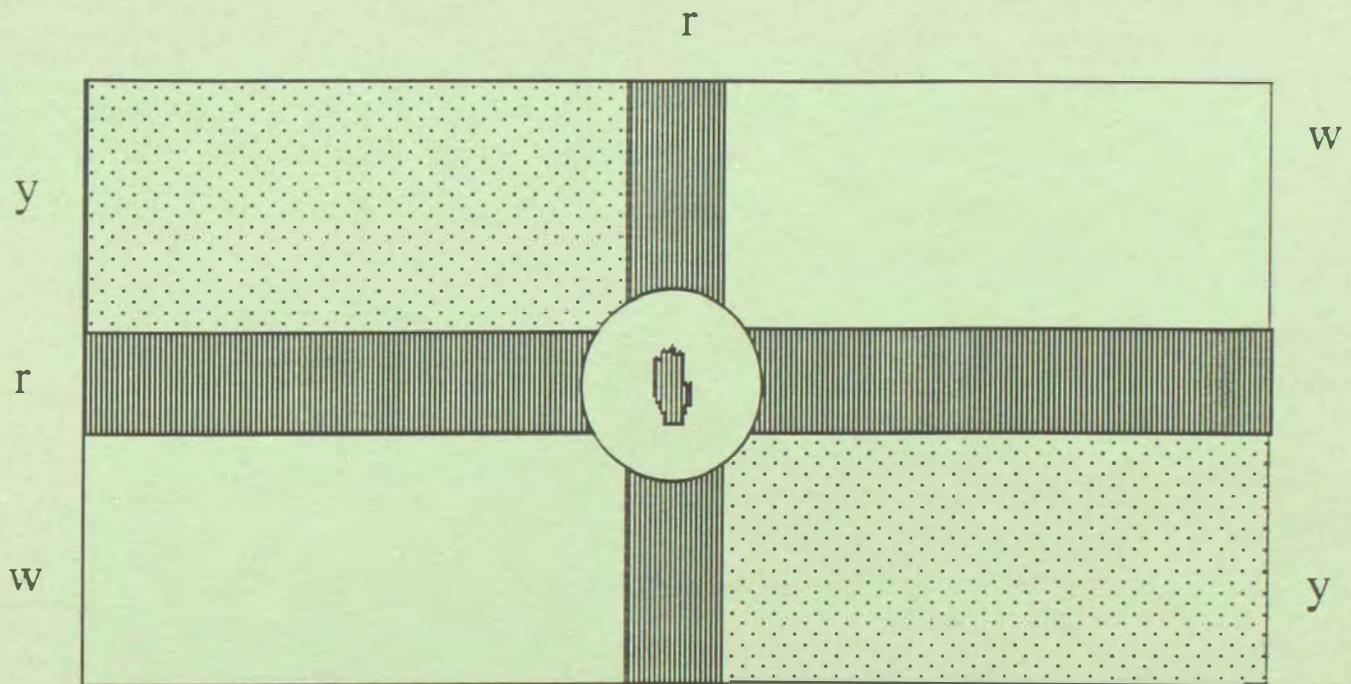


Figure 4. Proposed new flag for Northern Ireland



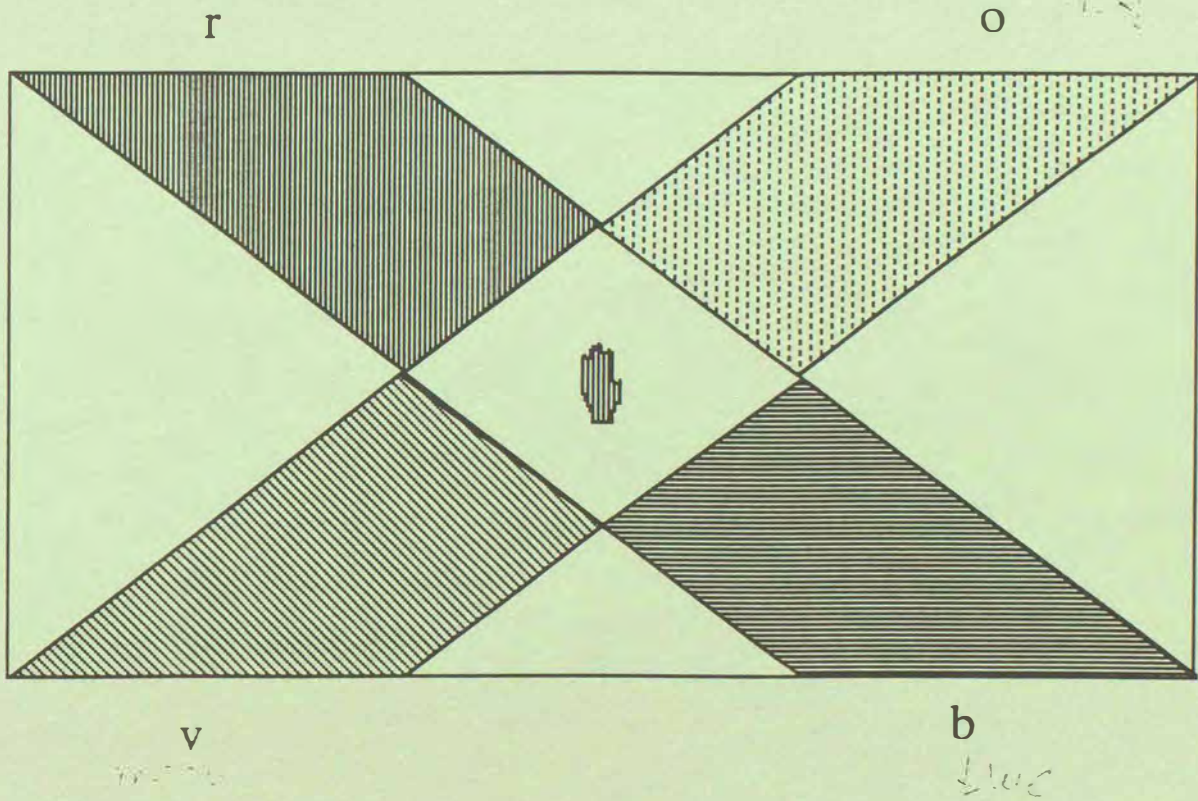


Figure 5. A 'South African' style proposal



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DJW/5/12

FROM: D J WATKINS  
US CENT SEC  
DATE: 6 DECEMBER 1994

CC: PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
PS/Mr Fell - B  
Mr Legge - B  
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B  
Mr Williams - B  
Mr Brooker - B  
Mrs Brown - B  
Mrs Collins - B  
Mr Maccabe - B  
Mr Marsh - B  
Mr Maxwell - B  
Mr Canavan - B 7.12  
Mr Smyth - B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Lamont, RID - B  
HMA, Dublin - B

*In the margin*  
You will be interested in the development of your original work on flag-flying. Some of the contributions are worth savouring. Next step, please, is a range of options to be put to Ministers. See X below; drawing on the correspondence.

*JL*  
7/12

Mr Bell (o/r) - B

IDENTITY ISSUES - FLYING OF FLAGS ON CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

1. Your minute to Tony Canavan of 22 November responded to his of 15 November, which had requested NIO views on a possible reduction in the number of days on which the Union flag is flown on Government buildings.
2. An identity issues agenda has emerged from the deliberations of the working group. Flag flying features prominently on that agenda and, in investigating the scope for change along lines which would be welcomed by the Irish and Nationalists, the policy of the civilian administration seemed a logical starting point. Furthermore, the particular, modest proposal which Mr Canavan put forward has its own history, having been submitted to the then Secretary of State in the mid 80s on at least two occasions by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, though with the advice that the timing was then inappropriate. This seemed a reasonable, indeed conservative, basis on which to open consideration of the issue.
3. The purpose of Mr Canavan's minute was to ensure that a wide range of NIO officials had an opportunity to consider and

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comment afresh on the question. The comments from NIO colleagues have thrown up a number of approaches and fresh ideas. In the light of these, we are minded to put to Ministers, rather than a single proposal, a range of options on flag flying. One comment which was common to several respondents was that a marginal change to the arrangements for flag flying would do little to assuage Nationalist sentiment while causing disproportionate offence to Unionists - in effect, a "minus sum game" even more unwelcome than your zero sum games. Recognition of this point, however, would suggest the alternatives of either inaction (presumably your favoured course) or a more radical proposal which would earn genuine Nationalist gratitude.

4. Another point made by several of those consulted was the need for caution in the timing of progress on this proposal, above all in letting it be publicly known that the issue was under consideration. I should stress that it had never been our intention to take precipitate action. Indeed, as you suggest, some have argued that an eventual Talks process might be the best forum for deploying ideas on flag flying, with a view to securing cross party consensus. On the other hand, the injection of such a sensitive subject into the Talks might poison progress in other areas. This would need to be explored more fully in any submission we make to Ministers.
  
5. One concern which was unique to yourself was for the maintenance of the flying of the Union flag on public buildings on 12 July. I am afraid I must challenge your assumption about the Twelfth. It is perhaps helpful to maintain a proper distinction between Unionism and Orangeism; many liberal-minded members of the Northern Ireland majority community would find conflation of the two worrying. Nor is it the case that the State's "esteem and respect" for the traditions of the Twelfth are of particularly long standing. They date from the Stormont administration of the 1920s: prior to that, the relationship between the Government and the Order had often been turbulent (much Orange folklore relates to this earlier period). Few

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Northern Ireland would characterise the Orange celebration of the Twelfth as defensive in tone, though the participants might share a defensive ideological mind-set.

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6. Whether the Unionist tradition is defensive or triumphalist is often a subjective judgement. Unionism has traditionally defended itself by denying any ground to its opposition, initially by refusing any right of self-determination to the majority of the Irish population and later by frustrating the attempt to adjust the border on the basis of local preference (the origin of "not an inch"). The logic of this defensiveness is military, and relates more, at least in its origins, to ethnic conflict than to civil society.
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7. Our aim, surely, is to create the conditions for a sustainable civil society in Northern Ireland, in which the essence of the Unionist birthright (the Union) is maintained and underwritten, for as long as a majority of the population wish it. But when Unionists exercised power through the Stormont administration, they tried to sustain a position of economic, social and cultural supremacy over a substantial minority of the population. The re-invention of Northern Ireland (which is the challenge facing us) must confront this burden of the past and may involve an element of redistribution (or at least a levelling up) of power, status and even, perhaps, emotional security. That is why I could not fully subscribe to your idea that progress on identity issues must be confined only to those to which Unionists are indifferent.
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[Signed DJW]

D J WATKINS

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DJW/RJ/28832

ms 790/11

FR : P N BELL, AUS(L)  
22 November 1994

Mr Canavan

- .cc PS/PUS (L&B)
- PS/Mr Fell
- Mr Legge
- Mr Thomas
- Mr Watkins
- Mr Williams
- Mr Brooker
- Mrs Brown
- Mrs Collins
- Mr Maccabe
- Mr Marsh
- Mr Maxwell
- Mr Smyth, AIS
- Mr Stephens
- Mr Lamont, RID
- HMA, Dublin

Mrs. Whyte  
 Mr. Bell at his best.  
 b. Conner  
 24/11/94

Mrs Connor  
 Mrs Keane  
 Mrs Keane

**IDENTITY ISSUES: FLYING OF FLAGS ON CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS**

I suspect you might be disappointed if I did not politely decline to accompany you on your planned trip to Gadara. Your minibus seems quite full enough already and, I suspect, the outing will end in tears.

2. The flags issue, however, raises considerations which go wider than the ostensible subject. I hope, therefore, that you will forgive me if I set out my reasoning not only fairly starkly (balance and beyond is copiously provided in other minutes) but in ways that try to set this issue in context.

Some wider considerations

3. To begin, national symbolism is of the first importance everywhere, and nowhere more so than in countries such as Ireland where issues of nationality are the marrow of politics. Such symbols serve with us, I suggest, at least two functions:

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- reassurance: as an indicator and reflection of collective identities and, moreover, may be the more cherished in proportion to the degree that identity is seen as threatened; and,
- score keeping: which community is up, which down, which rising, which falling.

