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McCartney sisters lose faith in police

Family claims the PSNI has failed to prevent Sinn Fein from obstructing the investigation into their brother's killing by IRA mob

Henry McDonald, Ireland editor
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The women who turned the murder of their brother, Robert McCartney, at the hands of an IRA gang into an international campaign for justice said they have lost faith in the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

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Catherine and Paula McCartney also claimed there has been political interference - especially since Sinn Fein joined the north of Ireland's Policing Board - which has stymied the inquiry into the killing almost three years ago. The sisters are planning to report their concerns to the Police Ombudsman in Northern Ireland. They said they were so dismayed over the official response to their worries about the murder investigation that they were considering emigration. Catherine McCartney has been offered a teaching post in Western Australia.

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Robert was stabbed and beaten to death by a mob of at least 12 men, the majority of them IRA members, outside a pub in Belfast City Centre in January 2005. Two men will appear in court later this year to face charges connected to the murder and a simultaneous attack on Robert's friend, Brendan Devine.

Speaking to The Observer this weekend, Catherine McCartney said they decided to speak out after attending a Policing Board meeting on Thursday night. 'What we heard at the board shocked us both,' said McCartney. 'The Assistant Chief Constable, Peter Sheridan, answered a question which was tabled for us by the SDLP board member, Dolores Kelly. We wanted to know if Sinn Fein was now co-operating with the detectives investigating Robert's murder. We also wanted to know if they had provided new information about what happened to Robert.

'We were told by the ACC that Sinn Fein was co-operating but Paula and I had already been told by the senior detective investigating Robert's murder that there had been no useful co-operation, nothing had changed, those connected to Sinn Fein who were in the bar that night maintained their wall of silence. We have always had faith in the detective team investigating Robert's

murder but our worry is that there is no political will to follow it through.' The sisters said they felt their intervention at the board was 'politically inconvenient'.

'Now that Sinn Fein is supposedly signed up to policing and in government it feels as if we shouldn't even be raising what happened and where the inquiry is going. After the board meeting, where we got no satisfactory answers at all, I felt let down. Paula and I now want the Ombudsman to look into how the inquiry is going. Sinn Fein and IRA members, we are told by detectives, who know what happened are still doing nothing. But it feels as if it's somehow "poor form" if we raise this,' she added.

A spokesman for the Assistant Chief Constable stressed that the murder inquiry was still a live investigation and was limited in what information he could disclose. 'ACC Sheridan confirmed that the detective in charge of the case had had a number of working meetings with representatives of Sinn Fein. At the last meeting, Sinn Fein agreed to look at encouraging members of their party and witnesses to come forward. As of Thursday 4 October no new witnesses had come forward,' he said.

'ACC Sheridan did not say there had been full co-operation from Sinn Fein. There are divergences between ACC Sheridan's comments and the briefings which have been given to the family by the detective in charge of the case. The case is due to come to court in the near future.'

The sisters have insisted that Sinn Fein only engaged with the inquiry team after the McCartney family called on the PSNI to approach the party.

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