



The Scotland-UN Committee

Willie McRae

The death of the solicitor and Scotland-UN Committee member William McRae has never been satisfactorily explained. He was shot just a few days after a similar attempt on the life of Scotland-UN founder and secretary John McGill, FSA (Scot.), at the height of repressive measures that the Thatcher regime in London was taking against Scottish nationalists generally and Scotland-UN in particular. It is now known that Special Branch police were shadowing him at the time, but the true story of his murder may never come to light. Willie's efforts were not in vain, because the Scotland-UN Committee that he helped to found later cracked the home rule nut for the first time in 300 years with a brilliant international diplomatic action that restored the Scottish Government and Parliament, and thereby gave the SNP the key to the door for its independence project. We asked John McGill to record his memories of Willie McRae and the events surrounding his death. His narrative also illustrates the atmosphere in Scotland after the disgraceful unionist coup d'état in 1979.

Friends,

Whenever the name Willie McRae is mentioned my immediate reaction is, "Oh no, not again! Please let him rest in peace". Then common sense kicks in. So here goes with a brief glossary of where Willie McRae fits in with Scotland-UN.

Willie McRae was not only a member of Scotland-UN; he was our legal representative. He was my personal legal representative, my lawyer on the political front. My lawyer on the civil front is a local man who is my lawyer on civil matters to this day. We were at school together.

However, because of the atmosphere in politics in Scotland during the 1960s, 70s and 80s it was prudent to have on board a lawyer of impeccable nationalist credentials. Willie McRae was that person.

Before we get to the day of Willie's assassination please bear with me in some of the happenings leading up to his state sponsored murder.

While I was trying to set up the Scotland-UN Committee I approached the SNP, thinking the party would support such a move. To cut a very long story short, chairman Billy Wolfe told me I was wasting my time, and its constitutional expert Prof. Neil McCormack told me if it had been possible he would have done it himself!

I have to say it was to be my final attempt to gain support from someone in the SNP, and failing a third time I was prepared to dump the whole idea. Willie McRae jumped at the idea, and as they say the rest is history!

It has to be said that Willie had already got me released from police custody, I having been arrested on the streets of Ayr for daring to exercise my right of free public speaking. My agents at that time were a local doctor and a local bank manager, and they were arrested with me even though they had written permission from the local authority to allow me, the SNP Prospective Parliamentary Candidate, to address the general public from the corners of Beresford Terrace and Miller Road, outside the bank managed by one of my agents.

Willie made one phone call, and we were released and allowed to continue with our public speaking.

Later in the 1980s there came to the town of Ayr a man called Dr Feates of the UK Atomic Energy Authority, who persuaded the local council to consider building an underground vault in the surrounding hills for the storage of nuclear waste. When the matter came up in the local council, Dr Feates revealed that the waste would mostly come from abroad, mainly Japan.

To say some of us hit the roof is an understatement. The Anti Nuclear Dumping in the Hills around Mulwharcher campaign was born. Willie McRae was one of us. To cut a long story short, our campaign culminated in a public enquiry in Ayr Town Hall lasting three months.

Willie McRae was with us every day of that enquiry. He led our case. We won. The plans were dropped but we were by then all marked men and women. He never charged us one penny and to this day his firm never tendered an invoice for three months work.

During every day of the enquiry there could be seen in the car park of Strathclyde Police three black Rover saloon cars with consecutive London registration plates. Their occupants were monitored by our campaigners, who described them as "dark-suited men with bulging left-breasted suits!" That is what we were told by trustworthy colleagues, who saluted them daily with Churchillian signs of respect!

Then there was the caravan incident. Dr Feates and his AEA colleagues attempted to trail a caravan through the Galloway Forest Park to the proposed dumping site at Mulwharcher via the humpbacked bridge just outside Dalrymple. The caravan stuck on the bridge, and while Dr Feates and his colleagues walked back to a garage in Dalrymple for help some local children removed the valves from the tyres of the caravan. And so the story goes on!

The stories that can be told would fill a book. For example, one day we were holding a private campaign meeting in a properly hired public hall in Peebles Street in Ayr when sounds were heard outside the room. One of our more perceptive members crept up to the door and opened it very quickly. One uniformed policeman and two plainclothes characters "fell" in to the room.

The chairman demanded an explanation, but the trio scampered - but not before the chairman had the uniformed officer's shoulder number. Willie McRae wrote the riot act to the local Chief Constable.

Then, on another occasion, while marching in Troon we were attacked by a group of BNP members from outside Scotland taking their spite upon our Saltire by spitting at it. Willie McRae took the matter to the Chief Constable because once again we had the written permission of the local council for our march.

I could go on and on in this vein, like the morning I was driving up the A77 road to Glasgow, to my office in Scotland Street. About one mile north of Fenwick, where the road passes through open country except for a clump of trees and scrub to the west of the A77 at that point, the car shuddered at the rear end, slewing to one side with the rear wheel striking the kerb as I made an emergency braking. (Strathclyde police later informed me that I then took all the wrong actions.)

