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NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
Whitehall London SW1A 2AZ

Telephone Direct Dialling 01-210 6503
Exchange 01-210 3000

S L Cowper-Coles Esq
British Embassy
WASHINGTON

Your reference

Our reference

Date 14 December 1987

Dear Sherard,

Muse. Thompson

IRISH ISSUES AND THE 1988 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

1. Many thanks for your letter of 24 November to Peter Bell on this subject. We fully endorse your idea that the Ambassador should be recommended to write to the twelve main Presidential candidates to register HMG's responsibility for Northern Ireland and to enclose a selection of information material bringing out the positive achievements of our policies.

2. Following your letter we have discussed on the telephone the briefing items which might be sent with the Ambassador's letter. As I understand it you are currently thinking of 5 documents (and have asked for 20 copies of each). The suggested enclosures are:

- (i) The Prime Minister's statement on equality of opportunity in employment in Northern Ireland, originally issued as an insert in the new Guide to Effective Practice. I enclose 20 copies of this statement.
- (ii) A crisp summary of our new and more positive line on MacBride, the full version of which was attached to the Secretary of State's letter of 7 December to the Ambassador. I understand that this has been sent to you separately by DED.
- (iii) "Points at Issue". We believe that this publication squarely addresses most of the misconceptions about Northern Ireland which are current in Irish-American circles; it could therefore be of considerable use to the candidates' staffers. The various papers have recently been updated and Information Department are now in the process of producing the revised version, which I believe is due to appear early in the New Year. We

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shall ask Information Department to send you the necessary copies as soon as they are available.

- (iv) Greyband on "Northern Ireland since the Anglo-Irish Agreement". We are in the final stages of producing this Greyband, which is a revised and updated version of the one which appeared last year entitled "The Anglo-Irish Agreement: one year later". It will detail the main positive achievements in the Province since the signing of the Agreement (making the point, of course, that not all of them are directly attributable to it) and provide a useful conspectus of "bull points". We shall let you have it as soon as possible.
- (v) "Northern Ireland: a Brief Survey". Your letter of 24 September recommends using this document and we agree that it could be valuable: it provides a slightly more reflective account of the position in the Province and could usefully supplement "Points at Issue". As you note, it is also in process of revision; copies will be sent to you as soon as the updated version is produced.

3. You also enclosed a draft of the covering letter which the Ambassador might send. Given that there must be a danger that some of the candidates and their staffs will not really focus on the enclosures, I wonder if there is a case for expanding somewhat the Ambassador's letter (which they will of course read) to highlight some of the positive aspects of our policy - particularly, of course, the Agreement. With this in mind, I would propose a new paragraph for the draft letter to be inserted between the existing paragraphs 1 and 2. This might read as follows:

"In discharging its responsibility for Northern Ireland the British Government seeks to maintain close and productive relations with the Irish Government through the mechanisms of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The Agreement is helping to

- carry forward the two Governments' joint effort (supported by an overwhelming majority in both parts of Ireland) to eradicate terrorism and paramilitary activity;
- demonstrate their recognition of and respect for the legitimate interests, identity and aspirations of the minority nationalist community in Northern Ireland;
- reassure the majority unionist community that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would come about only with the consent of a majority of its inhabitants. This reassurance, which has been affirmed by both the British and Irish Governments, is fundamental to the Agreement."

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4. Paragraph 3 of the draft would also of course need to be changed to reflect the wider range of material which it is now proposed to send.

Yours,

Stephen.

S J LEACH
SIL Division

cc: TJB George, Esq, RID, FCO
RJS Muir, Esq, Info Dept FCO
P J Fowler, Esq, NAD, FCO
R Bone, Esq, RID, FCO
R-Wilson, Esq, DED, BELFAST *in 2/1/58*
Chancery, DUBLIN.
(without attachments)

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