

Dermot Nally Papers

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relations come under intense strain



Mr James Molyneux: price being paid for his party's support.

The planned Anglo-Irish summit may not take place because the British Prime Minister is unwilling to respond positively to Irish overtures, writes Denis Coghlan, Chief Political Correspondent



Mr John Major: willing to renew contacts with Sinn Féin.

attempt to revive the talks in present circumstances would be futile.

So, rather than go along with a British government pretence that progress can be made through other avenues, the Taoiseach is expected to insist that a cessation of violence is the key to progress and that this can only be delivered through his proposed peace framework.

In an attempt to wriggle off this hook, the British government has sought to make a virtue out of exposure by declaring its willing-

ness to reopen contacts with Sinn Féin. Without reference to the Government's peace initiative, or to the demands contained in the Hume/Adams dialogue, it has held out the unreal prospect of a unilateral Provisional IRA cessation of violence as a result of renewed contact with Sinn Féin. And all in an obvious effort to buy time and space for further manoeuvre.

Sir Patrick told the House of Commons last Monday — words that were echoed yesterday by Mr Major — that the British govern-

ment was prepared to renew contacts with Sinn Féin "and if we don't succeed on this occasion, we should keep exploring again and again the opportunities for peace". Then, invoking Mr John Hume's comments on Mr Major, the Northern Ireland Secretary declared: "The key to peace is in the hands of the IRA."

This shift in direction was recognised by Mr Molyneux and his colleagues as the effective end of the Hume/Adams initiative and as vindication of the special

relationship between the Ulster Unionists, Mr Major and the Conservative government. The purchase of influence had paid off.

The Taoiseach has also invested heavily in his relationship with Mr Major. And while the refusal by the British government to support his initiative at this time will provide ammunition for those who believe he has made far too many concessions to the unionists, Mr Reynolds will be untouchable so long as the initiative remains alive.

Because of that, there is no question of Mr Reynolds stealing away into the night if his overture is rejected at this stage. Rather will the Government continue to press Mr Major and the British public to endorse it as the only way to break the cycle of violence which is engulfing both countries.

The Government's determination in that regard is partially fuelled by its anger over the behaviour of Mr Major, his Ministers and officials in negotiations up to now. Observers recall that while the Government was being told that Mr Major could not contemplate accepting aspects of the Hume/Adams process "because of the bloody fingerprints of the IRA", the British government was itself engaged in direct discussions with that organisation.

There is also a belief in Government circles that the policy direction Mr Major appears to have adopted is untenable. A solution involving compromise and involving both communities will have to be tried. And, of course, it may not be possible to stuff the Sinn Féin genie back into the bottle.

Reliable sources insisted last night that the summit would not go ahead unless the Government believed it would be successful. Unless and until negotiations

bring about a satisfactory outcome, the summit would be bound to fail. We are not in the business of holding a summit simply for the sake of it. The indications are that agreement is unlikely to be reached on the text of a communiqué before next Friday. To hold a summit in those circumstances would only make the situation worse," one source said.

Rather than accept the British government's suggestion that the unpalatable medicine should be swallowed quickly on Friday, the Government is suggesting that the dust should be allowed to settle in Northern Ireland over the dramatic British government/IRA revelations of last Monday and that an assessment of political prospects should only then be made. In the meantime, efforts to reach agreement on a communiqué should continue.

If Mr Major does not accept that suggestion, the Government may opt to cancel the summit, rather than preside over a failure. But, no matter what happens, it is determined that these substantive issues, with their implications for peace and a political settlement in Northern Ireland, will not be relegated to the margins of the European summit, due to be held in Brussels on December 10th.

EU seeks Dublin response to airline objections

From Sean Flynn, in Brussels

THE EU Commission, which is considering the proposed state aid of £175 million to Aer Lingus, has formally asked the Government to respond to a series of submissions it has received from

the state aid would be approved, possibly before the end of the year, after discussions in Brussels with the Transport Commissioner, Mr Abel Matutes.

Mr Cowen said he was so that the Government would no problems with raised by the



Web of intrigue clouds versions of events about British, IRA contacts

A WEB OF intrigue concerning the detail in the documents exchanged by the British government and the IRA began to emerge yesterday, as it became obvious that one side or the other must have falsified parts of the text to fit in with its version of events.

There is enormous — possibly even decisive — propaganda value for each side in having its account of developments accepted.

For the British government to retain credibility in its veracity and in the integrity of its policy, and for the Northern Ireland Secretary, Sir Patrick Mayhew, to survive politically, it is vital that its claim be accepted that this year's series of contacts was initiated by the IRA asking for advice on how to bring the conflict to a close.

But the IRA, in turn, it is crucial that it can refute the British version of the alleged message from the IRA leadership on February 22nd which amounted almost to an abject surrender offer.

The British version of the events and documents has been accepted implicitly in Britain's mass circulation media and on their television and radio networks. The issue of falsification or counterfeiting of documents or messages has not even arisen — and therefore Sir Patrick's case has been accepted at face value.

