



Public Record Office
of Northern Ireland

2010 ANNUAL RELEASES

1980 files – Highlights List

A full list of the files will be available

Introduction

The annual release of selected official files continues against a background of greater public access through the Freedom of Information Act balanced against the need to protect personal information. The FOI Act (2000) created a new access to information regime and all records were reviewed in accordance with both that Act and the Data Protection Act.

Records continue to be brought forward for release as they approach 30 years of age. This involves the referral of the files to the Responsible Authority for sensitivity review. This entails a page by page examination to ensure that a record contains nothing sensitive as defined by the FOI Act and DP Act.

This year's annual release covers official files with a terminal date of 1980. Of the 874 departmental files examined, 24 were subject to full closure, with an additional 64 subject to partial closure or redaction (blanking out).

Partial closure involves the removal of a limited number of papers from the file that have been deemed as exempt from the right to know under FOI. To facilitate the release of as much information as possible, redaction can be used to blank out sensitive data within individual documents that would otherwise prevent release. All information withheld under this procedure must conform to the exemptions contained in the FOI Act. In the majority of cases, the reason for extended closure was the application of section 40 – the personal information exemption – of the FOI Act. This means that personal information is exempt from the right to know if it would breach the Data Protection principles.



1980 Highlighted Files

Central Secretariat

- CENT/1/5/31** **1976-1980** **Visits of civil servants to problem areas** – meetings with Army – entails visits to areas such as Lower Falls, Shankill, New Lodge and Ardoyne. Civil servants were given special tours of various areas of sectarian conflict with the Army, and the days usually included discussions (albeit usually rather ‘philosophical’ affairs) on various local problems. Although the visits were mainly seen as interesting but of limited practical value to the various Northern Ireland Departments who attended, one (DHSS) visitor commented: ‘I found the visits of considerable value both for the work on which I was engaged (in one case transportation and in the other social services) and because the Army were most appreciative of the opportunity to put forward (very clearly and forthrightly) their views on matters arising from day to day within their respective areas. I suppose this is a sad commentary on the position in Northern Ireland in that we oblige the Army to take a close interest in civil matters and clearly from time to time they appear to be the only contact with local communities on certain aspects which rightly fall to Government Departments ...’.
- CENT/1/8/2** **1978-1980** **Anglo Irish Economic Co-Operation UK Inter-Departmental Group** – Refers to development of political cooperation between UK and Irish Republic Governments. NIO report in June 1980 states that ‘HMG could give a fairly positive response to any Irish desire for practical co-operation, Our aim was “to keep Mr Haughey sweet,” ie to maintain good relations by being as forthcoming as possible in the area of Anglo-Irish co-operation with a view to dissuading the Irish from making unhelpful comments on

NI matters ... it might be possible to promote convergence instead of divergence ... Mr Haughey would be able to present such developments as part of a process of removing barriers to eventual Irish unity but HMG should ensure that they were defensible against accusations that it was promoting Irish unity...very much in line with European Community policy of "harmonisation." ’

- CENT/1/8/51** **1979-1980** **Industrial Development in Northern Ireland – General [Confidential]** – contains the Rt Hon. Humphrey Atkins’ (Secretary of State) confidential assessment of the industrial development situation in Northern Ireland at the time, and the deteriorating relationship between various stakeholders (such as the Unions) and the British Government. He refers to the ‘growing feeling that the British Government is opting out of helping Northern Ireland’s economy, and it is my political opinion that I cannot afford to alienate an influential section of the community on economic affairs.’
- CENT/1/9/10** **1979-1980** **Catholic Unemployment in Northern Ireland** – includes the assertion (made in correspondence from Department of Manpower Services to Central Secretariat, Stormont) that the ‘allegations that two-thirds of the unemployed in Northern Ireland are Catholics is unsubstantiated.’ DMS referred to the 1971 Population Census which gave a figure of approximately 50% of those stating that they were unemployed as being Roman Catholic, ‘as a general rule the 50% estimate is nearer the truth ...’.
- CENT/1/9/12** **1980-1980** **Briefing material for Secretary of State – Meeting with Alliance Party** – The Alliance Party’s suggested solutions to the ‘fundamental problems’ prevalent in the Northern Ireland economy, including an increase in public expenditure, improving industrial relations and an action

plan to encourage the creation of new businesses, together with the Secretary of State's prepared responses.

