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Lords rule over police evidence on Hamill

(Barry McCaffrey, [Irish News](#))

The House of Lords will rule next week if 20 former police officers will be allowed to give evidence anonymously at a public inquiry into the murder of Portadown man Robert Hamill, who died 10 years ago this week after being beaten by a loyalist gang.

Father-of-three Mr Hamill (25) died in hospital on May 8 1997, 11 days after being beaten by a loyalist mob at Thomas Street in Portadown town centre.

Police denied eyewitness claims that four RUC officers in a nearby Land Rover had seen Mr Hamill being attacked but had failed to intervene.

Six Portadown men were initially charged with the murder but the charges against five were later dropped.

A sixth man stood trial but was acquitted of the murder charge and sentenced to four years for affray.

The director of public prosecutions decided not to bring charges against the police officers on duty that night for failure to save Mr Hamill's life.

An inquest into Mr Hamill's death was later abandoned over fears for the safety of civilian witnesses.

Three people, including a former RUC officer, were later charged with perverting the course of justice after it emerged that a telephone call had been made to the home of a Portadown loyalist hours after the murder to warn him that he was a suspect.

However, those charges were later dropped after a key witness failed to give evidence against the trio.

As a result of an internal police investigation a number of officers were later disciplined in connection with the investigation into the killing.

In 2004 retired Canadian judge Peter Cory recommended that a public inquiry should be held into the events surrounding

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Mr Hamill's murder.

That public inquiry opened in May 2005.

It was immediately adjourned but was expected to open later that year.

However, the inquiry has since been caught up in a legal wrangle after it ruled that 20 serving and former police officers would not be allowed anonymity when giving evidence.

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