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Full public inquiries the only way forward survivors insist

(Valerie Robinson, [Irish News](#))

For 30 years people in the Republic who were injured or bereaved as a result of the Troubles lived with their trauma hidden in the shadows – their plight was ignored by the state and forgotten by the public. But Irish News southern correspondent Valerie Robinson reports on how the survivors are no longer prepared to be forced to the margins

The 1970s was one of the most turbulent times in Irish history with the Dublin government faced with economic uncertainty and a conflict in Northern Ireland that was casting a terrifying shadow over the Republic.

The events surrounding the Arms Trial that famously saw government minister Charlie Haughey in the dock, accused of importing arms for northern republicans, raised the question of how the south should react to violence in the north.

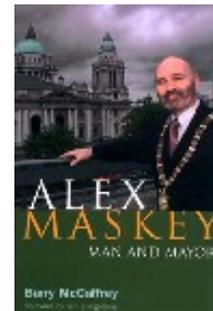
Taoiseach Jack Lynch's decision that the Fianna Fail government should not become directly involved in efforts to protect the Catholic community from loyalist violence set the tone for later years.

Successive governments were willing to enter political talks aimed at bringing about peace in Northern Ireland but the Republic's own victims were forgotten as the government distanced itself from the violence.

More than 130 people died in the south in violence linked to paramilitary violence; more than half of those victims (71) were killed between 1969 and 1976.

Many of those murdered were victims of loyalists but the list of the dead also includes those killed during internal republican feuds, 13 gardai and the 'accidental' victims like Brigid Carr, a waitress killed in the cross-fire between the IRA and British soldiers.

It was not until July 1993, when Yorkshire Television made a documentary on the conspiracy behind the loyalist car-bomb attacks on Dublin and Monaghan on May 1974 that survivors and the bereaved began to find a voice.



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by Barry McCaffrey

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The bombings had claimed 33 lives, including that of a heavily pregnant woman – the greatest loss of life in a single attack throughout the Troubles. Even so, the Garda investigation was wound up within three months, no arrests were made and no convictions secured.

A year after the carnage Jack Lynch voiced his suspicion that the British had been involved. It was widely known that loyalists in the mid-seventies did not have the expertise to "put together such an operation on their own".

During the decade and a half that followed the attacks a number of articles were written voicing concerns about alleged collusion between the British security forces and loyalist paramilitaries but no action was taken by the government.

A small group of people also managed to secure partial funding for legal fees from a "wealthy individual", holding their first public meeting in a Dublin hotel in January 1996.

They called themselves Justice For the Forgotten, believing that there had been an active effort on the part of authorities to 'forget' southern victims of the Troubles.

"It was a good name at the time because we faced a long hard struggle," the group's spokeswoman, Margaret Urwin, said.

The group called for a full public inquiry into the 1974 bombings, armed with a detailed dossier which included information supplied by ex-RUC officer John Weir, jailed for paramilitary offences, who insisted that widespread collusion between loyalists and the security forces had existed.

The group eventually brought on board other survivors, including the Monaghan families and those affected by bomb attacks in Castleblayney in 1976, Dublin in 1972/73, as well as Dublin Airport and Dundalk, both in 1975.

"At the beginning, our whole focus was on the bereaved but later we also began to work with the survivors, who should never be forgotten. We've been in contact with about 250 people who were injured in attacks, and that's only about 15 per cent of the total," Ms Urwin said.

"I think the problem was that those affected were ordinary people. In many cases they were working class and they had no common purpose. In Bloody Sunday there had been a common purpose. People had been taking part in a political march.

"But the people in the Dublin and Monaghan bombings didn't

know each other; they were anonymous in a way. They had been shopping, or coming from work or visiting. They had no-one to lead them and the politicians chose not to.

"By the beginning of June [1974] the story was gone out of the media, no questions were being asked in the Dail. It was as though the whole thing had never happened. It was just gone for years."

By the late 1990s Justice For the Forgotten had begun to win the support of a number of politicians and the Garda had set up an internal inquiry, while former tanaiste John Wilson was appointed to chair the Victims Commission in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement.

The government fell short of setting up a full public inquiry when they appointed a judge to investigate a series of bombings and murders in the Republic.

Unfortunately, Mr Justice Henry Barron's investigations were hampered by two key facts – he could not subpoena witnesses or documents and the British authorities refused to cooperate fully.

Since October 2003 four Barron reports have been published. None have led to the government establishing a public tribunal of inquiry.

In many cases, including the 1976 murder of Co Louth forestry worker Seamus Ludlow, the judge was highly critical of the original Garda investigators.

He complained that Garda and Department of Justice files had gone missing, also admitting that a lack of support by the British had tied his hands in many cases.

In all of the cases he investigated the judge fell just short of stating that collusion had taken place.

The findings of his investigation into the Dundalk attack, made public last month, echoed previous reports, in which he found that while allegations of collusion were impossible to prove "by [the security forces'] attitudes towards loyalist violence and towards violent members of their own forces, some senior members allowed a climate to develop in which loyalist subversives could believe that they could attack with impunity".

Judge Barron also repeated his belief that the farm of RUC reservist James Mitchell, in Glennane, near Newtownhamilton, had been a centre of operations for the UVF gang which carried out bomb attacks on both sides of

the border in the mid-seventies.

An Oireachtas committee began public hearings on the fourth and final Barron report last week.

In the meantime, the families are hopeful that criminal lawyer Patrick MacEntee, due to report to the government in October, could expose more evidence concerning collusion as it is believed he has spoken with members of Britain's secret services.

The police Historical Enquiries Team in Northern Ireland, which has been given the task of investigating unsolved murders linked to the conflict, has also met Justice for the Forgotten.

"For 30 years all of these people were just forgotten.

"We will continue to seek full public inquiries and we believe that's the only way forward. We cannot see any other way," Mrs Urwin said.

"It is up to this state to call for a public inquiry.

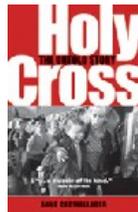
"If Britain chose not to cooperate, well then let them be seen before the world that they refused to cooperate with an official inquiry. That is what has to be done.

"It just seems to me so obvious that I can't see why the government cannot see that."

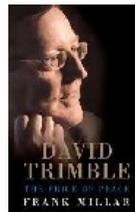
October 3, 2006

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