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MR. F. MURRAY

MR. P. TEAHON

MR. S. DONLON

MR. T. DALTON

Meeting between Taoiseach and Tanaiste and ~~Sinn Fein~~
Government Buildings, 28th March, 1995

Present were:

Irish Government: Taoiseach, Tanaiste, Mr. S. Donlon and the undersigned.

Sinn Fein: Mr. G. Adams, Mr. P. Doherty, Ms. L. Breathnach and Ms. R. O'Hare.

1. ~~Mr. Adams~~ began by regretting the public profile of the meeting. He had tried to play it down. It had been agreed with Mr. Teahon that there would be a meeting in the wake of the Joint Framework Document and the US visit. He had hoped the meeting between British Ministers and Sinn Fein would be behind them at that stage. He indicated that in addition to the agenda for such a meeting, he would wish to discuss the overall Irish Government strategy for "moving the situation forward" and also prison issues, including prisoners in Portlaoise.
2. As regards meeting the British at Ministerial level, he thought the British had bogged the process down, probably deliberately. They had used other issues such as the permanence debate, the clarification issue, etc., to slow things in the past. Their position was deplorable in terms of management of the peace process. Republicans were asking if they could not move the British even on the issue of Ministerial contact, how they could hope to move them on more substantive issues.
3. Mr. Adams said a letter had been issued to the British earlier that morning. (He passed this to the Irish side). He outlined the previous exchanges between Mr. McGuinness

and the British Government. Sinn Fein had suggested two changes in the agenda suggested: One was to remove the word "criminal" from the reference to "policing in criminal justice". The second was to suggest that decommissioning be handled as "demilitarisation including the decommissioning of arms".

4. The first they know of the British response was a briefing to the media, highlighting British rejection of the demilitarisation question, thus making things more difficult to resolve. British attitudes on demilitarisation was all the more surprising in that the matter had been on the agenda of the meeting of the 16th January and the NIO statement of the 7th February had included the remark "Sinn Fein emphasised the need to address the issue of demilitarisation across the board etc". Mr. Adams said that there was an issue of principle and he hoped the Irish Government would take a stand on it. Unlike the loyalist paramilitaries, Sinn Fein had a mandate. Furthermore, the agenda for dialogue was supposed to encompass all matters of concern to either side. He did not now know where things stood at present. Mr. McGuinness himself thought a resolution was near.
5. The Taoiseach and Tanaiste stressed the need for a practical agenda which would allow everyone to move to Ministerial talks as quickly as possible. The Taoiseach indicated that if there was a formula which appeared reasonable to the Government, they would use their best endeavours with the British to have it accepted.
6. There followed a long discussion on ways in which the agenda put forward by the British might be reshaped to meet the needs of all sides. Mr. Adams objected to the reference in item 2 of the British agenda to "the cessation of violence", on the grounds that British violence was continuing.

7. The Irish side stressed the sensitivities, particularly among Tory backbenchers, in the wake of the US visit. It would be necessary to get a formula which took everyone off any hook.
8. Mr. Adams made clear that, since the British had now publicly flagged the demilitarisation issue, he needed to have it mentioned on the agenda. The Taoiseach suggested it might be included under paragraph 2, e.g. on the lines "Other practical consequences of the cessation of violence, including Sinn Fein views on demilitarisation, etc."
9. Mr. Adams also objected to the fact that the decommissioning of arms was the only heading to have sub-headings spelled out. He made it clear that his objection was not to any British intentions to raise these points, but to the special treatment of the decommissioning item, in contrast to other agenda items. The Tanaiste suggested that the sub-headings might be dropped from the face of the agenda, on the understanding however that the British would be raising them.
10. In the temporary absence of the Taoiseach, who was attending the order of business in the Dail, discussion continued in an inconclusive way on the agenda. Mr. Adams made clear that the Sinn Fein priority was to launch talks at Ministerial level, but on a basis that did not disadvantage either side tactically.
11. Mr. Adams then raised more general issues about future strategy in the wake of the Framework Document. The Tanaiste explained the particular sensitivities of unionists at present, and the hope that their objections would diminish. It was explained that the two Governments would have a collective stock-taking at official level on the 6th

April, and that Ministers would review the situation at an Anglo-Irish Conference before the end of that month. It was probable the initial contacts would be bilateral rather than collective. The Sinn Fein delegation wondered whether the Irish Government could hold meetings of its own on the Framework Document, e.g. with SDLP, etc. The Irish side thought this would be of limited value, in the absence of unionist participation, and would overlap with the Forum.

12. The Tanaiste thought that the emphasis on arms and the US dimension had crowded out discussion of other matters. The Kilfedder by-election, and indeed the unionist leadership issue generally, was also a distraction. Mr. Adams said that if Clinton had not registered equality of treatment for Sinn Fein, there would have been a major problem. He recorded his appreciation of the help of the Irish Government. He mentioned he intended to return to the States, possibly about the 6th April. The Tanaiste asked that we be kept informed of his intentions and dates in that respect.

13. On the Taoiseach's return, Mr. Adams repeated that in view of the prominence the issue had acquired he could not take demilitarisation formally off the agenda. He also hoped the British would keep details of the agenda out of the public arena, since that added to Sinn Fein's difficulties in reaching agreement. After some further comments from the Taoiseach and Tanaiste, he agreed that he would take on board the various suggestions that had been made, would think them over and come back to the Irish side. The Taoiseach explained that he would wish to become involved in the process only on the basis of a clear understanding of what might be acceptable to Sinn Fein. The Government was anxious not to inadvertently complicate issues between Sinn Fein and the British.

14. The Sinn Fein delegation raised the issue of prisoners at Portlaoise prison. Mr. Doherty asked about the prospect of further releases and the system being applied to decide cases. The Tanaiste explained that a review was ongoing at official level within the Department of Justice. It would not be possible to anticipate the result of that review. The Minister for Justice, who was absent at present, would bring matters to her Government colleagues in due course. Sinn Fein made clear they did not want to enter into a discussion of individual prisoners. They repeated the importance of the issue for them, and the hope that something could be done at Easter.

15. The Sinn Fein delegation also asked about the likely timetable for legislation on the transfer of prisoners. The Irish side explained that it was intended to present the draft Bill to Government on the 11th April. It would depend on the opposition whether a further two weeks consideration time had to be allowed after that.

16. There was a discussion at the end of the meeting on the press presentation. Sinn Fein deplored the fact that the present meeting had been flagged in the media over the weekend. The Taoiseach said he did not believe the publicity had come from Government sources. There was general agreement between the two sides on the value of coordinating such presentation in advance. Mr. Adams also referred to the need to have regard to SDLP sensitivities, and to hold corresponding meetings with them.

17. The Taoiseach and Mr. Adams agreed the very broad lines of press presentation and the meeting, which had lasted almost two hours, then concluded.

Sean O hUiginn
29 March, 1995

Enclosure: Letter dated 29th March from Sinn Fein to Mr.
Quentin Thomas