

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Mr Whelan Secretary General
To see, please. I am also
13/1/2000 copying D/FA, Dr Mansergh, the Taoiseach
and Mr. Whelan.

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

12/1/2000

Views of Sir Reg Empey on facilitating Sinn Féin in the institutions of this State

Note

1. I previously mentioned orally to colleagues the views on the above expressed to me in London on 16 December last by Sir Reg Empey, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Investment in the Northern Ireland Executive. However, in view of some recent papers and ongoing consideration of this issue, I thought that I should make a written note of what he said.

2. Our conversation took place in the wings of the buffet lunch in Lancaster House which took place following the inaugural meeting of the British-Irish Council there, on the morning of Friday, 16 December, 1999. The Irish Government Ministerial team and most of my official colleagues had gone on to No. 10 Downing Street for the inaugural meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, as had First Minister Trimble and Deputy First Minister Mallon. I had stayed at Lancaster House, in the belief that courtesy required that at least one senior Irish official should remain there to interact over lunch with the representatives of the devolved administrations in the UK, and of the smaller island entities.

3. I had the opportunity for some discussion with Mr. Owen Kelly of the Scottish Executive staff and with the Chief Minister of the Isle of Man and his Chief Executive. The main conversation of interest was with Sir. Reg Empey.

4. He clearly intended to use the opportunity to convey a message. Unprompted by me, he was evidently aware of Sinn Féin wishes to have arrangements made, in or around the Oireachtas, to allow some form of participation of representatives elected in Northern Ireland and that thought was being given in Dublin as to how far, and in what way, to accommodate Sinn Féin wishes. He counselled that the Government in Dublin should exercise great caution in handling this issue. He warned against underestimating the adverse impact on unionist attitudes and opinion that injudicious steps could have. To go too far in a way that would suggest to unionists that the settlement now reached on constitutional issues was not a stable or secure one would have strong adverse effects and could affect adversely the position of David Trimble. I did not deny that the issue was under consideration in Dublin and undertook to convey his message to appropriate quarters.

5. In regard to the operation of the Northern Ireland Executive, he indicated that it was going reasonably well. In its normal operation, he did not foresee any

Mrs Smyth
For file
17/1/2000

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difficulties e.g. in relation to a programme for Government, that could not be surmounted, despite the varying perspectives on policy of the different parties participating in the Executive.

He referred in this connection, to the experience of coalition Governments in the South over the past ten years.

6. He indicated that his party would not be beating the drum over the weeks to come on the issue of the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. The ball was in the court of the paramilitaries and his party would simply wait to see whether or not they came up to the mark.

Walter P. Kirwan
Assistant Secretary
Northern Ireland Division.

12 January, 2000.

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