

RESTRICTED - POLICY

Secretary

FILE

TMG - Mr. Wilson

Mr McKerr

For information

FROM: D J R HILL  
CONSTITUTIONAL & POLITICAL DIVISION  
31 JULY 1997

cc: PS/Mr Murphy (L&B, DPP)  
PS/Mr Ingram (L&B, DEQ)  
PS/Mr Worthington (L, DHSS&DENI)  
PS/Lord Dubs (L, DANI & DOE)  
PS/PUS (L&B)  
PS/Sir David Fell  
Mr Thomas  
Mr Steele  
Mr Stephens  
Mr Bell  
Mr Daniell  
Mr Shannon  
Mr Watkins  
Mr Wood (L&B)  
Mr Maccabe  
Mr Brooker  
Mr Beeton  
Mrs Brown  
Mrs Rogers

PS/Secretary of State (L&B)

**SINN FÉIN: ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT/THE CENOTAPH**

It may be helpful if I set out, for the record, the outcome of that part of yesterday's discussion with the Secretary of State and Mr Murphy which touched on relations with Sinn Féin.

2. The Secretary of State concluded that once Sinn Féin (if invited to join the talks) had formally affirmed its total and absolute commitment to the Mitchell principles of democracy and non-violence (perhaps on 9 September) it should be treated in all respects like all other political parties in Northern Ireland. Until then, all the current limitations on contact with Sinn Féin should continue to be applied unless there is a specific authorisation to the contrary (eg the proposal to organise a meeting between Sinn Féin representatives and Mr Murphy to discuss the Comprehensive Spending Review).

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CPL/1915/CAO

GMI 2995/97

I should be grateful if Ministers' Private offices and Central Secretariat could ensure that the Northern Ireland Departments are aware of this decision. CPL will respond accordingly to requests for guidance from Whitehall Departments.

The Cenotaph

4. The proposal in the Home Secretary's minute of 26 July is arguably inconsistent with the policy position set out above. If Sinn Féin is, from 9 September, to be treated like any other political party, it would be difficult to justify a decision not to invite the two Sinn Féin MP s to the Cenotaph. The fact that they have not taken the Oath of Allegiance or taken up their seats is irrelevant: those are matters for the House authorities; so far as Government is concerned the two men are MP s and it would arguably be wrong to disenfranchise the electorates of West Belfast and mid-Ulster by refusing to invite them.

5. On that line of argument the Secretary of State might want to encourage the Home Secretary to defer sending an invitation, rather than not send one at all. I attach a draft for consideration. In practice it seems most unlikely that either Sinn Féin MP would wish to attend, so the disorderly scenes which the Home Secretary fears are unlikely to occur.

*(Signed: David Hill)*

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AFT MINUTE FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE TO THE HOME SECRETARY

THE CENOTAPH

In connection with your minute of 26 July to the Prime Minister I should point out that by the end of August I may be in a position to judge that the IRA ceasefire has been unequivocally restored and that Sinn Féin meet the criteria which would require me to invite them to join the multi-party negotiations in Northern Ireland. Thereafter, probably on 9 September, Sinn Féin would be required to affirm its total and absolute commitment to the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the report of the International Body; and from that point onwards I and my Ministerial colleagues will treat Sinn Féin like any other political party.

Given the principles of democracy, I see no basis for proceeding in any other way. The question of whether they take up their seats or take the Oath of Allegiance seems to me to be irrelevant: that is a matter for the House authorities; so far as Government is concerned, Sinn Féin elected representatives have a democratic mandate which should - once they have renounced terrorism - be fully respected. Against that background you might want to defer a decision on the question of whether or not to invite the two Sinn Féin MP s to the Cenotaph, and review the situation in the second week of September.

In practice I would not expect either of them to respond to an invitation. Republicans traditionally boycott such ceremonies and even mainstream nationalist politicians in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland have only begun to attend in recent years.

I am sending copies of this minute to the Prime Minister, Donald Dewar and Ron Davies.