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IRA informer is banned from giving evidence in Omagh case

Thursday, 5 March 2009

A High Court judge yesterday reversed his decision to allow a convicted IRA murderer-turned-informer to give evidence at the Omagh bomb civil action.

Sean O'Callaghan was due to be called this week to testify against jailed dissident republican leader Michael McKeivitt, one of five men being sued over the August 1998 atrocity which claimed 29 lives and injured hundreds more.

But Mr Justice Morgan ruled he was no longer prepared to allow cross-examination of a man he described as a self-confessed terrorist and "practised deceiver" who was at one stage being paid by the plaintiffs.

He said: "Questions arise on the issue of credibility. Is Mr O'Callaghan dropping Mr McKeivitt in it ... and to what extent can his evidence be judged reliable in relation to that?"

The judge's decision to stop O'Callaghan from going into the witness box came as lawyers for victims' relatives, who are seeking multi-million pound damages, closed their case after 10 months of evidence.

McKeivitt, Liam Campbell, Seamus McKenna, Colm Murphy and Seamus Daly all deny responsibility for the Omagh bombing.

The families' legal team wanted O'Callaghan to try to prove his claims that he and McKeivitt attended a meeting with other senior Provisionals in the mid-1980s to discuss buying deer hunting rifles for attacks on the military and police.

Mr Justice Morgan decided in December that the agent, who says he was once in charge of the Provisional IRA's southern command, should be allowed to give evidence on this and separate claims that he instructed his security officer to tell McKeivitt to stop taking vehicles from the organisation's car pool without permission.

He was also to be questioned on allegations that the IRA's Chief of Staff in 1985, Kevin McKenna, told him he wanted McKeivitt voted onto the paramilitary organisation's executive.

But issues around possible applications for Public Interest Immunity were raised by police lawyers, while some material being sought remained outstanding.

Lawyers for McKeivitt are now expected to open their defence against allegations made by the Omagh families.

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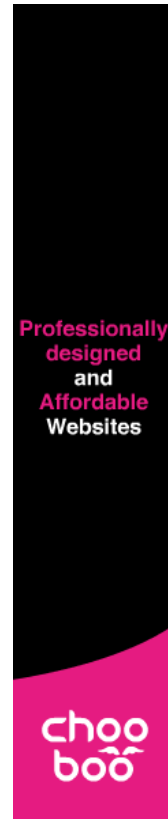
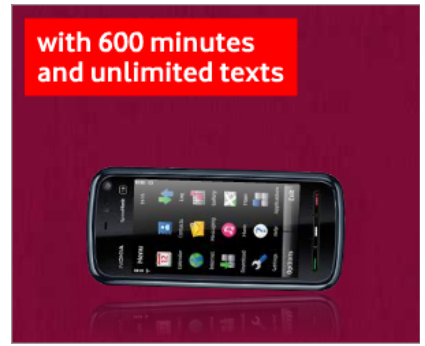
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