Once my car, a two-litre double skinned two-tonne Saab, came to a halt I got out to see what had happened, thinking I'd struck something on the road. To cut this story short the police told me I should have remained in the vehicle until help arrived! These were the days before mobile phones. I eventually drove to Newton Mearns to phone Willie McRae from a public phone box. Willie instructed me to drive to Pitt Street Police Station in Glasgow, where I was met by a police officer and two forensic scientists. I became a passenger in my own car being driven to Helen Street Police Laboratory in Govan to be informed there was a bullet hole at the lower end of the car chassis near the rear wheel arch. I'd been shot at.

The car was returned to me about five o'clock that day, after nine hours of forensic examination. To this day neither Willie McRae nor I ever got a report from Strathclyde Police despite several requests for one. So that is merely a flavour of the political atmosphere within which we were operating in those days. What happened next never crossed our minds.

The weekend of Willie McRae's state murder is etched into my consciousness permanently. I first heard of Willie's death from coverage in the Sunday Post the day after the shooting on Sunday, April 7th 1985.

To say I was shocked is yet another understatement. I immediately telephoned the Sunday Post who merely explained Mr. McRae had committed suicide! I objected and gave them my reasons for disbelieving that assertion.

I then telephoned the hospital and was given the same story. I telephoned the Inverness police station only to have the Sunday Post version confirmed. The operator gave me the number of a police station in Lochaber, which in fact turned out to be Fort William. The Lochaber operator gave me the same story. By now my suspicions were real.

I now believed that the story of Willie McRae's death had been written before he died. In my mind I was looking at state murder. Why? I have given you the flavour of the previous year's political atmosphere in Scotland prior to Willie's murder.

What neither the Sunday Post, the Hospital in Inverness, nor Grampian or Lochaber Police ever admitted is the following story I told each of those agencies as to why I believed (and still do) that Willie McRae was not in a suicidal mood, but was in fact murdered, and here's why.

On Saturday, April 6th 1985, Willie McRae was shot dead with two bullets behind his right ear. The classic SAS kill. The gun was found some forty feet from his Volvo Estate car where Willie was found slumped behind the wheel. If Willie was suicidal (which he was not) he knew enough about suicide by gunshot to know to put the barrel in your mouth and squeeze the trigger. Blow your brains out, death instantaneous. It is virtually impossible for an individual to shoot themselves twice behind the ear because of what is known as "the dead mans grip"; you might get off one shot but highly unlikely you'd get off a second one. Besides you would then suffer a slow painful death, as did Willie McRae.

There follows a summary of the story I gave the Sunday Post, the hospital and two police offices. To this day I have never been contacted as a result of my enquiries that weekend nor have I ever been interviewed as a result of my immediate enquiries on Sunday April 7th 1985.

On the morning of Friday April 5th 1985 Willie McRae phoned me to tell me, "John, I've got the buggers. They're going to bury the stuff where the sand never dries! I'm taking the week off at the Croft to prepare my case. I'll see you at the "wadden"!" He was of course talking about the ongoing debate about the disposal of nuclear waste. Willie liked to talk in riddles.

Of course there are only two places where "the sand never dries" - the sea bed, but in Scotland's case also the sands at Applecross. The plan was to create an underground storage facility which would be then under the protection of the nearby Royal Naval Base and the NATO Naval Base also nearby at that time. Willie McRae believed he had the AEA evidence but his brief case was never found at the murder scene.

Crucially, our daughter was due to be married in St Duthack's Church, Dornie, on Saturday April 12th 1985 with the reception (lasting a week!) in the Balmacara Hotel just down the road. Willie McRae was an invited guest and that was the "wadden" he was looking forward to. St Duthack's Church is just across Loch Alsh and Loch Duich from Willie McRae's Croft at Ardelve.

I gave all of this information to all of the aforementioned agencies but I was never interviewed. The "story" had in my view been written before Willie was murdered. Willie was looking forward to a real old-fashioned Highland wedding. Suicide was not on his mind.

To draw this to an end, Willie McRae was not a Communist, as was alleged. Willie campaigned actively for the independence of India; he assisted in the creation of the State of Israel. The government of Israel planted an orange grove in Tel Aviv in his honour and memory some months after his murder. Up until his death he was the chairman of the SNP Industry Committee on which I had the privilege to serve.

The executive of the SNP at that time gave the impression of being in agreement with the "official" view. I am no longer a card-carrying member of the SNP, but I still do what I can to forward the cause of independence for Scotland.

This is the first time I have put all this down on paper since April 1985, which I have found to have therapeutic value. After four heart attacks, one quadruple heart bypass and during the past two years four operations to my vocal chords (benign) allowing me back on to the speakers circuit, is it any wonder that I have now hung up my boots? I have not hung up my brain!

All I can say, gentlemen, is thank you for your interest. Willie McRae was a great patriot and that is how he should be remembered.

The information contained in this e-mail may be used in defence of the memory of Willie McRae and in the furtherance of Scotland's independence.

Yours always for Scotland. Thank you all.

John.