



Setting the record straight

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Sinn Féin is publishing this record of communications between itself and the British government in order to set the record straight. In public comments repeated many times British ministers, including Prime Minister John Major, have said that they would not negotiate with Irish republicans. That representatives of the British government have done so, and with approval at the highest level of government, is clear from this record. Communications and dialogue were intensive from mid 1990 and as chronicled here should be read in the light of the false assertions from British ministers. The facts as now presented for the first time speak for themselves and give the lie to the British governments claims.

INTRODUCTION

A line of communication has existed between Sinn Féin and the British government for over 20 years. It has not been in constant use. It has been used in an intensive way during such periods as the bilateral truce of 1974-75 and the Long Kesh Hunger-Strikes of 1980 and 1981.

The British government reactivated it in the middle of 1990. This led to a period of protracted contact and dialogue between Sinn Féin and the British government.

At all times Sinn Féin has endeavoured to avoid the disclosure of this line of communication even when such revelations would have been to our advantage or to the disadvantage of the British

government.

The British government has shown no such integrity. In the course of the recent protracted contact and dialogue Sinn Féin made a number of complaints to the British government about leaks to the media. These leaks are documented both in the Sinn Féin record and in the British government version.

In the early part of 1993 the British government proposed a series of meetings with Sinn Féin, arguing that an intensive round of such meetings would result in Irish republicans being convinced that armed struggle was no longer necessary. They requested a two to three week undeclared suspension of operations by the Irish Republican Army to facilitate this. Sinn Féin sought and gained such a commitment from the IRA. This was communicated to the British government on 10 May 1993.

There was no positive response to this and after some time it became quite clear that the British government was attempting to disguise its rejection of the substantial response by the IRA to its request.

Simultaneously the volume of leaks and rumours about talks between Sinn Féin and the British government noticeably increased.

The leaks led to the breaking of the story on 8 November 1993, by Belfast journalist, Eamon Mallie. There were immediate British government denials.

One of these leaks was from DUP MP Willie McCrea. According to Mr. McCrea he was given a copy of a British communiqué by a senior civil servant in the N10.

On BBC TV Breakfast Time on the 16 November, Mayhew, when asked about talks with Sinn Féin or the IRA said: "There has been no negotiating with Sinn Féin; no official, as I see, is alleged to have been talking to Sinn Féin on behalf of the British government."

Also on BBC TV when asked if there had been contact with Sinn Féin or the IRA by people who could be regarded as emissaries or representatives of the government Mayhew replied, "No, there hasn't."

Afterwards to reporters he again said: "There have been no negotiations with Sinn Féin...."

On the same day a spokesperson for John Major's office denied that it had been involved in "protracted contact and dialogue". The spokesperson went on to reiterate that there had been "no negotiation" with Sinn Féin or the IRA.

Three days later on 19 November speaking in Derry Mayhew reiterated that "Nobody has been authorised to talk or negotiate on behalf of the British government with Sinn Féin or any other terrorist organisation."

The following day in the House of Commons John Major asserted that he would not talk to Sinn Féin. Earlier he had declared that the prospects of talks with Gerry Adams would "turn my stomach".

Willie McCrea gave his document to The Observer on 17 November 1993. They are reported to have sent it to the British government for comment on Friday, 26 November 1993. That same day, in an enigmatic statement, Ulster Unionist Party leader, Jim Molyneaux, advised the people of the North not to jump to conclusions when information came out over the weekend.

The matter came to a head on the evening of Saturday, 27 November 1993. In a statement from the British government it admitted contact with Sinn Féin. Patrick Mayhew claimed that this contact was in response to a message from the IRA, sent by Martin McGuinness that the conflict was over.

In a follow-up statement on Sunday, 28 November 1993, Mayhew announced his intention of addressing the British parliament on this issue on Monday, 29 November.

On the morning of Monday, 29 November, Sinn Féin held a press conference. In a statement to the media, Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams said:

"Over the past weeks many of you have asked Sinn Féin to provide proof of the contact between us and representatives of the British government. Up to now we have declined to do so in an attempt to protect a line of communication which has always been dependant on confidentiality and which, we had hoped, could assist in the search for a viable peace process.

"At all times republicans have endeavoured to avoid the disclosure of this line of communication, even when such revelations would have been to our advantage or to the disadvantage of the British government. Despite the fact that the British Government, have shown no real evidence that they are genuinely seeking a real settlement, we regard the contact as a potentially important element in the development of an effective peace process. For this reason we endeavoured at all times to protect this contact believing that the objective of peace was far more important than the short-term political effects of disclosure.

"However, we also made it clear to the British Government that, if the contacts did become public, we would not tell lies by denying their existence. The onus was on both sides to ensure total confidentiality. For some time now, and going back at least over a three-year period, we have been concerned about leaks, whether initiated by elements of the British establishment or the unionists, and consequent speculation in the press. On each occasion that this happened we formally protested to the British government and expressed our concern.

"It is right that there is contact between the British government and our party. It is clearly supported by the majority of British and Irish people. For all of these reasons, Sinn Féin has sought to protect this process. Mr. Major and Mr. Mayhew, however, have sought in recent times to abuse it. They have acted in bad faith and Mayhew's statements are aimed at sowing dissension and confusion and

distracting attention from the real issues. For this reason, I have called this morning's press conference in order to place before you some of the documents, which have been exchanged between our party and the British government. I do this reluctantly and only to correct the lies that are now being told. It is still our intention to maintain and protect the line of contact.

"First of all, as I said yesterday, the contact was more than a conduit. It has been in existence over a period of two decades. To our certain knowledge it has never been abused until now by those who politically controlled it on the British side and it has never, ever been abused by the republicans.

"The current phase of discussion has been on and off for the last number of years. The British government initiated the latest phase of contact. We welcomed it. In the course of this, outlines of British government and Sinn Féin policies were exchanged and discussed. This process was not an alternative to the discussions, which I was conducting with John Hume. Indeed on a number of occasions Martin McGuinness instructed his contact that the Hume-Adams discussions were dealing with the substantive issues and that they were a serious effort to reach agreement on the principles, the dynamic and the process required to bring peace to Ireland. When John Hume and I reached agreement, the British were informed of this. The IRA's positive attitude to this development was also conveyed to them. There can be no doubt that Mr. Major and his colleagues knew that the Irish Peace Initiative had the potential to move all of us towards a lasting peace. They have lied about this also.

"I now want to deal with some of the detail of our exchanges with the British. This included written position papers. The British government supplied Sinn Féin with its position in a nine-paragraph document. We, in turn, supplied them with the Sinn Féin position in an eleven-paragraph document. You have these before you.

"The British government also proposed that a British government delegation should meet with a Sinn Féin delegation for a protracted and intense round of discussions. Venues and timescales for these meetings were discussed. We were told that such an intense period of negotiation would result in Irish republicans being convinced that armed struggle would be no longer necessary. We were

asked to seek a short suspension of IRA operations to facilitate these discussions.

"Given the importance of all of this, Sinn Féin sought and was given a commitment from the leadership of the Irish Republican Army, that it would suspend operations for two weeks to enable us to explore the potential of the British government's assertion.

"This was conveyed to the British government on 10 May 1993.

"Although we were informed that the positive response by republicans to the British proposal was the subject of a series of high-level meetings by British ministers and officials, including John Major, there was no positive response by them and although the line was in regular use in this period it was not used in any positive way. In fact, the British moved away from their proposal and refused to follow it through.

"We believe this was instanced, in part at least, by party political difficulties which overtook the Tory party leadership at this time, and other difficulties in the House of Commons which lead them to depend on unionist votes at Westminster.

"The bad faith and double dealing involved in this clearly presents serious difficulties for us. It was clear to us from the early summer that the British government had reneged on its proposal and the previous indications that it may have been actively seeking a way out of conflict. I want to stress also by this time that London was well advised that the discussions between those involved in the Irish Peace Initiative had reached a point of significant progress. They were also informed by us that this provided the best opportunity and framework for peace if they had the political will to move forward.

"Despite all of this the documents we were receiving continued to avoid the main issues. Their content was increasingly disingenuous and it became clear that the British were quite blatantly abusing the line of communication for their own narrow, short-term interests. The communications were quite clearly being written with a view to disguise the British government's rejection of the substantial and generous response by the IRA to the British request.

"Simultaneously the volume of leaks and rumours

increased quite noticeably.

"The British government was now trying to sow confusion and division among republicans. For example, they now claim that the current phase of contact commenced in response to a commitment that the conflict was over.

"They were also actively engaged in trying to thwart the Irish Peace Initiative and to spoil the potential which it presents. For example, they denied knowledge of its contents. Their strategy by this time was based upon lies and disinformation. Their objective was not peace but power. This remains their strategy up to and including today. Lies, lies and more lies.

"There will be more of this this afternoon.

"Patrick Mayhew is going to present a document which he alleges was in response to a communication from us. This is another lie. We did receive such a document but it came on 5 November, out of the blue, and incidentally, nine months after he alleges the contact was initiated. It is also the only substantial policy document we have received since the summer.

This claimed to be a response to a 2 November communication from Sinn Féin. We immediately made it clear that no such communication had been sent by us. You have the British government's 5 November communication before you.

"It represents the substance of John Major's public preconditions on talks with Sinn Féin as presented in his Lord Mayors Banquet speech at London's Guildhall. This unsolicited communication was a transparent manoeuvre to synchronise the British government's public and private positions in advance of this contact becoming public in a climate of leaks and rumours.

"Sinn Féin acted at all times in good faith. We sought to move towards peace, both through this private contact with the British government and through my talks with the leader of the SDLP John Hume. Republicans have demonstrated flexibility and integrity throughout. The British Government has demonstrated intransigence and duplicity. They have rejected these very real and tangible opportunities for peace.

"In conclusion, I return to what is clearly the most

important development in twenty five years of conflict - the issue which in reality is at the core of this controversy despite all the efforts at disguising that fact - the Irish Peace Initiative.

"It, I repeat, can deliver peace. John Major has rejected peace. He cannot hide this behind lies, diversions and distractions forever.

"He will be held publicly accountable by the people of Ireland, Britain and by international opinion for his denial of peace in Ireland.

"There is a need for honesty and a real peace process. Sinn Féin remains committed to this. When the dust has settled on this disgraceful phase of British government duplicity, bad faith and double-dealing, all of us will have to endeavour to build such a process. I appeal to people of good will to demonstrate their support for the existing opportunity for peace."

On Monday, 29 November 1993, Patrick Mayhew, the British Minister with chief responsibility for the Six Counties, lodged in the Library and Vote office at Westminster, what he claimed to be all messages "received and dispatched" in the course of the British government's protracted contact and dialogue with Irish republicans. His 'record' covered the period of 22 February 1993 -5 November 1993. He claimed this to be the totality of the period involved. He lied. The period involved extended long before 22 February 1993.

He claimed these documents related to communications between the British government and the IRA leadership. The protracted contact and dialogue was, in fact, between the British government and Sinn Féin, as the documentation will show. At approximately 3.30pm on the same day, Patrick Mayhew addressed the British parliament on the issue. Within an hour of Mayhew's speech, and solely on that basis, Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle member, Martin McGuinness, challenged the British minister's version of things. In a statement issued at approximately 5.00 pm, Mr. McGuinness said:

"Patrick Mayhew today read a text which he claims to be a communication sent by me to the British government in late February.

"I totally refute his claim. The text he read is counterfeit. No such communication was ever sent.

It is a lie. Yet another lie to add to the many lies, which have emanated from Patrick Mayhew and John Major in recent times. My initial comparison of the version of the 19 March document read out by Patrick Mayhew today even indicates that they are now counterfeiting their own documents to meet their current needs.

"The British government has been telling lie after lie after lie in recent times to disguise its rejection of peace in Ireland.

