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## Book Review

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# Murder in Northern Ireland: coordinated and controlled

by Mary Jane Freeman

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### **The Committee: Political Assassination in Northern Ireland**

by Sean McPhilemy

Niwot, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishers, 1998

378 pages, hardbound, \$24.95

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For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak. . . .

— *Hamlet*, Act II, Scene II

Long years of bloody sectarian violence. Catholic versus Protestant. Nationalist versus Loyalist. The Irish versus the British. All this comes to mind when the “Troubles” of Northern Ireland are mentioned. But filmmaker Sean McPhilemy, in his new book, goes beneath the surface phenomena to tell a blood-curdling tale of collusion, from 1989 to 1991, between the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), Loyalist paramilitary death squads, and respected Protestant “citizens above suspicion,” to plan and execute the murders of Republican paramilitaries and Catholics. If even part of what the author writes is true, then despite the RUC’s efforts to discredit McPhilemy’s evidence and destroy his livelihood, “murder, though it have no tongue, will speak.”

There has been Irish armed resistance to British rule since the 18th century, when Irish patriot and American Revolution supporter Henry Grattan attempted to force the British Crown to grant a declaration of rights to the Irish, including economic independence from Britain and an end to discrimination against Catholics, who were not allowed to hold office, vote, or own land. The roots of this centuries-long political and religious warfare are beyond the scope of this review. But suffice it to say, McPhilemy’s explosive documentation reveals yet another chapter in the sordid history of Northern Ireland, which provides a new piece in the puzzle of London’s control of terrorism. The weakness in his book lies in the failure to identify the policy command structure at the highest level. However, there are threads suggested in the book

which, if pulled, will likely lead to the boardrooms of the Club of the Isles and the Queen’s Privy Council.

A brief history serves to set the context of this tale. From 1968 to 1972, the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland began to build a civil rights movement. Violent clashes occurred, British Army troops were brought in to assist the RUC, the local police force, and in 1971, when the first British soldier was killed there since 1920s, a counterinsurgency warfare apparatus came into being which included both the RUC and Army intelligence specialists. In September 1971, the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) was set up as the main Loyalist (loyal to the British Crown) paramilitary force, and the ranks of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) swelled after the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre. The sectarian violence—Loyalist/Protestants vs. Republican/Catholics—since then has been orchestrated by British intelligence, on both sides of the “religious” divide. Both Loyalists and Republicans have caused death and destruction. For its role in this, the RUC has long been regarded as the enforcer of British occupation of Ulster. McPhilemy, not a partisan to either side, unveils one aspect of the British control of terrorism in Northern Ireland. We summarize here highlights of his story.

### **Collusion in murder**

The charge of RUC collusion with Loyalist paramilitaries had been raised many times during the 30-year war. In early March 1991, this issue surfaced again when a gang of Loyalist gunmen surreptitiously entered an isolated Catholic area and killed four people, including two teenagers. McPhilemy, a film producer, had a young research assistant who insisted on pursuing the story, even though his boss thought it wasn’t prudent. Soon he was given access to “a source” who revealed details of how this collusion worked, and names of people involved. What emerged from the source and their own investigation of his information, is that a private group, “The Committee,” composed of Ulster businessmen, clergy, and others, conspired with elements of the RUC to assassinate Republican paramilitaries and Catholics. The collusion, according to McPhilemy’s evidence, included organizing the financing for arms deals from South Africa to Loyalist gunmen, using

money-laundering schemes involving profits from drug and pornography trafficking. Some of his evidence, although undeveloped, points to British intelligence and Secret Air Services (SAS) commandos being involved in the plots described.

Eighteen murders are detailed in the book, eight within the first 30 pages. These eight Catholics, only two of whom were “IRA terrorists” (the supposed targets of the Loyalists), and all of whose murders remain unsolved, were victims of three Loyalist rub-out operations as described to McPhilemy by the source. The *modus operandi* for each of the brutal murders goes like this. Targets were picked, in general or specific. Intelligence files from the RUC’s Special Branch were divulged, revealing personal information about the target. The Committee would meet to approve a murder and select which assassin would be deployed for the job—most often either Billy “King Rat” Wright, or Robin “The Jackal” Jackson. Then, a protective screen, involving select RUC officers who were involved with the Committee, would ensure the hit-man’s access into and away from the target’s location without detection. Afterwards, the Committee met to assess the operation. McPhilemy asserts, “By 1991 . . . not one Loyalist squad was ever intercepted.”

