



Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

2 July 1981

[Handwritten initials]

Dear Clive,

Overseas Information Effort on Northern Ireland

I attach a paper drawn up with the Northern Ireland Office which summarises the Government's information activities abroad in the last two months. We are continuing to examine what more can be done.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Stephen Boys-Smith (Northern Ireland Office) and David Heyhoe (Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster's Office).

[Handwritten initials]

yours ever

Roderic Lyne

(R M J Lyne)
Private Secretary

Clive Whitmore Esq
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Prime Minister.

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GOVERNMENT INFORMATION EFFORT OVERSEAS ON NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Since Sands' death in the Maze Prison, Belfast, on 5 May, FCO posts have been sent a wide range of material including:-

(a) 13 Guidance telegrams containing up-to-date and factual information and arguments to deploy;

(b) 50 Retract and 11 Verbatim telegrams containing texts of Ministerial speeches, Parliamentary answers and messages;

(c) a paper containing favourable quotations from the overseas press (see also 2(b) below);

(d) a five-minute video film of PIRA bomb outrages produced by the COI for placing with local TV stations;

(e) profiles of all hunger strikers;

(f) the Paymaster-General's briefing note of points for Ministers to make;

(g) some COI feature articles.

2. Work in hand includes:-

(a) a revision of 'Points at Issue', a compendium of question and answer papers in loose-leaf folders last revised in September 1980 covering various aspects of the Northern Ireland policies;

(b) a second paper summarising overseas press comment;

(c) a 50-minute COI film aimed mainly at North American club gatherings but also worldwide and for TV;

(d) a five-minute video film showing conditions in the Maze prison;

(e) a two-page fact sheet for handing directly to MEPs and other interested foreign dignitaries;

(f) an eight-page paper covering the same ground but in more detail for the general enquirer.

3. In parallel, the NIO are preparing a further edition of 'What the Papers Say' (similar to the FCO summary of overseas press but including UK press comment) and a pamphlet on IRA atrocities. They have continued to brief resident foreign correspondents in London, as well as those visiting either London or Belfast for whom posts



have requested facilities. NIO officials also briefed the European Democratic Group of MEPs prior to the debate on Irish affairs at Strasbourg on 7 May, the outcome of which was satisfactory from our point of view.

4. In the United States and France, our posts have been specially active. For instance, since 22 April, our Embassy in Paris has received over 2,600 communications (letters, cards, petitions and telegrams, of which over 1,500 have been without addresses). Over 500 standard replies and dossiers have been issued. The Ambassador or the Counsellor (Information) have replied personally to over 100 Mayors, Senators, or Deputés, all of them known Communists or from a Communist area, and written frequently to editors. When Mr Butler, an NIO Minister of State, visited France for the Paris Air Show, the Embassy arranged for him to meet a number of key journalists; as a result, arrangements were made for a group of French journalists to visit the Maze and also to see at first hand the normality of life in Northern Ireland.

5. In the United States, six out of seven radio stations broadcast a COI interview by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland immediately after the death of Sands; CBS nationwide television also carried an interview with him. Since then, Mr Atkins has appeared in ABC's 'Good Morning, America', the top-rated US breakfast television show. The Ambassador, the Consul-General in New York and Chicago and the First Secretary in charge of BIS New York have also appeared on American television. Letters from the Consul-General setting the record straight have appeared in the 'New York Daily News', and the 'Philadelphia Daily News'. The British Information Services, New York, have handled over 600 letters written as part of successive campaigns in support of the prison protests in Northern Ireland.

6. Between 21 and 25 June, two senior NIO officials visited the United States to brief editors and other opinion-formers. Mr Alison, the Minister of State in the NIO responsible for prisons, is likely to visit the United States in July. (Washington would have difficulty in handling further visits at the moment but the series of all-party visits of MPs begun in December/January may be resumed later this year.)

7. In some countries, eg FRG, there has been little criticism to combat. ~~But~~ Many other posts have been active, including:-

(1) Mexico City (the Ambassador has written letters, all of which were published, in response to ill-informed or hostile comment in six different newspapers; the Counsellor has given a number of press and radio interviews);

(2) Port of Spain (the High Commissioner has written to one paper to correct an article and given an interview to another);

(3) Sofia (the Ambassador called on the Head of the Press Department at the MFA to draw attention to occasions when comment had been notably biased);



(4) The Hague (the Ambassador has called on a number of political figures specifically to discuss Northern Ireland);

(5) East Berlin (the Ambassador has circulated a paper to editors and other appropriate officials);

(6) Wellington (the High Commissioner has written to the editor of the leading Roman Catholic journal to correct tendentious articles);

(7) Pretoria (the Ambassador has given an on-the-record interview to the 'Rand Daily Mail').

30 June 1981

Information Department