

## Disgust and fury over Queen's banquet invite to McGuinness: Former IRA commander may attend white-tie event at Windsor Castle

- State banquet to be held in honour of former Irish president next month
- Martin McGuinness, former IRA commander, has been invited
- Said to be considering whether or not to attend white-tie dinner

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Martin McGuinness, former IRA commander and deputy Irish first minister, is considering whether to accept the invitation

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The revelation that former IRA commander Martin McGuinness may attend a state banquet hosted by the Queen sparked a furious reaction last night.

The Sinn Fein politician is still considering whether to accept an invitation to the white-tie event at Windsor Castle next month.

Buckingham Palace refused to confirm that Northern Ireland's deputy first minister is on the guest list for the banquet, in honour of Irish president Michael D Higgins.

McGuinness is also thought to have been invited to a reception, also at Windsor and hosted by the Queen, a few days later.

But former Tory chairman Lord Tebbit, who survived the IRA bombing of the Grand Hotel in Brighton in 1984 which left his wife Margaret paralysed, said: 'Were I the Queen, I think I would be looking very hard for a reason not to be inviting Mr McGuinness to my home.'

Newark MP Patrick Mercer, a former Army colonel who also served in Northern Ireland, said: 'The IRA was responsible for killing and injuring many of my colleagues and, while I fully appreciate the need for conciliation, I feel this invitation is going too far.'

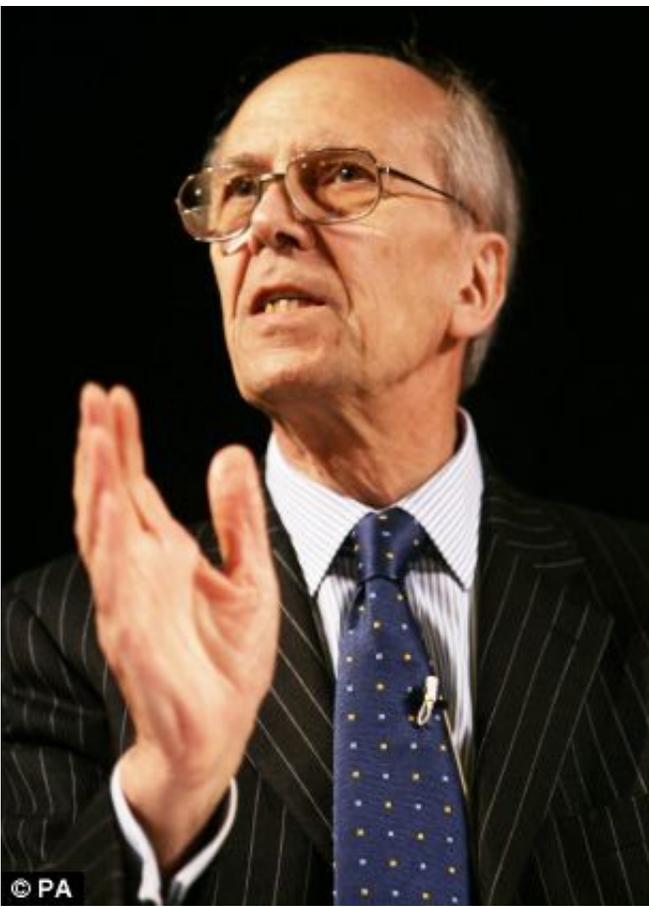
A former Parachute Regiment member, who was involved in Lord Saville's long-running and costly Bloody Sunday inquiry, said: 'The thought of this former IRA commander walking into Windsor Castle makes me feel physically sick. People should remember what the IRA did and how many innocent lives have been lost.'

Brian Goodman, whose policeman son was gunned down by an IRA fugitive in North Yorkshire in 1992, said: 'This invitation is absolutely disgusting. He shouldn't even be allowed into England.'

Other critics pointed out that the Queen's cousin, Lord Mountbatten of Burma – who was also Prince Philip's uncle – was murdered by an IRA bomb on his fishing boat in the Irish Republic in 1979.

However, some saw the invitation as a possible further step in the peace process.

Democratic Unionist MP Jeffrey Donaldson said: 'There are many in Northern Ireland who still carry the pain and the scars of the IRA and other terrorist organisations.'



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Opposition: Lord Tebbit (left) said he 'would be looking very hard for a reason not to be inviting Mr McGuinness to my home' while MP Patrick Mercer (right) said the

'But if the Republican movement is prepared to recognise the legitimacy of the Queen as Head of State then that might be looked upon as some sort of progress.'

Former army officer Colonel Tim Collins said: 'There will be some people who will be deeply upset but I believe this is a move which speaks of the power of reconciliation.'

Ulster Unionist chairman Lord Empey said: 'It's just a tragedy that so many people had to lose their lives before he [McGuinness] realised that violence was futile and the IRA campaign was doomed to failure.'

McGuinness, who met and shook the hand of the Queen in Belfast two years ago, would need any acceptance of an invitation to be ratified by senior Sinn Fein officials.

Last night the party refused to discuss when that decision would be made.

A Buckingham Palace spokesman said: 'We would never announce in advance the invitees to state banquets.'