

“I don’t back violence, but...” / The Observer / 27 December 1987



**Last journey : John McMichael's funeral yesterday**

by **MARTIN MCNAMARA** and **MARK PIGGOTT**

**John McMichael's publicly ambiguous attitude towards Protestant violence in Ulster came through vividly in an interview he gave before his murder.**

‘I don’t believe in the use of violence to bring about political ends, but I’ve got quite a number of friends in prison and I certainly wouldn’t condemn them or say they were wrong in what they did,’ he said.

‘I have a friend in prison who is serving a life sentence, who does himself a great deal of harm. When he goes before a parole board for life-sentence prisoners, one of the fundamental things they want to know is: Does he feel remorse for what he’s done? His standard answer is: “No, I’m not sorry for what I did at the time, but I would never do it again”.

‘He’s trying to give an honest answer but what they want is for him to say: “I’m really sorry, I shouldn’t have done that.” The point I’m trying to make is that at the time, under the circumstances, he did things in his belief that it was necessary for a greater good.’

During the interview, conducted in the headquarters of the Ulster Defence Association in East Belfast, Mr McMichael compared the violence in Northern Ireland to the Second World War.

‘People didn’t run around after the war saying: “You’re a murderer, you were a pilot who flew over Dresden and killed 70,000 people with incendiary bombs.” In a war situation, society accepts that people do things which are unacceptable in peace.

‘If we were living in Exeter or Cambridge, the same situation wouldn’t arise. It has to be recognised that there is a form of civil war going on in this country. People try to pretend that Northern Ireland isn’t at war, that there’s just some sort of giant crime wave.’

Mr McMichael said he firmly believed Catholics should play a substantial part in the running of Northern Ireland, as proposed in the UDA document, ‘Common Sense,’ published last January. ‘The UDA wants to see a power-sharing agreement between the two communities,’ he explained.

‘Our problem is to give them an agreed process of government which they can feel represents them and not just the Protestant community. We need Protestants and Catholics putting all their energies into rebuilding this place instead of despairing because of the division.’

**Ends**