

Mr Alexander
1. MR ALEXANDER

2. PRIME MINISTER

NORTHERN IRELAND - PROPAGANDA

You may care to see (attached) the latest publication from NIO.

2. This "What the papers say" sets out comments by newspapers at home and abroad, mostly across the USA, which generally support the UK Government's line. Copies of the booklet have been put in the libraries of both Houses and the Press Gallery

B. Ingham
B. INGHAM

8 June, 1981.

H-BLOCKS

What the
papers say

UNITED KINGDOM

THE TIMES

“THE NATURE of the offences committed by the IRA should alone disqualify their members from claiming political status. They are not, for the most part, committed against those people whom they hold responsible for the policy they object to. The greater proportion of those who have died and have been injured by IRA action have been innocent individuals, who have no responsibility. Indeed, in many instances the IRA have neither known nor cared who was liable to be killed. By what logic can such indiscriminate violence be classed as political crime justifying preferential treatment?”

THE GUARDIAN

“THE CENTRAL demand of the IRA — for clear political status — cannot be clearly met. To license killing of passers-by and census makers as well as of soldiers and policemen is to give every criminal with a passing political excuse free licence within the realm. How do you separate a bank robber for IRA funds and a bank robber from the East End who pleads that a random GLC election leaflet turned him into a crook?”

DAILY EXPRESS

“ORGANISED civilised government, with its compromises and tolerances, is unacceptable to extremists. They must get their own way in everything — and those who resist must perish. This is the tyranny of terror; be it the IRA, the Red Brigades of Italy, Baader-Meinhof in Germany, the Basque terrorists in Spain, or scores of similar organisations throughout the world. Britain has acted with a degree of restraint, unimaginable elsewhere.”

DAILY Mirror

“MR SANDS demanded political status, but he had won the political status which matters when he topped the poll in the Fermanagh by-election.”

The Daily Telegraph

“HUNGER striking is a fairly familiar device which normally fails even to procure lasting fame for those who employ it. Those who should be admired are the Government (particularly the Northern Ireland Office) for its steadfastness, the prison and medical staffs who have had to attend to the macabre details of this grisly affair, and the security forces who can be counted on to meet with vigour and restraint whatever plans the IRA may have to avenging with innocent blood Sands' crime against himself.”

THE Sun

“BOBBY Sands stood for tyranny – the dark tyranny of terror by the bomb cruelly placed to maim and kill unsuspecting innocents. Had his demands to wear his own clothes, to be excused work, to be allowed to mingle with other IRA prisoners, been granted does anyone imagine he would have been content? Of course not. He would simply have climbed to fresh heights of effrontery.”

Daily Mail

“THE FUNERAL of Bobby Sands was an occasion of genuine grief for the members of his family but the IRA did its best to make it a macabre propaganda circus. The ritual of the so-called full military honours at the graveside with masked gunmen solemnly firing volleys into the air is a gangsters' parody of the moving tributes which fighting men traditionally pay to comrades who fall in the defence of honourable causes. Bobby Sands was one who whether willingly or unwillingly killed himself to further an evil crusade. He was the tool of wicked conspirators who, if they ever took control of Ulster, would bring the province nought but bloodshed, tyranny and desolation.”

DAILY STAR

“IN THE long run the ballot box offers the people of Northern Ireland their only hope. Violence, like the death of Bobby Sands, offers them nothing.”

Belfast Telegraph

“THE ‘five demands’ (of the hunger strikers) are a means to an end — the undermining of the whole prison system, and, ultimately, the British responsibility for Northern Ireland. Any government which gave way to such pressures would not be worthy of the name, and would deserve the chaos that resulted. Mrs Thatcher is not in that mould.”

NEWS LETTER

“IT IS significant that not a single critical representation on the Government’s handling of the Maze hunger strike has been received from any foreign government while the orchestrated demonstrations that have taken place do not reflect representative views.”

