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News

We have sympathy, says special branch

Sunday, March 25, 2007

By Alan Murray

The authors of a damning analysis of Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan's criticisms of the handling of UVF informers in north Belfast say it's wrong to suggest they have no sympathy for the victims of terrorism.

THE authors of a damning analysis of Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan's criticisms of the handling of UVF informers in north Belfast say it's wrong to suggest they have no sympathy for the victims of terrorism.

The former senior Special Branch officers say that because they have rejected the Police Ombudsman's criticisms of agent handling methods, it does not mean they feel no sympathy for victims of crimes committed by police informants.

The officers say they acknowledge the grief and understand the frustration and anger of Raymond McCord, the campaigning dad whose son's murder by the UVF's Mount Vernon unit sparked the Ombudsman's report.

"Obviously to some extent we failed in our primary objective, the Government's objective too, of saving life," said one of the former senior RUC officers.

"More than 2,000 civilians died in the conflict so of course we obviously didn't get it right every time, but to suggest as Mrs O'Loan does that there were numerous systemic failures is a blatantly unsustainable argument."

The officers say they don't feel that meeting with Raymond McCord would bring any comfort to him, but urge him to read the entirety of their response carefully.

"We examine the methodology Mrs O'Loan adopts and tear apart her conclusions.

"That doesn't mean that we are unsympathetic to Raymond McCord or the relatives of any other victim.

"We would say particularly read pages 20 and 21 carefully because they refute Mrs O'Loan's portrayal of our position," the former RUC officer said.

On Friday, the Northern Ireland Office confirmed that it had no stated official definition of 'collusion'. It added that when the Secretary of State Peter Hain, in response to the Ombudsman's Report, stated that he accepted there was collusion, it really meant that he accepted Mrs O'Loan's assessment that instances of "wrong doing" had been uncovered.

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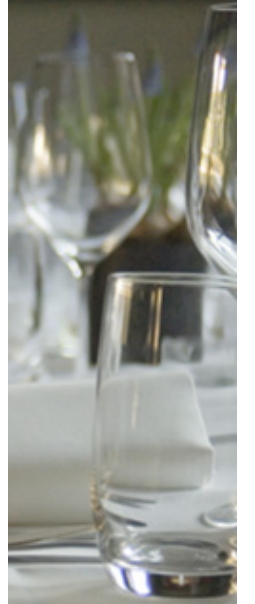
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