



HOUSE OF COMMONS
Tel: 01-219-5234

From: KEN MAGINNIS, M.P. *Fermanagh & South Tyrone*

cc. ① PS/SofS (BCL)
PS/Mr Hanley (BCL)
PS/PUS (BCL)
PS/Mr Eell
Mr Thomas
Mr Bell
Mr Alton
Mr DJR Hill

20 BROOKE STREET,
DUNGANNON,
BT71 7AN
Tel: 08687 - 23265

LA
16 JUL
SOS/369/92

12 July, 1992.

The Rt Hon Sir Patrick Mayhew, MP
Secretary of State for N.I. *Mr Maccabe*
Stormont Castle *Mr D A Hill **
BELFAST.

② SofS - to see

* Handed to me at 6.00pm in Parl. Bldg. today. Grateful for advice and a draft reply for SofS signature by return. Dis/7

Dear Sir Patrick,

I was disturbed to read, in the Belfast Telegraph (09-07-92), that Robert Atkins had met an Omagh Council delegation which included a Sinn Fein councillor.

More surprising still was the statement issued by a spokeswoman on behalf of the NIO. She said that the meeting did not represent any policy shift and went on,

"The Government continues to hold its frequently-expressed view that, so long as Sinn Fein endorses violence, we will not engage with them as if they were a normal democratic party".

However, she added what appears to be a clear contradiction,

"Inevitably Ministers and some Government officials will have direct or indirect contact with elected Sinn Fein representatives in respect of local matters and constitutional issues".

Presumably should have read "constitutional"

It is important to my Party, especially at this time, that the matter is clarified. We would expect that the "no contact" rule would be rigidly adhered to, and would have hoped, if an error had occurred, that an admission and a few simple words of regret would have been forthcoming.

I am disappointed that my own party colleagues and the Clerk to the Council did not ensure that Robert was saved unnecessary embarrassment.

It would be helpful if you could reassure me that the practice of "no ministerial or official contact with Sinn Fein" which we have, till now, been able to take for granted, is to continue.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

FAX 08687-25569

13.9.91

2. Prison might just shy to PAB, given the MA

GENT

ASST SEC 16 JUL 1992
MM
498/7 SEC

HEAD OF THE N.I.
16 JUL 1992
CIVIL SERVICE

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MINISTERS CASE

Reference : SOS/00369/92

Raised By : KEN MAGINNIS ESQ MP

Subject : THE PRACTICE OF MINISTERIAL/OFFICIAL CONTACT WITH SINN FEIN

ACTION REQUIRED

1. Please provide advice and draft reply for Secretary of State's signature no later than 20/07/1992.
2. Draft reply to be provided by :
 1. MR D A HILL, ESL
3. Reply to be co-ordinated with MR D A HILL, ESL.

W/ by
Mr M. O'Sullivan
- for free
16/7

4. Circulated to :-
- | | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| PS/Secretary of State (B) | PS/Secretary of State (L) | PS/Mr Hanley (B) |
| PS/Mr Hanley (DENI) | PS/Mr Hanley (L) | PS/PUS (B) |
| PS/PUS (L) | PS/Mr Fell | Mr Thomas |
| Mr Alston | Mr C Maccabe | Mr D J R Hill (CPL) |
| Mr P Bell | | |

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

Letter Received : 16/07/1992 Interim Reply Sent : ___/___/___

Letter Acknowledged : 16/07/1992 Final Reply Sent : ___/___/___

Referred To	Date	Referred To	Date
MR D A HILL, ESL	16/07/1992		

13.9.91
2. Please insert given the
MAA

DRAFT

Mr K Maginnis MP
20 Brooke Street
Dungannon
BT71 7AN

FOR SIGNATURE BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE

Thank you for your letter of 12 July about Robert Atkins' recent meeting with Omagh District Council in which you seek clarification of policy on Government contacts with Sinn Fein.

