

Date created:

24/06/96

Author:

Mary Brew

SECRET

6-6
2nd last page.

Official-level meeting with Sinn Féin 6 June, 1996

1. Following is a summary of the key points arising at this meeting. A list of those present is attached.
2. The Sinn Féin side made a number of detailed suggestions for improvements to the presentation of the Government's approach to the negotiations as conveyed orally at the meeting on . These are outlined at Appendix 2. [Because of time constraints, the bulk of the suggestions were communicated to the undersigned immediately after the close of the meeting]. The official side indicated that they would consider the suggestions. At the same time, they emphasised that the Government would be reluctant to entertain such suggestions in view of their reluctance in principle to provide a document to Sinn Féin. Mr. McGuinness referred to the fact that the British Labour Party favoured a United Ireland and suggested that no Irish Government should have a difficulty in subscribing to this objective.
3. Mr. Ó hUiginn gave a detailed presentation of the opening scenario, procedural guidelines and draft agenda papers which had been agreed with the British in London before the meeting. Copies of the papers were provided to the Sinn Féin side, with

the caution that some tidying-up work remained to be done.

4. Mr. Teahon emphasised the need for an indication of Sinn Féin's thinking at this point, particularly in view of the immence of the launch of negotiations. Mr. Adams made the following points, inter alia, in response:

- * Sinn Féin accepted that they had a responsibility to try to create the proper climate but others, especially the two Governments, also had a responsibility.

- * Sinn Féin also had a duty to assert the rights of their mandate.

- * Mr. McGuinness would need to satisfy himself on the content of what Mr. Ó hUiginn had outlined. The IRA - totally separately - might also wish to do this.

- * Mr. Adams had long felt that there was a need for a tactical reassessment (by the IRA) even in the absence of a package.

- * In terms of a time-frame, it would be entirely impossible to bring about a ceasefire before Monday, 10 June.

- * Beyond this, a ceasefire would depend to some degree on a number of factors, such as the way in which the talks were perceived.

- * We could be assured of Sinn Fein's good-will to try and "sort this out".

- * Mr. Adams might be able to come back by Monday, although he would not have anything definite.

- * He did not want to go to the IRA just to be rejected. If this were to happen, it would give the appearance that Sinn Féin had no influence.

- * He had not had a chance to read the documents provided by Mr. Ó hUiginn, whereas the official side had been working on them for 6 months.

5. Mr. Teahon raised the question as to the position the Government should adopt at the launch of the negotiations in a situation where Sinn Féin were not present. He suggested

that an advance indication that Sinn Féin felt that they had a package with which to go to the IRA would be of assistance in this regard. Mr. Adams responded that Sinn Féin had to be given space. Assuming, as he did, we were committed to Sinn Féin's being involved in the negotiations, this should inform any public statements on the opening of the negotiations.

6. Mr. Adams emphasised that it was futile to believe that the IRA would respond to pressure. The IRA was in fact under no pressure whatever from their own constituency. People might want Sinn Féin to be involved in the negotiations and they might even feel that the IRA should concede a ceasefire but they would not blame the IRA if they did not. The IRA were not concerned by what politicians like Messrs. Hume, Alderdice and Trimble said. Instead of bringing pressure on the IRA, we should look at what was done in 1994. Then, the Taoiseach had kept his cool, even after Letterkenny, and the ceasefire had been put together by methodically working things out and eyeballing in the Republican camp with logic.
7. Mr. Adams emphasised that he wanted to be at the talks. The alternative - an international propaganda campaign - would not lift morale. He believed that the talks were the way forward and, even if they were not as good as Sinn Féin would like, would help to expose and fragment Unionists and expose the British Government. Mr. Adams said that he might be in a position to talk to us on Sunday, although he indicated again

that he was unlikely to have anything definite. He reiterated the need for the Government to temper its public utterances.

8. Mr. Ó hUiginn emphasised that the tone of public statements would necessarily be coloured by expectations regarding the prospects for a restoration of the ceasefire. He also stressed that any suggestion that Sinn Féin's electoral mandate was being harnessed for anything other than purely political purposes or that Sinn Féin intended to keep a foot in "both camps" would generate a very strong reaction. Mr. Adams asked what Sinn Féin should do to allay concerns on this score. Mr. Ó hUiginn replied: "Be in there" (the talks). Mr. Adams responded: "Well, we'll do our best".

9. Mr. Teahon emphasised very strongly that Sinn Féin should aim to be in the talks from Day One. We were prepared to do anything we could between now and Monday to help make this possible. It would be extraordinarily difficult to manage things if Sinn Féin were not in the talks on Monday. Mr. Teahon took issue with Mr. Adams earlier reference to the Letterkenny conference: he did not believe that the situations then and now were equivalent. There was a huge danger that failure to manage a situation where Sinn Féin was not in the talks could tip things over the edge.

10. Mr. Dalton pointed out in support that there would naturally be a huge sense of disappointment on the part of the Government if after all that had been done, there was no ceasefire at this

point. In this situation, the Government was likely to say to the officials that they had "got it wrong". Mr. Dalton pressed for an early indication from Sinn Féin as to the prospects for a ceasefire. He asked how long it would take to effect a ceasefire. He also warned that a "spectacular" would make things totally impossible.

