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**Meeting with Sinn Féin**  
**Belfast City Hall, 3 June 1998**

Mr. McEllett (for info.)

Colm Ó Floinn, John Biggar and the undersigned met a delegation from Sinn Féin to discuss security related matters. Sinn Féin were represented by Gerry Kelly, Aidan McAteer, Barbre de Bruin, Alex Maskey and Leo Green.

**Consultation**

Mr. Ó Floinn introduced our side, underlining our desire for regular contact and consultation both in this format and in terms of individual contact on the range of critical issues concerned. Sinn Féin conveyed a strong desire to consult regularly. Kelly said that they were disappointed at the extent of it so far but agreed that the relationship was two-way and that they were free to convey their concerns as and when the need arose. Ó Floinn said that we were at the outset of the vitally important implementation phase of the Agreement and that the closest coordination and consultation between the Government, Sinn Féin and the SDLP was essential. We agreed to reconvene a meeting in this format at the end of June (post 25th) and that we would stay in regular contact in the interim.

**Police Commission**

Sinn Féin's concerns about consultation were clearly particularised by the issue of the Police Commission's membership. Maskey said that they were disappointed about the likely make-up. The conversation, which took place before news arrived that the Secretary of State had announced the Commission's membership, underscored the importance that Sinn Féin attached to consultation on all names put forward for the various bodies mentioned in the Agreement. Ó Floinn and the undersigned filled them in on the exchanges between the Government, broadly reflected in the *Irish Times* coverage. McKee explained our overall strategic purpose in terms of the dynamic we wished to see on the Commission. We believed that the strong North American element could and would be encouraged to fulfill the mandate of the Agreement, though we would clearly like to have a nationalist presence on the Commission for the sake of credibility and balance. That said, the text of the Agreement was very clear on what the Commission had to achieve. Maskey remained unconvinced about the membership, noting that

the proposed Commission was unlikely to improve nationalist confidence that policing would be resolved. [Note: that said, when news came of the membership, neither de Bruin nor Maskey showed surprise.]

### **Criminal Justice Review**

Ó Floinn said that, as with policing, we had counselled the British to avoid making announcements before 25 June. We also urged that the review, to be credible, had to have people on it who were outside the system. We had put forward names but the list remained open. He asked Sinn Féin for any names that they might wish to put forward. This had been a long-standing practice with the SDLP and we looked forward to developing this with Sinn Féin. Discussion followed on the nature of individuals we wished to see on the review. Ó Floinn asked whether Sinn Féin had their own channels with the British. In an inconclusive reply, they said that they preferred to operate through us, in the context of close liaison and coordination.

Biggar outlined his thinking regarding the review, in particular the need to develop a clear idea of the nature of the actual mechanism and its overall approach on a range of key issues - the relationship between justice and the Assembly, judicial appointments and so on. In response to McAteer's point about Sinn Féin's limited resources, Biggar said that we would be happy to share any source material which we were in the process of collating. We expected to complete a synthesised paper on all of these issues in about 3 months for submission to the review. In terms of the review of emergency legislation, Biggar said that we were preparing a detailed paper on this and would welcome Sinn Féin's input. Again asserting their limited resources in terms of producing text and the need for our assistance, they agreed to meet us again specifically to discuss the emergency legislation review.

### **Prisons**

Kelly led the discussion on prisoners. On the working of the Sentence Review Board, he said that consistency was vital. Ó Floinn noted that the British had indicated that the SRB would work in groups of three and possibly as individuals. Kelly expressed opposition to dealing with each prisoner as an individual case. On the membership, Kelly said that it was important to have

as many international figures as possible. He strenuously opposed the need for psychologists and the inference it carried. Overall, the system should be free of any new criteria. The Agreement would be in "deep trouble" if the legislation on prisoners had any new elements in it. Ó Floinn assured him that we had insisted that there could be no direct linkage between decommissioning and prisoner releases. A discussion ensued on the nature of suitable candidates which concluded with an agreement to remain in close touch as the selection process advanced.

Kelly said that it was important to resolve outstanding prisoner issues now rather than leave them to cause problems later. The issue of lifers was nebulous since what constituted life was indeterminate (natural life sentences, for example). While the safeguard of 2 years was there, he would prefer to spread out the release evenly rather than be left with a bloc at the end of that period.