Birmingham Post

“WHOSE DEATH should most trouble and stir the consciences of the peoples of Ireland, of Britain, of Europe and of the United States? That, self-inflicted in the Maze jail in Ulster by Robert Sands, a leading member of the IRA, or the death of a young mother Joanna Mathers, mercilessly gunned down while doing nothing more than collect census papers in Londonderry? According to the security authorities the gun from which the shot was fired had been used twice previously in IRA shootings. But which death *ought* to stir the conscience of Ireland, Britain, Europe and the United States? There can be but one answer. Only a distorted conscience, a wrong sense of human values, will be more moved by a death deliberately designed to cause mischief and great harm to others.”

The Journal, Newcastle

“AS THE funeral took place in Belfast of IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands, masked men in combat jackets were at the heart of the procession. Many shopkeepers and businesses were forced to close for the day “as a mark of respect”. The ceremony itself was conducted with what the Provisional Sinn Fein, the Provisional IRA’s political wing, described as “full military honours”. Many on this side of the Irish Channel — and indeed many people in the province itself — will find it hard to accept the freedom of movement allowed to terrorists as they see pictures in their newspapers or watch television film of shots being fired over the coffin. They will also find it hard to grasp why Sands should have been given the last rites of the Roman Catholic Church. He did, after all, commit suicide — and isn’t this a mortal sin in the eyes of the Catholic Church?”

Yorkshire Post

“THE IRA is as unrepresentative of the people of Northern Ireland as the Red Brigades are of the people of Italy. Even from his cell, Sands was holding innocent people hostage and making ransom demands. For the message always was that his suicide would lead to violence as surely as if a hijacker had exploded a hand-grenade in an aircraft. Hundreds of innocent people have been murdered and maimed by the IRA, whose victims are never given the choice between life and death.”

THE OBSERVER

“THE HUNGER strikes are not to improve prison conditions in Northern Ireland, which are better than in most European prisons. They are for political status – the right of convicted terrorists to run their own camp compounds; to train, discipline and punish their own members. The IRA and its apologists are not concerned with civil liberties or legal reform, but with victory in their terrorist campaign.”

SUNDAY EXPRESS

“THE VICTIMS of terrorism who have been murdered since Bobby Sands began his hunger strike, unlike Sands, had no choice about their fate. For them there were no last-ditch appeals. Nobody wants to see a coffin carried out of the Maze prison. But Bobby Sands' murderous friends plotted to arrange for all those other coffins to be carried out to Ulster's graveyards. They are the very dregs of humanity.”

The quality of Scotland SUNDAY STANDARD

“SANDS in his short life has been manipulated by his political masters with a cynicism matched only by Goebbels, the evil propagandist of the Third Reich. They promoted him 'officer commanding' in the Maze, they told him to stand in the Fermanagh-South Tyrone by-election, they ordered him to begin his fast. He was also told which visitors to agree to see, which to refuse.”

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Irish Independent

“BOBBY Sands was convinced he was doing the right thing for his cause and for Ireland. It is a matter of profound regret that this is not so. He was under the control of forces whose only desire was to use his death to manipulate public opinion through misplaced sympathy which his sufferings aroused. The ‘just demands’ of the prisoners must be placed alongside the thousands who, today, carry mishapen bodies because of the bombs and bullets of the terrorists. The demands for political status must be weighed in the balance with those who were murdered for alleged political reasons.”

THE IRISH TIMES

“HOWEVER widely support is given to the obsequies for Bobby Sands, it can in no sense be said that there is a process of national mourning going on. For one million people in Northern Ireland are mourning their own dead. The population of this island without that one million people in no way constitutes the nation.”

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Die Welt

“THE HARD fact remains that Sands was trying to blackmail the State with his life. To make political prisoners of these criminals now would mean to lend later legality to murder and terror.”

Bonner Rundschau, Bonn

“THE BRITISH Government’s attitude towards demands for political status is shared by East and West European Governments. If Britain had made concessions, almost irresistible pressure would have arisen in Germany, Italy, France, or Spain to make similar concessions to terrorists there.”