It has never in fact been the practice to have no contacts at all with representatives of Sinn Fein. That would not be possible bearing in mind the fact that Sinn Fein councillors (and in the past a Sinn Fein MP) have constituents to represent and we as a Government have a duty to ensure that those constituents are treated on a par with those represented by councillors of the constitutional political parties. It is for that reason that, as was explained to Mr Trimble in a letter from the Prime Minister in 1991, it is inevitable that Ministers and officials will have some indirect contact with elected Sinn Fein representatives in respect of local matters and constituency issues. But of course the Government do not and will not seek meetings with Sinn Fein representatives on any issues least of all constitutional ones. I fear the Belfast Telegraph report, which unfortunately my officials have been unable to trace, appears to have misquoted the spokeswoman. I gather the Irish News of the same date in reporting the event did not make the same mistake but referred, correctly to constituency matters.

Turning to the question of the consistency of the Government's attitude to Sinn Fein, I think that our attitude is consistent. We will not engage with Sinn Fein as if it were a normal political party because Ministers will not receive at Stormont (or Westminster) delegations containing Sinn Fein representatives, nor will they involve Sinn Fein in talks on political and constitutional

CPL1/13924

13.9.91 2. 10/5/91
given the MA

Ministers. Our aim is to limit contact with Sinn Fein elected representatives to the minimum consistent with safeguarding the interests of their constituents.

On the other hand I believe it would be intolerable to put ourselves in a position where Sinn Fein could effectively prevent Ministers visiting District Councils, on which Sinn Fein has representation, by indicating that they intend to be present. In such circumstances there is inevitably some contact; but Ministers do not seek or encourage it.

I hope you will appreciate that Government must inevitably have some very limited dealings with Sinn Fein elected representatives and these may involve personal contacts on the part of officials and even Ministers. These are however not at all of the same kind as we have with elected representatives of constitutional parties and, most importantly, they are not of our choosing.

Mr. P. Bell

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Letter Received 16/07/1982
Letter Acknowledged 16/07/1982

Referred To	Date	Referred To	Date
Mr. D. A. Hill, Sec.	16/07/1982		

CPL1/13924

13.9.91 2. Answer must be given the MA

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M:

D A HILL
ESL DIVISION
17 July 1992

cc: PS/S of S (L)
PS/PUS (L&B)
~~PS/Mr Fell~~
Mr Thomas (L&B)
Mr Bell (L&B)
Mr Alston
Mr Wood (L&B)
Mr D J R Hill
Mr Maccabe

1. PS/MR HANLEY (L&B)
2. PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (B)



SINN FEIN - LETTER FROM MR KEN MAGINNIS MP

You asked for advice and a draft reply to Mr Ken Maginnis's letter of 12 July to the Secretary of State about Mr Atkins' meeting with an Omagh District Council delegation, in Omagh, which included a Sinn Fein councillor. He refers to a report in the Belfast Telegraph of 9 July.

2. Mr Maginnis alleges a contradiction in Government policy on contacts with Sinn Fein as reported in the Belfast Telegraph, and requests reassurance that the practice of "no ministerial or official contact with Sinn Fein" is to continue.

3. Mr Maginnis' letter is based on a misconception of present practice exacerbated by what appears to be a piece of misreporting in the Belfast Telegraph (although we have been unable to trace any report of Mr Atkins' meeting in the edition of the Telegraph of 9 July held in London and Belfast Press Offices.)

4. Mr Atkins did indeed have the meeting as reported and it was known beforehand that a Sinn Fein councillor would be present. Mr May's minute of 6 July to PS/Mr Atkins (copied to PS/S of S) (Annex A) set out the background and for the reasons given in that minute recommended that the meeting should go ahead).

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5 This was consistent with present policy on contacts with Sinn Fein which is set out in the 'lines to take' attached to Mr Durbin's minute to PS/Mr Atkins of 8 July in response to a request for advice on the handling of a call from the Reverend Willie McCrea on the subject of Mr Atkins' proposed visit (Annex B). As will be seen from that briefing what we have said in the past is that Ministers and officials will inevitably have direct or indirect contacts with elected Sinn Fein representatives in respect of "local matters and constituency issues." The Irish News reporting the same meeting got the reference to constituency as opposed constitutional matters right.

