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RUC collusion officers still in police force

Sunday, January 21, 2007 - By Colm Heatley

A number of policemen implicated in the Police Ombudsman's report into collusion between the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and loyalist paramilitaries in the 1990s are still serving in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), according to senior sources.

The report, which will be published tomorrow, concludes that RUC Special Branch officers colluded in 18 murders in the North between 1990 and 2003 committed by a north Belfast Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) gang led by police informer Mark Haddock.

The report concludes that senior police colluded with - and protected from prosecution - loyalist killers.

Some of the officers have since retired, including the two most senior Special Branch men mentioned in the report, who ran agents within the UVF.

In the public version of the report, which has been shortened to 150 pages, the names of those implicated have been removed, but the private version, sent to PSNI Chief Constable Hugh Orde and Northern secretary Peter Hain last Friday, identifies the policemen and UVF agents involved.

A number of policemen mentioned in the report, and implicated in a number of sectarian murders in Belfast during the 1990s, have gone on to forge careers within the PSNI.

The Ombudsman's report was initially launched to investigate the murder of 22-year-old Protestant man, Raymond McCord Jr, in north Belfast in 1997, but was expanded to cover the activities of the same UVF gang in more than a dozen other murders.

The report will say that those who ordered and carried out McCord's murder, as well as other murders including that of 27-year-old Catholic woman Sharon McKenna, were Special Branch agents.

Haddock is serving ten years in prison for grievous bodily harm.

The new head of Haddock's former UVF unit is understood to be the man who killed McCord and is suspected of still being a police informer.

The revelation that some of the officers implicated are still serving members of the PSNI has caused concern among nationalists in the North.

Next Sunday, Sinn Fein will hold an ard fheis to debate whether to support the PSNI.

A series of Sinn Fein-sponsored public meetings on policing are to be held in the North this week.

A number of the crimes investigated by the Police Ombudsman took place after 2001, when the Patten reforms were supposed to have curbed the worst excesses of Special Branch.

The report uncovered evidence that Special Branch actively protected their informers, even when they had committed sectarian murders.

The Ombudsman's report was sent to the Department of Public Prosecution last year.

However, the DPP has yet to decide on whether to proceed with recommendations to charge officers.

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