- CENT/1/9/16** 1980-1980 **Consideration of Possible Fall Back Positions –** arrangements for potential positions to take, in the event that the constitutional initiative failed: 'the Government could decide to have a fundamental look at the constitutional status of Northern Ireland and perhaps start moving in the direction of Irish Unity or some new relationship between GB and Ireland ...' .
- CENT/1/9/18** 1980-1980 **Legislative Devolution and Range of Matters to be Devolved –** examining the divergences between Northern Ireland and England / Wales, and how to (where feasible) eliminate these divergences. Northern Ireland, it was recognised, had a 'disjointed history' and inherited a statute book separate from that in GB. As the Office of Legislative Draftsmen stated in correspondence to Central Secretariat: 'my principal concern is that, if the document does not offer legislative devolution as an option, the Government will be painting itself into a corner with a vengeance ... I fear that if legislative devolution is not on offer, Mr (Enoch) Powell's arguments will become very difficult to resist The United Kingdom Government has up to now taken the view that any large scale shift to legislation by Bill would be interpreted as evidence that HMG was content to see Northern Ireland gradually lose its separate legislative identity and become integrated with Great Britain ...' .
- CENT/1/9/20** 1980-1980 **Official Record of Constitutional Conference –** contains unpublished minutes recording the (closed) sessions of the Conference on the Government of Northern Ireland 1980, held between the delegations of the Secretary of State, Alliance, SDLP, UDUP and the Secretariat (UUP declined

to attend), during which the parties discussed the constitution of Northern Ireland and associated issues (security, nationality, legislative process, Direct Rule, etc.).

- CENT/1/9/22** **1980-1980** **Working Party on Terrorism** – examining terrorism related issues, such as that of a new offence of passing information supplied by proscribed organisation. The Office of the Legislative Draftsman commented that the effects of the Bennett Report (on holding centres) may result in a falling conviction rate, ‘especially if the number of confessions falls following the changes recommended by the Bennett Report...’Also, the issue of the closure of border roads was examined.
- CENT/1/9/27** **1980-1980** **PUS AND NICS Perm Secs Meetings** – minutes of the meetings between the Northern Ireland Permanent Secretaries and the NIO Permanent Under Secretary, covering De Lorean, investigation into abuse and child prostitution at Belfast children’s homes the reorganisation of education, housing, industrial development and strikes, etc.
- CENT/1/9/31** **1980-1980** **Secretary of State's Meeting with SDLP on 25/3/80**
‘Poverty and Economic Proposals’ Briefing Material – refers to UK Government attempts to reach consensus with the SDLP on a way forward in the economic downturn. ‘The Secretary of State pointed to the realities of current financial constraints and to the importance of deciding how to allocate funds in the best possible way. The Governments policy is to concentrate upon creating the right conditions within private enterprise and initiative can flourish.’
- CENT/1/9/4** **1979-1979** **Integrated Education** – file includes Department of

Education report on the issue of religious integration, which recognises the combined issues of segregated housing due to the Troubles, together with the prevalent attitude of the Roman Catholic church in maintaining separate schooling for its pupils.

CENT/1/10/18 **1978-1980** **De Lorean** – File refers to the ongoing problems faced by the De Lorean sports car company. Including correspondence from UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s Private Secretary in which she states: ‘In regard to the further assistance of £14 million, she has indicated that – in her view – an understanding that no further assistance will be available is not enough. She would like the further £14 million to be made available on condition that further assistance is ruled out, and she has said that this condition should be put in writing...’

