

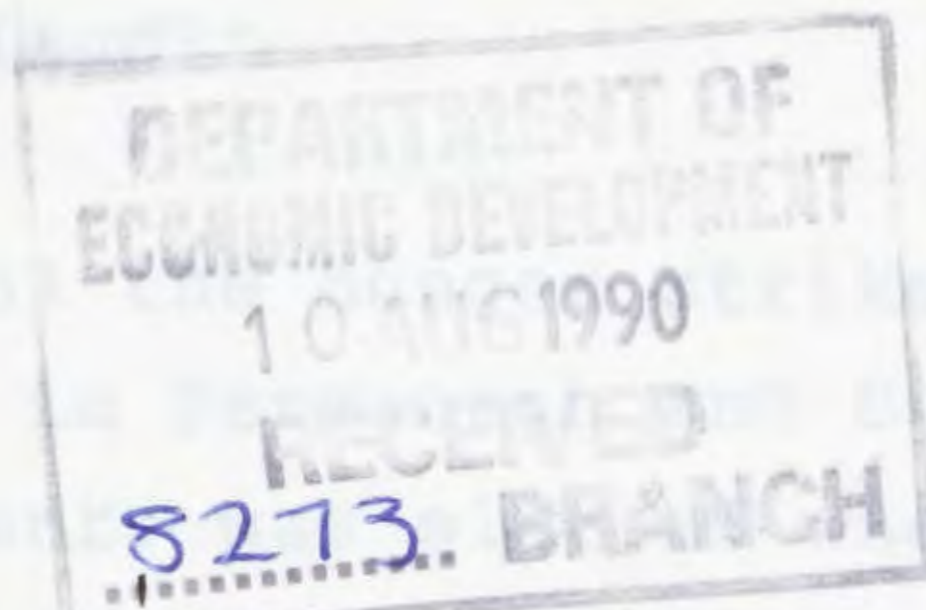
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FROM: D J R HILL
CPL DIVISION
7 AUGUST 1990

GM/06186/90
MC SOS



cc PS/Minister of State (L&B) - B
PS/Ministers (L&B) - B
PS/PUS o/r (L&B) - B
PS/Sir K Bloomfield - B
Mr Chilcot - B
Mr Ledlie - B
Mr Thomas o/r - B
Mr Alston - B
Mr Deverell - B
Mr A P Wilson - B
Mr Wood (L&B) - B
Mr Blackwell - B
Mr J McConnell - B
Mr Bell - B

cc Mr Fell.
8/14/8

PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B) - B (o/r 13 August)

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON SINN FEIN

1. Following the Secretary of State's morning meeting on 31 July CPL was tasked to produce a note on the Government's attitude to Sinn Fein.
2. Initially, Sinn Fein was an illegal organisation, first under the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act, then under the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1973. Sinn Fein was deproscribed in 1974 by the then Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees, who told Parliament:

"In my view there are signs that on both extreme wings there are people who, although at one time committed to violence, would now like to find a way back to political activity. It is right to encourage this as much as possible ..."
3. In 1981 Sinn Fein decided to take up any seats won in district council elections in Northern Ireland. At the Ard Fheis that year Sinn Fein's director of publicity uttered the now famous words:

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"Who here really believes that we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in this hand, we take power in Ireland?"

In April 1981 the hunger striker Bobby Sands won the Westminster by-election in Fermanagh and South Tyrone and Owen Carron, his election agent, was elected when Mr Sands died. Sinn Fein won 5 seats (and 10% of the vote) in the October 1982 Assembly elections.

4. At their Ard Fheis in October 1982, Sinn Fein pledged their elected representatives to be "unambivalent in support of the armed struggle". Accordingly, in the light of the party's failure to condemn violence it was decided that the Secretary of State would not meet them and junior Ministers would confine contact to the minimum required to deal with legitimate constituency issues, which in practice meant that meetings would be extremely rare. Moreover, NIO Ministers would only correspond with Sinn Fein representatives on constituency matters and the reply would normally issue from the Private Secretary.

5. In the June 1983 Westminster elections Gerry Adams won West Belfast and Sinn Fein polled 13% of the vote. The catalyst for Ministers adopting their current approach appears to have been the murder of UUP Assemblyman and Queen's Law Lecturer, Edgar Graham. Mr Prior, then Secretary of State, wanted it made clear to Sinn Fein that they could not continue to endorse violence, while at the same time seeking to use the democratic process and furthering their overall objectives by the handling of constituent's grievances; but official advice pointed out the problems of effectively disenfranchising parts of the electorate. On 21 December 1983, while touring Belfast City Centre, Mr Prior said:

"I have agreed with my Ministers that they would have no further contact by letter let alone by actually seeing members of Sinn Fein ... [The decision has been taken] in the light of

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activities of Provisional Sinn Fein, remarks they have made recently and their refusal to condemn violence ... I'm considering what other methods I can use which will show quite clearly to people that we are not prepared to give Provisional Sinn Fein recognition as far as political matters are concerned while they support violence."

The practical effect of this ban was almost negligible since only one Minister had met a Sinn Fein elected representative (David Mitchell/Gerry Adams on 29 November 1982 about housing).

6. Contact with Sinn Fein elected representatives is laid out in Central Secretariat's guidance of 20 May 1985. The main features of this guidance are:

- (i) Ministers will have no dealings with Sinn Fein elected representatives unless and until Sinn Fein renounces support for the use of violence.
- (ii) Any request from Sinn Fein for a meeting with Ministers should be refused and the enquirer asked to put their views in writing.
- (iii) Letters from Sinn Fein elected representatives to Ministers should not receive Ministerial replies, but rather "curt, formal and short" Private Secretary replies.
- (iv) Letters to Ministers raising constituents' problems must be dealt with adequately in the interests of the constituent but should be brief and formal.
- (v) Approaches from Sinn Fein elected representatives to local offices raising purely constituency matters which appear not to raise wider questions of policy may be dealt with at local level.
- (vi) Senior headquarter officials should avoid meeting Sinn

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Fein elected representatives unless the circumstances are exceptional and where such contact would be essential for fair administration. Ministerial authority must be sought for any such meeting.

7. CPL is currently working on a fuller, deliberative paper on the Government's current approach to Sinn Fein.

(SIGNED) David Hill

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7 August 1990

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