

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Promotion of Irish Government policy in U.S.

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Irish Government representatives in the United States face a difficult task in getting Irish policy on Northern Ireland across to the US Administration, Congress and the media. On one side they are faced by the British whose Embassy in Washington has a staff of around 600 (total staff at the Irish Embassy including secretarial staff, caretaker etc.: 17) and by the British Information Service. The BIS whose US operation is based in New York send a daily synopsis of the main British press ^{stories} to practically every newspaper, TV and radio station in the United States as well as offering a fairly comprehensive back-up service (videos, tapes, contacts, etc.) on British stories to news editors.

On the other side they are faced by the Provo propagandists and in practice to some extent which would include NORAID, the INC and elements in the Irish/American community. NORAID is the best organised of these groups with its own newspaper, The Irish People. It organises functions, meetings etc. in most areas of traditional Irish settlement and because of its fanatical bent, tends to attract fairly dedicated propagandists. Its target in the main is the Irish/American community and it can be argued that it has built up a hard following, however small, which is not open to persuasion from Government representatives, although efforts to this end have been made. The INC seeks to influence Congress as well as the Irish/American community and the media both in Ireland and the United States. In Congress it does enjoy the support of a number of Congressmen who are influenced by radical constituency pressure. Members like Mario Biaggi, who heads the Ad Hoc Committee on Irish Affairs, have managed to convey an impression among some Irish/Americans to be of more importance on the issue of Northern Ireland/ Biaggi claims a membership of his Committee of around 130 Congressmen. However, most are token members and those active are less than 10 in number. The INC is reputed to be well financed and appears to be efficiently run. It and its ally in Congress, the Ad Hoc Committee, have on occasion been able to outflank more moderate voices in Congress, though mostly for short-term publicity gains.

To convey the Government's message on Northern Ireland there are a total of 17 Irish diplomats in the United States based in Washington, New York, Boston, Chicago and San Francisco. These officers are also expected to carry out the full range of diplomatic, political, economic, consular, information and cultural work. Two of the officers, based in New York and Washington, are full-time press officers with responsibility for briefing the press throughout the United States. Obviously because of the size of the country they have had to concentrate on the media in the two cities involved. They are particularly handicapped in relation to the live media, having no technical back-up available of the kind offered by the BIS. All of the five missions involved run a limited information service wherein details of current stories on Ireland are circulated to political circles, the media and Irish/Americans. Because the operations are completely manual they tend to be intermittent, depending on staff resources available at any given time. In Washington there are three officers available to deal with Congress (the British have around 250 diplomats in Washington) including the vital job of "servicing" the Friends of Ireland group. The same three, the Ambassador, a Counsellor and a Third Secretary, endeavour to maintain reliable contacts in the White House, the National Security Council, the State Department, the Justice Department and to monitor and report on political developments unrelated to Northern Ireland.

Generally our representatives have been successful in acquainting key elements in the United States with Irish policy and attitudes. However, because of their number and lack of resources, they are handicapped in exploiting opportunities and in reacting to events.

Anglo-Irish Section

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