

FROM: RICHARD NEEDHAM
23rd MAY 1989

24 MAY 89/4

cc Ministers L&B - M
PUS L&B - M
Sir K Bloomfield - M
Mr Burns
Mr Stephens - M
Mr Murray, DOE - M
Mr Miles - M
Mr Spence - M
Mr Thomas
Mr Wood L&B - M
Mr Blackwell - M
Mr Daniell - M
Mr Kirk
Mr J McConnell - M

Mr K
5.6
"Chaps" - dangerous
ground, I think

Mr Kirk
Ms [unclear]
24/4

SECRETARY OF STATE (L&B) - M

GOVERNMENT AND SINN FEIN AFTER THE DISTRICT COUNCIL ELECTIONS

I have now seen Mr Kirk's minute of 12 May and Mr Stephens's minute of 16 May. We discussed this subject at our Ministerial meeting last Monday. I agree with the general thrust of both the minutes. This subject requires careful handling; we need to be alert to developments over the next few months (and we do not yet know how the "issue" will, or will not, develop); but we should continue with our existing policy on meeting Sinn Fein; and we should be prepared to defend that policy robustly, as the need arises.

2. There are, however, some points I should like now to record in the light of our discussion and our agreement on future action.

3. The existing guidance on 'Approaches to Government by Members of Sinn Fein', which can remain in place, quite properly draws a distinction between meetings on "our ground", as it were, and theirs. Requests for a Ministerial meeting with Sinn Fein representatives, whether separately or as part of a council

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delegation, should be turned down. But the presence of Sinn Fein representatives at meetings which we are not ourselves arranging, for example on a Ministerial visit to a district council, often cannot be prevented. In many circumstances, it would be counter-productive to insist that Sinn Fein councillors should not be present, since this could enable Sinn Fein to dictate Ministerial movements and our attendance at particular functions.

4. We discussed the link with the declaration. There is a clear distinction to be drawn between the behaviour of Sinn Fein councillors, which can be controlled via the declaration, and their beliefs, which cannot be. It is because their beliefs have not changed, on their own admission, that it is right to continue our existing policy on Ministerial meetings with them. We demonstrate our abhorrence of those beliefs by not ourselves doing business with them. Councils, on the other hand, can only conduct their business with the involvement of all councillors. The declaration facilitates the conduct of their business, by providing a remedy against any councillor who abuses his office by expressing support for acts of terrorism or proscribed organisations. Caird

5. I believe we can strongly defend our stance, as the need arises, and it is a stance which should be generally understood. Clearly, we should not close our minds to the possibility that Sinn Fein might one day repudiate the violence of the IRA, although there is no sign of that at present. On a point of presentation, however, we should now avoid the use of the word "repudiate", since Unionists sought unsuccessfully in the House to amend the declaration to include that term. Our case rests that Sinn Fein as a party continues to believe in violence, and Ministers will not meet with their councillors while they continue to hold that evil belief. At the same time, it is in the interests of all that councils should

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conduct their business, and the declaration is designed to allow them to do so, without fear of disruption by statements or other actions in support of terrorism.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Richard Needham". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.

RICHARD NEEDHAM

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