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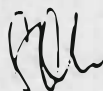
SECRET

Meeting with Representatives of Sinn Féin - 17th May, 1997  
and contacts subsequent to it

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Summary

1. After some initial objections to the respective press presentations, the meeting addressed the requirements for a ceasefire.
2. Sinn Féin showed an encouraging awareness of the need for very rapid progress in this respect. They repeated the demands enshrined in the "10th October" draft (Sinn Féin to enter talks immediately after an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire; decommissioning not to be a block to substantive negotiations; a reasonable timeframe for negotiations; confidence-building measures). They promised (and subsequently sent) a new draft on these points.
3. They suggested the Irish Government should balance the tone of Prime Minister Blair's Belfast speech, and that we should do everything possible to urge a real engagement by British officials. They asked that the officials should meet a Sinn Féin delegation led by Martin McGuinness, to discuss the forthcoming meeting with British officials.
4. The Official side stressed the nature of their mandate from the Government, stressed the particular importance of events on the ground and the earliest possible formal and unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire. They urged a degree of realism in relation to the choreography of Sinn Féin admission and on the decommissioning issue. The request for a further meeting would be submitted to the Government.



Sean Ó hUiginn

19 May 1997

SECRET

Meeting with Representatives of Sinn Féin -- 17th May, 1997  
and contacts subsequent to it

Present:

Official Side: Mr. Paddy Teahon, Mr. Tim Dalton, Mr. Sean O hUiginn

Sinn Féin: Mr. Gerry Adams, Mr. Pat Doherty, Mr. Aidan McAteer, Ms. Rita O'Hare.

1. The meeting began with a protest by Mr. Adams about the media presentation of the meeting. To state that it was being held in the context of an "imminent cessation" was totally unacceptable. Sinn Féin were operating on the basis of their mandate, and working towards meaningful negotiations. The "spin" which had been put on the meeting was counter-productive to the project in hand. A ceasefire was not imminent from the present meeting and people would wonder on what basis the meeting was being held. He urged a "more measured" approach to the public presentation. Because of the limited time available for the meeting, he was anxious to move quickly to the substantive agenda. The official side should indicate what they wanted Sinn Féin to do, and vice versa. The Irish Government would be familiar with the four points set out in the statement of 10th October.
2. Mr. Teahon concurred on the importance of identifying the specific points on how the project could be moved forward quickly. He stressed that the official side were meeting Sinn Féin as officials. While Sinn Féin were "their own masters" the official side were bound very rigidly by the

instructions given by the Government and set out publicly. The Official side stressed that the Government presentation would have to be consistent with these stated positions and also stressed the damage if the current meeting or any aspect of it became caught up in any party-political election agenda. That would be an untenable position.

3. Mr. Adams said he understood that officials had to follow their instructions. However, public presentation was best agreed in advance. He repeated that it would be "anti-democratic" not to recognise the mandate given by the people who had chosen Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin were anxious to use that mandate to deal with the problem and move forward. He accepted that the dialogue with the Government had to be a two-way street and that the meeting would be best to look at the "Realpolitik" of the present situation.
4. Mr. Dalton drew attention to the unhelpful terms of the most recent Sinn Féin statement, which seemed to fly in the face of the general expectation that Sinn Féin would use its influence and persuasive powers to advance the prospects for a ceasefire.
5. At Mr. Teahon's suggestion, it was agreed to address substantive issues, and to leave any further discussion of the presentational aspects to the end of the meeting. Mr. Adams mentioned he had asked that John Hume be informed of the fact of the meeting. (In the course of the meeting, Ms. O'Hare took a telephone call indicating that knowledge of the meeting was now public).
6. Turning to the substantive agenda, Mr. Adams expressed very forcefully his annoyance at the Blair speech, the full text of which he had read only that morning. It totally misread the mood of the nationalist community in Northern Ireland, who had just registered the highest nationalist vote ever.

Sinn Féin could make some allowance for pragmatic balancing, but the speech went "totally over the top". It suggested that commitment to the union was the basic underpinning of British policy. Commending the loyalist ceasefire for being "formally maintained" was particularly insensitive on the very day of Sean Browne's funeral. The only constitutional change envisaged was unilateral Irish constitutional change. He himself would be responding in a speech on Monday. However, the Irish Government needed to respond at their level by setting out strongly Irish national interests. That should be done not "a la Oxford speech", but on the lines of the Taoiseach's Meath Association speech of last year.

