

PERSONAL

December 1993

MESSAGES BETWEEN THE IRA AND THE GOVERNMENT

Since my statement in the House on Monday, allegations have been made by the IRA leadership that it was the British Government who initiated the exchange of messages and was seeking advice. These allegations are entirely false. The first message was the one received on 22 February originating from the IRA.

I need to write to you, however, to say that in rechecking the documentation some transcription and typing errors have come to light in the dossier of messages between the IRA and the Government which I placed in the Library and Vote Office on 29 November. These do not change the sense of the messages, but nonetheless they should be corrected. The House of Commons must have fully authentic documents, and mistakes in a Statement must not go uncorrected.

I am enclosing a list of the necessary corrections together with the text, thus corrected, of the 9 paragraph message from the British Government despatched on 19 March which I read out in my statement.

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These errors arose from the speed with which the dossier had to be completed and checked in Northern Ireland on Sunday, following the decision that day that it should be published in the House contemporaneously with my Parliamentary Statement on Monday.

Copies of this letter are being sent to all Northern Ireland
The corrections cast no doubt whatsoever upon the ^{message} authenticity of the original message of 22 February from the IRA leadership, which I read out in the House and which said: "The conflict is over but we need your advice on how to bring it to a close". As I said in my Statement, this came from Martin McGuinness. Equally, the Government, notwithstanding allegations by Sinn Fein to the contrary, has no reason to doubt the authenticity of the message sent by the IRA leadership on 2 November which I also read to the House, together with the Government's reply of 5 November.

Nor does the need for corrections of the transcription errors in paragraph 3 of the 9 paragraph note carry the implication, as has been suggested in the press today, that it was the Government rather than the IRA leadership which was seeking advice. The advice referred to in that paragraph is the advice sought in the IRA message of 22 February. The speaking note accompanying the 9 paragraph note, published in the dossier and first printed in the Observer, makes it entirely clear that the British message gives "substantive advice in response to the initial message", which is indeed the case.

Although they do not carry the implications claimed, I very much regret that these corrections need to be made. You should plainly have them as quickly as possible. I

naturally accept full Ministerial responsibility for the inaccuracies. I am placing copies of this letter and enclosures in the Library and the Vote Office. I will confirm the corrections in a written Answer tomorrow.

Copies of this letter are being sent to all Northern Ireland MPs and spokesmen in both Houses, and will be released to the press once the papers have been placed in the Library and Vote Office.

(a)

Paragraph 3

- Line 3 delete 'We note that what' and insert 'The'
- Line 4 after 'advice', delete 'and', replace the comma with a point and insert 'The position of the British Government is'
- Line 4 after 'dialogue' delete 'would' and insert 'could only'
- Line 5 after 'follow' delete 'as announced' and insert 'a'
- Line 5 after 'activity' insert 'It is understood that in the first instance this would have to be unannounced.'
- Line 5 after the preceding insertion delete 'we confirm that'
- Line 7 after 'then' insert 'progressive entry into'

(b)

Paragraph 6 line 3 after 'any' insert 'such'.

(c)

Paragraph 7 line 6 after 'but' insert 'this can'. After 'only' insert 'be'.

(d)

Paragraph 8

- Line 2 after 'for' delete 'the' and insert 'a'. After 'forward' delete 'We are ready to' and insert 'The British Government would'.
- Line 3 delete 'to'