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Omagh tapes findings dismissed by families

By Lesley-Anne Henry
Thursday, 22 January 2009

Claims that the intelligence services 'knew nothing' that could have prevented the Omagh bomb, were last night dismissed by victims' families.

Relatives of some of the 29 people murdered in the 1998 atrocity branded Sir Peter Gibson's review into alleged security service failings, "a paper exercise".

The families who had hoped to use any recordings in the long running civil action called on the Prime Minister to give them access to the full 'classified' report.

Gordon Brown commissioned the Intelligence Services Commissioner to investigate allegations that the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) had monitored the bombers as they drove into the Co Tyrone town.

The report, which was presented to the House of Commons yesterday, said there was "no evidence" that GCHQ failed to pass on intercepted intelligence to RUC detectives.

Allegations over GCHQ and the alleged failure to share intelligence surrounding the bombing were raised in a BBC Panorama documentary last year. The programme claimed intelligence officers had been listening to and recording mobile telephone exchanges between occupants in the scout car and those in the Vauxhall Cavalier bomb car as they travelled across the border. Ray White, a former assistant chief constable in charge of crime and Special Branch for the police backed the Panorama claims.

Former senior RUC officers, who were involved in the initial investigation, said they were never told of the existence of the tapes and were only given names of possible suspects by GCHQ days after the attack.

Last night Godfrey Wilson, whose 15-year-old daughter Lorraine was killed in the bomb, said: "The review was nothing more than a paper exercise. We knew that these people did have phone numbers of people who were planting the bomb and why they did not give that forward to the security forces is unbelievable."

"What mileage was to be gained by Ray White going along with the Panorama programme if there was no truth in it? Why would he even be part of that?"

"It hurts me because I had a 15-year-old daughter who was doing charity work and trying to help people and she would be 26-years-old now and she'd probably have her own family by now but she has been deprived of her life and we have been deprived of the joy of seeing her bring up her own children. It hurts me to the core that these people could sit on their hands over this."

The families are expected to meet with Gordon Brown in the near future to discuss the review. Mr Wilson said he would be pushing for access to the full report.

"Intelligence is coming out of the walls. There is so much in relation to Omagh and the only way to deal with it is to have a cross-border inquiry. Why are politicians not jumping from the rafters about this?"

"I think we should be taken before the Prime Minister and see the full report."

"We are not terrorists. We are not going to show things to people that shouldn't see them, but as victims we are entitled to the information."

Michael Gallagher, chairman of the Omagh Self Help and Support Group, added: "I think it has missed an opportunity to address the central core facts in the Panorama programme and that is 'why was information not passed at the earliest opportunity to the senior investigating officer?'

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That's something that needs to be looked at fully.

"We will be looking at the report ourselves and we will be questioning the Prime Minister about these failings and asking him to give whatever assistance he can to the civil action and to back our campaign for a full cross border public inquiry."

"We have had many reports like this that only look at parts of the Omagh story."

Meanwhile West Tyrone MP Pat Doherty said Sir Peter Gibson's findings were unsatisfactory.

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