

507/93.
Meetings with Political Reps

cc: PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Watkins
Mr Bell
Mr Holmes
Mr Maccabe
Mr Jordan
Ms Jendoubi
Mr Jardine
Mr Corbett
Mr MORROW

Mr Watkins
29/11

From: J A Canavan
CCRU

28 November 1995

To: PS/Michael Ancram (DENI, B&L)

MINISTER'S MEETING WITH THE REV DR I R K PAISLEY MP

1. Dr Paisley wrote on 15 September 1995 to the Minister requesting a meeting, along with a deputation, to discuss matters relating to the promotion of the Ulster Scots language in Northern Ireland and to express concern about the role of CCRU in that regard. The letter stated that he would like to discuss possible funding for the promotion of the Ulster Scots language, as it had received no funding comparable to that for the Irish language.
2. The Private Secretary replied on 3 October, agreeing to a meeting, and this has been arranged for Wednesday, 6 December at 1.45pm, with a pre-brief at 1.30pm.
3. Dr Paisley requested this meeting at a time when the Ulster Scots lobby had been engaged in a publicity offensive about Government's failure to give them sufficient recognition. In part this sprang from a

misunderstanding of some correspondence between myself and the Secretary of the Ulster Scots Academy, which has since been clarified with Dr Adamson.

4. It is suggested that the Minister, in handling this meeting, draws the attention of Dr Paisley and the delegation to financial support for Ulster Scots culture from the Cultural Traditions Group of the Community Relations Council, which is not inconsiderable. What cannot be conceded, for obvious resource reasons, is that Ulster Scots should be treated identically to Irish, ie similar levels of support, teaching in schools, examinations etc. Similarly, Government has never conceded the Irish language lobby's demands for identity of treatment with English, on the grounds of 'parity of esteem'. Nor is there any point in engaging the delegation on the sterile argument of whether Ulster Scots is a dialect of English or a separate language. The positive message which they should take away from the meeting is that Government respects and acknowledges the Ulster Scots contribution to the cultural heritage of Northern Ireland, including its distinctive linguistic component, and is prepared to support via the CTG soundly based proposals for assistance.
5. However, the Minister should not accept at face value the deputation's estimate of the level of support for their movement. A very small number of activists, led by Dr Adamson, has been promoting Ulster Scots. Unionist politicians have given their backing to the campaign, essentially as a way of criticising Government's policy towards the Irish language (cf. recent parliamentary questions from Robert McCartney MP), but it is unlikely that they would share the revivalist aspirations of the activists. Beyond this coalition, it is unlikely that many of the tens of

thousands of people claimed by the movement as 'native speakers' would acknowledge themselves as such.

6. Full briefing is attached.

[Signed: JAC]

J A CANAVAN

MINISTER'S MEETING WITH REV I R K PAISLEY MP AND ULSTER SCOTS
DELEGATION, 6 DECEMBER 1995

GENERAL POLICY

Line to Take

- Government acknowledges the many strands in the complex cultural heritage of Northern Ireland;
- one of the most important of these is the Scottish cultural connection, manifested in the Ulster Scots heritage, including its distinctive linguistic traditions;
- as with the Irish language, the Government is prepared to assist financially, where practicable, soundly based proposals for support.

Background

A small group of activists, centred round Dr Ian Adamson, has campaigned in recent years for governmental support for Ulster Scots, on a comparable level to that for the Irish language. This group operates through the Ulster Scots Language Society, the Ulster Scots Academy and Dr Adamson's own Pretani Press. In 1995 the Ulster Scots Language Society became affiliated to the Ulster Scots Heritage Council, a more broadly based organisation which seeks to encourage knowledge of the cultural, musical and religious links with Scotland.

It is widely acknowledged that there is a significant Scottish linguistic component in Ulster speech. The Ulster Scots lobby, however, go beyond this to claim that they have inherited a separate language, discrete from English and

still spoken by several tens of thousands of people in Counties Antrim and Down. This claim is widely regarded with scepticism, not least among academics (though the Society frequently quotes Professor Gregg of Vancouver in their support). The European Bureau for Lesser Used Languages has acknowledged Scots as a lesser used language in Scotland and the Society claims, by extension, that this validates their claims for Ulster Scots. This is essentially a sterile argument, which the Minister should avoid if at all possible. Whether a discrete language or a dialect of English, CCRU, the Cultural Traditions Group and the Arts Council regard the Ulster Scots linguistic tradition as worthy of research and support. As with Irish, Government is prepared to consider soundly based requests for financial assistance.

We cannot, however, concede that Ulster Scots requires support on the same scale as that accorded to Irish (currently £2m per annum, excluding the teaching of Irish in English medium schools). There is no evidence of any demand, outside the confined ranks of the Society and its affiliates, for Ulster Scots to be used in education or the media.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR ULSTER SCOTS

Line to Take

- In recent years a number of projects with an Ulster Scots dimension have been funded through the Cultural Traditions Group and the Arts Council;
- important that the Ulster Scots language movement bid realistically for resources;
- financial comparisons with support for the Irish language are not appropriate.