SWEDEN

Gothenburg Post

“BOBBY SANDS was a terrorist. Now he is a dead terrorist. We ought to bear it in mind in order not to fall into the trap where we think more of and sympathise with the murderer more than his victim.”

SWITZERLAND

Tages Anzeiger, Zurich

“THE BRITISH Government had no other choice than to let Sands die. Whatever the colour of the government there . . . compromising with terrorism is no way of mastering it. Bobby Sands, unlike over 2,000 other victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland, died of his own volition.”

The Washington Post

AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

(Circ 584,500)



“BOBBY Sands had a record of violence as an ‘IRA militant’, placing innocent lives in jeopardy while bombing warehouses and participating in armed robberies. But because of massive publicity he may be remembered mainly for the manner of his death after a 66-day fast, holding in his hands a golden crucifix presented by a special papal envoy.”

The Washington Star

(Circ 345,641)

“THE greater potential tragedy in the Sands affair is not the wasted life of that young man, who basically did himself in with the encouragement of his supposed friends, but the possibility that more innocents will die in related disturbances. Add to that the chance that Ulster’s ordeal will be prolonged — the inevitable peace delayed — and the cost of Bobby Sands’ self-destruction is great indeed.”

New York Times

(Circ 914,938)



“GRANTING political status to Nationalist prisoners was tried in 1972 and judged a failure in 1976 because it sanitized crime and abetted the IRA’s recruiting. In the words of Gerry Fitt, a Catholic Socialist who represents West Belfast in the British Parliament “Within days of special category status being granted the IRA went on a rampage. Within a month the heart was torn out of the city of Belfast where I was born and raised, on the day that became known as Bloody Friday.” Mr Fitt deeply regretted supporting the concession.”

Columnist Anthony Lewis:

“A GROUP of terrorists, highly disciplined and utterly brutal in its disregard for human life, set out to overthrow the existing order and establish a Marxist state. Its methods are murder and intimidation: most of its victims are innocent civilians. Such a group would be almost universally detested and condemned in this and other Western countries — right? Wrong: not if it is the Provisional Irish Republican Army. The Provisionals do not bring an Irish solution closer; they bring on the unworkable policies of extremism. That is why it is so sickening to see their blackshirt tactics romanticised.”

New York Daily News

(Circ 1,554,604)



“BRITISH Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher could grant political prisoner status to terrorists in the Maze Prison.

Thatcher firmly opposes such a decision — and so do we. To cave in . . . would be to hand the cause of international terrorism an enormous victory. It would suddenly elevate gun-runners, bombings and assassins to the high station of ‘freedom fighters’ and do infinite damage to the cause of peace in Ireland and around the world.”

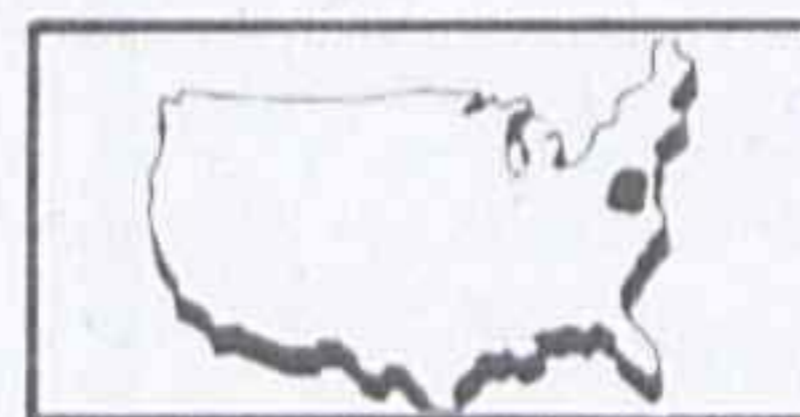
New York Post

(Circ 624,287)

“THE pathetic nature of Bobby Sands’ last act as a committed IRA man should not blind anyone to the cold-hearted cruelty for which his sacrifice is being used. His suicide is a rallying ground for the terrorists who form the Provisional Wing of the IRA. Their technique is violence. The greater potential tragedy in the Sands affair is not the wasted life of that young man, who basically did himself in with the encouragement of his supposed friends, but the possibility that more innocents will die in related disturbances. The chance that Ulster’s ordeal will be prolonged — the inevitable peace delayed — and the cost of Bobby Sands’ self destruction is great indeed.”

