



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

30 July 1981

Thank you for your letter of 8 July enclosing another, returned herewith, from Mrs. Arthur Rankin of Georgia, USA, about IRA propaganda in the USA.

I agree that her letter is disturbing. Although the general coverage of the hunger strikes by the foreign media has been more balanced than she suggests, there is still much ill-informed prejudice. We are well aware of this and are making strenuous efforts to tackle the problem. In recent weeks, Peter Carrington, Ian Gilmour and both Ministers of State at the Northern Ireland Office have visited the United States and have explained our case. In addition, the Ambassador and his senior staff have appeared more than 40 times on US radio and TV to explain the complexity of the Northern Ireland problem and the responsible nature of the Government's policies, as well as to counter the IRA's attempts to project the views of pro-Republican Irish Americans as representative of mainstream US opinion. They are not. The facts are:-

- (i) Not one leading American newspaper has supported the granting of political status to the Maze Prison hunger strikers;
- (ii) the US Government fully understand and support our policies. Secretary of State Haig at a press conference last month remarked that, if the British were not in Northern Ireland, they would have to be invented;

/(iii)

BK

(iii) a US Federal Court recently ruled that the Irish Northern Aid Committee (NORAIID), an organisation which collects funds ostensibly for humanitarian purposes, is an agent of the Provisional IRA in the United States.

Television, which lends itself to misleading images, is a particular problem. Although both the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Northern Ireland Office are in touch with many visiting film crews, they cannot force them to report the situation objectively. Nor, as you know, can we compel journalists to read our explanatory material or attend our briefings. And there are some who will never listen to reason.

You suggested that the COI ought to prepare a factual film for use in the United States. For your own information only, the COI is doing exactly this. If it is suitable, we hope to release it shortly, to supplement the television footage already provided by the BBC and ITN through their normal commercial links. We would prefer that the existence of this film should not become public knowledge at this stage.

Our Consultate-General in Atlanta (Georgia) has reported that, since early June, little adverse material has been printed in the Georgia press. Despite Mrs. Rankin's views, we believe that we are winning the major battle, to convince the US Government and opinion-formers that our policy is right. Nevertheless countering IRA propoganda in the United States remains a major task for us and one to which we attach great importance. We shall be further strengthening our US information effort to spread our net even wider and more Ministers will be speaking on Northern Irish matters in the United States of America.

(sgd) M T

The Rt. Hon. Sir Angus Maude, M.P.