7. Mr. Adams developed a more general criticism of the new Labour Government. The treatment of the Framework Document in the Blair speech had been less than generous. Metaphors of trains leaving stations were unconvincing. Mo Mowlam's statement on decommissioning was like something left behind by Mayhew and recycled by them. He had some hope that her less problematic language on this issue in Derry was due to the signals they had sent her. His real worry was that the officials who had ruined the last attempt at peace would now show their ability to undermine yet again the capacity for progress.
8. Mr. Teahon stressed the potential of the situation. Mr. Blair was very focussed and if he set out to transform the situation, he had the will and the capacity to do it.
9. Mr. Adams gave an account of the limited contact which they had had with the new Government to date. He had sent a fax to Mr. Blair and Ms. Mowlam on their election asking for a meeting, but saying they were not going public with the request. They had had a response from the

Government welcoming the fact that the request was not public and promising a more considered response later. The message also stressed the importance of "events on the ground". Sinn Féin had drawn attention to their concern about very worrying "events on the ground" in terms of loyalist killings, etc. They had also asked for facilities at Westminster to pick up their Parliamentary passes. Sinn Féin had then heard through Mr. Hume of the speech the Prime Minister proposed to make. Notwithstanding their strong reservations about the speech, they had responded they would do the meeting. It appeared Quentin Thomas would be leading on the British side. They would probably field the same team as before (Martin McGuinness, Gerry Kelly, etc.).

10. Mr. Adams asked that the Irish Government should use its influence as much as possible to ensure that this meeting with the British Government amounted to a real engagement. That had been lacking in previous meetings with officials. Mr. Adams and Mr. McAteer stressed the damage that would be done if the meetings led nowhere. Sinn Féin wanted to be able to confirm to the IRA that there was now a prospect of credible real negotiations. The Republican position had been set out. All negotiating fat had been cut off that position over the last eighteen months. Sinn Féin had followed the advice of the Irish Government to go only for what was do-able.
  
11. Mr. Adams stressed the importance of confidence-building. Not one prisoner had been transferred to Ireland since Pat Kelly. "Dingus" McGee had not seen his wife since August 1994. The crowds which mobbed Tony Blair were crying out for hope. What Blair had said would harden attitudes. John Hume was "out of sync" in his over-enthusiastic reception for the speech. The Roisin McAliskey case had to be taken into account (even if some

Republicans felt that, as a remand prisoner, the McAliksey case should not be taken out of context).

12. On decommissioning, Mr. Adams said he felt it personally very difficult to get the Republican movement as a whole to take a pragmatic view of the matter. It had to be handled in a way that made it transparently clear that this was simply one of the issues which needed to be addressed and resolved. The Republican movement had shifted its position hugely on this over the last eighteen months. They now accepted that it was something to be resolved alongside other issues.
13. Mr. Adams thought the timeframe should not be a major problem. They thought in terms of six months or so. The Taoiseach had spoken of six to nine months or a year. They would not "fall out" on precise duration in this ball-park.
14. On entry to the Talks, Sinn Féin were looking for "immediate entry". They accepted this had to be choreographed. Jim Steinberg of the White House had suggested that in a contact with him the entire issue boiled down to Sinn Féin entry. Mr. Adams said he had demurred: The essential reassurance to give to the IRA was that there would be no repeat of the last twelve months and that there should be *real* talks. The two Governments would have to drive the process. The unionists would inevitably look for minimalist movement. He added that it was particularly difficult for nationalists to hear lectures from loyalist spokesmen that Sinn Féin could not be in talks without a ceasefire, given what was being done by loyalists on the ground, and given the enormous disproportion between the mandate of Sinn Féin and that of the loyalist parties.

15. Mr. Dalton stressed the inevitability of some difficulty and resistance on the unionist side. Mr. Adams agreed that Sinn Féin would have to factor that in. It was difficult only if the unionists were given their way.
16. Mr. Teahon sketched out ways in which the four points of concern to Sinn Féin might be addressed. It was, however, very much a “chicken and egg” situation. The more people were convinced the Republican movement meant real business, the more they would be prepared to withstand the various pressures, but also vice versa. A sense of the timescale for the project was also needed, so as to choreograph the different elements.
17. Mr. Adams said they would be doing a re-worked version of the four points in the October 10th statement. It would be more succinct and clear. If he got those, he would go to the “army” and, in his view, they would have to have a ceasefire on that basis whether they liked it or not. As to timeframe, he would need whatever time it was necessary to process agreement on the points, and then they would need some time in turn to sort it out. If the British Government met and agreed the four points, he would look for the commitment straight away. He would however want to get the US involved, as guarantors, and they would want some centre-stage role for John Hume. After agreement on the four points, all that was needed was some time to choreograph matters to everyone’s satisfaction, and some time for the IRA’s internal processes.
18. Mr. Teahon pressed whether this was a matter of a week or two. Mr. Adams said he could not be that specific, but confirmed a very strong sense of urgency and that speed was of the essence. The election in the South was not a problem. (He referred, somewhat inconclusively at one point, to “ten days to a fortnight”).



