

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2010/53/906
Creation Date(s):	2 December 1980
Extent and medium:	4 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

4. All major dailies gave details of the Taoiseach's reply in the Dail last week and of the ensuing debate. The Guardian report indicated that the Taoiseach had "side stepped the question" and the Telegraph called it "an exercise in studied ambivalence". In editorial comments the Sun indicated that it was still "waiting for a direct answer" to the question, the Times stated that the Taoiseach was "equivocal" on the issue unlike his predecessors, and the Sunday Express criticised the Taoiseach for refusing to speak out.

United States

5. H-Block dominates the coverage of Irish affairs in US Newspapers. In the early stages of the hunger strike coverage largely took the form of human interest stories based on a tour of the US by three ex-blanket men and the visit to Northern Ireland by the Berrigan brothers. Actual developments in the strike were covered intermittently and were taken mainly from wire service reports. Contributions by Jimmy Breslin in the New York Daily News and Michael Kilian in the Chicago Tribune were severely critical of the British Government's handling of the issue and William Borders in the New York Times pointed out that the argument in favour of political status was backed up by the fact that the prisoners were convicted by special courts established by emergency anti-terrorist legislation.
6. Major editorials appeared early in the strike in the Washington Post and more recently in the New York Times. The Post editorial pointed out that the hunger strikers were convicted of "real crimes of death and violence" but went on to say that Americans should encourage Mrs. Thatcher to proceed along the path of

exploring political alternatives in Ulster. The New York Times said that the clothing issue should not be allowed to create martyrs and called for an end to the present confrontation on humane terms.

7. Coverage in the US has increased in the past week with emphasis on the increasing support for the strikers from Northern Ireland Catholics, the polarisation of the two communities, and possible consequences if the strikers die. Michael Kilian again criticised Mrs. Thatcher in the Chicago Tribune but the Washington Star stated that the participants were "not harmless patriots" and their main function was to provide propaganda material for the IRA. The intensified UK "propaganda campaign" on H-Blocks in North America is reported in two lengthy articles by William Borders in the New York Times and Leonard Downie Jnr. in the Washington Post.

Continental Europe

8. Interest in the strike is increasing in the European press with heaviest coverage in French and German newspapers. In France Le Monde and L'Humanite (Communist) summarised the historical background early in the strike. Coverage in recent weeks has continued mainly in publications to the left of the political spectrum and in regional newspapers in Brittany. Comment is almost uniformly critical of the UK Government on the basis of human rights considerations and 'anti-imperialism'. In Germany many newspapers have reported factually on the origins and developments of the strike. A recent article in Die Welt suggests that the propaganda effect in the Republic and the UK has not been great, and reports also on Mrs. Thatcher's audience with the Pope and the Taoiseach's recent Dail reply. In Belgium, Libre Belgique had an

early editorial on the strike and papers carried stories on H-Block demonstrations during the Queen of England's visit. Reports have also appeared in the Italian and Spanish press.

Australia

9. The H-Block issue is the main story of Irish interest in the Australian press. Coverage is based principally on wire service reports. The Melbourne Age has highlighted the UK Government's determination not to make concessions and the Melbourne Herald has asked if concessions should be made to "plain hoodlums".

Press Section
Department of Foreign Affairs
2 December, 1980

PSM
PSS
Mr. Neligan
GIS
Dept. Taoiseach