

THE RESEARCH UNIT - GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICE

The Research Unit - a completely new section of the Government Information Service - was set up in September 1970. Its main responsibilities are:

1. Reading a widerange of regular publications, including local, Irish and British daily, weekly and Sunday newspapers and periodicals, and systematically filing news items and articles on subjects of Government interest. About 140 such publications are studied per week, producing on average 500 cuttings, which are filed under 700 heads.
2. Circulating to appropriate officers in Cabinet Offices and other Departments those news items and articles which it is important they should read or take action upon.
3. Initiating action, where appropriate, on erroneous published statements.
4. Providing from file cuttings on specific issues upon request from officers in Cabinet Offices and other Departments. There is a regular demand for such information for use in the drafting of answers to PQs or speeches for Ministers.
5. Using newspaper cuttings, official reports, including Hansard, and other sources, compiling and circulating to Ministers and appropriate senior officers in Departments detailed Information Briefs on specific topics (eg Local Government Reorganisation, the Reform Programme, Licensing Legislation). Such briefs are intended for easy reference purposes in answering questions or compiling speeches.
6. Compiling a comprehensive Weekly News Summary containing reports of significant happenings and utterances and newspaper editorial comment thereon for circulation to busy people such as Ministers and senior Civil Servants who do not always have time to read a wide selection of newspapers, etc. Copies are also circulated to several Whitehall Departments and to British Information Posts abroad for the better "briefing" of foreign journalists on events in Northern Ireland.
7. Procuring for study and use occasional publications, ranging from books to "underground" news-sheets.
8. Undertaking at the request of the Director or other senior Cabinet Offices officers specific research projects (eg Judiciary bias, North-South comparisons).

9. Compilation of both weekly and monthly news indices through which recipients of the Weekly News Summary referred to at (6) may readily turn up references to specific subjects in newspapers over a period (each weekly index runs to 15 pages carries a master alphabetical key as well as a detailed daily index).
10. Providing specific "briefing" material for visiting journalists and officials and for Ministers and officials going abroad.

One use of the research unit is to ensure that information is available which can be used for immediate reaction to or background information on specific events or situations. An example of this which has already emerged was the preparation of notes on press reactions to the McGurk Bar explosion. Research in this case revealed major inconsistencies in the reported evidence of the eight-year-old eye witness.

Briefing material from the unit was also used in the preparation of the Prime Minister's speech on the recent Paisley motion on inter-Party talks.

Where topics arise on which information is not now available it will be the task of the unit to initiate the necessary research to fill those gaps.

Perhaps the best example of the unit's usefulness so far relates to the preparation of a background brief relating to the attitude of the Southern Government to Northern Ireland, for use in connection with the Home Secretary's current visit.

NO 64

N O R T H E R N I R E L A N D

W E E K L Y N E W S

S U M M A R Y

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TRAGEDY WITHOUT PRECEDENT

In the worst single disaster since the start of the terrorist campaign in Northern Ireland, 15 people died and 13 were injured when a bomb demolished a public house in North Queen Street, Belfast. Among those who died were the wife of the proprietor, her 11 year old daughter and a 13 year old boy who was visiting the family. The explosion occurred without warning on Saturday at 8 40 pm when the premises were crowded and it was estimated that the bomb contained between 50 and 70 lbs of gelignite.

Preliminary investigations by Army experts indicated that the bomb was detonated inside the pub, probably just inside the bar on the ground floor. One theory was that the bomb was left in the building by IRA men without the knowledge of the owner or occupants, to be collected later and planted in some other premises that night. The collector had, however, failed to collect the package and it had exploded.

While civilians joined with police and troops to clear the debris and free those trapped inside, a hostile crowd gathered in the area and shots were fired at the security forces. Two policemen were wounded and an Army Major was stated to be in a very serious condition after being shot in the head.

The Army dismissed as "unbelievably irresponsible" an allegation by Mr Paddy Kennedy, a Northern Ireland Republican MP, that the explosion was the work of British military intelligence. Speaking in Dublin shortly after the explosion occurred, Mr Kennedy claimed that a witness had seen two men run away into a Unionist area and jump into the back of an Army jeep.

Commenting on the tragedy, the Prime Minister, Mr Brian Faulkner, said:

The sight of that devastated building which literally collapsed on to its occupants must surely arouse feeling of horror and revulsion in the mind of any sane person - only an insane fanatic could place or even handle a gelignite bomb in premises crowded with ordinary citizens.

The tragedy vividly demonstrates once more that the men of violence are a menace to all of us in Northern Ireland, regardless of our political outlook. They bring nothing but death, suffering and fear. Whatever else divides us, we must unite, denounce and defeat the gunmen and the bombers to rid our society of this deadly evil.

The British Minister of State for Defence, Lord Balneil, said in the Commons at Westminster that he hoped the incident would have a sobering effect on those people in Northern Ireland who were engaged in any way in acts of terror:

I hope they will reject the violence and destruction of which this is the latest example.

