

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY



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Dear Stephen,

MEDIA INTERVIEWS: TALKING TO SINN FEIN ETC

My Secretary of State is conscious that the factitious media controversy over interviews he gave last week (on the occasion of his first 100 days in Northern Ireland) may provoke further questions. There has of course been no change in Government policy, but the Secretary of State believes it important that those colleagues principally concerned should respond to any follow up questions in the same terms.

In keeping the record straight my Secretary of State has emphasised the following points, which he hopes colleagues will find helpful:

- (i) There has been no change in Government policy;
- (ii) our overriding aim is to bring terrorism to an end, so that the people of Northern Ireland may live in peace and stability and take decisions about their own future, in accordance with the principle of democratic consent, without fear or coercion;
- (iii) everything must be done to support the Security Forces who have worked with courage and dedication and have shown that terrorism cannot and will not succeed;
- (iv) combatting terrorism requires the support of other measures of good Government;

- (v) the Secretary of State hopes to stimulate talks between the political parties and with Government, but on the basis that those who support terrorism can play no part;
- (vi) such talks would concentrate on government within Northern Ireland, since the constitutional position of Northern Ireland has been settled and could not change unless and until a majority of people there wanted it, which at present they clearly do not. (It is highly unlikely that Sinn Fein would wish to participate in talks of this kind since 'British withdrawal' would not be on the agenda. But the Secretary of State is in any event quite clear that we could deal with Sinn Fein only if they clearly renounced violence and demonstrated over a period that they had done so. A brief ceasefire would not be enough.)
- (vii) The Secretary of State referred to Cyprus only to illustrate the dangers of saying 'never'. There is no analogy between the colonial situation of Cyprus and the position of Northern Ireland, which is an integral part of the United Kingdom.

I also attach some question and answer material elaborating somewhat on these and other related issues.

I am copying this letter and attachments to Charles Powell (No.10), Colin Walters (HO), Brian Hawtin (MOD) and to Trevor Woolley (Sir Robin Butler's office).

Yours, etc.

Stephen Leach

S J LEACH

1. Any change in Government policy?

There has been no change in Government policy. Ministers will have no dealings with Sinn Fein because of its support for violence. Our commitment to defeat the terrorists remains unchanged.

2. Will Sinn Fein have a seat at any Conference table?

The Government will not talk to the supporters of terrorism. If in some future hypothetical situation Sinn Fein were to repudiate violence and to commit itself to democratic procedures - ie dissociate itself from the IRA's terrorist campaign - the Government would have to consider its response.

There is of course no question of any 'Conference table' to discuss Northern Ireland's constitutional position as a part of the United Kingdom unless and until there is reason to judge that a majority of the people there would wish to see a change in the present status of the Province. We cannot see such a situation arising in the foreseeable future.

3. Constitutional status of Northern Ireland

As both the British and Irish Governments recognised in Article 1 of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. The present wish of the people of Northern Ireland is for no change in that status.

Moreover, the Northern Ireland Constitutional Act 1973 declares that Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom and that in no event will Northern Ireland or any part of it cease to be part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland voting in a poll held for the purpose.

4. Comparison with Cyprus

There is no comparison between the position of Northern Ireland and that of Cyprus now or in the past. Cyprus was referred to by the Secretary of State simply to illustrate the point that it is unwise for a politician ever to use the word 'never'.

5. What about the current round of political talks?

Constitutional parties are being encouraged to talk to each other and to the Government about ways in which Northern Ireland politicians can play an enhanced part in the government and administration of the Province. Any party which has a record of support of violence, and which shows no sign whatever of withdrawing such support, can have no part in such discussions.

6. Can the IRA be defeated?

We are determined to defeat the efforts of the IRA to undermine the democratic process with terror. The Security Forces have the most conspicuous and dangerous role but it has long been recognised that our military efforts, though crucial, can not be our only response. The problem also has complex political, social and economic aspects. Our policies on these matters are therefore designed to demonstrate to people in Northern Ireland our determination to achieve a fully fair society where grievance and disadvantage can be remedied by democratic process.

