



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE
GREAT GEORGE STREET,
LONDON SW1P 3AJ

Ans
28/4

MODBA (O/R)

MS
21/4

N Sanders Esq
10 Downing Street
London SW1

21 April 1981

Dear Nick,

I sent you over this morning the material for which you asked in connexion with the request from three Irish TD's for a meeting with the Prime Minister. There are one or two further thoughts which, given the very short timetable to which we had to work, we were unable to get into that material; but it may be useful in any further consideration of current Northern Ireland troubles to have them on the record.

The present unrest in the Province has to be seen as, at least to some extent, the product of a situation in which four factors have converged in time:

- (a) The hunger strike by Sands is approaching a point of climax at which he either gives in or dies. This would have attracted a good deal of publicity in any case, but of course his success in the Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election has given it greatly heightened interest.
- (b) We are now in the run-up to the District Council elections which take place on 20 May. These would normally have led to some intensification of local political feeling along the usual polarised sectarian lines; but that has all been greatly aggravated by the "Carson trail" activities of Dr Paisley over recent weeks in which he has sought to stir up anti-Republic feelings.

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- (c) We are surely beginning to see, both in things said by Mr Haughey and in such moves as this latest request from the three TDs, the beginnings of the run-up to a parliamentary election in the South.
- (d) It is Easter, traditionally the time for expressions, verbal and physical, of Republican sentiment in Ireland north and south.

In spite of this concatenation of elements, the position is not giving undue cause for concern, and the police and the Army remain confident that they can contain the developing situation. It does mean, however, that with feelings somewhat raised on both sides of the community, the Government must take care to be, and to be seen to be, even-handed in its statements and dealings. Our policies are, we judge, fair and well-based, and there is no reason to change them. But we need to maintain a steady stance, steering between the extremes of the 'Daily Telegraph' on one side and Mr Haughey on the other.

I am sending a copy of this letter to John Halliday (Home Office), Francis Richards (FCO), and David Wright (Cabinet Office).

*Yours sincerely
Mike Hopkins*

M W HOPKINS

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