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Opinion

Viewpoint: UVF murders: police must reveal all

Wednesday, January 24, 2007

Some very serious questions remain unanswered, after the Ombudsman's three-year, £2m investigation into collusion between elements in the police and the UVF in north Belfast.

It is bad enough that no one is being held to account, because evidence was destroyed, but the failure of senior officers to co-operate fully with the inquiry team is an abdication of their responsibilities - whatever they think about the Ombudsman's methods.

This wall of silence, or lapse of memory, went right to the top of the police hierarchy at the time, and is reminiscent of many such investigations. Each time, the reputation of the force is sullied by a few intransigent individuals, when the vast majority of police officers, serving and retired, have fought against terrorism without fear or favour.

Now that the full gravity of the report can be studied, all those who have been less than open about the Mount Vernon scandal - and any others that are suspected - should examine their consciences. The families of at least 10 UVF murder victims deserve to hear the whole truth about what happened, and who may have escaped justice because he was a paid informer. That Mark Haddock, Informant 1, should have received an increase, after confessing to being in a murder gang, is iniquitous.






The initial response of the senior officers responsible for managing the police's actions in north Belfast has been disappointing, to say the least. Their statement, claiming that they "always acted in the best interests of the pursuit of justice" and "have nothing to be ashamed about" shows they are still in denial. From Tony Blair to Sir Hugh Orde, the Ombudsman's report has been accepted - and there must be plenty of detail that these officers could supply, from their own knowledge, to fill in the gaps.

In particular, Sir Ronnie Flanagan, a former Chief Constable and head of the Special Branch, should have been aware of lax procedures in the handling of informants, even if he did not know the detail of the north Belfast operation. He leads the UK police inspectorate, making sure that high standards are maintained, and yet his memory failed him when questioned by the Ombudsman's team.

Some will always believe the worst about the police, ignoring the fact that 300 officers were murdered in the course of a ruthless campaign, by terrorists who obeyed no rules. But while most people honour the police's bravery, they want to know how the counter-terrorist war was conducted, and why, in order to make sense of unexplained murders. On reflection, Sir Ronnie and his senior officers should tell all they know, to help establish the new era for policing.

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