

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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The Organisation of Work Relating to Northern Ireland,  
Anglo-Irish Relations and Foreign Information Services.

1. The papers which follow deal with the work of the Anglo-Irish Political Sections and the Information Section which have formed a Division of the Department under an Assistant Secretary since February 1972. Prior to that Anglo-Irish affairs had been dealt with in the general Political Division but with the increasing range of activities arising out of the Northern Ireland situation it was felt necessary to create a separate Anglo-Irish Political Section and, because Northern Ireland dominated in our foreign information work, to associate with it the information services of the Department. A chart setting out the structure of the Division is attached.

Anglo-Irish Political Affairs

2. The main feature of Anglo-Irish political work is Northern Ireland. In monitoring and assessing the Northern Ireland political situation, two officers of the Division travel regularly to Northern Ireland and maintain contact with leading politicians in the SDLP, Alliance, Official Unionist Party and Vanguard Party. Contact is also maintained with community groups, clergymen of all denominations, trade union and CBI representatives. Other contacts are maintained for specific purposes, e.g. solicitors and doctors for information on police/army ill-treatment of suspects. All readily available published material (including British Government reports and statements relating to Northern Ireland, the Belfast daily papers and the Northern Ireland provincial papers, statements by political parties, academic publications, reports of Northern Ireland Government Departments and specialised agencies such as the Housing Executive, the Fair Employment Agency, the Police Authority, etc.) are monitored and up-to-date assessments are made from time to time of the general political situation and of specific aspects of the situation, e.g. the system of local government, the pattern of sectarian assassinations. Informal contact is maintained with Irish Army Intelligence with whom the general political situation in Northern Ireland is discussed from time to time. The organisation of the relief of distress arising from the Northern Ireland situation, especially if it were to

deteriorate suddenly, is kept under constant review and for this purpose contact is maintained both with other relevant Departments here and with Catholic welfare groups in Northern Ireland. The most important of these groups is DACRAS, (Down and Connor Relief Advisory Services) an organisation set up by Bishop Philbin to deal with emergency situations.

3. In addition to the contact with the British Government at the levels of Taoiseach/Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs/Foreign Secretary and Northern Ireland Secretary of State, contact is also maintained at diplomatic/official level between the Embassy in London and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Northern Ireland Office and, less frequently, the Home Office, between the Department and the British Embassy in Dublin and between the Department and Belfast-based officials of the Northern Ireland Office.

4. The main topics discussed in all Anglo-Irish contacts relate to the political and security situation in Northern Ireland. All aspects are discussed and the following are the main areas where there have tended to be disagreements:

- the Northern Ireland political situation: main discussion takes place at Ministerial level with contact at Taoiseach/Prime Minister level when there are major differences of policy or tactics. The general British approach to the Northern Ireland situation is considered in the separate paper entitled "The Northern Ireland Political Situation";
- the Northern Ireland security situation and security co-operation: again, a separate paper is attached. The principles of security co-operation have been worked out at meetings involving the Northern Ireland Secretary of State and the Ministers for Foreign Affairs and Justice. The operational details of co-operation are matters for inter-police discussion which have been monitored almost exclusively by the Minister for Justice;
- north-south economic co-operation: a separate paper is attached. In general, there is a limited official level contact between Departments here and their counterparts in Belfast but while there has been some recent ministerial level contacts - Mason has tried to encourage more of this since he took office - there is room for more. The Department tries to keep a general picture of the degree of co-operation but obviously it is primarily a matter for individual Ministers and Departments;
- the Strasbourg Case: although primarily a matter for an international organisation, it has also figured in bilateral

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discussions at all levels. In general, recent discussion has been between the Attorneys General;

