

Local Heroes

LATEST GRASS ROOTS SPORT ONLINE EVERY WEDNESDAY

Belfast Telegraph | Sunday Life | Ireland's Saturday Night | Business Telegraph | Jobfinder | PropertyNews.com

Belfast Telegraph

News

- + Business
- + Business Telegraph
- + Features
- + Letters
- + Telegraph Columnists
- + Opinion
- + Northwest Edition
- + Northwest Weekly
- + Education
- + Interactive Letters
- + Weather
- + Dating
- + Media Pack

Sport

- + Football
- + World Cup 2006
- + Premiership
- + Rugby
- + Gaelic Games
- + General
- + Local Heroes **NEW**

Lifestyle

- + Arts
- + Film & TV
- + Food & Drink
- + Music
- + Health & Beauty
- + Motoring
- + Travel
- + Special Interest
- + Twentyfourseven

PropertyNews.com

Sunday Life

Ireland's

Saturday Night

Gaming

Top 100 Companies

Home Delivery

Online Archive

Calendar 2007

Ads For Free

Belfast Telegraph Home > News > Features

Time to deliver to victims, Mr Hain

The row over the appointment of Bertha McDougall as Victims Commissioner is in danger of overshadowing the needs of victims themselves, says the Rev David Clements. The Methodist minister, who has been a member of victims' support group WAVE for the past 12 years, and who is himself a 'victim', says that whatever the outcome, it is clear that there is still not enough support for those who have suffered during the Troubles

05 December 2006

I have followed with some interest the case in the High Court concerning the appointment of the Interim Victims Commissioner, Mrs Bertha McDougall.

The facts have been very well reported in this newspaper by Chris Thornton and others, who have aptly summarised the 33 pages of judgment from Mr Justice Girvan.

I also had questions about the appointment of Mrs McDougall, and so I wrote to the Secretary of State on Nov 2, 2005. Here are some of the questions I asked:

- **I note that you believe Bertha McDougall is the most suitable person for the job. By what criteria did you judge her suitability?**
- **Who advised you on her appointment?**
- **Is it a concern to you that most people who have been in this field of work for years have never met her or heard of her? (Note that I speak as someone whose father was also a member of the RUC, murdered by republicans)**
- **Is it really necessary for another year to elapse while she works on a report for you before action is taken on important matters?**

More than 10 weeks later, I received a reply from Angela Smith, writing on behalf of the Secretary of State.

She wrote: "In terms of the appointment process for the Interim Commissioner, senior officials from the Northern Ireland Office and the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister drew up a list of potential

Top picks



Today in the Premiership

Top flight football news club-by-club



Jan de Vries

The surgery is now open



Flushed Away

Stars discuss new animated comedy

Exclusive trailer



David Healy

My mate Gilly is in the form of his life



Global policing

PSNI expertise in world terror fight



Wellies appeal

Zoe Salmon urges schools to support children in Malawi



Time to party

Your guide to Christmas bubbly



Mission to kill

Michael Stone's letter to Telegraph



Mushroom magic

A bumper year for edible fungi



Sufjan Stevens

Christmas album with a dark side



Let's talk

IRA volunteer and Protestant victim engage in peace bid

SiteSearch

NORTHERN IRELAND'S TOP 100 COMPANIES

the definitive guide to the province's biggest companies



At The Movies

candidates for the post and measured against the criteria that the individual would:

- **have an established record in dealing with conflict situations either in Northern Ireland or elsewhere**
- **have the capacity and interpersonal skills to work with the diverse range of groups and organisations in the victims sector**
- **have the necessary analytical skills to organised and prepare a report on his or her findings; and be able to**
- **command cross community support.**

It was recommended to the Secretary of State that Mrs McDougall be appointed."

Comment

Some time later, in a meeting about victims' work, I happened to comment that I had written to the Secretary of State about the appointment of Mrs McDougall. A middle ranking civil servant (with whom I have no gripe at all) who works in the area indicated that he knew about the correspondence.

When I said that the reply had not really answered all my questions, he said with a smile: "Oh, it was a good letter then!"

