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Justice that works would be a step forward

(Brian Feeney, [Irish News](#))

It's now exactly four years since the Stevens Inquiry presented its report to the British administration here.

The public, in whose interest the inquiry was supposedly carried out, got a summary of a bit of the report which amounted to a fraction of one per cent of what we're told was in excess of 3,000 pages.

Stevens released enough information for us to know that collusion between the security forces and loyalist terrorist groups was routine, endemic and systemic.

He stopped short of saying it was institutional but certainly among sections of the British army and RUC Special Branch, it was.

Stevens was mainly concerned with events surrounding the killing of Pat Finucane but he ran a couple of other inquiries as a result of which we know that there was also a different kind of collusion with republicans, particularly members of the IRA.

Stevens submitted a file to the prosecution service here, or perhaps it should be called 'the non-prosecution service', because four years after receiving the file with Stevens's recommendations the outcome is zilch, nathin' – which is pretty much par for the course from the non-prosecution service when it comes to sensitive matters. True, it could be said that prosecutions could prejudice the outcome of any inquiry into the Finucane killing but since the British government have taken steps to ensure there is not going to be one, that argument falls down. Besides, the British administration used to say there could not be an inquiry because it might prejudice a prosecution.

Anyway, it is all to do with events nearly 20 years ago, so what?

Fair enough, except that there's not much evidence to show anything has changed.

For example, we are told to hold ourselves in readiness for a UVF statement saying their war is over or some such

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grandiose nonsense. We're also told they're keeping their guns. We know the UDA has no intention of packing in its activities or of handing over or destroying any weaponry.

Yet not a week goes by without the exploits of publicly-named UDA leaders being described in drooling detail in the Sunday press.

The UDA is supposed to be illegal, its ceasefire is not recognised, it is engaged in extortion, racketeering and drug-dealing but its acknowledged gang boss, unrepentant convicted extortionist Jackie McDonald, is an honoured guest at public occasions and an occasional golfing partner of President McAleese's husband.

To what end? At every opportunity he states the UDA will not give up its weaponry.

It is also taken for granted that the leadership of the UDA is collectively employed as agents of MI5, Special Branch and military intelligence. Why not? They always have been.

It is widely accepted that the overall UVF leader for many years has also been on the take from British intelligence of various stripes, perhaps even simultaneously.

Of course they know where he lives on the Shankill and that his organisation has been responsible for the deaths of many loyalists in recent years, long after the UVF ceasefire was announced.

What do the authorities do with all this knowledge? Precisely nothing. What is the point of it? Did they prevent the death of a single member of the LVF in 2005?

On the contrary, no-one in the UVF has been arrested or charged with directing terrorism.

On a monthly basis we watch the laughable revolving door policy of the courts and non-prosecution service as senior and publicly infamous UDA men are charged and released on bail or just released to terrorise their own communities – for it is those communities which have always borne the brunt of loyalist gangsterism.

The disgraceful stance of the British administration here is perhaps understandable considering the trouble they have taken to sustain loyalist terrorist groups over the years – especially supplying their favourite terrorist group, the UDA, with modern weaponry in the 1980s.

Now, instead of supplying loyalists with superfluous

weaponry, the NIO has managed to persuade visiting British ministers that the best way to sustain their loyalist friends is to designate a front organisation for them to receive public money up front.

The incoming executive can stop their money and should, instantly. The first real evidence of change will be a justice system that jails them.

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