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**Conversation with Hugh Jordan, Sunday World, NI Edition**

In the course of a telephone conversation with Hugh Jordan of The Sunday World's NI edition, who was seeking my assistance with a forthcoming visit to New York, I asked him about the Martha Pope story which he had broken in the SW.

I was quite surprised at how forthcoming he was in his response. While part of what Jordan told me appeared in an article in The Guardian on 14 December, his explanation of the roots of the story, an account of which follows, may be of some interest as an insight into how this murky story found its way into print.

Jordan maintains that the SW had the story for some time, apparently from RUC sources, but were reluctant to run it. They checked it out with a few people and a 'trusted MI5 contact' confirmed it. Still wary of the story, they were planning to publish, but without naming Martha Pope. Jordan went to see Paisley during the DUP Conference in Ballymena. When asked about the story, Paisley came forward with the following information.

A Senior member of the DUP had been shown a document in the Secretary of State's Office in Stormont which confirmed an MI5 investigation into a liaison between Martha Pope and Gerry Kelly.

Paisley claimed to have confronted the PM and Secretary of State Mayhew who, according to Paisley's account, seemed annoyed that the DUP had seen the document, but confirmed that it was genuine. According to Paisley, Mayhew said that he did not believe that the story had any foundation. Paisley, however, told Jordan that he did not accept that the SoS could dismiss an MI5 report in this manner. In Jordan's account, Paisley encouraged him to publish the story and promised that he would stand over every word of it.

While they were still finalising the story at The Sunday World on Saturday evening, they received a call from Chester Stern, the Mail on Sunday's crime reporter who was aware that both papers were working on the same story and proposed a sharing of information. Stern assured them that the story had been confirmed by 'trusted contacts' . Having received a copy of the Mail's story, which was stronger that what the Sunday World had been planning to run, their Dublin editor, Colm McGinty, decided to carry the stronger harder version of the story (although only in the NI edition as I recall) on the basis, according to Jordan, that the Mail was part of the British establishment and would have sourced its story authoritatively.

In the days following publication, 'the heat came on' from the paper's proprietor, Dr Tony O'Reilly, who instructed the Dublin editor to settle the matter as he was coming under pressure in North America. They settled within the week for a sum of £50,000. (The O'Reilly factor hardly explains why the Mail on Sunday paid damages with similar speed).

Jordan claims that he has since met a Senior Police Officer who insists that Martha Pope was a conduit for contact between the US Administration and the Provisionals. The officer, who was presumably the original source for the story, claims to have evidence that Pope and Kelly have spoken by telephone. Jordan is hoping to secure a recording of this conversation, but is understandably not confident of being able to do so.

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He acknowledged that this affair had been a salutary lesson in how the media can be hoodwinked into printing such a story. He acknowledged that it served to undermine his confidence in security services leaks and regrets that he didn't base the story entirely on what Paisley had told him when they met in Ballymena. After the story appeared, he says he wrote to Paisley reminding him of his undertaking to stand over every word of it. Not surprisingly, he never received a reply.

It is obvious that Jordan's version cannot be taken completely at face value given that he was the one who was taken in by this improbable yarn which, while still clinging to the belief that there was some contact between Kelly and Pope, he now admits to have been false in its central allegation of a sexual relationship between the two. His account does, however, confirm suspicions that the RUC and MI5 were instrumental in planting the story and that the DUP were active in spreading it.

Dan Mulhall
31 January 1997

cc PST, Second Secretary, Mr O'Floinn, Mr O'Fainin, Mr Gormley.

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