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Our confidence in law and order has been shattered

(Barry McCaffrey, [Irish News](#))

Carol Radford sat through each of the 56 days of the Omagh bomb trial in the hope that she would witness justice for her 16-year-old brother Alan.

Alan Radford had gone into Omagh on Saturday August 15 1998 to help his mother Marion with the weekly shopping.

A native of Scotland, Marion Radford had wanted to return home as soon as she heard the bomb warning but her son had urged her to continue with the family shopping, believing that the alert would turn out to be a hoax.

The schoolboy had just left his mother to go to a sports shop on Market Street when the 500lb device exploded.

In the commotion after the explosion an injured Mrs Radford called out her son's name, unaware that he was lying dead yards from her.

Later that night Paul Radford found his mother in hospital but was unable to find his brother.

The schoolboy, who had been due to begin training as a chef, was formally identified among the dead the following morning.

Carol Radford says she has lost all hope that anyone will ever be brought to justice for her brother's murder.

"I sat through every day of that trial but I now believe it was little more than a show trial," she says.

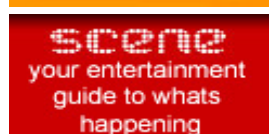
"We were told the prosecution had a strong case but I watched as day by day it fell apart in front of my eyes.

"As families we feel hugely let down by the whole thing."

She says her experiences since the Omagh bomb have been a "massive education" in how victims' families are treated by the state.

"In the beginning I was very naive but over the last nine years

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I've been given an education in the way the system mistreats victims.

"I'm not criticising the policemen who used their bare hands to dig our loved-ones from the rubble – they are as much victims as we are.

"They've been let down just as much as us.

"The people I can't forgive are the ones in government and the ones in the establishment who were already talking to the Real IRA before Omagh and who went on talking to them afterwards.

"They've crucified us by putting us through the last nine years.

"If they'd been honest and told us they'd done a deal with the Real IRA they could have spared us all these years of misery.

"Every time there was any kind of uproar in the media they'd go out and arrest someone but a few days later they'd let them out again.

"They were protecting the killers the whole time.

"It was bad enough having to cope with the death of our families but what they've forced us to go through since then was cruel. I just can't forgive them for that."

Michael Gallagher has found himself as the main spokesman for the families since he lost his only son, Aidan, in the Omagh bomb.

In the aftermath of the atrocity the families were given personal assurances by Tony Blair, Bertie Ahern, Bill Clinton and a succession of senior police officers on both sides of the border that the killers would be hunted down and brought to justice.

However, Michael Gallagher feels "utterly betrayed".

"Initially we trusted the police because we'd no reason not to," he says.

"It was the Real IRA who destroyed our lives. We'd no-one else but the RUC to bring the killers to justice."

He says that, despite the prime ministerial assurances, by late 2000 he began to suspect that there were serious problems within the Omagh murder investigation.

"After two years it became obvious things weren't going as well as they should have been," he says.

"We'd been given assurances from Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern that everything possible would be done to catch the killers.

"But by the time of Nuala O'Loan's report in 2001 it had emerged that the security services on both sides of the border had been warned that Omagh could be attacked."

Highlighting the fact that the same Real IRA gang had been heavily involved in similar bomb attacks in the months before Omagh, he says: "Omagh was not a one-off for them.

"There'd been a series of attacks in the run-up to Omagh in which the bombers used the codename Martha Pope.

"When that codename was used for Omagh that day the alarm bells should have gone off that this was no hoax.

"They should have known that it was a full-blown terrorist attack but for some reason they didn't pass on the warning."

Mr Gallagher said that police on both sides of the border knew the identity of the bombers within hours.

"Each member of that gang had strong dissident links.

"That gang had been very active for the whole of that year," he says.

"Every member of that gang was identified by the RUC within hours of Omagh.

"For some reason the investigation went nowhere."

Mr Gallagher claims there is overwhelming evidence that the security forces on both sides of the border deliberately withheld vital intelligence that could have led to the bombers' arrest after Omagh.

"The RUC had Kevin Fulton working as an agent, the FBI had David Rupert and Garda sergeant John White has already confirmed that the Irish authorities had informers within that Real IRA gang as well.

"At every level all the key intelligence agencies knew who was responsible for Omagh but did nothing."

Contrasting the lack of convictions in the Omagh investigation with other major bomb atrocities around the world, he says: "Look at the attack on the Twin Towers, look at the Madrid bombings, look at the 7/7 bombings in London.

"The Americans, British and Spanish governments moved

heaven and earth to track down those responsible and put them behind bars.

"None of their intelligence agencies had prior warnings about the attacks but they still managed to catch those responsible afterwards.

"In Omagh they had prior warnings, they knew the identity of the bombers within hours but they've never brought anyone to justice.

"People have a right to know why that is."

Michael Gallagher says the decision to charge Sean Hoey with the Omagh atrocity in September 2003 initially gave the families hope that someone would be brought to justice.

"When they arrested Hoey we were told there was a strong case against him and it looked that way at the initial court hearings.

"But when the trial began it all started to unravel.

"The trial revealed an appalling catalogue of errors and mistakes in the investigation. We were devastated by what came out during the trial. It completely shattered our confidence in law and order."

Mr Gallagher says the families now believe that only a public inquiry will uncover the truth surrounding the Omagh bomb.

"We have challenged the governments to set up a public inquiry into Omagh because if they've been telling us the truth they'll have nothing to hide.

"An inquiry may find that the governments did nothing wrong. We simply don't know.

"But the longer they resist the calls for a public inquiry the more suspicious people will become."

The Omagh spokesman says many of the families feel that the governments are deliberately blocking their attempts to have an inquiry established.

"They've used all sorts of excuses to block it.

"They say they can't afford another Bloody Sunday, that it would be too expensive. But this was the single worst atrocity of the Troubles.

"What is it that they don't want the public to know?"

Bernadette Doherty last saw her eight year-old son Oran as he left their home in Buncrana, Co Donegal, for a special day out in Omagh with friends.

She says that after nine years she has given up hope that anyone will ever be convicted for Omagh.

"In the beginning we had great hopes that we would get justice for our loved ones.

"But after all these years I don't think anyone will ever go to prison for Omagh," she says.

"I think the governments just want us to shut up and go away. But we can't and we won't go away."

Recalling how the lives of many Omagh families have remained stuck at 3.10pm, August 15 1998 she says:

"For me time has stood still from that day.

"I picture Oran the way he was when he left the house that day.

"His friends are all older now, they're all men now.

"We were robbed of watching Oran growing up and turning into a man.

"I watched as his friends went to their formals and I felt angry that he was being left behind.

"If Oran had survived he would have got his Leaving Cert on this year's anniversary.

"It's hard to lose a child at any time, never mind something like a bomb.

"But when you find out that the people who killed your son were protected – it's impossible to take."

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