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Participation by Government representatives and State-Sponsored Bodies in St. Patrick's Day Parades in the United States

1. Following the naming of Bobby Sands as "honorary Grand Marshal" of this year's New York St. Patrick's Day Parade the question of the official and State-Sponsored presence at this event arises. In previous years the question of our attitude in relation to parades (in New York and elsewhere in the U.S.) which included Noraid and Irish National Caucus units have arisen. The matter has been discussed by the Government and the practice has been for official representatives to withdraw from the reviewing stand when a Noraid/Caucus contingent is passing.
2. Late last year the organisation of this year's New York parade became embroiled in controversy when long-time parade committee chairman, Judge Comerford, announced that the parade would take place on the Sunday preceding March 17. An "ad hoc committee" formed to oppose this decision had a strong Noraid influence and the idea of naming Sands honorary marshal originated in this body. With the parade date restored to March 17 the parade committee proper met earlier this month and elected Brother Charles Quinn of Iona College, New Rochelle, N.Y. as Grand Marshal. Six or seven of those present spoke in favour of making Sands honorary marshal and this was apparently accepted without a vote. Noraid spokesmen presented this as a radical new departure for the parade and set about publicising it as such (their attitude is faithfully reflected in the attached piece from "The Irish People" a PIRA-orientated newspaper published in New York, but the Sands nomination has been widely noted in the media generally). A further difficulty for us is that the eleven aides to the Grand Marshal include one Patrick Mullen of Brooklyn who is under indictment on a charge of attempting to buy weapons from an undercover FBI agent. The trial of Mullen and three associates may take place next month. Noraid supporters are clearly seeking to strengthen their position in preparation for the forthcoming battle over control of the parade in future years (Judge Comerford is unlikely to continue as chairman). One of their strengths is the degree of cross-membership between the Ancient Order of Hibernians and Noraid - the former body has traditionally been dominant in the parade's

organisation. Thus, the immediate difficulty presented by the posthumous role of Sands may have to be seen in the context of a long term threat to the nature of the parade from the Noraid camp.

3. The Consul General in New York and his staff have lobbied extensively, though discreetly, against associating the parade with Sands among the more responsible elements involved in organising the parade. The initial response in these circles (see para. 6 below for current situation) was to try to avoid a confrontation on the issue which it is argued would merely serve Noraid's publicity purposes. Some well-disposed contacts however assured the Consulate that the symbolic involvement of Sands was likely to assume lesser rather than greater proportions. There is a danger that some politicians may seek to benefit from association with the Sands aspect of the parade in an election year. The Ambassador and Consul General have indicated some concern regarding Mayor Koch's attitude in particular.

4. The Consul General has discussed this matter with the Aer Lingus and Bord Fáilte representatives in New York. Aer Lingus are involved each year in the installation ceremony before the parade itself (a contingent of hostesses, shamrock presentation etc.) and they also purchase extensive T.V. advertising in connection with the event. Bord Fáilte's involvement is not so extensive but they maintain "open house" at their 5th Avenue office and Mr. Joe Kennedy of B.F. was last year's Grand Marshal. Aer Lingus, in particular, have strongly argued that there should be no over-reaction to the Sands proposal, that any instruction to withdraw would be commercially damaging and that any involvement in this type of political controversy would have other serious repercussions in terms of bomb threats etc.

5. On 3 March last a parade organisation meeting in San Francisco also named Sands as honorary Grand Marshal of their parade to be held on 14 March. This decision was taken when normal rules of procedure were overruled by a pliant chairman and the meeting was "packed" with Noraid elements. In other

U.S. cities where parades are due to take place the Ambassador reports that to date there have been no similar developments regarding Sands (with the exception of the small community of Bergen in New Jersey). Embassy and Consular officials normally attend parades in the major centres as staff resources allow. It is expected that in most cases the usual Noraid/Caucus contingents will participate this year. Parades have already taken place in the U.S. (weekend 6/7 March) but the major ones will take place between now and 20/21 March.

6. On 3 March standing policy in regard to official representatives on reviewing stands at U.S. parades was confirmed. i.e. that they should leave when units from Noraid or the Irish National Caucus are marching past. In New York the Consul General, acting on instructions, attended a reception before the Grand Marshall installation ceremony but withdrew before the ceremony itself as this would have involved sharing the dais with Mullen (para. 2 above). Regarding the conduct of this ceremony the Consul General reports that assurances from Judge Comerford and others that the Sands issue would be downplayed were to some extent realised. There was a strong Noraid clique present but Comerford by omitting any reference to Sands in his formal remarks and by his general conduct of the proceedings reflected an apparently more pronounced desire on the part of responsible committee members to minimise the Sands dimension (this desire had grown since the Consulate first began lobbying on this issue). However, the Consul General reports that the Noraid element is clearly intent on pushing the advantage they gained from the initial Sands decision. And the Committee's decision naming him an honorary Grand Marshal will not be reversed (the official parade programme will apparently contain a single sentence at the bottom of the first page referring to Sands).

7. The Consul General has recommended that if the Sands decision is as minimal as the more responsible organisers indicate then Aer Lingus and Bord Failte might be allowed to participate especially as controversy on this issue is likely to be welcomed by Noraid. Regarding his own role he might be instructed to attend on the reviewing stand for the early part of the parade but not march in the parade itself. This would avoid the

Consul General marching behind Mullen and give him the opportunity to withdraw more easily should the parade develop into a more manifest Sands demonstration than is now anticipated (as in other years and in line with renewed instructions the Consul General will, of course, leave the stand in any case before the arrival of Noraid/Caucus contingents). The Ambassador has endorsed the Consul General's recommendation in this matter.

8. The Minister and Government may wish to consider the question of participation by Government representatives and State-Sponsored bodies in U.S. parades, particularly in New York and San Francisco.