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Prime Minister

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23rd November 1983

Dear John,

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Mr Prior has recently returned from an eight day visit to the United States which began on 24 October and took him to Boston, San Francisco, Seattle (the Boeing Corporation), Los Angeles, New York and Washington. The three main objectives of the visit were:

- i) to reassert the validity of the Government's current approach to Northern Ireland and by doing so to lower expectations of the impact of the New Ireland Forum report;
- ii) to support the drive for inward investment and increased trade;
- iii) to support the efforts of diplomatic posts in countering Provisional propaganda.

The visit fully achieved its objectives: Mr Prior and Sir Oliver Wright both considered it was a success.

Political

Mr Prior gave two informal addresses in Boston to political/academic audiences, made a major speech in San Francisco and had a number of meetings with politicians in New York and Washington as well as calling on Mr Kenneth Dam at the State Department. On each occasion he stressed the Government's commitment to respect the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland regarding the constitutional status of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom; described the flexible framework provided by the Northern Ireland Act 1982 as a means of encouraging progress towards a widely acceptable form of devolved government; and stressed the Government's commitment to good Anglo-Irish relations. The latter was a particularly strong point in the light of the recent warmth of Anglo-Irish relations and the imminence of the 7 November Summit meeting with Dr FitzGerald. It seems to have made Mr Prior's listeners more receptive to the further points that the report of the New Ireland Forum would not of itself change the fundamental political problems and that

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Americans should not expect an easy or instant solution to emerge from it.

Mr Prior also spent some time briefing the relevant editorial staff of major US newspapers, particularly those with a significant Irish readership (the New York Daily News, The Boston Irish Echo, The Boston Globe, The San Francisco Chronicle and the Los Angeles Times). He also briefed editorial staff at the Christian Science Monitor, New York Times and Washington Post. While these briefings resulted in immediate press coverage, particularly in Boston, they should also have a positive influence on editorial policy in the months ahead. We understand, for example, that the Boston Irish Echo and Boston Globe have since published helpful articles. Mr Prior and British Information Services in New York feel that a particularly good impression was made with the New York Daily News which is under considerable pressure from its large Irish-American blue collar readership to take a harder line on Northern Ireland.

Industrial Development

Mr Prior made an important visit on the West Coast to a company which it is hoped will announce soon a decision to open a factory in Northern Ireland. He also gave a speech on industrial development to a group of businessmen over lunch at the City of Industry near Los Angeles. While in New York he participated in the opening day's engagements of a visit to North America by the Northern Ireland Partnership, a recently formed group of Northern Ireland business people backed by the Industrial Development Board for Northern Ireland (IDB) who seek to use their existing business contacts to promote further trade between Northern Ireland and the United States and to improve Northern Ireland's image as a location for inward investment. During that day, following the meeting with Mr Prior, the President of the AVX Corporation announced his company's intention to expand production at their Coleraine factory, raising employment from 550 to 800. This is a notable tribute - based on experience - to the industrial skills and good labour relations of the people of Northern Ireland. Mr Prior also spent a day touring the Boeing Corporation plants at Seattle in the company of Sir Philip Foreman, Chairman of Shorts, who have an excellent working relationship with Boeing. They were described as one of Boeing's most reliable sub-contractors in terms of both quality and delivery. Boeing naturally put the case against United Kingdom assistance for the new 150-seater Airbus. There was also some mention of the possibility that Shorts might take a stake in the production of Boeing's new 150-seater 7-7. Mr Prior assured both companies that the Government would consider any such proposal on commercial grounds.

Grenada

Although the Grenada crisis broke as Mr Prior arrived in the United States, the Ambassador ensured that he was kept fully briefed. Grenada tended to dominate the TV and radio interviews which Mr Prior gave - a further demonstration that US interest in Northern Ireland is much lower than people in Britain often seem to believe - and he was able to reaffirm the points made by the Prime Minister.

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Presence of Sinn Fein spokesmen

Two Sinn Fein spokesmen - the former MP Owen Carron and Mr Danny Morrison - were in the United States during Mr Prior's visit, having been brought there at the US taxpayers expense to answer charges of attempting to enter the United States illegally two years ago. Pending the trial, which eventually began on 31 October and ended in their conviction on 8 November, they were free to tour the United States, and they made full use of it. But it was notable, and encouraging that they got virtually no coverage outside the fringe Irish-American press. Danny Morrison was present at one of the seminars which Mr Prior spoke to in Boston and Owen Carron attended his speech to the Irish Forum a nationalist group in San Francisco. Both men were allowed to speak by the chairmen but their presence in fact gave Mr Prior the opportunity to stress Sinn Fein's support for terrorism - which they could not deny - and on both occasions the majority of the audience, particularly in Boston, ended up supporting him. Although we would not have sought such confrontations, posts report that the Sinn Fein spokesmen's failure to make an effective case will have dented their supporters' morale and had a positive effect on the attitude of the audiences. (You will have seen, incidentally, that Mr Prior took an opportunity in the House on 10 November to express the attitude of the House to the offensive remarks of the judge who tried Carron's and Morrison's case).

Special Envoy

The proposal for a US special envoy on Northern Ireland has been launched in the House and Senate by Members of the Friends of Ireland. Mr Prior made it clear in media interviews and in meetings with the sponsors of the idea that the appointment of a special envoy would be most unhelpful. They explained that their main objective had been to head off a more extreme version of the same proposal; that they had been successful in this; and they accepted that their motions would fall at the end of the Congressional session on 18 November. The Administration remains sound on the question of US involvement.

General Assessment

US interest in Northern Ireland matters is currently low. In general the views of those whom Mr Prior met were sympathetic and there were signs of a growing understanding of the complexities of the problem. However there clearly remains a hard core of IRA/NORAID supporters, important both for the help they provide the IRA and because of their influence on those Irish-American politicians who take a more moderate and electorally less popular line. Such politicians are worried by the rise in support for Sinn Fein at the expense of the SDLP and look, perhaps even more fixedly, to the United Kingdom and Irish Governments to get together and reach a solution. Mr Prior was able to improve the image of the Northern Ireland Assembly in the minds of some observers and key opinion formers but many continue to look to the New Ireland Forum as the best hope of securing progress. And people are conscious that Northern Ireland could easily become an issue in the US Presidential election campaign next year. The traditional St Patrick's Day

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(17 March) statements by President Reagan and the Friends of Ireland will have added significance next year, both because of the election and because of the New Ireland Forum, and there will be pressure on President Reagan to follow the lead of the Friends of Ireland. We will need to consider carefully how we might anticipate these developments.

There were signs that the improving climate in the USA was generating increased interest in investments abroad. So far as Northern Ireland is concerned, in addition to the investment decisions I have described, a number of companies clearly had Northern Ireland on their short lists - not out of sentiment but for hard business reasons. Mr Prior noted an improved understanding of the incentives which the IDB was offering and an appreciation (backed up by enthusiastic testimonials from US companies who had already worked there) of the industrial skills of the potential workforce.

Finally, Mr Prior has asked me to express his gratitude to Sir Oliver Wright and the staff of the diplomatic posts we visited for arranging a most rewarding programme, and for the continuing efforts they make to secure a favourable understanding of the Government's Northern Ireland policies in the United States.

I am sending copies of this letter to Brian Fall (FCO), Calum McCarthy (DTI), and Sir Oliver Wright.

Yours ever,

John

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