Boston Sunday Globe

(Circ 710,731)



“BOBBY Sands, MP, Commander in the IRA, is no Kevin Barry. He is not another martyr for old Ireland, another murder for the Crown. He is a victim of abuse and exploitation, not by the British but by the IRA.”

Christian Science Monitor

(Circ 172,470)

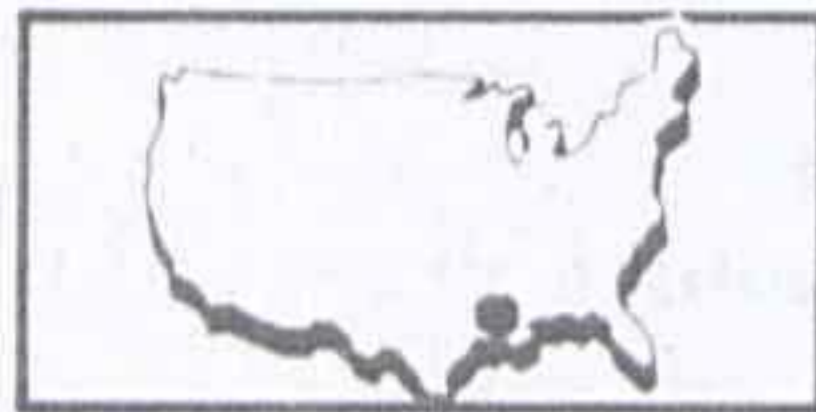
“PRIME Minister Margaret Thatcher cannot be faulted for her staunch refusal to the demands of the IRA prisoners at Maze prison who wish to be granted special status and treated as political prisoners. To do so would be to give legitimacy to the Provisional IRA and invite misuse of prison privileges for plotting further outrageous acts of terrorism. Those Irish Americans who so mindlessly contribute funds to the IRA should be aware that the IRA receives much of its weaponry (and moral support) from Soviet-bloc countries. The fact that Moscow lauds Bobby Sands as a martyred freedom fighter should give IRA sympathisers in the West pause.”

David K Willis, Staff Correspondent:

“... THE IRA strategy is to force the British out of Ireland . . . the scenario also presupposes a revolution in Southern Ireland as well — a point imperfectly understood abroad . . . The . . . platform (of Provisional Sinn Fein president Ruari O Bardaigh) stops only a short way from Communism. It calls for nationalisation of banking, finance, insurance, mining, energy and more. Worker-owned co-operatives would run agriculture and industry.”

Houston Post, Texas

(Circ 330,203)



“THOUGH the IRA tries to pin the label of torture on Sands’ death, it won’t stick. Sands starved by choice. In his last days he

was treated with remarkable tenderness — laid on a water bed and gently bandaged to ease the friction on the wasted body. Any torment given that body was by his own act of denial.”

Houston Chronicle

(Circ 348,601)

“LAST year the Basque separatists were blamed for 95 assassinations in Spain, most of them policemen. There were numerous acts of violence. Someone unfamiliar with Spain would think the entire Basque region was seething with rebellion. Not so. There are more than 2 million people of Basque heritage in Spain. But the ETA (which stands for Basque land and liberty) Guerrilla organisation has fewer than 400 members. Somehow the idea is spreading that these 400 terrorists speak for all the Basque people of Spain. It’s the same way in Northern Ireland. Most of the hard-working family-orientated people of Northern Ireland want nothing more than peace.”

