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Gun Running from the U.S. to Northern Ireland

1. It has always been difficult to estimate, given the reluctance of police authorities to divulge country of origin for arms finds and seizures, the extent of gun running from the U.S. to Northern Ireland. In an ABC television interview in 1977 the then British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, estimated that between 70% and 80% of the PIRA arsenal came from the U.S. A year previously a figure of 85% was mentioned by Foreign Secretary Callaghan in the House of Commons. In a meeting between the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dr Garret FitzGerald, and Secretary of State Vance in March 1977, an estimate of 60% was given by the Minister. U.S. Treasury sources have reckoned these estimates to be on the high side and insisted that perhaps no more than 25% of the PIRA weaponry comes from the U.S. They do admit that the bulk of the more modern type semi-automatic rifles e.g. the Armalite, used by the Provisionals come from the U.S. Since 1978 the Treasury Dept. have been able to trace directly 307 guns to the IRA. British intelligence sources estimate that some 2,000 weapons have been acquired by the IRA in the U.S.A. since 1970. While recent press reports have indicated that the source of supply of arms for the PIRA may have shifted to the Middle East, the U.S. continues to be a major source of supply of weaponry and the major source of funds for arms.

2. For the past decade both the FBI and the Treasury Department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms have been active in their attempts to halt the flow of arms to Northern Ireland. Major investigations have been conducted across the country into IRA gunrunning and have resulted in indictments against a number of alleged members of Noraid including Charles Malone (1973) in San Francisco, James O'Gara (1973) in New York, James Malin (1973) in New York, the Baltimore Four (1974) and two of the Philadelphia Five (1976). Most of these cases were instigated on the basis of weapons

seized in Northern Ireland which were later tracked by the U.S. authorities to gun dealers and their customers in the U.S.

3. More recently this year, the FBI scored a major success in their quest to curb gun running to Northern Ireland with the arrest of five men at Niagara who were trying to enter the U.S. from Canada with what has been described as a "shopping list" for guns and ammunition. The acquittal of Michael Flannery, national treasurer of NORAID, and the four other self-confessed gunrunners in New York last month on charges of attempted arms purchase, can be regarded as a setback to the efforts of the FBI to halt the arms to N.I. Their investigations into this case and their pending trial have slowed this flow to a trickle and have emphasised the high degree of British, Irish and U.S. cooperation to halt gunrunning. Evidence of such cooperation can be seen from the arrest in New York of four individuals who have been charged with conspiring to purchase arms and to ship arms to PIRA in Northern Ireland. Their arrest followed only four days after the arrest of Fr. Moloney in Limerick. Details of the current state of the cases including those charged with attempted arms purchases are covered by a separate note in the brief.

A note on current cases is attached.

Anglo-Irish Section

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