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TO IMMEDIATE F C O

TELEGRAM NUMBER 1472 OF 13 MAY 1981,

INFO IMMEDIATE N I O (LONDON), N I O (BELFAST)

PRIORITY DUBLIN, B I S NEW YORK.

M I P T

NORTHERN IRELAND: U S T V AND RADIO COVERAGE

1. FROM THE BEGINNING OF LAST WEEK, WITH THE THREE COMMERCIAL TV NETWORKS LINING UP NUMEROUS STAFF IN BELFAST FOR THE DEATH OF SANDS, WHICH OCCURRED LESS THAN AN HOUR AFTER MY INTERVIEW ON THE MCNEIL-LEHRER REPORT (PUBLIC BROADCASTING NETWORK), TELEVISION COVERAGE ABOUT N. IRELAND WAS THE MOST EXTENSIVE FOR SEVERAL YEARS.

2. THE IMPACT OF THE NETWORKS' COVERAGE WAS ACCENTUATED BY THE ABSENCE OF ANY OTHER MAJOR EVENT CONSISTENTLY CATCHING ATTENTION. N. IRELAND WAS THE LEADING SINGLE STORY, DOMESTIC OR INTERNATIONAL, OF LAST WEEK - FOR EXAMPLE, A B C'S NIGHTLINE CURRENT AFFAIRS PROGRAMME DEVOTED TWO PROGRAMMES IN FIVE NIGHTS TO THE SUBJECT. ONE OF THESE CARRIED AN INTERVIEW WITH THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF B I S.

3. THE NATIONAL NETWORKS GENERALLY MADE SOME ATTEMPT AT BALANCE, ALTHOUGH THIS DID NOT ALWAYS PREVAIL OVER THE PREJUDICES OF INDIVIDUAL REPORTERS: FOR INSTANCE A C B S CORRESPONDENT THOUGHT IT ADEQUATE TO QUALIFY HIS CLAIM THAT "THE EYES OF THE WORLD ARE ON THE HUNGER STRIKE, AND WORLD OPINION SEEMS IN FAVOUR OF THE STRIKERS" WITH THE SUGGESTION THAT "THE PROPAGANDA VICTORY OVER BRITAIN COULD BE LOST IF THERE IS WIDESPREAD VIOLENCE". ALL THE NETWORKS WENT TO SOME LENGTHS TO EMPHASISE THAT THE MUCH PREDICTED VIOLENCE AFTER SANDS' DEATH HAD NOT MATERIALISED, AND POINTED TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF CHILDREN (HIGHLIGHTED IN A SPECIAL REPORT ON A B C'S PRIME TIME MAGAZINE PROGRAMME 20/20) IN ATTACKS ON THE POLICE AND ARMED FORCES. C B S DEMONSTRATED TELLINGLY HOW SOME OF THE PRESS WERE USING CHILDREN TO POSE FOR PHOTOGRAPHS PURPORTEDLY DEPICTING SCENES OF VIOLENCE.

4. THE BRIEF CONFRONTATION IN THE HOUSE BETWEEN THE LABOUR M P, MR DUFFY, AND THE PRIME MINISTER, WAS REPORTED BY THE T V NETWORKS: AND COVERAGE OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S COMMENTS REPLAYED ON ALL THE NETWORKS, TENDED TO DISPLACE THE ATTENTION GIVEN TO THE JOINT INTERVIEW WITH MR ATKINS, FROM WHICH BRIEF EXTRACTS WERE CARRIED. BUT ON FRIDAY, A B C'S GOOD MORNING, AMERICA (WHICH BEFORE SANDS' DEATH HAD CARRIED A HELPFUL INTERVIEW WITH GERRY FITT AND HAROLD MCCUSKER) BILLED REPEATEDLY ITS EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH MR. ATKINS, WHICH RAN FOR 9 MINUTES ON THE PROGRAMME.

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5. ON THE SAME MORNING, C B S'S MORNING NEWS (FOLLOWING SOME UNATTRIBUTABLE BRIEFING FROM B I S) RAN THE FIRST PUBLIC STORY ABOUT THE INVESTIGATION OF DALY'S REPORTING FROM BELFAST IN THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, AND ON SATURDAY EVENING THE MAIN CBS NEWS RAN THE STORY PROMINENTLY, INCLUDING AN INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW NEIL OF THE ECONOMIST.

6. NETWORK RADIO COVERAGE CONCENTRATED FOR THE MOST PART ON FACTUAL REPORTS FROM BELFAST, AND OVERALL COVERAGE WAS NOT UNFAVOURABLE, WITH SUBSTANTIAL USE BY ALL THE MAIN NETWORKS OF EXTRACTS FROM MR. ATKINS' INTERVIEW FOR B I S HEARD ACROSS THE STATES WITHIN 12 HOURS OF SANDS' DEATH.

