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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

For: Anglo-Irish Division
For: Asst Sec Sean O hUiginn/
David Donoghue

From: Embassy London
From: Philip McDonagh

**Courtesy call on the Ambassador by Mr Gerry Adams
18 November 1994**

Mr Adams is on a two-day visit to London. Yesterday he was at the House of Commons under the wing of his long-standing Labour contacts Tony Benn MP and Jeremy Corbyn MP. His other engagements included a press conference at which he read the statement attached to this report, a meeting with Peter Temple-Morris MP, and a series of television interviews including appearances on the Channel 4 news and Newsnight on the BBC.

We understand that today Mr Adams is meeting the American Ambassador, signing copies of his book at Waterstones and attending a "Peace Night for Ireland Concert" under the auspices of the "Irish Peace Initiative". A notice in connection with the last event is also attached below.

Today's courtesy call to the Embassy, which was arranged on Wednesday (16th) at Sinn Fein's request, lasted for just over an hour. Adams was accompanied by Mr Francie Molloy, a Councillor from Tyrone, and by Mr Gerry McLochlainn of the Wolfe Tone Society in London. The Ambassador was accompanied by the undersigned.

The Political Situation in Dublin

Adams expressed surprise at the scale and speed of recent changes. He and his colleagues, in analysing the likely course of the peace process, had not identified an upheaval in Dublin as a possible factor. He remarked that it is always difficult to know at what point a relatively manageable issue will start to dominate the whole shape of events.

Adams expressed warm appreciation of the role of the Taoiseach in bringing about recent break-throughs.

From Sinn Fein's point of view, he said that what is now important is for a new Government to emerge quickly. Sinn Fein might have views about this but would not express them.

The Peace Process

Adams said he has had no indication of when the British will open the talks with Sinn Fein. He feels it may be closer to Christmas than to early December.

Adams asked for the Ambassador's assessment of British Government intentions. He accepted our view that British policy is consistent and is likely to be carried forward, and noted our comments on the mood in the Conservative Party and on the recent party conference in Bournemouth.

Adams praised Peter Temple-Morris MP for meeting him yesterday and for his contribution to the overall debate. He described Temple-Morris as a "sane voice" in the Conservative Party, and as someone whose views are helping to bring the Republican movement into dialogue. Temple-Morris told him that he expects the Inter-parliamentary Body to agree at its meeting in Cardiff on 12 - 14 December to attend the Forum.

Adams said that if the Embassy becomes aware of any other British political figures who may be ready to meet with him or his colleagues, he would be glad to be informed. Such meetings could be held if necessary on a basis of confidentiality.

Adams said that he has been overwhelmed by the media since arriving in London. He noted that at yesterday's press conference the overseas media exercised a restraining influence on British colleagues whose questioning appeared to them too wild.

[One of Adams' aides remarked to me on leaving that we should remember the fate of Arafat, who has run into difficulty because of the need to stand over a certain type of compromise. This I took to be a reference to Sinn Fein fears about the overall shape of the package to be negotiated in round-table talks.]

Prisoners

A considerable part of the discussion concerned prisoners. On this issue, Adams left much of the talking to Francie Molloy. The Sinn Fein delegation was anxious not to appear to be taking too much advantage of a courtesy call.

(a) Repatriations to the North

There have been no repatriations since the very controversial transfer of Magee a few months back. Only eight have been transferred to date. Adams believes that the British may be holding back in order to use this issue as a concession once talks with Sinn Fein begin. However, he also accepted the relevance of our observation that the Home Secretary has been under some political pressure of late and that he may be afraid of losing more ground in the Conservative Party to other right-wing figures.

Adams pointed out that the prisoners now seeking transfer have a lower profile than Magee and that only temporary certificates are being sought. It suits some prisoners to remain in Britain for family reasons.

Adams said that the repatriation of prisoners will be raised by Sinn Fein in the forthcoming talks with the British Government.

The Ambassador informed the Sinn Fein delegation of the efforts made by the Embassy to secure the repatriation of prisoners in the first place.

(b) Repatriations to our jurisdiction

Adams said that his colleague Pat Doherty has been assured that this issue will receive priority treatment from the Irish Government. The Ambassador noted that enabling legislation is required and that there are constraints of a practical nature arising from the great imbalance of numbers as between overseas prisoners in Ireland and Irish prisoners overseas. Only a limited number can be repatriated from abroad for that reason.

c) Prison regimes

Some papers handed to us by Mr Molloy are annexed below.

Reference was made to the regime in Whitemoor following the recent escape attempt - a twenty-three hour lock-up, an inability to agree on the conditions for visits, only one two-minute telephone call since the escape attempt. In addition some of the prisoners were badly beaten.

The Ambassador described various steps already taken by the Embassy, in particular in connection with the assaults on prisoners. He noted that a gun was used in the escape attempt at Whitemoor and that semtex was subsequently found. This put pressure on those within the British administration who are working to make prison conditions more humane.

Adams made a distinction between the prisoners themselves and their relatives. After an escape attempt the prisoners recognise that security will be tightened. This should not be a reason for adding to the burdens borne by wives, children, and elderly relatives.

Francie Molloy then described some of the difficulties faced by relatives. The "ghosting" of prisoners from one place to another without notice causes great distress to people for whom the cost of an extra overnight stay is often a major problem.

The Ambassador reiterated the willingness of the Embassy, if asked, to be of assistance and to make representations on prisoners' issues. It was agreed that Mr McLochlainn, who is London-based, would stay in touch with the Embassy.

Comment

Adams was more relaxed than his public image might have led one to expect. He was very friendly and careful not to make demands of the Embassy or to express harsh opinions. Our impression was that Adams found himself speaking more freely than he had perhaps expected. He joked on leaving, with reference to the peace process, "let's keep the ball in their half". The Sinn Fein delegation left with a set of the Irish newspapers which we presented to them when the question of political developments in Dublin first arose in the discussion. The Ambassador greeted Adams in Irish on his arrival but, surprisingly, he did not deviate from the Queen's English! //