4. Second, even if others lose their cool over this kind of general problem, we should not. And my first reaction (which is not necessarily wrong) was to say that we should not make too much of this particular case either. But that does not affect the logic of what you propose. For, even if it were a simple matter of 'harmonising' ('integrating'?) flag flying practice in Northern Ireland with England and Wales (and it probably is not - as Mr Thomas' minute to you exposes), the kind of proposal you are making appears intrinsically flawed for three basic reasons:

- as Mr Williams has perceptively commented, it appears to be the Union flag as such to which objection is taken (so that mere 'harmonisation' is unlikely to accelerate the day when "Northern Ireland is to become a land where people of all political and cultural allegiances can feel comfortable"); but
- as everyone accepts, it will certainly be seen, with varying degrees of passion, as hostile to Unionists; and,
- if there is to be any nationalist satisfaction derived from this change, it is more likely to be a measure sectarian gloating at Unionist discomfort (plus the 'barometer effect' noted in 3 above) and the expectation of more concessions - for nothing apparently given in return? - to come.

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Is this what we want? Now? When XD is about to start/is just underway; when we hope to move the Talks process up a gear? (Surely there are better arguments than to say we are kicking Unionists before Sinn Fein ask us to? Although I accept that the subject will probably surface in XD, even though I see no reason to be more immediately forward than we have been to more reputable organisations including the Irish Government.)

A historical footnote

5. But it may also be worth moving from first principles to a concrete historical illustration to see why the Politically Correct may already be salivating at the prospect of banning the Union Flag from central government buildings on 12 July. For if (and again let us not overstate the case) there is to be a major political NI issue arising from your proposals (as opposed to a sense of offence, disenchantment or alienation), it is likely to arise from the loss of the Flag on that day. No longer, it will be claimed, will there be this endorsement of the Unionist ascendancy; a blow will have been struck against sectarianism; the nearer we shall be to Mr Adams lying down with Dr Paisley. (I write metaphorically.)

6. Not so (I suggest). My reading of modern Unionism, following Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien (in his more nuanced "States of Ireland" rather than his present lugubrious mode) is of a profoundly defensive community. Even historically, back to 1690, Unionist slogans have not been predominantly triumphalist: "No surrender", "Not an inch", "What we have we hold"... Indeed the Battle of the Boyne itself, like the raising of the siege of Derry, is a battle not of triumph but of deliverance. The way it is now celebrated reflects that. True, the Orange Order had long commemorated the Boyne, but it is in 1886 that it became the mass demonstration that it has remained. And 1886 could be regarded as the year in which the siege of the Unionist population, with the proposed Home Rule legislation, began again.

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7. So, my deconstruction of your proposed withdrawal of the flag on 12 July yields the following double reading:

- a denial of esteem and respect for a long standing tradition of one community (which, in the fullness of time, we might hope to see still more completely metamorphose into folklore in the way 5 November, when the Pope used to burnt in effigy, has in England); but,
- it is from a already defensive, not an aggressive or triumphalist community that you are proposing the State should symbolically withdraw what little warmth some may believe it retains towards it.

Again, I pose the question: Is this what we want? Now?

Some conclusions

8. My conclusion is twofold. First, go ahead if you choose - you have secured enough top cover - with your courageous (in the "Yes, Minister" sense) proposal. But I hope you will do so in such a way that:

- Ministers do not conclude that all their officials are either out of touch with, or unsympathetic to the wider political considerations to which they must pay attention, including the Prime Minister's own injunction that we should be even handed and not move faster than the market will bear;
- you can offer an explanation of why action now, rather than either later (or left to the bargaining of a devolved - or devolving - administration) is more rather than less likely to facilitate a successful end game of the Talks process. (Here I strongly endorse the timing points made by Mr Maccabe in his second minute to you); or,

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- if you follow up Mr Thomas' ingenious idea of a genuinely 'NI list', you avoid some of the pitfalls suggested above. (Better still leave it to the parties.)

9. Second, and more fundamentally, I continue to see attractions in setting the flag question in the wider context of identity issues. As I argued at the Secretary of State's recent meeting on the Meanscoil, we should be looking to meet nationalist aspirations within Northern Ireland in a way that does not involve significant Unionist loss. (No 'zero sum games' for Christmas, please, Santa.) Hence, the degree of sympathy on my part which strict educational arguments might not merit for projects like the Meanscoil, but also for more administratively and politically sensible ways of furthering the Irish language; or projects in realm of the media, for instance - and, I readily admit, at significantly greater financial cost. Equally you may want to explore the symbolism (including flags and iconography) to be associated with our proposed North/South body. More generally, should we not be exploring avenues which do not (as this proposal does) humiliate/anger/annoy (who can say which or to what degree?) just one section of the community (in a way, I might add, earlier identify measures - street names, jurors' oaths - do not seem to). If it is argued that the Joint Declaration etc requires us to do so, then that document is essentially flawed or, we need a more equitable interpretation of it - at which this paragraph is meant to point.

