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Local & National

Former hunger striker cleared of 1977 murders

Thursday, February 15, 2007

A former IRA hunger striker and a Londonderry newspaper editor today spoke of their delight after their convictions for the murder of a policeman 30 years ago were quashed.

The Court of Appeal judgment brought to an end a long legal battle by outgoing Foyle Sinn Fein MLA Raymond McCartney, and Sunday Journal editor, Eamonn MacDermott, to clear their names.

Both men were jailed for the 1977 murder of Constable Patrick McNulty in Derry. Mr McCartney was also jailed for the killing of local industrialist Jeff Agate, who was shot six days after the policeman. Today both his convictions were quashed.

The charges were quashed in the Court of Appeal after a judge revealed a "distinct feeling of unease" about the safety of the convictions.

Three High Court judges ruled evidence given by police officers at the murder trials "may have been discredited by evidence which is now available".

Mr McCartney, who spent 53 days on hunger strike in 1980, said today: "I am absolutely delighted with today's decision.

"I have a great legal team to thank, who, throughout this process, have provided the best and most professional legal help available. This is also a day for my family, who have been so supportive over the years.

"I also think this case highlights the RUC interrogation techniques, the use of emergency law to convict people, and the willingness of Diplock courts to ignore evidence to get convictions."

Mr MacDermott said: "We are obviously delighted; this has been a long time coming, as it has been over 30 years since we were first arrested. I think I'm still just taking it all in.

"In some ways I am loath to say that justice was done, as it has taken over 30 years, which is a long, long time. However it does display a certain willingness on behalf of the Northern Ireland judiciary to admit to their past."

Mr McCartney was sentenced in 1979 for the murders of Jeff Agate and Patrick McNulty.

He has always maintained that whilst being held in Castlereagh holding centre in Belfast, he was repeatedly beaten and the verbal admissions and written statements about the murders - the only evidence against him - were concocted by police officers.





Mr MacDermott was also jailed for the murder of Constable McNulty and he made claims of ill-treatment and assaults by police whilst in Castlereagh.

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