

cc. Eo
JH

FROM: PS/SECRETARY OF STATE
11 June 1996

cc PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - B
PS/Michael Ancram (B&L) - B
PS/PUS (B&L) - B
PS/Sir David Fell - B
Mr Leach (B&L) - B
Mr Bell - B
Mr Watkins - B
Mr Stephens - B
Mr Hill - B
Mr Maccabe - B
Mr Beeton - B
Mr Wood (B&L) - B
Mr Budd, Cabinet Office
Mr Lamont, RID - B
Mr Holmes, No 10
HMA Dublin - B

file
John 12/6.

Mr Thomas (B&L) - B

TURNING AWAY SINN FEIN: A CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE REPUBLICAN KIND

For the record, this is an account of events at lunchtime yesterday when Sinn Fein attempted to gain access to the all-party talks in Castle Buildings.

2. The Sinn Fein delegation turned up at the Prince of Wales gate and after a lengthy debate decided to accept Mr Beeton's offer of a meeting with Irish and British Government officials in Castle Buildings. They proceeded by vehicle to the outer perimeter of Castle Buildings from where they moved by foot into the inevitable media scrum. Following a number of interviews with the press, and a debate amongst themselves, the Sinn Fein delegation decided to dispatch Martin McGuinness, Siobhan O'Hanlon and Richard Macauley to establish exactly what the two Governments were proposing to say to them. Mr Beeton accordingly escorted the three into Castle Buildings and into a room close to the entrance, where I, together with Bill Nolan representing the Irish Government, was waiting.

3. After greeting Mr McGuinness and his party, I explained that we represented the British and Irish Governments and wished to read

a joint statement. Mr McGuinness said that before we went into formalities he wanted to establish who we were, what it was we were proposing to discuss with Sinn Fein and whether the other parties were being treated in the same manner. I confirmed my identity (which Mr McGuinness acknowledged he already knew) and Mr Nolan gave his name. I said that the purpose of the meeting was for us to read to the Sinn Fein delegation a joint statement agreed by both Governments. Mr Nolan added that the statement was based on the provisions of the communique of 28 February. I said that the statement was intended for Sinn Fein alone and that we were not taking similar action with the other parties.

4. I offered, once more, to read the statement to them but Mr McGuinness politely declined. He said he would report to his party leader and establish whether the whole Sinn Fein delegation would come into Castle Buildings to hear the statement. I said that we would wait to hear the result of that consultation and to receive the complete delegation if they wished to enter. Mr McGuinness and his party then left. In the meantime, Mr Wood, as planned, had read the statement to the media thus placing it in the public domain.

5. Following consultation among themselves in a press portacabin, the Sinn Fein delegation sent a message via Mr Beeton, asking that the representatives of the British and Irish Governments come out and read the statement to them in public. With the agreement of Mr Nolan, I refused this request and asked for Mr Beeton to repeat the invitation for the whole delegation to enter Castle Buildings and, in the event of a refusal, to offer to hand over a copy of the text. Mr Beeton duly passed this message on. Predictably enough, the Sinn Fein delegation declined to enter the building again. They also declined to receive the text in writing, saying they had already had a copy from the press. This was in turn reported back to Mr Nolan and myself at which point we regarded the matter as concluded and left our posts.

6. Although things did not go wholly according to plan, I believe the overall result was successful in that we managed to avoid Sinn Fein's objective of a confrontation played out

in public and in front of the massed ranks of the media. Reporting this morning generally appears to bear this out. I am most grateful to Mr Beeton for acting as escort and messenger in the full glare of the cameras. He carried out this task with his usual aplomb.

From the Private Secretary

11 June 1996

Signed

MARTIN HOWARD
PS/Secretary of State

After the opening of the Northern Ireland talks on 10 June in Belfast, the Prime Minister and Taoiseach met for almost an hour to talk about EU issues. The Taoiseach was accompanied by a member of his office responsible for EU affairs and Shane Kelly, his press spokesman. Jonathan Haslam and I were present on our side.

The Taoiseach asked what we were looking for at Florence. The Prime Minister said we were keen to solve the problem before Florence if possible. We wanted a comprehensive framework for progressive lifting of the ban. We hoped the Commission and Presidency would endorse our proposal. It could then go to the SVC, perhaps to Agriculture Ministers and thereafter to the Foreign Ministers' conclave on 17 June. He did not want a last minute negotiation at Florence. This would be difficult for everybody. So he hoped the future Presidency would help the present Presidency by supporting an agreement which need only be endorsed at Florence.

In response to the Taoiseach's question, the Prime Minister explained why we had become so frustrated with some of our EU partners. The Taoiseach tried to suggest that our exports to the EU were actually quite small, but that we had got the issue out of proportion, particularly when, for example, the US and Hong Kong continued to ban our exports. The Prime Minister said that this was certainly not the case for Northern Ireland and Scotland. Moreover the ban on exports to third countries was illegal and unnecessary. The Taoiseach wondered whether a regionally based relaxation might be a starter (the Prime Minister explained the political difficulties with this). He also commented that continental ideas of food safety were rather different from those in the UK and Ireland. Kohl had told him he wanted a solution but more than the UK's non-cooperation policy was stirring up bad feelings.

BB/SSTALKS/100