

Irish Daily Mail

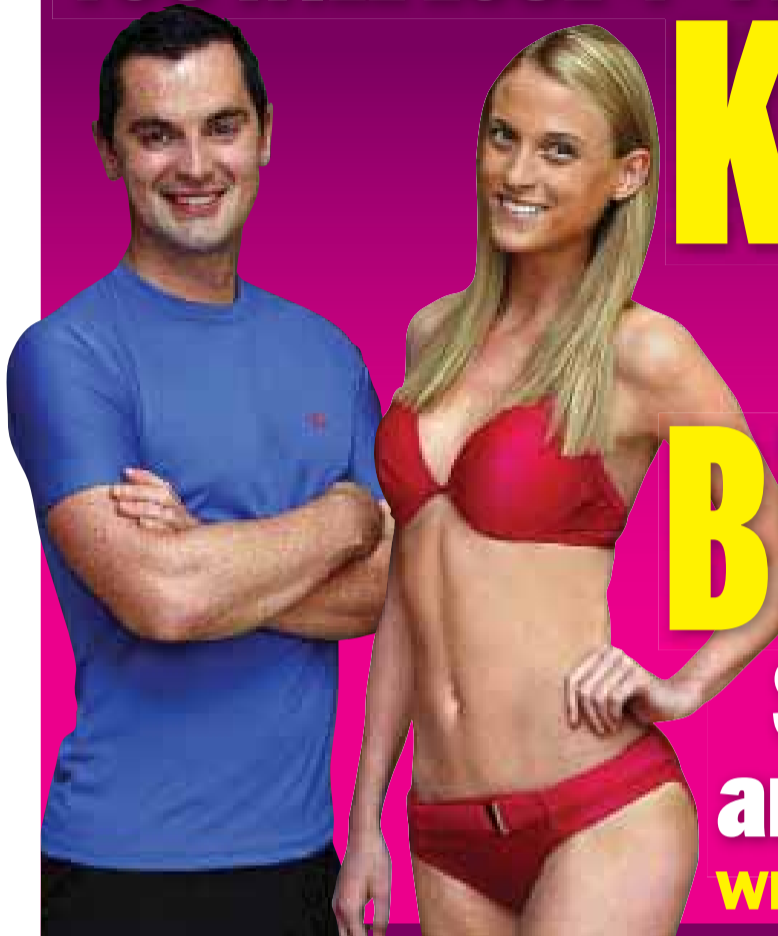
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Ó Snodaigh could face prosecution after expert analyses use of printer cartridges

INKGATE: GARDAI LAUNCH PROBE

By **Senan Molony**
Political Editor

GARDAÍ are investigating Aengus Ó Snodaigh's use of ink cartridges from the Dáil during the Inkgate scandal revealed in the Irish Daily Mail this year.

A computer expert has reported the Sinn Féin TD after accessing official Dáil records and finding anomalies in the log of repairs carried out on his printers.

And last night, it emerged that a senior Garda officer has written to the clerk of the Dáil over the matter.

If the investigation uncovers evidence that Mr Ó Snodaigh was passing on unused computer print cartridges to others – as has been suggested – a file could be sent to the DPP with a view to a possible prosecution.

This February, the Mail sensationally

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Westlife raise up 80,000 fans
SEE PAGE THREE

McGuinness will shake queen's hand

MARTIN McGuinness will shake the queen's hand in a historic meeting in Belfast next Wednesday – but it will be behind closed doors.

A year after Sinn Féin snubbed the royal visit to the Republic last year, the party's ruling council agreed to the meeting between the former senior IRA man and symbolic head of British forces, whose cousin Lord Mountbatten was killed in 1979 by the Provos.

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'The number of spare parts was too low'

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revealed that Mr Ó Snodaigh had used 434 ink cartridges – worth about €50,000, and enough to print out more than 3million pages – on his office printers within the space of just two years.

At the time, the Dublin South Central deputy claimed the cartridges were used in the course of regular constituency business.

However, computer expert Stephen Kearon points out that that level of usage would have caused extra demand on other printer parts due to wear and tear – demand which did not materialise, Dáil records show.

