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PS/Secretary of State (L&B)

- PS/Ministers (L&B) - M
- PS/PUS (L&B) - M
- Mr Brennan
- Mr Stephens - M
- Mr Barry - M
- Mr Erskine - M
- Mr Reid - M
- Mr Innes - M
- Mr Merifield - M
- Mr Ferneylough - M
- Mr Carvill - M
- Mr Chesterton o/r
- Mr Gilliland - M ✓
- Mr Reeve - M
- Miss Elliott
- Mr McConnell
- Mr Clark RID FCO

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20 SEP 1985
STOCK EXCHANGE ANNEX

(16)

IRISH POLICY TOWARDS SINN FEIN

You asked for a note on the attitude of the Irish Government towards Sinn Fein. The following is based both on approaches to the Irish and published information.

2. Sinn Fein currently holds ¹⁰ seats on county councils and ~~corporations~~ corporations, the upper tier of local government in the Republic. It has a large number on the lower tier district councils but no figures are immediately available because Sinn Fein is not a recognised political party and statistics are not kept by the Irish Department of the Environment. The Sinn Fein component is nevertheless more dilute than it now is in Northern Ireland. Their total share of the vote was 2.8% in June this year compared with 11.8% in Northern Ireland in May. Sinn Fein is less radical in the Republic and has less desire to disrupt local government than in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless the Irish Government has encountered the same sort of difficulties as we expect to face. The DFA acknowledge that while Irish Ministers have a clear policy of having no dealings with Sinn Fein, in practice things are not so straightforward.

3. Irish Ministers have been largely successful in applying their policy of refusing to see local authority delegations if they contain Sinn Fein Members. They even declined to receive a delegation from Leitrim County Council whose Chairman is a member of Sinn Fein. The Irish have commented that in practice the position is well understood so that any council wishing to do serious business would not usually

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include a Sinn Fein member in its delegation. But despite these precautions now and again Irish Ministers do come across Sinn Fein members when meeting delegations. If this happens, apparently, Irish Ministers do their best not to recognise the presence of Sinn Fein representatives or, in some cases, if it can be done, extricate themselves from the engagement.

4. Irish Ministers do visit councils with Sinn Fein members. But we have been told they refused to greet the members: depending on the personality of the Minister some were ruder in the way they did this than others. But Sinn Fein councillors have managed on occasions to be photographed with Ministers and the Secretary of State may have seen from an Irish Times article on 27 April that Mr Quinn, the Minister for Labour, attended a meeting at which two Sinn Fein Councillors also spoke. The Irish said that this was a 'mistake'.

5. One problem for the Irish Government was the election of a Sinn Fein Vice-President, Phil Flynn, to the Executive Council of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. Flynn was also General Secretary of the Local Government and Public Services Union. Flynn resigned his Sinn Fein Vice-Presidency, he has not however had any dealings with the Government and has maintained a very low profile altogether. He has not exploited his position for publicity as might have been expected.

6. We have pursued, with the Irish, the question of whether the Irish Government has a policy on Sinn Fein and public appointments and what discretion their Ministers have in deciding whether to accept Council's nominations for public bodies. The Embassy have told us that this question caused the DFA some difficulties. They at first took the line that there are no known examples of Sinn Fein people being appointed to statutory bodies. They then mentioned the possibility that Sinn Fein members may have been unwittingly appointed appointed to Health Boards and they undertook to investigate this. We have not yet had a further reply.

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7. The Irish have therefore undoubtedly tried to maintain their policy of no Ministerial contacts with Sinn Fein but it has not been so easy in practice. The Irish practice parallels ours but the scale of their difficulties are less. The Irish have already suggested that we take them into our confidence before our policy towards Sinn Fein is hardened up. There would be advantage in continuing to pursue parallel policies, and particular advantage, if we took legislative action, in persuading the Irish to do the same. I would suggest therefore that, in the light of Monday's discussion, we ask the FCO to instruct the Embassy to give the Irish an indication of the Secretary of State's thinking. We could also take the opportunity to make further inquiries about Sinn Fein appointments to Health Boards. We will submit draft telegrams for the Secretary of State's approval for the meeting next Monday.

P. N. Bell

P N BELL

20 September 1985

SECRET