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What did GCHQ overhear about Omagh atrocity?

Tuesday, 17 February 2009

The families of the Omagh bomb victims want Panorama reporter John Ware to tell a Commons Select Committee why intelligence services failed to prevent the bombing and catch the bombers.

Relatives of the victims have written to the chairman of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to urge him to set up a hearing to probe what the intelligence services knew about the gang that bombed the town.

They want MPs on the Committee to call the Panorama reporter to give evidence about his investigation into the role the government's secret listening station GCHQ played in tracking and listening to the bombers.

They hope former Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan, and retired RUC officers who held senior anti-terrorist positions at the time, will agree to tell MPs what they learned from GCHQ before and after the attack which left 29 people and unborn twins dead.

Michael Gallagher, whose son Aidan was killed in the explosion, sent a letter to the chairman of the Committee, Sir Patrick Cormack, asking him to set up a hearing to take evidence from Mr Ware and others who could help MPs piece together what happened before and after the attack, and explain why the bombers were not caught.

He said the recent report by Sir Peter Gibson, the Intelligence Services Commissioner, into what GCHQ knew was inadequate.

John Ware has already written a detailed critique of Sir Peter's report in which he says it confirms the contention at the heart of the BBC programme that GCHQ was monitoring some mobile phones used during the bomb run.

Mr Gallagher thinks MPs on the Select Committee could give a balanced view of the report.

"This is a powerful committee which has tackled many complex and serious issues and we feel that the MPs on it could shed some light on this murky area which remains in great dispute."

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