6. It is perhaps a little surprising that Mr Maginnis has taken quite the line he has since only last year the Prime Minister wrote to David Trimble MP setting out policy in much the same terms as described above. (PM's letter of 1 February 1991 - Annex C).

7. It would in fact be impossible to have no contacts with Sinn Fein elected representatives since this could disadvantage their constituents. However, in line with the policy of not engaging with them as if they were a normal democratic party, personal contacts are restricted to the minimum necessary and Government does not engage with Sinn Fein on political/constitutional issues and correspondence is only at official level.

8. A draft reply clarifying policy for Mr Maginnis is attached for the Secretary of State's signature if agreed.

(Signed) D A HILL

D A HILL
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DIVISION
OAB Ext 6495

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13.9.91 2 11:50
given the MA

197187.



Northern Ireland Office
Stormont Castle
Belfast BT4 3ST



Ken Maginnis Esq MP
20 Brooke Street
DUNGANNON
BT71 7AN

UNDER/ SEC 758/7
24 JUL 1992
CENT SEC

22 July 1992

m h
D M Jenkins

Dear Ken:

Thank you for your letter of 12 July about Robert Atkins' recent meeting with Omagh District Council and the policy on Government contacts with Sinn Fein.

It has never in fact been the practice to have no contacts of any kind with representatives of Sinn Fein. Because Sinn Fein councillors (like a former Sinn Fein MP) have constituents to represent, including those who did not vote for them, we as a Government have a duty to ensure that those constituents are treated on a par with those represented by councillors of the constitutional political parties. As the Prime Minister has already explained to David Trimble in a letter last year, it is inevitable that Ministers and officials will have some indirect contact with elected Sinn Fein representatives in respect of local matters and constituency issues. But of course the Government does not, and will not, seek meetings with Sinn Fein representatives on any broader issues, least of all constitutional ones. I fear the Belfast Telegraph report, which unfortunately my officials have been unable to trace, appears to have misquoted the spokeswoman. I gather the Irish News of the same date did not make the same mistake in reporting the event but referred, correctly, to constituency matters.

I think that our attitude is consistent. We shall not engage with Sinn Fein as if it were a normal political party, because Ministers will not receive at Stormont (or Westminster) delegations containing Sinn Fein representatives; nor shall we involve Sinn Fein in talks on political and constitutional matters. Our aim is to limit



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contact with Sinn Fein elected representatives to the minimum consistent with safeguarding the interests of their constituents.

On the other hand I believe it would be intolerable to put ourselves in a position where Sinn Fein could effectively prevent Ministers visiting District Councils, on which Sinn Fein has representation, by indicating that they intend to be present. In such circumstances there is inevitably some contact; but Ministers do not seek or encourage it.

*James
Paddy*

2. Mr Maginnis alleges a contradiction in Government policy on contacts with Sinn Fein as reported in the Belfast Telegraph, and requests reassurance that the practice of "no ministerial or official contact with Sinn Fein" is to be maintained.

Hcc hnt PS/SOS (B+L)
PS/MR. HANLEY (DENI, BTH)

3. Mr Maginnis' letter is based on a misapprehension of the practice excoersted by what appears to be a piece in the Belfast Telegraph (although we have been advised by report of Mr Atkins' meeting in the office of the July 2nd in London and Belfast Press Offices.)

PS/PUS (BTH)
PS/MR FELL
MR. THOMAS
MR. BELL
MR. ALSTON
MR. WOOD
MR. D. J. R. HILL
MR. DPHILL
MR. MACCABE
SOS 369/92

4. Mr Atkins did indeed have the meeting as reported above and it was understood that a Sinn Fein councillor would be present. Mr May's minute of 5 July to PS/Mr Atkins (copied to PS/S ST 5) (Annex A) set out the background and for the reasons given in that minute recommended that the meeting should go ahead.

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13.9.11

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