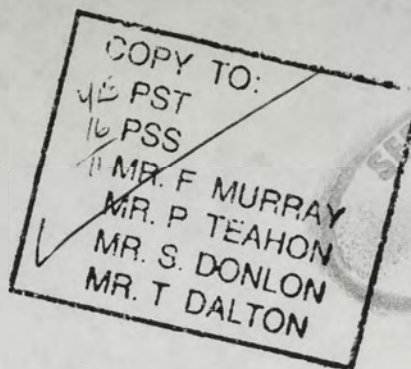


CONFIDENTIAL



Meeting between the Tanaiste and Sinn Fein
Iveagh House -- 16 November, 1995

Present were:

Government side: The Tanaiste and the undersigned.

Sinn Fein side: Mr. Martin McGuinness and Ms. Rita O'Hare

1. The Tanaiste welcomed the delegation and asked Mr. McGuinness for an update.
2. Mr. McGuinness gave a pessimistic account of the present situation: Many were now concluding that the whole basis of the peace process did not exist any more. The initial scepticism in the Republican family about the ability of even a united nationalist front to move the British Government now appeared to be vindicated. The British were not interested in real negotiations and Sinn Fein had enormous difficulty to keep the boat steady.
3. Mr. McGuinness said that while everyone in the Republican movement realised the British Government were to blame, many also felt the Taoiseach was "not on board". This had been crystallised when the Taoiseach refused a meeting with Messrs. Hume and Adams, and had put a position of his own to the British. Sinn Fein could not sell that position to the people who supported

them and if they sought to do so, their position would be "grievously and seriously" undermined. The Taoiseach's London speech had however given some comfort by underlining British responsibility. In spite of everything Sinn Fein believed the British could be moved if a united Irish position did everything possible to canvass the US to engage proactively with the British Government.

4. Mr. McGuinness said that Sinn Fein had been flexible, firstly in accepting an international body which most of their followers "wouldn't touch with a bargepole". He listed various points where they had tried to meet Ancram, but the British had not reciprocated. Their constant reiteration of the Washington three condition showed all too clearly they intended to "jump that up" at the end, irrespective of the body. Instancing the Bosnian experience to show that, even after great bloodshed, people could sit down without pre-conditions, Mr. McGuinness again appealed for the Taoiseach to make a direct appeal to the United States to intervene. Emergency action was needed and the Irish Government, and the Taoiseach in particular, had a crucial role.

5. The Tanaiste said it was necessary to have a realistic view of what the Americans might or might not do. President Clinton's agenda was essentially to stay President. The cancellation of the Japanese trip showed that even the concerns of a major world power took second place when the President's political agenda came under threat. The President had been extremely helpful and accessible. However it was crucial that he should get no unsettling signal at the present time. There would be many voices cautioning him not to visit Ireland, either because of the stalemate, or the possibility that things might go wrong shortly thereafter. The visit was extraordinarily important and Sinn Fein should be careful not to jeopardise it in any way.

6. The Tanaiste made clear that in speaking in London, the Taoiseach was speaking on behalf of the whole Government, as the Tanaiste himself had publicly underlined on the radio on Monday. He recalled the six points which we had put to Major, in the hope that if Major had a problem associating President Clinton with a solution, he could get the problem out of the way before the visit. Major's New Zealand trip had intervened, but we expected a position paper from them before the weekend.

7. The Tanaiste said he was not over-optimistic about the content of that paper, in spite of up-beat briefing in London. He recounted his contacts with British Labour Party figures, in particular Robin Cooke and Mo Mowlam, to suggest that Blair should talk privately to Major about not losing the present unique opportunity. In relation to the Hume/Adams draft, the British could be expected to have extra resistance to that, because of its source. The Irish Government had tried to overcome that problem. The Tanaiste indicated that when the British draft was received, he would have no trouble in working with Sinn Fein on it. He said he shared the general worry about the present stand-off.

7. Mr. McGuinness again recounted his experiences with Michael Ancram and Quentin Thomas, who had showed no willingness to move. The British timeframe was their own. It was more and more obvious that they were hostage to the unionists and to the position at Westminster.

8. The Tanaiste pointed out it was possible that Major might conclude he had nothing to lose and go for a role in the history books. He illustrated the difficulties that Major faced, including the lack of interest in Ireland on the part of his Government colleagues. This had been well illustrated in meetings which the Tanaiste had recently with Portillo and Rifkind.

