

BIZARRE TAPES DECISION

By any standards, the decision of the 1st US Circuit Court of Appeal to order Boston College to hand over recordings of taped interviews with dozens of former IRA and UVF members, which were conducted on the basis of confidentiality, poses a threat to the safety of those involved; it is bizarre and has significant implications for future academic and journalistic research

These interviews were recorded and collated for Boston College's Belfast Project, and participants were assured that the interviews would not be published while they were alive. British prosecutors, in collaboration with the US Justice Department, want access to the tapes to aid their efforts to investigate past crimes in Northern Ireland. Perhaps the British government might display unequivocal moral leadership on this issue and lead by example.

In 1984, following a string of allegations about a shoot-to-kill policy in Northern Ireland carried out by the RUC and British Army, the British Government set up the Stalker/Sampson Inquiry. Families of those killed in this alleged shoot-to-kill policy are still awaiting justice. Despite a four-year investigation into these allegations, the final Report has never been published.

Then, in 1989, the Stevens Inquiry was established by the British government to investigate claims of collusion between the RUC, MI5, British Intelligence forces and loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland's 'dirty war'. Following a six-year Inquiry by the Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police Service, Sir John Stevens, culminating in three separate reports, only 19 pages of the 3,000-page final report were made public.

Furthermore, there have been three Joint Oireachtas Committee reports into the Dublin and Monaghan bombings of 1974. Since then the democratic pursuit of justice for the 33 innocent people killed in the biggest mass murder in Irish history has led to deadends and cul-de-sacs.

Requests from Mr Justice Henry Barron in the Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into these bombings for documentation which was in the possession of the British government, and which would have been vital in establishing the identity of those responsible for this atrocity, were refused.

Even recent requests from Taoiseach Enda Kenny to David Cameron to release files relevant to these cases were refused. Such double-standards!

If the British government is to be seen to be consistent, fair and open in its application of standards of justice, why does it not apply equally the judicial principles it demands from Boston to Belfast, London, and Dublin?

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