The Garda investigation team, headed by a superintendent, has made contact with the Oireachtas officials specifically over Mr Ó Snodaigh's claim that the hundreds of ink cartridges he took in 2007 and 2009 were for his own parliamentary use.

Dáil maintenance records show that while engineering assistance was sought more than a dozen times for the three printers being used by Mr Ó Snodaigh – two at his Leinster House office, the third at his Ballyfermot Road constituency office – during the two years under investigation, just three spare parts were required.

According to technical experts, the machines in question come fitted with an imaging drum which must be replaced after 35,000 impressions.

According to figures uncovered by Mr Kearon, the printers registered in Mr Ó Snodaigh's name required the replacement of just one such imaging drum.

The computer expert explained: 'I launched a Freedom of Information request to the Houses of the Oireachtas after the Irish Daily Mail broke the story.'

'These printers register every time they are used and Mr Ó Snodaigh

every printing day – enough for 3,500,000 pages

TD TOOK PRINTER CARTRIDGES WORTH €50K FROM DAIL

A SINN FÉIN TD took computer print cartridges worth €50,000 from the Dáil. **EXCLUSIVE**

Then: How Mail broke the story

was adamant he had used 434 printer cartridges – enough to print over three million pages – on solely his own machines.

'I received the details I'd sought, but the number of spare parts used for the Ó Snodaigh printers was very low. I sent an email seeking clarification on this and was told that, yes, only three parts had been supplied.'

'The single imaging drum he got for his Dell printers was rated for 35,000 pages. To print 3million pages he would have needed an additional 85 imaging drum components.'

Mr Kearon, who is chairman of the Wicklow town Fianna Fáil cumann and a former special adviser to ex-European Affairs Minister Dick Roche, presented his findings to the gardai at Pearse Street.

He said: 'Additional research I have done shows that his old Minolta printers were only capable of printing 2.4 colour pages per minute, and the Dell printers which replaced them had a known fault which meant that after every 100 pages the printer needed a 20-minute cooling-off period before

it could print again.' Mr Kearon added that the records cast doubt on claims that the printers had produced 3 million pages, and he added: 'Deputy Ó Snodaigh now has some serious questions to answer.'

'Based on his explanations so far, Mr Ó Snodaigh must be assumed to have misled the public.'

The gardai have obtained legal advice on Mr Kearon's submissions, and have now instituted a full investigation. Superintendent Joseph Gannon has written this week to Kieran Coughlan, the clerk of the Dáil, on the matter.

The superintendent, based in Pearse Street, told the Mail yesterday that it would be 'wholly inappropriate' to discuss an ongoing investigation.

'Serious questions to answer'

Yesterday, Mr Ó Snodaigh did not respond to voicemail messages left on his mobile phone seeking a comment on the latest development.

A spokesman for the Houses of the Oireachtas said last night: 'I can confirm that Garda correspondence has been received.'

He declined to elaborate on the statement, or to discuss the material sought by gardai.

The Mail revealed in February that in 2007 the Sinn Féin TD obtained 215 computer print cartridges worth almost €26,000.

The following year he took delivery of 219 cartridges, which were valued at €24,700.

In 2009 there was a clampdown on the number of print toner kits that TDs could claim. However, in that year he still managed to use significantly more cartridges than anybody



Leaflets: Aengus Ó Snodaigh claimed cartridge use was justified

else in Leinster House. Deputy Ó Snodaigh insisted to this newspaper that all print cartridges had been used in either his Dáil or constituency offices.

On February 28 he also told listeners to Morning Ireland: 'All of the printing cartridges that I got I used in my constituency office and I used them for constituency material, and anyone who lives in the constituency would be aware of getting leaflets on a continuous basis.'

He also declared: 'Nobody ever raised with me, in Leinster House, the cost of it or that it was excessive or anything else.'

But a follow-up Freedom of Information request by the Irish Daily Mail revealed that Mr Ó Snodaigh was contacted by the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission in 2006.

