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 WEDNESDAY
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Policing issue has now been removed says Catherine McCartney

Republican assistance with the Robert McCartney murder probe will be the acid test of Sinn Fein's new support for policing in Northern Ireland, the victim's sister has claimed.

By: Press Association

As detectives hunting the gang of IRA men blamed for stabbing the father of two outside a Belfast bar urged witnesses to break their silence, Catherine McCartney insisted nothing less than full co-operation would do.

She issued her challenge on the second anniversary of a killing which plunged the republican movement into crisis amid allegations that the murderers were being protected, and just days after Gerry Adams won overwhelming backing for his strategy of ending Sinn Fein opposition to the police service.

Ms McCartney said: "This is the litmus test for them.

"They have no excuses. If it was purely a policing issue for Sinn Fein that has now been removed.

"Sinn Fein members (in the bar) refused to speak to police. They had a nonsense of talking to third parties like priests, but that was fruitless.

"Police are trained to take statements, not priests.

"I want Gerry Adams to say he will encourage everybody to come forward and say they will help with the investigation into Robert`s murder.

"That will prove there was no culture of cover-up going on."

Mr McCartney, 33, was attacked with his friend Brendan Devine after a row inside Magennis` Bar on January 30, 2005 spilled outside. He was beaten and knifed to death in a nearby street.

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Even though one man has been charged with his murder, the McCartney family - who drew international attention with a justice campaign that went all the way to the White House - believe at least a dozen people were involved in the assault.

Others allegedly mounted a clean-up operation inside the pub to remove any evidence.

As the Provisionals came under intense pressure at the time, the paramilitary organisation said it had expelled three members over the stabbing and even offered to shoot those involved.

Sinn Fein later suspended a number of its members.

The detective heading the inquiry, Superintendent Kevin Dunwoody, said tonight that a vicious gang carried out the killing and he emphasised to potential witnesses how he needs their information.

He said: "I would also address my appeal to those who have declined to speak to police in the past for whatever reason.

"I would ask you to reconsider that decision; come talk to me or my team, tell me what you know so that Robert can get justice, his family can get justice and peace of mind and that those who committed this terrible crime can be held to account."

He added: "While a small number of people actually assaulted Robert and Brendan, others helped and supported those in what they did and afterwards.

"So far one person has been charged with Robert`s murder. A number of other individuals have been reported for offences linked to the murder.

"However I still have open lines of inquiry and I urge anyone who was there that night who hasn`t already given a statement to police to come forward now."

The officer also urged a number of drivers who were in the area to speak to police.

"In Cromac Square we know an attack took place at the traffic lights at the junction of Cromac Street and East Bridge Street," he said.

"There were two cars - one blue and one silver - waiting at the traffic lights to turn right onto Cromac Street. We are still appealing for the people in the blue car to come forward and to tell us what they saw.

"They could provide us with invaluable help. We also need to talk to the driver of another car in East Bridge Street that Sunday night who narrowly avoided a collision with another vehicle coming out of Market Street."

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On 31 Jan at 12:02 - ger from belfast said:

SF have already strongly encouraged anyone with info to come forward. Indeed they have been so robust in this case that many people in the Strand and Markets have left the movement in protest at the leadership's actions. Short of threatening people to come forward what the hell else are they to do?? Gerry Adams is NOT responsible for the actions of all republicans anymore than Paisley is for all unionists.

On 31 Jan at 14:21 - john from belfast said:

Its the police who should be catching killers not a political party

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