

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES**

**IRELAND**



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TO HQ FROM WASHINGTON  
FOR ASST SEC NELIGAN FROM AMBASSADOR  
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22/5 9/30  
Felan

THE US MEDIA AND IRELAND

COVERAGE OF THE H-BLOCK HUNGER STRIKE HAS BEEN MUCH MORE EXTENSIVE THAN THAT DEVOTED TO ANY IRISH STORY IN RECENT YEARS. THE RECENT DEATH OF MCCREESH AND THE APPARENT IMMINENT DEATH OF O'HARA COVERAGE HAVE NOT, HOWEVER, RECEIVED THE SAME COVERAGE AS THE SANDS DEATH AND IT IS UNDERSTOOD THAT MOST AMERICAN MEDIA HAVE NOW WITHDRAWN THEIR CORRESPONDENTS FROM BELFAST. THE EXTENSIVE FOUR-  
WDBROBTUERTXENOEINDREY TO BOBBSSSTANOSCHWERRRBOVWBBIOHAIBSSHUTOPICS CAN NOW EXPECT IN US MEDIA BUT ALSO TO CONSIDER WHAT ADJUSTMENT, IF ANY, NEEDS TO BE MADE IN OUR PRESS AND INFORMATION ACTIVITIES. AS YOU ARE AWARE IT IS NOW JUST OVER TEN YEARS SINCE WE STARTED A STEPPED-UP MEDIA OPERATION WHICH INCLUDED THE APPOINTMENT OF PRESS OFFICERS IN NEW YORK, WASHINGTON AND LONDON DIRECTING ALL OR PART OF THEIR EFFORTS TOWARDS THE US MEDIA.

2. SMYTH, FIRST SECRETARY (PRESS AND INFORMATION) HAS ANALYSED IN DETAIL THE COVERAGE OF THE HUNGER STRIKE AND THIS REPORT HAS BEEN TRANSMITTED TO YOU IN TELEX NUMBER 267. YOUR ATTENTION IS DRAWN TO THE FOLLOWING CONCLUSIONS:

- (A) THE NATURE OF THE COVERAGE IS DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT TO THAT IN 1969-72. ON THIS OCCASION REPORTING ON CURRENT EVENTS IS SUPPLEMENTED BY EXTENSIVE BACKGROUND HISTORY AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS. OVERALL COVERAGE HAS BEEN RESPONSIBLE, MATURE AND WELL INFORMED:
- (B) THE OVERALL TONE OF THE ANALYSIS IS CRITICAL OF THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT NOT ONLY FOR ITS HANDLING OF THE H-BLOCK SITUATION BUT MORE PARTICULARLY FOR ITS FAILURE TO COME TO GRIPS WITH THE PROBLEM OVER THE LAST TWELVE YEARS:
- (C) THE NON-VIOLENT ASPIRATION TO IRISH UNITY HAS BEEN CLEARLY PRESENTED AND THE POSITION OF THE IRISH GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN GIVEN EXTENSIVE COVERAGE AND EDITORIAL SUPPORT:
- (D) THE REPORTS BY LONDON BASED US CORRESPONDENTS HAVE SHOWN A HIGH SENSITIVITY TO IRISH GOVERNMENT POLICY:
- (E) THE WIRE SERVICE REPORTS (AP AND UPI) HAVE TENDED TO BE FLIMSY AND OVER-SIMPLIFIED.

3. YOU WILL SEE FROM THE ABOVE THAT THERE IS NO BASIS WHATEVER FOR THE STATEMENT ATTRIBUTED TO A SENIOR IRISH DIPLOMAT IN THE ECONOMIST (16-22 MAY 1981 ISSUE) THAT QUOTE AMERICAN PRESS COVERAGE OF ULSTER WAS DISASTROUS UNQUOTE. BY ANY YARDSTICK THE IRISH GOVERNMENT'S POSITION HAS EMERGED WELL. THE COVERAGE HAS, HOWEVER, BEEN DISASTROUS FOR THE BRITISH AND WE ARE AWARE THAT BRITISH OFFICIALS IN THE UNITED STATES HAVE BEEN UPSET BY IT. THE INITIAL RESPONSE WAS TO MAKE BRITISH SPOKESMEN AVAILABLE AT LOCAL LEVELS TO PROVIDE A COUNTER WEIGHT BUT THIS WAS TO MISUNDERSTAND THE WORKING OF THE US MEDIA. IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO COUNTER, FOR EXAMPLE, EDITORIALS IN THE NEW YORK TIMES BY APPEARING ON A LOCAL TELEVISION STATION IN WASHINGTON AND IN ANY EVENT, MOST BRITISH SPOKESMEN DO NOT APPEAR TO HAVE AS MUCH KNOWLEDGE OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND SITUATION EVEN AS THOSE WHO ARE INTERVIEWING THEM. THE BRITISH AMBASSADOR, FOR INSTANCE, DID MORE HARM THAN GOOD IN AN APPEARANCE ON A LOCAL TV PROGRAMME BY CLAIMING THAT THERE WAS NO DISCRIMINATION IN NORTHERN BUT THAT CATHOLICS THERE HAD AN INFERIOR JOBS BECAUSE THEY HAD GONE TO INFERIOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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THE REACTION

