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## Local & National

### UVF talks with Eames-Bradley

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Friday, February 08, 2008

The men who directed the UVF's "war" have held secret talks with the Eames-Bradley Group on Northern Ireland's past, the Belfast Telegraph reveals today.

On Tuesday retired Church of Ireland Primate Lord Eames and former Policing Board vice-chairman Denis Bradley met the most senior figures in the loyalist paramilitary leadership.

Informed loyalist sources have confirmed the meeting took place.

In the room were men from what the UVF calls its Command Staff - including its overall leader and his second-in-command.

Their roles at the top of the loyalist organisation have spanned several decades.

The delegation is also believed to have included another influential Shankill Road loyalist - possibly the commander of the UVF's "1st Battalion", although this has not yet been confirmed by sources.

A fourth man at the talks is a former prisoner who had a key background role ahead of the public presentation of the organisation's endgame statement last May.

Tuesday's talks were at the request of the Eames-Bradley Group and were held in their offices in central Belfast.

One of the loyalists present is a suspected long-time Special Branch agent - and to this day a member of that UVF Command Staff.

The Belfast Telegraph knows his identity, but is not revealing it at this time.

Informed sources had recently signalled the intention of the Eames-Bradley Consultative Group to try to begin a private dialogue not just with the UVF, but the UDA and IRA leaderships also.

They want to explore what contribution those organisations are prepared to make to any examination of Northern Ireland's past - and the search for the truth.

Tuesday's talks - achieved through background negotiations - were the start of that process.

The report and recommendations of the Consultative Group are due this summer.

Contacted by the Belfast Telegraph about the UVF-Eames/Bradley talks, the leader of the Progressive Unionist Party Dawn, Purvis would neither confirm nor deny the meeting.

She said the PUP - which has links to the UVF - had met the Eames-Bradley Group and "a wide range of issues were discussed".

The Telegraph understands that meeting also happened on Tuesday - some hours before the UVF talks.

Other members of the Consultative Group joined Lord Eames and Denis Bradley in the meeting with loyalist leaders.

The UVF has been behind hundreds of killings - and remains an armed organisation.

### Puppets and strings

After the UVF leadership met the Eames-Bradley group, security writer Brian Rowan asks: what's in it for them?

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THERE are many questions but only some answers on that meeting on Tuesday when Lord Eames, Denis Bradley and some of their colleagues sat in the room with the UVF leadership.

We know why the Consultative Group on the Past wanted those talks.

They are speaking to governments and political parties and the security forces, and want to know what the republican and loyalist leaderships are prepared to contribute in an explanation of their "wars".

I have said before the question is, is it to be a truth or a part-truth process?

That the UVF have come through the door so quickly surprises me, and yet, in the same breath, does not surprise me at all. I know the men in the room ? have known them for a very long time, and have spoken to them and not spoken to them, depending on their mood, over many years.

But why have they spoken to Eames-Bradley?

Think of the backdrop to this meeting - all of the recent controversy around those words "war" and "amnesty" as part of a looking back and a thinking forward.

The UVF would certainly have an opinion on all of that.

But there is something else worth considering.

Eames-Bradley have had access to the Stevens Investigation - to the secrets of that inquiry into the business of agents and collusion.

And there is a suggestion out there that the community will be, if not devastated, then shocked, at the extent of the relationship and collusion between elements of the security forces and not just the loyalists, but the IRA also.

This is the dirty business of war - except we called it something else.

We choose the Troubles.

What intrigues me is the UVF line-up for that Eames-Bradley meeting, including the presence of a man who I am told was a Special Branch agent for a very, very, long time.

Is he still a paid informer?

Can you stop being one?

I do not have the answers to those questions.

Is he part of what is shocking about our past - that war or whatever else we choose to call it?

It depends whether we should be shocked that someone who sits in the highest seat at the UVF's table could also have been in the pay of Special Branch - a CHIS, or covert human intelligence source.

Could he, for his own reasons and concerns, be trying to get a read on what Eames-Bradley might reveal?

Is it likely that in Tuesday's talks that visit to the Stevens Investigation team was raised, and how that might fit into the overall reporting of the Eames-Bradley Group?

I reckon it was, and that tells you that people are worried about what could spill out from the past - what Eames and Bradley have found under some of the stones, and how vulnerable that could leave some of the players in our dirty war.

For them, it is not about national security any more - but national insecurity. The past is worrying the present.

Someone took the lid off the can of worms - others have had a look inside, and there are secrets that are spilling out.

There is talk in the loyalist background not just about one informer at the top of the UVF - but two.

"There's two at least," one source told me.

But how does he know, and why is he telling me, and who told him?

Does it suit a purpose to spread the blame - and spread suspicion?

There are those who have nothing to fear who just want it all to come out - want to know the real story and the whole story, and who was on what side.

It is about puppets and strings - and who was pulling them and for what purpose, and not just inside the UVF and not just on the loyalist side.

There is much more to this story.

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