



CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister
mt , *To note.*

A.J.C. 29/4

Prime Minister

✓ Mr. Spelman.


NORTHERN IRELAND: OVERSEAS INFORMATION EFFORT

I last ^{See pt 11}minuted you about this on 11 March 1982. Now, a year later and after the events of St Patrick's Day 1983 in the USA, Jim Prior, FCO colleagues and I feel that you would find helpful a brief report on the presentation of Northern Ireland issues overseas. I am principally concerned with the United States of America, though many of the lessons learned here apply elsewhere.

Background

1982 and the early part of 1983 saw a relatively low level of interest in Northern Ireland's affairs in the USA and the period was in general a quiet one for us with few major problems. The White Report, commissioned during the hunger-strike period of 1981 to examine our overseas information effort, stressed the need to maintain the background briefing of leading opinion formers during quiet periods; we therefore concentrated our efforts on the small group of US opinion-formers (Congress, the Administration, and the serious media) who have a continuing interest in Northern Ireland affairs. These are the people whom we would need to carry with us in any future period of difficulty or heightened interest, and whose general understanding of Northern Ireland we would at all times like to increase.

CONFIDENTIAL


CONFIDENTIAL

Themes

The proposals set out in the White Paper of April 1982, provided the prime information theme for the year and gave us a positive message which we were able to use to good effect. The Administration was in private supportive and the Congressional Friends of Ireland, who could normally have been expected to follow Mr John Hume of the SDLP in condemnation, remained publicly silent and privately prepared to wait and see how the Assembly developed. However we cannot be complacent about the extent or permanence of our success particularly given the unrealistic expectations of quick progress held by some in the US. The welcome accorded to the Irish Government's "Forum for a New Ireland" by some in the USA also reinforces the need for us to continue to present our position. Nonetheless I believe we have created a reservoir of knowledge and understanding which should stand us in good stead in the future.

Media

It will never be possible to achieve the totally favourable coverage of Northern Ireland issues in the USA which we would like, and media coverage in 1982 was mixed. Interest in the Falklands crisis obviously overshadowed both the publication of the White Paper in April and the Bill while a second high point of media interest around the Assembly elections in October focussed misleadingly upon the "success" of Sinn Fein. Interest around St Patrick's Day 1983, centred on the election of Michael Flannery as Grand Marshal of the New York St Patrick's Day Parade, gave wide publicity to NORAIID's aims but produced a gratifyingly unanimous editorial condemnation of NORAIID and of Flannery's election.

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

As an indication of the overall balance of US media reporting on Northern Ireland, British Information Services in New York report that of the 106 television programmes on Northern Ireland which they monitored during 1982, 34 were favourable to HMG, 59 were neutral and only 13 were unfavourable. I believe this is quite an achievement in a predominantly Irish-American area, and one for which Information Staff in US posts deserve great credit.

Events

The early part of 1982 saw an intensive lobbying exercise by our Embassy in Washington aimed principally at achieving a favourable St Patrick's Day statement from the Administration. In the event the 1982 statement proved a most helpful one, condemning violence and American support therefor, re-asserting US non-involvement and calling for US investment. It provided the basis for the equally helpful 1983 statement.

With encouragement and, where appropriate, financial support from the Northern Ireland Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office a number of Northern Ireland visitors went to the USA throughout 1982 into 1983. The five NIO Ministerial visits, including two by Jim Prior on which his Private Secretary has separately reported, were concentrated in the latter half of the year; Grey Gowrie, Adam Butler, and myself all participated; between us we covered most of the major Irish-American areas. Two useful visits were made, just before St Patrick's Day in both years, by Harold McCusker under our sponsorship. Austin Currie (Moderate SDLP, and also sponsored by us), Professor Paul Wilkinson, and (pitched at a rather different audience) the "Widows Mite" group of victims of terrorism all made worthwhile visits. There have been others and I feel that taken together these provided a most valuable supplement to the continuing work of Information Staff on the ground and cumulatively made a considerable impact upon the target group.

