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cc. PS/Ministers (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
Mr Brennan
Mr Stephens
NI Perm Secs
Mr Merifield
Mr Chesterton
Mr Gilliland
Mr Spence
Miss F Elliott
Mr M Elliott
Mr Ehrman

PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Introduction

1. This submission invites the Secretary of State to consider the approach which should be adopted with respect to community relations matters in Northern Ireland.
2. The issue needs, of course, to be considered in the wider context of political developments generally and in the light of the current examination of equal opportunities in employment.

Background

3. PCC has considered the report of a working group of officials which has been reviewing the effectiveness of the present arrangements for the promotion of good community relations.

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4. Annex A contains a summary of the report and indicates the further action which is proposed on specific recommendations involving relatively modest provision of public funds to encourage worthwhile community development activities.

Discussion

5. The PCC discussion opened up a number of major issues to which further attention needs to be given.
6. It can be argued that relations between the two communities in NI are worse today than for some time and that the immediate prospects are not good. A great deal of that deterioration arises, of course, from the continuation of violence and political instability.
7. Improvement of community relations should be one of the central policies of any administration in NI, whether in the Direct Role situation or under a devolved administration.
8. Clearly the relationships between the two communities will be helped by progress on the security front, Anglo-Irish relations, devolved government and tackling inequality where it exists. Government support for organisations which work at grass-roots level towards reconciliation between the two communities is also important.

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9. PCC believed, however, that Government should give a clear lead in respect of community relations, providing a framework within which all Departments and public bodies would operate. Three major steps are envisaged.

Public Debate

10. PCC felt that there is a need to open up a public debate about the sort of society which the people of NI want. In particular, do they want to go down the path of "segregation" - separate schools, separate housing areas and [now] the Irish Government speaking on behalf of the minority community - or towards "integration"? We believe that Government must advocate the integrated path as essentially the right one, though there may well have to be some concessions to segregationalist pressure.

11. There needs, therefore, to be a positive portrayal of the NI society of the future as one in which there is full equality of opportunity in all fields; respect for, and understanding of, the different traditions; freedom to express separate identities and loyalties without threatening the other side; a continuing process whereby the two traditions enrich each other; the development of a more confident and constructive relationship between the two communities in response to the many problems in that society.

12. Government needs to take the lead in launching such a debate. It can be argued that the time is not opportune for an initiative on these lines and that a low-key approach would be more appropriate, for example, through a conference of interested parties. However, this issue is at the very heart of the current

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political debate and there are advantages in Ministers asking NI political and community leaders to address themselves to the challenge at this time.

Major policy issues

13. PCC believes that it is necessary to build into our decision-making machinery consideration of the impact of major decisions on community relations. For example, each Department should have the improvement of community relations as one of the key objectives in its top management system. Where appropriate, policy submissions to PCC and Ministers should in future include an assessment of the impact on community relations. Moreover, there might now be a more positive and open bias towards "integrationalist" measures wherever possible, for example, in relation to moves towards integrated education.

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Structures

14. A small branch in DENI is all that remains of the structure created in the 1970s to promote better community relations - the Community Relations Commission and the Department of Community Relations. It is for debate whether there should be a strong central body concerned with the broad thrust of Government action in respect of community relations matters. There is, however, the counter-argument that the existence of such a body might deflect Departments from regarding improvement of community relations as an integral part of their responsibilities.
15. The case for creating a powerful Human Rights body which would encompass the community relations role has been made in my submission of [Nov] in the

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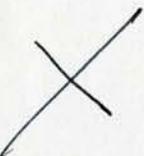
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context of the EESG Review. It is suggested that, as an intermediate measure, Central Secretariat, together with PAB, should adopt a more positive role in focussing on major community relations issues.

Conclusion

16. The Secretary of State is invited to agree that -

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- (1) Ministers should seek to open up a debate about the future of NI society and to argue strongly for an integrationalist approach;
 - (2) consideration of the impact of major decisions on community relations should be build into our decision-making processes; and
 - (3) further consideration should be given, in the context of the discussions on the EESG Report, to the need for a powerful body which could help to promote the improvement of community relations.

K P BLOOMFIELD

November 1985

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