"Sinn Féin will be returning to all of this in the coming days."

Sinn Féin received a copy of the British government's version of the record late in the evening of Monday, 29 November 1993 and began an examination of this in the context of the Sinn Féin files then available.

Confidentiality required that the files were kept in secure locations outside of Sinn Féin offices. Ironically Sinn Féin had properly tasked itself with keeping confidential British government documents safe from the possibility of discovery in the course of raids on Sinn Féin offices by British forces. In doing so, we hampered our ability to make a prompt and comprehensive response.

On 1 December 1993, Patrick Mayhew admitted that his version of the exchanges was inaccurate. It is clear that documents released by him were doctored but in a further attempt to deceive, he attributed this to typographical errors. These included both British government and Sinn Féin documents. He offered a number of corrections. These did not rectify all of the documents, which had been doctored. The issue of messages omitted from the British version was not addressed. He did not address the issue of the bogus documents fabricated by the British government whose authorship was attributed to Sinn Féin.

In due course, Sinn Féin issued an "Interim Briefing Paper" at a press conference in Belfast on Thursday 2 December 1993. The briefing paper was titled "A review of British Disinformation; Lies; Omissions and Fabrications."

At the launch of Sinn Féin's "Interim Briefing", party president Gerry Adams said: "As we informed you some days ago, on Monday, 29 November 1993, Sinn Féin is scrutinising the British version of the

protracted contact and dialogue between our party and the British government and the documents provided by Patrick Mayhew on Monday to the British parliament. We are providing you today with an interim report of our scrutiny.

"There are matters we will have to return to. It remains our intention to place our account of these matters on the public record and to thus set the record straight."

He explained that the Sinn Féin record would be lodged in the Linen hall Library, Belfast, and the National Library, Dublin. (The full text of Gerry Adams' statement is carried in this record).

Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle member, Martin McGuinness, provided an outline account of the history of this phase of the protracted dialogue and of the line of communication between Sinn Féin and the British government.

He began by saying that he "never thought there would be a need for us to set the record straight as we are doing today. Let me stress that we are doing so reluctantly and because of the blatant abuse by the British government of the line of communication between us and it." (The full text of Martin McGuinness' statement is carried in this record).

As stated at the press conference on Thursday, 2 December, Sinn Féin is now "placing our account of these matters on the public record" so as "to set the record straight".

STATEMENT FROM SINN FÉIN PRESIDENT GERRY ADAMS

2 December 1993

As we informed you some days ago Sinn Féin is scrutinising the British version of the protracted dialogue and contact between our party and the British government and the documents provided by Patrick Mayhew on Monday to the British parliament. We are providing you today with an interim report of our scrutiny. There are matters we will have to return to. For example, last night's admissions from Mayhew have not been properly scrutinised by us. May I also once again demand an end to London and Dublin government

editorship. It remains our intention to place our account of these matters on the public record and to thus set the record straight.

It is important that this is done because if this line of communication is to have any value in the future its integrity must be restored. The British government has acted, and is acting in bad faith and has actively abused our contact with it in order to sow dissension and confusion and to distract attention from the real issues. This can only devalue the peace process, which has been severely damaged by Major and Mayhew's actions.

Martin McGuinness will give you an outline account of the history of this phase of the protracted dialogue and of the line of communication between Sinn Féin and the British government. Richard McAuley will also provide you with a preliminary report of our scrutiny and an information document on British Bogus, Omitted and Altered documents - BOA....snake in the grass!

We will also be releasing a number of documents, some from Sinn Féin and some from the British government. In due course, and when we have completed our scrutiny and compiled a full account on all these matters, we will be placing this on the public record in the Linen hall Library, Belfast, and in the National Library, Dublin.

I now want to make a number of important points regarding this affair. The behaviour of the British government, the lies, omissions, falsification, forgeries, diversions and distractions are all proof of the British government's opposition to peace in our country which arises from its dogged refusal to concede to the people of Ireland, all of us, our right to determine our own future - our right to govern ourselves free of division and conflict.

This has to be seen also against the failure of British rule in our country. But there are positive aspects to this situation, for example, no government on these islands can ever again claim that there is any popular support for a policy of excluding Sinn Féin. The pompous, self-righteous rhetoric of British government officials and of John Major that he will not talk to us, has been totally exposed as cheap political manoeuvring. People support inclusive dialogue. Even the British House of Commons supports dialogue with us despite all the posturing of the past by all of the parties in that

establishment.

This recent phase of our history is one of the most shameful in 25 years of conflict, or perhaps since the partition of this country. The British government's attitude to nationalist Ireland, whether represented by Albert Reynolds or John Hume or Sinn Féin has been despicable, devious and damnable. The British government knows, and has known for some long time now that the Irish Peace Initiative presents a real opportunity for peace. John Hume has told them this privately and publicly. We have told them this privately and publicly. Public opinion, in both Ireland and Britain, with the exception of the unionists has told them it also.

I want to appeal to the unionists. Republicans are not outraged by the conduct of British government ministers. We expect nothing less. But we do expect more from you. You and we, and the rest of the Irish people can build a common future together. The main cause of the division between us is the British connection. You can have little confidence in British governments. Major and Mayhew have lied to your leaders. They see Ian Paisley and Molyneaux and John Hume and I and Albert Reynolds and Dublin politicians as leaders of Irish opinion. You and we are seen by the London government for what we are, as people of Ireland. They will use you today and abuse you tomorrow and dump you the day after that. You know that. It is time we stopped being used by liars and cheats who have no right to rule us.

Why is the British telling all these lies? What is the purpose? Let us forget for a minute the convoluted and confusing detail of documents. Let us deal with the main point. Nationalist Ireland wants peace. The British government does not. The British government cannot admit this and it wishes to distract attention from it and to confuse and to divide us. They say that Irish republicans are ready to surrender. This is a lie. Our commitment to struggle is firm and undaunted.

We do want to move towards a negotiated settlement. We want peace. We are prepared to take risks and have taken risks to achieve this and we will continue to take risks because the objective of peace is so important to us.

Following protracted dialogue and contact between us and the British over a considerable period at the

beginning of this year, the British government proposed delegation meetings between Sinn Féin and its representatives. We will deal with the detail of this later. Suffice to say now that we negotiated the preliminary procedures for these discussions. In order to assist this process the IRA responded positively to a British request for a temporary suspension of operations. The British then moved away from this position. Fair enough. Such to-ing and fro-ing is not unusual. But to then try to use the generosity of the IRA in order to cover its own failure to engage meaningfully in a dialogue for peace as it moved away from its own proposal is totally unacceptable. It damages the prospects for peace.

It has always been clear to this generation of Irish republicans that the British government seeks to defeat us. It seeks not to bring about peace, not to end conflict, but merely to end the IRA's campaign as a means of subverting all Irish nationalist opinion.

When rumours about the dialogue between Sinn Féin and the British government started again recently, the British government moved to defend its position in a selfish and narrow way. When it became likely that some of these matters might become public they then moved to counteract this. That is what the Guildhall speech was about. That is what the bogus messages of February 22, June 1 and November 2 are about. That is what the forgeries are about. The British government dare not admit that it made a proposal, which met with a principled, flexible but positive response from both Sinn Féin and the IRA. And John Major threw this back in our faces as he did with John Hume, as he has done with the Dublin government. How this is dealt with is a matter for those concerned. How we deal with our affairs is a matter for us. I am now demanding that John Major explains why he and his cabinet walked away from their own proposal and condemned all of us to the violence, which has occurred since.

So, in conclusion, and I will return to this in my closing remarks, there is a need for nationalist Ireland and for progressive public opinion in Britain to see beyond the lies. It is time for the unionists to likewise. But more importantly, we all need to move beyond the lies and to consolidate the peace process. What we have seen so far have been skirmishes on the sidelines, but the high ground - that is, the opportunity for peace presented by the

Irish Peace Initiative - remains intact. Let us avoid diversions about whether or not Sinn Féin will be involved in talks. We have been and we will be again. This is not the main issue at this time.

The main issue, to paraphrase the words of John Hume, is that the British government "hold the key" to peace in our country, and between the people of Britain and Ireland. Major has refused to turn this key. When we have cleared away all of these distractions, then all of us, Dublin and London, republicans and nationalists, must strive - and must seek the support of the unionist section of our people - to build upon the peace process. ENDS

STATEMENT FROM SINN FÉIN ARD CHOMHAIRLE MEMBER MARTIN McGUINNESS

2 December 1993

Let me begin by saying that I never thought there would be a need for us to set the record straight as we are doing today. Let me stress that we are doing so reluctantly and because of the blatant abuse by the British government of the line of communication between us and it.

The Sinn Féin leadership has always accepted that each side in this process will seek to gain advantage over the other. This is part of the battle in which we are engaged. However, what has occurred this last year and which is now partially in the public domain goes far beyond legitimate manoeuvring. At no time, even under Thatcher, has any government attempted to use and abuse communication by fabrication and forgery in the way which the Major government has.

The history of my involvement with this line of communication between Sinn Féin and the British government must be seen against the background of our initiatives on peace and against the background of the evolution and the development of party policy on this issue. Most of you will be aware that for the last five years, at least, Sinn Féin has been involved in trying to build consensus in Ireland around the need for a negotiated settlement of the conflict here. This was publicly outlined in a series of discussion documents from "Scenario for Peace" through to "Towards a Lasting Peace". It

has dominated party Ard Fheiseanna and it has been the central focus for us.

As part of our strategy, senior party members were given responsibility for engaging in private and public debate with different elements of opinion here and abroad. I was given major responsibility for engaging in public debate with the British government. I was accountable to a small committee, chaired by party president, Gerry Adams.

As many of you will recall the development of our policy and the public articulation of it informed public debate during this time. Sinn Féin has always had a policy based on the need for dialogue and for as long as I can recall, we have been in regular contact with many elements of Irish and British opinion. As Sinn Féin engaged more and more confidently in the peace debate these contacts became more intense. It was in this climate that the British government reactivated the line of communication and its current phase of protracted contact and dialogue with us. This line of contact was not an alternative to other dialogue that we were engaged in. Nor indeed was it the most productive. At all times our objective was aimed at building a process towards a lasting peace. The most significant progress in this regard has been made in the discussions between John Hume and Gerry Adams. Throughout these discussions, and especially when significant progress was made we pointed the British government at this initiative and advised them that it presented the best opportunity for peace.

The line of communication goes back over two decades. I had no dealings with it before the Hunger Strikes although I was aware of its existence. The line of communication was dormant from the breakdown of 74 - 75 truce until the Hunger Strikes. The two Hunger Strikes were a period of frenzied contact between us and them. The contacts between us and the British government at this time are not disputed. Incidentally, we were assured during this period that Margaret Thatcher had authorised the line of communication with us and with the political prisoners in the H-Blocks and Armagh Prisons. The British government representative was appointed by London not Stormont.

After the Hunger Strikes the line of communication was dormant until mid 1990. Even though the line

of communication was dormant the contact remained in touch with the British government representative and occasionally with me. In mid-1990 the British government representative intimated that he wished to open up the line of communication once again. We thought that this was only an opening approach aimed at picking up on the bad situation between us since the Hunger Strikes and we received some general and occasional oral briefings on the British government position during this time.

During this period also the British government representative informed the contact that he would like to meet me. Towards the end of 1990 he passed word to Sinn Féin that he was due for retirement and he would like to meet me before he left and to prepare the way for a new British government representative. Gerry Adams and I discussed this invitation with others in the Sinn Féin officer board and decided to go ahead with the meeting. I was instructed to proceed on a listening brief.

This meeting took place in October 1990. The contact was also in attendance. It was a low key meeting lasting for three hours and discussed the general political and the current state of British policy and Anglo-Irish relations. In keeping with my brief, I said very little and was noncommittal on all aspects of republican policy.

