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FM WASHINGTON 202301Z MAY 81

TO IMMEDIATE F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 1578 OF 20 MAY 1981

INFO IMMEDIATE NIO BELFAST NIO LONDON

INFO PRIORITY DUBLIN

INFO SAVING BIS NEW YORK

M I P T

NORTHERN IRELAND: U S TV AND RADIO COVERAGE 11-18 MAY.

1. THE DEATH OF HUGHES, THE SUBSEQUENT RIOTING AND VARIOUS FUNERALS IN N. IRELAND WERE REPORTED BY THE TELEVISION AND RADIO NETWORKS WITHOUT PROMINENCE AND WITH MUCH LESS SENSATIONAL REPORTING THAN IN THE PREVIOUS WEEK (MY TEL NO 1471). MOST REPORTS DESCRIBED HUGHES AS A QUOTE CONVICTED MURDERER UNQUOTE, AND EXTRACTS OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR N.I.'S RADIO INTERVIEW WERE WIDELY AND HELPFULLY USED BY ALL THE MAIN RADIO NETWORKS. ABC CARRIED THE SECRETARY OF STATE'S DESCRIPTION OF HUGHES AS QUOTE ONE OF THE MOST WANTED MEN IN N.IRELAND UNQUOTE. BUT REPORTS ON ALL THE TELEVISION NETWORKS OF THE BRAWLS OVER THE ROUTE FOR THE HEARSE CARRYING HUGHES'S BODY FROM THE MAZE, WITH EXTENSIVE FILM OF THE POLICE REMOVING THE UNDERTAKER FROM THE HEARSE BY FORCE SHOWED THE SECURITY AUTHORITIES IN AN UNSYMPATHETIC LIGHT. BOTH ABC AND CBS CARRIED CRITICAL COMMENT BY A FRIEND OF HUGHES. REPORTS OF THE HUGHES FUNERAL ALSO PLAYED UP THE SECURITY RESTRICTIONS PLACED ON MOURNERS. BUT THE FUNERAL OF THE MILKMAN, KILLED BY RIOTERS AFTER SANDS DEATH WAS ALSO PROMINENTLY COVERED. ON THE SAME EVENING, CABLE NEWS NETWORK, NOW RECEIVED IN OVER 5 MILLION HOMES, CARRIED AN HOUR LONG INTERVIEW WITH HMC G NEW YORK.

2. THE SINGLE MOST UNHELPFUL TELEVISION REPORT OF THE WEEK WAS THE REPEAT OF A 1974 REPORT ABOUT STRABANE BY ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR PROGRAMMES IN THE COUNTRY, CBS'S QUOTE 60 MINUTES UNQUOTE (WITH AN AUDIENCE OF ABOUT 30 MILLION A WEEK). THE SEGMENT, INTRODUCED AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF HOW LITTLE THE SITUATION HAD CHANGED IN THE LAST DECADE, WAS AN EMOTIVE ACCOUNT OF DEATH AND DESTRUCTION IN STRABANE, SHOWING QUOTE THE INDIGNITIES AN OCCUPYING FORCE INFLECTS ON PEOPLE, INCLUDING A VISITING CAMERA CREW, EVERYWHERE UNQUOTE, THE DESTRUCTION OF SHOPS AND OFFICES, AND THE INEVITABLE FILM OF SOLDIERS JUXTAPOSED WITH YOUNG CHILDREN.

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3. OTHERWISE THE REDUCED IMPACT OF REPORTS ON NETWORK TV AND RADIO ILLUSTRATED THEIR TENDENCY TO CONCENTRATE ON ONE MAJOR STORY AT A TIME AND THEN TO DROP IT ABRUPTLY. ATTENTION HAS NOW BEEN DIVERTED TO THE SHOOTING OF THE POPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST. IN A SUMMARY OF THE WEEK'S NEWS ON 17 MAY CBS PLACED A REPORT ON THE DEATH OF HUGHES AFTER ACCOUNTS OF THE SHOOTING OF THE POPE, THE ISRAEL/SYRIA DISPUTE AND THE ELECTION OF THE NEW PRESIDENT OF FRANCE AND BALANCED IT WITH AN ACCOUNT OF THE MURDER OF A CATHOLIC BUTCHER WHO HAD REFUSED TO CLOSE HIS SHOP ON THE DAY OF THE FUNERAL.