SPOKESMEN WITHDREW AND THE CURRENT BRITISH ACTIVITY SEEMS TO BE MAINLY OUT OF LONDON WHERE UN-NAMED SPOKESMEN ARE IMPRESSING, MAINLY ON THE BRITISH SIDE, THAT LONDON'S VIEW IS WIDELY REPORTED AND SUPPORTED IN THE UNITED STATES. THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR ON 18 MAY QUOTES AN UN-NAMED BRITISH SPOKESMAN AS SAYING THAT QUOTE ON THE WHOLE LONDON SEEMS SATISFIED THAT ITS OWN VIEW IS WIDELY UNDERSTOOD UNQUOTE. THE ECONOMIST ARTICLE PROBABLY ALSO REFLECTS BRITISH BRIEFING OR GUIDANCE. THE TRUTH IS THAT THE BRITISH POSITION HAS TAKEN SOMETHING OF A HAMMERING

4. THE IRA POSITION HAS PROBABLY GAINED SOME SUPPORT MAINLY THROUGH LOCAL TV AND RADIO STATIONS IN THE PRINCIPAL IRISH AMERICAN CENTRES. THESE STATIONS RELY HEAVILY ON THE WIRE SERVICES REPORTS WHICH THEY SUPPLEMENT WITH LOCAL INTERVIEWS. IN WHAT WAS CLEARLY A WELL PLANNED OPERATION NCRAID SPOKESMEN, MAINLY EX-LONG KESH PRISONERS, WERE AVAILABLE FOR INTERVIEWS AT A TIME WHEN E.G. OUR OFFICES WERE NOT IN A POSITION TO PROVIDE SPOKESMEN. IN SIMILAR SITUATIONS IN THE FUTURE IT WOULD BE HELPFUL IF WE WERE PREPARED TO TAKE MORE ACTION THAN WE WERE ABLE TO TAKE ON THIS OCCASION. THERE IS, OF COURSE, A LIMIT TO WHAT WE CAN DO WITH OUR PRESENT RESOURCES PARTICULARLY FROM OFFICES IN SAN FRANCISCO,,

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PERSON OFFICES THROUGH VACANCIES REMAINING UNFILLED OR OFFICERS TEMPORARILY ASSIGNED TO THE UN

5. IT IS CLEAR THAT OUR INFORMATION ACTIVITIES OVER THE LAST TEN YEARS ARE NOW BEGINNING TO ACHIEVE SIGNIFICANT RESULTS. PARTICULAR CREDIT MUST GO TO THE PRESS AND INFORMATION OFFICERS WORKING OUT OF NEW YORK BUT COVERING ALL OF THE UNITED STATES. THE DAILY ROUTINE WHICH HE AND HIS PREDECESSORS HAVE FOLLOWED OF MAINTAINING FREQUENT CONTACT WITH CAREFULLY SELECTED PEOPLE IN ALL THE MAJOR MEDIA CENTRES OF THE US IS NOW BEARING FRUIT AND THE RELATIVELY SMALL EXTRA INVESTMENT IN TRAVEL AND ENTERTAINMENT COSTS HAS BEEN MORE THAN JUSTIFIED. THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE PRESS AND INFORMATION OFFICERS IN LONDON IN THEIR DEALINGS WITH THE INFLUENTIAL US MEDIA GROUP THERE IS ALSO A CONSIDERABLE ONE THERE IS NO REASON TO CONTEMPLATE AT THIS STAGE ANY CHANGE IN THE ARRANGEMENTS UNDER WHICH OUR INFORMATION ACTIVITIES FOR THE US ARE CONDUCTED PRIMARILY OUT OF NEW YORK AND LONDON WITH WASHINGTON AND DUBLIN PROVIDING APPROPRIATE GUIDANCE AND BACK-UP.

6. THE INFORMATION SPEEDILY PROVIDED BY THE DEPARTMENT IN DAILY NEWS SUMMARIES AND SELECTED ARTICLES HAS BEEN OF ENORMOUS HELP ESPECIALLY WHEN THE DELIVERY OF IRISH NEWSPAPERS HERE IS SO SLOW AND ERRATIC. THE MORE DETAILED INFORMATION THAT CAN BE PROVIDED DAILY ON THE NORTHERN IRELAND SITUATION THE BETTER WE CAN KEEP THE INTEREST HERE ALIVE. ATTRACTIVE THOUGH THE BULLETIN IRELAND TODAY IS, IT IS NOT SUFFICIENTLY FOCUSED ON TOPICS OF MEDIA INTEREST TO BE OF ANY SIGNIFICANT USE TO JOURNALISTS HERE. ANY DEVELOPMENT OF IRELAND TODAY WHICH WOULD ENABLE IT TO BE USED AS AN ACTIVE VEHICLE OF CURRENT INFORMATION AND POLICY WOULD BE HELPFUL. ONE LAST AREA WHICH MIGHT BE EXAMINED IS THE POSSIBILITY OF DIRECTING MORE INFORMATION TOWARDS THE MAJOR WIRE SERVICES ALL OF WHICH HAVE CORRESPONDENTS IN DUBLIN OR BELFAST. THIS IS SOMETHING WHICH HAS BEEN TRIED IN THE PAST WITHOUT MAJOR RESULTS BUT A FURTHER EFFORT MIGHT BE WORTHWHILE AT THIS STAGE PARTICULARLY IF IT WERE TO BE DONE IN CONJUNCTION WITH OUR APPROACHING THE WIRE SERVICE EDITORS AT THIS END.

END OF MESSAGE