

*h. Cribbin  
why for information*

*6/4/97*

**ROINN AN TAOISIGH**

*(54)*

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To Secretary  
From Walter Kirwan, Assistant Secretary

**Draft Reply to Mr Gerry Adams, President, Sinn Féin**

1. As discussed, I submit alternative draft replies to the letter dated 31 January from Mr Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Féin. In our discussion, we recalled that, at the time when officials were meeting Sinn Féin or appeared likely to do so again before long, it had been our general practice not to respond in writing to letters sent to the Taoiseach by Mr Adams, but rather to deal with any points raised, as necessary and appropriate, whenever meetings took place. However, now that meetings are unlikely to take place, there could be advantage in taking the opportunity afforded by Mr Adams to make some points to Sinn Féin - or alternatively using another channel such as John Hume.
2. I mentioned to Mr Seán Ó hUiginn, Second Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs, our consideration of replying to Mr Adams. Mr Ó hUiginn had seen Adams' letter and was also aware that the British had received a letter from him in almost identical terms. Mr Ó hUiginn saw Mr Adams' letter as broadly ritual in character and as not really providing a basis for any very useful dialogue. His understanding is that the British were considering a relatively perfunctory reply at Private Secretary level.
3. Mr Adams' letter is certainly a ritual tissue of Republican rhetoric, which ignores and distorts reality in every line of it. In itself, it certainly does not provide a basis for any potentially productive exchanges. Nevertheless, I considered whether there might be some advantage in a reply from the Taoiseach that would
  - (1) robustly repudiate all that Mr Adams says and deal with the central point of his letter - the alleged exclusion of Sinn Féin from the talks by the two Governments; and
  - (2) seek to test is there any remaining "opportunity for peace," as Mr Adams has said there is.

The first alternative draft reply was prepared on this basis.

4. As to (1) above, there is other material in Mr Adams' letter that one could deal with head on and in terms e.g. his suggestion that "the words of the CLMC are, apparently, enough to allow the Loyalist parties to participate in dialogue when the Loyalist paramilitaries are quite blatantly involve in sectarian violence, ..." But it seems preferable to make a general



repudiation and otherwise focus only on his principal point which, of course, links with (2) above.

5. As to the latter, the position, as I see it, is that, apart from the time lag/fixed date for entry aspect, there was relatively little between the British and Sinn Féin in the alternative texts in circulation in regard to John Hume's efforts, before and after Christmas. If one could get a formula to cover the timing aspect, and, crucially, if the Republican Movement or a majority grouping within it are really interested in peace and participation in the talks on a realistic basis, - certainly a very big 'if' - the other differences that were there in November last and since are minor.
6. Thus, it may be worth focusing on the time aspect and using opportunities that are now in prospect, to test Republican bona fides. I suggest that if it turns out that they fail the test, nothing is lost, because the Government would have made no concessions on the principled positions it has taken.
7. We are now looking at a hiatus in the talks related to the Westminster election. You are aware that the range of dates for that is 20 March - 1 May. The local elections in Northern Ireland are to take place on a date already fixed, 21 May. Realistically, it may be difficult to make progress in the talks before those latter elections. One could, accordingly, argue that one should consider holding over resumption of the talks until after 21 May and I understand that in discussions in Belfast this week the British side were tending in that direction. In the event of an early, fresh ceasefire, this would allow up to 3 months to test its genuineness. We all know that in view of experience 1994-96, this is not enough time for an absolute test but it is a good deal longer than the Government were prepared to take as adequate when we were seeking a fixed date related to the Christmas interval. I am, of course, conscious that over and since Christmas, the tempo of the IRA campaign has been stepped up. I am also conscious of the difficulty that the nearer to the Westminster election any new ceasefire came, the more it would appear to be merely tactical in nature and give rise to a strong suspicion that it was in fact, no more than that.
8. My answer to that can only be
  - (1) that it is still worth testing it, so long as we concede nothing to get a new ceasefire: if, either before or after 22 May, deeds did not match words, a mechanism is available for again ejecting Sinn Féin from the talks, if they had been invited in or after 22 May, participated; and
  - (2) if they definitively fail the test, the talks could proceed on the basis that Sinn Féin were definitively out, thus, one would expect, making



