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PS/Secretary of State (L&B)-M

- cc \*PS/Dr Mawhinney(L&B)-M
- \*PS/PUS (L&B)-M
- \*PS/Sir K Bloomfield-M
- Mr Burns - B
- \*Mr Stephens-M
- Mr Chesterton-B
- Mr Miles-B
- Mr Spence-B
- Mr Harbinson, DFP-M
- Mr Daniell-B
- Mr Bell-B

UNDER/ SEC 6314  
 12 APR 1988  
 CENT SEC

*Mr Hamilton 12/4*  
*Mr McCusker 12/13/4*  
*loser or return pl*  
*M 12/4*

(\*with copy of Nuffield Foundation letter)

"THIRD PARTY INITIATIVE"

The Secretary of State may recall (from Mr McConnell's short note of 4 March) that an academic group from the New University of Ulster, headed by Dr Paul Arthur, have in mind a "third party initiative", designed, at least in part, as a catalyst to get the political parties together.

2. The group, which also includes Dr Hepburn and Mr McCartney of the Centre for the Study of Conflict and Dr Ryan, a lecturer in Peace Studies of the Department of History, have now formulated a study proposal entitled "Analysing Political Relationships in Northern Ireland". They are seeking initial funding from the Nuffield Foundation, which has asked for our opinion, "given the delicacy of what is being proposed". I attach a copy of the correspondence, in case the Secretary of State wishes to glance through it.

3. The group say that "the unique contribution of this initiative is that it is the first systematic and sustained intervention by a multi-disciplinary group of locally-based academics using a rationale based on the problem-solving approach.....the task of the project is to create conditions and a framework within which parties can explore the issues and the perspectives of the parties, preferably in dialogue with each other." The aim would be, in a 3-year project, to involve two representatives each of the main

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constitutional parties (probably the "younger second line leadership"), plus also the UDA and Sinn Fein (who would be expected to represent the IRA), as well as representatives of the British and Irish Governments. Dialogue could concentrate on shared concerns (such as agriculture or tourism) or, more profitably (it is thought), on potentially divisive issues - "an obvious current issue is the imminent review of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in November, because all the parties have to decide what response to make."

4. This is clearly not a "third party initiative" of a 'normal' sort; but neither is it a 'normal' academic project. The initiation of such a project now would appear to cut across our own current efforts to bring about political dialogue and would cause confusion. There would be difficulties for all the potential 'participants' -including ourselves - about agreeing to the other participants in a "workshop". The project would also effectively be outside our control. Even if our current efforts to promote dialogue came to an end, the same difficulties would still apply and it seems unlikely that such a project could make a useful contribution - indeed, it would seem more likely to fail if our own effort had already failed. That said, there is no advantage to be gained in ruling out of court any future initiatives which might conceivably find favour with the parties.

5. I have spoken to Dr Tomei of the Nuffield Foundation, which is likely, I understand, to have considerable doubts of its own about the project. The Foundation is already supporting integrated education and could not be criticised for lack of interest in Northern Ireland if it turned down this application for funds. The decision is for the Foundation and their rejection of funding will not necessarily mean that the project will not go ahead. Our views may then be sought directly by the organisers. There could perhaps be publicity for the proposals.

6. Against this background, it seems prudent to draw attention to some of the difficulties about such a project, without closing any doors.

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Recommendation

7. I invite the Secretary of State to note the fact that the Centre for the Study of Conflict have sought Nuffield funding for a study, "Analysing Political Relationships in Northern Ireland"; the general line we are taking on this "initiative"; and the terms of a draft response to the Nuffield Foundation (which I should desirably despatch on Tuesday evening, tomorrow).

D C KIRK

Constitutional and Political Division (London)

11th April 1988.

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DRAFT

Dr Anthony Tomei  
The Nuffield Foundation  
28 Bedford Square  
London, WC1B 3EG.

6th April 1988

Thank you for your letter of 22 March to John McConnell, about which we have spoken. You asked for the NIO's advice about an application for financial support from the Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster, for a project entitled "Analysing Political Relationships in Northern Ireland".