## The Committee

The Committee structure was highly organized, McPhilemy reports. In mid-1986, the Ulster Loyalist Central Coordinating Committee came together, assuming “full authority over all Loyalist military and political activity.” It included political groups, such as the Ulster Independence Party; paramilitary groups, such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) and the Ulster Defense Association, which sometimes went by the cover-name Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF); as well as prominent businessmen, clergy, and lawyers. Its chairman was Billy Abernethy, a bank manager at the Ulster Bank, the Northern Ireland subsidiary of National Westminster Bank (NatWest is a powerful institutional force of the British oligarchy). Abernethy, if the account is accurate, fit the profile of a person who could easily be manipulated. The source revealed that Abernethy was “a leading figure in the Masonic Order, a member of a secret lodge known as ‘Sons of Ulster.’” He had been a part-time police officer and member of the RUC Reserve, thus having access to “high-level intelligence from Special Branch files.” His younger brother, Colin, had been killed by an IRA assassination in 1988. Another person alleged to be at the top of the Committee was the former Assistant Chief Constable and former head of the RUC Special Branch, Trevor Forbes, OBE. He was given “early retirement” due to his overt Loyalist leanings, which surfaced during investigations into whether the RUC had a “shoot-to-kill” policy toward the IRA.

The Committee’s structure included disgruntled RUC officers who constituted a secret and illicit “Inner Force” found within “every RUC division in the province.” The Inner

Force, in turn, designated the “most militant Loyalists within the force,” to the “Inner Circle,” effectively an executive body. It was, according to McPhilemy, the Inner Circle “which supervised the operational assistance . . . to Loyalist squads by rank and file RUC officers.”

McPhilemy attributes the motivation for these murders to the Committee’s desire to secure an independent nation, called Ulster, in reaction to their belief that Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s Tory government would sell out the cause of Ulster, and allow a united Ireland to come into being. Therefore, as the story goes, the Committee had to take charge. The spark for this belief was the signing of the 1985 Anglo-Irish agreement by Britain and Ireland, which was a diplomatic effort to end the Troubles. While plausible, this motive is superficial. When the British monarchy deems that there is a threat to its power in a region, the Crown often makes use of *private* networks to reassert control, as *EIR* documented in its September 1997 *Special Report*, “The True Story Behind the Fall of the House of Windsor.” Since the days of William Pitt the Younger, during the French Revolution, or Lord Palmerston’s reign of terror in the 19th century, utilizing gang-counter-gang warfare to destabilize nations, the British model of geopolitical control has been to play both sides of a conflict. The British-imposed division of Ireland into North and South, is no less a geopolitical endeavor than Britain’s colonial role in Africa, Bosnia, or the Middle East. Thus, to the extent that what McPhilemy has uncovered is true, then the Thatcher government is shown to have played the diplomatic game, appearing to cool out the war, while Her Majesty’s security services, including the RUC, British Army intelligence, and SAS commandos, prolonged and inflamed it.

## Protecting the terrorists

When McPhilemy’s investigation and documentation were compiled, simultaneous with the documentary, “The Committee,” airing on Britain’s Channel 4 TV, a detailed dossier was given to the RUC, in hopes that they would conduct a serious investigation. Rumors and press accounts of alleged collusion between the RUC and Loyalist terrorists had persisted since the mid-1980s, but there were always official denials. In 1989, one incident destroyed the credibility of these denials. As McPhilemy writes, “Two Loyalist terror organizations, the Ulster Defense Association and Ulster Freedom Fighters, admitted on television . . . that they had received confidential information on Republicans from members of the security forces.” The UDA/UFF admission occurred to justify a murder they had recently committed; they boasted that they had seen the victim’s confidential RUC file, which, they claimed, showed that he had been a member of the IRA.

Not able to ignore these televised remarks, the RUC set up an “independent inquiry.” The Stevens Inquiry, as it was called, ended abruptly, when its investigative files were set ablaze and its key witness was tipped off to leave the country,

escaping arrest. Despite these calamities, Stevens concluded, “members of the security forces have passed information to paramilitaries. However, . . . it is restricted to a small number of individuals . . . [and is not] institutionalized.” But with the October 1991 airing of McPhilemy’s evidence, new detailed leads of names, places, witnesses, etc. to be pursued were provided, which could have solved the still-unsolved murders. Instead, the RUC decided, as McPhilemy’s Chapter 6 is titled, to “Shoot the Messenger.” RUC Chief Constable Hugh Annesley angrily attacked the television program and announced that he was setting up an RUC investigation of the RUC itself!

