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Father attacks trial's supergrass protection

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- [Henry McDonald](#)
[The Observer](#), Sunday April 20 2008

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The reintroduction of the supergrass system into Northern Ireland has been designed to protect terrorists who are state agents from court exposure, the father of a murder victim claimed last night.

Justice campaigner Paul McIlwaine's teenage son David was brutally beaten and slashed to death alongside his friend Andrew Robb in Co. Armagh eight years ago. The pair had been targeted by the Ulster Volunteer Force in a revenge attack following the murder of one of their leaders in Portadown by rival loyalists.

Paul McIlwaine had gone to Belfast's High Court on Friday hoping to see two of the men accused of the double murder - Mark Burcombe and Steven Brown - stand trial. But he and relatives of Andrew Robb stormed out of the non-jury trial after it emerged that Burcombe had offered to give evidence against his co-accused in return for the less serious charge of GBH with intent. He did so under powers contained in the new Serious Crimes Act.


This was the first time the supergrass system was used by the Crown to secure a conviction since it collapsed in the mid 1980s resulting in dozens of top republican and loyalist terrorist suspects being freed from jail.

The McIlwaine and Robb families along with British Irish Rights Watch were not told about Burcombe's offer to offer evidence for the Crown. They also claimed Burcombe will not now be questioned about the role of a senior UVF commander in mid-Ulster whom Paul McIlwaine alleges is a Special Branch agent.

McIlwaine said the supergrass deal was unnecessary given that there was already enough forensic evidence against Brown.

'The latest police team to take charge of the case told me as far back as five years ago that they had my son's blood and DNA on one of the accused and that this man's blood and DNA had also been found on David's body,' he said.

'Both families now fear that with Burcombe turning Queen's evidence Brown's lawyers will think the game is up and advise him to plead guilty. Then there is no full trial... no disclosure in court about the man who gave the order that David and Andrew be killed and who helped organise it.'

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