

06 August 2006

McKie: Where does the finger of suspicion now point?

Ken MacIntosh

Don't believe everything you read in the papers. No I don't mean the nonsense about Tommy Sheridan. I'm referring to the Shirley McKie case and the accusations levelled at the fingerprint officers of the Scottish Criminal Records Office (SCRO).

For six years, the suggestion that four fingerprint experts might even have conspired to misidentify the fingerprint of Shirley McKie has gone almost unchallenged in the Scottish press and, more shamefully, on BBC Scotland.

There have been calls for these officers to be sacked. There have been calls to close down the whole bureau. There have been claims that not only did the officers misidentify Shirley McKie's print, but they got it wrong on two other fingerprints in the original murder case – prints referred to as QD2 and QI2. There have been allegations that SCRO further got it wrong on two other cases – the so-called Mark Sinclair case and one involving a stolen lorry.

But now a committee inquiry, established by the Scottish parliament and which will resume its work in September, has for the first time, allowed us all to hear the other side of the story.

And what has the inquiry revealed? Well the Danish experts called in to look at QD2 and who had said the SCRO officers got it wrong, an opinion which led to the suspension of the four experts, now say they made a mistake and SCRO were right all along. The Northern Irish fingerprint service has confirmed that SCRO was right in the Sinclair case.

Three experts, Allan Bayle, John MacLeod and Gary Dempster, all of whom provided evidence against the SCRO officers, now admit they got it wrong on the lorry case. Bayle, who has appeared on BBC Scotland's Newsnight raising the alarm, had to make a public apology to the committee and SCRO for the mistake.

The idea of a conspiracy has been demolished by the evidence. Peter Swann, the independent expert hired by McKie initially, reported that he agreed with the SCRO officers. In fact not only Swann, but the independent defence expert in the Marion Ross murder case, Malcolm Graham, also initially agreed with the SCRO officers.

I do not envy the job of the members of the justice committee as they try to pull all this together, but they have already done us a huge service. For four public servants denied their day in court, they have provided a public platform where they have been allowed to speak up for the first time. They have allowed those of us who wish to, to see and hear both sides of the story for ourselves. They have allowed those of us who choose to, to listen and to hear all the evidence.

13 August 2006

Pointing the finger

To answer the question posed by Labour MSP Ken MacIntosh, (“McKie: Where does the finger of suspicion now point?”, Comment, August 6), the simple answer is where it always has - at the SCRO experts and supporters like himself.

He cites the usual suspects in his defence. Malcom Graham, an independent fingerprint expert, who has already publicly offered two apologies to Shirley for his “ terrible mistake”. He then goes on to cite the Danish experts admitting that SCRO was right in the identification of a fingerprint but fails to inform us that the Danish experts were given the wrong prints to look at.

He castigates three other experts for admitting they were wrong (what a pity SCRO had not done this 10 years ago) but fails to inform us that there are serious questions around the quality of the prints prepared by SCRO for their examination.

Mr MacIntosh also cites Peter Swann in SCRO’s defence. He forgets, however, to inform us of the 20 reports and statements attesting to their culpability including a major police report alleging criminality at SCRO and this year’s Cathy Jamieson - sponsored Mulhern Action Plan, confirming the ‘mistake’. His memory appears to fail him when he omits to mention the hundreds of experts from across the world attesting to Mr Swann and SCRO being wrong.

As if this wasn’t enough having done all he could to disrupt the parliamentary enquiry he now has the brass neck to sympathise with the justice committee members “as they try to pull all this together”.

In the run up to next year’s election can I suggest that Ken MacIntosh and his colleagues within the Scottish Executive join the growing call for a judicial enquiry instead of trying to obscure reality with half truths and innuendo.

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