10. Slán agus beannacht.

(Signed PNB)

P N BELL  
OAB 6469

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*Identity 1.*

cc: PS/Mr Fell - B  
Mr Thomas - B  
Mr Legge - B  
Mr Watkins - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Williams - B  
Mrs Brown - B  
Mr Brooker - B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Maxwell - B  
Mrs Collins - B  
Mr Marsh - B  
Mr T Smyth - B  
~~Mr Morrow~~  
Mr Lamont, RID - B

*min letter  
Mr  
15/11*

From: Mr J A Canavan  
CCRU

15 November 1994

To: Mr Maccabe - B

FLYING OF FLAGS ON CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

1. The update on progress on "identity issues" circulated for the last IGC, mentioned that British officials were considering the scope for reducing the number of days on which the Union Flag was flown on civilian Government buildings in Northern Ireland. I enclose with this minute a draft submission for possible eventual signature by Mr Fell to the Secretary of State, suggesting an alteration in policy in this regard and a means of bringing it about.
2. Your minute of today's date, provoked by an earlier note from me on identity issues, arrived after preparation of the draft and the remainder of this covering note. It anticipated the reaction which I expected from this proposal. I think, though, that others should have a chance to comment on the fairly modest thinking which CCRU has been engaged in. If we do decide to take the matter forward (and I give full weight to the drawbacks in what follows) it should be after consideration of all the issues

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rather than in a premature knee-jerk reaction to what we assume Unionists will think.

3. One such consideration is that inaction also sends signals. For several years Government has been making a number of symbolic gestures towards Nationalist sensitivities, eg street names, jurors' oaths, etc. This policy has been modest and measured. I think that our proposal on flags falls into this category. If a complete block is put on the proposal of such moves, a change of policy will be perceived by Nationalists. There is an obverse to the extreme Unionist conspiracy theory which you set out in your note. In the absence of the future development of Government's policies on identity, Nationalists might conclude that any gestures previously made were in response to violence, and that, with the end of violence, "parity of esteem" is off the Government agenda. That would be as wrong as the Unionist paranoid fantasy and possibly more dangerous.
  
4. I wish to give this draft a wide circulation within the NIO system to ensure that adequate consideration is given to timing and implications of such an initiative. The change would not be brought about particularly quickly. Ministers would first have to be persuaded of the benefits of a reduction in the number of official flag flying days; at official level we would then need to clear with Department of National Heritage and the Home Office a draft letter to be sent by the Secretary of State to the Private Secretary to HM The Queen; and finally Royal approval would need to be obtained for the reduction. Flag flying has been in the news recently, with the Army deciding to remove the Union flag from some of its South Armagh bases, but events move quickly these days and the flurry of publicity seems to have died down. However, the flying of the flag on Government buildings is a frequent source of correspondence

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and the occasional PQ from John Taylor MP. The news of a reduction in the number of official days would undoubtedly provoke Unionist ire, especially as one of the days we would propose to delist is 12 July. I have sought to bring these implications out in the draft submission.

5. On the other hand, there is much to recommend such an initiative at this time. It would boost our meagre tally of progress on identity issues, which the Dublin Embassy has recently disparaged. Like the change in the jurors' oath, it would be defensible on the grounds of bringing Northern Ireland practice more into line with that in GB. In effect, it would redress the effects of patriotic exuberance by the pre-war Unionist administration.
6. Mr Watkins has also pointed out the advantage of Government taking an initiative such as this in advance of it becoming a Sinn Fein demand.
7. I would like you and copy recipients to consider some of the implications of the change in policy on flag flying on Government buildings. First, attention might be drawn to the practice of local authorities, which have a free hand on where and when to fly the flag. There might be pressure from Nationalists for a reduction in the amount of flag flying by Unionist Councils, perhaps with a suggestion that Government should need to control this. Unionist Councils might react against a change in central Government policy by flying the flag with even greater enthusiasm.
8. Second, the RUC's policy on flag flying, set out in the Force Code is close to, but not identical with, central Government policy. The five days which it is proposed to delist are also days on which the RUC flies its flag. That might point to a future reconsideration by the Police of

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their policy, with the likelihood of Nationalist criticism if they do not follow suit.

