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# Opinion

# Viewpoint: This is a dangerous, last-resort tactic

Tuesday, August 21, 2007

David Simpson, the DUP MP for Upper Bann, has put the cat among the pigeons with his threat to name, under parliamentary privilege, a prominent

Sinn Fein representative whom he believes was involved in a murder in 1979. The allegation is that the republican helped remove IRA weapons, but was later recruited as an informer and has escaped further inquiry.

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Sinn Fein have described the claim as "baseless", even before any details are given, and clearly it threatens to upset the cosy relationship between the leading Assembly parties. The public has been left to speculate why the matter has been raised now, and why it has been given prominence over other unsolved murders. If the allegations are proven, there would be implications for the man, his party and the workings of the Stormont executive.

There are also grave doubts about the morality of using parliamentary privilege, which allows MPs to name individuals without risking libel. It should only be used when every other avenue has been explored, since it leaves the accused defenceless, and it is puzzling that Mr Simpson should issue a warning which can only be acted upon in October. Could he be reacting to Sinn Fein's well-publicised campaign for the truth to be told about collusion between the security forces and active members of paramilitary organisations?

There are other reasons, of course, why the MP may have chosen this particular course of action. The murdered man, former RUC reservist Frederick (Eric) Lytton, was a cousin, whose family have been thwarted in their efforts to discover the truth. A son, who was eight at the time of the killing, was recently approached by two former police officers who have passed on their suspicions - and there are hopes that naming names at Westminster could re-start the investigation.

Dealing with the past, after a civil conflict that lasted more than 30 years, is an enormously difficult and delicate task, which the last direct rule administration referred to an independent commission under Lord Eames and Denis Bradley. Public inquiries are being held into controversial killings, on both sides, and the Historical Enquiries Team is slowly working its way through the unsolved murders, letting families hear, often for the first time, the exact circumstances of a death. There is a commitment to bring charges, where possible, but discovering information is of great importance.

Time will tell if Mr Simpson carries out his threat, but it is a dangerous, last-resort tactic - to accuse, without having to produce proof. No one, especially in government, should rush to conclusions. In an ideal world, the truth about the years of collusion and conspiracy, involving the security forces and the paramilitary organisations, would be uncovered in the courts. In real life, the truth will always be elusive.

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