



THE SUNDAY TIMES

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Mr Tom King
Secretary of State for Defence
Main Building
Ministry of Defence
Whitehall
London SW1

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Dear Mr King

You may be aware from your time in Northern Ireland of the activities of the Murphy family. You may also be aware that the family have a number of libel actions outstanding against The Sunday Times, the first of which is due to come before the court in Dublin next Tuesday.

At present, we have no defence against any of the libel actions as it has proved impossible to get anyone from the security forces to testify in our defence either through an affidavit or in person.

Unless circumstances change, we will be compelled to settle this case by paying £325,000 to the Murphys along with £155,000 in costs. That money breaks down as £250,000 in settlement of four libel actions in Belfast and the balance for two libel actions in Belfast. These sums are in addition to the £120,000 they have already received from a libel action against my book, *The Financing of Terror*.

If the Murphys are allowed to win this case, a number of things will follow:

1. This year the IRA will have received more money from libel actions than any other single source of income.
2. The money will be used to finance more acts of terrorism to kill members of the security forces and innocent civilians.
3. Father Patrick Ryan will proceed with his libel actions from which he will receive at least £1m.
4. The IRA will receive a significant boost to their morale while the impotence of the government in this matter will be noted by its supporters.

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5. The IRA will succeed in stifling debate of their activities in the press. Already, it is difficult enough to expose IRA terrorism and the success of these libel actions will make sure that the media will be even more careful when writing about the IRA. While the government use new laws to prevent publication of terrorists' views, the IRA are using the libel laws to the same effect.

6. Rather than pay the money, we are considering withdrawing from Ireland altogether. This would clearly be a major victory for the IRA.

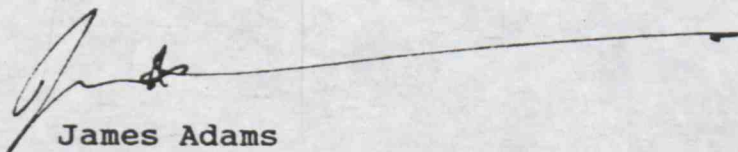
Even at this late stage, The Sunday Times is prepared to fight this case because we do not believe that we should be providing funds to terrorists. However, this simple principle is proving difficult to stand by as to-date we have been unable to gather any support other than good wishes from anyone in the Government.

In the various discussions that have taken place on this issue I understand that the conclusion has been that allowing anyone to testify might compromise sensitive sources. I fully understand this difficulty but I do not believe sufficient political clout has been put behind the problem to find a solution.

I would like to suggest a meeting at the earliest opportunity to see if there is any way forward. A meeting might include lawyers from your side and ours so that we could explore possibilities. It may be, for example, that more could be done for the Belfast cases than for those in Dublin. However, at the moment we have only questions and no answers and time is very short.

I know you share my concerns in this matter and I do hope you can use your knowledge and experience to move this appalling state of affairs to a conclusion that represents something less than total victory for the IRA.

Yours sincerely



James Adams
Defence Correspondent

