



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Secure Fax

21 April 1997

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 PST: PSS: Messrs. Teahon,
 Donlon & Dalton;
 Ambassadors London &
 Washington; Joint Secretary;
 Counsellors A-I

Dear Secretary

DISCUSSION WITH NIALL O'DOWD

1. Niall O'Dowd telephoned on Friday to say he was travelling to Northern Ireland over the weekend and would be meeting Gerry Adams and others in the Sinn Féin hierarchy there. He said he is quite unable at present to see much political sense or strategy in the activities of the Republican movement and feels that, politically, it is drifting without real focus or direction. The only (and very vague) sense he has is that Sinn Féin do not envisage being in talks before September, although a ceasefire could well be called quite some time earlier. However, O'Dowd hopes to have a better sense of Republican thinking following his meetings this week, and will touch base on his return.

2. O'Dowd went on to ask, on a personal basis, for my assessment on one specific issue, the possibility of a further U.S. visa being made available for Adams in the near future. Apparently, the Sinn Féin leader would wish to travel to the U.S. shortly after the British election. I said that, in circumstances where a decision to put in place an unambiguous IRA ceasefire had not been taken, the White House simply would not entertain such an application. It would in effect be sent back unopened.

Comment

3. The reality is that the White House attitude towards Sinn Féin has been hardening significantly over a period. This is not, of course, in the least surprising given the outrageous attempt by the IRA to murder a woman Constable in Derry, the nonsense at Aintree and the continuing perverse attempt to cause maximum disruption in London and other cities. The Sinn Féin leadership, which presumably has the political sophistication to see all this, has, for whatever reason, decided not to take up the existing option of joining the political and talks process. In acting in this way, they have undermined the patience and the willingness of the President to reach out to them - and also of other significant players here, including Senators Kennedy and Dodd. Kennedy, I might add, is extremely irritated at the lack of response by the Republican movement to his recent New York speech, and his follow-on article in the Irish Times. The President for his part, while remaining very ready to help again in the right circumstances, feels quite let down, in particular as he rightly feels he has done more to help advance peace and dialogue in the North in a few years than all his predecessors combined.

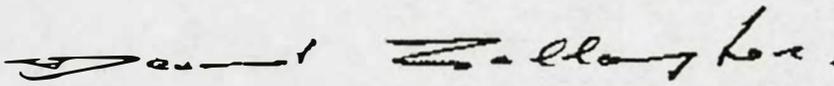
NI Elections

4. Turning back to the conversation with O'Dowd, he said that Adams was reasonably confident of Sinn Féin winning in West Belfast, and possibly also in Mid-Ulster. He felt, however, that West Tyrone would be difficult, given that the SDLP had a particularly good candidate there (we had been aware of this from Ray Bassett's excellent reports from the constituency). O'Dowd also gained the impression that Séamus Mallon's seat might be in some danger. In order to be certain of winning, Mallon apparently will need votes from constituents who might have some Sinn Féin

leanings; however, given the present fraught relationship between Sinn Féin and Mallon, there has to be a question mark over such votes.

5. I will follow-up with O'Dowd on his return.

Yours sincerely



Dermot Gallagher
Ambassador

Seán Ó hUiginn Uas
Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs