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Meeting with Sinn Féin  
Saturday, 27th January, 1996

Mr Teahon  
Mr Adams  
PST  
PSS  
Mr T Dalton

1. Mr. Teahon and I had a meeting, at their request, with Mr. Aidan McAteer and Ms. Rita O'Hare of Sinn Féin.
2. Mr. McAteer outlined difficulties which the response to the Mitchell Report posed for Sinn Féin. They were being "collared" and put under pressure to say where they stood on the principles. Mr. Adams was seeking to give a positive response to the Mitchell Report. However the wording of the principles involved aspects which Sinn Féin could not accept as policy. They had not as yet worked out precise wording of their own. However, with some change of wording, the principles could be acceptable and the Sinn Féin leadership would argue for them.
3. Mr. McAteer then sketched out their attitude to the six principles:

**Principle (a):** No comment to make.

**Principle (b):** They had difficulty with the word "paramilitary", and their policy was for a total demilitarisation of the situation.

**Principle (c):** Sinn Féin accepted verification by a "third party". They would be anxious to stay with that terminology rather than commit themselves to a Commission, as such.

**Principle (d):** While the thought did not pose any essential difficulty, they would prefer to “oppose the use of force” rather than “renouncing” it.

**Principle (e):** They would wish to specify that the purpose of the negotiating process would be “to find agreement among all the people of Ireland”.

**Principle (f):** They wondered how to define “effective steps”. Sinn Féin were opposed to punishment beatings, etc.

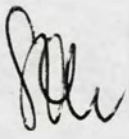
4. The Official Side cautioned against an approach which sought to unpick the principles. Some of the points raised did not seem to affect the essence of the principles. We said that any rewording of them would give rise to an interminable theological debate, and would probably be decoded by the public as essentially a refusal to accept them. We suggested instead that Sinn Féin should engage in an internal education process, to win support for these principles in the terms stated. It would be possible for Sinn Féin to make its position clear on certain issues, e.g. demilitarisation, in the context of other parts of the report, without unpicking the principles as such.

5. We informed Sinn Féin that the Irish Government would seek to bring everyone back to the Mitchell Report, and use the principles as a test of democratic commitment for future talks. Bearing that in mind, Sinn Féin should work towards an unambiguous acceptance of the principles at the appropriate time. If that were not possible for the present, they could point to the doubt about the willingness of the British Government to avail of the report to advance negotiations. Sinn Féin could indicate that if doubts were

removed on that score, they would begin a process aimed at bringing their followers on board, and express optimism about their capacity to do so successfully.

6. Mr. McAteer thought that this might appear “evasive”. Mr. Teahon emphasised again that any tampering with the principles would be grist to the mill of those who said that an election was the only way forward. He thought the Sinn Féin spokespersons should concentrate on the “effective balance” in the Mitchell Report. It contained matters which were challenging to everyone. It was legitimate for Sinn Féin to say that, in order to persuade people to accept those difficulties, it had to be shown that the report opened the way to negotiations. He asked what Sinn Féin would say about the other challenging aspect of the Mitchell Report, the commitment to advancing decommissioning during negotiations.
7. Mr. McAteer said that Sinn Féin had made its position known on that. They accepted that decommissioning would be on the agenda in negotiations, and all these matters could be looked at.
8. There followed some general discussion on the elected body proposal. The Sinn Féin side rehearsed again the various difficulties involved, which they said were all the more acute in a context where the twin-track approach seemed to be off the rails.
9. The meeting concluded with a brief discussion of the forthcoming report from the Forum which has been agreed ad referendum to all the parties. A Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle will study this on Monday. Ms. O’Hare outlined some of the difficulties she foresaw in that discussion. However, the expectation was that all parties would ultimately accept the report, and if so, it would be

adopted at a plenary meeting of the Forum the following Friday. The Official Side underlined the need to use that development positively, to enhance the momentum towards negotiations.



Sean Ó hUiginn

29 January, 1996