10. Mr. McGuinness anticipated that the Tories might fight the next election on an anti-devolution pro-union opposition to the Labour Party. Major might well be the biggest Unionist of all. Leadership was about leading and there was no evidence Major was prepared to do that.

9. The Tanaiste objected that leadership was more often about survival. Q hUiginn suggested that in times of stalemate, Sinn Fein had an understandable tendency to reassure their own constituency by reasserting their hardest line. They should however appreciate that that played into British tactics, since these hardline statements made the British Government position look more justifiable. The Tanaiste said that if Gerry Adams had condemned the Republican Sinn Fein bomb, his stock in the South would have "gone through the roof".

10. Mr. McGuinness pointed out the amount of hard work Gerry Adams had done to launch and sustain the peace process. His statements should be looked at against the background of fifteen months of one of the most successful conflict resolution attempts ever. The fate of Rabin reminded the Sinn Fein leaders that their necks were on the line. They were prepared to live, and to die if necessary for this position. But the focus should be on reality. The decommissioning card had prevented all discussion of the real constitutional and other issues for the past fifteen months. The Unionist reaction to Seamus Mallon's RUC proposals suggested they had no interest whatever in movement.

11. Q hUiginn thought the British might seek in their response to emphasise those points where they knew there was a difference between the Irish Government and Sinn Fein. It would be important therefore for Sinn Fein to seek to exercise maximum flexibility in relation to those. The first was the question

of target versus fixed date. He instanced various multilateral meetings, etc., which could be invoked to make a target date more credible. Could Sinn Fein see possibilities there?

11. Mr. McGuinness said the crucial point was whether the Unionists would engage. The whole process was shot through with a unionist veto. The Unionists would not talk to Sinn Fein except on the context of an Assembly. Hume and Mallon had made the SDLP position clear on this. Sinn Fein would not touch the Assembly either.
12. The Tanaiste pointed out that in his conversation with Trimble, Trimble had not mounted a very convincing case for the Assembly. It would be tactically unwise to say to the Unionists that the Assembly proposal could not even be discussed. Nationalists would have ample opportunity in such discussions to make their views on the proposal known.
13. O hUiginn pointed out that the nature of the weapons to be looked at by the international body was a genuinely sensitive issue for the British. There was a lot of potential common ground which could be worked on if there was flexibility all round. Mr. McGuinness said they had asked the British for a formula on this and none had been forthcoming.
14. Drawing the discussion to a close, the Tanaiste again stressed the importance of handling the US dimension very carefully at the present juncture so as not to jeopardise the President's trip.
15. The Tanaiste then raised the question of punishment beatings, pointing out they were totally unacceptable in themselves and a grave tactical liability for Sinn Fein. Mr. McGuinness said that Sinn Fein did not approve such

beatings, but went on to give the usual response on the acceptability of the RUC. The Tanaiste also voiced his serious objections to certain vigilante-type actions by Sinn Fein representatives against drug offenders in Kerry.

16. Mr. McGuinness raised the question of prisoners, in particular the refusal of bail to Quinlivan and McAuley. The Tanaiste made clear there could never have been a question of a promise on bail. Not to have opposed bail would have given a very dangerous opening, also in terms of the on-going negotiations on the transfer of prisoners. Ms. O'Hare said they had not been let get their representative, Ms. Anne O'Sullivan, in contact with the prisoners, who had then followed their lawyer's advice in not seeking bail on the first day.
17. Mr. McGuinness raised the issues of prisoners generally. People were concerned that only four prisoners had been released.
18. It was pointed out that this made a total of thirty-six, and the Tanaiste indicated that other possibilities could be looked at in due course. He stressed that talk of a crisis was counter-productive in that respect. Mr. McGuinness observed that the British would now overtake our totals on Friday.
19. The Sinn Fein side also raised the question of "deportees" in the United States. The Tanaiste outlined the action that had been taken to try to address this problem on a case-by-case basis.
20. At the close of the meeting, Mr. McGuinness and Ms. O'Hare emphasised again the need for a joint approach. The Tanaiste pointed out that the creation of a joint approach was a two-way process. The Irish Government

responsibilities were often wider than those of Sinn Fein. He pointed out the Taoiseach had taken a lot of "flak" both from the British and from the Unionists in relation to Saturday's speech. It was important Sinn Fein should be aware of that and be as flexible and supportive as possible. The Tanaiste stressed again the importance of the Clinton visit and of avoiding all action which might jeopardise it.

Sean Ó hUiginn

16 November 1995