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Supergrasses

Sir John Hermon

Speaking at the British Irish Association Conference in Oxford on 18 September, Sir John Hermon replied to points raised during a discussion on the use of "supergrasses" by the authorities in Northern Ireland. The following are the points he made:

- The granting of immunity from conviction is considered individually. There is no immunity for murder.
- It is not within the power of the RUC to reduce a sentence. That is a matter of royal prerogative.
- He was taken by surprise by the emergence of the "supergrasses", following the hunger strike and the third force. It is not a tactic which was initiated by the RUC.
- The RUC are in the business of obtaining intelligence. Any money is provided under authorised authority and there is full accountability. The RUC, under the laws of evidence, cannot offer any inducement, threat or promise.
- The supergrass is operating within clearly defined legal principles within Common Law. He sought to emphasise that the evidence provided by supergrasses is frequently corroborated.
- The RUC are guided by the Director of Public Prosecutions and by the Attorney General.
- UVF, IRA and INLA have suffered greatly and have made strong efforts, including murder, kidnapping and gross intimidation, to destroy the system.
- He is aware it is becoming a contentious issue.
- The response on the ground is that people are glad the terrorists are being locked up, [Gerry Fitt agreed with him] and are asking the police to continue using the supergrasses to keep them locked up.
- The nature of terrorism is being explained, for all to see, during the trials.

- The RUC are trying to remove from the streets those people who are engaged in a frightening manipulation of people. The RUC in doing this will use all legal means, including the use of supergrasses.
- The law is his business. The moral or political consequences are not.
- He had welcomed the Bennett Report. Since its recommendations have been implemented the RUC have been more successful in arresting and charging terrorists. He stressed ^{the}RUC becoming more professional.

Doc

D. Ó Ceallaigh

19 September 1983