

Mayhew's Corrections in Commons

2nd December 1993

Documents

Mr. Mates : To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he has any correction to make to the text of any document placed in the Library and the Vote Office at the time when he made his statement on 29 November.

Sir Patrick Mayhew : 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. I have placed in the Library and the Vote Office the corrected version of the dossier. A list of the necessary corrections appears at the beginning of the corrected versions of the dossier.

These errors do not change the sense of the messages, but nonetheless they should be corrected. Parliament must have fully authentic documents. The errors arose from the speed with which the dossier had to be completed and checked in Northern Ireland on Sunday, after the decision that day that it should be published in Parliament the following day. The relevant corrections also apply to the quotations from the documents in my statement on 29 November. The corrections cast no doubt whatsoever upon the authenticity of the original message of 22 February from the IRA leadership, which I read out in my statement 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 nine paragraph note sent on 19 March carry any implication 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 nine 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 those corrections need to be made. I naturally accept full ministerial responsibility for the inaccuracies.

The corrections have been notified to the House at the earliest opportunity. Copies of a letter to all Northern Ireland MPs and spokesmen, enclosing the list of corrections

and the text, thus corrected, of the nine paragraph message from the British Government despatched on 19 March, were placed last night in the Library of the Vote Office.