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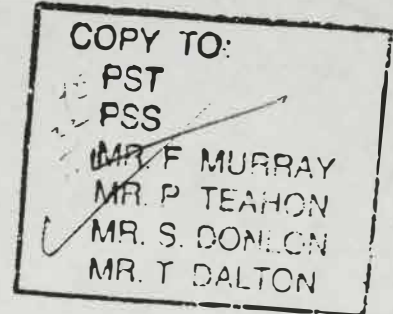
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Meeting between the Government and Sinn Féin

21 November, 1995



Present were:

Government Side: Taoiseach, Tanaiste, Minister for Social Welfare,
Messrs. Teahon and O hUiginn.

Sinn Fein: Messrs. Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, Ms.
Lucilita Breathnach, Ms. Siobhan O'Hanlon and Ms.
Rita O'Hare.

1. The Taoiseach asked whether Sinn Féin had the "more considered response" they had promised.
2. Mr. Adams expressed appreciation for the leeway which had been given. They wished to put their comments in written form. It was a submission to the Government, and for the Government to decide. He cautioned about White House attitudes, since the White House needed a breakthrough. They denied having any understanding with the British on "Washington Three", and merely hoped the British would do the right thing.
3. Mr. Adams observed that the earlier (September) Communique had been shorter. It was important the twin track should be parallel and get rid of pre-conditions. The British had moved back on a number of points in relation to both timing and on "reaching" rather than "seeking" agreement on the twin track process.

4. Mr. Adams then handed over a commentary and went through its terms in some detail.
5. The Taoiseach said the memorandum at first glance was self-explanatory. He did not feel it was necessary to discuss it in detail. The Tanaiste said it would be studied in the spirit in which it was put. At the end of the day a call had to be made. Mr. McGuinness asked about the response which had been made to the British Government. The Taoiseach said it was a detailed response. The Irish side was working against a time limit.
6. Mr. Adams said it would be disastrous if the visit went ahead and the peace process collapsed shortly afterwards. The US would feel cheated. The Irish position was much stronger than people realised. The goal of all-party talks was a reasonable one and fifteen months was a very long interval. The Americans "wanted what worked". The more long headed people were looking beyond next year into 1997. He urged the Taoiseach not to underestimate the potential to use the United States dimension for a balanced accommodation.
7. The Tanaiste said the Taoiseach's six points in the London speech created a dynamic. Whatever about Clinton, time was running out for Major.
8. The Taoiseach underlined this latter point. Major was now engaged. There was a risk he might not be so a third time. It was necessary to get all parties to the table.
9. The Minister for Social Welfare referred to de Klerk's speech that morning. It was important to move at the right point. There should now be a dynamic.

It was important not to underplay or overplay the hand.

10. Mr. Adams concurred that there was now a possibility of movement. He stressed that in dealing with pre-conditions, etc., the Republican movement had gone to the "end of the line". There might be a strategy to get Hume on board and thereby force Sinn Féin on board. That would not however work for the IRA.
10. The Taoiseach stressed again that he wanted all relevant parties in negotiations. That called for judgements which could sometimes be difficult.
11. Mr. McGuinness said it would be much easier by agreement with the British Government. He underlined the despondency of the Sinn Féin constituency at the failure of the British Government to encourage the unionists to engage at any time over the past fifteen months. Now the Assembly was being produced as a further distraction.
12. Mr. Adams asked on future developments in relation to a Summit. It would be important to avoid surprises. The Taoiseach confirmed that both sides were working intensively towards the earliest possible Summit, possibly by the weekend if things could be tied down.
13. Mr. Adams suggested the alternative approach might be, if it were not possible to get agreement with the British, to go to the US and put the US in the role of a player.
14. The Taoiseach objected that it was necessary to put oneself in one's antagonists' shoes. Mr. Adams objected that the British had able spokespersons of their own.

15. Mr. Adams recalled that the British draft was not good enough either for the Irish Government or for Sinn Féin. They would like to be informed of the outcome of these contacts in due course.
16. The Taoiseach pointed out the notice might be short. It might be down to the personal dynamic between himself and the British Prime Minister or the Tanaiste and the Secretary of State. A leap might be required.
17. Mr. McGuinness objected that Sinn Féin had taken the biggest leap of all. It was agreed there would be further contact on developments with Sinn Féin.
18. After some further discussion on de Klerk and the need for the British to cooperate with Sinn Fein, the meeting concluded.

Comment

19. As far as it could be judged the Sinn Féin delegation sought to secure three objectives:
 - (i) to put their own position on record, presumably as an insurance policy;
 - (ii) to stress to the Taoiseach the tactical potential of the present situation and the need to put pressure on the British; and
 - (iii) a tacit signal of acquiescence in the broad course proposed.

(Given (i) above, this was more a matter of body language and omission than a positive endorsement).



