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NORTHERN IRELAND: OVERSEAS INFORMATION EFFORT

Hidden c.c.

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Mr. Brennan 2. At 10.

Mr. P. N. Bell

Mr. Gilliland

Mr. Elliott

Mr. McConnell

Mr. Wood

I minuted you about the Overseas Information Effort on Northern Ireland on 29 July last year. Now, a year later and nearly 9 months after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, Tom King and I thought it might be useful for you to have a further report which not surprisingly pays particular attention to the USA.

2. The United States

- (i) Our information effort continues to be dominated by the US. There is more interest in developments in Northern Ireland than elsewhere outside the British Isles, and the USA has a special significance for Northern Ireland, because of the presence of a large Irish/American population with a powerful lobby; because of its actual and potential investment in Northern Ireland, because of its role as a super-power; because it remains a source of weapons and money for terrorists and because the people of Northern Ireland in both parts of the community pay a good deal of attention to the US and views expressed there.
- (ii) The Anglo-Irish Agreement has had a very positive influence on US perceptions of our policies in Northern Ireland. As I found when I visited Washington, New York and Boston immediately after the signing it was welcomed by the Administration and by the Congressional leadership, including



moderate Irish-American opinion. Even those, such as Congressman Biaggi, who have opposed most aspects of our policy, gave the Agreement a guarded welcome. Only Noraid and other extreme Republican-orientated elements opposed it.

The Agreement continues to stand us in good stead with the more moderate sections of Irish/American opinion. But if the Agreement was seen to be failing support for it would evaporate fast. Media coverage in the United States of the signing of the Agreement was extensive (although it competed for space with the Reagan/Gorbachev summit and the Columbian volcano disaster). It was seen as a positive and courageous step by both Governments to tackle a major and seemingly intractable problem. Considered editorial opinion was enthusiastic in its praise of you and Dr FitzGerald.

(iii) However, although the US Government and the general population are currently well-disposed to our policies in Northern Ireland, extreme Irish/American groups, in particular the Irish National Caucus and Noraid, continue to be troublesome. Although they are not numerous they can exploit American concerns for human rights as well as traditional anti-British feeling in 'Irish America' to mount potentially damaging campaigns. Countering these takes up a good deal of time and energy. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that the outward projection efforts of the Central Office of Information and the enormously valuable work of the British Information Services throughout the United States should not be impaired. Obviously we believe it desirable that such efforts should be intensified but it is essential that they are not reduced.

(iv) The first of these campaigns concerned the UK/US Supplementary Extradition Treaty which removed the political offence exemption in respect of certain serious crimes. The signing of the Anglo Irish Agreement helped to put editorial opinion



behind the Extradition Treaty and support became almost universal after the US raid on Libya. The US Administration was as you know most helpful and supportive throughout. We saw such comments as - "The IRA is a murderous, anti-democratic, pro-Soviet apparatus that has artfully capitalised on sentimentality and some legitimate resources"; "When the rest of our allies were nervously clearing their throats and declaring the sky off-limits, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was giving this country the go-ahead to strike at Libyan terrorists from British bases". (The Washington Times, 14 May 1986). Nevertheless we faced a widespread mobilisation of Irish-American opinion. Some Senators, during Senate ratification, hesitated to support us because of grass-roots opinion, and there was also anxiety about the precedent the Treaty would set for treaties with countries with less good human rights records.

Tom King's visit to the US in May was particularly opportune and he lobbied hard while there in favour of the Treaty. Our Ambassador in Washington and his staff were tireless in their efforts to bring influential opinion on Capitol Hill and elsewhere on side. These efforts have finally paid dividends; the Treaty has been ratified. Although some amendments were necessary to secure its passage the final Treaty represents a significant advance in terms both in Anglo-US relations and combatting terrorism.

The MacBride Principles

- (v) Irish-American Groups are attempting to force American companies investing in Northern Ireland to adhere to a set of principles which claim to ensure fair employment policy and are named after Sean MacBride (the Nobel and Lenin prize



winner who was the IRA Chief of Staff in the 1930's). They have put forward shareholder resolutions within particular companies who have invested in Northern Ireland and have had legislation put forward in various State legislatures to implement these Principles. The legislation carries the threat of disinvestment by pension funds from companies if the Principles are not applied in Northern Ireland. We believe that if this movement gains strength it could be very damaging to the Province discouraging both existing and new investment. We have therefore devoted considerable efforts to resist the MacBride Principles. The IDB has briefed and assisted US companies. The Embassy and Consulates have lobbied political contacts. But given the wide geographical area, the fact that Irish-American groups are fighting on home ground, and our small staff resources, it has been an uphill struggle. The Principles have been held at bay in some areas but legislation has been passed in two State Legislatures (New York and Massachusetts) and threatens to succeed elsewhere. We will redouble our efforts and indeed we may need to dedicate more resources to the task.

Briefing Material

3. We have not neglected our wider information effort. In early January the FCO issued to some 178 posts a new film on Northern Ireland produced with the COI and NIO which gives a basic outline of



Irish history in so far as it is relevant to present day problems. The film is presented as essentially educational rather than propagandist, and is aimed, through our overseas posts, at use in schools, universities, and other educational and cultural institutions. It is also being used for briefing in our posts of staff and invited guests. It briefly records, in particular, the efforts of successive British Governments to find a political solution to Northern Ireland's problems acceptable to all shades of opinion. The film has already been shown on television in a number of third world countries and we hope it will be shown on Canadian television. It has also proved valuable in briefings by Embassies and High Commissions. It capitalises on the Anglo-Irish Agreement and should serve to increase understanding of our policies at relatively small cost.

Additional material on a wide range of topics relevant to the current situation has been provided by seven briefing papers prepared up to July this year by the FCO in conjunction with NIO. A Background Briefing - "Qadhafi and Irish Terrorism" - was also issued by the FCO in April this year. These briefs are invaluable for briefing trusted contacts abroad - who often have no easy way of getting the facts.

Visits

4. A good deal of useful work has been done with a regular flow of



visits to and from Northern Ireland. As I noted above Tom King has been visiting Washington and New York primarily to make political contacts. Charlie Lyell and Rhodes Boyson have also visited West Germany to promote Northern Ireland agriculture and industry respectively, Rhodes like myself, has also been to the States to encourage investment; I went to Paris to launch our new film and explain the Anglo Irish Agreement and Brian Mawhinney visited Mexico and the West Coast of America during the World Cup. We have kept up the pressure, encouraging foreign, London-based Diplomats to visit Northern Ireland and in the last year we have welcomed the Canadian High Commissioner, the US Ambassador and the Japanese Ambassador. Tom and I have continued to give high priority to the briefing of US and other foreign journalists both in London and Belfast.

The Future

5. We will continue to work closely with the FCO to promote NIO's image in the USA, as well as more widely abroad, and to capitalise both figuratively and literally on the goodwill the Anglo Irish Agreement has earned us. Another direct product of the Agreement, the International Fund for Ireland to which the US has already committed \$50 million with contributions to come from the Canadians, New Zealand, probably also Australia and other countries - constitutes a further symbolic but also financially worthwhile recognition for what we are trying to achieve in Ireland.



6. I am copying this note to Willie Whitelaw, Douglas Hurd, Geoffrey Howe, Tom King and John Wakeham.

MS.

NICHOLAS SCOTT

12 August 1986