The British government representative intimated to me that after his retirement a new representative would be appointed and that there would be an effort to reactivate the line of communication. I was noncommittal on this. I reported all this back to my colleagues. While we felt a moral imperative to explore any overtures from the British, because of previous experiences during the Hunger Strikes and the 72 and 74 bilateral truces, and given that there was no public evidence that the British government position had changed, we were sceptical about their intentions. This strongly influenced our attitude. However, we agreed if the British desired to activate the line of communication that we were morally and tactically obliged not to reject their offer. We did not communicate this to the British. In January 1991 the British government representative I met retired.

April 91: Contact informed us that the British government, through the now retired British government representative, had passed to him

information that the loyalist death squads were about to announce a cease fire for the inter-party talks.

We were informed of this orally through the line of communication and after this there was no contact until June 1991. Then we were informed that a new named representative had been appointed. He had introduced himself to the contact. He verified his status by producing a letter signed by the then British Secretary of State Peter Brooke. This letter was read by the contact and kept by the British government representative. His status was also verified by the previous British government representative. We were informed that he was appointed by London.

June to Christmas 91: During this period the new British government representative initiated a series of periodical meetings and occasional telephone conversations with the contact. We were given detailed briefings on British government policy. The meetings took place both in the Six Counties and in London. The representative declared that it was his objective to ensure that republicans knew the thinking of his government. We presumed that he was also engaged in building up a relationship with us and with the contact. We were assured that John Major had authorised the line of communication. Our private position was that in all of this that the British government's strategy remained one aimed at defeating the republican struggle. During this period we did not initiate any contact and our response to all information was to note it.

January to April 1992: Throughout 1992 the British government representative became very active in briefing us. The major part of these briefings was taken up by reports of the progress, or lack of it, which was being made in the inter-party talks. Peter Brooke made a number of keynote speeches at this time and we were advised of these in advance.

April to Christmas 1992: During this time, after the Westminster election Peter Brooke was replaced by Patrick Mayhew. We were informed that the line of communication would continue as before and that Patrick Mayhew was "fully on board".

We were being given consistent reports from the British government representative that the Brooke/Mayhew talks were going nowhere and that

the government's prediction was that they would end in failure.

We were also being told that there was friction between the senior civil servants (in London and Stormont) and Mayhew. In October, we were provided with a two-page document on the progress of the talks under Sir Ninian Stephen.

Jan-Mar 1993: The British government representative was in frequent contact, on occasion on a daily basis. He was suggesting that there was a possibility of meetings taking place between British government representatives and Sinn Féin representatives. We began to take his proposal more seriously when he got into discussions about the logistics of carrying out such a meeting.

At all times we stressed that there could be no preconditions to such a meeting and that Sinn Féin's electoral mandate was the basis for our engagement. The British government representative said there would be a need for the British prime minister to defend talks with us if these became public and this would be most difficult if the IRA campaign was continuing at a high level. He told us that the British government accepted that the IRA activity would only be halted as a result of negotiations. He said that the British government believed that intensive meetings with Sinn Féin would persuade republicans that armed struggle was no longer necessary. He proposed that if we got agreement of these meetings that the IRA should reduce its campaign or suspend it in order to enhance this process.

In February Sinn Féin held its Ard Fheis. There were keynote speeches from Gerry Adams and myself outlining party policy on the need for a peace process.

This triggered further intense responses from the British government. We were advised that we would shortly be in a situation in which a definite arrangement would be made for such a meeting. Suggestions were made that meetings could take place in various venues. They offered to arrange an airplane to fly us to Scotland, Norway or Denmark.

I asked for information about the make-up of the meetings, eg numbers of delegates. I was informed that the British were prepared to be flexible about

this. They suggested that three delegates, accompanied by three advisors, would be sufficient.

They would also be similarly represented. I asked for an indication of the seniority of the British representatives. I was then given the names of those who would represent the British side. The British government representative stressed that the British government believed that the end result of these talks would be that republicans would feel that there would be no need to go back to armed struggle.

He also stated that he believed two-weeks intensive daily meetings would suffice. I reported this to Gerry Adams. After a discussion with senior colleagues, the British request was passed to the IRA.

By this time, the British government had appointed two representatives. By the end of March we had reached agreement in principle about the meetings. The Sinn Féin side applied itself to terms of reference and an outline of policy position. It was during this period that we received the British nine-paragraph document. We prepared an eleven-paragraph response to it. We also appointed a small secretariat under my tutelage.

At this time Sinn Féin sought and was given a commitment by the IRA that it would create the conditions necessary to facilitate this round of talks and to enable us to explore the potential of the British government's assertion. This would have involved a 14-day suspension of operations.

This was conveyed to the British government on 10 May.

Although we were informed that the positive response by republicans to the British proposal was the subject of a series of high-level meetings by British ministers and officials, including John Major, there was no positive response by them. I was informed that this was discussed on Monday, 17 May 1993, at a meeting, which included Major, Hurd, Mayhew, Chilcott, and Braithwaite. The meeting was indecisive and was reconvened on Tuesday, 18 May, and Kenneth Clarke was involved in this. Clarke's advice was that the opening of public negotiations with us was "too risky with the government under siege". Mayhew was wobbling between "pushing for acceptance

and wanting a safer longer period of cessation". John Major compromised by instructing his secretary to draw up a programme, which he would be able to announce in parliament..... "that he was instructing the N10 to enter into dialogue with the Republican Movement". Later we received a written communication, which you have before you. This deals directly with the 10 May situation. From this point, although the line was in regular use in this period it was not used in any positive way. In fact, the British moved away from their proposal and refused to follow it through.

We believe that this was due to John Major's difficulties within his party and in the British parliament, and his need to secure an alliance with the UUP.

During this time there were a number of leaks to the media, which hinted at contact between us and the British. s We made a number of formal complaints as we had done on previous occasions and expressed concern at the risk to the process.

In fact we believe these leaks to have been inspired from within the British military and political establishment and that this led to the British government being forced to give the UUP a limited briefing on its contacts with Sinn Féin.

July 1993: The Sinn Féin response to the British government's nine paragraph document, which had been prepared in April for presentation by our secretariat in advance of the proposed delegation meetings, was lodged with the contact to be passed to the British. This outlined the basis on which we were entering negotiations.

After this the exchanges we received became less and less. They continued to avoid the main issue raised on 10 May. Their content was increasingly disingenuous and it became clear that the British were quite blatantly abusing the line of communication for their own narrow, short-term interests.

The communications were quite clearly being written with a view to disguise the British government's rejection of the substantial and courageous response by the IRA to the British request. Simultaneously the volume of leaks and rumours increased quite noticeably. During this period the Hume/Adams discussions were making considerable progress and we conveyed this to the

British both verbally and in written messages.

November 1993: In early November we received a British government document, which purported to be in response to a request from us. We immediately dispatched a repudiation of any request from us. You know the rest.

I have outlined this chronology to you because the line of communication with the British government has been abused by Major and Mayhew. Today we are setting the record straight. It is important that this is done because if this line of communication is to have any value in the future its integrity must be restored. The British government is acting in bad faith and is now actively abusing our contact with them in order to sow dissension and confusion and to distract attention from the real issues. This can only devalue the peace process.

Sinn Féin acted at all times in good faith. We sought to move towards peace both through this private contact with the British government and through our involvement in the Irish Peace Initiative. Republicans have demonstrated flexibility and integrity throughout. The British government has demonstrated intransigence and duplicity. They have rejected very real and tangible opportunities for peace. It is up to John Major to explain why his government "walked away from its own proposal and rejected the positive republican response to this. ENDS

"SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT"

All messages contained are written messages unless clearly designated as oral or reports of meetings.

The British government chose to describe its version as being between the British government and the 'Provisional Movement'.

The protracted contact and dialogue was, in fact, between the British government and Sinn Féin.

A number of communications, which relate directly to the line of communication have been withheld from this record as have a number of messages relating to the Irish Peace Initiative. These prove

conclusively that the British government was fully aware of the detail of the Irish Peace Initiative at a very early stage. They are withheld at this time because of their sensitivity. They are dated 7 January 1992, 29 January 1992, 26 October 1992, and 14 June 1993.

The line of communication with the British government extends back over two decades.

It was in use during the 1974 - 1975 period of bilateral truce.

It was again in use during the Hunger Strikes of 1980 and 1981.

These phases of its use have not been a matter of dispute.

The phase of its use between October 1990 - November 1993, however, is disputed by the British government.

For their own reasons they claim this phase began on 22 February, 1993 and ended on 5 November 1993. In support of their claim they mixed fact and fiction to produce their 29 November, 1993 version.

Accordingly their version opens with a bogus message purporting to come from Sinn Féin on 22 February, 1993. Appropriately the hinge on which, it closes is an equally bogus message purporting to come from Sinn Féin on 2 November, 1993.

British government attitudes varied greatly from one period of this phase to the next.

During the first period the British government representatives engaged in building up a relationship with the contact and with Sinn Féin between October 1990 and the autumn of 1992. The British government representative initiated a series of periodical meetings, which took place both in the Six Counties and in London, and occasional telephone conversations with the contact. His objective, he declared, was to ensure that republicans knew the thinking of his government.

The next period is characterised by an intense exchange of contact and communications surrounding the "10 May" scenario and the subsequent consideration of that.

The third period is characterised by the stringing out of the British government decision to walk away from its own proposal as contained in the "10 May" message. The intensity of the first part of the year is replaced by, in relative terms, a leaner crop of communications.

The final period of this phase is characterised by the British government moves to synchronise its private and public positions in a climate of leaks and rumours - moves that ultimately culminated in the publication of the British governments fabricated version on 29 November, 1993.

A record of communication between Sinn Féin and the British government October 1990 - November 1993

October 1990: Meeting between Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle member Martin McGuinness and British government representative.

The British government representative initiated the meeting. He informed McGuinness of his imminent retirement and intimated that there would be an effort to reactivate a long-standing line of communication.

Martin McGuinness attended the meeting on a listening brief. Subsequently an advance copy of Peter Brooke's Whitbread Speech "The British Presence" was forwarded to Sinn Féin. Brooke made this speech on November 9, 1990.

April 1991: Oral message from the British government.

Sinn Féin was informed via the (now retired) British government representative that the loyalist death squads were about to announce a ceasefire for the duration of the inter-party talks.

June 1991: British government appoints new representative.

In June of 1991 the newly appointed British government representative introduced himself to the contact. He verified his status by producing a letter signed by the then British Secretary of State Peter Brooke. This letter was read by the contact and retained by the British government representative. The former British government representative also verified his status. Sinn Féin

was informed that the appointment was made by London.

August and September 1991: Oral messages from British government

Clarification was sought on two confusing messages, which the NIO claimed to have received from people claiming to be in contact with republicans. They speculated about an extension of the Irish Republican Army's traditional suspension of operations for three days at Christmas. Archbishop Robin Eames was, it was claimed, one of these people.

The matter was clarified.

October 1991: Oral message from the British government

This gave Sinn Féin pre-notice of a speech by Peter Brooke in Enniskillen.

November 1991: Oral message from the British government

It sought Sinn Féin advice on the usefulness of setting up, as a point of contact, the home of a retired civil servant in County Derry.

Sinn Féin responded orally saying we were more interested in the substance of communications than the means. However, if the British government had something solid to say Sinn Féin would be listening.

January 7, 1992: Written message from Sinn Féin to the British government

This related to the developing Irish peace initiative. It is being withheld because of its sensitivity.

January 26, 1992: Oral message from the British government

This drew Sinn Féin's attention to comments made by Peter Brooke in the course of an interview on RTE on 20 January, 1992.

It indicated that Brooke and Major were working on a speech. Sinn Féin was subsequently given a preview of the speech - a speech by John Major to Scottish Conservative candidates delivered on 22 February, 1992, in Glasgow.