4. ON LOCAL TELEVISION STATIONS IN NEW YORK INTEREST IN LOCAL NORAIID DEMONSTRATIONS WAS ALSO GREATLY REDUCED. ONLY ONE STATION, COMPARED WITH SIX THE PREVIOUS WEEK, USED A SHORT INTERVIEW WITH BIS NEW YORK ON THE DEATH OF HUGHES. REPORTS OF THE DEMONSTRATIONS OUTSIDE THE CONSULATE GENERAL AND ON THE ARRIVAL OF THE QE2, WERE ALSO BRIEF. THE VISITING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF IRELAND GROUP WERE WELL COVERED ON LOCAL RADIO AND TELEVISION STATIONS: ONE MEMBER GAVE A COMMENTARY ON NEW YORK'S NORMALLY HOSTILE CHANNEL 5 NEWS AS A BALANCE TO A PREVIOUS STATEMENT BY A NORAIID SUPPORTER.

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TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELEGRAM NUMBER 1577 OF 20 MAY

INFO IMMEDIATE NIO BELFAST, NIO LONDON, PRIORITY DUBLIN,

BIS NEW YORK.

MY TELEGRAM NO 1471

NORTHERN IRELAND: US MEDIA COVERAGE

1. THE DECLINE OF US MEDIA ATTENTION OBSERVED IN MY TELEGRAM UNDER REFERENCE CONTINUES. NORTHERN IRELAND REMAINS A PROMINENT STORY, BUT BY NO MEANS THE DOMINANT ONE.

2. MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS SUCH AS HUGHES' FUNERAL AND THE MURDER OF 5 BRITISH SOLDIERS HAVE RECEIVED FULL BUT FACTUAL COVERAGE. EDITORIAL COVERAGE CONTINUES AT A LESSER RATE; IT REMAINS THE CASE THAT NO INFLUENTIAL US NEWSPAPER HAS CALLED FOR THE GRANTING OF POLITICAL STATUS. INDEED EDITORIAL COMMENT, THOUGH BY NO MEANS UNIFORM, IS INCREASINGLY FAVOURABLE. TODAY'S PRESS COMMENT INCLUDES A REPORT BY THE JOURNAL OF COMMERCE NOTING THE STRENGTH OF BRITISH AND NORTHERN IRISH POPULAR SUPPORT FOR HMG'S POSITION, THE NORMALITY OF ONGOING INDIVIDUAL AND COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY AND THE STRONG ATTRACTIVE FORCES OF NORTHERN IRELAND FOR FOREIGN INVESTMENT; A FORCEFUL AND STRONGLY SUPPORTIVE ARTICLE IN THE NEW YORK TIMES BY THE ASSISTANT EDITOR OF THE IRISH TIMES; AND AN EDITORIAL IN THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS UNEQUIVOCALLY CONDEMNING THE IRA GANGSTERS WHO BLEW UP A BRITISH ARMoured CAR AND EQUATING THEM WITH THE PUERTO RICAN THUGS WHO BOASTED OF A MURDEROUS BOMB ATTACK AT A NEW YORK AIRPORT.