Department of Commerce

COM/62/1/1531 **1977-1980** **Short Bros Ltd Belfast, ‘Skyvan and Missiles’** – includes papers relating to potential sales of ‘military and allied supplies’ to various overseas parties. One exchange of correspondence refers to the ethical debate in government circles about the requested sale of ‘internal security vehicles’ to Nicaragua. Officials agreed that such licences for such sales would not be granted to Nicaragua under the circumstances prevalent in the country, and admitted that: ‘the present regime could remain in power through implementing a severe campaign of repression. Ministers are not prepared to allow Shorts products to be exported in view of their potential use either in a civil war or in implementing repressive measures ...’.

COM/107/1/9 **1973-1980** **Army Occupation of Factories** – Details the arrangements made for British Army units to temporarily

occupy factories in Northern Ireland. However, more interestingly, the file illustrates the problems faced when dealing with military occupation of civilian areas, especially at a time when the UK Government was desperately trying to encourage local industrial development. Of one potentially viable industrial site (occupied by the Army), an official commented: 'It is fairly obvious even if the Army was willing to restore it to our standards...visiting industrialists should not be shown through it. Its fortress like appearance cannot create a good impression ...'.

COM/107/2/1 **1980-1980** **LearFan – General Financial aspects and possible funding arrangements (except option)** – details the complex negotiations to secure the production of Learfan, and includes a cautionary note in a Departmental briefing to the Secretary of State: 'The Northern Ireland case is by far the most vulnerable in this increasingly competitive scene and as the economic recession continues, the drive from other more attractive regions of the United Kingdom will increase ...'.

Department of Manpower Services

DMS/2/184 **1980-1980** **Industrial Relations – Deep Sea Docks Belfast** – This file details the ongoing (Labour Relations Agency) Committee Inquiry into Deep Sea Docks. Illustrates the profound effects of the growing recession in Northern Ireland upon the stevedoring operations at Belfast Deep Sea Docks, and the efforts of figures such as Paddy Devlin to lobby on behalf of the 'Deep Sea men.'

Department of the Environment

ENV/21/1/8 **1980-1980** **Belfast areas of need [BAN] working group: minutes –**

Ardoyne – contains notes of liaison meetings with field workers in various deprived areas of Belfast, but in particular Ardoyne. Gross dissatisfaction with the work of BAN was regularly communicated at these forums, with community groups feeling left out of consultations.

Department of Finance

- FIN/30/R/2/A/3 1973-1973 Secretary of State – Meetings with Parties in connection with Executive** – contains declassified confidential minutes of meetings held between Secretary of State William Whitelaw and the various senior figures in the Ulster Unionists, SDLP and Alliance parties and including Oliver Napier, Brian Faulkner, John Hume, and Gerry Fitt, concerning issues such as the economy, discrimination in the public sector, police and security, extradition, etc.
- FIN/18/59/4 1979-1980 Refugees: Settling in Northern Ireland** – refers to assistance provided to those seeking asylum following the Vietnam conflict.

Department of Health and Social Services

- HSS/13/36/8 1978-1980 'Smoking and Health' – development grant to Gallaher Ltd** – illustrates the apparent conflict of policies between the UK Government's health education policy and economic implications in Northern Ireland regarding the tobacco industry and employment.
- HSS/32/1/15/1A 1979-1980 Dirty protests in prisons** – contains detailed papers on the medical aspects of the 'Dirty' Protest in HMP Maze, including the need for prisoners to consent to medical inspection and intervention. In one letter, medical inspectors warned that protesting prisoners' dental hygiene was poor, and 'if the protesters are a typical cross section of the population, half of them will already be on their way

to full sets of dentures ...'. However, the correspondent also observed that searches revealed toothbrushes and toothpaste hidden in prisoner mattresses. They also cautioned 'against expecting too much from the weekly inspections; poor light and non co-operation meant only hygiene could be assessed, not protestors' health ...'.

HSS/32/1/15/2 **1979-1980** **Medical role in prisons (with particular reference to the dirty protest)** – contains the UK Government's attempts to offset sustained negative publicity on the dirty protests by issuing statements explaining the role of the medical staff and the reasons for 'the medical approach to prisoners who refuse to co-operate with the doctors ...'. One confidential memo notes (in reference to the proposed Government statements): 'I would prefer to see the word 'campaign' used in place of 'protest.' The latter implies that these prisoners action is defensive, while the former suggests a more deliberately aggressive stance ...'.

