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More topsy-turvy times ahead after revelations

(Tom Kelly, [Irish News](#))

The revelations about collusion between police and paramilitaries in the Police Ombudsman's report will hardly surprise anyone living in Northern Ireland.

Nevertheless to see it documented, researched and presented in such a professional and dignified way by Mrs O'Loan makes all of us feel somewhat sullied and let down by the forces of law and order.

In fairness the revelations prove beyond doubt that the policing architecture established after Patten actually work and that today we have one of the most scrutinised police services anywhere in the world.

Would the old Police Authority have responded as quickly as the new Policing Board in implementing the changes as recommended by Mrs O'Loan? Somehow one doubts it.

Mark Durkan was right when he said that as far as policing goes all the 'heavy lifting' was done by the SDLP and those who embraced the Patten proposals.

The most worrying aspect of the O'Loan report was that the ombudsman was only looking at the operations of one part of Special Branch and one small but out of control UVF Unit, in one very small part of Belfast.

Only a few days before the launch of her report the great and the good lined up to attend the funeral of David Ervine.

I mentioned at the time that I felt queasy watching the spectacle, though I know that some of those present felt even more uncomfortable sharing space with the very obvious UVF contingent also at the funeral. They should be uncomfortable.

They should be uncomfortable having a member of the PUP on the Policing Board while the UVF is still active but then again we are living in 'topsy-turvy' land where anything that would be normal anywhere else in the world is stood on its head.

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Mr McCord too, deserves a lot of credit for pursuing with such tenacity justice for his murdered son.

Yet these days we are told people who once were apologists for terrorists are 'remarkable'. I could think of a few adjectives to describe them but remarkable would not be among them.

Given the alleged and admitted roles of Freddie Scappaticci and Denis Donaldson as British agents within the Provisional movement, some people attending yesterday's (Sunday) special ard fheis must have given the odd glance around the room wondering how many more 'comrades' are still in the pay of the intelligence services.

The logical outcome of the O'Loan report points to widespread collusion between some members of the security forces and paramilitaries; that some police and UDR shared the anti republican sympathies of loyalist paramilitaries is even in less doubt. The way that some unionist politicians reacted to the O'Loan report was disgraceful and actually besmirched and insulted the thousands of good, decent police officers who served the community to the best of their ability throughout the troubles.

Thinking back to the 1980s and 1990s and the murders of Catholic civilian workers or those working in the court system or even Catholic police officers – one wonders how many of them may have been sacrificed to maintain the reputations and standing of informers within the Provisional IRA? Anyone who believes that collusion is an issue solely concerning police and loyalist paramilitaries is delusional; it was as rampant within the ranks of the IRA and to their handlers it did not matter who got in the way.

Even the paramilitaries colluded across the divide to set up and remove bothersome comrades. There is no code of honour in the world of informants – they sell to the highest bidder and usually once sold they don't have the loyalty to stay bought.

Watching former senior RUC officers trail themselves around TV studios to explain their alleged non cooperation with the ombudsman's investigation made for very uncomfortable viewing. Even more uncomfortable was watching the report being shelved by government as its ink was still drying.

Nonetheless Mrs O'Loan has lifted a lid on a shameful and dirty chapter in our recent past which will not be easily put down.

The problem for such reports is that they can appear to be very one sided. Of course while that is unfortunate, it's a consequence of participating in a political process which has no mechanism for getting answers or justice for the actions of paramilitaries.

Notwithstanding that, the work of the ombudsman must continue to highlight shortcomings which impede the progress of good policing because, as John F Kennedy once said, we are free to disagree with the law but not to disobey it.

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