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John Hume: Loyalist terror boss 'consulted with Hume twice while drafting UDA political strategy'

5-6 minutes



John Hume met with McMichael (above) despite his violent record. The letter claims that the nationalist leader was consulted on two occasions by top loyalist paramilitary John McMichael, whilst McMichael was drafting a kind of UDA manifesto called 'Common Sense'.

The letter which reveals these claims belongs to the Irish government, and is marked 'secret'.

It has just been published online by the University of Ulster's Conflict Archive on the Internet (CAIN) service - along with a raft of other classified documents from the 1986-88 period.

The letter is an account of a meeting between an unnamed journalist and Irish diplomat David Donoghue, dated February

1987, and sent to the Irish foreign minister.

From the way the letter is written, it appears the anonymous journalist had been supplying information to the Irish diplomat for some time.

Mr Donoghue (who later became the Irish ambassador to the UN) said he and the journalist had discussed 'Common Sense', which calls for a devolved NI assembly, a written NI constitution, and co-operation between Catholics and Protestants to "lay the foundations" of a new society.

Mr Donoghue wrote: "My contact has been in touch with his usual UDA sources since this document was published.

"They have told him that John McMichael is 'over the moon' about the positive responses evoked by the document.

"In addition to the welcome from Hume and Cushnahan, and the obvious discomfiture of Molyneaux and Paisley, he is pleased with the reaction from the NIO...

"The origins of the document lie in the UDA's uncertain reaction to the Anglo-Irish Agreement at the end of 1985. At the time [some in the UDA were] all in favour of a violent response.

"Others, however, argued for the production of a political alternative. It was left to McMichael and the UDA's 'Ulster Political Research Group' to draft something...

"In the course of drafting the document, McMichael (or his colleagues) consulted John Hume twice about it. Hume was reportedly even more positive about it in private than he was in his public statement on the matter."

But despite Mr Hume's warm welcome, the unnamed journalist was skeptical.

"My contact regards the UDA document as an essentially opportunistic exercise intended to upstage the Unionist politicians and to win some favourable publicity for the UDA," Mr Donoghue wrote.

"McMichael, in his view, 'does not mean any of it sincerely'. His intention is simply to score some points off the Unionist politicians.

“Inside the UDA people have been reflecting wryly on the contrast between McMichael’s ostensible concern to ‘bring Catholics to the Cabinet table’ and his well-known belief (indistinguishable from racism) that exclusively-Protestant preserves must be created in Northern Ireland in order to safeguard the Loyalist heritage.”

What makes the consultations with Mr Hume doubly unusual is that only three months earlier, the chairman of the Lisburn SDLP branch Peter O’Hagan met with an Irish official to blame an upsurge in violence in Lisburn on “the malevolent influence of one man – John McMichael”.

The SDLP chairman said: “He has directed the UDA violence since their attacks first on RUC homes early in 1986 and then transferred it to the Catholics after unionists began to speak out a against the former action.

“He is known by some to be extremely violent and ruthless while at the same time publicly pleads that there is no sectarian violence in Lisburn and the UDA action is only against ‘republican elements’ within the town.”

McMichael was himself murdered in 1987.

A message from the Editor:

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Alistair Bushe

Editor