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Puppets behind the killing of lawyer Finucane are known, but who pulled the strings?

Saturday, 14 February 2009

Twenty years after the murder of high profile Belfast solicitor Pat Finucane, security expert Brian Rowan reports on the questions that will not go away.

It is a story of puppets and strings, a killing that goes back into the 1980s, the murder of a Belfast solicitor by loyalists — but on whose orders?

That is a question that has been asked for 20 years: who wanted Pat Finucane dead? The UDA killed him, shot him fourteen times with two guns — but was that organisation encouraged or manipulated by others?

It is a question that may never be answered. The story and the facts may be too ugly, too embarrassing to be allowed to emerge.

And that could be the reason why the type of public inquiry that is being demanded will continue to be resisted.

Twenty years on that inquiry remains the focus of the Finucane family — the one means of getting to the truth. This weekend a major conference is being held at Trinity College Dublin to mark the 20th anniversary of the killing.

“It is obvious that the mechanisms employed to kill my father were also employed to kill many other selected targets,” Michael Finucane told the Belfast Telegraph.

“It is vital that society knows the truth behind these killings and I believe a public inquiry is the only way to achieve this,” he added.

In September 2004 a loyalist Ken Barrett was jailed for the murder. He was not the gunman — not according to loyalist and Special Branch sources.

“As far as I know, he did the business a couple of times,” one of the most senior figures in the UDA said in September 2004.

Doing the business was his way of describing killing. So what about the Finucane murder and Barrett’s role?

“He wasn’t the gunman,” the loyalist source said. “He knew all about it. He was maybe the driver.”

I asked again. “I’ve been told that from reliable people (that Barrett was not the gunman),” the senior UDA figure responded.

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“People volunteered that information to me — boys who would know,” he said. Two of the boys who would know are still senior figures in the UDA organisation in the Shankill area of Belfast, including the current “brigadier” and another man, once closely associated with Barrett. Detectives from the Stevens Investigation questioned both of them.

“I’m absolutely sure he wasn’t,” a source said in September 2004 as Barrett was jailed. “He wasn’t the gunman,” he said.

Barrett was not working for Special Branch at the time of the Finucane murder. He was

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recruited afterwards. "He tried to sell his wares through a number of organisations," a source revealed. "CID, Special Branch, MI5."

The source dismissed him as "more a problem than an asset".

But was he at one time on the books of Special Branch? "I'm quite sure that was right," the source responded.

Other agents working for the Army and the Special Branch were part of the Finucane murder plot.

Brian Nelson had an intelligence-gathering role inside the UDA and William Stobie, a paramilitary quartermaster, supplied the guns. Both are now dead.

Nelson died in 2003.

In 2001 Stobie was murdered by the UDA to silence him. He knew too much. They would have murdered Barrett also but he fled Belfast after being branded a "tout". There were many "touts" at the time of the Finucane killing – including the then "brigadier" of the UDA on the Shankill Road Tommy Lyttle.

There were so many working for the different intelligence agencies and still Pat Finucane was murdered. Sir John Stevens — then Britain's most senior police officer — said he believed the murder "could have been prevented" and that there was collusion.

Separate from the Stevens Investigation, an inquiry was recommended by the Canadian judge Peter Cory — an inquiry that has not yet happened.

The concern is that there are powers in the Inquiries Act that mean a minister could block information from emerging — information that an inquiry panel may want to make public. And, so, the standoff continues.

There has been a more recent suggestion — that the Legacy Commission recommended as part of the Eames-Bradley report could be the place to deal with this. It has been flatly rejected as inadequate by the Finucane family's solicitor Peter Madden.

So, 20 years on the question is still there — not who killed Pat Finucane, but why was he killed? The puppets are known – Nelson, Stobie, Barrett and others. But who was pulling their strings?

What does collusion mean in this case?

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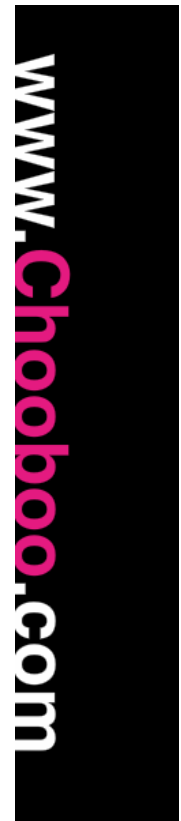
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