



cc: PS/Ministers (L & B)  
PS/PUS (L & B)  
PS/Mr Bell ✓  
Mr Blelloch  
Mr Marshall  
Mr Moriarty  
Mr Wyatt  
Mr Gilliland  
Mr Corbett  
Mr Harrington

① Mr Bell ✓  
② POL ✓  
8/7

Secretary of State (L & B)

PUBLIC OPINION IN THE UNITED STATES

1. We have made considerable efforts to woo American public opinion. We have strengthened our diplomatic representation and we have achieved a PR output of a very high standard. This has achieved some notable successes (see separate minute <sup>to David Gilliland</sup> on Business Week International of 11.5.81 dated today) yet I find we are still constantly criticised, by Americans as well as by our compatriots, for our poor showing in the media over there. They think we are losing sympathy fast.
2. The fact is that Diplomats don't influence public opinion, they influence governments. In this, of course, they are in competition with public opinion. But in a democracy public opinion outweighs diplomatic pressure. It is therefore becoming increasingly necessary to tackle American public opinion direct.
3. We can:
  - (i) (a) send a public figure to make media appearances. We are about to do this, but the influence of his visit won't last long. We need a sustained effort over a long time.
  - (b) A variation of this would be to send other selected people for the same purpose. PIRA have already had the 9-year-old daughter of a hunger-striker on American TV. Why don't we have the parents or families of assassinated PIRA victims? The effects of this could be considerable, but again they would be temporary.
- (ii) We can recruit voluntary help: there is a constant stream of businessmen, lawyers and others going to the States from here.



We should provide those of them known to us with a briefing pamphlet or pack such as we would give to speakers here during an Election Campaign. They won't need platforms to speak from; they will find the subject impossible to avoid. At present too few of them know enough not to be evasive, which is harmful. Their informed and constructive conversation, on the other hand, could help us a lot. The stock of material should be ready to hand, but small enough to be kept updated. Many individuals who could help in this way must be known to us already. We can add to them from lists of trade delegations and Co available from OTB. This policy could be sustained for as long as necessary.

(iii) All this will still have a very limited effect. We are dealing with a huge market. None of us is familiar with it. We need professional advice and action from people who are. This means hiring a professional American PR organisation to put out our case in the States on the Irish issue for as long as it is necessary to do so. It should be ~~put under~~ <sup>retained by</sup> the ~~command~~ of FCO and furnished, through them, with material provided by us. There is nothing very new in this. Governments quite normally retain agencies to present their commercial or tourist policies for them. Our need is more pressing than that.

4. A further suggestion, which was made by yet another complaining American (this time a Republican State Senator from North Carolina), was to "invite a bona fide news gathering team in from the States to study Northern Ireland and see what the results of the British getting out might really be. But of course", he added, "it might not go your way. How about getting a British company to do it on contract to a company in the States? Sixty minutes of that would be the hottest thing on American TV". The risks of that are large and obvious, but perhaps we could find a way of generating an acceptable programme that could be sold to the US networks. (A free handout would be instantly discounted as propaganda. So, Robert Kee for editor?)

5. In putting forward these views I intend in no way to belittle the enormous effort already being put into the PR Campaign by our own officials. My point is that it is almost all directed through traditional diplomatic channels not



designed to influence public opinion. It ought to be directed through channels that are so designed. The introduction of new initiatives ancillary to our diplomatic effort should not stop us reinforcing the valuable work it already does. Have we yet considered producing information films on video? I have seen no response yet to this suggestion. VCR machines are very common in the States. Commercial companies in GB have the skill and expertise necessary to produce first-class programmes. Cassetted they could be of considerable use to our diplomatic posts both in the States and elsewhere.

*Robert*

THE LORD ELTON

*7th* July 1981