



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Analysis of Sinn Fein document on contacts with the British Government

General.

1. There is nothing fundamentally new in the document published by Sinn Fein on 17 January. It amplifies the basic contentions made by Sinn Fein in the immediate aftermath of the disclosures, i. e., that
 - a line of communication between Sinn Fein and the British Government has been in existence for the past twenty years;
 - the recent phase of contact began not on 22 February 1993 (as the British claim) but in mid-1990;
 - it was the British who took the initiative in this regard, not Sinn Fein;
 - it involved Sinn Fein only and not (as the British suggest) the "Provisional leadership";
 - the British record of the exchanges is faulty because it omits (in roughly a dozen instances, by Sinn Fein's count), amends or fabricates a number of key exchanges;
 - in particular, the exchanges which began and closed the sequence (in the British version) were fabricated;

- the British, not Sinn Fein, are to blame for the public disclosure of the dialogue.

2. The Sinn Fein version is fuller than the British one and is generally plausible and credible in its detail. In addition, its accuracy has not so far been questioned on the British side.

On the other hand, it is not a comprehensive record: Sinn Fein have themselves admitted that they withheld four documents on grounds of "sensitivity", and there may well have been more. Furthermore, its reliability cannot be presumed. There are a number of minor inconsistencies even between Martin McGuinness' earlier statement of 2 December and this account. In addition, the inability to specify the date of one document beyond "autumn 1991 or autumn 1992" does not inspire confidence.

3. A further point worth noting is that, while the media elsewhere received clean copies of the Sinn Fein document, Belfast-based journalists appear also to have received photocopies of the original handwritten messages - which contain a number of interesting additional details.

Main points of interest

4. A meeting between the then "British Government representative" and Martin McGuinness, which the latter attended "on a listening brief", occurred in October 1990. A new detail now provided is that an advance copy of Peter Brooke's Whitbread speech (delivered on 9 November 1990) was subsequently forwarded to Sinn Fein.
5. A first discrepancy between the McGuinness account of 2

December and this week's document is that the "contact" whom Sinn Fein used as an intermediary with the British Government representative was male in the 2 December version but female in the latest version. However, it is possible that more than one person was used over the three-year period in question.

6. No fresh clues are offered about the identity of the British Government representative (assuming there was only one) other than that (i) he was neither John Chilcot nor Quentin Thomas; (ii) he took a "walking holiday" in May 1993; and (iii) according to a photocopy seen by Ed Moloney (Belfast), he signed messages with the initial "R".
7. A new detail is that Sinn Fein's contact was told by a NIO source in August-September 1991 that Archbishop Eames had had "contact with Republicans". (The Archbishop has since denied this).
8. Four messages relating to the developing "Irish peace initiative" are withheld on grounds of "sensitivity". It is striking that no reference to any of these messages appeared in the McGuinness account of 2 December - perhaps because Sinn Fein were awaiting developments in the negotiations between the two Governments on a possible peace process?
9. The first of these messages was sent by Sinn Fein to the British Government on 7 January 1992.

It is worth recalling that there were indications at that time that an internal debate was underway within the Republican movement. An article by Mitchel Laughlin in the January 1992 edition of the Starry Plough attracted considerable attention because of its rejection of any

notion of coercing Unionists into Irish unity and its emphasis on the need for an "equitable agreement" between Unionists and nationalists in the aftermath of a British Government declaration of intent to leave Northern Ireland. The article prompted Bishop Edward Daly to open private discussions with McLaughlin and McGuinness. In the same month, two former Presbyterian Moderators opened a dialogue with Adams and Tom Hartley.

10. The second message withheld is a British Government message of 29 January 1992 (presumably a response to Sinn Fein's message of 7 January).

It is perhaps worth recalling that the British were taking at that time a fairly negative view of the prospects for movement within Sinn Fein. In a conversation with the Joint Secretary (latter's report of 20 February 1992), a senior British official indicated that the various channels which they used to take soundings in Sinn Fein/IRA were "all quiet at present". Their assessment was that Sinn Fein had concluded that there was not enough in the Whitbread speech and other statements for them to move, at least for the present, and that the hard men had reasserted themselves in the IRA. They believed that the forthcoming Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis would be less interesting than the previous year's and that a discussion document referred to at a Sinn Fein press conference in mid-February was intended merely as a defence against criticism that Sinn Fein had nothing to offer.

11. Contrary to the British assessment, the Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis of 17-18 February 1992 unveiled a significant policy document, Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland, which attracted considerable attention. This accepted for the first time that British withdrawal could come

about only by agreement between the British and Irish Governments.

12. The Sinn Fein document contains a curious undated text, described as a "message from the British Government to Sinn Fein", which in fact appears to be an extract from an internal British Government minute. The unidentified author makes various recommendations about action which the Secretary of State might take in relation to a possible IRA Christmas ceasefire.
13. A further discrepancy between the McGuinness account of 2 December and this week's document is that, although McGuinness said that Sinn Fein had been informed (following Peter Brooke's replacement by Sir Patrick Mayhew in mid-1992) that the line of communication would continue as before and that Mayhew was "fully on board", there is no documentary evidence in the new document (even in the form of an internal report by Sinn Fein) to corroborate this important point. This again raises questions about the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the Sinn Fein dossier.
14. There is also no documentary evidence to support the 2 December claim of "consistent reports from the British Government representative" that the Talks were going nowhere and that there was friction between the new Secretary of State and his senior civil servants.
15. It is also odd that the new document offers no evidence for the "frequent...even daily" meetings with the British Government representative during the period January/March 1993 which McGuinness claimed on 2 December. Furthermore, while McGuinness (2 December) emphasized a key point made by Sinn Fein at all those meetings, that point is strangely absent from the single report of a

meeting during that period (12 January) which is contained in the new document.