January 29, 1992 : Sinn Féin received a written message from the British government on the Irish Peace Initiative.

This is being withheld at this time because of its sensitivity.

May 19, 1992: Oral message from the British government

This urged Sinn Féin to be more proactive in using the line of communication.

Undated: Message from the British government to Sinn Féin

It is unclear from our files whether this document was received in Autumn 91 or Autumn 92.

Conclusion

6. As things stand, I do not recommend that we should positively encourage the Provisionals to declare a Christmas ceasefire. But we should be prepared to move very quickly if they decide to do so unilaterally, conceivably in the day or so before and after Christmas. I propose to review the situation again some time in the week beginning 10 December (given that the Taoiseach may say something on the subject to the Prime Minister at the next month's Summit).

7.1 recommend the Secretary of State agree that: -

(i) we should prepare to respond very quickly to a ceasefire at Christmas, but not seek to initiate one:

(ii) we should take forward detailed staff work on prison's issues suitable for the medium term;

(iii) I should keep the Chief Constable and GOC abreast of our thinking; and

(iv) we should keep the situation under close review and report again after the Summit.

8. The Secretary of State may also wish at this stage to note that, as last year, it may be necessary to make quick - and potentially far-reaching - political decision in the immediate run-in to Christmas and we may need to set up machinery and a short-term contingency plan for this. I say this because we cannot rule out a sequence which

goes something like: - PIRA calls a Christmas ceasefire; we respond with some security de-escalatory measures; and Sinn Féin asks for a dialogue with Government on political issues - this dialogue to be linked to a continuing absence of hostilities. Alternatively, some third party or parties may elicit a response from the Provisionals, with similar implications.

October 26. 1992: This document was sent to Sinn Féin by the British government

1. Intensive shuttle diplomacy on the part of Sir N Stephen. Atmosphere improves.

2. On 16 October SOSNI had a short meeting with the Irish. Both Governments agreed that the best chance of progress lay in the proposal that Sir Ninian Stephen should invite all the talk's participants to submit to him privately their individual suggestions for Heads of Agreement across all three Strands. It was a high risk strategy, but Sir Ninian appeared well aware of the extreme delicacy of the task and the importance of getting his synthesis right first time. There was a slight danger that Sir Ninian's report would be based on the lowest common denominator of the parties' submissions and thus not form the basis of a workable blueprint; this was a risk, which would have to be taken.

3. On the afternoon of 16 October there was a short session of the Strand 2 committee. Sir Ninian formally asked the parties to submit to him, either orally or in writing, their ideas for Heads of Agreement, their concept of the areas where their proposals agreed with those of other delegations, and their views on any areas where they perceived disagreements to exist. Sir Ninian would then correlate the submissions with his own impressions and formulate his report. He had no preconceptions about the form the report would take, and indeed he realised that there was disagreement between the participants as to the scope of the exercise; he saw the process as being a dynamic one which would assume a more coherent form during the course of the following week's consultations.

4. On timetable. Sir Ninian suggested that 19 and 20 October be taken up with bilateral consultations with the N1 political parties and that he should talk to the two Governments separately on 21 and 22 October. On 23 October he would report progress

to the entire subcommittee either orally or on paper. This, however, he stressed, was only an outline, and changes could be made if people felt it desirable. In addition, he encouraged the delegations to talk to each other as much as possible.

5. These proposals were accepted, albeit with some reservation by the SDLP.

Outlook

6. The talks have thus entered an entirely new stage. Sir Ninian is now effectively in control of all three Strands and the nature of his proposed shuttle diplomacy over the next week (and possibly for longer) means those events could begin to develop very quickly. Information about who is saying what to whom will be at a premium.

7. In preparation for its meeting with Sir Ninian on 21 October the HMG team is drawing up model Heads of Agreement which it believes stand the widest chance of being accepted by all concerned. These will be submitted for his use on a non-attributable basis, in an attempt to guide his consultations. The idea is to "ghost-write" Sir Ninian's report. The main elements are as follows:

Strand 1. Based closely on the Strand 1 subcommittee report of earlier in the year, with the chairmen of Assembly committees becoming heads of department, and with the Assembly being the sole legislative authority but having to submit draft legislation to the separate "Panel" for ratification.

Strand 2. This envisages co-operation between respective departments in the North and the South, the establishment of cross-border executive agencies by the respective legislatures North and South and remaining answerable to them, and the delivery of some all-Ireland executive functions by the body itself, subject to democratic approval and accountability.

Strand 3. An IGC and Secretariat to deal with non-transferred matters affecting NI, with Panel members and committee chairmen from NI formally part of the IGC structure. On the constitutional status of the Province, a statement that NI is currently part of the UK is proposed together with a recognition that a substantial minority wish for a united Ireland, and have the

right to pursue that by peaceful and democratic means and without impediment. Replacement of Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution by an aspiration to a united Ireland is also sought.

The paper, it is stressed, represents HMG's judgement of what it is possible to achieve, rather than its own sense of priorities in individual areas.

8. If an outline agreement something along these lines is possible there may be a chance of the parties reconvening to put flesh on the bones at some point in the future after the 16 November IGC. Events in the next couple of weeks could move rapidly and unpredictably.

Note: Reports up to this point on the Stormont talks had been pessimistic in outlook. When the unfounded optimism contained in the 'Ninian Stephen' document subsided, Sinn Féin was informed that given the lack of progress in the Stormont talks that the British and Irish governments were considering imposing a situation over the heads of the political parties.

October 26, 1992 : This preview of points for a speech to be made by Patrick Mayhew in Coleraine was sent to Sinn Féin. We also received a message.

1. Sinn Féin is not denied current involvement in democratic institutions, but is subject to constraints of law and political reality arising from its relationship with the campaign of violence.

2. As the previous Secretary of State envisaged in his speech of 9 November 1990: "An Irish republicanism seen to have finally renounced violence would be able, like other parties, to seek a role in the peaceful political life of the community."

3. As to the Talks process, the agreed ground rules of 26 March 1991 for the present and previous rounds of Talks sought to bring together the main constitutional political parties of the day. The present round of Talks is scheduled to last until 16 November 1992. The underlying analysis that political development should focus on three main relationships - within Northern Ireland, within Ireland, and between the two Governments - is likely to remain valid for the foreseeable future.

4. The British Government could not impose on the participants ground rules for any future phases of a

continuing Talks process. But its objectives would continue to include the involvement of all the main political parties of the day, which did not condone violence. The British Government has no desire to inhibit legitimate constitutional expression of political opinion or input to the political process.

5. The Talks process is based on the participation of each delegation as a free agent. It seeks to produce an agreed accommodation, not an imposed solution. The British Government does not work to any preconceived master plan.

6. Successive Governments have stressed that any new structures for the government of Northern Ireland must be acceptable to both major traditions. A return to the old Stormont political system would not meet this and other publicly stated criteria. The British Government also recognises the need for any new North/South arrangement adequately to cater for and express both traditions.

7. In the event of a genuine and established cessation of violence, the whole range of policies and activities undertaken in response to that violence would inevitably have to be looked at afresh.

October 26, 1992 : Report of meeting with British government representative

He pointed to earlier reports on the progress of the Stormont talks. These consistently put the British government view that they were not going to succeed. While that opinion had not changed he pointed out that Ninian Stephen had improved the general climate. He provided the 'Ninian Stephen' document as evidence of that.

He strongly advocated that we should be sending Sinn Féin addresses and keynote speeches through the line of communication as they had been doing to us.

He said that he understood the dissatisfaction with the means of communicating and that he had been working on this. He intimated the possibility of meetings but stressed that conditions would have to be created to allow this. Such matters move very slowly.

October 26, 1992 : Message from the British government

The message shows that the British government was aware of developments in the Irish peace initiative.

Sinn Féin is withholding this message from this record because of its sensitivity.

December 4, 1992 : Sinn Féin response to receipt of the 1-7 point document received on October 26 1992

Thanks for your recent document (the 1-7 paragraphs) received on October 26, 1992.

The document is interesting but the present method of communications is totally unsatisfactory. A more satisfactory means of discussion must be found if there is to be any hope of forward movement

NOTE: This message is omitted from the British government version.

December 14, 1992 : Report of a meeting with British government representative

This returned to the subject of the method of communicating. Sinn Féin would have to be patient. The British government was not the only ones being cautious. Meetings were possible but only if suitable and acceptable conditions were created.

They had been working at these possibilities for two years now.

He inquired about the possibility of a unilateral cease-fire by the IRA. He was advised that this was highly improbable.

He inquired about the possibilities of the IRA easing off in the context of a talk's situation and was informed that advice on this would be sought. He supplied Sinn Féin with an advance copy of Patrick Mayhew's Coleraine speech, which was to be delivered on 16 December, 1992.

January 12, 1993 : Report of a meeting with British government representative

This began with an outline of the political risks being taken by the British government.

Republicans should be in no doubt that this

indicates their seriousness in the whole thing. The conflict had been going on for too long. He said the British government was not serious in 1974/75 but they were now.

There was a conviction by senior civil servants that talks had to start. The politicians were slower but they were moving to this position.

It could not be done without a major gesture from republicans. They realised an IRA cease-fire was a non-starter. He voiced his view that a suspension - an easing off - would start the ball rolling in a significant way. That republicans would be convinced in that time that armed struggle was not necessary any longer.

He was informed that advice would be sought on all of this.

February 20, 1993: Speech by Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle member Martin McGuinness to Sinn Féin Ard Fheis.

The British government representative later claimed that it was this speech by Martin McGuinness, which 'triggered' British government action. This speech and the presidential address by Gerry Adams were forwarded to the British government.

"When British Secretary of State Peter Brooke began the inter party talks process little did he realise that three years later this long running and boring saga would collapse in confusion and recrimination as each of the participants blamed everyone else for the failure.

Mr. Brooke must surely have expected that a partitionist agreement on the future government of what the British call Northern Ireland would have emerged.

Well, last year, after three years of discussion which proved lucrative for the participants and worthless to everyone else, the inter-party talks ground to a predictable halt. Furthermore, even though it was to become a grave embarrassment to the British, Sinn Féin was undemocratically excluded from those discussions.

Democracy, British style, dictated that the Alliance Party, with less support than Sinn Féin, were there, the Democratic Unionists, who publicly advocate

the killing of republicans, were also there, as were the Official Unionists whose track record includes the exclusion and repression of the Nationalist community since partition. The British government was represented by Sir Patrick Mayhew. He has recently taken to describing his government's role as a facilitator. How right he is. The British government has indeed facilitated the persecution of the nationalist people of the six counties since partition.

Meanwhile, scores of thousands of supporters were excluded, chastised and penalised because they voted for the party of their choice. This fact conveniently guaranteed the absence of any criticisms of the British government's role in a conflict, which they created and have dismally failed to resolve in the decades since they partitioned Ireland and divided the Irish people.

Instead the endless discussions yielded no imaginative solutions, which would end the injustice of partition and bridge the divisions between our people.

The rocks on which the talks foundered were of course unionist suspicion that they were being gently inched towards on all-Ireland settlement and SDLP reservations about agreeing a partitionist settlement. Through it all Peter Brooke and Patrick Mayhew behaved as though they were dithering Wimbledon umpires watching the ball fly over the net but unable to decide who should win the point. The British of course are not referees in this dispute and we repudiate any attempts to portray them as neutral.

The British government's policy is crucial if there is to be a just settlement on this island. The other parties to the debate can have but a limited influence on the situation and it is essential if there is to be any hope of peace that the British government led the way by outlining its plan for a final resolution of the problem. Britain cannot be allowed to abdicate its responsibility by standing by like Pontius Pilate washing its hands off a problem it created.

