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PUP running scared – McCord

North Belfast News

by Ciarán Barnes

02/09/2007

A campaigning father whose son was murdered by the UVF is claiming to have frightened the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) out of standing in the Assembly elections in North Belfast.

Raymond McCord says the fall out from the Police Ombudsman's report into the 1997 death of his son, Raymond McCord Jnr, has led the PUP to abandon all hope of capturing a seat in the north of the city.

The ombudsman's findings, published two weeks ago, show how Special Branch protected Mount Vernon UVF boss Mark Haddock and covered up his role in 16 murders.

The PUP, which is one of the smallest unionist parties, offers political advice to the UVF.

On Wednesday its leader Dawn Purvis announced the party will contest three seats – East Belfast, South Belfast and North Down.

North Belfast, where the PUP's Billy Hutchinson held an Assembly seat until 2003, was surprisingly left off the list.

Mr McCord, who plans to stand in the March 7 election, is in no doubt that the reason for this was the ombudsman's report.

He asked: "Who is going to vote for the PUP in North Belfast after Nuala O'Loan's report?"

"The PUP knows it has no chance in North Belfast and it is frightened of standing a candidate in case they get less votes than me."

Mr McCord is to submit his electoral application forms tomorrow. Since revealing he is to stand he says he has been inundated with messages of support from both sides of the community.

"I've had people from all walks of life saying they are going to vote for me," he added.

"I am standing on a victims ticket. I want to represent the all the victims of paramilitary violence, no matter what religion they are."

The North Belfast News tried to contact PUP leader Dawn Purvis to ask why the party was not fielding a candidate in North Belfast. However, she was unavailable for comment.

Meanwhile, the UVF unit in Mount Vernon at the centre of the RUC collusion storm has appointed a new leader.

The man, who is in his 30s, was part of the loyalist gang who kicked Protestant John Harbinson to death in the estate in 1997.

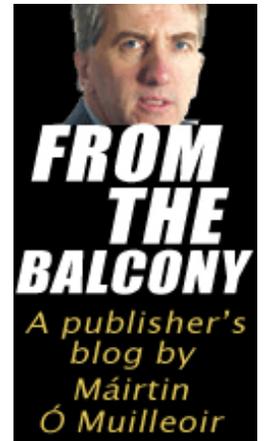
He has served a short period of time in prison for UVF related offences but had other serious charges dropped which fuelled suspicions that he too may be a PSNI agent.

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