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MC Dori

FROM: MICHAEL ANCRAM

DATE: 1 FEBRUARY 1995

cc PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
PS/Mr Fell - B  
Mr Thomas (B&L) - B  
Mr Legge - B  
Mr Steele - B  
Mr Shannon - B  
Mr Williams - B  
Mr Watkins - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Wood (B&L) - B  
Mr Maxwell - B  
Mr Maccabe - B  
Mr Stephens - B  
Mr Margetts - B

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2/2

Mr 5/2

TO: SECRETARY OF STATE (B&L) - B  
SIR JOHN WHEELER (DFP, B&L) - B/m  
BARONESS DENTON (DED, DANI, B&L) - B/m  
MALCOLM MOSS (DOE, DHSS & L) - B/m

Mr 5/2

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT: ITS ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS

1. Following our meeting last Friday about the Prime Minister's request for a more systematic means of making good news flow into the public domain, I attach a note prepared by Central Secretariat which sets out how we propose to carry this exercise forward.
2. Also attached is a draft note which Mr Fell proposes to issue to his Permanent Secretary colleagues which sets out the Prime Minister's requirements.
3. In order to put the proposed new arrangements into operation as soon as possible, I should be grateful for colleagues' comments by Thursday 2 February at the latest.

SIGNED

MICHAEL ANCRAM

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INFORMATION MANAGEMENT: ITS ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS

STRUCTURE OF COLLECTION AND DISSEMINATION OF GOOD NEWS

NOTE BY CENTRAL SECRETARIAT

Introduction

1. The purpose of this note is to meet the Prime Minister's request for a more systematic means of making "good news" about Northern Ireland flow into the public domain.

Objectives

2. The objectives of this exercise are twofold, viz
  - (a) to use the imaginative presentation of Government policies to help bring about a political settlement in Northern Ireland, and at the same time to underpin the peace process; and
  - (b) to demonstrate that it is the British Government which is the primary instrument in driving forward the peace process.
3. Within those broad overall objectives the initiative breaks down into a number of areas, viz to ensure that:
  - (a) the people of Northern Ireland are constantly bombarded with evidence that peace, or the absence of violence, since 31 August 1994 is palpably changing their lives. The requirement will be to demonstrate the economic benefits of peace, ie the peace dividend, and the corollary of what would be lost if the violence returns;

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- (b) through such reminders pressure is brought to bear, through community pressure on politicians to achieve a lasting political settlement, on paramilitaries to forswear the use of violence;
- (c) the Government information effort is fully co-ordinated across all its various aspects ie, political, economic and social policies and, as far as possible, security;
- (d) the Prime Minister receives regular (weekly) reports on a menu of good news items and bull points, and that other non-Northern Ireland Ministers are given full briefing and good news bull points for use as appropriate; and
- (e) progress towards peace and a political settlement, and HM Government's role in this, are portrayed by all available means in Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Europe, the Far East and in the United States. Essentially, this is about selling the lead role of Government in the peace process, by counteracting the idea either that our role is passive, or grudgingly reactive. The aim will be to put across the responses that have been made to continuing peace, particularly on the security front (this would embrace issues such as any relaxation of rules regarding access by Sinn Fein to Ministers, alternative help for Meanscoil; the White House Trade and Investment Conference; and any movement on the security front, including prisoners).

Machinery

(a) Ministerial Responsibility

4. Given that there is a strong political overlay to this exercise, it has been agreed that Michael Ancram, as the political

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development Minister, should take charge of it. However, all Northern Ireland Ministers will have a key role to play in the positive presentation of Government policies, and in the deployment of all information designed to achieve the Government's overall political objectives.

(b) Official Support

5. It is proposed to establish a small working committee, under Michael Ancram's Ministerial guidance, to work up a co-ordinated approach aimed at making the maximum possible presentational impact of the Government's policies geared towards embedding the peace process. The Committee, which will normally meet weekly (after the Ministerial meeting on Thursdays), will be composed of Mr Steele (Head of Security Policy), Mr Williams (as Chairman of SIG), Mr Bell (representing SIL who will in turn relate to the FCO and the Central Office of Information), Mr Wood (Head of the Government Information Service) and Mr Maxwell (Central Secretariat). Mr Maxwell will be responsible for co-ordinating the exercise across all the Departments and Divisions involved.

