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Transcript of Gary McMichael and Alex Attwood
Morning Ireland
Wednesday 5th March 1999

Aine Lawlor:
The final programme in Peter Taylor's theory on Loyalists goes out on Sunday night and it's already proving controversial. In it former UDA leader Bobby Philpott claims he was getting so many police and army documents on IRA suspects, he didn't know where to put them and he said there is no way Loyalist Paramilitaries could have done what they did without that degree of help from the security forces. Now there have been many claims about security force collusion in many sectarian murders in the North, for instance that of Belfast Solicitor, Pat Finucane. To discuss this further I am joined by Alex Attwood from the SDLP and in a moment we will also be talking to Ulster Democratic Party Leader, Gary McMichael. Alex Attwood first of all you have seen the programme. can you describe what's in it?

Alex Attwood:
Well in the programme this former UDA leader makes very specific allegations about what information is made available to him and his like by the security forces. in all branches of the security forces even down to he says the colour of socks republicans wear. I think though that people have to be cautious about what this sort of person is saying, because he has little credibility and they have an inflated sense of their own role. But having said that there is independently sourced and independent credible information with the British Government, both in relation to the Pat Finucane murder and Stalker and Samson and given the independent and credible nature of that information, that's the information the British Government should now act on, not on the allegations of a former paramilitary leader.

Aine Lawlor:
There has also been reaction from the SDLP, from comments made by John Taylor MP in the programme.

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Alex Attwood:
Yes, well as people will see on Sunday night, John Taylor makes comments that appears to confirm both the analysis that loyalist killings helped to bring about an IRA ceasefire and that there was a silent regard as he puts it for loyalist activities in the heartland of Ulster. Now whatever John Taylor meant, whatever his intentions, his comments were ill timed and ill judged because they run the risk of legitimising the killing of innocent Catholics in the eyes of those who carried out those activities and I think John Taylor has made comments that unfortunately might haunt him for some time to come.

Aine Lawlor:
Gary McMichael you are there on the line, listening are you? Is Bobby Philpott exaggerating do you think?

Gary McMichael:
Well I think that the issue is being exaggerated. I have never come across any evidence that there has been organised collusion between Government agencies and the loyalists.

Aine Lawlor:
None at all?

Gary McMichael:
No, none at all.

Aine Lawlor:
So how come Bobby Philpot is saying he was getting so many documents he didn't know where to put them?

Gary McMichael:
Well I don't think that it's unrealistic to suppose that individuals within the police or the army were making information available, but I don't think that that suggests there has been any organised collusion and in fact the Stevens Inquiry which took place in 1988/9 to investigate this. It didn't turn up an evidence of organised collusion.

Aine Lawlor:
Philpot was asked could the UFF have done what it did without that degree of help from inside the security forces. Answer, no.

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Gary McMichael:
No I mean his comments stand as his comments, in that the leader of a political party which has been trying to ensure that there are no such evidence of activities where people lose their lives so you know I mean this programme has been to analyse loyalism and to recount the views of individuals who were involved in paramilitary activity, so you know he has to answer for his comments.

Aine Lawlor:
But one of the features of this programme surely has been for anyone who has been watching it over the past couple of weeks has been the remarkable frankness with which former paramilitaries have spoken to Peter Taylor. So given that tradition of frankness within the series doesn't it mean we should take these claims more seriously.

Gary McMichael:
Well we have to understand as well that you know to fulfil the logic through, if the security forces were aiding people like Bobby Philpot to do what he was doing, how come he ended up behind bars? How come it was the British Agencies who apprehended him and who then sentenced him twice and he went through lengthy prison sentences, it doesn't really follow.

Aine Lawlor:
Alex Attwood how would you answer that?

Alex Attwood:
Well I think that it's very difficult to know what the truth of these matters are. Was their organised, institutionalised collusion or was it renegade elements in the security services. It is impossible to say. That is why the British Government should respond to the information that has recently being given to them in relation to the most high profile killings of a Northern Catholic, Pat Finucane. That is why the information in that confidential document needs a full and proper response from the British Government because then I think you can begin to determine fully and properly what was the level if any of collusion between the security services and loyalist paramilitaries. Where there is evidence let the British Government respond. It is in the Pat Finucane case that the truth of this matter one way or the other will come out.

Aine Lawlor:
Gary McMichael would you agree with that call?

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Gary McMichael:
I don't know what's in this confidential report, I would be able to comment on it if I seen the contents, but I don't, the Government have it however and you know they will have to make up their own minds as to what they are going to do with it.