If they continue with their present policies there will be no settlement, no peace. Britain must also publicly accept, as I believe they now privately do, that an essential ingredient in the search for a solution is the acceptance of the need for inclusive dialogue as a vehicle towards a final settlement.

Following Peter Brooke's earlier example Patrick Mayhew has recently addressed us on this issue. Contradicting himself he says that Sinn Féin will not be involved in talks until the IRA calls a ceasefire yet implicit in everything else he says is an acceptance that Republicans must be part of the solution.

In the wake of the suspension of the Stormont talks there is increasing acceptance that the British government must now speak to Sinn Féin. Numerous editorials and one of the architects of the London/Dublin agreement have added their voices to those who now accept we must be involved. The concept of inclusive dialogue as the way forward is gathering momentum.

With the election of a new government in Dublin there is to be a further attempt to resume the talk's process. We are told these will initially take the form of bi-lateral meetings rather than round table discussions. This actually provides both the British and Dublin governments with an opportunity to bring Sinn Féin into a talk's process. If both governments have the courage of their private convictions they should now finally meet with Sinn Féin. For our part we recognise that such a scenario would place a great responsibility on us.

We would approach any serious talks accepting that we haven't got all the answers but we most certainly believe we have some of them.

The British government and others demand dramatic initiatives from us before we can be involved in talks. Whilst rejecting any pre-conditions on our participation we are quite prepared to be open and flexible to serious proposals, which can lead to a realistic agreement.

Years of struggle have not diminished the determination of the republican people to end British interference in Ireland. We are as determined as ever. No one can argue that a democratic resolution would be a simple matter. All involved in the conflict, all those who are affected by it, would have to be prepared for a dramatic and imaginative initiative. Republicans are willing to engage in the search for a democratic settlement with courage and flexibility.

We must all allow each other room to manoeuvre if there is to be any hope that the misery, injustice

and death of the past twenty-five years are to be finally ended.

We have, all of us, Irish and British, been hurt by this conflict. We have all suffered and if we all share responsibility for that, then surely, only when we are all included in a healing process which honestly and seriously seeks to remove the root causes of our troubles, will there be the slimmest chance of peace.

In recent weeks Patrick Mayhew agreed with Dick Spring that the demand of unionists for constitutional change would require an examination of the root causes of the conflict. This coming as it does from Mr. Mayhew was an interesting and important admission.

Since the ending of the talks a new Government had been formed in Dublin. Its stated policy is that change in the constitution can take place in the context of an overall agreement. Dublin should be under no illusion about this issue. The nationalist community in the six counties and I believe the overwhelming majority of Irish people in this island are bitterly opposed to any change which would dilute the sovereign rights of the people of Ireland to nationhood.

Sinn Féin recognises the dismay and confusion, which exists within the unionist community. Many fear that the British Government is looking for a way out and they believe it's only a matter of time before this happens. This places a considerable onus on everyone including ourselves as Irish republicans to apply a new and radical thinking to the predicament unionists find themselves in. The plight of unionists is requiring particular consideration to guarantee and protect their interests in any new arrangements, which will be needed to resolve the conflict.

The British portray Republicans as the cause of the conflict. The British are dishonest. We are not the cause of this conflict we are the victims of it. We are the product of decades of British tyranny and misrule.

In his Coleraine speech Mr. Mayhew in the understatement of the year said, "You will not find me seeking to argue that Britain's role in this island has only ever been associated with what has been uplifting. On the contrary, there is much in the long and often tragic history of Ireland for deep regret

and the British Government for its part shares in that regret to the full".

Regret alone will not solve our problems. What is needed is a plan to establish agreed democratic institutions to redress the damage done to Ireland and its people by successive British governments. Both Dublin and the SDLP should join with us in placing this reality before the British Government.

Until this happens the struggle will continue until justice is done and freedom is ours.

NOTE: The British government version opens with a message, which it claims was sent by Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle member Martin McGuinness.

The message begins: "The conflict is over but we need your advice on how to bring it to a close...."

No such message was sent.

This was written by the British government. It is bogus.

February 24.1993: Report of a meeting with British government representative

He was very upbeat about the possibility of delegation meetings. He said that he and his colleagues had been working on this for two years. Major and Mayhew had discussed the republican struggle and the Christmas cessation on 14 February. The Tory whips had regarded Mayhew's Coleraine speech as a bridge too far. The politicians were moving. They were serious. The republicans will have to grasp the opportunity while it exists. Events on the ground will bring an enormous influence to bear. The IRA needs to provide the space to turn the possibility of meetings into a reality. A suspension is all that is being required of them.

The British believed that two or three weeks were a sufficient period to convince republicans. There would be an intensive round of talks. Once started people remain until decisions were arrived at. Reciprocation would be immediate; troops withdrawn to barracks, checkpoints removed, security levels determined by loyalist threat.

Their side would probably be led, in such an event, by Quentin Thomas (Deputy Secretary to Chilcott). The republican side could include whomever they

wanted. Possibly three plus advisors.

Thomas might at the beginning say "Thanks for the ceasefire" but do not be concerned with that. He ventured the opinion that Willie Ross the Unionist MP would be the next leader of the UUP.

February 26, 1993 British government message to Sinn Féin

We understand and appreciate the seriousness of what has been said. We wish to take it seriously and at face value. That will of course be influenced by events on the ground over the coming days and weeks. In view of the importance of the message it is not possible to give a substantive reply immediately. It is however necessary that this acknowledgement is given promptly. We are working to reply further as swiftly as possible. We understand the need for this.

February 26, 1993: Report of meeting with British government representative

The main points covered were;

1. The British government has agreed to talks with Sinn Féin.
2. They need a 'no violence' understanding over 2/3 weeks of private talks. No public declaration of this.
3. They believe they can convince Irish republicans in 2/3 weeks of talks that armed struggle is no longer necessary.
4. If the talks are going well they could quickly move from a private to a public situation.
5. Suggested venues: Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Scotland, and Isle of Man.

March 1, 1993: Oral message from the British government

Proposed meeting and venue for 23 March to discuss logistics for delegation talks.

March 5.1993:Oral message from Sinn Féin to the British government

We were pleased to receive this message and welcome the possibility of a meeting. We would like

two representatives, Martin McGuinness and Gerry Kelly/ to have an exploratory meeting with you as soon as possible.

March 11, 1993: Message from the British government to Sinn Féin

Wishing to take seriously what has developed/ we have been preparing a considered and substantive response.

But in the light of the continued violence of recent days since the first response we are not yet able to send a substantive response.

There must be some evidence of consistency between word and deed.

Given that background our ability to send a substantive response will depend on events on the ground.

March 19 1993: Nine paragraph document sent by the British government to Sinn Féin

1. The importance of what has been said, the wish to take it seriously, and the influence of events on the ground/ have been acknowledged. All of those involved share a responsibility to work to end the conflict. No one has a monopoly of suffering. There is a need for a healing process.

2. It is essential that there should be no deception on either side and also that no deception should, through any misunderstanding, be seen where it is not intended. It is also essential that both sides have a clear and realistic understanding of what it is possible to achieve, so that neither side can in the future claim that it has been tricked.

3. The position of the British Government on dealing with those who espouse violence is clearly understood. This is why the envisaged sequence of events is important. What is being sought at this stage is advice. The position of the British Government is that any dialogue could only follow a halt to violent activity. It is understood that in the first instance this would have to be unannounced. If violence had genuinely been brought to an end/ whether or not that fact had been announced/ then progressive entry into dialogue could take place.

4. It must be understood/ though/ that once a halt to activity became public/ the British government

would have to acknowledge and defend its entry into dialogue. It would do so by pointing out that its agreement to exploratory dialogue about the possibility of an inclusive process had been given because - and only because - it had received a private assurance that organised violence had been brought to an end.

5. The British government has made clear that:

- no political objective, which is advocated by constitutional means alone, could properly be excluded from discussion in the talk's process;

- the commitment to return as much responsibility as possible to local politicians should be seen within a wider framework of stable relationships to be worked out with all concerned;

- new political arrangements would be designed to ensure that no legitimate group was excluded from eligibility to share in the exercise of this responsibility;

- in the event of a genuine and established ending of violence/ the whole range of responses to it would inevitably be looked at afresh.

6. The British Government has no desire to inhibit or impede legitimate constitutional expression of any political opinion, or any such input to the political process, and wants to see included in this process all main parties, which have sufficiently shown they genuinely do not espouse violence. It has no blueprint. It wants an agreed accommodation, not an imposed settlement, arrived at through an inclusive process in which the parties are free agents.

7. The British Government does not have, and will not adopt, any prior objective of "ending of partition". The British Government cannot enter a talks process, or expect others to do so, with the purpose of achieving a predetermined outcome, whether the "ending of partition" or anything else. It has accepted that the eventual outcome of such a process could be a united Ireland, but this can only be on the basis of the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. Should this be the eventual outcome of a peaceful democratic process, the British Government would bring democratic process, the British Government would bring forward legislation to implement the will of the people here. But unless the people of Northern

Ireland come to express such a view, the British Government will continue to uphold the union, seeking to ensure the good governance of Northern Ireland, in the interests of all its people, within the totality of relationships in these islands.

8. Evidence on the ground that any group had ceased violent activity would induce resulting reduction of security force activity. Were violence to end, the British Government's overall response in terms of security force activity on the ground would still have to take account of the overall threat. The threat posed by Republican and Loyalist groups, which remained active, would have to continue to be countered.

9. It is important to establish whether this provides a basis for a way forward. The British Government would answer specific questions or give further explanation.

NOTE: The British government version issued on Mon 29 November 1993 by Patrick Mayhew was altered in paragraph three to give the appearance that the British government was responding to a request for advice from Sinn Féin. The document was altered in a number of other places also.

The British government sought to rectify this on Wed 1 December 1993 after Sinn Féin had pointed in a general way to amendments on the evening of Monday 29 Nov.

Subsequent inquiries by journalists provoked an admission of this from the British government two days later.

March 19, 1993 : Oral message from the British government received with above.

This process is fraught with difficulties for the British government, as must be obvious. They are nevertheless prepared to tackle these and accept the risks they entail.

But it must be recognised that all acts of violence hereafter could only enhance those difficulties and risks, quite conceivably to the point when the process would be destroyed.

If that were to occur the British would consider that a potentially historic opportunity had been squandered.

The paper gives our substantive advice in response to the initial message. As it makes clear, we wish to establish whether this provides a basis for a way forward. We on our side are ready to answer specific questions or give further explanation.

You should also emphasise to your interlocutor the British government's acknowledgement that all those involved in the conflict share a responsibility to work to end the conflict. We agree on the need for a healing process. We wish to take a positive view of these developments and hope that it will continue to be possible to do so.

March 23, 1993: Report of meeting with British government representative

The British government representative said Martin McGuinness' address to the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis 1993 had been read and triggered government action. Mayhew had tried marginalisation, defeating the IRA etc. That's gone. Coleraine speech was a significant move. Mayhew is now determined. He wants Sinn Féin to play a part not because he likes Sinn Féin but because it cannot work without them. Any settlement not involving all of the people North and South won't work. A North/South settlement that won't frighten unionists. The final solution is union. It is going to happen anyway. The historical train - Europe - determines that. We are committed to Europe. Unionists will have to change. This island will be as one.

He outlined the situation of talks at the level of delegations. The politicians, he said, were moving. This opportunity must be grasped. Next week if possible. British government is sincere. No cheating involved. He mentioned the Rees letter to Wilson: "We set out to con them and we did." The two weeks for talks proposed was repeated. He alleged that John Chilcott had instructed him to inform Sinn Féin that if this was agreed at six o'clock that clearance for meetings at the level of delegations would be forthcoming by one minute past six.

Confidentiality was of the utmost importance. Only Major, Mayhew, Hurd and secretary to the cabinet knew of all this. The British side would probably be led by Quentin Thomas with John Chilcott down the line. This issue of location for meetings was raised again.