CONFIDENTIAL



CONFIDENTIAL

The COI film 'Northern Ireland Chronicle' was widely distributed during 1982 and received a lot of favourable comment. We are working on an updated version at the moment.

St Patrick's Day 1983 and NORAID

The publicity surrounding the election of the Director of NORAID, Michael Flannery, as Grand Marshal of the St Patrick's Day Parade in New York was on balance helpful to us, Flannery's election being condemned by the Irish Government and leading Irish-American politicians, with the US media mainly concentrating on NORAID's support for violence in Ireland. NORAID continue, in defiance of recent US court decisions, to refuse to supply financial returns to the US Department of Justice (further court action is pending) but it may be some time before we have any indication of the impact of the controversy on NORAID fund raising. Our preliminary assessment is that it has caused many previously unthinking NORAID supporters to question their position.

St Patrick's Day also saw the tabling of less than helpful resolutions in Congress by the Friends of Ireland. Their powerful condemnations of violence will inevitably, for domestic political reasons, be balanced by statements favouring the principle of Irish unity or attacking specific aspects of HMG's policies in Northern Ireland. But such attacks are rarely pressed home (I understand that the Friends of Ireland do not intend to put their Resolutions to a vote).

Summary and Foward Look for 1983

We have exploited the quiet period of 1982 and early 1983 with a careful programme of background briefing and personal contacts designed to provide us with a solid reservoir of informed opinion which, while its instinctive bias (at least outside the Administration) will be towards Irish unity, can nonetheless be

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL



relied on to back us rather than PIRA or NORAIID in a crisis. This provides a surer foundation for promoting greater understanding of our policies and of the actual situation in Northern Ireland, about which there is much ignorance in the USA.

We now intend to consolidate these gains, I also hope to introduce into the thinking of US opinion-formers a more subtle understanding of the politics of Northern Ireland, especially the strength and depth of Unionist feeling against a united Ireland and the importance of the minority community playing a part in the political life of the Province. It will also be necessary to make it clear to the US audience, particularly the US Administration, that we are prepared to see a steady normalisation of our relations with the Irish Republic.

We feel that the existing level of activity on our part is about right for this objective. The programme of Ministerial visits will be maintained, with due regard to the need to co-ordinate such visits with those by other spokesmen from Northern Ireland so that we achieve an appropriate spread of visitors (both geographically and in time). We will continue to prepare and distribute background briefs on topical issues; to brief US (and other overseas) journalists in London and Belfast; and to encourage people from Northern Ireland to put their own points of view across to relevant people in the USA, with our support. We must, of course, deny NORAIID the opportunity to shift the ground of the debate from issues to tactics, and this means resisting the temptation to over-react to minor NORAIID propaganda. I shall continue our efforts to re-assure back-benchers of the importance we attach to this work, for example by continuing to place representative selections of US press cuttings in the Commons' Library.

The Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland is particularly concerned that Northern Ireland's bad "image" overseas has inhibited investment. They have a number of

CONFIDENTIAL

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

interesting ideas for correcting this and presenting the essential normality of daily life in Northern Ireland and I shall ensure that their efforts are consistent with our overall information policy.

Other Countries

The hostile interest shown by groups in other countries around the world during the hunger-strike has virtually disappeared. We have coped easily with a very much diminished problem.

I am sending copies of this minute to the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary; to the Lord President, because of his responsibility for the co-ordination of government information; to the Chief Whip, in view of the large number of backbenchers who on his initiative have taken up our standing offer of briefing before departing on visits to the US; and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

MS.

NICHOLAS SCOTT

29 April 1983

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

IRELAND: Situation
Pt 13.



209 APR 1983
100/11/122-17
18 11 22
71 15 18

File

285

3 May 1983

NORTHERN IRELAND: OVERSEAS INFORMATION EFFORT

The Prime Minister has noted the contents of Mr. Scott's minuee of 29 April.

A. J. COLES

Miss Claire Marson,
Office of the Parliamentary Under Secretary
of State (Mr. Nicholas Scott, MBE, MP),
Northern Ireland Office.