



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

To: Secretary to the Government
From: W. Kirwan, Assistant Secretary.

Contacts between Bord na Gaeilge and Sinn Fein, Belfast.

1. The minute of 9 May from Mr. McCarthy and accompanying papers set out the background in this case which was brought to our attention by the Department of Foreign Affairs and on which we obtained a report from Roinn na Gaeltachta.
2. I agree generally with what Mr. McCarthy says. While the Government decision of 20 February, 1984 relates only to meetings between Ministers and Ministers of State, on the one hand, and deputations which include members of Provisional Sinn Fein, on the other hand and while no explicit decision was taken in regard to correspondence or contacts at official level, the spirit of the Government decision and sound considerations of policy argue that Bord na Gaeilge should avoid substantive correspondence or contacts with Sinn Fein representatives, as such, in relation to the Irish language. The question of correspondence from Sinn Fein was dealt with in the Minister for Justice's Memorandum of 15 February, 1984 which led to the Government decision in question. Reference was made to difficulties of a practical nature - of identification and communication of the Sinn Fein people - about extending any decision on ostracisation to such correspondence. However, these difficulties do not attach to correspondence received from the President of Provisional Sinn Fein or to contacts with persons acting in a representative capacity on behalf of Sinn Fein or well known in Northern Ireland to be persons associated with Sinn Fein.

*Wally,
I think the
"unless they
publicly
dissociate themselves
from the IRA
campaign of
violence" might
be highlighted
more as a
Govt. decision.
If you agree
perhaps you
could modify the
letter & let me
see it again
for mention to
the Taoiseach.*

53
12/5

*Secretary to
the Government.
I have
added an
additional
sentence in the
penultimate
paragraph,
to meet your
point.
W. Kirwan
13/5/86*

*OK. - speed by Taoiseach - copied to W. O'Hanrahan
5.1.86 by Campbell (any p.m. 4.45) - PL why to
Letter issued today -
15/5/86
15/5/86
141004 Gr 10.01 50m/82 Fodhla D797
together with exchange of correspondence
with Roinn na Gaeltachta 15-5-86*

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

To:

From:

2.

3. In regard to the general question raised by Mr. McCarthy in the first substantive paragraph of his minute as to whether the Government would wish to clarify their 1984 decision so as to include State bodies - he was reflecting discussion we had about this matter - I feel, on reflection, that it may be preferable to proceed on a case by case basis, as hitherto. The practical difficulties previously noted by the Minister for Justice would apply very much to the implementation of any general instruction to State bodies, with particular reference to approaches from representatives of Sinn Fein at local level in the State. State bodies generally will be aware of the Government policy enshrined in the decision of February, 1984 and one can probably rely on them to act in its spirit. Indeed, in the case under review, while they should have been more circumspect than they were, Bord na Gaeilge showed that they were sensitive to the politics of the situation of the Irish language in the North and Sinn Fein efforts to exploit the matter and any contacts for political advantage.

4. As mentioned by Mr. McCarthy, we have a precedent in a previous case involving AnCO where we confirmed that they were right in withdrawing from a certain project in which Sinn Fein had a slight involvement. In the present case, as set out in my draft minute to Roinn na Gaeltachta, there are, in addition, specific policy reasons for ensuring that Sinn Fein are not helped in any way to hijack the Irish language for their purposes. We are taking particular steps, through the Intergovernmental Conference, to prevent this: as you know, the matter is to be discussed again at the next meeting of the Conference.

ROINN AN TAOISIGH

Uimhir.....

To:

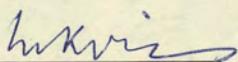
From:

- 3 -

5. If Bord na Gaeilge now avoid engaging in any substantive correspondence with Sinn Fein, this will be noted by the latter and may be played up as a propaganda point. However, this may now be unavoidable and is very much the lesser of two evils.

6. In my draft minute which, if you agree, I shall issue to Roinn na Gaeltachta, I ask that the following guidelines be conveyed to Bord na Gaeilge:

- (i) not to engage in correspondence with Sinn Fein in the future other than, perhaps, to acknowledge letters from them;
- (ii) not to issue any invitations, on behalf of the Board, to representatives of Sinn Fein, to be present at meetings in which the Board takes part; and
- (iii) not consciously to meet people acting as representatives of Sinn Fein and, in cases where it was possible that such people would be participants in wider groups, such as a Glor na nGael committee or the management committee of a school, so to handle matters, as far as possible, that contact with Sinn Fein people was avoided.



12 May, 1986.