

FROM: D COLEMAN
CPL DIVISION
22 APRIL 1996

~~Mrs McRobbin~~
Thank you, I think this
is better.

LD 23/4

DESK IMMEDIATE

Mrs Devlin, Cent Sec -B

Mr Maccabe -B

PQ NO 842: MS JANET ANDERSON MP

Please find attached a revised draft answer to the above PQ. If you have any comments/views on this perhaps you could phone Linda Rogers direct on OAB ext 6575 by close of play today. Otherwise we will assume that you are content.

signed David Coleman

D COLEMAN
Constitutional and Political Division
OAB Ext 6576

Informed David Coleman
that we are content.

Informed him of
'article' in BT supplement

Cmck
24.4.96

CPL1/AJH/21944

AFT

FROM: D COLEMAN
CPL DIVISION
APRIL 1996

cc: Mr Thomas -B
Mr Leach -B
Mr Watkins -B
Mr Wood (L&B) -B
Mr Stephens -B
Mr Maccabe -B
Mr Beeton -B
Mrs Brown -B
Mrs Devlin -B
Miss McKibben -B

1. Mrs Rogers
2. Mr Hill
3. Mr Brearley -B

PQ NO: 842/96

Please find attached, as requested, a draft reply to the above PQ.
Also attached are Notes for Supplementaries.

2. The proposed answer and supplementary material have been cleared with Central Secretariat and PAB Division.

D COLEMAN
Constitutional and Political Division
OAB Ext 6576

CPL1/AJH/21944

DATE FOR ANSWER: THURSDAY 2 MAY

ORAL NO: 13

MS JANET ANDERSON (Rossendale and Darwen): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what recent contacts have been made by the Government with Sinn Fein.

SIR PATRICK MAYHEW

There have been no meetings between Ministers and Sinn Fein since the breakdown of the ceasefire.

CPL1/AJH/21944

BACKGROUND NOTE TO PQ NO 13

Following the breakdown of the PIRA ceasefire on 9 February and lack of subsequent condemnation from Sinn Fein, the Prime Minister said in his statement to the House on 12 February:-

"In the absence of a genuine end to this renewed violence, meetings between British Ministers and Sinn Fein are not acceptable and cannot take place".

The Prime Minister reiterated this position to the House on 28 February when he said:

"There can be no dialogue between Ministers and Sinn Fein until the ceasefire is unequivocally restored".

2. The Secretary of State's has also commented in the House (on 22 February):-

"Ministers will not meet Sinn Fein to discuss matters that are related to the peace process or political process and until a ceasefire has been credibly restored, as it should be forthwith. As for officials, to the best of my knowledge, there will be no meetings with officials."

3. The withdrawal of Ministerial contact with Sinn Fein follows an agreed, joint, approach between the UK and Irish Governments.

4. The only meeting with Sinn Fein that has taken place since these statements has been that with senior officials held on 26 February when it was publicly announced (see Press Notice at Annex C) that the meeting was a listening exercise. It was made quite clear that no negotiations would take place.

Review in policy towards Sinn Fein

5. Given the statements above, it has become necessary to examine policy in respect of contacts between representatives of Sinn Fein and either Ministers or senior officials. Any contact must be defensible in the House and in the media generally.

6. The main change in the guidance (a shortened version of which is at Annex A) from that which operated during the ceasefire is, therefore, that there is to be no Ministerial contact with Sinn Fein as a party, although there may be contact with groups which include Sinn Fein as part of a wider delegation. The other point of note is that the guidance makes clear that senior officials may meet Sinn Fein but explicit Ministerial approval is required.

7. Attached at Annex B are Notes for Supplementaries.

GUIDELINES FOR CONTACTS WITH SINN FEIN

In the absence of an IRA ceasefire, contact between Sinn Fein and NIO Ministers and officials will be circumscribed as follows:

- a) Ministers will not meet with an exclusively Sinn Fein delegation in any circumstances nor will they meet, on Government property, a delegation or group which includes Sinn Fein representatives;
- b) Ministers will continue their outside visits in Northern Ireland on the understanding that any contacts with Sinn Fein will be incidental to the primary purpose of the visit, eg, during a visit to a District Council to discuss Council business;
- c) meetings between Sinn Fein and senior officials may take place with the explicit approval of the appropriate Departmental Minister;
- d) contact between Sinn Fein and junior officials on local constituency matters will continue uninterrupted;
- e) Sinn Fein should continue to receive Press Notices and other material sent to all political parties.

NOTE FOR SUPPLEMENTARIES

Q1. Why not negotiate with Sinn Fein now?

A1. As the Prime Minister has made it clear, there can be no question of negotiations with Sinn Fein until IRA violence is ended.

Q2. Prospects for a new IRA ceasefire?

A2. There is no shred of justification for renewed violence. The people of NI have a right to expect an end to this violence once and for all. If there is no end, the IRA and Sinn Fein automatically exclude themselves from the political process. This will go on without them. We and the Irish Government have made this absolutely clear.

Q3. What is the Government's position on decommissioning?

A3. We have always believed a start to decommissioning was the most direct route to negotiations. Sinn Fein could have been in negotiations long ago if the IRA had begun to decommission. But, as the Mitchell Report made clear, the paramilitaries refused to do so. The Government then set out an alternative route, through elections, to all-party negotiations. That is the route we are now pursuing.

Q4. Aren't the Government ducking the decommissioning question?

A4. Decommissioning cannot be ducked. The Mitchell proposals, including those for parallel decommissioning, will have to be addressed at the beginning of the discussions.

Have there been any meetings between Government officials and Sinn Fein since the breakdown of the ceasefires?

A5. Senior officials met them on 26 February, simply to hear any message they have, and to explain Government policy. There have also been a limited number of meetings between officials and Sinn Fein representatives concerning economic and social matters. All of these meetings have been at the express approval of the appropriate Departmental Minister.