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Top loyalist praises McGuinness but warns of 'Real UDA clowns'

By David Gordon
Thursday, 12 March 2009

A leading loyalist has praised the response of Sinn Fein's Martin McGuinness to the dissident republican murders of the past week.

Jackie McDonald — widely regarded as Northern Ireland's most senior UDA figure — said the deputy First Minister's strong words of condemnation had helped put the loyalist community "at ease".

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While stressing that the UDA had no intention of retaliating, he also warned of the possibility of "clowns" calling themselves the "Real UDA".

Speaking at yesterday's peace rally at Belfast city centre, Mr McDonald said there was anger among loyalists at the killings by the Real IRA and Continuity IRA.

"The message has to go to the loyalist community — and most of them do understand it — that this is not the pan-nationalist front, as it was deemed in the past.

"This is a selection of individuals — criminals."

He also stated: "The Provisional IRA literally blew the two communities apart. What these people are doing is bringing the two communities back together again.

"To be fair to Sinn Fein, they have come out and said some very robust stuff and they've condemned the people out of hand, as we all must do.

"Some young loyalists might become embittered and say this is us back to where we were. It's not — this is no pan-nationalist front. It's individuals who are creating difficulty for both communities."

Referring to the stance taken by Martin McGuinness this week, the leading loyalist said: "It helps to put the loyalist community at ease because they understand it's not coming from the old source.

"The danger is, what's likely to happen — it's happened in the past — some clowns will appear in balaclavas calling themselves the Real UFF or the Real UDA.

"They are as much good to the loyalist community as these hoods and criminals are to the nationalist community."

Speculating about the tactics of the dissident republican factions, the Belfast loyalist added: "The danger is that if it doesn't work with the army and the police, they'll go into the loyalist community with mayhem.



Loyalist Frankie Gallagher at rally in Belfast

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"But we'll still have to hold our resolve then. It takes more courage to do this than going to attack a Celtic jersey somewhere. You can't do those things any more. Those things are in the past."

He also stated: "I've been talking to the UDA. They've no intention of doing anything to anybody."

"They've been engaged in a process with the loyalist community and they have been for years and they don't want to be derailed this time."

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