The objective of this project would appear to be "to resolve the conflict in Northern Ireland". We would not dismiss out of hand any efforts seriously directed to that end, as this project is. However, this is clearly not intended to be purely an "academic exercise", nor, it seems to us, could it be. The initiation of such a project would raise a number of very difficult questions of a political nature, not least, from our point of view, about the participation and role of the British Government. The questions that would be raised for the other potential participants, who include, we note, not only the main constitutional political parties, but also Sinn Fein and the UDA, as well as the Irish

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Government, would not be for us to answer. But their answers would, it seems to us, inevitably have implications, perhaps major implications, for the efforts that are currently being made to achieve political progress in Northern Ireland. This would, we expect, continue to be so over the period for which the project would run.

It may be argued that the existence of such a project, operating in parallel with other activities devoted to the same end, could have a benign effect. We would not wish to suggest that the effect would necessarily be malign, but we do believe that it is very likely that confusion would be caused. We are concerned about the risks of confusion which such a project would entail, and, if it is proceeded with, we would need to consider very carefully whether we could participate and, if so, on what basis. Whether the approach that is proposed would commend itself to the other parties who might be involved would be for them to say. I can only say that we have been given no indication that it would (but neither of course have we sought their views). You will no doubt be aware, however, that a number of the parties are already committed in various ways to further dialogue about the future government of Northern Ireland.

I doubt that I can usefully add to these tentative comments, but I should be happy to discuss, if that would be helpful. I have not, of course, sought to offer a view on the purely academic merits of the proposal.

D C KIRK  
Constitutional and Political Division

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Mr Chesterton (c/o Mr Miles) - B

cc Mr Burns o/r - B  
Mr Miles - B  
Mr Spence - M  
Mr Bell - B  
Dr Harbison - M  
Mr Daniell - M

UNDER/ SEC 26/4  
-7 APR 1988  
CENT SEC

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07 APR 1988  
MUFAX ROOM  
STORMONT HOUSE ANNEX

"THIRD PARTY INITIATIVE"

You have seen Mr McConnell's minute of 25 March, and I have discussed in draft with you and Mr Burns.

2. It seems to me that the short answer has to be "no". But it may be helpful to set down why our answer is negative, if only so that we can decide the best way of conveying a negative response. And we ought to consider whether there is anything positive that can be got out of this approach.

3. We agreed at the most recent PDG meeting that now was not the time for a "third party initiative", although we would not want to rule it out for later. I do not think we had in mind quite the academic prospectus that is now before us. It is one thing for the Government and/or the parties to "appoint" a person or persons to carry out some sort of study designed to establish the common political ground. It is rather a different kettle of fish for a group of academics to initiate their own show and to carry it through independently from the Government (or Governments, since the Republic is also involved) and the parties. Conceivably, we might be able to convert the current proposition into something more like a study "by appointment", as it were. But we were fairly clear in the PDG discussion that any such exercise would only be desirable if

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it arose from agreement between the parties. In the present case, it seems to me extremely unlikely that agreement would be forthcoming, if it were sought. There are a lot of people who would need to agree: the full list of 'players' includes not only the two governments and the main constitutional parties, but also Sinn Fein and the UDA (and the NIO would evidently be expected also to "represent" the security forces). That list would pose problems for almost everyone on it. Few could be expected to be enthusiastic, in any case, about participation in what reads rather like an "experiment in political anthropology". For obvious reasons the future "agenda" is not clear, although a good deal of prominence is given to the Article 11 review for starters. Moreover, for the moment, at any rate, there is no obvious gap in our political development efforts to be filled: the Secretary of State is following a strategy to bring the various parties together. It is hard to see that an independent 'study' - involving more junior politicians - would do anything other than confuse and make life more difficult for the Government.

4. A conversation with Dr Tomei last week leads me to suppose that the Nuffield Foundation would understand this very well. They are, I believe, expecting to say "no": they feel that they could not be accused of unwillingness to take an interest in Northern Ireland, since they are already supporting integrated education. They may have sufficient grounds for saying "no" without our "advice". I think we are bound, however, to give them some comments, but it would be wise to be fairly cautious in making them. This is potentially a matter of considerable controversy and we genuinely do not want to rule out any efforts to bring about dialogue or contribute to a "solution", if they seemed likely to command general support. In fact, we do not have to say "no" in terms.

