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## families feel deserted

Relatives forced out and failed by society

By David Young  
Monday, 11 August 2008

Omagh families have spoken of their deepening despair and sense of isolation as a dispute about Friday's tenth anniversary memorial service simmered on.

As the town

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prepares to mark the anniversary of the terrorist outrage, relatives accused the authorities and even neighbours of failing to back a quest for justice.



What are these?

No-one has ever been convicted for the Real IRA attack which claimed the lives of 29 people, including a woman pregnant with twins, with hundreds injured.

Cathy Gallagher, whose 21-year-old brother Aiden died in the explosion, said she was forced to move away from her hometown which she claimed was a cold and cruel place and where victims' families are resented. "Everything about the town had turned rotten," she said, claiming the families' support and self-help group is ridiculed and despised by many within the local community.

"The Omagh community spirit I read so much about in newspaper articles never existed for me," she said.

Such is the level of anger, at least 10 of the families are to boycott the commemoration service to mark the anniversary on Friday.

They are deeply unhappy with the way Omagh District Council handled the contentious issue of the wording for new memorials erected at the bomb site on the town's Market Street and at a nearby garden of remembrance.

Instead the relatives, the majority of whom belong to the support group, are staging their own memorial event on Sunday.

However, the four main church leaders in the town have angered the group by rejecting an invitation to that event, despite having attended it in previous years.

The clergy are only going to the council event, where former Lebanon hostage Terry Waite will give an address.

Carol Radford, whose 16-year-old brother Alan was killed, moved out of a nationalist estate in Omagh after claiming she was subject to intimidation which culminated with 'IRA' being daubed on the side of her house.

Her sister and brother have left the town altogether to start new lives in England in order to escape the bitterness. "I wish I had left too," she added. "There's not much support we get in this town."

Ms Radford is among those who have decided to stay away from the council commemoration.

Members of the support group demanded the retention of a phrase engraved on an original tribute stone — since removed from the garden of remembrance — stating the victims were 'murdered by a dissident republican terrorist car bomb'.

The council appointed an independent fact-finding team to try to resolve the issue and councillors unanimously accepted its recommendation to use the phrase on the walls of the garden of remembrance, but not on the glass obelisk at the bomb site.

Ms Radford said Sinn Fein council members are trying to airbrush republican involvement.

Godfrey Wilson, whose 15-year-old daughter Lorraine died, will also not be attending the council service: "The victims are running our own (service), which we did do the last five years," he said.

"I'm not attending the other service. We've held our service this last five years on the Sunday closest to the date and that's the way we've been doing it, everybody's welcome to come along and we want to progress that way."



The bomb attack was the worst ever atrocity of Northern Ireland's decades of violence.



Stanley McComb, whose wife Anne was killed, said he would only be going to the family-run service: "What I'll be doing on the Sunday is commemorating those murdered on the street.

"What's happening is just a big facade about the great job they (the council) think they've done."

But Sinn Fein councillor and chairman of Omagh council Martin McLoughlin said it was a pity some decided not to attend and defended the approach to the memorial issue. He said: "As a council we have tried to do our best to mark the anniversary. The wording issue as far as we are concerned is resolved. The support group wanted certain wording at the garden and that has been included."

Meanwhile, the failure to catch the killers has seen police on both sides of the border heavily criticised. Some families have launched a £14 million civil case against five men they believe were responsible. That case continues in the High Court in the autumn.

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