Sean Ó hUiginn

21 November 1995

Encl. Sinn Féin paper

21 November 1995

The British draft of a proposed joint communique is much longer than previous suggested drafts. This is important only in so far as all of the additional paragraphs deal with the arms issue so that in a 12 paragraph statement, 8 paragraphs deal in detail with the arms issue, while 4 deal in a general way with the political track. The British draft also subverts the original idea of a twin track. This was to allow for simultaneous or parallel movement on both tracks. The British draft makes movement on the political track totally qualified and conditional on the second track. Furthermore, the British have clearly put lots of negotiating fat into their draft, ie they have moved back from positions already agreed. For example, the period of time between the commencement of work of an International Body and the date for commencement of talks.

The British proposals fall far short of the proposals sent to them recently by the Irish government and in some ways step back from the British governments own position prior to 6 September.

Sinn Fein has already agreed propositions between Gerry Adams and John Hume but in this paper we analyse the British draft in the context of our understanding of the Irish government's position.

1. The Prime Minister and the Taoiseach met today to review progress in the peace process. After intensive efforts by both governments and with the benefit of consultations with parties in Northern Ireland the two governments agreed to launch a 'twin track' process to make progress in parallel on the (SF amendment replace the word 'decommissioning' with the word 'arms') arms issue and towards all party negotiations.

SF Commentary - with the one amendment of replacing the word "decommission" with the word "arms" this paragraph is acceptable.

The use of the word decommissioning is clearly sectional. The word itself has become highly politicised and carries the implication that the International Body will not accept submissions on of arms other than those which the British government wish to see decommissioned.

2. Both governments reaffirmed their commitment to securing the launch of all party negotiations. By way of the twin tracks, the two governments' target is to achieve this by the end of February 1996. It is the two governments considered view that, with co-operation from all the relevant parties in both tracks, that objective should prove achievable. Both governments commit themselves to working, with others, to achieve it.

SF Commentary - The target date is not acceptable so the entire paragraph would have to reworked to incorporate a date which is not conditional. In addition the target date given is a full 12 weeks after the setting up of the International Body and 6 weeks after it reports. There is no logic for this delay and it runs counter to the 6 weeks mentioned in the draft Communique for the postponed 6 September Summit and referred to in the Taoiseach's letter to John Major which quotes the joint communique as

"The two government has agreed to work together to create the conditions so that all party talks in round table format aimed at reaching an agreed political settlement based on

consent, could commence (refer to 6 weeks)."

.....
In the Irish Governments proposals to the British, it states,

"On a date for round table talks the Irish government's position has been, and remains, that a reasonable target date should be set with a clear commitment to make the utmost endeavours in good faith to reach it. The date should be six weeks from the international body commences work".

Our suggested alternative is;

2. Both governments reaffirm their commitment to all party negotiations and, in consequence, have set () as the date for the commencement of substantive political negotiations, in round table format, to reach an agreed political settlement.

3. To this end, the two governments have agreed to invite the parties to preparatory talks with a remit to achieve (SF amendment - seek) agreement, acceptable to all, on what the basis, participation, structure, format and agenda for subsequent all party political negotiations should be. These talks will have an open agenda, allowing any party to raise any relevant matter, including how best the structure and format of all party negotiations, directed to addressing in a comprehensive way all the relevant relationships in a single process, can properly take account of democratic mandates and principles (SF amendment delete -, including whether and how an elected body could play a part).

SF Commentary - This paragraph is in the main OK with above amendments.

A) The first amendment replaces the requirement to "achieve agreement" in the preparatory talks, which implies a further condition to the start of all-party negotiations, with the words "to seek agreement". The British have already agreed to this amendment and it is in line with the wording in the draft communique for the postponed 6 September summit, and is high-lighted in the Taoiseach's letter to the British Prime Minister;

" The two governments have agreed to work together to create the conditions so that all-party talks in round table format aimed at reaching an agreed political settlement based on consent, could commence [refer to six weeks]. A series of meetings will now be jointly convened by both Governments with all parties to lay the groundwork for these talks. Both governments share the aim of creating conditions in which all the relevant parties will attend these talks and will participate on the most constructive possible basis. "

B) SF's second amendment would remove the explicit reference to an elected body (the Unionist-proposed assembly). It is of course the right of any party to raise any matter or to make any proposal in the preparatory talks, but it is wrong to elevate any one proposal for mention in a joint communique. Full discussion of, and any decision on, this issue is, of course, a matter for the substantive political negotiations. We propose that this reference be deleted.

4. In managing the process of preparatory talks, each (SF amendment - both) governments will build on existing exchanges and bilateral contacts, treating each party on an equal basis, and will encourage other formats for meetings with the parties and among the parties which might further the objective of the preparatory talks.

SF Commentary - This paragraph is generally OK with the one amendment of replacing each with both. The idea of separating out the roles of the two governments is clearly aimed at

down-grading the role of the Irish government and runs counter to the wording in the draft communique for the postponed 6 September summit, ie;

" A series of meetings will now be jointly convened by both Governments with all parties to lay the groundwork for these [all-party] talks."

