

*Mr McNeill*

C O N F I D E N T I A L

PAB/6518/DGMcN/RG

*P/A* 571188

FROM: D G McNEILL, PAB  
DATE: 8 OCTOBER 1990

- cc Mr Chilcot
- Mr Ledlie
- Mr Thomas
- Mr A P Wilson
- Mr Alston
- Mr J E Steele
- Mr A Wood (L&B)
- Mr D J R Hill
- Mr Blackwell
- Mr Petch
- Mr Bell
- Mr Dodds

*(Handwritten mark)*

CLAIRE MARSON, CPL

REVISED ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT CIRCULAR: SINN FEIN ANNEX

PAB have considered your draft circular which you sent to Mr McConnell on 27 September 1990. We are content with the draft as it stands.

(SIGNED)

D G McNEILL  
Political Affairs Division  
SH Ext 2238

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C O N F I D E N T I A L

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*Mr McNeill*

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213/90

FROM: CLAIRE MARSON  
CPL DIVISION  
27 SEPTEMBER 1990

*Why is Legation file*  

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- cc Mr Chilcot - B
- Mr Ledlie - B
- Mr Thomas - B
- Mr A P Wilson - B
- Mr Alston - B
- Mr J E Steele - B
- Mr A Wood (L&B) - B
- Mr Blackwell - B
- Mr F G McConnell - B
- Mr Daniell - B
- Mr Bell - B
- Mr Dodds - B

- 1. MR D J R HILL (Signed David Hill 28.9)
- 2. (MR SPENCE - B  
(MR J McCONNELL - B

REVISED ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT CIRCULAR:  
SINN FEIN ANNEX

- 1. My minute of 10 August covered the draft revised Access to Government Circular, which will issue from Central Secretariat once the Secretary of State has approved the draft.
- 2. Paragraph 3 of my minute mentioned revising and re-issuing the guidance on Sinn Fein as an annex to the circular. The draft annex is attached for your comments.
- 3. The policy remains the same. Ministers seem content with the current approach and, although CPL has spent the summer drafting several papers covering that approach, we are not sure that now is the time to put them forward.
- 4. The only changes in the circular then, are:
  - (i) format - we thought the instructions needed to be more obvious in layout;
  - (ii) greater emphasis on NI departments passing details of approaches to the Secretary of State's office who will

C O N F I D E N T I A L

CPL1/JR/9848

186

C O N F I D E N T I A L

seek guidance from Central Secretariat bringing in CPL and PAB for a more cohesive approach (see latter part of 4 (iv) below); (iii) omission of the instruction for replies to Sinn Fein to be "curt" "avoiding any appearance of friendliness". We feel the instruction for replies to be brief and formal covers these points more sympathetically and would be deemed by a court to be more dignified should the guidance become a discoverable document at any stage.

(iv) inclusion of the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) in the annex. I am grateful to Mr Bestwick for his minute to me of 24 August (available from Mr Copeland OF47/SB). We feel that although there is the obvious difference in scale, there are sufficient similarities between the UDP's relationship with the UDA and Sinn Fein's relationship with PIRA to treat the two organisations in the same way. There is also the possibility that any legal challenge to our stance on Sinn Fein could raise the question of evenhandedness of our approach and we must have a viable defence. I believe there may also be a case for adopting the same approach to the Progressive Unionist Party (although Mr Daniell will know more accurately Mr Hugh Smyth's connections). On that front though, I fear we have been stymied by Northern Ireland departmental Private Offices who have included Mr Smyth in delegations to Ministers without consulting us. The PUP also automatically receives copies of consultation papers and draft Orders in Council. Unfortunately, I think we could not alter matters in this respect without a good deal of trouble.

5. I am starting a new job on 15 October so it would be helpful to have your comments in time for me to process them, since my successor is from another Department and would probably appreciate a little more time to familiarise himself with Northern Ireland

C O N F I D E N T I A L

CPL1/JR/9848

C O N F I D E N T I A L

matters before plunging in at the deepish end.

SIGNED

CLAIRE MARSON  
Constitutional and Political Division  
OAB Ext 6575  
27 September 1990

C O N F I D E N T I A L

CPL1/JR/9848

APPROACHES TO GOVERNMENT BY MEMBERS OF SINN FEIN

1. Ministers have decided not to extend to those political parties who overtly or covertly support violence the usual courtesies expected by constitutional political parties.
2. The purpose of this annex is to restate the policy, and other guidance, on government contact with Sinn Fein. The advice in this annex applies also to the Ulster Democratic Party (UDP). It supercedes Central Secretariat's existing guidance of 20 May 1985. Additional guidance concerning access by Sinn Fein to prisons and prisoners is contained in Prison Headquarters Circulars 46/86 and 31/87.