5. On the other hand, I do not think we can convey - assuming that our advice to the Nuffield Foundation may, or may need to, reach the University of Ulster in some way - a message that is any more positive or enthusiastic about this project than is the attached draft. It is not clear that there will come a time in the near future when a "third party initiative" - of this sort, or a variant

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- would be helpful. Nor is it in our interest to suggest now that time might come. We do not want to take eyes off the ball which we currently have in the air - a ball which the Secretary of State is playing. There are very considerable risks, it seems to me, about diversions elsewhere on the field.

6. Dr Tomei will want a reply by the middle of next week. I have undertaken to have a further word with him next Monday about our thinking. Subject to any views that you or others may have, I think it would also be prudent to show the papers to the Secretary of State, Dr Mawhinney and PUS's on Monday, summarizing the advice here and inviting the Secretary of State to note the reply which I might send on Tuesday evening (after the PDG meeting, incidentally, on that day). It would therefore be helpful to have any comments in the next couple of days, thus enabling me to submit the papers early on Monday (when I shall mostly be out of the office).

(Signed)

D C KIRK  
Constitutional and Political Division (London)  
6th April 1988

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DRAFT

Dr Anthony Tomei  
The Muffield Foundation  
28 Bedford Square  
London, WC1B 3EG.

6th April 1988

Thank you for your letter of 22 March to John McConnell, about which we have spoken. You asked for the MIO's advice - "given the delicacy of what is being proposed" - about an application for financial support from the Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster, for a project "Analysing Political Relationships in Northern Ireland".

It is not, I think, putting it too grandly to suggest that the objective of this project is "to resolve the conflict". We would not dismiss out of hand any efforts seriously directed to that end, as this project is. However, this is clearly not intended to be purely an "academic exercise", nor, it seems to us, could it be. The initiation of such a project would raise a number of very difficult questions of a political nature, not least, from our point of view, about the participation and role of the British Government. The questions that would be raised for the other potential participants, who include, we note, not only the main constitutional political parties, but also Sinn Fein and the UDA, as well as the Irish Government, would not be for us to answer. But their answers would, it seems to us, inevitably have implications, perhaps major implications, for the efforts that are currently being made to achieve political progress in Northern Ireland. This would, we expect, continue to be so over the period for which the project would run.

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It may be argued that the existence of such a project, operating in parallel with other activities devoted to the same end, could have a benign effect. We would not wish to suggest that the effect would necessarily be malign, but do believe that it is very likely that confusion would be caused. Since we would have no control over the project - and, by its nature, we properly would not - it would not be in our gift to resolve any such confusion. We are, therefore, rather wary about the risks which such a project would entail, and, if it is proceeded with, we would need to consider very carefully whether we could participate and, if so, on what basis. Whether the approach that is proposed would commend itself to the other parties who might be involved would be for them to say. I can only say that we have been given no indication that it would (but neither have we sought their views). You will no doubt be aware, however, that a number of the parties are already committed in various ways to further dialogue about the future government of Northern Ireland.

I doubt that I can add to these tentative comments, but I should be happy to discuss, if that would be helpful. I have not, of course, sought to offer a view on the academic merits of the proposal.

D C KIRK

Constitutional and Political Division

2652/im

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Belfast BT4 3ST  
Tel. Belfast 63011

Head of the Northern Ireland  
Civil Service  
Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, KCB

HCS/4/1

Sir Robert Kidd

6 April 1988

*Dear Bob,*

Thank you for sending me a copy of the letter you received from Keith Webb of the Centre for the Analysis of Conflict about the proposal for "facilitation" with various parties in Northern Ireland.

I understand that this proposal forms part of a 3-year project developed by some academics in the University of Ulster under the title "Analysing political relationships in Northern Ireland". The main theme of the project is to develop communication among those who are considered parties to the conflict in Northern Ireland. The group headed by Paul Arthur and Tony Hepburn are presently trying to secure funding from one of the major Charitable Trusts in Great Britain.

We have already concluded that it would not be appropriate for Government to have any links with this project, since, given the present sensitive stage of political dialogue, any third party initiative may not be at all helpful, however well intentioned. I would therefore caution against any support from Co-Operation North.

I hope this explains the position, but if you require further information or advice please let me know.

*Yours  
Ken*

hec ~~Mr Spence~~  
Mr J McConnell.

/JH