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Opinion

Brian Rowan: Who will open door on Stevens store of papers?

Tuesday, February 19, 2008

In the background of the Eames/Bradley process a couple of questions are now being asked.

Questions about why the door of the Stevens investigation was opened to the Consultative Group on the Past, and why details of that visit became so public so soon afterwards.

Stevens has a vast store of intelligence information - the secret story of Northern Ireland's agent world.

The suggestion is that at any one time in the course of the conflict here up to 1,200 informers were being run by the various security and intelligence agencies.

It stacks up into 1.9 million documents being held and being protected by the Stevens team, and one of the questions is: protected against whom?

It is not the republicans nor the loyalists.

Inside the Stevens store you will find the story of Freddie Scappaticci and Brian Nelson - and so much more, agent numbers, the locations in which those agents were operating and photographs from surveillance operations.

It was close up, and it had an "emotional impact" on the visiting Eames/Bradley team who travelled in two separate groups.

There is an opinion that on the question of collusion "there is a case to be answered" - that "it needs scrutinised". But, in terms of it being systemic or institutionalised, "it is not proven beyond reasonable doubt".

That said, there is an opinion being expressed that aspects of the "counter-terrorist" operation were "vicious, subversive and amoral" - words used to describe it to me by someone with knowledge of the Stevens material.

That same source believes that there will be an onus on the Government, at a political level, to acknowledge that.

It is on this issue that there is a view that the unionist community, in particular, will be shocked - shocked at the level of security force and intelligence service involvement in the so-called "dirty war".


The ten or so filing cabinets containing details on republican informers, and held by the Stevens team, raises questions about how much was known about IRA activity. And, after recent talks with the UVF leadership, I understand the Eames/Bradley group has made some tentative approaches on the republican side about a meeting with the IRA.


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