19. In response to a query from Mr. Dalton, Mr. Adams said they would hope to get the piece of paper to us this evening. The four points would also be set out publicly. Mr. McAteer and Mr. Adams again stressed the damage that would be done if a meeting with British officials, in which hopes were invested, shattered expectations.
20. Mr. O hUiginn said on the Blair speech that while we accepted the need for some protective camouflage to cover the welcome outreach to Sinn Féin, we had made very clear to the British in private our dismay at the way in which they had done it. Nevertheless, we hoped that this government wanted the inclusive process to succeed, whereas the previous one probably had decided privately they could not handle it. It was important therefore to work at the relationship with Labour. "Events on the ground" was hugely relevant now, not just for the sake of avoiding harm to people, but for the viability of the project.
21. Mr. O hUiginn summarised the most recent exchanges with the British on decommissioning. We hoped, but could not yet be sure, that they were trying to climb out of the hole which had been dug. We would be anxious to work with them on certain conditions (decommissioning handled totally in line with the Mitchell report, political progress not made hostage to it, the two Governments taking greater ownership and ensuring that it was not used as a tactical blocking mechanism, etc.). Subject to those conditions, we would be anxious to make conciliatory gestures, including possibly setting up the verification commission as of now.
22. Mr. O hUiginn stressed the likely problem with Sinn Féin's immediate entry into talks. In the real order of things, a delay of a couple of weeks could not be a deciding factor, although he accepted that the symbolism of a delay

could be crucial. Part of the problem with choreography, was that the timetable for the talks was not entirely clear. The Irish Government would certainly support the reopening date and be present on June 3rd. After that, the outcome of the election, the likely unionist position, etc., were so many imponderables. Realistically, the Labour Government would not want a "Tuesday ceasefire, Wednesday talks" scenario. It would minimise flak if they could include Sinn Féin on terms which could be presented as similar to those of the previous Government. That is why it was crucial for events on the ground to hold in a very positive way. With goodwill, that might be used retrospectively as part of a formula to ease the situation, although this should not be taken in any way as qualifying the basic goal of an unequivocal and formal restoration as of now.

23. Mr. Adams said it would be a "Tuesday, Tuesday situation". Any suggestion of a "decontamination" period would be fatal to the enterprise. The "choreography" should make clear that from the moment of the ceasefire, Sinn Féin had the same rights as other parties.
24. There followed a somewhat inconclusive exchange between officials and Sinn Féin on this issue. In response to urgings for some realistic flexibility, Mr. Adams stressed very strongly the need for Sinn Féin to be treated exactly the same as other parties. At the same time he seemed to accept that the uncertainties of the situation meant it was difficult to say what an acceptable "choreography" involved in practice. He stressed the importance of immediate access to Castle Buildings as one important psychological test for them.
25. On the decommissioning issue, Mr. Adams accepted the point that the unionists were quite likely to continue to use this as a blocking mechanism

and that procedurally at least the Governments had to find a way around this. He said however that Sinn Féin had factored that in. The crucial test in their eyes was the two Governments to have a clear, firm and acceptable position on the issue. He repeated again that the process had to be "Government led". He stressed also his view that the pro-union stance of the Blair speech had put an onus on the Government to balance the record. There was a new mood in the nationalist community. After Drumcree the nationalist community were now more adamant than ever there could be no internal settlement.

26. Mr. Teahon and Mr. Dalton drew attention to the dangers of setting out the four points in tablets of stone before the meeting with the British Government. Mr. Adams implied that the public statement would be in rather generic terms on the lines of his Irish Times article.
27. Mr. Dalton stressed the importance of an early meeting with the British Government, since any delay would be misunderstood, and some provision for ice-breaking contacts should be factored in in any case. Mr. Adams again stressed the hope that the Irish Government would use its influence on the British Government to ensure a real engagement, and suggested that there would be great value in Martin McGuinness, as the leader of the British delegation, having a session with Irish Officials, to "get his head around" the meeting with the British. Irish Officials stressed that they were on a very restricted mandate from the Government, and political clearance would be necessary before they could make any such commitment.
28. The meeting concluded with an exchange on the logistics of transmitting the Sinn Féin paper, and on the best way to ensure a mutually acceptable press presentation of the current contact.