7. COVERAGE BY LOCAL NEW YORK STATIONS OF EVENTS IN BELFAST AND OF THE REACTION IN NEW YORK, ILLUSTRATED VIVIDLY THE VAST GULF IN STANDARDS BETWEEN THESE STATIONS AND THE NATIONAL NETWORKS. LOCAL STATIONS INDULGED IN 1 MINUTE GLOSSY HISTORIES OF IRELAND (''BOBBY SANDS AND OTHERS OF THE I R A DIED FOR THE DREAM OF THIS MAP. BRITISH TROOPS AND PROTESTANTS IN THE NORTH HAVE DIED TO KEEP THE MAP THE WAY IT IS'' - W A B C), LACED THEIR REPORTS WITH BRIEF INTERVIEWS WITH IRISH-AMERICAN SYMPATHISERS WITH SANDS, AND NEVER FAILED TO CATCH THE BURNING OF EFFIGIES OUTSIDE THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT OFFICES NEATLY TIMED FOR LOCAL NEWS CONSUMPTION. THE BRIEF USAGE OF MR. ATKINS' STATEMENT, READ TO CAMERA FOR 1 SMALL NETWORK AND 6 STATIONS BY B I S'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PROVIDED A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF STABILITY IN GENERALLY EMOTIVE REPORTS, FULL OF LANGUAGE LIKE ''THE DEATH OF SANDS WILL MAKE IRISH-AMERICANS MORE CONSCIOUS OF THEIR HERITAGE AND OF THE LOYALTY THAT THEY OWE TO THEIR BRETHREN, THE MEN AND WOMEN IN IRELAND WHO ARE RELATED TO THEM BY THE STRONGEST TIES OF BLOOD''. BY THE END OF THE WEEK SUCH LANGUAGE HAD BEEN WATERED DOWN, ALL THE LOCAL STATIONS CARRIED THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF DALY'S RESIGNATION FROM THE ''DAILY NEWS'', AND EVEN NEW YORK'S CONSISTANTLY HOSTILE CHANNEL 5 LED WITH AN INTERVIEW WITH THE VISITING BRITISH MINISTER FOR TRADE, MR. PARKINSON, ABOUT N. IRELAND.

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MY TELEGRAM NO 1319

NORTHERN IRELAND : US MEDIA COVERAGE

1. THE HIGH AND GROWING VOLUME OF MEDIA COVERAGE (MY TELEGRAM UNDER REFERENCE) INTENSIFIED FURTHER FOLLOWING SANDS' DEATH ON 4 MAY. THROUGHOUT LAST WEEK NORTHERN IRELAND WAS THE LEADING SINGLE MEDIA STORY.

2. MY IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING TELEGRAM GIVES A DETAILED ACCOUNT OF TV AND RADIO COVERAGE, COMPILED IN NEW YORK WHERE THE MAJOR NETWORK HEADQUARTERS ARE SITED. TWO POINTS SHOULD BE EMPHASISED. FIRST, IT IS THE NATURE OF TV, AND PARTICULARLY US TV, TO FOCUS ON THE PICTORIAL, THE SENSATIONAL AND THE DRAMATIC RATHER THAN TO ANALYSE AND DISCUSS. MOREOVER, US TV HAS A MARKED TENDENCY TO IDENTIFY THE CURRENT LEAD STORY AND THEN GO FOR IT REGARDLESS. THE THREE US NETWORKS HAD THEIR TEAMS IN BELFAST AND WERE COMPETING FOR THE MOST STRIKING COVERAGE. PROCESSIONS, FUNERALS AND STREET VIOLENCE WERE WELCOME. SECOND, SUBJECT TO THOSE CONSIDERATIONS THE NATIONAL NETWORKS MADE SOME ATTEMPT AT BALANCE - THOUGH THAT BALANCE REFLECTED THE DEEP-ROOTED US PERCEPTION OF A TWO-SIDED STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE IRA AND THE BRITISH AUTHORITIES, WITH SCANT REFERENCE TO PROTESTANT OPINION OTHER THAN EXTREMIST.

