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TO HQ FROM LONDON
FOR ANGLO-IRISH FROM SCANNELL

Handwritten: 26/9

THE FOLLOWING IS A RESUME XM OF QUESTIONS AND REPLIES BY MASON AT TODAY'S LUNCHEON AT THE FOREIGN PRESS ASSOCIATION.

QUESTIONS

1. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ABOUT RECENT REMARKS BY THE MINISTER FOR P AND T CONCERNING ARTICLES 2 AND 3 OF THE CONSTITUTION, MASON SAID THAT SUCH A STATEMENT WAS A HELPFUL GESTURE AS IT SHOWED TO THE MAJORITY COMMUNITY IN NORTHERN IRELAND, ESPECIALLY HARD-LINE PROTESTANTS, THAT THE REPUBLIC WAS PREPARED TO HELP, TO LUBRICATE, LOCAL POLITICIANS TO FIND A SOLUTION. HE HOPED THE LOCAL POLITICIANS WOULD TAKE NOTE OF THE STATEMENT AND WOULD BE ABLE TO ACT UPON IT. IT WAS DOUBTFUL HOWEVER IF THERE WOULD BE ANY DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE A GENERAL ELECTION, WHICH MIGHT TAKE PLACE THIS YEAR, AND IN ANY EVENT THE MATTER WOULD HAVE TO BE PUT TO THE PEOPLE IN A REFERENDUM.

2. ASKED ABOUT THE NS CRITICISM IN A RECENT ARTICLE THAT HE WAS HIDING BEHIND THE PETTICOATS OF THE PEACE MOVEMENT, MASON SAID THAT IT DID NOT MAKE GOOD POLITICAL SENSE TO STEP IN AND APPLAUD OR DENIGRATE THE PEACE MOVEMENT. IF HE OR ANY GOVERNMENT MINISTER HAD COME OUT AND SPOKEN IN FAVOUR OF THE MOVEMENT THERE WERE ELEMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND WHICH WOULD USE SUCH A STATEMENT TO BESMIRCHED AND DENIGRATED IT. AS MASON SAW IT THE MOVEMENT HAD SHOWN THAT THE SECTARIAN DIVIDE BARRER COULD BE CROSSED: IT HAD ALSO LED TO AN INCREASE IN COOPERATION WITH THE POLICE, ESPECIALLY THROUGH THE USE OF THE CONFIDENTIAL TELEPHONE SYSTEM. THE PEACE MOVEMENT WAS NOW CHANGING ITS ROLE AND WAS SETTING UP COMMUNITY PEACE GROUPS, ESPECIALLY IN WORKING CLASS AREAS. MASON DID NOT COMMENT ON THIS ACTIVITY.

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3. ASKED ABOUT THE EMERGENCE OF AN INDEPENDENT ULSTER MOVEMENT AND HOW THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT WOULD REACT TO IT IF IT WERE TO GAIN WIDESPREAD SUPPORT, MASON STATED THAT THE QUESTION OF INDEPENDENCE HAD EMANATED FROM ONE WEEKEND SEMINAR AND 'WAS GOOD NEWS COPY' BECAUSE IT WAS NEW. THIS PROPOSAL HAD RECEIVED NO SUPPORT FROM ANY POLITICAL PARTY AND WAS THEREFORE UNREAL. HE QUOTED GERRY FITT AS SAYING "'DO YOU EXPECT THE BRITISH TO GET OUT AND LEAVE THEIR PURSE BEHIND ON THE SHELF''.

4. ASKED ABOUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PIRA STATEMENT LAST NIGHT, MASON SAID THAT IT WAS MERELY PROGANDA AND AN ATTEMPT TO GAIN THE HEADLINES. THE SECURITY FORCES HAD AN EXTREMELY GOOD YEAR IN 1976, OVER 700 PIRA MEN HAD BEEN CHARGED AND 400+ FROM THE LOYALIST SIDE. SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS HAD BEEN ENDED, SO FAR 91 'POLITICAL' PRISONERS HAD CONFORMED TO ORDINARY PRISON RULES. ANOTHER 40 HAD REFUSED AND THESE WERE HAVING THEIR REMISSIONS REMOVED, TO DATE 5 1/2 YEARS HAD BEEN LOST IN REMISSION BY THESE.

HE STRESSED THERE WOULD BE NO RETURN TO POLITICAL STATUS AND NO AMNESTY. BECAUSE OF THIS, AND BECAUSE OF THE SUCCESSES OF THE RUC, THE PIRA WERE EMBARKING ON A CAMPAIGN ON TWO FRONTS IN 1977,

- (1) ATTACKING THESE SECURITY FORCES MORE THAN IN THE PAST, AND
- (2) STEPPING UP THEIR ECONOMIC WAR AGAINST COMMERCIAL TARGETS IN NI. THIS POLICY WAS BECAUSE OF THE SEARCH FOR SPECTACULAR PROGANDA TARGETS, WHICH NEEDED TO SHOW THEIR FOLLOWERS THEY WERE STILL IN EXISTENCE.

MASON SAID THAT IT WAS HIS INTENTION TO TIGHTEN THE NET ON THE PIRA IN 1977 AND TO GET NEARER THE GODFATHERS OF VIOLENCE

5. MASON ATTRIBUTED THE DECREASE IN CLAIMS FOR COMPENSATION SINCE THE PRESENT BRITISH GOVERNMENT TOOK OFFICE TO THE SCALING DOWN OF VIOLENCE IN NORTHERN IRELAND. HE SAID THAT NO LONGER WAS ONE WITNESSING THE WAVES OF VIOLENCE ON THE STREETS - INSTEAD THE PIRA WERE SEEKING FOR PUBLICITY SPECULATORS.

