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Protestant victim to address Sinn Féin

Henry McDonald, Ireland editor
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Raymond McCord is set to become the first Protestant victim of the Troubles to address a Sinn Féin Ard Fheis. The campaigning father, whose son was beaten to death in 1997 by a loyalist gang in north Belfast, has accepted an invitation from the party to speak at its annual conference at the end of this month.

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During his speech, said McCord, he intends to raise the issue of collusion between the security forces and paramilitaries.

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Raymond McCord Jnr was killed in 1997 at a quarry on the northern outskirts of Belfast. He had been facing charges of possession of cannabis, which had been provided to him by the UVF commander in the Mount Vernon area of the city.

The local UVF boss, named in the Irish parliament as Mark Haddock, blamed McCord Jnr for importing the drugs and, to cover his own back, allegedly dispatched a UVF punishment squad to abduct and kill him.

For the past decade his father has fought a lone campaign to expose his son's killers. In the process he discovered that several members of the gang were informers working for Special Branch. McCord has alleged their handlers turned a blind eye to keep their 'intelligence assets' intact.

His campaign for justice eventually led to last year's damning report by the Police Ombudsman, Nuala O'Loan, who found widespread collusion between some police officers and the north Belfast UVF unit.

Asked about possible criticism from within his own Protestant community over attending the Sinn Féin conference in Dublin, McCord said: 'The Democratic

Unionist Party are getting paid salaries to sit down with Sinn Féin at Stormont. What I am doing is engaging with the same people, at their conference, without any payment or favour. I have no apology to make about being prepared to do that.'

McCord said he felt it was his duty to speak to Sinn Féin about the collusion issue. 'I am certainly not going to pull any punches when I deliver my speech. I will tell the delegates something many of them probably already know - that collusion was a two-way street.

'The security forces had high-profile informers working not only in organisations like the UVF and UDA, but also within the IRA. I know for a fact there are cases where policemen and soldiers died at the hands of IRA informers. They were allowed to die in order to protect the identity of the informants.

'The DUP in particular says it has the interests of the relatives and loved ones of murdered police officers and soldiers in its heart. But so far they have not raised the issue of those police officers and soldiers that were killed in attacks organised by informers inside the IRA and INLA.

'So I will use my speech to Sinn Féin to raise the case of those particular victims and ask why those in authority allowed these people to die.'

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