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Operation U.S.A. : Visit of Unionist delegation to U.S.

1. In October 1981 Robert Bradford M.P., Ian Paisley M.P., Peter Robinson M.P., and John Taylor M.E.P. announced that they intended to visit the U.S. The objectives of the visit were:

- (i) To stop support and money for Noraid
- (ii) To meet the U.S. media and convey the views of the majority community in Northern Ireland to them.
- (iii) To meet with Congressional Representatives.

On 14 November Robert Bradford M.P. was assassinated by the P.I.R.A. His widow Norah Bradford subsequently agreed to take his place on the Unionist delegation. On 21 December the U.S. State Department announced that it was revoking the visa issued to the Rev. Ian Paisley. In giving our Embassy at Washington advance notice of the cancellation, the State Department indicated that the decision was made on the basis of the person more than the policies involved. A State Department official said that the decision was based on Mr. Paisley's "near advocacy" of violence, on the contents of his various public statements and on the establishment of the Third Force, which was felt to be "contrary to President Reagan's fight against terrorism and to his policy on Northern Ireland."

2. The decision was made against a background of Irish American opposition to Mr. Paisley's proposed visit, and a decisive factor must have been the request made to the Reagan administration by three prominent Democrats, Speaker O'Neill, Senator Edward Kennedy and Senator Daniel Moynihan to have the visa revoked. Rep. Biaggi's Ad Hoc Committee also became involved when one of its members, Republican Congressman William Carney, sent the State Department a petition supported by 107 Congressmen asking for the visa to be withdrawn. An argument used by Rep. Carney was that as Mr. Owen Carron had been refused a visa, so also should Mr. Paisley. Supporters of the Irish National Caucus and the Ad Hoc Committee tried to represent the change in the State Department's position as being the result of

Rep. Carney's efforts, when in fact the intervention of Speaker O'Neill and his colleagues is much more likely to have been the decisive factor. The Irish Government took the position that the question of Mr. Paisley's visa was one for the U.S. authorities to decide, in line with the position on previous visa cases.

3. In order to circumvent his exclusion from the United States Mrs. Eileen Paisley replaced her husband on the Unionist delegation while he himself flew to Canada on 15 January 1982 with the intention of spreading his message through appearances on U.S. television and radio and in this he was successful. However on arrival in Toronto he was heckled and jostled by republican sympathisers. Although Canadian media coverage of Paisley's visit was extensive there was nevertheless, both presentationally and in substance, a barely suppressed disapproval of Paisley's message and manner. He departed from Canada on 21 January.

4. Peter Robinson, John Taylor, Mrs. Eileen Paisley and Mrs. Norah Bradford arrived in New York on 15 January 1982. They were accompanied by Mr. Jim Allister and Mr. David Burnside who were described as joint directors of Operation U.S.A. The delegation had a meeting with the British Ambassador, addressed the National Press Club in Washington and had meetings with the editorial boards of leading American newspapers. Mr. Taylor visited Dallas, Boston and Chicago where he held press conferences addressed meetings and was interviewed on local radio and T.V. stations. Mr. Robinson travelled to San Francisco, Sacramento, and Atlanta. Mr. Robinson, Mrs. Paisley and Mrs. Bradford attended a meeting at the Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina.

5. Democratic Whip Tom Foley, together with his aide Mr. Brandt and Speaker O'Neill's counsel Mr. Kirk O'Donnell also met the delegation. Mr. Foley explained the purpose of the Friends of Ireland viz. its clear condemnation of violence and its support for unity on the basis of the consent of a majority in Northern Ireland. He pointed out that as politicians themselves the visitors would have to understand that support for Irish unity among Irish Americans was

a basic reality which politicians in the U.S. could not ignore. Furthermore the Friends of Ireland was the only organisation offering clear leadership to Irish-Americans and the only group consistently condemnatory of violence. In the absence of this leadership there would be a vacuum which others more militant would fill. Robinson and Taylor were angry because they had been ignored by Senator Kennedy, whose main preoccupation at present is re-election by a massive majority in Massachusetts and who is nervous of giving any hostage to fortune to the often hostile South-Boston constituency. Similar re-election constraints apply in the case of Senator Moynihan who also refused to meet the delegation. The U.S. side viewed this meeting with the Unionists as being not very useful and a waste of time. It was their impression that the overall visit to the U.S. had not been very productive for the Unionists.

6) The delegation also had a meeting with Deputy Secretary of State Stoessel and left New York on 28 January. Mr. David Burnside was quoted as being not pleased with publicity in Washington and media coverage elsewhere. Reference was made by some politicians and in the media to the damage that Operation USA could have caused to Northern Ireland's prospects of attracting U.S. investment. From our point of view it can be argued that there were positive aspects to Operation U.S.A. Members of the delegation were exposed to both reasonable and emotional argument by nationally minded Irish-Americans who resent the implication that they are supporting the IRA. The deep concern that is felt about the issues involved in Northern Ireland and the general interest in seeing a speedy resolution to the problem was made clear to members of the delegation. While they made few converts to the Unionist cause they may have served a useful purpose in educating some of the more emotional Irish-Americans to the fact that the Unionist viewpoint is also strongly held and that it cannot be ignored.

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