

PUS/ 3568

26 APR 1988

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① PS/Sir K. Blomfield.
cc Mr Burns ②
Mr Stephens NIOB
Mr Innes
Mr Bell - M.

PS/SIR JOHN BLELLOCH (B&L) - B

cc Mr Wood - B
Mr Hewitt - B
Mr J McConnell - B

INFORMATION WORK IN NORTHERN IRELAND

As instructed I attach a note on this subject following the PUS's meeting yesterday. Before drafting, I discussed the subject matter with Mr Hewitt and Mr McConnell.

[signed]

R O MILES
26 April 1988

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INFORMATION WORK IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Target Audience

Our information work has several different targets, the main divisions being the international audience, the British audience, and Northern Ireland itself. These are listed in order of increasing importance, though the Irish/American audience is in a special category which justifies and receives a special effort.

Anti-Terrorist Propaganda

2. Public opinion in Northern Ireland is deeply divided on the interpretation of political events. There is no possibility of providing a rallying point for national opinion (on the lines of Yad Vashem). Anything which struck the right note with one community would automatically strike the wrong note with the other. We can however bring home to public opinion the true nature of the paramilitaries, and expose the harm they do to the population as a whole.

Reactive Information Work

3. There is intense media interest in security incidents in Northern Ireland, and this calls for a very fast reaction from us. We consider that we are generally successful in this, and it is not the case that the terrorists "get their story out first". One problem is the tendency of the media to expect a response from the Secretary of State himself. Given the volume of material and the need to be on call seven days a week this places an unfair burden on him.

Background Information Work

4. It is equally important, though less headline catching, to reiterate again and again the underlying facts about the purpose of the Army's presence, the objectives of Government and police etc. For this the co-operation of Army and police Press spokesmen with the Northern Ireland Press Office is essential, but not enough. Far more important for the public image of the Army and RUC than what they say is what they do.

5. The same applies more broadly to Government policy too. When any major political development is in preparation, whether a statement by the Attorney General on prosecutions or a decision on

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support for shipbuilding, the question of public presentation should be an integral part of the process. It would be worth circulating regularly to Ministers a list of issues which require careful presentation in public, on the lines of the defensive list of sensitive issues which is currently prepared for No 10.

Conclusions

6. (i) The Government should continually look for ways to show up the nature of paramilitary activity.
- (ii) Consideration should be given to sharing Ministerial responsibility for urgent Press interviews.
- (iii) The Army and RUC should ^{continue to} work closely with the Press Office, not merely to co-ordinate Press lines but to keep Press lines and action in step.
- (iv) Submissions on issues which are sensitive in Northern Ireland, whether the NIO or another Department is in the lead, should incorporate consideration of how best to present them in Northern Ireland.
- (v) A paper giving the line to take on current sensitive issues could be circulated periodically.