Dallas Times Herald

(Circ 249,890)



“DURING his first term in prison Irish revolutionary Bobby Sands wrote his creed: ‘I was set to confront the might of the Imperial

Empire with an M-1 carbine and enough hate to topple the world’. Today Sands is dead, the victim of a searing hatred that has taken 2,000 lives in Northern Ireland in the last 12 years. Sands starved himself to death in a vain effort to force the British Government to treat revolutionary terrorists as political prisoners, instead of common criminals.”

Dallas Morning News

(Circ 286,955)

“THE WORD ‘martyr’ is being applied freely to Sands both at home and abroad. No tag could be less appropriate. Classically the martyr — a word derived from the Greek for witness (of Christ) — is a man or woman put to death for the strength and constancy of his religious faith. The British, who refused Sands’ claims to political prisoner status, did not put him to death. He committed suicide by refusing to eat.”

San Francisco Chronicle

(Circ 506,000)



“THE demands (for the hunger strikers) appear harmless enough, perhaps even trivial. And many view the British Government’s response as heartless and inhumane. That Government, however, would have been in the position of admitting to the world that it held prisoners because of their political beliefs and not because they had violated criminal statutes. Terrorism goes far beyond the expression of political belief and dealing with it does not allow for compromise, as many countries of western Europe and United States have learned.”

San Francisco Examiner

(Circ 159,325)

“IT’S a pity that Bobby Sands died but he was deluded if he confused nobility with violence, and thought that the latter could bring his land to a better day. We expect his testimonial of death will not cause the British Government to make concessions to terrorism. Nor should it make any, no matter what price must be paid for the rule of law, and the rule of the ballot as the ultimate deciding power.”

Riverside (California) Press

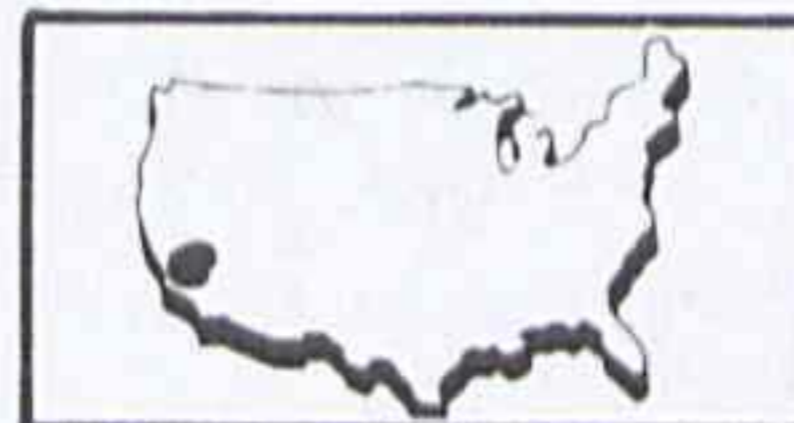
(Circ 33,334)



“SANDS’ demand of Britain for special treatment as a political prisoner is a status that even the Irish Republic does not give to IRA gunmen such as he.”

Los Angeles Times

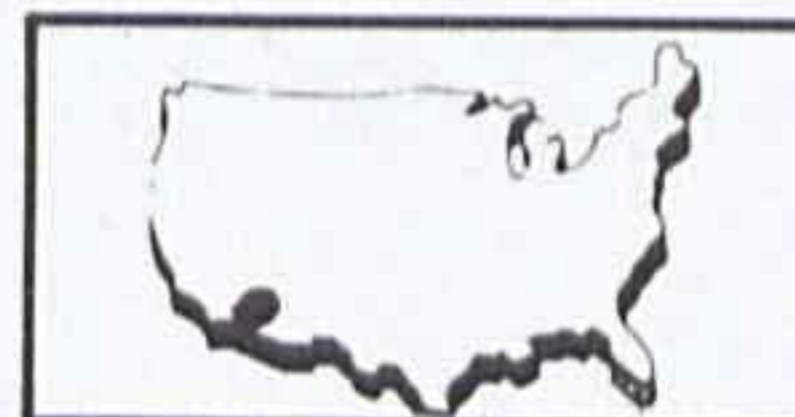
(Circ 1,024,322)



“SANDS was a terrorist who chose to die, unlike the more than 2,000 victims of the past 12 years of violence who had no choice. And the organisation that he represented, the Provisional Wing of the IRA, is a terrorist group composed of men and women who murder and mutilate. Americans can play a role by not feeding the violence through contributions to such organisations as the Irish Northern Aid Committee which was ordered by a Federal Judge to register as an agent of the IRA.”