### **Assault on the author’s credibility**

More than one-third of the book describes the “dirty tricks” the RUC used to undermine and discredit McPhilemy’s documentary.

Chief Annesley initiated two lines of attack. First, the RUC orchestrated a media barrage, denouncing the documentary as “a pack of lies.” The political constituency leader who surfaced to denounce the film was David Trimble. A few days after the film “The Committee” aired, Channel 4 TV’s “Right to Reply” program was given over to Trimble, who accompanied his constituent, the Rev. Hugh Ross, who had appeared in the film’s segment on the Ulster Independence Party. Ross denounced the “misuse” of his interview, as the juxtaposition clearly implicated him in the activities of the Committee. Trimble defended the RUC. It is noteworthy that in 1988, Trimble had been, along with Colin Abernethy, a leader of the Ulster Clubs movement, at which time he authored a pamphlet in favor of Ulster’s independence.

Second, a protracted legal assault was launched. McPhilemy had complied with laws which require anyone with information about terrorism in Northern Ireland to present it to the police; he gave a dossier to the RUC when the film was aired. It included names of 19 persons alleged to be Committee members, details of murders, names of suspects, etc. But the RUC was not interested in pursuing these leads. Instead, it went to court to compel the name of McPhilemy’s source! The filmmaker had refused to divulge the name of his source, who feared for his life, as he had been a mid-level member of the Committee, and because a promise of absolute confidentiality had been given by the film company. Using the full weight of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, three Scotland Yard detectives, on behalf of the RUC, secretly appeared before a judge, saying a terrorism investigation had been opened as a result of the Channel 4 documentary. The anonymous source has knowledge “of vital importance” and must be “apprehended and interrogated,” they argued. Hours later, the Scotland Yard boys served McPhilemy with production orders to turn over the name of his source, advising him that he could spend five years in prison if he disobeyed the orders.

A legal battle ensued, as McPhilemy and Channel 4 re-

fused to name their source, and the case was thrown into the political arena. The contempt proceedings were sent to Attorney General Sir Patrick Mayhew, a cabinet minister in Thatcher’s Conservative Party government. (Mayhew delayed scheduling the case until after the April 1992 elections returned the Conservative Party to power, and the House of Commons was out of session.) The RUC used the delay to its advantage, launching a “Big Lie” campaign through its media stringers, against McPhilemy and his researcher, Ben Hamilton, with hopes of severing Channel 4’s support for the film. RUC propagandists masquerading as reporters wrote that McPhilemy and Hamilton had bribed sources, scripted on-camera confessions, and relied on IRA sources, among other misdeeds. It also hoked up perjury charges, stemming from the contempt proceedings, against Hamilton, for which he was arrested and his home searched. It was during this search that the RUC found a document with an indirect reference to the source which, however, had enough specificity to enable the RUC to identify him. Jim Sands, the source, was discovered, arrested, squeezed, and turned by the RUC. Sands’s boss was Rev. Hugh Ross.

Once the RUC caused Sands to recant all he had told the filmmakers, McPhilemy recounts, the two most reliable “RUC spin-doctors,” Rupert Murdoch’s *Sunday Times* and Lord Steven’s *Sunday Express*, repeatedly published articles tagging the documentary as a “hoax” which sullied the good name of the RUC and undermined the public’s confidence in the police force.

Meanwhile, Annesley announced that the RUC’s investigation showed that the “outrageous allegations” presented in the film were “without foundation.” Incredibly, the core of the RUC’s finding was, that with the exception of the two named terrorists, Wright and Jackson, the people named in the dossier given to the RUC were “respectable members of the community” who had “impeccable reputations” and “categorically denied having any knowledge of the . . . Committee, the Inner Force or the Inner Circle.”

But now, cracks in the RUC’s cover-up have occurred. The book tells how McPhilemy, forced to defend against civil and criminal libel actions, has proceeded to unearth independent verification for aspects of Sands’s original tale of terror.

Much of what McPhilemy reveals will not seem far-fetched to readers of *EIR*. But the question remains, after reading this devastating book: Who benefitted from this orgy of murder and political destabilization in Northern Ireland?

The hints are in the book, but not elaborated. For example, does Abernethy’s association with Natwest, a leading institution of the British oligarchy, imply control by the monarchy in coordinating Loyalist terror operations? The charge that drug-money laundering was used to finance arms shipments from South Africa is an important lead; if verified, it leads potentially into the filthy drugs-for-arms networks exposed in *EIR*’s *Special Report* “George Bush and the 12333 Serial Murder Ring.”