9. Finally, attention might be redirected to the Army's policy on flag flying, which is, on the basis of the latest papers I have seen, idiosyncratic, or at least difficult to explain to the uninitiated.
10. I would be grateful for comments by copy recipients by the end of the week. If you wish to elaborate on your note of today's date, please feel free.

[Signed: JAC]

J A CANAVAN

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DRAFT

HCS/ /94

cc PS/Sir John Wheeler (DFP,B&L) - B  
PS/Michael Ancram (DENI,B&L) - B  
PS/Mr Moss (DOE,DHSS&L) - B  
PS/Baroness Denton (DED,DANI&L) - B  
PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
PS/Mr Fell - B  
Mr Thomas - B  
Mr Legge - B  
Mr Steele - B  
Mr Williams - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Watkins - B  
Mrs Brown - B  
Mr Brooker - B  
Mr Canavan - B  
Mr Maccabe - B  
Mr Maxwell - B  
Mr Smyth - B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mrs Collins - B  
Mr Morrow  
Mr Lamont, RID - B  
HMA, Dublin - B

From: D Fell

November 1994

To: PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B

#### FLYING OF FLAGS ON CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS

1. The September Intergovernmental Conference considered a joint report from British and Irish officials on identity issues, which indicated, inter alia, that, at the request of the Irish side, the British side were examining the scope for reducing the number of days on which the Union Flag was flown on civilian Government buildings.

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2. This minute seeks Ministers' views on a proposal for a reduction in the number of days on which the Union Flag is flown, and their agreement to approaches being made by officials to the Home Office and the Department of National Heritage to prepare the way for a submission at an appropriate time from the Secretary of State to Her Majesty the Queen on this matter.

**Background**

3. Under regulations for the hoisting of the national flag, as promulgated by the Department of National Heritage (formerly the Department of the Environment), by Her Majesty's Command, all Central Government buildings in the United Kingdom are required to fly the Union Flag from 8.00 am till sunset on the days specified. A Government building is one where more than 50% of the building is occupied by civil servants.
4. The Annex lists the days in 1994 on which the flag is to be flown in Northern Ireland. Fifteen of the 20 days listed are common throughout the United Kingdom, and cover the birthdays of members of the Royal Family, the Anniversary of Her Majesty's Accession, Coronation Day, Her Majesty's Wedding Day, Commonwealth Day and Remembrance Day. The additional five days specific to Northern Ireland are New Year's Day, St Patrick's Day, Easter Day, 12 July and Christmas Day. St Patrick's Day has parallels in England, Scotland and Wales, where the Union Flag is flown on St George's, St Andrew's and St David's Days respectively.
5. Approval for the flying of the Union Flag in Northern Ireland on New Year's Day, St. Patrick's Day, Easter Day and Christmas Day was given in October 1927 by the Home Office in a letter to the Private Secretary to the Governor of Northern Ireland. On 5 April 1933 the Northern Ireland

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Cabinet decided that the Union Flag should also be flown on 12 July: this decision was approved by the Governor.

6. In 1986, at the time when repeal of the Flags and Emblems Act (NI) was being considered, my predecessor submitted to the then Secretary of State on the practice of official flag flying in Northern Ireland. While conceding that there was much to be said in principle for coming into line with the rest of the UK, the submission concluded that the time was not then appropriate.
7. The issue of the flying of the Union flag has become subsumed within the wider range of 'identity issues' raised by the Irish and nationalists generally. These include the position of the Irish language, oaths of loyalty and other aspects of State symbolism. In addition to the flying of the flag on civil administrative buildings, its use by the Army and police has also come in for recent scrutiny.

**Possible Change**

8. In examining the scope for change which would address at least some of the nationalist sensitivities over the flying of the Union Flag, we have borne in mind that any change must be fully consistent with Northern Ireland's constitutional position as part of the United Kingdom. Similarly, we have been conscious that symbols play a large part in Northern Ireland life and that sensitivities about the flying of the Union Flag exist on both sides of the community. The majority Unionist community regards the flying of the Union flag as a symbolic affirmation of Northern Ireland's status within the United Kingdom. Any reduction in the extent of flying of the flag would be criticised by Unionist politicians. The minority Nationalist population, in contrast, does not view the Union flag simply as a non-party emblem of State authority,

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but rather as a traditional symbol of Unionist political hegemony. Regrettably, the Union flag lacks in Northern Ireland the politically neutral connotations which it enjoys in the rest of the United Kingdom.