Statement from Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams in relation to Warrington bomb

The British government version contained a 22 March, 1993 message relating to the Warrington bomb. Sinn Féin did not send this message. It is bogus.

However, after the Warrington bomb the British government were referred to a statement from Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams. The statement said:

"Republicans, not least because we have also buried our children, know the agony of the families of Jonathan Ball and Tim Parry. Children are always innocent. None of the rest of us stands guiltless.

"Those who are now exploiting the understandable emotion and human reaction to the Warrington explosions know this. Yet they are manipulating the genuine grief and deep sadness of people throughout Ireland to channel public opinion in one direction - against republicans.

"Republicans have nothing to fear from a genuine peace movement. Sinn Féin has been engaged in developing a peace process for some time now. I welcome any positive approach to building peace but I appeal to those who really wish to end the conflict to beware against letting themselves be cynically used."

April 3, 1993: Message from Sinn Féin to the British government

We welcome the recent discussion and hope that it will lead to a process, which will secure a lasting peace. We are committed to this objective. We record our disappointment that only one of your representatives was in attendance. Despite this, the discussion was most useful and a report of it is currently under consideration. A response will be prepared without delay.

NOTE: This message is omitted from the British government version.

April 24, 1993: Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams and SDLP Party Leader, John Hume, issued the first of three joint statements by the two party leaders in the course of 1993.

The statement said:

A meeting between us held on Saturday/10 April, in our capacities as party leaders of the SDLP and Sinn Féin has given rise to media coverage, some of which was ill informed or purely speculative.

We are not acting as intermediaries. As leaders of our respective parties, we accept that the most pressing issue facing the people of Ireland and Britain today is the question of lasting peace and how it can best be achieved.

Everyone has a solemn duty to change the political climate away from conflict and towards a process of national reconciliation, which sees the peaceful accommodation of the differences between the people of Britain and Ireland and the Irish people themselves.

In striving for that end, we accept that an internal settlement is not a solution because it obviously does not deal with all the relationships at the heart of the problem.

We accept that the Irish people as a whole have a right to national self-determination. This is a view shared by a majority of the people of this island though not by all its people.

The exercise of self-determination is a matter for agreement between the people of Ireland. It is the search for that agreement and the means of achieving it on which we will be concentrating.

We are mindful that not all the people of Ireland share that view or agree on how to give meaningful expression to it. Indeed, we cannot disguise the different views held by our own parties.

As leaders of our respective parties, we have told each other that we see the task of reaching agreement on a peaceful and democratic accord for all on this island as our primary challenge.

We both recognise that such a new agreement is only achievable and viable if it can earn and enjoy the allegiance of the different traditions on this island, by accommodating diversity and providing for national reconciliation.

We are reporting our discussion of these matters back to our respective parties. They have fully endorsed the continuation of this process of

dialogue.

We will be picking up on where the talks between our parties ended in 1988 and reviewing the current political situation.

At that time we engaged in a political dialogue aimed at investigating the possibility of developing an overall political strategy to establish justice and peace in Ireland."

A copy of this statement was forwarded to the British government.

April 24, 1993: Message from the British government to Sinn Féin in response to Sinn Féin message of April 3, 1993

Please speak of the basis of the following:

We are pleased at this positive response. Our leading board member is away till Monday 26 April, but in his absence we request to see Mr. Brown on Monday in London so that Mr. Ferguson can convey the "Yes" position to our Board on Tuesday 27 April. We need to be assured that our 'nine-paragrapher' has been accepted as our position (for any future discussion) and most important that Mr. Campbell/Campbell confirms (privately or otherwise as they wish) that the "not a single share position" will be in operation. Ideas on timings would be appreciated.

NOTE: This message is omitted from the British government version.

April 26, 1993: Report of meeting with British government representative

Two British government representatives attended. They confirmed their commitment to the delegation meetings, notwithstanding events on the ground at that time.

They were told that Sinn Féin would be providing a policy outline which would be the basis for its entering into dialogue at that level. The British government was asked to come forward with the logistics for the meetings as soon as possible.

May 4, 1993: Oral message from Sinn Féin to the British government

Some time has passed since we both agreed to

proceed to delegation meetings. Why the delay in your response on how we are to proceed to the next stage? Are you still serious about this? Are there problems?

NOTE: This message is omitted from the British government version.

May 5, 1993: Message sent by the British government to Sinn Féin

Events on the ground are crucial, as we have consistently made clear. We cannot conceivably disregard them. We gave advice in good faith taking what we were told at face value. It is difficult to reconcile that with recent events.

2. Nonetheless we confirm that we stand by the 9-paragraph document, which we prepared as that advice.

3. We have not received the necessary private assurance that organised violence has been brought to an end. We hope that we do so soon and that violence is genuinely brought to an end as, without that, further progress cannot be made.

NOTE: The version of this published by the British government contains two important alterations.

In the first paragraph; "We gave advice in good faith...." is amended to "We gave in good faith the advice which was sought."

In the second paragraph; "which we prepared as that advice." is amended to "...which we prepared in response to that request for advice."

Both alterations seek to support the alterations made by the British government to its own March 19 nine-paragraph document. It was subsequently forced to rectify this. However the British governments December 1, 1993 statement does not address the above amendments.

May 6, 1993: British government message in response to Sinn Féin's May 4

Yes the order of events was the main problem. We will be back tomorrow with a more detailed explanation of exactly what we mean.

May 7, 1993: British government message in response to Sinn Féin's May 4

We confirm that we stand by the 9-paragraph document.

The Secretary of State will, as you know, be away until next week. This gives the opportunity for you to consider any other questions, which you may wish to put to us or to seek further explanation.

We confirm that the ordering of events is important. The 9-paragraph note made clear in paragraphs 3 and 4 that any dialogue could only follow a halt to violent activity and receipt of a private assurance that organised violence had been brought to an end.

May 10 1993: Message from Sinn Féin to the British government

The following message was given to the British government representative. He was also briefed that the IRA had agreed to a two-week suspension, that Sinn Féin had prepared a response to the British government nine-paragraph outline of policy and that the Sinn Féin document was the party's basis for entry into dialogue. This would be presented to the British at the first meeting of the proposed joint secretariat.

We welcome the face-to-face exchange with your representative. Given the seriousness of this project we trust that this represents only the beginning of such meetings. We are concerned that the movement to further meetings has been delayed by your side.

It is important that we are frank with each other. Our seriousness in addressing this project should not be in any doubt. But it is greatly tempered by caution, occasioned by the far from satisfactory experiences in 1972,1975 and during the hunger strikes 1980/81. It would be wrong to minimise or underestimate the problems which these experiences have given rise to.

Having said that, we are responding directly to your request for advice, recognising fully the sensitivity of any position, from you or us, which is committed to paper at this stage. Our response has been couched accordingly but it is clear that we are prepared to make the crucial move if a genuine peace process is set in place.

You say you require a private assurance in order to

defend publicly your entry into dialogue with us. We have proceeded to this stage/without assurance.

We wish now to proceed without delay to the delegation meetings'. In order to facilitate this step we sought and received a commitment, which will permit you to proceed so that we can both explore the potential for developing a real peace process. This depends upon agreement between us about the next stage and particularly about the seniority of your representatives. It is important that you understand how important a gesture this is and how/even though it will be of a short duration it underlines the sincerity of those involved and their faith in us. We wish to stress that we will be not be party to any dealings, which could undermine this faith. To do so will serve only to damage our peace project and the overall quest for peace.

Democratic reasons clearly determine that Sinn Féin's right to represent its electorate and to promote its analysis should be accepted and acted upon. This is the basis upon which we enter into dialogue.

We need to agree agendas and formats for meetings etc. We have appointed a small secretariat to assist in this task. We would like you to nominate someone to liaise with M.McG' on this.

We also have a number of questions. They are to do with the mechanics of the sequence outlined by you. They are;

Who will represent you? We need to know when the BG will be politically represented in this process and by whom?

We need clarification of phrase 'progressive entry into dialogue'?

When will this start?

Where is the proposed venue?

It would be more practical and quicker/ if these details could be agreed directly with M. McG'. If this is not possible we ask that you proceed through usual channel as soon as possible."

Sinn Féin's basis for entering into dialogue

This document is the basis on which Sinn Féin was entering into dialogue. The British government had its position. Sinn Féin had its position.

Sinn Féin lodged this document with the contact to be put on the agenda of the first meeting of the joint Sinn Féin/British government secretariat as proposed by Sinn Féin in its May 10 message.

APRIL 1993

1. We welcome this contact and hope it can help create a healing process, which removes both the causes and the consequences of conflict. Everyone shares the responsibility to work to bring about a real and lasting peace in Ireland. Republicans are not reluctant to face up to our responsibility in this but the British Government clearly has the power and the major responsibility to initiate the necessary process.

2. Our longstanding position has been one of willingness to enter into dialogue with a view to resolving the conflict. In all of this we do not seek to impose pre-conditions nor should preconditions be imposed on us. This is not a position, which we could easily recommend let alone successfully defend.

Dialogue and negotiations are necessary and inevitable if this conflict is to be resolved on a democratic basis. Pre-conditions represent obstacles to peace.

Moreover/ after more than two decades of conflict and political impasse/ we hold as self-evident the view that democratic/ political and practical imperatives clearly require the open involvement and inclusion of all political views if a democratic resolution is to be sought and achieved. Democratic reasons clearly determine that Sinn Féin's right to represent its electorate and to promote its analysis should be accepted and acted upon. This is the basis upon which we enter into dialogue.

3. The route to peace in Ireland is to be found in the restoration to the Irish people of our right to national self-determination - in the free exercise of this right without impediment of any kind.

4. British sovereignty over the six-counties, as with all of Ireland before partition, is the inherent cause

of political instability and conflict. This must be addressed within the democratic context of the exercise of the right to national self-determination if the cause of instability and conflict is to be removed.

5. We seek to assist the establishment of, and to support, a process, which, with due regard for the real difficulties involved, culminates in the exercise of that right and the end of your jurisdiction.

6. We believe that the wish of the majority of the Irish people is for Irish unity. We believe that an adherence to democratic principles makes Irish unity inevitable. The emerging political and economic imperatives both within Ireland and within the broader context of greater European political union support the logic of Irish unity. It is our view therefore that the British Government should play a crucial and constructive role in persuading the unionist community to reach an accommodation with the rest of the Irish people.

7. Your disavowal of any prior objective is contradicted by your commitment to uphold the unionist veto. The consequence of upholding the veto is, in effect, to set as your objective the maintenance of partition and the six-county state let. And consequently, the maintenance of the primary source of the conflict.

Since its creation 72 years ago, the six-county statelet has been in constant crisis. Its survival has always been dependant on the existence and exercise of repressive legislation, coercion and discrimination. Its existence lies at the heart of the present conflict and divisions, both in Ireland, and between Britain and Ireland.

8. We recognise that the concerns and perceived concerns of the unionist population about their position in an Irish national democracy must be addressed and resolved in the form of the greatest reassurance possible, including legislation for all measures agreed in the course of a process of negotiations. This process of national reconciliation must secure the political, religious and democratic rights of the northern unionist population.

That is not only the democratic norm but also a practical necessity if we are to advance the cause of peace in Ireland and find a way out of the present impasse.

9. The most urgent issue facing the people of Ireland and Britain is the need for a genuine peace process which sets equality, justice and political stability as its objectives and, has as its means, dialogue and all-embracing negotiations in the context of democratic principles. In attempting to progress towards that position, we are prepared to be as reasonable and flexible as possible.

In this context, we are willing to seriously consider any proposal, which genuinely aims to set such a process in train, and to take the accompanying political risks involved.