WHEN QUESTIONED ON HIS "'TROOPS OUT STATEMENT'' IN 1974 MASON STATED THAT HE HAD NEVER IMPLIED THIS, WHAT HE WAS SAYING THEN WAS THAT THE NORTHERN IRELAND PEOPLE WOULD HAVE TO DO MORE TO HELP THEMSELVES. AT THE PRESENT TIME HE WAS PINPOINTING THE POLITICIANS RATHER THAN THE PEOPLE TO HELP THE SITUATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

6. IN REPLY TO A QUESTION ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S NEXT STEP TO BRING ABOUT A POLITICAL SOLUTION, MASON SAID THAT FIRST OF ALL IT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD THAT THERE WAS NO MILITARY SOLUTION, THERE HAD TO BE A POLITICAL SOLUTION. HE STOOD BACK FROM TAKING ANY INITIATIVE, THE REASON BEING THAT HE WANTED TO SEE WILLINGNESS FIRST FROM THE NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICIANS THEMSELVES TO BE PREPARED TO FIND A SOLUTION. THERE WERE HARD MEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES ON BOTH SIDES WHO FOUND IT HARD TO CROSS THE DIVIDE AND AGREE TO "PARTNERSHIP IN GOVERNMENT". HE WANTED TO SEE THAT PARTNERSHIP FIRST, THEN HE WOULD HELP AND ENCOURAGE AND PUT FLESH ON THE FRAMEWORK OF AN AGREEMENT. THE IRISH REPUBLIC WAS ALSO PREPARED TO MAKE A GESTURE AND DROP ARTICLES 2 AND 3 IF THEY SAW MOVEMENT. HE WAS NOT PREPARED TO HAVE THE PARTIES STEP ASIDE AT THE 11TH HOUR AND PLUNGE HIM AND THE PEOPLE OF NI INTO THE PIT OF DESPAIR.

7. WHEN QUESTIONED ON THE PRESS COVERAGE ON NORTHERN IRELAND MASON STATED THAT WHAT HE WANTED WAS NOT CENSORSHIP BUT "RESPONSIBLE REPORTING". FOR INSTANCE, ON LAST SATURDAY A GUARDIAN BACK PAGE ARTICLE WAS HEADED "ULSTER WORST DAY OF VIOLENCE". MASON SAID THAT THIS HEADLINE WAS COMPLETELY MISLEADING. THE REPORT ITSELF CLEARLY MEANT THAT IT WAS ULSTER'S WORST DAY OF VIOLENCE IN 1977. ALSO, THE HEADLINE WAS MISLEADING IN THAT IT REFERRED TO ULSTER. IT WAS NOT ULSTER, WHICH HAD 9 COUNTIES, BUT NI. AS REGARDS 'D NOTICES' HE COULD NOT IMPOSE THIS SYSTEM ON NI AS THE REPUBLIC'S PAPERS, TV AND RADIO WERE AVAILABLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

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8. WHEN ASKED TO EXPLAIN WHY THE BRITISH ARMY WERE 7 1/2 YEARS IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND SUPPORT FOR THE IRA WAS STILL CONTINUING, MASON STATED THAT THE BRITISH ARMY HAD BEEN REDUCED FROM 22,000 TO 14,000 AND THE LOCAL SECURITY FORCES BUILT UP. THE PROFILE OF THE IRA HAD BEEN DECREASED. THAT WAS WHY THEY WERE TRYING FOR SPECTACULARS TO PROVE THAT THEY WERE STILL IN EXISTENCE - IT PERHAPS EXPLAINED THE LONDON BOMBS. THE SECURITY FORCES WERE MANAGING TO CONTROL THE SITUATION AND THERE WASN'T A CIVIL WAR IN PROGRESS. THE SECURITY FORCES HAD A GOOD YEAR IN 1976 AND 1977 WOULD BE BETTER.

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9. ON PROTECTION RACKETS AND GANGSTERISM, MASON STATED THAT THE FIRST ESSENTIAL OF THE RUC WAS TO DEAL WITH THE CRIMINAL ELEMENTS. IT WOULD BE 4 OR 5 YEARS BEFORE IT COULD BE CONTROLLED, THE FIRST ESSENTIAL BEING TO COMBAT TERRORISM.

10. ON THE ISSUE OF DEVOLUTION MASON WAS EMPHATIC THAT HE WOULD NOT LAY DOWN PARAMETERS AS NO MATTER HOW BROAD, THEY WOULD BE SEEN BY SOME AS A STRAITJACKET. IT WAS SUFFICIENT FOR EITHER SIDE TO SHOW THEY WERE PREPARED TO MOVE TOWARDS THE OTHER COMMUNITY FOR TALKS TO TAKE PLACE. AS REGARDS THE MOLYNEAUX STATEMENT, IT APPEARED TO INDICATE MOVEMENT AWAY FROM THE MAJORITY CONVENTION REPORT. THERE WAS MOVEMENT AND HE THOUGHT OTHERS WOULD BE PREPARED TO CONSIDER IT. IT NOW APPEARED TO HIM THAT SOME POLITICIANS IN NI WHO ARE IMBUED WITH THE MENTALITY OF "NOT AN INCH" HAD DRAWN MOLYNEAUX BACK FROM HIS ORIGINAL PROPOSALS AND HAVE SPOILT IDEAS BEING CONSIDERED IN NI.

ASKED ABOUT HIS "TROOPS OUT" SPEECH WHILE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, MASON SAID HE DIDN'T USE "THAT LANGUAGE". HIS RESEARCH AT THAT TIME HOWEVER THAT THE PEOPLE OF NI MUST BE PREPARED TO DO MORE FOR THEMSELVES WAS IN FACT PROPHETIC.

END

BS 2/2/77 17.21

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