

Answers to HMG's Questions.

20/2/97.

John, a Chara,

Please find below Sinn Féin's answers to the questions from the British government which you sent to me last Friday.

*Bernie*

A1.

Sinn Féin is committed to work for an end to conflict regardless of the difficulties involved. Our peace strategy and our commitment to peaceful and democratic methods is the cornerstone of our party policy. We are committed to inclusive democratic negotiations. These will best be conducted in a wholly peaceful environment. In order to create this Sinn Féin is working for an end to all armed actions by all the groups involved. We can, with credibility, seek to persuade the IRA to restore the cessation of August 1994, when a meaningful and inclusive process of negotiations is genuinely being offered. In our view this is the only effective way to proceed.

With this objective in mind Sinn Féin has identified, publicly and privately (Note 1), a number of key issues which need to be dealt with adequately and unambiguously, if we are to make a credible argument that an inclusive and meaningful process of negotiations is on offer.

The position of the two governments as outlined in the Joint Communiqué of 28 February 1996 is that Sinn Féin's "participation in negotiations requires the restoration of the ceasefire of August 1994". Sinn Féin believes that any restoration by the IRA of its cessation of August 1994 will be genuinely unequivocal, containing a clear and unambiguous commitment to enhance a genuine peace process.

Sinn Féin has the democratic right to be involved in negotiations and to represent our electorate on the basis of our established electoral mandate. There should be no preconditions to dialogue and negotiations.

**Note (1).**

In correspondence to John Major, to John Hume accompanying the October 10 position, in the memo to John Hume in response to his suggested Questions and Answers on 30/1/97 and in the wording of the October 10 positions on the issues of;

1. Sinn Féin entry into dialogue.
2. Removal of preconditions.
3. Timeframe.
4. Confidence building measures.

A2. Sinn Féin have already publicly made clear our commitment to the Mitchell Principles and we will do so formally when we enter negotiations. Sinn Féin can only speak for ourselves and on behalf of our electorate. Sinn Féin is not the IRA. But we recognise and acknowledge the IRA's stated intention of enhancing



the democratic peace process and the IRA's definitive commitment to its success.

It is self-evident that threats of any description from any quarter have no role to play in a process of democratic negotiations. We are wholly committed to democratic negotiations and to a democratic outcome of those negotiations.

A3. Yes. It is Sinn Féin's intention to exercise our democratic right to raise any issue of concern in the negotiations.

A4. Yes. Equality of treatment is an essential ingredient of any process of democratic negotiations. Sinn Féin wholly endorses an approach, where all parties are subject to the same rules and procedures in the negotiations.

A5. The removal of the gun from the political equation in Ireland is a clear objective of a lasting peace settlement.

Given the importance of this objective the approach should be one which is most likely to succeed rather than one which blocks and disrupts the wider negotiations which are based on the principle that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. The issue of disarmament needs to be resolved but without blocking the negotiations.

Sinn Féin have already stated our willingness to address all aspects of the Report of the International Body in the context of our participation in inclusive negotiations.

Sinn Féin is prepared to consider any proposals which address the need to take all the guns out of Irish politics and we will be putting forward, for consideration, our proposals on this issue.

A6. Sinn Féin will approach the negotiations on the sole basis of our democratic mandate. We are totally committed to peaceful and democratic means of resolving political problems.

Sinn Féin endorses the suggestions on confidence building made by the International Body in Chapter VII of their report. As the International Body remarked, there is a need for action by the British Government on prisoners, emergency legislation, policing and on social and economic issues.

In particular, issues of equality which are democratic or human rights matters do not required any negotiation. The British government could and should act on these issues immediately if they wish to demonstrate an interest in building confidence in their approach to the search for a lasting peace.

Sinn Féin believes that an unequivocal restoration of the IRA cessation would represent the most important confidence building initiative on the IRA's part.