9. Two possible approaches to change have been considered, both of which would link practice in Northern Ireland closely to that in the rest of the United Kingdom. Under the first, the number of prescribed days for flying the Union Flag in Northern Ireland would be the same 15 days as are at present common throughout the United Kingdom. Under the second, these 15 days would continue to be prescribed days but, just as in England, Scotland and Wales, where the Union Flag is also flown on the relevant Saint's Day, St Patrick's Day would (as at present) be an additional prescribed day in Northern Ireland.
  
10. The second approach has its attractions, in that this would result in closer correspondence with practice in England, Scotland and Wales. However, any decision to remove 12 July from the list of prescribed days - even though the day itself would continue to be a Bank and Public Holiday - may be expected to provoke some strong Unionist reaction. The day is redolent with Unionist political overtones and the delisting of it for flag flying purposes would be interpreted as a dissociation by the State from the Unionist tradition. In the circumstances, as St Patrick's Day is seen by many - though by no means all - Unionists as more related to the Nationalist tradition than a cause for celebration by all people in Northern Ireland, its retention as a prescribed day, when 12 July was no longer being retained, is likely to be seen by them as favouring one tradition over the other. Nationalists, though, would derive little satisfaction from the retention of St Patrick's Day. Accordingly it is recommended that the first approach be adopted, with the Union Flag being flown

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on Government buildings in Northern Ireland on the 15 days which are at present common to the whole of the United Kingdom.

11. If Ministers agree to this approach and Royal permission is granted, it will be necessary to distinguish between the issue of flying of flags on Government buildings, and the unchanged status of St Patrick's Day and 12 July as holidays.

**Timing of Any Change**

12. The timing of any change will be important, given the complex pattern of developments on the political and other fronts at this time. There is much to be said for an early initiative to demonstrate Government's readiness to grasp the nettle of identity issues rather than appearing to concede to pressure from Sinn Fein at a later stage.
13. We have consulted the Home Office, the Department of National Heritage and the Lord Chamberlain's Office about the appropriate procedure by which to effect any change, and are advised - in this apparently unprecedented situation - that, as Her Majesty gives permission to fly the Union Flag, she alone can withdraw permission. Accordingly, if Ministers are content that we should proceed with a change, we would propose to draw up, in consultation with the Home Office and the Department of National Heritage, a draft submission from the Secretary of State to Her Majesty The Queen, for the Secretary of State's consideration.

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Summary

14. Ministers are invited to:

- a. consider the proposal for a reduction of five in the number of prescribed days on which the Union Flag is flown on civilian Government buildings; and
- b. if this proposal is acceptable, authorise officials to draw up in consultation with the Home Office and the Department of National Heritage, a submission from the Secretary of State to Her Majesty The Queen, for the Secretary of State's consideration.

15. Should Ministers consider that a discussion with officials would be helpful, perhaps they would advise me.

[Signed: DF]

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ANNEX

DAYS IN 1994 FOR HOISTING FLAGS ON GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS IN NORTHERN IRELAND FROM 8.00 AM UNTIL SUNSET

1 January		New Year's Day
6 February		Her Majesty's Accession
19 February		Birthday of The Duke of York
10 March		Birthday of Prince Edward
14 March	*	Commonwealth Day
17 March		St Patrick's Day
3 April		Easter Sunday
21 April		Birthday of Her Majesty The Queen
2 June		Coronation Day
10 June		Birthday of The Duke of Edinburgh
11 June		Official Celebration of Her Majesty's Birthday
1 July		Birthday of The Princess of Wales
12 July		Battle of the Boyne Anniversary
4 August		Birthday of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother
15 August		Birthday of The Princess Royal
21 August		Birthday of The Princess Margaret
13 November	**	Remembrance Day
14 November		Birthday of The Prince of Wales
20 November		Anniversary of Her Majesty's Wedding
25 December		Christmas Day

\* Commonwealth Day is the second Monday in March

\*\* Remembrance Sunday is the second Sunday in November. Flags should be flown right up all day

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