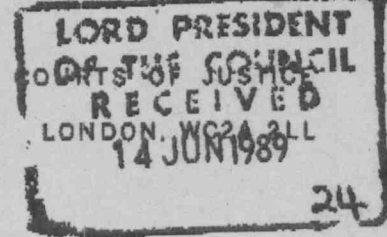




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ROYAL



The Rt Hon the Lord Mackay of Clashfern QC
 The Lord Chancellor's Department
 House of Lords
 London SW1A 0PW

13 June 1989

Lord Simon

I have seen your letter of 25 May to the Lord President and the responses of colleagues to that letter.

I remain convinced that the decision we took at the Lord President's meeting on 23 January was sound. What was previously applied as being the law should be reinstated.

I am of the view that the proposed course is fully compatible with our obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights and with our other human rights obligations. The way we present our proposal to the Irish and to others will of course have to be carefully considered. We will be assisted in this task by a knowledge of the existing law in the Republic on witnesses' compellability; I hope we can find this out urgently.

I am sending copies of this letter to members of H Committee, George Younger and Sir Robin Butler.

*Lord Simon,
 Solicitor*

Hurd's gag begins to tighten

Sinn Fein seems to be losing its gift for manipulating the media.

David Hearst reports from Belfast on the views we don't hear

LONG before the Republican Press Centre appeared in the Falls Road, Sinn Fein had an instinctive feel for keeping relations sweet with the British and foreign media. While the Orange Men would bully, threaten and sometimes attack cameramen at parades, a Republican minder would always be on hand to show the world the other side of the barricade.

Only rarely would the real command structure show through the seamless web of their organisation. When a colleague filing copy at a Republican funeral was attacked by one old man in a crowd 1,000 strong (at a stage in the funeral when he could only have been writing about RUC security rather than the funeral itself) the notebook that had been snatched out of his hands was returned to him within an

hour, upon appeal to the senior Sinn Fein steward.

Recently the chrome of their PR has begun to wear off around the edges. To read the latest pamphlet produced last week by Danny Morrison, Sinn Fein's publicity director, the Republican movement's current difficulties in getting its views across are due to the steadily tightening gag of British legislation. This was capped by the ban on broadcasting interviews imposed by Douglas Hurd, the Home Secretary, on October 19, last year.

From Downing Street's point of view, the ban has indeed had its desired effect, spreading ripples far beyond the specific prohibition on the actual words of anyone who expresses support for political violence or a proscribed organisation. Any Sinn Fein appearance even on regional television screens is

now limited to a few seconds. The number of inquiries Sinn Fein received from the BBC on any subject has fallen by a 75 per cent since October 19.

Each appearance of a Republican on television now has to be carefully vetted by a panoply of lawyers, when no hesitation is shown about prominent loyalist politicians who were filmed parading with Ulster Resistance, the paramilitary organisation allegedly involved in importing arms from South Africa.

But that is the immediate explanation. Others would say the rot has been setting in for some time and coincides with the ferment going on inside the movement, as the IRA campaign continues. For one reason or another each time another IRA "mistake" accounts for more civilian casualties, the camera has got closer. Scenes of bandmen frantically picking the rubble off the dead bodies of the Enniskillen bomb were captured on an amateur video. On March 19 last year every living room in Britain and around the world had front row seats on the savage mobbing and deaths of two British

Army corporals who had blundered into an IRA funeral on the Andersonstown Road.

The scene at the Republican Press Centre immediately after the attack on the car was one of bewilderment. At first the two occupants of the car were "Loyalists" repeating Michael Stone's murderous sally at Milltown Cemetery three days earlier. Then they were "SAS men", as if the SAS go around with pendants identifying the telephone number of their base in Herefordshire.

As deaths go in Northern Ireland, it was no more savage than many. The difference was, it was there for everyone to see. The seizure of film by the RUC from television companies, the involvement of journalists as witnesses in a trial which is still continuing were secondary matters to those fatal images, indelibly etched on Irish, American, French minds.

Republican nerves about the trial and its implications, continue to this day. Two of the BBC journalists subpoenaed to appear received detailed death threats. Both decided to give evidence at the trial in public. One of them, Mr John Conway,

former head of BBC News and Current Affairs in Northern Ireland was the same BBC executive to whom Mr Morrison complained about declining BBC interest in Sinn Fein.

Sinn Fein say they have found no proof that the IRA threatened them. Danny Morrison said last Wednesday: "We do not support action being taken against journalists who carry out their duty, because we have to work with the media and it would jeopardise our interests."

But there have been other straws in the wind. For the first time in many years, journalists were told they had to be accredited "with Sinn Fein to cover the annual Republican parades at Easter. The reason given was concern over another Loyalist attack. When broadcasting branch of the NUJ chapel in Belfast refused and agreed to confront Sinn Fein en masse, the threat disappeared. It had all been a mistake, they were told.

Pauline Ni Chiarain, chairperson of the branch, said: "The atmosphere in which journalists have to work at present is probably the worst it has been for many years. We are threatened by the Loyalists and by the IRA."

Even during election time when the ban is replaced by the Representation of the People Act, the Sinn Fein publicity machine is not acting with the sure-footedness that successive generations of journalists are used to. The pirate radio stations and videos that were supposed to emerge to counter the ban never appeared.

Sinn Fein say this is because they might jeopardise the case they are taking against the Government in the courts, but they are also saying they are short of funds. It could be that what journalists are seeing is the real Republican movement furiously divided on what to do next.