3. PRINT COVERAGE HAS BEEN QUITE DIFFERENT. NEWS REPORTS FILED BY LONDON-BASED US CORRESPONDENTS HAVE BEEN EXTENSIVE AND GENERALLY FACTUAL. WILLIS (CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR) HAS BEEN PARTICULARLY HELPFUL IN E.G. HIS COVERAGE OF RADICAL LEFT-WING IRA OBJECTIVES, LINKS WITH OTHER TERRORIST GROUPS, AND FOREIGN TV CREWS PAYING CHILDREN TO STAGE STREET ATTACKS ON SECURITY FORCES. DOMESTIC NON-EDITORIAL COMMENT HAS BEEN VARIED. THERE HAS BEEN PROMINENT AND VIRULENT CRITICISM FROM IRA-SYMPATHISERS, ANSWERED TO SOME EXTENT BY ARTICLES AND LETTERS FROM CONSULS-GENERAL AND RESPONSIBLE MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC. THE BALANCE OF THE CORRESPONDENCE COLUMNS HAS BEEN ADVERSE, ALTHOUGH THE STRIDENT TONE OF MANY OF THE IRA SUPPORTERS MAY NOT HAVE DONE THEIR CAUSE ANY GOOD. MORE SIGNIFICANTLY IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT THE MAJOR COLUMNISTS WHO HAVE ADDRESSED THE ISSUE (GEORGE WILL, WASHINGTON POST; ANTHONY LEWIS, NEW YORK TIMES; WILLIAM BUCKLEY, WASHINGTON STAR) HAVE BEEN STRONGLY SUPPORTIVE OF THE BRITISH POSITION. A NOTABLE AND PREDICTABLE EXCEPTION WAS MICHAEL

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DALY, NEW YORK DAILY NEWS: BUT HIS PIECE ON THE ACTIONS OF A BRITISH ARMY PATROL HAS BEEN SO THOROUGHLY DEMOLISHED BY ANDREW NEIL IN THE DAILY MAIL AND ECONOMIST AS TO FORCE HIS RESIGNATION.

4. THE MOST LASTING AND SIGNIFICANT EXPRESSION OF US MAINSTREAM OPINION IS ALWAYS THE EDITORIALS. THE OUTCOME TO DATE HAS BEEN GENERALLY FAVOURABLE, CERTAINLY ON THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE OF POLITICAL STATUS. IT HAS BEEN GENERALLY RECOGNISED THAT THE PRISONERS OWN DEMANDS HAVE MADE THIS, RATHER THAN SPECIFIC PRISON REGULATIONS, THE CRUX. A SMALL MINORITY OF EDITORIALS HAVE DUCKED THE ISSUE, RESORTING TO GENERAL HAND-WRINGING OVER POINTLESS VIOLENCE, NEED FOR CONSTRUCTIVE ACTION ETC. BUT THE GREAT MAJORITY HAVE ADDRESSED THE PROBLEM, AND THE VERDICT HAS BEEN OVERWHELMINGLY FAVOURABLE TO HMG. IN MOST CASES THIS HAS BEEN TEMPERED BY THE NEAR-OBLIGATORY NEED TO SHOW QUOTE BALANCE UNQUOTE BY CRITICISING HMG ON SOME ASPECT OF POLICY TOWARDS N. IRELAND : HISTORIC MISDEEDS, DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CATHOLICS, BENIGN NEGLECT OF PROTESTANT BIGOTRY, NEED TO PRESS ACTIVELY FOR POWER-SHARING, NEED FOR FORCE-FEEDING OR FOR SOME QUOTE FLEXIBILITY UNQUOTE ON PRISON CONDITIONS, HAUGHTY INTRANSIGENCE (OF MANNER RATHER THAN SUBSTANCE). THERE IS CONSIDERABLE SUPPORT FOR CONTINUED LONDON-DUBLIN TALKS. SEVERAL WRITERS ARGUE THAT UNIFICATION, BY PEACEFUL CONSENT, IS THE ONLY FEASIBLE LONG-TERM SOLUTION. BUT, TO OUR KNOWLEDGE HERE, NO INFLUENTIAL US NEWSPAPER HAS CALLED EDITORIALY FOR THE GRANTING OF POLITICAL STATUS.

5. IN THE LAST FEW DAYS MEDIA ATTENTION, PRINT AND ELECTRONIC, HAS ECLINED SUBSTANTIALLY. SO FAR IT HAS NOT BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY REVIVED BY HUGHES' DEATH.

6. I AND MY STAFF - IN WASHINGTON, BIR NEW YORK AND CONSULS-GENERAL - HAVE GIVEN NUMEROUS RADIO AND TV INTERVIEWS. WE WILL CONTINUE TO TAKE WORTHWHILE OPPORTUNITIES ON INFLUENTIAL PROGRAMMES, THOUGH WE SHOULD AVOID GIVING LIFE TO THE STORY IF IT CONTINUES TO DECLINE. IT HAS BEEN HELPFUL TO HAVE THE IRISH PRESBYTERIAN GROUP HERE, AND THEY HAVE PERFORMED WELL: AND MR. PARKINSON GAVE A VERY EFFECTIVE TV INTERVIEW IN NEW YORK. WE WILL KEEP UNDER CONSTANT REVIEW THE DESIRABILITY OF VISITS BY MINISTERS OR MPS, AND WILL RECOMMEND ACCORDINGLY.

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