

15 Jul 1997 10:04

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No. 7142 P. 2/4

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File
12/7Ken Maginnis MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

14 July 1997

Dear Ken

DEBATE ON THE INTERIM PERIOD EXTENSION ORDER: 30 JUNE

You will recall that during the recent debate on the above Order, which continued direct rule for a further year, you asked me about contacts between NIO officials and Sinn Fein.

In reply to you I mentioned that there had been two telephone calls from Sinn Fein to my officials. That figure was, in fact, incorrect; I subsequently realised that I had made an inadvertent slip - there were three calls, not two. Please accept my apologies for this unintended error.

Perhaps I could use this letter to repeat what I said to you on 30 June, that there have been no meetings between Sinn Fein and officials since the two meetings on 21 and 28 May referred to in the aide memoire. (A copy of the aide memoire has been placed in the House of Commons library). Nor, as Lord Richard said in the Lords on 25th June, are any further meetings planned. We have not, ourselves, initiated any further clarificatory exchanges since the meeting of 28 May.

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So let me be clear with you as to when and how we have responded to Sinn Fein's requests for clarification, a process we have followed with all other parties not just Sinn Fein.

On the 13th June, an aide memoire was sent to Sinn Fein.

On the 16th June with the murder of two policemen in Lurgan, the Prime Minister says "there can be no question of talking in these circumstances."

On the 17th June a telephone call from Sinn Fein to the Northern Ireland Office. On the 20th June, a letter from Sinn Fein to the Prime Minister; and further telephone calls on the 23rd and 27th of June from Sinn Fein to the Northern Ireland Office.

When I spoke in the House of Commons on the 30th June, I made it clear in answer to a question from David Trimble that Sinn Fein had telephoned to ask for further meetings and the answer had been no.

A letter was sent from Sinn Fein to the Northern Ireland Office on the 2 July, followed by telephone calls on the 4, 11 and 14th of July. A reply to Sinn Fein's letter was sent on the 9th of July.

I am pleased to have this opportunity to correct the error made in the House of Commons on the 30th of June and provide information to you on other moves by Sinn Fein to contact officials.

We have acted as explained above because we are anxious that there should be no misunderstandings about the Government's position. A number of the participants

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in the talks process, in addition to Sinn Fein, have raised points of clarification on the aide memoire and it is only right that we should respond to genuine requests. The aide memoire was, however, written in clear terms and there will be a limit to the clarification that would be justified. As we have said all along, there is no question of negotiation.

I hope this is helpful.

Signer

MARJORIE MOWLAM

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