Watching just one episode of Yes, Minister! is enough to show that, for Government and the Civil Service, telling the truth is important - but not necessarily the whole truth ...

Clearly, Mr Justice Girvan is not impressed with that approach.

Whatever the final outcome of the case and the investigation by the Attorney General - and I don't want to take sides on the matter - there is one issue of overriding concern that I fear will once again be eclipsed.

That issue is the work that still needs to be done with the victims of our long years of conflict. In defending himself on the appointment of the Interim Victims Commissioner, Mr Hain has reportedly said: "The cause and the interests of victims has been badly neglected for far too long. What we want to see is a fresh recognition and momentum for victims in Northern Ireland."

Farcical

Fine words Mr Hain, but your inability to deliver is matched only by the farcical failures of our own politicians.

The sad truth is that in spite of fairly high media profile, and occasional verbal platitudes like that quoted above, the work of supporting victims is well down the political agenda.

I can give ample illustration of the point. For more than 12 years I have been involved with WAVE, a victims' support group that has worked with thousands of people from all backgrounds, all over the province.

Over that time we have met with every Secretary of State (apart from Peter Hain - he has not yet found time to accept our invitation to visit. Though, to be fair, not many



On a wing and a prayer

Turkey visit lands Pope in cultural war



Blix vs Blair

This time it is our weapons of mass destruction



BA cross ban

Local MPs back campaign

Have your say



Snow will go on

Gary Lightbody on his plans for solo album



Jack Black

Interview with the Hollywood funnyman



Clock stopper

Noel Gallagher talks about the new Oasis compilation



11 plus limbo

In search of an alternative

Have your say



Game on

Want a new console this Christmas?



Life by numbers

Use maths to solve all your problems



Fighting Fitt

From Workhouse to Upper House



Ulster's delights

Tourists flock to beauty spots and night-life



New councils

What do you think they should called? **Have your say**



Farepak fiasco

£40m Christmas hamper scandal **Have your say**



of his predecessors came to visit within the first year of their time in office.)

Paul Murphy came just before he left. He was greatly impressed with the work and spoke glowingly about it in the House of Commons. He recognised the need for a Victims Commissioner - someone who would have a clear, strong, articulate and independent voice; a champion for the causes of victims (all kinds of victims), as Sir Kenneth Bloomfield had recommended in his report more than eight years ago. That was in March 2005.

A year and a half later, the legislation is in place. What really bugs me is that when it is politically expedient, legislation can be done in a week.

Peter wants to make political fudge - no problem. Paul wants to support victims work - long finger.

Finally, to return to the judicial review, I have a grave concern. I am afraid the work of the interim commissioner will be undermined or negated altogether and another year will have been largely wasted.

I don't know what will be in Mrs McDougall's report; perhaps there will be bits I don't like. I know that she has listened carefully and widely and she seems to be an intelligent woman, so her report is bound to have some value.

I will be amazed if she does not find that the need for more work to support victims is pressing and that the resources available are still inadequate.

What the NIO and the Secretary of State will do with her recommendations will prompt the next set of questions.

The Rev David Clements is a Methodist minister in Dungannon and a member of the management committee for WAVE for the past 12 years. His father, Bill Clements, was a policeman, shot dead in December 1985. He is married to Niccy and they have four children

[Back](#) | [Return to top](#) | [Printable Story](#)



MLA expenses

Assembly members business interests, travel and property

The Belfast Festival

→ News and reviews

Visiting the city?

→ Download our Belfast guide (3mb PDF)

Iraq: the toll of war

→ Survey: 650,000 Iraqis killed since invasion

In focus

St Andrews



News, views, analysis and the agreement in full

George Best



The latest news and tributes to Ulster's football legend

Robert Fisk



Award-winning journalist reports on the Middle East

BUSINESS TELEGRAPH
ONLINE EVERY MONDAY
UPDATES EVERY DAY...

[CLICK HERE](#)

[Terms & conditions](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Advertise online](#) | [Advertise in print](#) | [Contact us](#) |

© 2006 Independent News and Media (NI)
a division of Independent News & media (UK) Ltd