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[History](#)
[NewsoftheIrish](#)
[Book Reviews
& Book Forum](#)
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Back to 10/96

[Papers](#)
[Reference](#)
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[Contact](#)

Police under pressure to reopen murder bid probe

(Allison Morris, [Irish News](#))

Police are under growing pressure to reopen a probe of the drive-by shooting of a north Belfast man on the same night teenager Gerard Lawlor was gunned down by loyalists.

A report by Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan which criticises the investigation into a loyalist gun attack on Jason O'Halloran in July 2002 has recommended that officers reopen the case and review all evidence.

The report also reveals that ballistics prove at least two loyalist death squads were active that night and that different guns were used in the murder and the attempted murder.

Mr O'Halloran was shot three times in the leg and groin as he stood talking to his friend Jim Burns close to Rosapenna Street in north Belfast.

Less than an hour later Mr Lawlor was shot in the back by loyalists as he walked home along the Antrim Road.

No-one has been arrested in connection with the murder of Mr Lawlor or the attempted murders of Mr O'Halloran and Mr Burns.

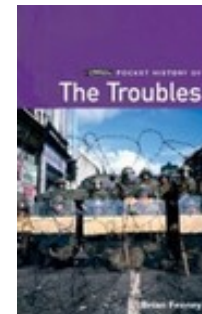
Mr Lawlor's mother Sharon said her family felt let down by police.

"We have never been kept informed. We have had to go out there looking for answers ourselves," she said.

"This is the first time we've heard that there were two separate guns used in the murder of Gerard and the shooting earlier that night.

"But this is not the way this story is going to end. Gerard cannot speak for himself any more. He only has us, his family, to keep fighting for justice and that's what we fully intend to do."

Patrick Murray of Kevin Winters solicitors said that although he welcomed Mrs O'Loan's latest findings, her report did not



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go far enough to address the wider failings of police on the night.

Mr Murray, who represents Mr O'Halloran and the Lawlor family, claimed police had failed to follow up evidence and track down the perpetrators and that Mrs O'Loan must look at these matters.

"Collusion does not just cover the handing over of information that may lead to a person's death. It also covers a deliberate failure to properly investigate and bring to justice those responsible," he said.

"The investigation into Gerard Lawlor's murder is the first real test of Nuala O'Loan's office in that it is the first major investigation into the actions of police after Hugh Orde took control. The handling of this case by the ombudsman is one which the wider community will be watching with interest."

January 8, 2007

This article appeared first in the January 6, 2007 edition of the [Irish News](#).

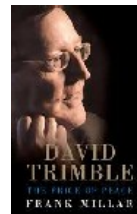
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[History](#)

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