He had been the only TD to complain about measures taken to monitor print cartridge usage. Mr

Ó Snodaigh subsequently breached the ceilings set in 2009 and failed to make repayment despite receiving three letters about his excess use by the Houses of the Oireachtas.

After the Mail revelation, he and Gerry Adams sent clearing cheques for €3,286.07 and €317 respectively to meet breaches of the limits last year.

Information from the Houses of the Oireachtas clearly shows that the only spare parts supplied to him in 2007 and 2008 were two drums for a Minolta 5430 machine (replaced in June 2007) and an imaging drum for a Dell 5110CN laser printer (supplied at the same time).

The Inkgate controversy re-emerged in the same week that Mr Ó Snodaigh learned that he will come under pressure to retain his seat when his constituency loses a representative in the next election.

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Sinn Féin approves greeting for queen behind closed doors – but photographer will be there



Historic: Martin McGuinness

MARTIN McGuinness will shake the queen's hand in Belfast next week in a historic event behind closed doors.

The unprecedented meeting between the former senior IRA leader and symbolic head of the British armed forces was approved at a meeting of Sinn Féin's ruling council in Dublin yesterday.

The decision to accept the invitation from peace organisation Co-operation Ireland to meet Queen Elizabeth was announced by Gerry Adams at a packed press conference.

Mr McGuinness has been invited to meet the queen next Wednesday in his role as the North's Deputy First Minister. The queen, who will be in the North as part of her Diamond Jubilee celebrations, has never met a senior figure of the Provisional IRA, who killed her cousin Lord Mountbatten in Co. Sligo in 1979.

The handshake will be in private and a photographer will be there to record the momentous occasion. Also in attendance will be President Michael D Higgins and the North's First

By **Ferghal Blaney**
Political Correspondent

Minister Peter Robinson. The queen and President Higgins are joint patrons of Co-operation Ireland.

Mr Adams stressed that the event next week is unconnected with any official Jubilee celebrations and he called on all Sinn Féin members to support his party's decision.

'Today's decision is the right thing to do at the right time and for the right reasons,' he said. 'I ask all Sinn Féin members and all republicans to support this initiative.'

The 40-strong Ard Comhairle debated the matter for some hours and despite some dissenting voices, the invitation was approved by a large majority, Mr Adams revealed.

'Because this involves Martin meeting the British monarch, this will cause difficulty for republicans and nationalists who have suffered at the hands of British forces in Ireland over many decades,' Mr Adams said.

'However, in the context of conflict resolution and national reconciliation, as well as our own republican national

objectives, the Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle agreed that Martin should accept the invitation.'

Mr Adams denied that the move was a final abandonment by Sinn Féin of its republican principles. Peter Sheridan, chief executive of Co-operation Ireland, said: 'We must remember those important words, we can bow to the past, but not be bound by it. And in Mrs McAleese's words, you cannot

'In the context of conflict resolution'

change the past but you can choose to change the future. This is about changing the future for the young people across this island.'

The decision was welcomed by Taoiseach Enda Kenny and Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore last night.

However, Fianna Fáil's foreign affairs spokesman Seán Ó Fearghail criticised Sinn Féin for deciding to meet the queen now after snubbing her official visit last year. He said: 'Sinn Féin got

wrong when they entirely misjudged last year's state visit by Queen Elizabeth and snubbed then president Mary McAleese. 'Nothing has changed in the meantime and now Sinn Féin seeks to portray its decision to follow the lead of all other Irish political parties as a momentous landmark in Irish history,' he added.

Bill Clinton, who was in Cork yesterday at a gala dinner with the Taoiseach, welcomed the move.

'It is a very good thing,' said the former U.S. president, who was heavily involved in the Northern peace process in the Nineties.

'It says to the people of the UK and to the doubters in Northern Ireland that he and Gerry Adams and the vast majority of Sinn Féin and the IRA have abandoned the strategy of conflict for the promise of co-operation.'

'The queen doing it says that not just the current British government or the government of Tony Blair or the government of John Major, but the nation has made a decision to reconcile. It reinforces the peace process.'

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