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Reference Code: 2021/97/16

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by Mr. [unclear]
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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

12/5/95

Uimhir.....
SEEN BY
TAOISEACH

CONFIDENTIAL

**Telephone Call from Mr. Quentin Thomas
of the Northern Ireland Office
10 May, 1995.**

Mr. Gubbins
S.H. 17.5.95.

Taoiseach
Do see
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Mr. Thomas telephoned this evening (at the request of No. 10 Downing Street) to give an account of today's discussions with Sinn Fein for the Taoiseach's information. At the outset he said that the British side thought that they had done well up to the end of the meeting. It was, of course, Michael Ancram's first meeting with Sinn Fein: there had been a full engagement on a range of matters.

The meeting commenced with opening statements on both sides. Sinn Fein representatives dealt at some length with a number of well known themes with specific reference to their electoral mandate. The decommissioning of arms issue was raised by the British side. Sinn Fein made the point that they were entering the talks on the basis of their mandate - they had no arms. Minister Ancram indicated that the British side were anxious to get to the point where "everybody was on the same footing". They were not expecting to resolve the arms decommissioning issue in one go. They explained the steps involved - a commitment to decommissioning, modalities and the beginning of substantial progress.

Mr. Thomas said that there had been what he described as "useful skirmishing" on the foregoing themes for about an hour and a quarter. The British side then went on to discuss details of decommissioning with a view to obtaining a response from the Sinn Fein representatives, but this was not forthcoming. He said that Sinn Fein had listened to what the British side had said but had made no response. The British then handed Sinn Fein a paper on this subject which set out the various issues involved - methods, modalities etc. The possibility of finding arms at particular places on the basis of tip-offs was also adverted to. Sinn Fein agreed to take this paper for consideration. The British side suggested that they would return to the topic at a subsequent meeting.

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Sinn Fein then raised the question of moving to the bilateral meeting phase. They were anxious that the Secretary of State would meet Gerry Adams. The British side indicated that they would respond to requests for meetings with Sinn Fein on their merits in each particular instance (i.e. on an ad hoc basis). In principle the Secretary of State might meet Gerry Adams but would not be agreeable to do so on issues which were being discussed elsewhere i.e. in the course of the Ancram talks. The meeting then adjourned for an interval.

On resumption Minister Ancram suggested three days next week for a resumption of the talks with Sinn Fein. The demand for a meeting with the Secretary of State was reiterated. On the British side that was seen as part of the bilateral process. On being pressed Minister Ancram said that he would put the Sinn Fein request to the Secretary of State. The British side cast doubts on whether such a meeting would be possible at this stage.

Mr. Thomas told me that the British side were ready to move on to talks on other issues but that in effect "all this had been rejected". As he saw it the whole process was now cast in doubt because of the demand for a meeting with the Secretary of State.

I enquired as to how he saw the situation evolving. He said that there was now a real difficulty. The British side were anxious for a discussion on the decommissioning of arms in the sense in which they had defined it. They had met with Sinn Fein today on the basis that this meeting would be a serious discussion although not confined to a single item agenda. They saw the need for further work to be done in the Ancram talks. They had presented a paper on decommissioning as already mentioned.

In conclusion Mr. Thomas reiterated that Sinn Fein were demanding to be allowed into the political bilateral process now. The British side would have a real difficulty if Sinn Fein maintained this attitude. If

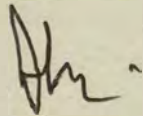
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they don't meet Michael Ancram again it was hard to see how matters could be resolved.

I thanked Mr. Thomas for his call and confirmed that I would convey his message to the Taoiseach this evening.



Frank Murray,
10 May, 1995.

c.c. Secretary Teahon
Secretary Dalton
Secretary O'hUiginn
Mr. Sean Donlon

Copy for information.