Mechanisms for Collecting the Good News

(a) NI Departments

6. It is proposed that Mr Fell should write to each of the NI Permanent Secretaries drawing their attention to the Prime Minister's request and seeking their co-operation; a copy of the proposed draft letter is attached. Departmental Press Officers have also been instructed by the Information Service to be alert to good news items, and to report these centrally on a weekly basis. Mr Maxwell will also be meeting Permanent Secretaries, or a representative nominated by them, to explore how good news might be generated within their respective Departments.

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NIO

7. Mr Steele and Mr Bell have written to their NIO colleagues to ask them to put in place quickly arrangements which would let them have on a continuous basis any items of good news interest which arise in their Divisions, or in the NDPBs for which they are responsible.

Security Forces

8. This is potentially the most sensitive, and most productive, aspect of this exercise. Changes in security force deployments - de-escalatory measures - are perhaps the most visible sign of the peace process. It is recognised that the security forces have the right to operate their own information network, but they are in overall terms part of the same organisation, and will share, in terms of embedding the peace process, the same objectives as Government. A system is therefore needed whereby their "good news" can be fed into the public domain in the most well-timed and effective way. Sir John Wheeler and Mr Steele have already had the opportunity of discussing the matter with the Deputy Chief Constable (Operations), who has agreed to ensure that the NIO is kept fully informed in future: the subject is on the agenda for tomorrow's SCM. In addition, SPOB is being reinforced with the addition of an RUC Liaison Officer who begins work on 6 February. De-escalatory measures will be an important element in the work of the Ancram group: particular emphasis will be placed on ensuring that this part of the new arrangements work effectively.

Other Sources (CBI, Tourist Board, Chamber of Commerce, etc)

9. A mechanism will be put in place to pick up the good news not generated within the NI Departmental system.

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Dissemination of Good News

10. There are potentially three audiences which need to be addressed:

- Northern Ireland community;
- Great Britain (including No 10's requirements);
- international audience.

The method of disseminating the good news will vary according to the audience.

Northern Ireland Audience

11. With regard to the Northern Ireland audience this will be a matter of ensuring that whatever good news emerges from Departments has attached to it, as appropriate, a "peace process spin". This will be the responsibility of Michael Ancram's committee. In addition to the strategic presentation of the good news emanating from Departments, and other sources, the committee will also be required to consider the scope for re-cycling, or reinforcing, "good news" which has already issued.

Great Britain

12. There is an immediate requirement to respond to Mr Lyne's minute of 23 January; a draft is being prepared. It is also proposed that the good news will emerge through:

- press notices
- articles in selected journals, newspapers etc
- Secretary of State, Prime Ministerial statements, speeches etc

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- bull point briefings for other Ministers.

The scope for informing selected members of the media about "good news" stories will also be examined.

International Audience

13. There are already in place well established procedures for disseminating "good news" about Northern Ireland overseas, eg the British Information Service and the various overseas posts. However, in the light of the Prime Minister's request, we will seek to build on these outlets through eg:

- overseas visits by Ministers, particularly to the US;
- Washington Investment Conference (and lead up to it);
- briefing of information specialists in US;
- briefing of foreign journalists in London;
- regular good news telegrams to overseas posts; and
- press cuttings.

Advice will also be sought from appropriate posts on what their requirements are with regard to "good news" stories. In this context, Michael Ancram will be chairing a meeting of the Northern Ireland Overseas Information Committee (NIOIC) on 22 February: the Prime Minister's request will be a major agenda item for the meeting.

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Timing of Meetings of Ancram Committee

14. It is proposed that the weekly meeting between Michael Ancram and officials should be held immediately following the Thursday Ministerial meeting (about 9.30 am). These meetings will normally last no longer than  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour, and will be informed by pre-prepared documentation assessing the previous week's activity and looking forward to the week ahead. The Prime Minister's weekly "good news" brief will be transmitted to No 10 Downing Street on Friday (for the Prime Minister's weekend box).

Assessment of Value of Exercise

15. There will be a need to establish an assessment mechanism for this exercise to trace whether public perceptions are actually being changed through the dissemination of good news. A meeting with Ulster Marketing Surveys has been arranged for this purpose.

