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CONFIDENTIAL

189/3

c.c. Mr. Spence
Mr. Elliott
Mr. Hewitt
Mr. Carson

Mr. Pearson, ^{27/3/86}

VISIT BY MEMBER OF THE DFA TO THE ARTS COUNCIL, BELFAST

In response to your minute of 10 March. I raised with the Irish side of the Secretariat the matter of Mr. O'Flynn's visit to Mr. Carson of the Arts Council.

The Irish Secretariat were concerned about this meeting and in particular regretted the insensitivity with which it was handled. Steps have been taken by the Irish to ensure that any future contacts by the DFA with Northern Ireland departments, including fringe bodies, of a sensitive nature, are cleared through the Secretariat in advance. They have asked, not unreasonably that we might reciprocate, by having the British Side informed of any approaches of a sensitive nature being made by Northern Ireland Departments.

In doing so, the Secretariat would not wish to inhibit day-to-day routine exchanges between Northern Ireland Departments and their Dublin counter parts.

PRINCIPAL SECRETARIAT

25th March, 1986

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Mr Spence
Views on this?
WMM 2/3

- CC: PS/Mr Scott (B&L)
- PS/Dr Mawhinney (B&L)
- PS/PUS (B&L) 2/3
- PS/Mr Bloomfield cc
- Mr Parkes 2. Mr. Spence
- Mr Stephens 3. Al. No.
- Mr Chesterton
- Mr M Elliott
- Mr Cowling
- Mr Johnston - DENI

PS/SOS (B&L)



1. Some time ago the Minister raised at a Presentational Strategy Meeting the relationship of the work of the Intergovernmental Conference to the work of NI Departments and the seeking of information from those departments.
2. The enclosed note comes from the Director of the Arts Council which reports on the visit to Mr Ciaran Carson from a member of the DFA, Dublin. Mr Carson, an officer of the Arts Council, was being asked, from limited knowledge, to advise a Dublin Department on hypothetical public policy in Northern Ireland. In fact it is now quite clear that Mr O'Flynn's approach directly stemmed from an Irish IC initiative on part of which NIO asked the Department of Education for Northern Ireland for advice.
3. The Minister would have thought the meeting should have been cleared in advance, through Central Secretariat, and have been subject to the intended constraints, such as Mr O'Flynn being accompanied by someone from the UK side. For this purpose the Arts Council should be treated as effectively a Government Department.
4. In the light of this, the Minister would like to re-affirm the concern he expressed at the PSM meeting about the degree of co-ordination between the various Secretariats, NI Departments and Ministers.

Peter Black

PETER BLACK
PS/Dr Mawhinney

24 March 1986

SP

NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE ARTS COUNCIL

On Tuesday 25 February 1986 Ciaran Carson, the Arts Council's Traditional Arts Officer, received a 'phone call from a Mr. Colm O'Flynn who described himself as an officer of the Department of Foreign Affairs (Republic of Ireland). He explained that he would be in Belfast on 27 February and would like to have an informal discussion about matters of general interest against the background of the Anglo-Irish agreement. Mr. Carson immediately reported this approach to me and, since he had agreed to see Mr. Colm O'Flynn, I felt that it would be heavy-handed to stand on protocol and refuse the visit.

The visit took place as arranged on 27 February and was lengthy and informal.

It emerged that Mr. O'Flynn was taking soundings in various quarters - he would, for example, be speaking with the Professor of Celtic at Queen's. Already he was well informed on the language position in particular and on traditional music. He was at pains, however, to underline the fact that under no circumstances would he be talking to Sinn Fein! Indeed it emerged that the central purpose of his exploratory discussions is to see whether some proposal can be formulated that will rest the "cultural initiative" from Sinn Fein. To this end, he asked specifically whether, if additional money were available, the Arts Council would be prepared to play a more positive role in language development. To this Mr. Carson replied that the policies of the Arts Council oblige it to concern itself only with that aspect of language that is literature - poetry, imaginative prose etc. (invest?)

Mr. O'Flynn thought that the present Arts Council allocation for traditional arts is small and Mr. Carson agreed that if arts funding were increased and if the Arts Council saw it as a priority, the traditional arts department could certainly use additional financial resources. Mr. O'Flynn seemed to attach particular importance to this area for potential development because of the way in which it is shared among Protestants and Catholics, particularly in the rural communities where music-making still retains a relevance to its roots in the pattern of rural life.

Mr. O'Flynn was vague when asked where the additional finance would come from, but Mr. Carson formed the impression that it would come from the Northern Ireland Office under urging from the Anglo-Irish Conference.

There was also a suggestion that language development might be vested in a language board of some kind, on which Mr. O'Flynn hoped the Arts Council could be represented.

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OBSERVATIONS

Since it is possible that Mr. O'Flynn's visit is associated with forthcoming consideration by the Anglo-Irish conference of cultural matters, it might be helpful if I make the following observations.

1. Protocol: It would, I think, have eased our position if Mr. O'Flynn had been introduced to us through the Arts & Libraries branch.
2. Language as Literature:
It would not be appropriate for the Arts Council to be asked to participate in any programme of language development. The Arts Council is specifically responsible for creative work of literary quality and the Arts Council would not wish to treat writing in Irish any differently from writing in English as concerns the assessment of literary quality. The Council would, however, be willing to take account of the possibly smaller sales potential provided: (a) the work is accepted for publication; (b) it is adjudged to be of literary quality; and (c) the Council has resources appropriate to any increased demand.
3. Present demand for support for writing in Irish:
In the last twenty years, the Arts Council has had only a few applications for support for writing in Irish, maybe no more than five. This may be thought surprising, but the number of native Irish speakers in Ulster is probably not enough to support a literature.
4. Representation on language board:
If a language board were set up, I would think it reasonable and desirable for Mr. Carson to be a member since a literature is most likely to emerge from a strong language tradition. Whether he were to serve in a personal capacity or as a representative of the Arts Council would be for the Council's Board to consider.
5. Enhanced Funding:
Should there be any question of increased funding for traditional arts activities, or for writing in Irish were there to be any increase in manuscripts of acceptable literary standard, it would be necessary to find a formula for making additional funds available. The Arts Council has exercised considerable care to protect traditional arts forms from simplistic 'labelling' and would not wish any increase in its activities or support in this sector to be thought to spring from any political platform. There would, however, be no reluctance to substantially increase activity