The San Diego Union

(Circ 201,798)



“TO YIELD, the British would be bowing to the same plea that comes from terrorists in every part of the world — that acts of violence are somehow excusable if they are committed for a political cause. A Government cannot make that concession and uphold the rule of law. For the British to have yielded in this case would have been a step towards surrendering the Irish people to anarchy and civil war.”

Chicago Tribune

(Circ 789,767)



“BOBBY Sands deliberately aimed at suicide, not as a protest against violence but as a stimulus to civil war. Mahatma Gandhi

used the hunger strike to move his countrymen to abstain from fratricide. Bobby Sands' deliberate slow suicide is intended to precipitate civil war. The former deserved veneration and influence. The latter would be viewed, in a reasonable world, not as a charismatic martyr but as a fanatical suicide, whose regrettable death provides no sufficient occasion for killing others ”

Sun-Times

(Circ 657,275)

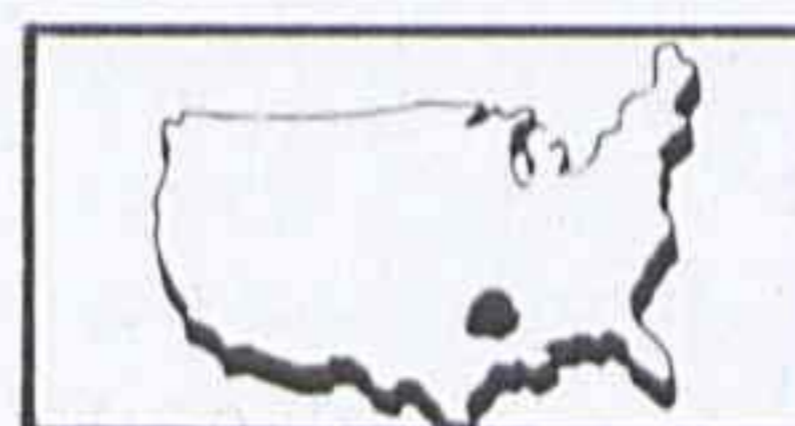
“SANDS is no political idealist. His long record indicates the obvious about his behaviour. He is a savage terrorist. A criminal. The British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher is right in refusing to grant Sands' demands on grounds that his crimes were politically motivated.”

Columnist Edward Langley:

“IRISH Americans mostly believe that innocent Catholics have been randomly scooped up by the British and tortured into confessions that will put them into a Maze Prison, a hell-hole that reeks of filth. Both are largely myths. Torture? All security interrogations are recorded on TV tape. And the Maze is the newest most modern prison in Europe. Most IRA true believers in America have been had. They're too terrified to set a shoe in Ulster or to look at the other side of the coin. The Irish war will fade in direct proportion to the Irish-Americans' willingness to challenge the IRA's line, to hear the British side and to — one hopes — realise that the IRA is: less than 500 Oswald Hinckley freaks supplied with Soviet-bloc weapons intent on turning both Irelands into an Allende-type Chile; there isn't a patriot among them. ”

Tulsa Tribune

(Circ 75,994)

