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BBC journalist fiercely defends Omagh bomb phone claims

Thursday, 26 March 2009

The man behind the documentary that claimed British security forces failed to pass on crucial evidence about the Omagh bombers has mounted a fierce defence of the programme.

Panorama reporter John Ware's 'Omagh: What the Police Were Never Told' was criticised for "leading the families on" after it was screened last year.

On the orders of Prime Minister Gordon Brown it later became the subject of a report by Sir Peter Gibson, who concluded that the bombing could not have been prevented. Called before MPs yesterday, however, Mr Ware branded the report "disingenuous", adding it left more questions than it answered.

"He does not challenge our claims in his report that CID were not given the numbers of those mobiles that were being intercepted on the day of the bombing," he said. "It is what he doesn't say that is important. He doesn't explain why CID were not told there had been intercepts. He doesn't explain why CID were left for nine months to trawl through phone logs to make connections — which phones were speaking where and when on the day.

"In other words, he doesn't address what is the nub of the programme, which is encapsulated in the title Omagh: What the Police Were Never Told. He carefully avoids dealing with the central issue."

The Real IRA car bomb killed 29 people when it exploded in 1998 in County Tyrone. In the documentary, screened last September, claims were made that GCHQ was monitoring calls made by the bombers in the run up to the blast.

Relatives, unhappy with the findings of Sir Peter's report, called on the Northern Ireland Affairs committee to step in to investigate and are still pushing for a full public inquiry.

Mr Ware told MPs the police were never "given the bullets to fire" because they were not given the information.

While he strongly believes that the phone used by Colm Murphy, who is currently facing a civil action over the atrocity, was being monitored, he refused to go as far as saying the bombing could have been prevented. At the heart of the failure to share information were strict protocols, the committee heard, prompting questions over what the point of monitoring by GCHQ was if they then did not pass on intelligence.

Adding that he had been "shattered" by the attacks on the programme, he insisted it was very carefully sourced and all departments involved had been given two month's notice of the allegations made but did not want to respond.

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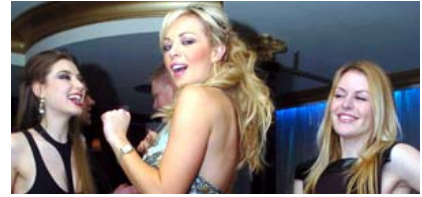
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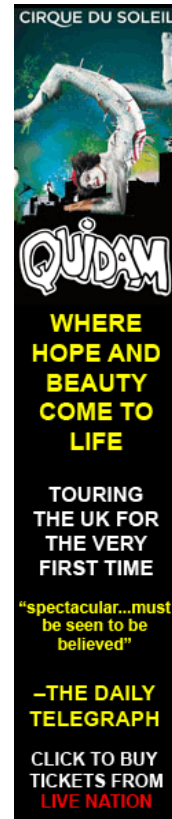
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