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Bleak reflection a cry for all north's victims

(Susan McKay, [Irish News](#))

Mo Courtney walked free last week after Belfast Crown Court ruled he had no case to answer on a charge of murdering young Alan 'Bucky' McCullough during a loyalist feud in 2003.

"You have to ask yourself if there is any justice in the world at all," the victim's mother, Barbara McCullough, whose husband was also murdered in 1981, said. The family intends to appeal the ruling.

Mrs McCullough expressed her sympathy for another bereaved mother, Vera McVeigh (82).

Her teenage son, Columba, disappeared in 1975. She found out many years later that the IRA had abducted and murdered him and buried his body in a bog, where it still lies, undiscovered, despite extensive searches.

On Thursday, the Reverend Ian Paisley visited Mrs McVeigh and appealed to those who knew where Columba's remains were to come forward.

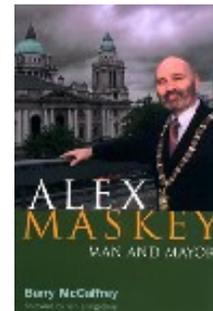
Relatives of the six men murdered by the UVF in the Heights Bar at Loughinisland in 1994 went to Brussels to meet MEPs. They told the politicians they believed the RUC investigation had been compromised because of collusion between the killers and the security forces.

Police Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan is investigating the handling of the case.

It emerged that Mrs O'Loan's potentially explosive investigation of loyalist murders carried out by a north Belfast UVF gang will be delayed until early next year.

It is expected that the report will link Special Branch informer Mark Haddock to a string of sectarian murders.

Pat Irvine, whose mother was one of 15 people murdered when McGurk's bar in north Belfast was blown up by the UVF in 1971, announced that her family had set up a website as a tribute to those who died.



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by Barry McCaffrey

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Again, the ombudsman is investigating.

Ms Irvine said she was hopeful that the "absolute truth" would eventually emerge.

Families whose loved ones were murdered by the so-called 'Glenanne gang' of loyalists, policemen and UDR soldiers in the 1970s welcomed the findings of an Oireachtas committee which said the "spectre of collusion" was present in the killings.

Taoiseach Bertie Ahern urged the British prime minister to make the full facts known. The families vowed to press on with their demands for a full inquiry.

The trial continued in Belfast of Sean Hoey, who faces 58 charges in connection with the Real IRA's Omagh bomb and other devices in 1998.

Twenty-nine people, including a woman pregnant with twins, were killed in the atrocity and some of their families last week demanded a full cross-border inquiry. There are allegations that intelligence was available to the authorities that could have prevented the attack.

The family of Richard Fallon, the first garda shot during the Troubles, demanded a full public inquiry into the murder.

The 43-year-old was shot dead by members of the republican splinter group, Saor Eire, during a bank robbery in Dublin in 1970. The family claim senior Fianna Fail figures colluded with those who smuggled the weapons used in the raid into the country. Gardai said the case remained open.

All of these cases were in the news last week. There is also a vast amount of activity ongoing behind the scenes in relation to other inquiries and demands for inquiries relating to victims of the Troubles.

Lord Saville is locked away with the millions of words he must consider before publishing the findings of the Bloody Sunday Tribunal. The Historic Enquiries Team is working on hundreds of cases.

On Friday, the Healing Through Remembering Group held a public meeting to discuss the group's excellent new report [*Making Peace with the Past*](#).

Written by Kieran McEvoy, it outlines five options for 'truth recovery' if there is to be a unified rather than a piecemeal approach.

The sub-group which developed these options is remarkably diverse, including former combatants and relatives of victims among others.

Former British soldier Alan Wardle said that "political generosity" had been required of all of them and was at the heart of the project to find a way of dealing with our painful past.

The meeting was poorly attended but it is to be hoped that the year-long consultation the group is embarking on gains momentum, for this is an honourable and important project.

Meanwhile, Secretary of State Peter Hain remains under court scrutiny over his disgracefully botched handling of the appointment of a victims' commissioner.

We can't give them back their murdered loved ones but we owe it to those who suffered most to do our best to give them the truth.

Barbara McCullough's bleak reflection on justice cries out and must be heard.

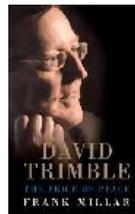
December 6, 2006

This article appeared first in the December 5, 2006 edition of the [Irish News](#).

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