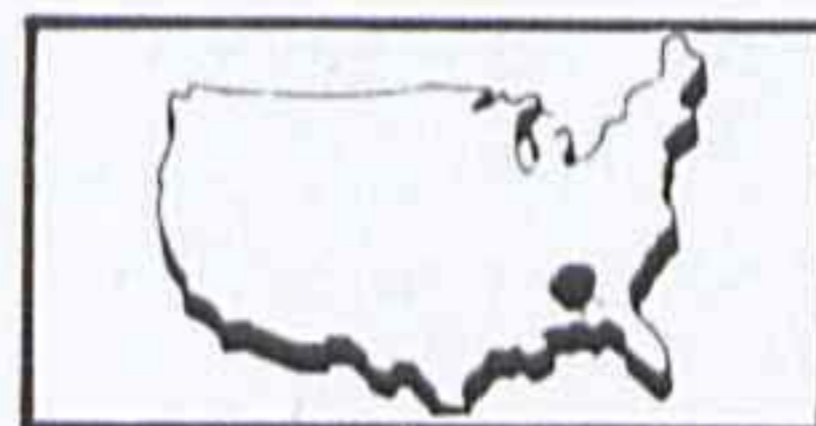


“IF THE British Government had bowed to the demands of Bobby Sands and raised the status of himself and the IRA

terror squads to that of political prisoners it would, of course, be under obligation to do the same for their opponents. The child who steps into a booby trap and is torn to ribbons would therefore be considered not the victim of a heinous crime but simply a participant in a political demonstration. Where does this thinking lead? ”

THE TENNESSEAN

(Circ 128,170)



“BLOOD money. That is the only word to describe the money given by American supporters of the Irish Republican Army

in Northern Ireland. The money buys guns, bullets and explosives. Most often, the innocent die. Bobby Sands' death wasn't noble. It was pathetic, as pathetic as those who believe their money contributes to anything other than wrongdoing. ”

Detroit News

(Circ 630,573)

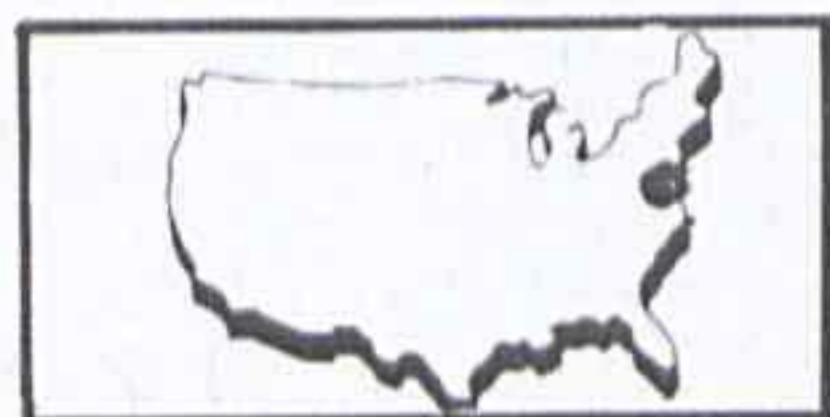


“NO GOVERNMENT can afford to concede that repugnant acts of violence are somehow sanctified by political aspirations. The

IRA is accorded no political status in the Republic of Ireland, and human rights groups, like Amnesty International, have not supported its demands for recognition.”

Quincy Patriot Ledger, Mass

(Circ 82,612)



“Were Britain to concede to demands for privileged status for convicted terrorists, the IRA would quickly find another

issue to ignite street warfare.”

Pittsburgh Post Gazette

(Circ 180,772)



“THE LOGIC of the basic British position is sound. Unless a Government is willing to concede that it exercises authority in-

validly it necessarily will punish those who break the law and harm others for ‘political’ reasons the way it punishes other lawbreakers and the men of violence.”

The Oregonian

(Circ 248,229)



“THE EUROPEAN Commission on Human Rights and Amnesty International recognised it was proper for the British to

refuse to give convicted criminals political status while in prison. Those Americans who have made such demands on the British Government would be shocked at permitting the Symbionese Liberation Army, the Weather Underground or any Nazi or Klan activists arrested for acts of violence to claim special privileges on the grounds their acts were political.”

CANADA

The Gazette, Montreal

(Circ 142,256)

“It is a pity that a man should choose to die for a simple-minded and implausible idea, a confusion of violence and politics.”