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News

Special Branch Files: No closure without justice for victims

Sunday, April 22, 2007

The brother of Mary Travers - shot dead outside a south Belfast church in April 1984 - says he believes Northern Ireland cannot fully move on without justice for victims of the Troubles.

Paul Travers was responding to a Sunday Life investigation into his sister's murder that uncovered allegations of a cover-up in the killing.

The Historical Enquiries Team of the PSNI is said to be carrying out a "thorough" investigation.

Mr Travers told Sunday Life: "It's a real shame that we didn't go the way of the South Africans with their truth and reconciliation commission. It might have brought some real comfort to many affected by the past 30 years.

"It would, in my view, give real substance, depth and meaning to what we are apparently seeing reflected in the make-up of the new government at Stormont.

"I also think it is a reasonable and fair solution when victims are asked to live with the release of prisoners involved in these atrocities and the elevation of those to Government who, in the past, were only too happy to justify the murder of those they now want to govern."

Mr Travers had intended to work as a barrister in Belfast until his sister's murder, but left instead for London in 1988.

He emigrated to Australia in 1993 and is now director of cultural heritage with the Government of Queensland, working on the rights of the Aboriginal peoples.

He added: "If they (the politicians) genuinely believe in reconciliation and want respect for their office, then surely they should tell the whole story of what happened. We all need healing. We all need to understand. To me, it seems unusually cold-hearted that victims are being required to struggle to obtain the truth, or are simply being asked, as an alternative, to forget."

This is a view shared by serving and former members of RUC Special Branch. Eight of these detectives met Sunday Life last week.

One serving member told us: "We've had the Stevens Inquiry for 18 years costing tens of millions, the Ombudsman has spent £40m and the Historical Enquiries Team are set to add to that cost.

"But this is not just about money, though, this is about telling the whole truth about the Troubles.

"We are ready to play our part in any truth and reconciliation tribunal as long as it is properly constituted and doesn't turn into another expensive public inquiry.

"More than 3,600 people died in the Troubles and 30,000 people were injured. We need to address that before we can move on.

"We fully support the establishment of devolution on May 8 - let no one be in any doubt about that. This is a massive step forward.

"However, we don't believe we can have a proper future without clearing up the debris from the past."

A fellow officer then dropped a bombshell: "The IRA had a spy inside Special Branch for years. We know who he was and yet nothing was done.

"He is the person responsible for the Castlereagh break-in. Forget about the chef (Larry Zaitschek), this was a Branch mole helping the Provos."

The codenames of scores of informers, the information they had provided to detectives and the telephone numbers and addresses of Special Branch officers were taken in the raid on St Patrick's Day 2002.

More than 300 police officers and others were forced to move home at an estimated cost of £30m as a

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result of information falling into the hands of IRA intelligence.

The encrypted computer disks and notes were in the hands of the IRA within hours of the burglary.

Police said nine months ago that they want to charge US-based Lawrence 'Larry' Zaitschek, a former chef at the police base, but an extradition warrant still hasn't been issued.

Another former Special Branch officer said the Branch mole may have had a role in the collapse of the last Assembly.

He said: "Let's put it like this, Denis Donaldson was working for someone in Special Branch when the so-called 'spy ring' was uncovered, but it was Denis who was running that ring, so it was a rogue Branch spy ring rather than a Provo spy ring."

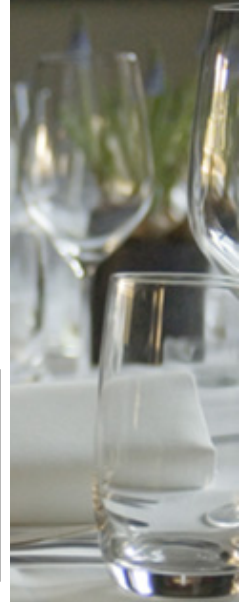
Donaldson's arrest as part of 'Stormontgate' in October 2002 led to the collapse of the last Assembly. When charges were dropped against Donaldson in December 2005, he admitted having worked for Special Branch. He was shot dead at an isolated cottage near Glenties, Co Donegal on April 4 last year.

This Branch officer added: "Donaldson was killed because he had too many secrets to tell and I believe those secrets related to his work with Special Branch rather than the IRA."

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