

**WHAT'S WRONG
WITH
THE MacBRIDE
CAMPAIGN?**

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"If the British Government . . . should promote and adopt legislation with clear and comprehensive legal powers to eradicate discrimination and to ensure equality of opportunity—the MacBride Principles would become redundant"

Submission by MacBride supporters to Ohio State Legislature, 1988.

"My advice to our friends in the United States was and is, if you really want to help us, then encourage investment in areas of high unemployment in Northern Ireland. That is a positive thing to do. The effect of the MacBride Principles campaign, whether people like to admit it or not, is to stop investment coming in and that is bad for us."

John Hume, MP, MEP, Leader of the Northern Ireland Social Democratic and Labour Party, 1987.

The Problem

Unemployment in Northern Ireland stands at over 15%. In some Catholic areas, it is much higher than that. Catholic males are more than twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestant males. The British Government introduced legislation in 1976 which outlawed discrimination in employment. It also took vigorous measures to eliminate inequality of opportunity. These had a major impact in the public sector (which accounts for over 40% of all employment in Northern Ireland) but had less marked effects on other areas of employment. Discrimination in employment, wherever it continues to exist, must clearly be brought to an end. Just as important, more jobs are needed, particularly in areas of highest unemployment, which are predominantly Catholic.

T Solutions

The British Government is committed to promoting the economic development of Northern Ireland. In 1988/89 Government support to the region was worth more than \$2.7 billion — \$1,800 per head a year for a population of some 1.5 million. An example of the Government's commitment is the recent announcement that it will spend some \$100m, on top of existing programs, in West Belfast and other disadvantaged areas of the city.

But Government programs alone are not enough. What Northern Ireland needs above all else is new job-creating private sector investment, from the rest of the United Kingdom and abroad, including the United States. The Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland is working hard, in North America and around the world, to attract such investment.

Most significant, the Government has brought in comprehensive new anti-discrimination legislation, which comes into force on January 1 1990 and largely supersedes the 1976 Act.

The new law imposes important additional duties on *all* employers in Northern Ireland, not just US companies. It requires them to monitor their work forces, and regularly review their employment practices. It provides for mandatory affirmative action programs, including the setting of goals and timetables. And the whole framework is underpinned by new watchdog and enforcement agencies, with powers to impose severe criminal penalties and economic sanctions (such as contract compliance) on defaulters. This is not only by far the toughest anti-discrimination law ever passed in the United Kingdom; it is also a practical, workable program for dealing with discrimination.

The new law has been welcomed by the majority Catholic party in Northern Ireland, the SDLP; and by the Irish Government. Both were closely consulted on the drafting of the Bill. Implementation of the Act will be actively monitored by both the British and Irish Governments under the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

MacBride: Why the campaign is harmful

The MacBride campaign focuses exclusively on pressurising US companies in Northern Ireland, who are among the best employers in the region, and account for 10% of manufacturing jobs there.

The British Government opposes the campaign on two main grounds:

- first, it believes that the Principles are a set of superficial "feel-good" slogans, which fail to get to the root of the problem. At best, the Principles are divisive and confusing. At worst, they could mislead an employer into illegal action. Either way, they are positively harmful to the prospects of creating equal job opportunities for all in Northern Ireland.
- second, and even more important, the Government believes that the overall effect of the MacBride campaign is to discourage new job-creating US investment in Northern Ireland. Threats of divestment, shareholder resolutions, product boycotts and burdensome reporting requirements with attendant political hassle are part and parcel of the MacBride campaign. Forcing US companies to comply with dozens of differing requirements from several different State legislatures, *on top* of the stringent requirements of Northern Ireland fair employment law, only deters firms from investing there. New investment is the key to more jobs, and more jobs are the key to reducing unemployment.

MacBride: Why the Principles are harmful

At first sight, the Principles may appear unobjectionable. But closer examination shows them to be wholly inadequate for addressing the complicated realities of tackling job discrimination in Northern Ireland. This is not surprising, since the Principles—unlike the new law—are not the result of Parliamentary debate, nor any form of consultation with the people of Northern Ireland.

continued overleaf

the Principles, unlike the Northern Ireland fair employment law:

- offer slogans, not programs, and thus do nothing to help—and could hinder—employers in implementing the fair employment law in Northern Ireland;
- apply only to US companies, who are in the forefront of equal opportunity practice;
- have no legal status in Northern Ireland;
- may imply, in at least three cases, quotas and reverse discrimination, both of which are illegal in Northern Ireland, for the good reason that they make it harder to achieve the goal of equal opportunity for all;
- offer employers no detailed, practical guidance on how they should actually go about practising equal employment opportunity in recruitment, selection and training;
- contain no provisions for monitoring, enforcement or regular review by employers;
- contain no spur to implementation other than threats of divestment or shareholder resolutions;
- make no mention of goals and timetables, and make no practical provision for affirmative action;
- make employers responsible for ensuring security for their workers traveling to and from work, something not only impractical but possibly dangerous. Security must be the overall responsibility of the police, not individual firms;
- generally, through confused and inappropriate language, distract employers from the task of implementing the *far more radical and comprehensive Northern Ireland fair employment law*.

In contrast the British Government has clearly, in the words of the Ohio supporters of MacBride to their State legislature, "promoted and adopted legislation with clear and comprehensive legal powers to eradicate discrimination and to ensure equality of opportunity." The MacBride Principles are redundant and should be dropped.

Conclusion

The Principles fail to address the real issues of fair employment in Northern Ireland. Worse still, the MacBride campaign, by hassling existing investors and discouraging new ones, actually harms those it is ostensibly intended to help—the people of Northern Ireland.

That's why:

- the majority Catholic Nationalist Party in Northern Ireland—the SDLP—opposes the campaign;
- the *only* political party in Northern Ireland to support MacBride is Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, whose terrorist violence continues to destroy jobs in Catholic areas;
- one of the prime movers in the MacBride campaign in the US is the Irish Northern Aid Committee (NORAID), the registered US agent of the Provisional IRA;
- the MacBride campaign has failed to win support from churches, employers, trade unions and the Fair Employment Agency in Northern Ireland; and
- not one US company has signed up to the Principles.

In 4 years, the MacBride campaign has created not a single job in Northern Ireland, and produced not a dime of new investment. No-one will ever know how much damage it has done to Northern Ireland's fragile economy by frightening off new investment which would have created the jobs people there so desperately need.

So, if you *really* want to help the people of Northern Ireland, you will respect *their* clearly expressed wishes, and will not support the MacBride campaign.

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