10. We accept, of course, that it is essential that both sides have a clear and realistic understanding of what it is possible to achieve. But we are sure you will agree that what is realistic is dependent upon the existing conditions at any given point and the political will to move the situation on. If the essential political will exists then the construction, at this time, of a peace process is clearly feasible.

11. We found our preliminary meeting with your representative valuable. We believe that there exists a basis for progress, which can be developed into a genuine realistic and democratic peace process. The potentially historic opportunity, which this represents for the cause of peace in Ireland, should not be lost. We have outlined our position. You have outlined yours. It is now time to move on. You should arrange for us to do so as speedily as possible.

NOTE: In the British government version the first line of paragraph 11 is deleted, i.e. "We found our preliminary meeting with your representative valuable."

May 11, 1993: Oral message from Sinn Féin to the British government

We are reliably informed that an English reporter in USA has picked up a story about talks between you and us. Maybe working for Sunday Times. We are told he was briefed by your people in Washington??

Note: This message is omitted from the British government version.

May 13 1993: Message from the British government to Sinn Féin responding to a complaint about leaks to the media

I was very concerned to hear about the alarming press story you told me. I've checked on this with the Bank's press department who said, "Oh that old story from Washington? It's all gibberish. We'd heard it was going to be in last Sunday's papers, but we think that the editors must have realised that it didn't make sense". Please reassure your friends that this is the last thing that we would do or want. We believe that somebody visiting Washington from Stormont who was not privy to the loan business was shooting his mouth off and a journalist embellished it out of all proportion. If asked, our press people will deny it.

Note: This message is omitted from the British government version.

May 15. 1993: Report of a meeting with British government representatives

They said that it had been a hell of a battle with Mayhew who wanted to revert to his more comfortable position, i.e. These bad boys must obey our rules and then we would consider what action we'll take.

The Number 10 people said that historically they couldn't defend it if the May 10 position is not fully explored.

In the end the May 10 position was accepted and a new draft British paper had been formulated. This was to be put to Major at a special meeting on Tuesday 18 May in Downing Street. They were not prepared to hand over the draft.

May 25.1993: Report of a meeting with British government representative

There were no developments from 4:30pm 18th May 1993. (British government representative) returned from his walking holiday and contacted (the contact) at 11:00 am Monday 24th May to say that he was absolutely disgusted at what had happened and would it be possible to speak to (the contact) on Wednesday at (location deleted). (The contact) was anxious to avoid the constant stretching of the position by (British government representative) and (the contact) said she was going to travel to (location deleted) immediately, which she did and met (British government representative) at the usual hotel.

(The contact) felt very detached and (British government representative) gave his explanation as follows. 1 That the initiative of 11th May had been very well received by Chilcott and plans were immediately put in place to get approval from John Major. Mr. Mayhew had reservations pointing out that he couldn't risk any announcements in the run up to the local government elections. He stated that he was worried about an upsurge in support for the DUP at the expense of the UUP. It was pointed out to him that in reality it was unlikely that there would be enough time anyway for any formal discussions. The timetable agenda was agreed by Chilcott and Mayhew. That is cessation followed within 1-7 days by logistics followed by delegates meeting. It was the intention to put this to Major on Monday 17th May. Present at the meeting were Major, Hurd, Mayhew, Chilcott, Braithwaite and two other names which appeared to be secretaries or similar. The meeting was rushed and indecisive with Major asking questions on which he should have been more fully briefed, e.g. 1 What guarantees we have that this cessation can be held or will hold? 2 We need more evidence that what they say, they mean. Douglas Hurd had to leave for a meeting of Foreign Secretaries on the Bosnian peace plan. On the whole the meeting was most unsatisfactory from an Irish point of view. John Major adjourned the meeting to the following day Tuesday 18th and called in Kenneth Clarke who was in buoyant, bombastic mood and advised John Major that the proposition was much too risky at the present time with the government under siege and if the Republicans were sincere about their intentions then the Prime Minister should hasten slowly to adopt such a radical departure from their previous publicly successful anti-terrorist line. Mayhew was wobbling between pushing for acceptance and wanting a safer longer period of cessation. John Major compromised by instructing his secretaries to draw up a programme which he would be able to announce in Parliament having previously i.e. 24 hours before, informed Dr. Eames, Cahal Daly and the heads of the main political parties that he was instructing the Northern Ireland Office to enter into dialogue with the Republican Movement. Major's plan involved a longer cessation, followed by private logistics, (The two British government representatives), followed by his agreed statement at Westminster followed by dialogue. (The contact) spent approximately 1.5 hours in London listening to (British government representative) and (the British government representative's) last remark was that he would like it known that everything that

he had said to (Sinn Féin representatives) was the truth exactly as he had been instructed by Chilcott with specific reference to his famous one minute past six offer (see page 28).

June 3, 1993: Message from the British government to Sinn Féin in response to May 10

The Government was working out a response, which, because it was radical, needed careful crafting. This meant deliberate (but not artificially slow) work at the highest levels. One of the reasons why it was necessary to proceed so carefully was the recognition that any response must remove existing doubts, misconceptions and suspicions.

Before that process could be completed renewed violence on a serious scale took place - with the inevitable consequence that that process itself had to be halted. Since then there have of course been changes in the Government. It would be possible for further considerations of this to be resumed after the Whitsun recess. The outcome will, as always, be affected by events on the ground. This is not a threat, merely a statement of reality."

NOTE: 1. This message is omitted from the British government version.

2. Sinn Féin received two messages simultaneously in the first week of June.

(a) June 3 message from the British government to Sinn Féin.

(b) a letter from the British government representative.

3. The British government version contained a June 1 message. It purports to come from the 'Provisional Leadership' and talks of "the offer of a total cessation". It is bogus.

June 3, 1993: letter from the British government representative to Sinn Féin received in the first week of June

Grateful if you would convey the following to (Sinn Féin representatives) which is personal from me:

"There is depression and anger here at our failure to respond to your brave and straightforward offer. None feel it more than I do for obvious reasons. I

appreciate - as do all those most closely involved - the position this puts you in. It also contrasts with all that you have heard earlier. You have my word that all that was conveyed was done so honestly and accurately at the time. There would have been no quotation from 1975 if the intention was to copy that bad example and I for one would not be party to it.

The present position is that the local Chairman had accepted your offer, but such a vital economic issue had to go to the Board. We had miscalculated in assuming that the National Chairman would simply give it the nod of approval. Recent economic events have made him nervous of bold steps and your unfortunate headline events of April have made acceptance of your offer much more risky for him. You and I may think this should not matter, but the fact is that it does and it is that which is holding things up - if you like, human characteristics rather than anything more sinister.

We all hope that you and your colleagues can bear with the situation - you are certainly being asked for a lot, but there is will on both sides to complete the loan and we must succeed. We have our struggles and pressures from individuals as perhaps you do.

There is a proposal worked out (the National Chairman's own and new idea of 18 May) which delayed us and was then in turn put on one side after the events of 19 May. I know that you feel for our Bank "the time is never right", but this time it will be. I cannot tell you when - our wheels turn far too slowly, but that is the way of the Bank, not any notion of stringing the other side along. If delay were a ploy it is certainly taking up our attention just as much as yours!

I can only ask for patience for all our sakes. You will carry out your own financial policy and it would be impertinent for me to suggest anything otherwise (as well as being counter-productive); but in economic terms headline stuff knocks us back because the National Chairman is then wary of proceeding and it gives support to those who are against such a step.

I hope you will not mind me ending with a new meaning to Tíochfaidh ar la."

(This document was initialed by the author. The initials have been deleted by Sinn Féin.)

June 10, 1993: Oral message from Sinn Féin to the British government.

We are concerned at the protracted delay by your side. It is now a month since you received our May 10 position. You will also be aware of progress in peace initiatives here. We wish to reiterate our support for this and to confirm our positive attitude to recent developments. We would welcome an indication of your attitude to this.

NOTE: This message is omitted from the British government version.

June 14, 1993: The British government representative forwarded a text designated "SECRET" to Sinn Féin.

The "SECRET" text shows conclusively that the British government was fully aware of the detail of the Irish peace initiative at this point.

This "SECRET" text is withheld because of its sensitivity.

July 4, 1993 : Sinn Féin message to the British government

We can only presume from the failure by your side to follow up on your proposal and our May 10 response that you do not wish to proceed or that you underestimate the importance, seriousness and significance of May 10.

We also note the lack of any response by your side to the Irish peace initiative.

NOTE: This message is omitted from the British government version

July 11, 1993 : Sinn Féin message to the British government complaining about leaks to the media

We are most displeased at what we read in the popular press. It seems obvious to ourselves that some of [your] colleagues are leaking what we had come to regard as a confidence between ourselves and [you]. The [RUC] are clearly well informed of whatever the situations was and even more clearly are briefing people like [a journalist is named]. As usual we have kept our word and there hasn't been any deviation from our established position of saying nothing. We view the latest breach with

extreme disquiet and furthermore we seek an explanation as to what is happening and why [your side] are encouraging the position to develop.

July 17 1993 : British government message sent to Sinn Féin

The importance, seriousness and significance of your message of 10 May was fully understood.

As you know, consideration was being given to a far-reaching response. It would have replied to the questions posed and was intended to remove remaining doubts, misconceptions and suspicions. There was no ulterior motive in any delay, and you would have had the response as soon as it was cleared. But this response needed to be carefully and deliberately written to avoid misunderstanding or suspicion about bad faith. You should understand this, as it took you some time to respond to the nine-paragraph note, presumably for the same reasons.

Events on the ground shortly after the Elections of 19 May, however, made it impossible to proceed with this response. Events on the ground are crucial, as we have consistently made clear. We cannot conceivably disregard them. Although it was absolutely clear from the attacks, which took place in March that events on the ground could halt progress, these attacks following the May elections, went ahead. This has happened several times now with an inevitable result.

This said, the position of the nine-paragraph note stands and progress is still possible. Does the ending of conflict remain your objective, and is there a way forward?

There is one very important point, which needs to be answered to remove possible misunderstandings. Recent pronouncements, including the Bodinstown speech, seem to imply that unless your analysis of the way forward is accepted within a set time, the halt in violence will only be temporary. This is not acceptable.

The reasons for not talking about a permanent cessation are understood, but the peace process cannot be conditional on the acceptance of any particular or single analysis. The views of others involved must also be recognised as valid, though you will of course want to promote your own views. Paragraph 7 of the 9 paragraph note sets out our

position.

Can you confirm that you envisage a peace process which is aimed at an inclusive political process and that a lasting end to violence does not depend on your analysis being endorsed as the only way forward?

If you can, we remind you that this process of dialogue leading to an inclusive political process can only start after we have received the necessary assurance that organised violence had been brought to an end. In the meantime progress has to be subject to events on the ground.

August 14 1993: Sinn Féin message to the British Government in response to its message of July 17

We are concerned at the inflexibility of your most recent communication. It does not reflect, in tone or content, the pre 10th May position. This coupled with recent political statements must raise a serious question over your commitment to a real peace process.

Sinn Féin is committed to securing peace and an end to conflict. In our view this requires a genuine peace process which sets equality, justice and political stability as its objectives and has as its means dialogue and all embracing negotiations in the context of democratic principles.

In attempting to progress towards that situation we are prepared to be as reasonable and flexible as possible.

There is a way forward for all who have the political will to grasp it. Our will to do so should not be in any doubt.

We are perplexed by your latest communication. In this you require a private unilateral assurance that organised violence has been brought to an end. The purpose of a dialogue about peace is to bring all organised violence by all parties to the conflict to an end. This is implicitly recognised in the contacts, which have been made in the past several years. Without any such assurance we were prepared to proceed to the point of a face-to-face meeting. We welcomed this development.

In the course of that exchange you asserted the belief that a two week suspension to accommodate

talks would result in republicans being persuaded that there is no further need for armed struggle.

