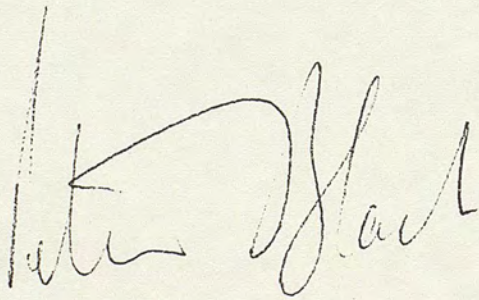


PS/Secretary of State (B&L)

cc: PS/Ministers (L&B)
PS/Mr Bloomfield
NI Perm Secs
Mr Brennan
Mr Stephens
Mr Chesterton
Mr M Elliott
Mr Spence ✓

THE TWO TRADITIONS

The Minister has seen Mr Bloomfield's note of 15 January and has some reservations about recommendations 2 and 3. If the Secretary of State thought it worth discussing these matters with colleagues and officials before reaching a decision, then my Minister would welcome being part of the discussion.



PETER BLACK
PS/Dr Mawhinney

20 January 1987

GBC

E. R.

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HCS/ 1/ 27

Mr Pearson 16/1/87 46/1
Mr Carson 16/1/87

to see a return pl
MM 15/1

cc. PS/Ministers (B&L) -M
PS/PUS (B&L) -M
NI Perm Secs
Mr Brennan -M
Mr Stephens
Mr Chesterton -M
Mr M Elliott
Mr Spence

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

THE TWO TRADITIONS

1. PCC has been considering, against the background of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the current political climate in NI, what further steps might be taken in the very complex and difficult area of Government's policy in relation to the "two traditions" in Northern Ireland.
2. Our starting point has to be a continuing concern over the deepening divisions between the two communities in NI, and the increasing difficulties which Government faces in responding sensitively and sensibly to the existence of the "two traditions" in ways which do not simply increase those divisions or increase the existing confusion over the "identity" of the people who live in NI.
3. The problems are exemplified by the present debate over the position of the Irish language in NI. There are enormous gaps between what the Irish Government and the SDLP would like to see in terms of positive encouragement of the Irish language, what HMG would regard as sensible, and what the majority community would deem to be reasonable.
4. We have, therefore, been exploring what further action might be available to Government. First, we believe that over the coming months Ministers should be

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seeking opportunities to restate their basic position - ie that HMG is seeking the development of a society in NI in which there is full equality of opportunity; 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 etc etc.

5. Regretfully, we suspect that, in the present political atmosphere, Ministers are unlikely to get a very positive response, especially from the majority community, to such a message. Nevertheless, it is important that Ministers should continue to make their position clear.
6. We have been exploring tentatively whether there might be a role for some sort of new body which would be charged with giving advice on how greater understanding of, and respect for, the different traditions in NI might be achieved and on how Government might handle sensitive issues in this general area in a way which unites rather than divides. Some of us feel that we lost a useful concept and left a gap in our machinery of government when the Community Relations Commission disappeared.
7. There is a persuasive argument that an authoritative body, composed largely of people born in NI, might help Government to develop a sounder and more widely accepted basis for long-term policy in this extremely difficult area, as well as assisting in influencing political and public opinion in NI. On the other hand, it would be hard to find members for such a body who would command the respect of both communities and there is no guarantee that the body would always provide advice which Ministers would regard as sensible or workable. Also, in the absence of political progress, such a body could well find itself drawn into wider issues, including segregated education and indeed the Agreement itself. More importantly, we suspect that unionists would be deeply suspicious of the motives for such an initiative.

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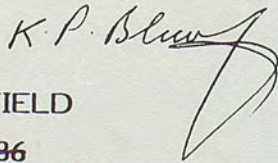
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8. Nevertheless, I think that, if and when it proves possible to achieve some movement on the political front, there might be a case for considering a Government initiative along these lines.
10. In the meantime, we believe that it would be worthwhile to explore an alternative of drawing together, independent of Government, a group of NI people to look at these identity issues. There are a few individuals of some experience and standing who have already expressed some interest in being involved in such a way. It might be possible to arrange support and funding through an outside body like the British Irish Association or the "Two Traditions Group". While a woolly general report by some well intentioned people would have little positive impact, thorough and well-argued advice from a group of Ulster people of some weight and credibility (eg George Thompson, outgoing Director of the Ulster Folk Museum), might be helpful. I would, therefore, like the Secretary of State's agreement to exploring the possibilities further, without, of course, committing him or involving Government in any formal way.
11. The Secretary of State is invited to:-
 - 11.1 agree that Ministers should seek appropriate opportunities to restate Government policy in relation to the two traditions in NI;
 - 11.2 bear in mind, in the event of some progress proving possible on the political front, the advantages of creating a new body to advise on these matters; and
 - 11.3 agree to officials exploring discreetly the possibility of useful work by a group of experienced individuals, independent of government but perhaps supported from some other source.

K P BLOOMFIELD

15 January 1986

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