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Local & National

Minister 'astonished' by MI5 Wright warning

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Wednesday, March 12, 2008

The Security Minister who approved Billy Wright's move to the Maze Prison has told the inquiry into the LVF leader's murder that he did not see an MI5 warning against the transfer.

Former Minister Sir John Wheeler said he was astonished to see the alert that the Security Service has given to the inquiry.

The minister and the RUC Special Branch detective responsible for watching the INLA have now both said they do not recall any warning.

An MI5 agent has told the inquiry that he issued an alert in April 1997 after an INLA informer told him of a plot to kill Wright if the LVF leader was transferred to the Maze from Maghaberry Prison.

The INLA informer said prisoners planned to kill Wright by injecting him with poison.

"The INLA intended to kill Billy Wright at the first opportunity if he were to be transferred to H Block 6 at the Maze," a summary of the MI5 documents said.

The summary said the INLA leadership was aware of the plot and "INLA prisoners at the prison were in possession of such syringes and poisons" .

Wright was transferred to the Maze four days after the MI5 warning was allegedly passed to police.

He was subsequently shot dead by three INLA inmates in December 1997.

Sir John appeared before the inquiry this week to testify about his approval for the transfer of Wright. He said he had not received the warning.

"I'm reading this frankly with astonishment," he said.

"If this had come to my notice as Minister in April 1997, I would have asked the Chief Executive of the NI Prison Service, 'What are you going to do about this?'"

The inquiry is investigating allegations that the state colluded with the INLA in murdering Wright.

A senior MI5 officer is due to appear before the Wright inquiry today.

The former officer, known as DC11, is believed to have advised ministers directly about intelligence matters at the time of the Wright murder.

The inquiry panel granted anonymity to the agent because identification could increase any threat to his life or informers he handled.

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