16. There is, however, a consistency between the reported remarks of the British Government representative on 12 January and a speech delivered on the same day by the Secretary of State, who claimed that IRA leaders were realizing increasingly that there was "no way out" and "many of them wisely want to stop".
17. In October 1992 Sinn Fein received a "preview" of points for the Secretary of State's Coleraine speech (delivered on 16 December 1992). It is worth noting that this preview, reflecting perhaps the fact that it was drafted while the Talks were still in progress, bears little resemblance to the speech as finally delivered (which dispensed with the Talks process and concentrated instead on nationalist concerns).
18. The Sinn Fein version of events in February 1993 is that it was the British who responded to speeches by Adams and McGuinness at the Sinn Fein Ard-Fheis (20-21 February). The new document says that copies of these speeches were sent to the British Government. It provides Sinn Fein reports of meetings with the British Government representative on 24 and 26 February respectively (on arrangements for talks following a ceasefire). These reports are broadly consistent with the account given by McGuinness on 2 December.
19. The British version has "the leadership of the Provisional movement" sending a message on 22 February which enclosed the two Ard-Fheis speeches and declared that the conflict was over but that they needed advice on how to bring it to a close. Sinn Fein dismiss this as bogus.

20. The first message common to both the Sinn Fein and British Government versions is one of 26 February in which the British Government promised a "substantive reply" as soon as possible.
21. Both versions also document an oral message of 5 March from Sinn Fein to the British Government and a written message of 11 March in the opposite direction. Both also reproduce a British "nine-paragraph" document of 19 March - the awaited substantive reply. Sinn Fein point out, however, that the text initially published by Sir Patrick Mayhew contained a number of "alterations" which had to be rectified subsequently.
22. Both also reproduce the oral message from the British Government which accompanied this document (the "speaking note" which was later leaked to Willie McCrea MP).
23. Sinn Fein provide a report on a meeting of 23 March with the British Government representative (not mentioned in the British documentation). At this, Sinn Fein were evidently informed, inter alia, that the British delegation to talks "would probably be led by Quentin Thomas, with John Chilcott down the line".
24. Sinn Fein reject the British Government claim that they sent on 22 March a message expressing regret for the Warrington bomb. They mention, however, the terms of Gerry Adams' statement on the latter (to which the British Government had been "referred").
25. Sinn Fein claim that a message which they sent on 3 April (promising a response to a recent discussion) has been omitted from the British Government documentation. The same complaint is made about a message which the British

Government reportedly sent back on 24 April (which, inter alia, requested a meeting with a "Mr Brown" - the individual whom Martin McGuinness would later disown for conveying an unauthorised message in early November). Ed Moloney in the Sunday Tribune noted that a fax number on the copy he had seen was a London number ("somewhere in Mayfair").

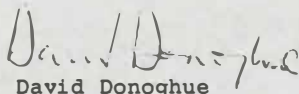
26. Sinn Fein also complain that the British documentation omits an oral message which they sent on 4 May. Furthermore, they note that a message which the British Government sent to them on the following day was altered in the version published by the Secretary of State (to support the alterations made to the British document of 19 March); that the British Government subsequently had to rectify this; but that this was not mentioned by the Secretary of State in his statement of 2 December.
27. A lengthy Sinn Fein message was sent on 10 May. What is striking here is that Sinn Fein have evidently still not spotted the contradiction between the British Government's version of events and the appearance in this message (in both published versions) of a sentence which begins "Having said that, we are responding directly to your request for advice" (emphasis supplied). No explanation for this contradiction was given by the Secretary of State in his statement of 1 December and Sinn Fein do not appear to have adverted to it since.
28. Sinn Fein reproduce a document dated "April 1993" which, in the British version, is given the date of 22 July instead. (The British explanation for this discrepancy is that the document, while prepared in April, was only belatedly passed to the intermediaries and not formally tabled until July). Sinn Fein note that the version published by the British deleted the first sentence of

this text, i. e., "We found our preliminary meeting with your representative valuable". Surprisingly, they do not go on to highlight the Secretary of State's failure (on 1 December) to account for this discrepancy.

29. A Sinn Fein report of a meeting on 24 May with the British Government representative (following the latter's return from "his walking holiday") mentions a request by the latter for a meeting "at the usual hotel" with Sinn Fein's contact, identified as female. It provides a detailed account of Cabinet-level discussions in London and ends with the representative insisting that everything he had said was the truth, "exactly as he had been instructed by Chilcott".
30. Sinn Fein dismiss as bogus an alleged Sinn Fein message of 1 June offering "a total cessation" which appears in the British documentation. In contrast, they complain at the omission from the latter of (i) a British Government message to them (of 3 June); (ii) a letter from the British Government representative, received during the first week of June; (iii) a Sinn Fein oral message of 10 June; and (iv) a Sinn Fein message of 4 July.
31. The versions again run in parallel, however, with messages of 11 July (Sinn Fein to British Government), 17 July (vice versa), 14 August and 30 August (Sinn Fein to British Government). The need for a British Government correction to the initially published version of the 14 August text is noted.
32. Sinn Fein dismiss as a fabrication a message of 2 November which the British claim to have received from them (though it is clear that Martin McGuinness' initial reaction was to suspect that a message of an irregular

and unauthorised nature had indeed been transmitted by "Mr Brown"). They are correspondingly dismissive of the "response" to this message which the British despatched on 5 November.

In a detailed account of the background to this exchange, Sinn Fein claim that the purported message of 2 November was sent to Sinn Fein, not the other way round, and that the "response" by the British Government was accordingly prepared (and later published) in bad faith. They complain at the British Government's failure to include in their documentation a message of 8 November from Sinn Fein "repudiating" the alleged communication of 2 November.



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