And the Shadow Home Secretary, Mr Callaghan, asked that every step should be taken to bring the miscreants to justice:

May I express the hope that they will be able to sleep easily in their beds at night with their consciences in view of the indescribable destruction, terror and misery they are bringing to countless homes.

The leader of the SDL Party, Mr Gerry Fitt, in whose constituency the bombing occurred, condemned the incident as "a dastardly act":

I believe that there is such a deep sense of revulsion felt in the constituency and in Northern Ireland at this callous murder that the truth will come out and will be known. I don't think it is the time to apportion blame or guilt because we simply do not know who was responsible. I personally am so shocked that I cannot think clearly what next week will hold. All I know is there will be 15 funerals from my constituency and that is all I can think of.

Describing the bomb blast deaths as "crimes against humanity", the Roman Catholic Primate of All Ireland, Cardinal Conway, said that they and other recent killings "must give rise to feelings of revulsion in anyone with a human heart in his breast". He considered the explosion to "represent a new development" and to be "a new and vicious twist in this terrible spiral of violence and counter-violence":

More than ever it is necessary for people not to allow feelings of bitterness or anger to fester in their hearts but rather to seek to stifle such feelings and to turn with love and sympathy and understanding to all, no matter whom, who have suffered from this awful and continuing tragedy.

Meanwhile the Roman Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor, Dr William Philbin, said he was "shocked and horrified by this latest and most disastrous of a series of outrages". Referring to the victims, he said:

May the cruel fate that has overtaken them in this deplorable mass-murder serve to shock our whole society, of all denominations, into a clear realisation of what has been happening among us. No causes or flags or slogans, no rights that are demanded, or are claimed to have been inherited will justify actions which, even when war is legitimately waged by a sovereign nation, would be inherently wicked and impermissible.

It is time for ordinary people to make clear by every means that, whatever objectives they may legitimately aim at, they reject the use of murder and wholesale destruction as means towards those ends. In the last analysis it is only the masses of the people who can bring this orgy of hatred and destruction to an end.

There was also strong condemnation of the incident from Protestant church leaders. The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, Dr Rupert Gibson, said:

It does not matter who the people who died are and what they are, our sympathy goes out to all the families so tragically bereaved. Surely it must cause a revulsion in the hearts and minds of men and women against this evil in our midst. I would appeal to my fellow citizens to come together and say 'We are going to have no more of this terrorism, bitterness and hatred'.

The President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, the Rev Charles H Bain, said that "all right-thinking people with any vestige of human feeling" would be "numbed and speechless":

We utterly condemn violence as a means to any political goal and we are convinced that it can bring no acceptable and lasting solution to Ireland's problems. We call on all God-fearing people and men of reason to stand together. If not in the name of our common Christianity, then in the name of commonsense and common humanity let us seek immediately ways to bring a right and just end to this mounting tragedy.

And on behalf of the Church of Ireland, the Bishop of Connor, the Rt Rev A H Butler sympathised with all who had suffered and said that those who had perpetrated such a "dreadful act" would have it on their conscience for the rest of their lives.

The Press said:

BELFAST TELEGRAPH - There is a report that when the blast was first heard, there were cheers from some at the prospect of another Provisional "success". But the cheers turned to tears when the truth was known, and from the rival camp, flags were waved and party songs sung. This is what the kind of civil war going on in this province does to some people. It drives them into their embattled camps and immunises them to the sufferings of others. In Ulster, we know all about the adage that hate destroys the soul.

All who have advocated or even condoned violence, on either side of the fence, are at least partly to blame. But the long term hope must be that a few more will recognise the folly of bombing people to change their political opinions.

NEWS LETTER, BELFAST - Only in terms of numbers, of lives lost and men women and children maimed or injured, does the heinous and sadistic crime exceed those which preceded it. The special tragedy of Ulster today is that the bloodshed is so unavailing and unnecessary and that the community has become so firmly hooked on its present way of life that the sorrow of one disaster is drowned by the thunder of the next. No section of the community can say 'We are not to blame'. If the claim is made history will record the hypocrisy of it.

There is one area alone that offers Protestant and Roman Catholic alike redemption and a chance to work jointly for the benefit of each. It is the eradication of terrorism.

IRISH NEWS, BELFAST - Each one of us can only look in horror at the toll of fifteen deaths and many seriously injured, with dazed, numb feelings. But when the first horror has subsided, we shall, all of us, cry out against whoever was responsible and who showed such a merciless ingoring of the certainty of death and appalling injury to innocent people, gathered in enjoyment of a Saturday night drink on the premises. Until the truth emerges, everyone who addresses himself to Saturday's explosion will have his own answer as to the culprit or culprits.