- behaviour of security forces: on the basis of detailed information from reliable contacts in Northern Ireland, allegations of ill-treatment of suspects by the RUC and/or British Army are raised with the British. In general, the position in 1976 was that there was little to complain about but there have been some disturbing allegations in recent months and a detailed assessment is currently being made;
- the UDR and RUC Reserve: we have grave doubts about the increase in the use of full-time UDR and RUC Reservists because of the evidence of overlapping membership between these groups and loyalist para-militaries. These doubts are repeatedly conveyed to the British and we continue to press for much tighter screening. Evidence continues to emerge of UDR men's involvement in the loyalist campaign of violence;
- Northern Ireland security policy generally: considerable pressure had to be brought to bear on the British before a reasonably balanced approach to the violence which emanates from both sections of the Northern Ireland community was achieved. In general, the position is now satisfactory and the rate of convictions of loyalist para-militaries has improved significantly in the past year;
- compensation for damage caused to property on this side of the border by the operations of the security forces in Northern Ireland continues to be a subject on which we have serious differences with the British. An estimated £1 m. of damage has been caused and no compensation has been received from the British. Individual property owners here have received compensation totalling £½ m. ultimately from central funds and there are major outstanding claims estimated at £½ m. in respect of damage caused to local authority property alone. Discussions with the British continue;
- cross-border incidents are discussed as soon as they take place and accurate information is available;
- incursions by British security forces are a continuing problem, though the number of incidents has dropped sharply since the SAS affair last year;
- the treatment of some IRA prisoners in British jails has given rise for concern and has been the subject of special discussion with the British Home Secretary.

5. The situation in Northern Ireland is a major element in the work of all our representatives abroad but particularly those in the United States and to a lesser extent in Canada and Australia. A separate paper is attached on Northern Ireland and the United States. Northern Ireland also arises from time to time in international organisations. At the moment, the only live issue

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relating to Northern Ireland before an international forum is the human rights case in relation to which the European Court of Human Rights is expected to deliver its judgement later this year. The judgement of the Court is transmitted to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe which is tasked with supervising its execution.

#### Foreign Information Services

6. The Information Section administers Subhead G of the Department's Vote which in the current year amounts to £115,000. The general policy aim of the foreign information service is to improve the image of Ireland in priority target areas abroad as a basis for encouraging foreign earnings and investment. Through the Embassies and career Consulate Generals, Government policy is explained to the media and other influential contacts and information about all aspects of Irish life is disseminated. In the late sixties, with the emergence of the Northern Ireland crisis and Irish membership of the European Communities, the need for an effective, permanent and specialist information service abroad was felt and as a result there are now nine full-time press and information officers working in offices in London (three officers deal with British national and provincial media and foreign media whose coverage of Ireland is organised from London), Washington, New York, Bonn, Paris, Rome and Brussels. Through the network of contacts built up by these officers, key figures in newspapers, radio and television are kept in contact with Ireland and provided with a regular flow of material including major speeches by Ministers, Ireland Today - a bulletin produced by the Department 22 times a year - and other relevant publications. Facility visits to Ireland are also arranged for groups of foreign journalists and occasionally for individuals. In the current year, visits have already been organised for groups from Germany and Japan and further visits are planned for representative groups from Britain and Northern Ireland. The cost of the visits programme this year is estimated at £12,750.

7. The nine Press and Information Officers report regularly on media coverage abroad of Irish affairs and these reports are summarised monthly in the Department's Foreign Press Digest which

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is circulated internally and to Government Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, Secretaries and press officers of Departments, members of the Publicity Co-ordinating Committee and Irish Embassies and Consulates abroad.

8. A First Secretary in the Information Section is designated spokesman for the Department and maintains contact with the daily papers and with RTE. All press queries about the activities and policies of the Department are routed through him though on complex or delicate questions senior officers of the Department have also made themselves available for background briefing.

9. Regular contact is also maintained with full-time representatives and Irish correspondents of foreign media. At the moment, the BBC, Financial Times, Daily Mirror, Daily Mail, Daily Express, The People, The News of the World, Christian Science Monitor, Press Association and TASS have full-time correspondents in Dublin while the London Times, Telegraph, Guardian and Sun cover Irish affairs from their Belfast offices. Media which maintain part-time correspondents and stringers in Dublin include Agence France Presse, Deutsche Presse Agentur, Reuter, United Press International, The Economist, Le Monde, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, American Broadcasting Corporation, The Observer, Sunday Telegraph, Sunday Times, New York Times, Boston Globe, NBC, Westinghouse Broadcasting, CBS, Westdeutsche Rundfunk, Deutsche Welle and Voice of America.

