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The Commission and Sinn Féin

On 25 April 1983 Gerry Adams, Danny Morrison and eight other representatives of Sinn Féin were received by the Belfast office of the Commission. The Sinn Féin machine used the occasion for publicity and propaganda purposes afterwards.

On 29 April 1983 in expressing concern to Mr Roy Reeve, the new FCO official at the NIO in Belfast, about contact between the authorities and Sinn Féin, I put to Reeve the suggestion, on a purely personal basis, that the British and Irish Governments might jointly request that the Commission should not receive Sinn Féin (my object in doing this was to smoke Reeve out). Reeve's answer was evasive, as I had expected, and I did not hear since from him.

On 30 April I raised the visit with Martin, Head of the Commission Office in Belfast. He said he had had no option but to receive the delegation and that his line had been cleared by Brussels. (Note: I find this convincing and indeed it has been confirmed to me by Commission contacts: the Commission in its relations with Member States must meticulously acknowledge the Institutions of those States, whatever the character of elected representatives may be.)

On 2 June the Department was informed by telephone by the Permanent Representation in Brussels that the British Permanent Representative, Sir Michael Butler, had indicated that he would like to raise with Mr O'Rourke the notion of a joint approach in relation to an alleged proposed visit by Sinn Féin members to the Dublin office of the Commission.

The Department immediately spoke to the acting Head of the Dublin office of the Commission, Mr Peter Doyle, and informed him that the Irish Government would disapprove of such a delegation being received by the Dublin office. Mr Doyle said, and subsequently confirmed, that he had no information about such a possible approach.

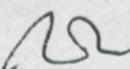
The Department then informed the Permanent Representation that the British Permanent Representative should be informed that the Irish Government had already requested that the Commission should not receive Sinn Féin representatives in Dublin.

Following consultation with the Secretary, we again contacted the Permanent Representation and authorised them to agree to a joint approach to the Commission requesting that the Commission should not receive Sinn Féin representatives either in Belfast or in Dublin or elsewhere. We asked the Permanent Representation to state, when making a joint approach, that we were not intending any criticism of the representative of the Commission in Belfast (who has been helpful to Anglo-Irish Division and who was the Taoiseach's host on an important public occasion in Belfast).

Apparently Butler initially agreed to make a joint approach and subsequently informed our Permanent Representative that he would have to seek instructions before doing so. As of this moment he has not come back to Mr O'Rourke.

My own guess would be that Butler jumped the gun on the basis of garbled information in suggesting the joint approach relating to the Dublin office of the Commission. His subsequent unwillingness to proceed followed by the hesitation on a joint démarche relating to the Belfast and Dublin offices indicates British unwillingness to be seen to snub Sinn Féin.

In the circumstances of Stuttgart and given Mrs Thatcher's well-known attitudes, it might be useful if the Taoiseach were to suggest that the Prime Minister and he should jointly approach Gaston Thorn on this matter. It is suggested that if such a course is adopted the Taoiseach should state very clearly that no criticism is intended of Mr Martin, on the contrary.


16 June 1983