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Unionist in 'father's sash' makes history at SF event

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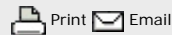
By Colm Kelpie and Dan McGinn
Saturday March 01 2008

The father of a man murdered by a loyalist gang tonight launched a stinging attack on the Democratic Unionist Party, accusing them of ignoring evidence of British collusion in loyalist killings.

Wearing a Protestant sash, Raymond McCord, whose son Raymond Jnr was killed by a UVF gang riddled with informers, made history by becoming the first unionist to address a Sinn Fein ard fheis.

Addressing delegates in Dublin he berated the DUP leadership for failing to respond to a government report revealing police shielded a north Belfast UVF murder squad doubling as informers.

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Expose

Instead he applauded Sinn Fein for championing his cause to expose collusion between the British security forces and loyalist killers.

"A year ago a report came out from [former Police Ombudsman] Nuala O'Loan which proved collusion," he said.

"Nuala O'Loan is a government appointee, yet the DUP in particular ignored it.

"I met Gerry Adams last year. He made a promise that he would raise my son's case with Downing Street. And he kept his promise. Jeffrey Donaldson gave me a promise four or five years ago that he would name the killers in Parliament.

"He must have a bad memory, because he's never named them," he said.

Mr McCord got rapturous applause when he took to the podium announcing he would be wearing his father's sash, "not to rub people's noses in it", but because he was proud to.

"To be the first Unionist to speak at the ard fheis is an honour.

"I wanted to bring something from a unionist Protestant culture, and I don't want to rub people's noses in it.

"It's something I'm proud of and it's my father's sash. And I'm going to wear it to give my speech in," he said.

Raymond McCord Jnr, a 22-year-old former member of the RAF, was beaten to death in 1997 and his body dumped in a quarry on the outskirts of north Belfast.

Murders

The Police Ombudsman's report claimed UVF members in the Mount Vernon area committed murders and other serious crimes while working as informers for the Royal Ulster Constabulary's Special Branch.

Also at the ard fheis, the Democratic Unionists were last night urged not to break a deadline for securing policing and justice powers for the Northern Ireland Assembly just for the sake of it.

The appeal was made by Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness in his first speech to his party's annual conference in Dublin as Stormont Deputy First Minister.

Mr McGuinness acknowledged the huge steps taken by Ian Paisley's DUP since they agreed to power sharing.

- *Colm Kelpie and Dan McGinn*

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