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ACT 2000

JOHN WHITE

UDP PRISONS SPOKESMAN

Background

Born in the Loyalist Forthriver area of Belfast in 1952, White first came to notice in 1972, when he was arrested in London on charges relating to arms procurement. Continued involvement in shootings and robbery led to prison sentences in 1975 and 1976; and in 1978 White was given two life sentences for the stabbing of SDLP Councillor Patrick Wilson and his personal assistant Irene Andrews five years earlier. In prison, White swung between associating with moderate prisoners (at one stage, he applied to join the Peace People) and extremists (the leadership of the Shankill Butchers gang). Towards the end of his imprisonment, however, he distanced himself from paramilitary contact, and was a model prisoner at the time of his release in 1993. Two of White's brothers have also served prison sentences for involvement in the Ulster Defence Association (UDA).

Personality and Political Views

A well-scrubbed appearance and mild manner seem at odds with White's turbulent past, and his somewhat nebulous present

As prisons spokesman for the UDP, he has access to most of the UDA prisoners in the Maze, and seems to exert some moderating influence over them. Prior to the Loyalist ceasefire, he was active in promoting a cessation of violence. In a visit to the USA in October 1994 he created a good impression with his articulation of the Loyalist position, and this led some observers to speculate that he was capable of becoming an important player in Loyalist politics. He appears to be genuinely determined to develop Loyalist politics as a respectable activity divorced from criminal or paramilitary activity. Whether or not he can deliver remains to be seen.

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