



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

### Police to investigate 3000 deaths from the Troubles.



Historical Enquiries Team, led by a former Metropolitan Police commander, Dave Cox (left) and his colleague, Phillip James.

**A special police team is to reopen investigations into the more than 3,000 deaths of the Troubles.**

**It is a testimony to political incompetence but, above all, to political interference, that so many murders have gone unsolved.**

**It has to be said in defence of hard-pressed investigating officers during the IRA murder campaign, that not merely the burden of work but the fact that the Government was constantly in secret talks with the murderers and seeking to placate them in whatever way it could — and that included hindering investigations which took the police too close to top Sinn Fein/IRA murderers — made the task they were**

**given virtually impossible.**

The main aim of the venture is said to be the helping of bereaved families achieve “a measure of resolution”.

The work will be carried out by a new unit called the Historical Enquiries Team, led by a former Metropolitan Police commander, Dave Cox and his colleague, Phillip James. It will include serving and former officers from Northern Ireland and police forces in Britain. Officially it will have a timescale of six years, but there is speculation that the exercise could take longer. It will have a budget of more than £30m.

The plan is to re-examine deaths since 1969, contacting officers who ran murder inquiries and trawling through any intelligence held by Special Branch and Military Intelligence. In many cases, DNA and other scientific techniques not available in the 1960s and 1970s will be brought to bear on cases which were never solved. Prosecutions may eventually result, but anyone convicted of murder is expected to serve a maximum of two years in prison.

Mr. Cox said the team’s two main aims would be to “offer answers and a greater level of resolution to bereaved families”. There will be two distinct investigative units — one will be made up exclusively of officers from outside Northern Ireland, who would work on cases, where, for example, there had been allegations of security force collusion. The team said they would be operationally independent from the PSNI, but would report to the chief constable. The Northern Ireland Secretary, Peter Hain, said it was quite possible that people would serve jail terms as a result of the new murder investigations.

Martin McGuinness is one of a number of politicians likely to be grilled by detectives from the Historical Enquiries team. He will be quizzed when the team investigates the murder of an army agent 20 years ago. Frank Hegarty from Londonderry was murdered by the IRA in May 1986. Hegarty’s army handlers were shocked at a raid on a Co. Donegal arms dump by the Gardai because they knew that their agent, who had got close to Martin McGuin-



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ness, would be immediately suspected. The 45-year-old Roman Catholic from the Shantalow area had been encouraged to get close to McGuinness who was then regarded as the IRA's number one military figure.

The RUC did not interrogate McGuinness about Hegarty's last hours. Why it did not is unknown!