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## O'Loan report just the tip of collusion iceberg

(Jim Gibney, [Irish News](#))

It was ever so cosy. Great company and place to have a bit of R&R. A refuge to escape from the pressures of the job. Somewhere to relax in the company of very obliging friends – mates really. They were very protective, generous with their time, advice and, of course, money. They provided much needed accommodation for a night or two to get away from it all, wholesome food and a friendly chat. All pals together.

That sort of commentary you will, understandably, not find in Nuala O'Loan's devastating and withering report about the Mount Vernon UVF. An organisation who moved in and out of the RUC/PSNI Special Branch and Castlereagh interrogation centre as freely as they moved about north Belfast killing hapless victims at will, Catholics and Protestants.

For me that sort of commentary was inescapable as I read O'Loan's report. There was an old boy's bonhomie club atmosphere about the interplay between the state forces and those deemed illegal as they shared cells in Castlereagh or met in unnamed locations to collaborate over the many acts of violence under discussion. It was akin to 'shooting the breeze' with your buddies.

O'Loan's report is refreshing for its frankness and clarity. Its precise, to the point, use of language exposes senior and middle ranks of the RUC/PSNI, its Special Branch and CID and their direct involvement in murder, plotting to murder, attempted murder, extortion and drug dealing.

O'Loan's style of investigation and its presentation brings you into the centre of a sordid and secret world which relatives, human rights organisations, solicitors and Sinn Féin have been trying to expose for decades. A world where there is contempt for life and the law is manipulated to protect the perpetrator. O'Loan draws back the heavy black curtain and shines a beam into crevices and reveals disturbing and frightening behaviour.

In the 160 pages of her report you meet dark, sinister, Machiavellian people in the uniform of the RUC/PSNI who protected, paid and praised UVF personnel responsible for a

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10-year catalogue of crimes against defenceless people. Senior RUC personnel who knowingly and wilfully provided glowing references for murderers as if they were applying for a prestigious job.

In fact, they provided the Director of Public Prosecutions a 'get out of jail' card for many UVF personnel.

This report reveals a powerful, elaborate, carefully constructed, tried and trusted system which with ease expertly concealed the killers, the planners, the bank-rollers of a state-sponsored, controlled and directed killing machine. A system which, until the publication of this report, was virtually impenetrable. A system which was a law unto itself, run by people who played God with the lives of individuals they were paid to protect and did not.

The report strikes you in so many different ways, in particular the intrinsic immorality and corruption of the Special Branch. There is no personal or operational distinction between the UVF killers and the Special Branch. There is no informer/handler relationship. There is no 'them and 'us'; police officer and loyalist; no thin blue line protecting citizen and society. There is just 'us'; UVF and Special Branch, Special Branch and UVF.

Even though I have known and read extensively about collusion this report shocks on practically every page.

Most shocking of all is the cloak of protection the Special Branch weaved around those involved in killing as many as 15 people.

The killing of Sharon McKenna screams out of the pages of the report for justice as you read how the Special Branch carefully erected a fortress around the killer which even his own admission to them for killing her failed to dislodge.

Their influence even stretched into the H-Blocks into the very cell where they protected the person who killed Raymond McCord junior, whose father's campaign was to lead O'Loan's report.

Murder files and investigations lost or deliberately destroyed, falsified statements, sham interviews, concocted alibis for killers, withholding vital information, frustrating O'Loan's inquiry – the active hand of the Special Branch behind every obstacle.

It represents the tip of the collusion iceberg. The perpetrators are in the spotlight but where are those who shaped and set the policy – MI5 and their paymasters in 10 Downing Street?



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