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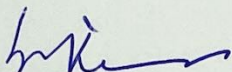
9. I am, of course, conscious that the first alternative reply, so far as it envisages a possible talks break up to 22 May, represents a significant development of policy and would require inter-departmental and Cabinet Committee consultation and, of course, consultation with the British. There are arguments against so long a break. For example, it would bring the talks resumption close to what may be a very difficult marching season. Most Northern Ireland parties in the talks are likely to be opposed to so long a break, for the above reason and for other political and financial reasons. But, I submit, the balance of arguments would be tipped in favour of so long a break if one was sure that it would lead to an unequivocal restoration of the IRA ceasefire. If Sinn Féin were to enter the talks, it is, in any case, likely that the main Unionist parties would withdraw for a period, so that the reality might be, on a benign assumption, genuine resumption of the talks in the autumn of this year.
10. I draw attention to the fact that the draft letter is phrased, so far as an interval in the talks is concerned, in terms of 'ifs' and makes no commitment to a break lasting until after 21 May: nevertheless, there are significant risks, as set out in para.12 below.
11. I am conscious of the possible anomaly in the Taoiseach personally signing a letter to Mr Adams at a time when Ministerial meetings with Sinn Féin have been suspended. Such signature by the Taoiseach is not essential but if the approach of testing Sinn Féin by way of a reply to Mr Adams's letter were to be taken, the chances of it making the necessary impact would undoubtedly be increased if the Taoiseach signed the letter.
12. However, there are strong arguments against including a reference to a possible break in the talks in a reply from the Taoiseach to Mr Adams. As already indicated, the content and tenor of his letter does not encourage a view that he and Sinn Féin are in constructive mode. In the run-up to elections, Mr Adams might see advantage in leaking the Taoiseach's letter, with a concentration on allegations of continuing exclusion. Such leaking could have quite adverse effects as the Unionist parties, while probably themselves intending no serious negotiations ahead of the local elections, would present the references to a long break as confirmation of their view that the Irish Government is not serious about the talks and is only interested in appeasing Sinn Féin and getting them into the talks.
13. Accordingly, even if we decide to promote with Sinn Féin the idea of a long break in the talks as an opportunity for their entry, it is probably preferable to leave it out of a reply to Mr Adams and to use Mr John



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Hume's continuing efforts as the vehicle for getting the opportunity across. If, as seems best, we opt for this route, it may be best to go for a shorter reply, signed by the Private Secretary, since the strong statement of the position on Sinn Féin entry to talks in the first alternative reply was designed to provide a firm background for the 'carrot' about a long break. I submit, therefore, a second alternative draft reply, for Private Secretary signature and I would recommend that we follow this route, while promoting the opportunity represented by the talks break through John Hume's contacts with Mr Adams.



6 February 1997

I have been asked by the Taoiseach to reply to your letter of 31 January. The basis for participation in the multi-party talks was agreed and set out in the Joint Communiqué issued by the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister on 28 February 1996 and, subsequently, in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the General Rules for the negotiations agreed on 16 April 1996. These terms were, in any case, essentially a restatement of the basis on which both Governments had engaged in political dialogue with Sinn Féin, following the IRA ceasefire of August, 1994, a basis, which, is now, seen on the generally accepted norms of democracy. The IRA's abandonment of its announced cessation was a fundamental breach of that basis and it was, accordingly, that abandonment which gave rise to the Republican movement's self-claimed right to the talks process.

The Irish Government wished the talks to be fully inclusive and ensured that the talks process was established on a basis that was, potentially, fully inclusive. They would however not, in fact, if the Republican movement takes the action which would bring it into compliance with the publicly stated terms for the participation of Sinn Féin in the process. These terms have been conveyed and explained at a series of meetings between officials of the Government and your party. If the Republican movement wishes to participate in the talks it is crystal clear what is required - a restoration of the 1994 ceasefire that is unequivocal and thus genuine, not merely tactical and ephemeral as both the ceasefire and the Mitchell Principles. The Taoiseach believes that it should also be clear, including from the other conditions to be met, that once these requirements were met Sinn Féin would be able to participate in the negotiations.

The official-level channel for a meeting remains available. If necessary a very short meeting, once the Government receive reliable assurances from Sinn Féin that it





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Office of the Taoiseach

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President  
Sinn Féin

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The basis for participation in the multi-party talks was agreed and set out in the Joint Communiqué issued by the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister on 28 February, 1996 and, subsequently, in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Ground Rules for the negotiations agreed on 16 April, 1996. These terms were, in any case, essentially a restatement of the basis on which both Governments had engaged in political dialogue with Sinn Féin, following the IRA ceasefire of August, 1994, a basis, which, in turn, rests on the generally accepted norms of democracy. The IRA's abandonment of its announced cessation was a fundamental breach of that basis and it was, accordingly, that abandonment which gave rise to the Republican movement's self-exclusion from the talks process.

