



O'Loan to probe Lawlor case

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

The parents of the last Catholic man shot dead by loyalists during the Troubles have asked the Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan to investigate new claims that the PSNI failed to arrest their son's killers, despite their being identified by two witnesses.

The parents of Gerard Lawlor (19) have asked the Police Ombudsman to examine whether their son's murder was properly investigated amid concerns that the original PSNI inquiry was "seriously flawed" and may have been thwarted to protect police informers.

The teenager had been due to move into a new home with his partner Siobhan and their 18-month-old son Josh days after he was shot dead by Ulster Defence Association gunmen in July 2002.

One year later, a senior detective admitted that the PSNI had not arrested or questioned anyone for the murder, despite police knowing the identity of the killers.

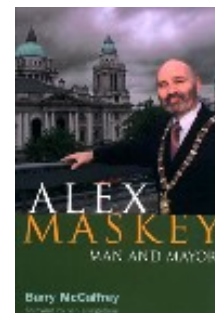
"We have no forensic evidence, no witnesses, no information. I am depending on those people making admissions," Roy Suitters, then a detective superintendent, said.

Despite the apparent lack of progress, the Lawlor family believed that police were doing everything possible to apprehend their son's killers.

Over the last 18 months, they have become increasingly concerned that there was never any serious effort to catch their son's killers.

John and Sharon Lawlor and Gerard's partner Siobhan Ramsbottom have asked Mrs O'Loan to investigate a series of apparent serious failures in the PSNI murder inquiry.

Among their concerns is evidence that a telephone call was made to the PSNI confidential telephone line days after the murder that identified a well-known associate of the loyalist leader Johnny Adair as having visited the Bellevue Bar several times in the week before the shooting.



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by Barry McCaffrey

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It is understood the suspect was never arrested.

He later fled to Bolton with other Adair supporters in 2003 after a UDA feud.

Police subsequently told the Lawlors that the motorbike used by the killers had been found at a house in nearby Newtownabbey. The house is understood to have belonged to the relative of a well-known north Belfast loyalist, suspected of involvement in the murder.

The Lawlors were informed that it had been impossible to obtain forensic evidence from the motorbike because the vehicle had been burned.

A female PSNI officer identified one of the suspects from a police photofit but no ID parade ever took place.

It has also emerged that a third witness, who can be identified only as X, used the confidential police telephone line days after the murder to identify two loyalists as having admitted to the murder several hours after the attack.

Neither of the named suspects was arrested.

After hearing nothing in the intervening four years, X approached police this summer and she gave a statement identifying the two suspects and their confessions.

X offered to give evidence at any subsequent trial.

The PSNI is understood to have claimed that it could find no record of the original telephone call made by X identifying the killers.

The Lawlor family have now learned that police have refused to investigate her claims in the absence of fresh corroborating evidence.

Last week John Lawlor said: "We trusted the police when they told us that they were doing everything they could to catch Gerard's killers..."

"But now we believe the original police investigation was nothing more than a sham and that Gerard's killers were protected."

Gerard Lawlor's mother Sharon said the family hoped the ombudsman would uncover the facts.

"All we want is the truth. We want to know why there

weren't more police patrols in the area, given that there had been a series of attacks earlier in the night," she said.

"We want to know why the police do not appear to have followed up on three different people's evidence about who may have been involved in Gerard's murder.

"Why does it appear that little or nothing was done to find these people?"

A spokesman for the Police Ombudsman's office confirmed it had been asked to investigate the PSNI inquiry.

A PSNI spokeswoman said it would be inappropriate to comment on a case that Mrs O'Loan had been asked to investigate.

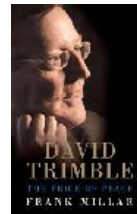
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