In west Belfast and other nationalist areas, it is almost equally implicitly accepted that the British version cannot be trusted, but the IRA must be concerned at doubts that have been sown concerning their strength of purpose.

And while Sir Patrick may not be too concerned, in a personal political career sense, with his image in west Belfast, the IRA must be alarmed at the impact of the British version among republican support sectors in Britain and the US.

There is circumstantial evidence of a most subtle and significant tampering with some of the documentary wording — for purposes either of "black propaganda" or political expedience.

One of the most intriguing dissimilarities between the "same" document, as issued by the two opposing sides, is so adroitly crafted that it is impossible to credit that the disparity could have been accidental —

Circumstantial evidence of a most subtle and significant tampering

the result, perhaps, of a typing error.

As pointed out in *The Irish Times* yesterday, the first substantive British document sent after the alleged verbal IRA "surrender" message implies distinctly — in the version of it released by the NIO and laid before the Commons — that "advice" was sought by the IRA on how to bring its violent activity to a close.

The version of the same document, dated March 19th, as released by Sinn Féin, clearly implies that the British government is seeking "advice" from the IRA (or Sinn Féin).

As the British government and Sinn Féin stick to their versions of events over documents, Dick Grogan, Northern Editor, believes that somebody has gone to a great deal of trouble to hide the truth

Sinn Féin yesterday issued what it said was a photocopy of the original British document, as sent to them. The relevant section reads: "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. 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."

In the NIO version of the document, the same section reads: "We note that what is being sought at this stage is advice; and that any dialogue would follow an unannounced halt to violent activity. We confirm that if violence had genuinely been brought to an end, whether or not that fact had been announced, then dialogue could take place."

The words "We note" and "We confirm" are particularly telling variations. The whole thrust of having made the approaches and implicitly offered an end to violence is thus thrown onto the republican side (and Sir Patrick's justification to parliament is authenticated).

Most pointed, also, is the variation of "entry into dialogue" in the British version, to "progressive entry into dialogue" in the Sinn Féin version. The NIO version of a later message from the

Provisionals dated May 10th includes the line: "We need clarification of the phrase 'progressive entry into dialogue'."

The phrase "progressive entry into dialogue" does not turn up anywhere else in the documents as released by the NIO, so how did it disappear from the British version of the March 19th document — as disappear it must have done, on the evidence of the Provisionals' document (NIO version) dated May 10th.

Another sentence missing from the version of a Sinn Féin document issued by the NIO could also be significant. The document is dated July 22nd and is a response to the British message of March 19th.

The sentence missing from the British version, but included in the Sinn Féin version, reads: "We found our preliminary meeting with your representative valuable."

The words "preliminary meeting" are the key here, for if they were truly in the Provisionals' document transmitted to the British, that would imply that the republican side perceived the first meeting with a British representative or intermediary to have taken place after March 19th. It implies, therefore, that there was no meeting on February 22nd at which the alleged oral message of "surrender" and advice-seeking

could have been communicated.

These are most artful and cunning variations, if they have indeed been contrived at. The Sinn Féin president, Mr. Gerry Adams, said yesterday that his party was continuing to scrutinise the documents published by Sir Patrick and that an initial study had detected "a number of bogus documents and changes in other documents."

Mr. Adams said that when the scrutiny was completed, Sinn Féin would set the record straight. "It is important that this is done," he said in a statement, "because if this line of communication is to have any value in the future, its integrity must be restored."

It will be important to bear in mind who stood to lose most

Mr. Martin McGuinness, said by the British to have communicated the February 22nd message, suggested that this "bogus IRA surrender" message was part of a pretext invented by the British in order to justify their involvement in talks with the republican movement.

Another element in that pretext, he alleged, was the British document of November 5th last, which, he said, "contrary to their claims, was unsolicited by Sinn Féin."

Mr. McGuinness further alleged that the British document of March 19th (mentioned above) was not in response to

any "fictitious" request for advice from the IRA. "It was, Sinn Féin was told at that time by the British, in response to speeches at our ard fheis of February 1993."

In trying to unravel the truth in this apparent convoluted tangle of forgery and deception, it will be important to bear in mind who stood to lose most, and also the timing of the various releases of documents.

For example, Sinn Féin issued its version of the March 19th document on Monday morning, hours before the British version was published to the House of Commons. They would have known already, of course, of Sir Patrick's claim the day before that the IRA said in February that "the conflict is over but we need your advice to bring it to a close."

But they would have had less than 24 hours to conspire, contrive at, perfect and re-type the key documents to fit in with their desired version of events. And they could not have known at that stage, of course, the extent of the documentation to be issued by the British, or how much authentication the British would be able to bring to bear on what they released.

These arguments would point to a British, rather than an IRA, conspiracy of deception. But one could also ask for more convincing reasons why Sinn Féin rushed to release some documents on Monday, ahead of the Mayhew releases.

While nothing has been absolutely established as certainty in this circle of deception, it becomes more and more apparent that somebody has gone to a great deal of trouble to hide the truth.