Since the terrorists cannot win, their use of terror is not only evil itself, but also futile. Its main victims have of course been the people of Northern Ireland.

7. Security force morale affected by Secretary of State's comments?

The security forces play a vital role in combatting terrorism - their heroism, continuing bravery and professionalism are

unparalleled. They have too much common sense to be affected by media speculation.

8. Alleged UDR leaks linked to Secretary of State's view that military defeat of IRA impossible?

Nonsense. The vast majority of the UDR support the forces of law and order, and condemn those few whose behaviour lets down the Regiment.

9. "Suspending" the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

The Government is committed to the Agreement which, as an international treaty, cannot be suspended. It is longstanding Government policy that the Agreement could be operated sensitively in the interests of bringing about talks between the political parties. This is also reflected in paragraph 29 of the Report of the Review of the Operation of the Intergovernmental Conference published earlier this year.

Note

Para 29 says 'If in future it were to appear that the objectives of the Agreement could be more effectively served by changes in the scope and nature of the working of the Conference, consistent with the basic provisions and spirit of the Agreement, the two Governments would be ready in principle to consider such changes'.

(If raised) Mr Brooke drew attention to the fact that a gap has occurred between Conference meetings this summer, and there could be similar natural gaps in the future. He did not suggest that such a gap was necessary for inter-party talks to take place; but it was necessary that there should be a "clear sense on the part of everybody that they think that talks are sensible ... and would have a prospect of success". He also made clear that he would want to have "further conversations" with "all the leaders of the Parties" before "we would know whether there was a sufficient meeting of minds on everybody's part to go to the next step".

10. How will the Secretary of State encourage political movement?

As he said, this is something he wishes to explore between now and the end of the year. The main aim is to examine the scope for agreement on the means to transfer governmental power to people within Northern Ireland. There is of course no question of considering the constitutional status of Northern Ireland which has effectively been settled by the people of Northern Ireland.

11. Discussing devolution with the Irish

The prime objective is to reach agreement among the constitutional parties of Northern Ireland on governmental arrangements within the Province. Progress towards devolution has clear implications for the operation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement which would need to be discussed with the Irish. The Irish Government is committed to supporting our efforts in pursuit of devolution. As Mr Brooke said, "assuming the conversations go forward with the local political parties ... it is a subject which I would be wanting to discuss with the Irish Government thereafter".

12. Does the Government support Mr Haughey's view that any group adopting democratic process and renouncing violence could participate in talks?

Both our Governments made clear in the Agreement our total rejection of any attempt to promote political objectives by violence. We welcome the fact that Mr Haughey and other politicians support the position, as stated by the Secretary of State, that there can be no question of Ministerial dealings with Sinn Fein so long as they support terrorism.

13. Government's economic policy

Industrial situation healthier now than for many years; manufacturing industry continuing to show high level of activity.

Last year's investment by IDB client companies amounted to £400 million. IDB supported investment has totalled more than £1,500 million and 23,000 job promotions in last 5 years. There has been a consistent fall in the seasonally adjusted unemployment figure - now at 14.6%.

14. The 'Declaration Against Terrorism' and Sinn Fein Councillors

The 43 Sinn Fein councillors, like all other councillors, have signed a declaration that they would not "by word or deed express support for or approval of" proscribed organisations or acts of terrorism. We hope that all councillors will abide by that declaration, but it has not led Sinn Fein as a party to repudiate terrorist violence. (If raised: The declaration was introduced in response to widespread concern that a number of councillors were abusing elected office to give support to terrorism. If councillors are believed to be in breach of their declarations, actions may be brought in the High Court by their electors, fellow councillors or the council itself; any finding of a "breach" would disqualify a councillor from holding or seeking council office for five years.)

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