Central Secretariat

31 January 1995



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FROM: D FELL

DATE: JANUARY 1995

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B  
 PS/Sir John Wheeler (DFP,B&L) - B  
 PS/Michael Ancram (DENI,B&L) - B  
 PS/Baroness Denton (DED,B&L) - B  
 PS/Mr Moss (DOE,DHSS,&L) - B  
 PS/PUS (B&L) - B  
 Mr Thomas - B  
 Mr Legge - B  
 Mr Watkins - B  
 Mr Williams - B  
 Mr Steele - B  
 Mr Shannon  
 Mr Bell - B  
 Mr Blackwell - B  
 Mr Wood (B&L) - B  
 Mr Maxwell - B  
 Mr Maccabe - B  
 Mr Stephens - B

TO: NI PERMANENT SECRETARIES

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

1. The Prime Minister has asked the Secretary of State to devise a more systematic means of making "good news" about Northern Ireland flow into the public domain. The Prime Minister feels that we should be making greater capital out of the peace process, and that by whatever means we should be getting across to the people of Northern Ireland, and to the wider GB and international audience, the genuine economic and social benefits which the peace process has generated. He has asked for a report on how we propose to tackle the issue.



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The Prime Minister's request was discussed fully at a recent Ministerial meeting. As a first step Ministers have agreed to establish a small working committee of officials, under the Ministerial guidance of Michael Ancram, to take forward the work needed to meet the Prime Minister's request. The primary task of the Committee will be to work up a co-ordinated information approach aimed at making the maximum possible presentational impact of the Government's policies towards embedding the peace process, and gaining acceptance for the political process. The Committee, which will meet initially on a weekly basis, will be composed of Mr Wood (Head of Information Service), Mr Williams (Chairman of Security Information Group), Mr Bell (representing SIL who will be able to relate in turn to the FCO and the Central Office of Information), Mr Steele (Head of Security Policy, NIO) and Mr Maxwell (Central Secretariat), who will be responsible for co-ordinating the exercise across all of the Departments and Divisions involved.

3. The mission of the new Committee will be twofold, viz:
  - a. to use an imaginative presentation of Government policies to help bring about a political settlement in Northern Ireland, and at the same time to underpin the peace process; and
  - b. to demonstrate that it is the British Government which is the primary instrument in driving forward the peace process.
4. The immediate priority for the Committee will be to devise a mechanism whereby we can pick up the "good news" in the pipeline within the Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO which would serve to enhance, within the public perspective, the benefits of peace. The Committee will also look at boosting the message in the international arena, particularly in the run up to the Washington Conference in May.

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Although Michael Ancram will assume Ministerial oversight of the Committee, the entire Ministerial team will need to play a role in this work. This will require the addition of "peace spins" to the good news stories emanating from their individual Departments, together with appropriate overseas visits. In the latter context, I would envisage a scheduled programme of visits by Ministers to the US over the period leading up to the Washington Conference (which has now been re-scheduled for 24-26 May).

6. In addition to this ongoing programme of work Downing Street has asked for a regular (weekly) brief of bull points on good news stories for deployment by the Prime Minister and Cabinet colleagues in speeches, interviews and at Prime Ministers' questions. Mr Maxwell will be responsible for co-ordinating the preparation of the weekly brief.

7. NIO colleagues have already put in train mechanisms for collecting good news stories within their respective Divisions. My purpose in writing to you is to:

a. alert you to the Prime Minister's request; and

b. ask you to identify an individual within your Department who would act as focal point for the collection of good news, and for communicating this to Mr Maxwell. It will be the natural instinct to allocate this particular task to your Departmental co-ordinator, but given the importance attached to this work by the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State and his Ministerial team, and by me, I would ask you to give some thought to identifying an individual who would have imagination, ability to think laterally, and a "nose" for good news. In other words, you need to identify a "sparky" individual who also has your authority to ferret the good news out of your Department, and where appropriate your NDPBs.

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Your Departmental Press Officer has already been charged by the Information Service to communicate "good news" stories centrally. I would therefore expect that whoever you designate for this task would work closely with your Press Officer. I would need the name of your nominee by close of play on Friday 3 February. I would hope that he or she would be able to identify 2 or 3 good news stories each week, and to communicate them weekly to Mr Maxwell. He will be in touch with them directly about reporting arrangements.

9. I cannot stress heavily enough the importance which the Prime Minister attaches to this work. A positive presentation of Government's policies and programmes is a vital component of embedding the peace process. I regard this as a major priority over the next few months, and I expect Departments to respond accordingly.

DAVID FELL

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