Aine Lawlor:
You don't know about the level of controversy that has surrounded this and other cases though, would you welcome a through investigation to establish for once and for all what the extent if any of collusion between the security forces and loyalist paramilitary was. Surely in the era we are now in this would be a progressive development.

Alex Attwood:
Well I am not sure that it would. I am not sure that it's good to be raking over old ground. But what it's not going to be, even if it were true, I am not sure if it is, even if it were true I don't think that it would result in anything being changed. I don't think it would result in more people coming before the courts and I think it would cause more hurt and harm to those who have suffered already. You know what I mean, there have been instances where its taken place from all perspectives, members of the Garda have been sentenced and have served sentences for passing information to the IRA. I have no doubt that there are people in the security forces under pressure to provide information to the IRA to allow them do what they did. I think that what this process is about, that we are involved in is try and put all of that behind us and I understand the frustrations that people may feel with the view that I am articulating here, but unless the is concrete evidence, I haven't seen any concrete evidence then there is no point in raking over this ground continually.

Aine Lawlor:
Alex Attwood again what about this argument of you know causing more hurt, raking over the past in a way that wouldn't be constructive.

Alex Attwood:
I think the point that Gary makes is a very valid one. What I am calling for is that the British Government to respond specifically on Finucane confidential dossier, but in the wider issue of conducting an inquiry into this or other allegations arising from all the deaths and all the conflict over the last 30 years, that's a different matter, because it may be that the community in the North at this stage does not have the maturity to deal with a more fully fledged inquiry into all the deaths and all the causes of the conflict over the last 30 years. It

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may be that our community has not got the wisdom, out of the pain of the last 30 years at this stage in order to go down that road, but there are representative issues in our community, one of which is the murder of Pat Finucane and that deserves a representative response from the British Government.

Aine Lawlor:
The RUC has said in a statement that there is not and never has been anything to support allegations of official collusion and the issues have been thoroughly investigated in the past. Given the debate that's going on about policing at the moment how much credence or how much damage will this do to the reputation of the RUC?

Alex Attwood:
In my view people's minds on the ground in West Belfast, west of the Bann and generally are already quite firm in relation to the nature of the RUC and that these latest allegations will not add to or diminish how people feel about the RUC. After 30 years experience people whether they are for or against, or indifferent about the RUC have long ago made up their minds. I think what's important is that Ronnie Flangan rather than ritualistically saying that these allegations have been investigated in the past and proven not to be true. It would be more helpful if Ronnie Flangan would say if there is new information in relation to for example the murder of Pat Finucane then that new information needs to be assessed and if necessary Ronnie Flanagan should be saying the new information requires a new inquiry.

Aine Lawlor:
Gary McMichael, I know you are saying that you know maybe this may have happened on an individual basis, but to the best of your knowledge it wasn't anything, clearly organised, but what do you make of the RUC denials?

Gary McMichael:
Well I think they reflect my view as well and the view of most people who share. If the evidence isn't there, if the evidence isn't firmly there what do you do?

Aine Lawlor:
So you are happy with Ronnie Flangan's response on this, is not, never has been anything to support allegations of official collusion?

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Gary McMichael:
Well I think that is the fact and I mean what I am saying as someone from within loyalisim who has you know I suppose a limited knowledge of what goes on within loyalisim I have no knowledge or understanding or evidence, there has been any structural involvement by agencies such as the security forces in assisting loyalists to carry their campaign.

Aine Lawlor:
And just before you go, just on John Taylor's remarks, which Alex Attwood was talking about earlier that loyalist killings helped to bring about an IRA ceasefire and that there was a silent regard for loyalist activities in the heartland of Ulster. Now you heard Alex Attwood earlier being very critical of John Taylor for making those remarks, do you think he was right to say them?

Gary McMichael:
Well I mean you have to ask him that I think. You know I....

Aine Lawlor:
Was it fair comment, do you think what he was saying was true?

Gary McMichael:
Well I think it's true that any paramilitary organisation and the paramilitary organisations on both sides in the conflict couldn't have continued their activity without popular support.

Aine Lawlor:
He was simply stating a reality?

Gary McMichael:
Well I think it is a reality you know and you know the evidence is there to show that people within loyalisim seen that loyalist paramilitaries were doing was defending their community against what they seen as a brutal onslaught from the IRA. Others in republican communities and nationalist communities would take a different view. But what we have is much in the nature of the conflict is that paramilitary organisations have commanded popular support within the ..... say many otherwise they wouldn't be there and they wouldn't exist.

Aine Lawlor:
Well the programme goes out on BBC 2 on Sunday night at 8.00pm I think.
ENDS.

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