**MEETING MINISTERS**

3. (a) Any request for a meeting between a Northern Ireland Office Minister and a Sinn Fein elected representative (MP or Councillor) should be refused. The enquirer should be asked to put their views in writing.
- (b) It should be made clear to any District Council with Sinn Fein members asking to send a deputation to see the Minister that the deputation may not include any Sinn Fein councillors.
- (c) Requests for meetings from anyone else with links with Sinn Fein should be referred immediately to the Secretary of State's Office, who will consult Central Secretariat and copy requests for advice to Constitutional and Political Division (London) and Political Affairs Division (Belfast). Since such meetings will probably be refused no indication should be given to the contrary.

## MINISTERS VISITING DISTRICT COUNCILS

4. (a) Ministers have not ruled out visits to District Councils simply because Sinn Fein elected representatives might be present, but each case must be considered carefully on its merits. If there is a likelihood of Sinn Fein members being present, the Secretary of State's Office must be given all relevant information as soon as possible and they will seek advice from Central Secretariat in consultation with CPL and PAB.
- (b) Visits to Councils with Sinn Fein Chairpersons should be kept to a minimum.
- (c) If a visit takes place:
- (i) Ministerial contact with Sinn Fein members should be kept to a minimum, and should cover only council responsibilities;
  - (ii) Ministers' briefing will need to include:
    - advance identification of Sinn Fein Councillors;
    - extent of Sinn Fein's workings with Council (eg committee structure);
    - local Sinn Fein policies;
    - issues of particular local interest to Sinn Fein as opposed to the whole council.
  - (iii) Care must be taken handling photocalls and any stage managing generally;
  - (iv) Individual courtesies such as handshaking should be left to the Minister's discretion.

#### SINN FEIN LETTERS TO MINISTERS AND REPLIES

5. (a) Letters from Sinn Fein elected representatives, party officers and unelected spokespersons addressed to Ministers will receive a Private Secretary, not a Ministerial, reply.
- (b) Letters to Ministers raising constituents' problems must be dealt with adequately in the interests of the constituent, but should be brief and formal.
- (c) For some letters (eg a brief covering letter to a document which has been widely circulated or a particularly abusive letter) a single sentence acknowledgement by a Private Secretary is appropriate.
- (d) Particular attention should be paid to the style, substance and possible political implications of the replies (especially with letters dealing with broad policy issues). Any doubts about the content or tone of a letter should be passed to Central Secretariat who will consult CPL and PAB.

#### SINN FEIN APPROACHES TO OFFICIALS

6. (a) Sinn Fein spokespersons telephoning Private Offices should be asked to make their points in writing.
- (b) Exceptionally, when a request is urgent (eg compassionate parole to see a dying relative) Ministers' Private Offices should inform the Secretary of State's Office who will consult Central Secretariat and others, as necessary.
- (c) Approaches from Sinn Fein representatives to local offices etc concerning purely constituency matters which do not appear to raise wider questions of policy will continue to be dealt with at local level in the same way

CPL1/JR/9848

as similar approaches from other MPs or members of the public. Officials are instructed that if these approaches do go wider or if they have any doubts they should refer them to their Minister's Private Office who in turn will consult senior departmental officials and Central Secretariat.

- (d) Separate advice has been issued to senior headquarter officials (Assistant Secretary level and above) in Central Secretariat's minute of 28 September 1988 about receiving deputations which include Sinn Fein councillors and paying site visits to Councils where it is known that a Sinn Fein councillor would be present. Such head-to-head discussions are to be avoided whenever possible. Ministerial authority must be sought for any proposed meetings of this sort, and the Secretary of State's office, Central Secretariat, CPL and PAB should be kept informed.

#### GOVERNMENT OCCASIONS

7. Sinn Fein representatives should not be invited to receptions, presentations, seminars or similar events being held by government or public agencies, whether or not a Minister is to be present.

#### GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS

8. (a) Sinn Fein's MP should not automatically receive departmental publications which other MPs receive as a matter of courtesy.
- (b) If any Sinn Fein elected representative makes a specific request for a document which is already generally available (and which would be supplied on request to elected representatives of other political parties) this should normally be supplied. Requests from other Sinn Fein sources should be referred to the place where the

document can be purchased. Documents which are available free of charge should normally be made available on request.

#### WHITEHALL DEPARTMENTS

9. United Kingdom Ministers outside the Northern Ireland Office may receive correspondence from members of Sinn Fein (whether an MP, Councillor or in any other capacity with explicit links with Sinn Fein). Where the Sinn Fein connection is apparent, the appropriate response should be a formal and brief Private Secretary reply as in the case of NIO Private Offices. Ministers in charge of Whitehall Departments have been advised accordingly.

Central Secretariat

October 1990

CPL1/JR/9848