29. (Sinn Féin subsequently confirmed to Mr. Teahon that the meeting with British officials had been set for Wednesday next, and repeated the request for a meeting with Mr. McGuinness before then). The paper faxed to Mr. Teahon is attached.



Sean Ó hUiginn

19 May 1997

Draft  
15/5/97.

To be effective in achieving a lasting peace settlement, a negotiation process must address all the issues which have led to conflict and division. Sinn Fein will bring to the negotiations an Irish republican analysis and perspective of how conflict can best be resolved and a lasting peace established. Our objective is to end British rule in Ireland. We seek national self-determination, and the unity and independence of Ireland as a sovereign state. That is our objective in approaching any negotiations.

It also is our view and the democratic norm that our democratic mandate should allow us unconditional access to any talks affecting the future of those who vote for our party.

According to the British legislation setting up the talks if there was an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cessation of August 1994, Sinn Fein would be invited to participate in the negotiations.

So in line with the legislation setting up the talks Sinn Fein's entry into full participation in the negotiations on the basis of equality with all other parties should immediately follow on from an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cessation of August 1994.

#### **Meaningful and inclusive negotiations.**

There are 4 core issues which need to be resolved if a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations is genuinely being offered.

These are:

- 1) Confidence building.
- 2) The removal of preconditions.
- 2) A timeframe for the negotiations.
- 4) Sinn Fein's entry into negotiations.

Absolute clarity is essential on all these matters.

#### **1) Confidence Building.**

If trust and confidence is to be built then the British government should outline a programme of specific confidence building measures.

The issues which need to be addressed as part of a programme of confidence building measures are:

A. Those issues which fall into the equality and democratic rights agenda and which address political, economic, social and cultural discrimination. These issues do not require any negotiation. They can and should be addressed immediately.

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The principles of equality of treatment, equality of opportunity and parity of esteem would have to apply across the political, cultural, economic, social, legal and security spectrum.

B. Both governments would also need to urgently address a demilitarisation agenda dealing with issues such as:  
political prisoners;  
emergency legislation; and  
policing.

## 2) The Removal of Preconditions.

The two governments should outline how the obstacle of decommissioning is to be removed so that this issue can be properly addressed along with all other issues without blocking the negotiations.

The removal of the gun from the political equation in Ireland is a clear objective of a lasting peace settlement. Sinn Féin is totally committed to resolving all issues through negotiations, including the issue of disarmament, decommissioning and demilitarisation. Sinn Féin is willing to address all aspects of the Report of the International Body and to sign up to the 6 Mitchell Principles in the context of our participation in inclusive negotiations.

Our party is prepared to consider any proposals which address the need to take all the guns out of Irish politics and we will be putting forward, for consideration, our proposals on this issue.

However, it is clear at this time, 12 months after the commencement of the talks at Stormont, that the issue of decommissioning is being used as a block on the overall negotiations process, thus preventing movement towards an agreement which would resolve all of the vexed issues. If real progress is to be made and the substantive issues addressed then this situation must be corrected.

## 3) A Timeframe for the Conduct of the Negotiations.

The two governments should propose a timeframe and calendar, in our view in the region of 6 months, for the conduct of the negotiations. At this point both governments will review the negotiations process and if there is not sufficient progress the two governments will proceed with the substantive issues.

The Stormont talks have, after 12 months, not yet begun to address the substantive issues. The loss of confidence as a result is obvious. Confidence and momentum needs to be injected.

There needs to be some structural device to insure that unionist politicians, as the incumbents and beneficiaries of the status quo, cannot exploit that advantage by using an open ended negotiating process as a tactical instrument to ward off or delay, rather than seek agreement on political change.

The two governments have already taken such a leading role in relation to a number of issues including both the chairing of the talks and the ground rules for the talks. The alternative, as we have seen since June 10, is endless stalling and obstruction.

**4) Sinn Féin's entry into negotiations.**

The British government should state clearly that Sinn Féin will join the negotiations immediately following an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cessation of August 1994.