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Friday, September 26, 2008

Youths picked on 'for being Catholics'

MICKEY DONNELLY

THE MICHAEL McIlveen murder trial has been told that he and two friends were initially picked on because they were "Catholics - no other reason".

Michael (15), Ballymena, Co Antrim, died from head injuries on May 8th, 2006, after allegedly being bludgeoned and punched and kicked up to 60 times.

The claim was made yesterday by Liam Phillips (18), a friend of the schoolboy, in a police video-taped interview screened at the Antrim Crown Court trial of six Ballymena youths facing charges arising out of Michael's death.

Mr Phillips said the 30 to 40 Protestant youths they met that night knew that Michael, known as Mickey-Bo, and his friend were Catholics and "they certainly know I'm a Catholic".

Mr Phillips claimed that during the attack on Michael, he tried to get help from friends after escaping into their garden, "but nobody moved". He said: "I tried to get people to help me, like sorta break it up, push these boys back, but nobody moved." Later he "rang a mate's phone" who said he tried to get the boy to go to hospital, but "Michael didn't want to, he said he'd just sleep it off".

Denying murder are a 17-year- old who cannot be named for legal reasons; Jeff Lewis (19), Rossdale; Christopher Kerr (22), Carnduff Drive; Aaron Cavana Wallace (20), Moat Road, and Christopher McLeister (18), Knock Crescent, all Ballymena. Mervyn Wilson Moon (20), Douglas Terrace, has already pleaded guilty.

Mr Phillips claimed that he, Michael and another friend had gone out that night to look for friends among a group of up to 40 Protestant youths after being "invited" earlier that day.

A drunken Mr Lewis offered to fight all three of them, allegedly having picked on them "cause we're Catholics and he thought we're down

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here to start trouble". Mr Phillips said they "took nothing from it", but then he got a mobile call from his father telling him to "come up home".

As he went to walk away, "Lewis and a few others started calling after me, calling me a Fenian and calling me a yellow belly and that".

Mr Phillips said he decided to stay, fearing his friends were "gonna get a kicking", but despite his reservations, "a few of them were actually being dead on" and while some called him "a Fenian and that", others said, "nobody's going to touch you".

His friend then overheard a plot to give them "a kicking" and "whispered to me to get Michael McIlveen and go".

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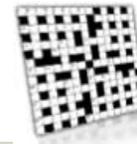
This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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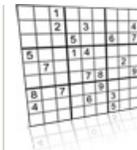
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