On transfers, Kelly said that 7 remained in Britain, one of which was on remand and another who had appealed. Ó Floinn confirmed that 2 had just been approved on our side. On the question of Jan Martin, an Englishman seeking Irish citizenship to secure transfer, Kelly argued that a passport be issued forthwith. Ó Floinn and Biggar explained the legal position, though Kelly was content to say that it was only a matter of will. On releases in the South, Ó Floinn said that we would revert after we had spoken with Justice but that we expected that releases would become routine after 25 June. Kelly averted to the cancelling of weekend leave for the Balcombe Street four and on this we said we would revert, Biggar noting that, in deference to the interests of those seeking transfers, we needed to be very sensitive about handling matters like parole. Kelly accepted the point with caution, adding that "just because we got 96% at the Ard Fheis, not everything is hunky dory". Prisons were the most effective centres of information for the republican community - changes in regime were quickly and widely interpreted. At any rate, the Balcombe Street men were "our Mandelas" and, far from being treated leniently, had already spent 24 years in prison.

### **Parades**

Kelly said that Sinn Féin supported the residents. Nationalism needs the support of the Irish Government. It would be a mistake to say that Trimble needed the 'Tour of the North' to go

through to help his electoral prospects. It would also be a mistake to underestimate the strength of feeling in North Belfast where 25% of all the deaths in the Troubles had occurred. Ó Floinn underlined our concerns about the problems of the marching season, about which we were all familiar. He commended Sinn Féin's leadership last year and impressed on them the need to use their influence with residents in the search for agreement. McAteer said that the parades presented a real danger for the Good Friday Agreement. The British had to stand up against force - to do otherwise would undermine those in the republican movement who had argued that alternatives to force existed. Pressure should be put on Trimble to discuss the Garvaghy Road with the residents who were, after all, his constituents. If the parade was forced down, the situation would escalate and violence spread.

McKee outlined the Government's position and the points it had been making to the British side both at political and official level, particularly the critical role policing had played in escalating tensions on the ground. We remained committed to the concept of local agreement but were alive both to the intransigence of the Orange Order and to the impact that the policing of contentious parades had, citing the recent provocation by the RUC in Portadown last weekend. It was important that we remained in close contact both in terms of what could be done before a contentious parade and on the day in question. On the Garvaghy Road, we had impressed on the British the need to keep all options open, including making the necessary security arrangements to ensure that the parade could be rerouted. We had seen in the past that the failure to make the necessary security decisions ended up as a decision to force the parade down. On the 'Tour of the North', he looked forward to meeting again next week to discuss it in more detail with people on the ground.

Looking at the bigger picture, Ó Floinn explored the possibility of trade-offs. The delegation was reserved on the idea saying that each one had to be taken on its merits. Their influence was very contingent on what acceptable alternatives existed in each case. Kelly said that he could only speak on the Tour of the North parade. Reciting the RUC's very rough handling of him at the parade in 1996 - which he said was done deliberately to excite the residents, he said that the community's opposition should not be underestimated. He said that "the point in between is not the answer". In other words and without directly saying so, Kelly was arguing that the parade

had to be rerouted. McAteer said that there was a logic in an overview of the parades issue. Derry had tried to play such a role but this approach had been rejected last year by the loyal Orders. He accepted McKee's point that the loyal orders last year had acted very positively in a multi-lateral way and that some potential might yet exist in this approach. In operational terms, McKee said that close contact and information exchange between our side and people on the ground was crucial to our effectiveness viz the British side particularly in regard to policing arrangements.

### **De-escalation**

The delegation showed some signs of resignation about the lack of movement on this front. The situation had actually disimproved in a number of locations, such as South Armagh. Expenditure on security infrastructure had increased. Unaccompanied British Army patrols were increasingly evident. Maskey mentioned an increase in British Army patrolling in Andersontown. Speaking frankly, McKee said that at official level we had encountered a lack of receptivity to the implications of 10 April and the need for a new imaginative approach. Obvious movement before 25 June was unlikely. We would need to work closely together to maximise leverage on this issue. We were putting a paper together on de-escalation and looked forward to detailed exchanges with the political parties as it was being formulated.



Eamonn McKee

Security Section

Anglo-Irish

8 June 1998