



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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The Stevens Inquiry

Background Note

1. Deputy Chief Constable John Stevens from Cambridgeshire was appointed to conduct an inquiry on 14 September 1989 into allegations of collusion between members of the Security Forces and Loyalist paramilitaries. He issued a summary of his report on 16 May 1990.

2. The Stevens Report and its implications were a constant agenda item at Conferences from October 1989 to April 1991. Following conclusion of the report in May 1990, the Minister used Conference meetings to press for the prompt implementation of Stevens' recommendations (of which there were 83), and he also underlined the importance of proceeding with charges where justified. At the Conference of 9 April 1991, the Minister referred to renewed allegations of collusion after the Cappagh and Craigavon shootings and newspaper reports of some documents finding their way into Loyalist hands. He sought an assurance that every serious allegation would be immediately and thoroughly investigated. Lord Belstead responded that the British side took what the Minister said very seriously.

3. At the Conference of 26 April 1991, the Minister said he was glad to see that the remaining people facing charges as a result of the Inquiry would be dealt with soon by the courts. He attached great importance to the implementation of the recommendations and particularly those on the vetting of applicants for the UDR. The Chief Constable reported that sixteen defendants were soon to face charges, and that the process of putting the recommendations into effect was proceeding very satisfactorily. A further discussion of collusion took place at the Conference meeting in October 1991 in the wake of a Channel 4 TV documentary alleging the existence of organised collusion involving the RUC.

Brian Nelson

5. Much comment and speculation has focussed on the case of Brian Nelson, the UDA member who, after initially being charged in January 1990 on foot of the Stevens Inquiry with possession of information likely to be of use to terrorists, was charged last year with murder and conspiracy to commit murder. It is now very widely accepted that Nelson, a former British soldier, was a British military agent during his time in the UDA and collected a great deal of information on computer on Republicans. Having initially been faced with a minor charge, the implication of his having to defend himself against murder charges raises major questions relating to what he will say in Court in his defence. (His trial is due to begin on Monday next). There have been rumours and fears in Loyalist circles that Nelson will turn "Supergrass". Moreover, if Nelson was a British Military agent and was involved in leaks of classified information from the security forces, this raises the question of the extent to which the Army had prior knowledge of this collusion and of the intentions by Loyalists to assassinate suspected Republicans. Moreover, Nelson has reportedly claimed that he was urged by an Army contact to encourage the UDA to plant bombs in this jurisdiction.

6. We heard from contacts in Belfast that Nelson is believed to have conveyed to the RUC a Loyalist target list of lawyers deemed to have Republican sympathies; and that there have been suggestions that Nelson may claim in court that the RUC had prior knowledge of the threat to Pat Finucane and did nothing about it. Moreover, there was a reference in last October's Channel 4 documentary to involvement by a British Army agent in the preparation of Finucane's murder.

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