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Killers must be held to account

Pro fide et patria

Editorial

28/06/08

Anyone who has closely followed the trial of three men charged in connection with the murder of Robert McCartney will not be entirely surprised at the not guilty verdicts handed down at Belfast Crown Court yesterday.

In reality, this was always going to be a difficult case for the prosecution, as the police investigation was

hampered and obstructed from the outset.

What is not in doubt is that Mr McCartney died as the result of a savage and arbitrary attack.

Despite the fact that this dreadful killing took place outside a crowded bar, the involvement of republicans ensured witnesses remained silent.

There were also allegations that potentially vital forensic evidence was removed from the scene.

The sisters of Mr McCartney mounted a high-profile and relentless campaign to seek justice for their brother, placing the republican movement under some intense pressure.

Despite early denials of involvement, both the IRA and Sinn Fein expelled a number of members, while the IRA offered to shoot those responsible – a proposition which caused outrage.

The political atmosphere today is very different from the situation which prevailed only three years ago when this shocking crime took place.

In many ways, this was a landmark case for the republican movement, highlighting – at a crucial stage in the peace process – Sinn Fein's unsustainable position on policing.

Following yesterday's verdict, the McCartney sisters said they were disappointed but accepted the judge made the right decision based on the evidence.

This was a measured and dignified response from a family who have suffered so much. Not only did they lose their brother but they have been subjected to unwarranted abuse, vilification and intimidation, their lives changed forever by the events of January 30 2005.

Those brought to court received a fair trial, the judge in this no-jury case applying the highest standard of proof.

Much of the case rested on the identification evidence of a woman who had been driving past the scene at the time of the attack.

Mr Justice Gillen described her as courageous and honest but found there were flaws in her evidence.

This woman was brave indeed and she should be commended for coming forward. It is a tragedy for justice that more witnesses to the events of that night felt unable to do the same.

It is not too late. This case started with the brutal killing of a man.

Someone was responsible for this crime and should be held to account.

The family of Robert McCartney hope that justice will be done one day, but that will only happen if there is


cooperation, information, strong evidence and a willingness to do the right thing.

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