3. SUCH COMMENT WILL ITSELF PROVOKE HOSTILE LETTERS AND ARTICLES. BUT THE TREND OF MAINSTREAM COMMENT IS INCREASINGLY BALANCED, INDEED FAVOURABLE. I THINK THERE ARE TWO FACTORS IN THIS. FIRST, THE VERY LONG DRAWN OUT NATURE OF THE HUNGER STRIKES, AND THE INTENSITY OF THE PRO-IRA PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN, HAS FORCED EDITORIAL WRITERS AND MAJOR COLUMNISTS TO TAKE A LONGER AND MORE CONSIDERED LOOK AT THE ISSUES THAN IS NORMAL HERE WITH NORTHERN IRISH COVERAGE. SECOND, THE ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON THE POPE AND (ESPECIALLY IN NEW YORK) THE PUERTO RICAN BOMBINGS, CLOSELY COINCIDING WITH THE MURDER OF THE FIVE SOLDIERS, HAVE BROUGHT TO THE FORE THE GENERAL U.S. FEAR AND DETESTATION OF TERRORISM, AND STRENGTHENED CONSERVATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF AN INTERNATIONAL LINKAGE (HOWEVER STRUCTURED) OF TERRORIST GROUPS. I SENSE A GROWING REALISATION IN THE MAJOR U.S. MEDIA THAT THEY HAVE DROPPED THEIR GUARD, AND HAVE TOO EASILY AND UNCRITICALLY PROVIDED A PLATFORM FOR STRONGLY BIASED AND EXTREMIST VIEWS, AND THAT THIS REFLECTS POORLY ON THEIR JOURNALISTIC PROBITY. THE ENFORCED RESIGNATION OF DALY (DAILY NEWS COLUMNIST) WAS A MILESTONE IN THIS PROCESS. AND THE ECONOMIST ASSESSMENT, OF 16 MAY, OF US MEDIA COVERAGE WAS, WE KNOW, ADDRESSED PRIMARILY TO U.S. EDITORS AND, COMING FROM THAT INFLUENTIAL SOURCE, WILL HAVE PRODUCED SOME CONSCIENCE-SEARCHING.

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4. M I F T GIVES A FURTHER AND DETAILED ACCOUNT OF TV AND RADIO COVERAGE AS OBSERVED IN NEW YORK UP TO 18 MAY. THIS DEMONSTRATES CLEARLY ENOUGH THAT WE STILL FACE HOSTILE ATTITUDES IN MANY QUARTERS, PARTICULARLY IN NEW YORK AND OTHER CITIES WITH A CONCENTRATION OF EXTREME IRISH-AMERICAN OPINION.

5. BUT WE ARE NOW SEEING, IN THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA BOTH PRINT AND ELECTRONIC, EVIDENCE OF A WISH TO RESTORE SOME BALANCE AND INDEED TO PRESENT HMG'S VIEWS MORE FAIRLY. ON 19 MAY ABC TELEVISIONS QUOTE NIGHTLINE UNQUOTE (ONE OF THE MOST WIDELY RESPECTED AND INFLUENTIAL CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMMES ON U.S. TELEVISION, WITH AN AUDIENCE OF APPROXIMATELY 10 MILLION A NIGHT) DEVOTED ITS ENTIRE 30 MINUTES TO PRESENTING AN QUOTE ANTI-IRA POINT OF VIEW UNQUOTE. THE PROGRAMME INCLUDED AN INTERVIEW WITH A MEMBER OF THE RUC SEVERELY BURNT IN AN INCIDENT WHEN A COLLEAGUE WAS KILLED (QUOTE ONE OF THE INCREASING NUMBER OF LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIALS UNDER ATTACK FROM THE IRA UNQUOTE), A LIVE DISCUSSION WITH TWO LONDONDERRY WIDOWS (QUOTE THE TERRORISTS HAVE BEEN MADE OUT TO BE HEROES, YET THEIR VICTIMS HAVE BEEN FORGOTTEN EXCEPT BY THOSE WHO LOVED THEM UNQUOTE), AND A COMMENTARY BY AN IRISH-AMERICAN CATHOLIC WHO DESCRIBED THE IRA AS BENT ON QUOTE A MISSION OF MISERY, DESTRUCTION AND DEATH, SO TURN ALL OF IRELAND INTO A GIGANTIC CUBA WITH A BROGUE UNQUOTE. THE PROGRAMME CONCLUDED WITH A LIVE INTERVIEW WITH ME. I AND MY STAFF, U.S.-WIDE, OF COURSE CONTINUE TO TAKE EVERY WORTHWHILE OPPORTUNITY TO STATE THE CASE. IT IS NOW BEING HEARD, AND REFLECTED, MORE WIDELY.

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