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## Former RUC chief brands Wright claim 'outrageous'

Thursday, 26 March 2009

Former Chief Constable Sir Ronnie Flanagan has described allegations that he was the "supposed" senior RUC officer who made a remark that LVF boss Billy Wright would be removed on a permanent basis as "absolutely outrageous".

Sir Ronnie was speaking yesterday in response to questioning from Angus Stewart QC, lead counsel for the Billy Wright Inquiry.

Sir Ronnie, who was Chief Constable from 1996-2002, told the hearing in Banbridge that the allegation contained in a book written about the former LVF leader — which inferred that a senior RUC officer had prior knowledge Wright would be killed — was absolutely outrageous.

The reference is made in the book, *The Billy Boy*, and forms part of the line of questioning of the inquiry.

In the book, Wright's father, David, claims he was told a meeting had taken place between several prominent Orange Order members and senior RUC officers following the fallout from the 1996 Drumcree parade. He claimed that in the course of a conversation between the two parties, a senior RUC officer made reference to the fact that Billy Wright was part of the "problems" at the 1995 and 1996 Drumcree parade, but would not be "part of the problem in 1997".

The source of this claim told Wright's father that while he acknowledged it could have been said in reference to the LVF leader being imprisoned, he believed it was a direct reference to "remove Billy Wright on a permanent basis".

Mr Stewart asked Sir Ronnie if he was aware this allegation, which alludes to possible state collusion, was one of the factors behind the inquiry into the murder and whether he knew the senior officer being referred to was believed to be him.

"Although you have not been named, the inquiry has received information that you "are 'one of the senior RUC officers'," Mr Stewart said.

Sir Ronnie, who recently became strategic adviser to the Minister of Interior of the United Arab Emirates, said he was aware of the state collusion allegation but had no recollection of such a conversation and refuted the suggestion the remarks were attributed to him. He also hit out at suggestions that the remark was a direct reference to state collusion.

"To consider it is absolutely outrageous," he told the hearing. "The sinister claim in the book, the suggestion that Billy Wright had to be removed because he was a road block to the political process. Absolutely not. That's the whole truth and it would be outrageous to suggest otherwise."

However, when asked by Mr Stewart if the remark could have been made in relation to the fact that Wright was in custody and possibly facing a prison sentence, the former HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary admitted it could have been possible.

"I suppose such a remark could have been made in relation to imprisonment, but I have no recollection of making such a remark," he said.

William Stephen (Billy) Wright was shot dead by INLA inmates at the Maze prison on December 27, 1997.

The inquiry was set up following an investigation by retired Canadian judge Peter Cory into allegations of collusion by the prison service and other authorities. Wright's killers, Christopher McWilliams, John Glennon and John Kennaway were jailed for life but later released under the Good Friday Agreement. At hearing.

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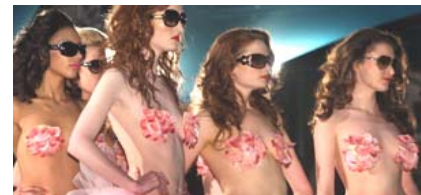
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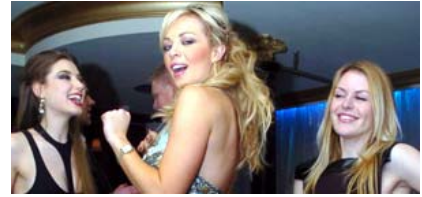
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