Because of our commitment to a lasting settlement and despite all of the difficulties involved we sought and received a commitment to facilitate that step so that we could both explore the potential for a real peace process. We acknowledge this positive response to our request as a sign of the seriousness of those involved.

The commitment was conveyed to you by the intermediaries. You failed to grasp that opportunity. This failure has frustrated any further developments.

Your latest written communication states that the "importance, seriousness and significance" of this message "was fully understood". The logic of that should have been to move forward on the outlined basis. Regrettably that did not happen. Instead you did not respond to this development.

We believe that this may be for expedient, internal and domestic party political reasons. If we are to move forward such narrow considerations must be set to one side. We are not interested in playing games.

In addition, much time prior to this was devoted by us to the drafting of an 11-paragraph response to your 9-paragraph document. This has been lodged with the intermediaries for some time now. It was our intention to put this on the agenda when the joint secretariat, proposed by us, met to agree procedures. Because of your failure to respond this did not happen.

The manner in which we have handled this project is a clear demonstration of our seriousness and commitment to bringing about a peace process. The way in which you have handled it has damaged the project and may have increased the difficulties.

Your failure to respond, coupled with recent statements by your Prime Minister and other senior ministers shows no flexibility or imagination.

As for events on the ground. The greatest number of fatalities for some time now in the conflict has resulted from the actions of loyalist groups acting both on their own agenda and as surrogates for British intelligence. South African guns supplied by

British agent Brian Nelson with the full knowledge of the British authorities are being used for attacks on the nationalist population, members of Sinn Féin and their families.

This is the reality of events on the ground, which we seek to change, so let us be serious. There is a conflict. The issue is its resolution.

The absence of such a peace process condemns us all to ongoing conflict and tragedy.

Note: In the British government version the following sentence was omitted from paragraph 5, line three after "end." "The purpose of a dialogue about peace is to bring all organised violence by all parties to the conflict to an end."

This was subsequently corrected by the British government on Wednesday

December 1, 1993. August 30, 1993 : Message from Sinn Féin to the British Government

We reiterate our concern at the continuing leaks from your side. The Sunday Times story of 22nd August 1993 was but the latest in a recent series which include a previous Sunday Times article and several informed references in public statements by a number of Unionist spokesmen. We are also convinced and concerned that the recent Cook Report is connected to the above revelations.

September 1, 1993 : British government message in response to Sinn Féin message of August 14, 1993

MESSAGE IN RESPONSE TO NOTE OF 14 AUGUST 1993

1. The importance of clear mutual understanding has already been recognised. Minds do not seem to be meeting at the moment. This needs to be overcome.

2. The note you sent on 14 August did not deal with a crucial point. It did not confirm that you envisage a peace process which is aimed at an inclusive political process and that a lasting end to violence does not depend on your analysis being endorsed as the only way forward.

3. On a further point in it, the Government side has not asserted a belief that a two weeks suspension

would have the result described in paragraph 6. On the contrary, it has been their consistent position that violence must be brought to an end before any process could begin.

4. Equally it is accepted that your side genuinely and reasonably believed it had made a serious and significant offer. If it is the case that your side believes it has been met with indifference, or worse, then it shows that both sides must strive to be more clear with each other.

5. The important thing, without raking over every point of detail, is to establish whether there is a clearly understood way forward which could be agreed and adopted, without sacrifice of essential principles on either side, in pursuit of the objectives of securing peace, stability and reconciliation.

6. Two points are of importance:

i. since it is not possible to hold discussions under the threat of violence, there must be an end to violent activity before the process could begin;

ii. the objectives of an inclusive process would be the pursuit of peace, stability and reconciliation on the widest possible basis. Beyond that, there would be no attempt to impose prior restrictions on the agenda. On the contrary it is assumed that each participant would enter such a process on the basis of their separately stated political analysis and objectives. The Government's position is well understood publicly. The 9-paragraph note was entirely consistent with that position.

7. Against that background, can you confirm that you want a peace process which is aimed at an inclusive political process and that a lasting end to violence does not depend on your analysis being endorsed as the only way forward?

8. If you can confirm this, then we remind you that this process of dialogue leading to an inclusive political process can only start after the receipt of the necessary assurance that organised violence had been brought to an end. In the meantime progress has to be subject to events on the ground.

September 3, 1993 : British government message sent to Sinn Féin in response to a complaint of August 30, 1993 concerning leaks to the media

MESSAGE IN RESPONSE TO NOTE OF YOUR NOTE OF 30 AUGUST

Recent media reports and speculation do not result from authorised briefing. Nor do they serve the interests of anybody seeking to bring these exchanges to a successful conclusion. As both sides recognise, that depends on maintaining maximum confidentiality. Recent reports are certainly not being inspired/ let alone orchestrated, by the Government side to which they are most unwelcome. Accordingly, the Government side will continue to respect the confidentiality of these exchanges. It remains committed as before to the nine-paragraph note.

September 6, 1993: Oral message from the British government.

This stated that Major was now a force for progress. It stressed that the May 10 situation has got to be got back on the rails and suggested that Sinn Féin should comment in as major a way as possible on the PLO/Rabin deal; that Sinn Féin should be saying 'If they can come to an agreement in Israel, why not here? We are standing at the altar why won't you come and join us'.

It also said that a full frontal publicity offensive from Sinn Féin is expected, pointing out that various contingencies and defensive positions are already in place.

NOTE: This is omitted from the British government version.

September 10, 1993: Sinn Féin response to British government message of September 1, 1993

RESPONSE TO 1 SEPTEMBER COMMUNICATION

In our communication of August 14 we outlined our doubts about your commitment to the development of a real peace process. Your message of 1 September 1993 does little to remove these doubts.

From the beginning of this process we had assured you of our preparedness to be as reasonable and flexible as possible. Our commitment to the search for a genuine peace process was evidenced by the

fact that we positively conveyed the very specific request from your representative for a two-week suspension of military activity on the part of the IRA to the IRA leadership. You informed us that the discussions, which would follow on from such a suspension, would result in republicans being convinced that armed struggle was no longer necessary.

The positive response to this request by the leadership of the Irish Republican Army underlined the willingness on the republican side to facilitate movement towards a real peace process.

The rejection of this substantial gesture by you has not only prevented further movement, but has damaged the project and increased the difficulties involved. This, and your present attempts to deny this aspect of the contact between us, can only be regarded with the utmost scepticism and must raise serious questions about your motives in all of this.

As we have already pointed out we found our preliminary meeting valuable. Despite our reservations, and the difficulties since, we still believe that there exists a basis for progress, which can be developed into a genuine, realistic, and democratic peace process. This, however, requires a degree of political will to move forward which has, up to now, been singularly lacking on your part.

Sinn Féin is engaged in a serious attempt through our contact with you and with others to develop such a process. Our party president Gerry Adams is currently discussing with SDLP leader John Hume this possibility. We have publicly called for a new and imaginative initiative by the Dublin and London Governments, based on democratic principles, to break the present deadlock.

Our commitment to any genuine peace process which sets equality, justice and political stability as its objective is a matter of public record. Sinn Féin has, like every other party to this conflict, its own particular political analysis. But the future shape of Irish society is a matter for the Irish people to decide democratically, without impediment of any kind, through dialogue and all embracing negotiations. Sinn Féin remains committed to such a real peace process

NOTE: This message is omitted from the British government version.

September 25. 1993: Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams and SDLP Party Leader John Hume issued the second of three joint statements by the two party leaders in the course of 1993.

The statement said:

"Our discussions, aimed at the creation of a peace process which would involve all parties, have made considerable progress.

We agreed to forward a report on the position reached to date to Dublin for consideration.

We recognise that the broad principles involved will be for wider consideration between the two governments.

Accordingly, we have suspended detailed discussions for the time being in order to facilitate this.

We are convinced from our discussions that a process can be designed to lead to agreement among the divided people of this island, which will provide a solid basis for peace.

Such a process would obviously also be designed to ensure that any new agreement that might emerge respects the diversity of our different traditions and earns their allegiance and agreement."

A copy of this statement was forwarded to the British government.

September 28. 1993: Sinn Féin message to British Government seeking response to Sinn Féin's message of September 10 1993

We are still awaiting your response to our communication of September 10.

Developments since then particularly the Hume/Adams statement have moved the situation forward. It deserves a more positive response than that given by Patrick Mayhew yesterday

NOTE: This message is omitted from the British government version.

November 5 1993: British government message to Sinn Féin

The British government claimed it had sent this message as a response to a written message sent by Sinn Féin on November 2, 1993. The November 2 message is contained in the British government version of these exchanges.

Sinn Féin did not send this message. It is bogus. It was written by the British government.

Sinn Féin received this message and the bogus November 2 message purporting to come from Sinn Féin simultaneously on the evening of November 5, 1993.

Sinn Féin believes that this 'Substantive Response' is the "new draft British paper" referred to on May 15 1993 (see page 34) and which was discussed by the British ministers on May 17 and May 18 (see page 35) and referred to in their message of July 17 (see page 37).

SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE

1. Your message of 2 November is taken as being of the greatest importance and significance. The answer to the specific question you raise is given in paragraph 4 below.

2. We hold to what was said jointly and in public by the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach in Brussels on 29 October. A copy of the Statement is annexed. There can be no departure from what is said there and in particular its statement that there could be no secret agreements or understandings between Governments and organisations supporting violence as a price for its cessation and its call on them to renounce for good the use of, or support for/ violence. There can also be no departure from the constitutional guarantee that Northern Ireland's status as part of the United Kingdom will not change without the consent of a majority of its people.

3. It is the public and consistent position of the British Government that any dialogue could only follow a permanent end to violent activity.

4. You ask about the sequence of events in the event of a total end to hostilities. If, as you have offered, you were to give us an unequivocal assurance that violence has indeed been brought to a permanent end, and that accordingly Sinn Féin

is now committed to political progress by peaceful and democratic means alone, we will make clear publicly our commitment to enter exploratory dialogue with you. Our public statement will make clear that, provided your private assurance is promptly confirmed publicly after our public statement and that events on the ground are fully consistent with this, a first meeting for exploratory dialogue will take place within a week of Parliament's return in January.

5. Exploratory dialogue will have the following purposes:

(i) to explore the basis upon which Sinn Féin would come to be admitted to an inclusive political talks process to which the British Government is committed but without anticipating the negotiations within that process;

(ii) to exchange views on how Sinn Féin would be able over a period to play the same part as the current constitutional parties in the public life of Northern Ireland;

(iii) to examine the practical consequences of the ending of violence.

6. The attached Annex summarises the sequence of events and provides answers to the procedural questions concerning exploratory dialogue, which have been raised.

7. If, in advance of our public statement, any public statement were made on your behalf which appears to us inconsistent with this basis for proceeding it would not be possible for us then to proceed.

8. If we received the necessary assurance, which you have offered, that violence has been brought to an end, we shall assume that you are assenting to the basis for proceeding explained in this note and its attachment.

PROCEDURAL ANNEX

November 8, 1993: Sinn Féin message to British government repudiating the November 2, 1993 message. This was despatched by Sinn Féin on November 8, 1993

After a discussion between Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness the following message was

sent at 11am Wednesday 10th November 1993.

I have been instructed to send this message.

We were informed on Friday November 5th of a communication received by you on November 2. This communication was issued without our authority or knowledge and solely on the initiative of Mr. Brown.

As you are aware it is our belief that the Hume/Adams process provides the basis for peace. The IRA has also publicly indicated a positive attitude.

This provides a unique opportunity which should be grasped.

8th November 1993.

NOTE: This message is omitted from the British government version. It was sent in the belief (as described above) that the British government had received a message and before the contact had satisfied Sinn Féin that no message whatsoever had been sent by the contact.