Background

The Ulster Scots lobby have unrealistic expectations of the level of support which they can expect from Government and associated agencies, largely because they assume that they should receive support on the same scale as that for the Irish language. In fact, Ulster Scots projects have been quite successful in attracting assistance from the Cultural Traditions Group and the Arts Council.

- In 1992/93 CTG gave publication grants totalling £4,500 to Pretani Press for books on 3 Ulster Scots 'Weaver Poets';
- in 1994/95 CTG gave a grant of £3,000 to a book, 'The Hamely Tongue' by James Fenton, published by the Ulster Scots Academy;
- the journal of the Ulster Scots language society is currently supported by CTG with a grant of £400 and by the Arts Council with a grant of £750;

- CTG has allocated £10,000 to the Ulster Scots Heritage Council for the salary costs of a development worker, £1,500 to assist the development of a strategy for the Council, and £900 towards the costs of an Ulster Scots Directory;
- CTG is organising a conference on "Varieties of Scottishness" to be held in Queens University and the Ulster Museum in March 1996, at an estimated cost of £6,000.

Grants for cultural activities of this sort would normally be made by CTG, rather than CCRU. CCRU directly funds Irish language projects because of their political sensitivity. It may also be recalled that DENI has contributed over £250,000 to the production of a Schools Dictionary of Ulster Speech, to be published by Oxford University Press in 1996, and in which Scottish linguistic influences will obviously be prominent.

Against this background, it is surprising that Dr Adamson should claim in a Newsletter article of 19 September that Ulster Scots 'receives no funding'.

The Society and the Academy have lodged very large bids in the past for Government assistance. In 1994, Dr Adamson put forward a prospectus for the development of the Ulster Scots Academy which envisaged capital expenditure of £123k and annual recurrent expenditure of £107k. In 1995 he submitted a further application for funding for the Academy from European sources of £0.5m. These applications have been unsuccessful. There is also a current application from the Ulster Scots Language Society to the Arts Council for funding in the next financial year of £168k. When pitched at this level, such applications are unlikely to be successful,

particularly given the narrow basis of support for the Ulster Scots language movement.

Paradoxically, Ulster Scots activists extrapolate from the level of support for Irish language projects, just as Irish language enthusiasts claim that expenditure on Scots Gaelic and Welsh sets the benchmark for their own Government funding in Northern Ireland. As with the Scottish and Welsh parallels, we do not accept that financial read across is appropriate. The levels of usage of each language, their geographic dispersal, and pattern of historic continuity differ in each case and determine the levels of support which can be realistically expected from Government.

ULSTER SCOTS AND STREET NAMES LEGISLATION

Lines to Take

- The new street names legislation permits a District Council to erect street signs in two languages, one of which must be English;
- it is for the relevant District Council to decide on what the second language should be

[If the issue of a Court challenge is raised]

- an aggrieved party may apply for judicial review of a District Council decision and that might require consideration of whether the second street name was in a language other than English

Background

In May 1995 the provisions of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) (NI) Order came into effect. This removed the previous prohibition on a District Council erecting a street name in a language other than English. Henceforth, a District Council may erect bilingual signs and English must be one of the two languages. It is generally assumed that, in practice, the second language most frequently used will be Irish.

Ms Isobel M'Culloch, the Secretary of the Ulster Scots Academy, wrote (in Ulster Scots) to CCRU in May 1995 to enquire whether street names in English and Ulster Scots would have the same legal standing as street names in English and Irish. She received a reply, cleared by DOE and Solicitors Branch, which stated that responsibility for street naming is a District Council matter and that if a

Council chose to regard Ulster Scots as 'a language other than English', the Government would take no view on the matter. A third party might, however, seek to challenge such a decision on the grounds of a linguistic status of Ulster Scots, but that would ultimately be for the Courts to decide. There was further correspondence with Ms M'Culloch to clarify this point. Dr Adamson seems to have misunderstood this correspondence and claimed in his Newsletter article of 19 September that 'we have been told by the Central Community Relations Unit that we must prove the linguistic status of Ulster Scots in Court'. CCRU has since written to Dr Adamson correcting this misapprehension and others which he voiced in a radio interview at that time.

ULSTER SCOTS AND NEXT CENSUS

Line to Take

[if raised]

- The possibility of a question on competence in Ulster Scots has been raised in a recent PQ by Robert McCartney MP. The number and form of question to be included in the 2001 Census has not yet been determined. There will be a process of consultation, testing and review before decisions are made. The possibility of including a question on Ulster Scots will be considered as part of that process. A census order, including the proposed questions, will be laid before Parliament in 1999.

Background

The 1991 Census included a question for the first time on the ability of respondents to speak, read or write Irish. This generated the figure of 142,000 people who claimed to have such knowledge. In line with their general view that Government should treat Ulster Scots and Irish identically, Ulster Scots activists would be keen to have an additional question included in the 2001 Census in respect of Ulster Scots.

The line to take above reflects an answer given to Robert McCartney MP when he asked a written PQ on the subject in October. It also reflects the line taken by the Secretary of State for Scotland in response to a PQ from Sir David Steel on including a question in Scotland on competence in Scots.