

## **Reconciliation at work at Magoo hearing**

### **IOL, undated**

While all eyes have been focused on "Magoo's bomber" Robert McBride during the high-profile Truth and Reconciliation Commission amnesty application in Durban this week, a very quiet reconciliation process between McBride and a state witness whose testimony helped to put him in jail has been taking place.

Matthew Lecordier - a former member of the ANC's special operations unit who worked closely with McBride - was the state witness known only as "Mr C" during the 1987 trial of McBride and co-accused Greta Apelgren.

Despite the fact that Lecordier (a former schoolmate and childhood friend of McBride's) gave evidence against the two - and against fellow activist Alan Pearce during his trial on arson, terrorism and explosives charges which landed him in jail for almost four years - his former colleagues have forgiven him.

Pearce, who served nearly four years of an eight-and-a-half-year sentence, said he and his former comrades had forgiven Lecordier, a former Wentworth social worker, for turning state witness.

"We've all realised that Matthew was in a position where he had to give evidence against us - he simply didn't have a choice. I've forgiven him, and Robert and the others have as well," Pearce said.

Roshan Dehal - the attorney who represented McBride and Apelgren during their trial - is also handling the amnesty application by the two, Pearce and Trevor Andrews.

Ironically, his partner, Indira Kooverjee, is also representing Lecordier, who is applying for amnesty along with his former comrades for the Magoo's bar bombing; the arson attack on Fairvale High School, for which Pearce was jailed; the rescue of ANC cadre Gordon Webster from Edendale Hospital; the handgrenade attack on the home of Labour Party official Peter Klein; and the bombing of water and electricity pipelines in Jacobs and Westville.

Lecordier (a sentenced prisoner who cannot be quoted) will only get the chance to put forward his version of the bloody events of 1985 and 1986 - during which various ANC units turned Durban into "bomb city" - when he makes his application next week.

However, the Saturday Star can reveal that after McBride's trial, Lecordier - an accomplice in a number of attacks who was allegedly forced to turn state witness - was relocated to the Western Cape by the then security branch, who paid him R2 000 for giving evidence against his co-conspirators.

However, after pressure was put on him by the police to begin infiltrating trade unions operating in the chemical sector, he skipped from "protective custody" - where he had worked for two to three years - and returned to Durban.

Despite being publicly forgiven by McBride on McBride's release in September 1992, Lecordier failed to be accepted by the Wentworth community, which, along with the mother of his child, continued to ostracise him for his role in the trial, which saw McBride sentenced to death for the bomb attack in which three young women were killed and some 70 people injured.

"We asked the community to forgive Matthew because he only gave evidence under duress," Pearce said, "but ordinary people who didn't have anything to do with the unit still continued to ostracise him because of the support they had for us."

a source close to the former guerrilla unit said: "Matthew found himself in the position where he was afraid of the cops and rejected by his community. If anything, he was one of the real victims of the entire situation - he had nowhere to turn to."

By 1995, Lecordier's life took an even more serious downswing: he became involved with a group of gangsters and, in early 1997, was jailed for 10 years for his role in the armed robbery of a cash-in-transit vehicle after he was arrested in possession of money and two firearms stolen during the heist.

For the past week, Lecordier has sat quietly in the row of chairs behind McBride, Apelgren and fellow applicants, sandwiched between two prison guards who escort him to the hearings daily.

Casually dressed in a tracksuit for most of the week, Lecordier has spent the lunchtime recesses with his warders, although his fellow applicants stop to chat to him during breaks.

A second state witnesses in the case, Nazeem Cassim, is somewhat further from being forgiven by his former comrades.

Cassim, believed to be living in Cape Town after members of the Wentworth community turned against him, has eluded efforts by TRC investigators to locate him in an attempt to have him, as an implicated person, attend the hearings. He is also understood to have avoided all contact with McBride and other applicants.

On Tuesday, McBride will give his long-awaited testimony about the Magoo's bar bomb and other offences.