10. An officer in the Information Section also maintains contact with the Belfast Telegraph, Irish News, Newsletter, UTV, BBC NI and Belfast Downtown Radio both by visiting them regularly in Belfast and by regular telephone briefing. Speeches of Northern Ireland interest are telexed and Government policy is explained in detail and at considerable length to all the senior journalists concerned including the editors.

11. As part of the Information Section's programme to enhance the Irish image abroad, substantial proportions of the Subhead are devoted to the production and dissemination of a range of publications and audio-visual material. The main publication is the Department's bulletin, Ireland Today, which appears 22 times

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a year, costs about £25,000 this year and reaches over 12,000 addresses. Authoritative articles on aspects of Irish life are commissioned from experts in their fields for publication in the bulletin. Funds have been allocated and a basic text has been prepared of a new edition of Facts About Ireland. This booklet first appeared in 1964 and is now in need of a complete revision. It is the basic information booklet of the Department. The most recent edition (1972) is now quite out of date and has been withdrawn. Other information material produced include a broadsheet poster of 60 photographs with accompanying texts mainly designed for schoolchildren. A series of facts sheets is currently being produced, each dealing with a specific aspect of Irish life such as Cost of Living, Education and a Bibliography.

12. The Department has a stock of over 100 films about Ireland which are distributed to non-commercial outlets in countries where there are Irish diplomatic Missions. In many countries professional distribution agencies are used. From time to time films are specially commissioned and at present we are involved to the extent of £20,000 in an eight-part series on Ireland's Heritage by Louis Marcus, to the extent of £12,500 in a new film mainly on Irish scenery by Patrick Carey, and a nature film by the French film-maker Frederic Rossif, which will cost us £1,500. Because of the high cost of production, the films commissioned in recent years (including those mentioned above) are produced in co-operation with other contributing bodies, chiefly Bord Fáilte. The Department also purchases prints of film made by independent Irish producers and by RTE.

13. Most Missions abroad have a library of books about Ireland which they lend to enquirers and the Department aims to keep Missions supplied with an up-to-date collection of useful books. Missions have also been supplied with slide projectors and slides, which many of them find to be very useful in their information work.

14. A number of State-sponsored bodies (such as Bord Fáilte, CTT, Aer Lingus, IDA) are also concerned with Ireland's image abroad. The Department, with these, forms a Publicity Co-ordinating Committee which meets bi-monthly to discuss joint

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action in the planning of publicity initiatives abroad. The Department participates fully in the activities of the PCC.

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S. DONLON (Asst. Secretary Anglo Irish Political, Information & Cultural Division)

- General Supervision of Division
- Relations with SDLP and Alliance Parties

Anglo-Irish Political Division

Information Section

H. SWIFT

- Relations with British Government
- Monitoring and Assessing British Scene
- International Aspects of NI Situation
- Westminster
- British Political Parties
- Irish Community in Britain
- Security Co-operation (north-south)
- Border Problems
- NI in International Organisations, including the Strasbourg case
- NI and Irish Communities Abroad

S. O hUIGINN

- Monitoring and Assessing Northern Ireland Political Scene
- NI Political Parties, except SDLP and Alliance
- NI Community and other groups
- Relief of Distress in NI
- NI Policy of Political Parties in the Republic
- NI Aspects of Political, Economic and Legislative Developments in the Republic
- North-South Co-operation
- NI Civil Service, Local Authorities and Public Bodies
- NI Economic Developments
- Human Rights in NI

G. O BROIN

- Administration of Subhead G (Information)
- General information work
- Department's relations with home press
- Visits programme for foreign media
- Relations with Northern Ireland press
- Monitoring foreign press coverage of Irish affairs
- Production and dissemination of Department's publications
  - Ireland today
  - Facts about Ireland
  - Broadsheet
  - Facts Sheets
- Commissioning films and purchase of prints and other audio-visual material
- Liaison with other Departments