11. Mr. Adams responded as follows:

- * We were all victims of the recent past.
- * He knew that we believed Sinn Féin and the IRA were one and the same (Sinn Féin/IRA) but in fact Sinn Féin had fulfilled all their promises.
- * If he were to go to the IRA, as the Taoiseach has asked, and if the IRA did not deliver, this would cause huge confusion and massive disruption and probably all sorts of other difficulties.
- * We were caught in a conundrum, all of which related directly to the history of the past two years.
- * Sinn Féin needed to consult about the papers presented by Mr. Ó hUiginn, which had been received "almost in the jaws of the negotiations".
- * Mr. Adams' forward position on the Mitchell Principles had caused difficulties, which Mr. Doherty and Mr. J. O'Connor/O'Connell? were going to have to deal with.
- * Sinn Féin would need to read all the documentation presented at the meeting. Presumably then the IRA

would have to take a decision and there would have to be some sort of consultation. The whole IRA strategy was leadership-led, although there was broad support. There were bound to be different personalities and stresses etc.

* Sinn Féin wanted to be in the talks. They believed they could make some impact on the Unionists.

* The Sinn Féin side would look at the documents constructively.

12. Mr. Teahon repeated it would be useful to have an indication from Sinn Féin in advance of Monday that they believed that they now had a package which would enable them to go back to the IRA. Mr. Adams said again that he would try to give us some sense before Monday. He suggested that the Government was bound to understand the difficulty of giving a definitive response in such a short space of time. Mr. Teahon said, emphatically, that they did not understand this, because of the way in which they perceived Sinn Féin and the IRA.

13. Mr. Ó hUiginn said that there was a very serious danger that the policy of outreach to include Sinn Féin would go into reverse.

14. Mr. Adams mentioned Sinn Féin's plans for a rally in Magerafelt and the possibility of a visit to Dublin by the 17 Sinn Féin candidates who had succeeded in the recent elections. Their plan for Monday was simply for Sinn Féin to go up to the talks and to try to have ready the speech which Mr. Adams would

have made if Sinn Féin had been present. Mr. Adams also mentioned that Sinn Féin had been advised that they had a prima facie case against the Irish Government over their exclusion from the negotiations. He added that Sinn Féin's inclination would probably be not to go this road, although they might still take it. Mr. Ó hUiginn said that if Sinn Féin were to take a case, the Government would simply call witness after witness to establish the linkage between the IRA and Sinn Féin. He also suggested that confrontational rallies would not be helpful. Mr. Adams said there was a need to channel the quite sizeable frustration among Sinn Féin supporters but added that Sinn Féin would try to find another way of doing this.

15. Mr. Ó hUiginn outlined three reasons why Sinn Féin should seek to ensure, through securing a restored ceasefire, that they were in the talks from Day One:

First, if they didn't secure a restoration now, there was a danger that the policy of outreach to Sinn Féin could to into reverse. Failure to secure a restoration would give rise to great doubts across the Government and the same would be true of Mr. Hume.

Second, if Sinn Féin were to enter into the negotiations - following a ceasefire - at a later point, they would be an anomaly and this would give rise to procedural difficulties which their opponents would be likely to exploit.

Third, Sinn Féin's energy was needed to sustain the Nationalist position from the start.

16. Mr. Adams said that the Sinn Féin side took on board everything that had been said at the meeting. At the same

time, he suggested that the Government should give some thought to a scenario which would involve Sinn Féin going into the talks at a point beyond the opening date. Mr. Teahon indicated that he took it that this would be in a context where the ceasefire had been restored. Mr. Adams confirmed this. He recalled that he had said that it would be impossible to have a ceasefire by Monday: his point was that we would need to consider a scenario where a ceasefire was declared 1-2 weeks after the opening of negotiations. Mr. Teahon asked if Mr. Adams believed that this might happen. Mr. Adams replied that all he was saying was first, the IRA - particularly in view of their statement during the week - might make their position clear. Second, Sinn Féin would try to expedite matters. Third, he would get back before Monday to give us some sense, although it is getting back be right simply by saying that he had not succeeded in seeing anyone.

17. Mr. McGuinness took up Mr. Dalton's reference to the disappointment which the Government would feel if the ceasefire was not quickly restored. He said that the lead up to the 1994 ceasefire had been even more arduous. He and Mr. McAteer had been back and forward for months and had then had to talk to people. Mr. McGuinness also said that the Sinn Féin side were just human beings - and they did not have planes and helicopters at their disposal. There was no question of a lack of will on their part. However, there was a Mt. Everest to climb because of the British Government's bad

faith.

18. Mr. Adams asked if it would be enough, so far as the Irish and British Governments were concerned, for the IRA to declare an unequivocal restoration of the August, 1994, ceasefire for Sinn Féin to be admitted to the negotiations. The official side indicated that it would.

But this commitment
- that this would be enough
could be argued to be before
Lisburn etc changed the landscape.
∴ I do not think we could be
reasonably held to this.

Attendance

Mr. Teahon, Department of the Taoiseach

Mr. Dalton, Department of Justice

Mr. Ó hUiginn, Department of Foreign Affairs

Mr. Hare, Department of the Taoiseach

* * * * *

Mr. Adams, Sinn Féin

Mr. Doherty, Sinn Féin

Mr. McGuinness, Sinn Féin

Ms. Bhreathnach, Sinn Féin

Mr. McAteer, Sinn Féin

Ms. O'Hare, Sinn Féin

Ms. Foyle, Sinn Féin