DAILY TELEGRAPH, LONDON - It seems likely that Saturday's bomb was an IRA bomb which exploded in transit, rather than a Protestant reprisal for endless Republican outrages. There can be no doubt, however, that if anarchy is not checked it will spread. On psychological grounds if on no others, there is a powerful case for some new and dramatic departure in security policy. It is essential, however, that this should be made at the behest of Mr Faulkner's Government, even if it should involve some temporary delegation of civilian powers to the military. Until something resembling order has been restored, there should certainly be no further talk of political initiatives: this has already done much to encourage rebellion.

SIMON WINCHESTER in THE GUARDIAN, LONDON - There seems little doubt that when the present convulsions in Ireland have shuddered to a halt in the months or years ahead, this, above all other tragedies, will stick fast in Irish memories as the most ghastly episode in a long trail of misery.

IRISH PRESS, DUBLIN - McGurk's deathly demolition will do little to advance any political strategy be it Catholic or Protestant, Unionist or Republican. Yet it may have the effect of stirring the consciences of the recalcitrant. Whether or not it is the work of the mentally abnormal it raises the question of why must these things happen. Protestants and Catholics are in despair about their future. They need some sign that all is not lost. Even the planned inter-party talks at Westminster provided a ray of hope. Putting them on the long finger is a dangerous exercise. There are many outside political activity in the North wishing and waiting for a stroke of statesmanship. There is a need for urgency in plotting a new future.

IRISH INDEPENDENT, DUBLIN - It is a pity that a moment of such deep personal tragedy for the bereaved and of such shame for the community as a whole should have been cheapened by some public persons who saw fit to use the incident to advance premature speculation about the authorship of the explosion. The motives in these cases appear to have been no more than party political propaganda. Violent comment in the wake of violence is a sure way of guaranteeing a continuation of violence.

Other terrorist activities

Two other people lost their lives as a result of terrorist activities throughout Northern Ireland. A young man whose body was found close to the Border near Crossmaglen, Co Down, had been shot through the head from a .45 calibre gun. He was later identified as an Army private who was to have married a girl from the Irish Republic in the new year and the shooting occurred as he was returning from a visit to her. The soldier's father was reported in the IRISH TIMES, DUBLIN, as saying that his son had been warned by the IRA either to get out of the Army or to stop fraternising with an Irish girl.

Inf/3/4/5
Weekly News Summary
#67 20/12/71 - 21/1/72

Twenty-five people were injured by flying debris when a bomb estimated to contain more than 100 lbs of gelignite exploded at the rear of a Belfast city centre hotel. Two youths who had left the bomb in a stolen car alerted the hotel staff and ran off. Police, troops and firemen rushed to the scene, and before the bomb exploded about twenty minutes later, more than 300 children were led to safety from an adjoining cinema. The blast blew a gaping hole in the cinema screen and its surround.

There were numerous other bombing incidents throughout the province, the targets including hotels, shops, restaurants and business premises. And bomb hoaxes caused a two-hour traffic delay at a peak time on the Queen's, Albert and Ormeau Bridges in Belfast.

In a series of armed robberies the terrorists raided seven post offices as well as shops, licensed premises, bookmakers and a bank and made off with substantial sums of money.

The home of the Speaker of the Stormont House of Commons, Major Ivan Neill, at Rostrevor, Co Down, was destroyed by fire. Neither he nor his wife were in residence at the time. The Official wing of the IRA later claimed responsibility for the incident.

Arms seizures and arrests

Searches by the security forces uncovered quantities of arms, ammunition and explosives throughout Northern Ireland, mainly in the Belfast area. Thirty-three men were detained for questioning in Belfast and five in Londonderry.

Sequel to bar explosion

In relation to the explosion at McGurk's public house, North Queen Street, Belfast, in which 15 civilians were killed (see News Summary No 64), it was reported that there was evidence that five of the dead had been standing around the bomb when it exploded. One of the five was said to have been identified as a senior IRA man who was an expert on explosives and on the security forces' wanted list.

The security forces were reported to be now convinced that the bar was a transfer point in the IRA chain between the makers and the planters of bombs.

COPY OF A STATEMENT PHONED TO ALL THE NEWSPAPERS ON SUNDAY, 5 DECEMBER 1971

On behalf of the Government and citizens of Northern Ireland I extend our deepest sympathy to those who have been bereaved and to those who have been injured in last night's terrible explosion.

This outrage claimed the highest number of victims in any single terrorist explosion. The sight of that devastated building which literally collapsed on to its occupants must surely arouse feelings of horror and revulsion in the mind of any sane person - only the insane fanatic could place or even handle a gelignite bomb in premises crowded with ordinary citizens.

The tragedy vividly demonstrates once more that the men of violence are a menace to all of us in Northern Ireland regardless of our political outlook. They bring nothing but death, suffering and fear. Whatever else divides us, we must unite to denounce and defeat the gunmen and the bombers and to rid our society of this deadly evil.