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No Tart (499)

Mr. HaymanNorthern Ireland

A 404

Mr. Stratton Mills, Ulster Unionist Member of Parliament for Belfast, North, wrote to the Secretary of State on 19 September about the Irish propaganda campaign in the United States.

B & C

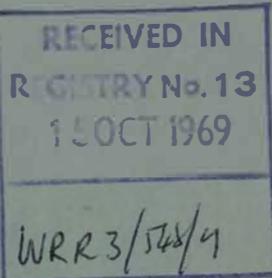
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2. I recommend that the attached draft reply, which takes account of the views of the Embassy in Washington (their telegram No.2675 and an earlier letter) should issue from the Secretary of State himself. Western European and Guidance Departments concur.

Argument

3. Mr. Stratton Mills was a member of the self-appointed "truth squad" which went to the United States with the intention of correcting the picture of the situation in Northern Ireland being painted by Miss Bernadette Devlin, M.P. He is no doubt conscious that the visit was not a great success and sensitive about the rough passage he had with Miss Devlin in a television confrontation in New York on 2 September. It is thus desirable that the reply to his letter should carry the full authority of the Secretary of State. (In any case, this provides an opening to state for the record what we are doing to combat the Irish propaganda campaign.)

4. The draft reply does not deal directly with Mr. Stratton Mills' request that we protest about "this deliberate and mischievous propaganda campaign." Any protest would have to be directed at the content of

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the campaign: the mere fact of a government involved in a dispute with us appointing additional information officers round the world to publicise its case would not be sufficient grounds. We did not protest formally when the present campaign was at its height (though Sir Andrew Gilchrist commented on a personal basis to Ministers likely to be receptive) and we would not wish to do so in present circumstances. (It is perhaps relevant that we have never protested formally to the Spanish Government about their campaign over Gibraltar.) It seems best, therefore, to gloss over the request for a protest at this stage and wait to see if Mr. Stratton Mills returns to the charge - he may well not do so.

Background

5. During the television debate with Mr. Stratton Mills, Miss Devlin quoted from a letter (which she alleged had been sent to the Secretary of State by H.M. Ambassador Washington) a phrase admitting the existence of anti-Catholic bias in Northern Ireland. It subsequently emerged that she was almost certainly referring to a reply from a member of the Information Department at the Embassy to a letter a member of the public had written to the Secretary of State (Washington telegrams Nos. 2388 and 2389).

D & E

Taken out of context, as it was by Miss Devlin, the phrase in question was undoubtedly open to misinterpretation. At the time the Ambassador commented that the letter was a vigorous and reasoned defence of our policies. This it was. But it must also be said that the letter exposed too

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much surface (and had not been cleared with any senior member of the Embassy staff). The latest telegram reports that the Ambassador has issued instructions to guard against this sort of thing happening again.

Charles Wiggins

(C.D. Wiggin)

American Department

8 October 1969

Copies to:

- Mr. Tait
- Mr. Hankey
- Mr. H.T. Morgan
- Mr. Brinson

I think that the reply should go from the Secretary of State but Lord Chalfont should see first.

- 1. Mr Tait*
- 2. Private Secretary.*

pa
J. Rayson
9.X.69

- 3 -

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I agree *C*

Letter sent, somewhat amended
13/10