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UNDER
SEC 5966
16 JUN 1998
CENT SEC

FROM: LINDA ROGERS
CPL DIVISION
16 JUNE 1998

cc: Distribution list below

3

Mr Brown

- 1. MR HILL
- 2. PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B)

SINN FEIN AND THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

ASST 352/6 DB.
SEC 17 JUN 1998
CENT SEC

As requested, I attach a draft letter for the Secretary of State to send to the President of the Council.

2. The draft draws to Mrs Taylor's attention the problems likely to be faced by the continued exclusion of Sinn Fein from Parliament against the background of their growing involvement in the democratic process and suggests that the question of the Oath might be a suitable item for consideration by the Modernisation of the House Committee.

Mrs Taylor

Signed

LINDA ROGERS
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Mr Davis

LD 18/6

DRAFT LETTER FOR SIGNATURE BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE

The Rt Hon Mrs Ann Taylor MP
President of the Council
68 Whitehall
London SW1A 2AT

THE PARLIAMENTARY OATH

We have spoken from time to time and exchanged letters about the question of the Members' Oath at Westminster.

You will be aware of the particular resonance this issue has for me in respect of political development in Northern Ireland - a resonance which may be expected to increase against the background of the forthcoming elections. It is because of this potential difficulty that I have decided to write to you again on this question.

The members of the new Northern Ireland Assembly will not have to swear an oath of allegiance to the Queen but will make a Pledge of Office and sign a roll of enlistment. Some of those Members will belong to Sinn Fein and could include either or both of the two Westminster MPs.

As the situation currently stands, Sinn Fein will be in a position to claim that while they have demonstrated their good faith in the political process

they continue to be penalised, by their continued exclusion from Westminster, for holding republican views.

The situation may be further complicated when members of the devolved institutions meet each other (and Westminster Ministers) possibly even in Palace of Westminster. This will mean that Sinn Fein may meet Government Ministers, members of other devolved administrations and may even possibly enter Westminster as a member of a devolved administration but not as a Member of Parliament. You may remember that I made this latter point in my letter to you of 8 May in response to the paper on proposals for dealing with Scottish and Welsh business at Westminster.

You know that I would prefer to see some movement on our part in order, at least, to allow Sinn Fein to use some facilities at Westminster even if they were not permitted to take their seats and play an active role in the business of the House. I am aware of the difficulties such a move may create but I think that as a Government, we must be ready to meet any adverse publicity the current situation may bring with an agreed and considered line of defence (even if we decide not to change our policy).

I would like to suggest, therefore, that the question of the oath, which does have a wider aspect within Parliament as well as a particularly, Northern Ireland, angle, might be worthy of consideration by the

Modernisation of the House Committee. As you Chair that Committee I would be grateful for your views on whether this is an issue you would be willing to have put onto the agenda.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister and to the Lord Chancellor.