HSS/32/1/15/6A **1978-1980** **Bennett Report – Implementations** – Refers to the Bennett Committee investigation into conditions for detainees at the various Royal Ulster Constabulary 'Holding Centres' (such as Gough, Armagh and Castlereagh, Belfast), which were used to temporarily imprison and interrogate those suspected of scheduled terrorism related offences.

Northern Ireland Office

NIO/12/147 **1979-1980** **Prisons – Protest against ending of Special Category – ECHR – Papers Following Receipt of Applicants Comments on HM Government's Observations** – contains detailed allegations of mistreatment, inhumane conditions and breaches of the Geneva Convention, at HMP Maze and HMP Armagh, brought (by four protesting Republican prisoners) to the European Commission on

Human Rights at Strasbourg. However, these accusations are counterbalanced in the file by the UK Government's 'Observations on Admissibility' paper, which sought to refute the various individual allegations.

- NIO/12/153** **1979-1980** **Prisons – Protest – Protest Action arising from Claim to Special Category Status – Ministers Cases for 1979**
– refers to the allegations that conditions in HMP Armagh and HMP Maze were 'inhumane;' and potentially breached Article 3 of the Third Geneva Convention of 1949 (an allegation refuted by the UK Government, who claimed that all terrorist prisoners were treated in accordance with human rights legislation). Contains allegation that female prisoners at HMP Armagh faced 'inadequate bathing facilities' and 'limited amounts of food,' they only receive 'two spoonfuls of jam per week' and 'have to make teabags from their tights ...'.
- NIO/12/176** **1980-1980** **Prisons – Protest – Protest Action Arising from Claim to Special Category Status – Ministers Cases for 1980**
– includes political correspondence and associated papers on the developing protests, and details the UK Government's attempts to refute a seemingly constant flow of allegations (coming from various corners: Trade Unions, Members of Parliament, Amnesty International, etc.) concerning the treatment of prisoners claiming political status.
- NIO/12/184** **1980-1980** **Prisons – European Commission of Human Rights – Consideration of Partial Decision on Maze Case (June 1980)** – contains detailed discussions, legal opinions and speculation concerning the ECHR consideration of the treatment and conditions of detention at the HMP Maze Prison in Northern Ireland of prisoners claiming Special Category Status.

- NIO/12/189** **1980-1980** **Prison – Protest Action – Protest Action Arising from Claim to Special Category Status – Ministers Cases on the Hunger Strike** – comprises detailed correspondence between UK Government Ministers and various individuals and organisations concerning the developing campaign. This includes correspondence between Bishop Cahal Daly and Secretary of State Humphrey Atkins, relating to the prospect of hunger strike at HMP Maze and where the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise made clear his concern at the deteriorating situation.
- NIO/12/191** **1980-1980** **Prisons – Protest Action – Protest Action Arising from Claim to Special Category Status – Hunger Strike by Loyalist Prisoners** – includes attempt by Ian Paisley to arrange for an urgent meeting with UK Government, regarding Loyalist prisoners' (Ulster Defence Association) threatened hunger strike over withdrawal of Special Category Status. Includes official minute dated 10th Dec 1980, relating to a proposed meeting with the UDA, namely Andy Tyrie: '(Dr Paisley) said that the matter was urgent because 2 "Loyalist" prisoners had jumped the gun and had started a hunger strike that morning ...'.

Policy Co-ordinating Committee

- PCC/1/9/22** **1980** **Minutes of Policy Co-ordinating Committee held at Parliament Buildings Stormont, Wednesday 17 December 1980** – contains notes for the Permanent Secretaries on the latest developments on the Hunger Strikes at HMP Maze, illustrating the position of the UK Government that they would not negotiate with then prisoners, whether Republican or Loyalist: 'these six (UDA) prisoners are convicted and sentenced criminals like all others in Maze Cellular Prison and will be treated like the other hunger strikers. Their claim for segregation is

inadmissible on the same grounds: they have been convicted for crimes such as murder, not for their political views.'