5. In parallel, the two governments have agreed to establish an International Body to provide an independent assessment of the decommissioning (SF amendment - arms) issue.

SF Commentary - with the one amendment of replacing the word "decommission" with the word "arms" this paragraph is acceptable.

The use of the word decommissioning is clearly sectional. The word itself has become highly politicised and carries the implication that the International Body will not accept submissions on of arms other than those which the British government wish to see decommissioned.

6. Recognising the widely held desire to see all weapons removed from Irish politics, the two governments will ask the International Body to report on the arrangements necessary for the removal of - (SF amendment to delete - those arms and other material silenced by the statements of 31 of August 1994 and 13th October 1994 - and replace it with - *arms and other material of war*) from the political equation.

SF Commentary - this paragraph is acceptable also with the amendment above which replaces the reference to "those arms and other material silenced by the statements of 31 of August 1994 and 13th October 1994" which quite explicitly refers only to IRA and loyalist paramilitary weapons, with a more general reference - "arms and other material of war."

7. In particular, the two governments will ask the Body to:

Identify and advise on a suitable and acceptable method for full and verifiable decommissioning; and

report whether there is a clear commitment by or on behalf of those in possession of such arms to a satisfactory process to achieve that.

SF Commentary - this paragraph narrows the remit of the International Body quite explicitly to the modalities of decommissioning and to establishing that those in possession of weapons are committed to decommissioning them (Washington 1&2). This allows the British government absolute freedom to revisit their demand for a surrender of IRA weapons as a precondition to the commencement of all-party talks after the international body has reported.

The entire twin track approach was argued on the basis that it was a way around the unrealisable demand for a surrender of IRA weapons as a precondition to all-party talks. However this text anticipates SF's co-operation with an international body with the British quite explicitly retaining the option of Washington 3. This is obviously not a position we could sell.

The twin track approach is only viable if it removes all preconditions, deals with the arms issue to everyone's satisfaction and moves us into all-party talks.

In addition the second clause requires that the Body reports "whether there is a clear commitment by, or on behalf of, those in possession of such arms to a satisfactory process to achieve(decommissioning).

SF's position is that we are willing to address the issue of IRA arms in an authoritative manner. We would also address the issue of all other weapons involved in the conflict.

The Irish government position is;

"On political parties and arms the formula of the political parties "speaking to the international body authoritatively on the position of IRA/Loyalist weapons and the issue of how the arms can be taken out of Irish politics" represents a reasonable basis for moving forward.

We would therefore suggest that the two points in Paragraph 7 be reworked as follows;

SF Amendment.

7. In particular, the two governments will ask the Body to:

examine whether and in what context and manner the question of arms, now thankfully silenced, could be finally and satisfactorily settled; and

ascertain and advise the two governments on the commitment of the respective political parties to exclusively peaceful and democratic means of influencing the body politic and on their commitment to the removal of all weapons from Irish politics.

8. It will be for the International Body to determine its own procedures. The two governments expect it to consult widely, to invite relevant parties to submit their analysis of the decommissioning (SF amendment to replace the word "decommissioning" with the word "arms") issue and, in reaching conclusions on its remit, to consider such evidence on its merits.

SF Commentary - with the one amendment of replacing the word "decommission" with the word "arms" this paragraph is acceptable.

The use of the word decommissioning is clearly sectional. The word itself has become highly politicised and carries the implication that the International Body will not accept submissions on of arms other than those which the British government wish to see decommissioned.

9. In establishing the Body, the British government reaffirms its willingness to continue to take responsive measures, on the advice of the security forces, as movement on such arms reduces the threat.

SF Commentary - this paragraph is a unilateral British position and has no place in joint communique. The simple way to deal with these problems is to remove this paragraph as it does nothing to enhance the proposal.

10. The two governments have invited Senator George Mitchell to chair the body and have invited [] to serve as the other members of the Body.

SF Commentary - we have no objection to this paragraph subject to agreement on the other

members of the Body.

11. The two governments have asked the Body to submit its report to the two governments by mid-January 1996. Neither government, nor any other party cooperating with the work of the Body, is bound in advance to accept their recommendations (SF amendment to delete - , which will be purely advisory and not operational).

SF Commentary - this paragraph is acceptable with the one amendment to delete the last part of the last sentence. We believe this to be an unnecessary clause as the point is already covered and it smacks of options being kept open.

12. The two governments will consider carefully any recommendations it makes and give them due weight on their merits. (SF Amendment to delete - To this end, and to review progress in preparatory talks and towards the target date for all party negotiations, the two governments plan to meet again by mid-February 1996).

SF Commentary - this paragraph contains the new element of a meeting to consider the findings of an international body. This can only be regarded as a further device for stalling the start of all-party talks and should be removed. A meeting may be necessary, but that should be judged at the time and not written into a joint communique.