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Inquest into killing of IRA man delayed again

Thursday, 22 January 2009

The inquest into the disputed killing of an IRA man by police has again been delayed, it was confirmed today.

Chief Northern Ireland coroner John Leckey had set a January start date for the inquest into the death of Pearse Jordan in Belfast in 1992 - but during yet another in a series of preliminary hearings he said it could not start before June at the earliest.

When he apologised to the dead man's parents, Hugh and Teresa Jordan, for the latest delay, they responded in unison "We are used to it".

Outside the court Mr Jordan said given the likelihood for dispute over several outstanding issues being taken to the High Court for Judicial Review he held out no hope of a June start.

"I would not expect to get anything over the next two years."

The first preliminary hearing was held in September 2007 and Mr Jordan said: "Since we started on this process I don't know how many judicial reviews there have been - someone said recently it was at least 25.

"I don't expect the inquest to start in June - well maybe June 2030."

Pearse Jordan, 23, an IRA man from the Ballymurphy area of west Belfast, was shot dead by the RUC in disputed circumstances after a car crash in the Falls Road in November 1992.

Witnesses claimed the stolen car he was driving was rammed, and that as he attempted to run away, he was shot three times in the back .

Republicans claim his death was as a result of a "shoot to kill" policy operated by the security forces.

The Department of Public Prosecutions directed years ago that the RUC officer who fired the fatal shots should not be prosecuted.

Known only as Sergeant A he currently lives outside the legal jurisdiction of the United Kingdom.

He has indicated he will not return to give evidence and Mr Leckey told the preliminary hearing he had no power to summons him to do so because his address was outside the jurisdiction.

A barrister representing the families urged Mr Leckey to do more to seek his attendance - including serving a summons on his last known address in Northern Ireland.

"He is probably the most important witness of this inquest, he is the one who fired the shots. Without his attendance the purpose of this inquest will be severely reduced," said Barry Macdonald QC.

Mr Leckey said it would be pointless for him to serve a summons on an address at which Sergeant A no longer lived. But Mr Macdonald said he understood the witness was a visitor to Northern Ireland and everything should be done to issue a summons against him before the inquest.

But the coroner was adamant: "I have no jurisdiction over someone not resident in the UK. When a person is no longer in the jurisdiction the issue of a summons serves no purpose at all."

Another preliminary hearing to check on progress was set for February 12.

Police have been slow to provide documentation for the inquest and last month a High Court judge ordered Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde to hand over to Mr and Mrs Jordan within a

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fortnight a list of documents which had already been provided to the coroner.

The Jordan inquest is the first of a series into alleged shoot-to-kill deaths which are finally due to be held.

In 2007 Mr Leckey set aside 2009 to hold the inquests into the Jordan death and intended to follow it with those of three IRA men shot dead by police in November 1982 in Co Armagh - Eugene Toman, Gervaise McKerr and John Burns - and Catholic teenager Michael Tighe, shot dead at a Co Armagh hay shed the same month.

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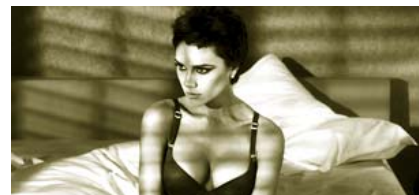


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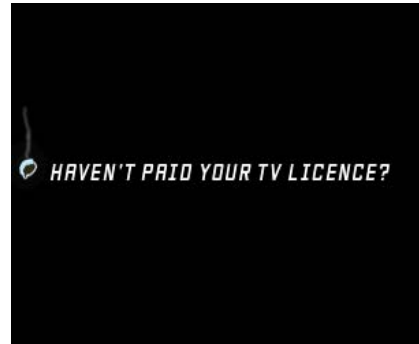


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