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## Hamill family demand inquiry into PPS decision

08 July 2007 By Colm Heatley in Belfast

The family of murdered Catholic Robert Hamill are demanding that the role of the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) in the North be examined in the public inquiry into his killing.

Hamill, 27, was kicked to death by a mob of loyalists in Portadown, Co Armagh in April 1997, as RUC officers in a Landrover looked on and failed to take any action to stop the attack. His murder was one of the killings that Judge Peter Corry recommended should be the subject of a public inquiry.

The Hamill family say that a PPS decision in 2003 to withdraw charges of perverting the course of justice against one of the RUC men in the Landrover is on a list of concerns they have about the role of the PPS.

The RUC man was charged with perverting the course of justice when it emerged that phonecalls from his house were made to one of the murder suspects.

The RUC man produced two individuals, who said they made the calls from his house. However, both later withdrew their evidence and said the RUC man had asked them to make the false statements. Both were prepared to testify in court but the PPS withdrew the charge.

Earlier this year, the family appealed to Northern Secretary Peter Hain to widen the scope of the inquiry and allow it to examine the role of the PPS. Hain was asked for a meeting but never granted it.

It is understood that Hain faced strong opposition from the British Attorney General, Lord Goldsmith, who is in effect the head of the PPS. With Gordon Brown's accession to power, Goldsmith has been replaced.

The Hamill family have written to Hain's successor, Shaun Woodward, asking for a meeting to discuss their concerns.

"We don't see how Robert's murder can be properly or thoroughly investigated without the role of the PPS being properly examined," said Hamill's sister Diane.

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“They obviously played a central role in the decision not to proceed with charges against Atkinson, a decision which stunned our family and many in the legal profession.

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“We are calling on Mr Woodward to agree to a meeting with us.”

Last week, the PPS announced that it would not be proceeding with a prosecution against any of the RUC men implicated in the murder of Pat Finucane in February 1989, despite the Stevens Inquiry finding strong evidence of collusion in the killing.

The decision shocked many Northern nationalists, and has added to long-standing suspicions that the PPS has failed to act impartially in controversial cases involving the state.

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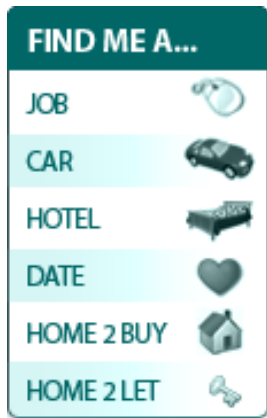
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