

CONFIDENTIAL

The Cabinet -

Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion and invited the Secretary of State for Social Security to proceed accordingly.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Northern Ireland

Previous

Reference:

CM(94) 1.2

2. THE FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH SECRETARY said that he had just visited the United States (US) where he had had an opportunity to discuss with senior members of the Administration the US decision to grant Mr Gerry Adams, the President of Sinn Fein, a visa to visit the United States. The decision had been taken only after prolonged debate. The Irish Government and Mr John Hume, the Leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, had argued in favour, the United Kingdom against. In discussions between the White House and the Prime Minister's office strict conditions, requiring a renunciation of violence and support for the Anglo-Irish Joint Declaration, had been agreed as the basis for the granting of a visa. They had been put to Mr Adams but he had rejected them. Nonetheless, contrary to expectations, the visa had been granted. The visit itself had been a substantial media opportunity for Sinn Fein with 48 hours of intense and sympathetic publicity. Mr Adams however had said nothing new and had given no indication of a disposition to renounce violence. The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary had spoken in strong terms to Vice-President Gore and to a number of leading Senators pointing out that the British Government's predictions of the likely damaging consequences of such a visit had turned out to be correct. There was some evidence that those in the United States who had argued in favour of the granting of a visa were disappointed and apprehensive and that the Administration might therefore be wary of involvement in the issue in future. But the Administration's decision was revealing about the line up of forces in Washington. Mr Christopher, the Secretary of State, Mr Foley, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Mr Seitz, the United States Ambassador in London, had all argued in support of the British Government. But President Clinton and the White House had been swayed by the views of the Irish Government, Mr Hume and his need for Congressional votes on domestic issues.

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In discussion, it was noted that the position of the Irish Government appeared to have shifted. Previously they had professed support both for what they described as the peace process and for the three-stranded political talks. But Mr Reynolds, the Taoiseach, had invested a great deal in the former and now seemed to want to put the political talks on the back-burner, at least until after Sinn Fein's annual conference due to take place later in the month. At the recent meeting of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, the Irish side had been resistant to any commitment to progress in the political talks and the discussions with them had been difficult. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had warned Mr Spring, the Tanaiste, privately of the need not to alienate the Ulster Unionists and, in particular, to retain the confidence of Mr Molyneaux, the Leader of the Official Unionist Party; and he would be floating some ideas for the future administration of Northern Ireland. These would however be general ideas rather than, as had been suggested in the press, precise proposals. It was necessary to keep alongside the Irish Government. Progress in Northern Ireland could only be achieved on a consensual basis. But it was clear that Sinn Fein had so far accepted the incentives offered to them without any real movement towards ceasing violence.

In further discussion, it was noted that it would be damaging to the wider relationship with the United States to draw public attention to the fact that the United States Administration had reneged on a set of conditions for the granting of a visa to Mr Adams. The emphasis in the Government's public position should be on the failure of Mr Adams to make the specific commitment to the cessation of violence which those in the US Administration who had favoured his visit had been hoping for. As regards the position of the Irish Government, gullibility, rather than perfidy, was the more likely explanation of their behaviour. Mr Reynolds seemed to be convinced of the need to help Mr Adams overcome resistance within the Irish Republican Army to the abandonment of violence and participation in the political process. But the Irish Government's recent behaviour, both in pressing for a visa for Mr Adams and in failing to provide any warning to the British Government of their intention not to renew the broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein, was not consistent with the attitude of partnership for which they had previously professed support. There was a case for putting their desire for partnership to the test, for example by pressing the idea of shared presentation of the Joint Declaration in the United States.

The Cabinet -

1. Took note.