The Irish Government wished the talks to be fully inclusive and ensured that the talks process was established on a basis that was, potentially, fully inclusive. They could become so, in fact, if the Republican movement takes the action which would bring it into compliance with the publicly stated terms for the participation of Sinn Féin in the process. These terms have been conveyed and explained at a series of meetings between officials of the Government and your party. If the Republican movement wish to participate in the talks, it is crystal clear what is required - a restoration of the 1994 ceasefire that is unequivocal and thus genuine, not merely tactical and adherence to both the cessation and the Mitchell Principles. The Taoiseach believes that it should also be clear, including from the many statements he has made, that once these requirements were met Sinn Féin would be able to participate in the negotiations.

The official-level channel for a meeting remains available, if necessary at very short notice, once the Government receive reliable assurances from Sinn Féin that a



ceasefire is actually imminent and that identified and attainable things need to be discussed and done, that will achieve that end. The Taoiseach would hope that any further communication from you would be in the context of conveying such an assurance. He is most anxious to see the people who voted for Sinn Féin represented at the talks. For this to happen, the entire Republican movement must turn its back on anti-democratic violence and commit itself exclusively to peaceful and democratic methods. The opportunity for peace, in that sense, never goes away. The Taoiseach hopes that it will be taken.

Yours sincerely,

Private Secretary

I have your letter of 21 January.

I disagree with and regret the practically every word in your representation as it. I do not think there would be any profit in doing so on a line by line basis and accordingly I will confine myself to the following points.

As far as I and the Government are concerned, there is a symbolic relationship between Sinn Féin and the IRA, an organisation which engages in violence directed at the achievement of political objectives, without any legitimate mandate and thus, in a manner that is the antithesis of democracy. This reality was taken into account by the Government when the terms for participation in the multi-party talks were agreed and set out in the Joint Communiqué issued by me and the British Prime Minister on 28 February, 1996 and, subsequently, in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Ground Rules for the negotiations agreed on 16 April, 1996. These terms were, in any case, essentially a restatement of the basis on which both Governments had engaged in political dialogue with Sinn Féin, following the IRA ceasefire of August, 1994, a basis, which, in turn, rested on widely accepted norms of democracy.

These norms and that basis were encapsulated in the statement of Governmental Challenge on 9 September, 1994 by my predecessor, Mr John Hume and yourself that "we are all totally and absolutely committed to democratic and peaceful methods of resolving our political problems", a commitment reiterated at meetings on 14 July, 1995 and 28 August, 1995, between you and myself and Government colleagues. The IRA's abandonment of its announced cessation was a fundamental breach of those commitments by you and Sinn Féin, as part of the Republican movement and of the





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I disagree with and repudiate practically every assertion and implication in it. I do not think there would be any profit in doing so on a line by line basis and accordingly I will confine myself to the following points.

As far as I and the Government are concerned, there is a symbiotic relationship between Sinn Féin and the IRA, an organisation which engages in violence directed at the achievement of political objectives, without any legitimate mandate and, thus, in a manner that is the antithesis of democratic. This reality was taken into account by the Government when the terms for participation in the multi-party talks were agreed and set out in the Joint Communiqué issued by me and the British Prime Minister on 28 February, 1996 and, subsequently, in paragraphs 8 and 9 of the Ground Rules for the negotiations agreed on 16 April, 1996. These terms were, in any case, essentially a restatement of the basis on which both Governments had engaged in political dialogue with Sinn Féin, following the IRA ceasefire of August, 1994, a basis, which, in turn, rests on the generally accepted norms of democracy.

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As a result of IRA violence, all the participants in the negotiations will need convincing that any ceasefire is genuine and not merely tactical but one could foresee that if there is a break in the talks arising from the forthcoming Westminster elections and if this were prolonged until after the Northern Ireland local elections fixed for 21 May, and if during a new IRA ceasefire, deeds matched words, Sinn Féin could participate on the resumption of the talks. The official-level channel for a meeting remains available, if necessary at very short notice, once the Government receive reliable assurances from Sinn Féin that a ceasefire is actually imminent and that identified and attainable things need to be discussed and done, that will achieve that end.

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