

**UTV INSIGHT**  
**“COP OUT?”**

**01:40** INTRODUCTION: At least 2 people have been kicked to death on our streets this year. [REDACTED] was one a policeman set on by a mob who decided to take their grievances out on him. Another was Robert Hamill a young catholic again set on by thugs with murderous intent. In his case the police were there in a land rover parked a few yards away and as you'll hear in [REDACTED] report one alleged witness claims he warned the RUC something awful was about to happen just 10 minutes before it did. So, what did happen to Robert Hamill? I should stress one man is in custody charged with his murder. 5 others have had the charges withdrawn and the RUC's role is subject to investigation by the Independent Commission for Police Complaints. [REDACTED]'s report also contains some strong language.

**3:04** [REDACTED]: Robert Hamill was fatally injured at 01.45 on a Sunday morning as he made his way home from a social club in the centre of Portadown. The assault happened here in Market Street just yards from a RUC land rover which was parked outside the Halifax. We have spoken to a number of people who were there that night among them one man who said he warned police about the potential for an attack minutes before it happened. Tonight 'Insight' asks how could a night out with friends turn to tragedy despite the presence of the RUC and could anything have been done to save Robert Hamill's life? Robert Hamill was twenty five and the father of two small boys to whom he was devoted. His partner was pregnant with their third child. The night he was murdered by a Loyalist mob he'd bumped into his friends **D** and **E** and **E**'s sister **F** at a dance in St Patrick's Hall.

**4:16 E**: Me and **D** and my sister **F** and another two friends went to St Patrick's Hall, there was a night on, and we were there for about half nine and we didn't meet Robert in the Hall Robert didn't come in 'til about half ten. I seen him standing at the bar and I went over to him and he gave me a big hug he always hugged me when he seen me. I says "Are you coming to join our company" and he says "Yes I'll be over in a minute". So he came over and he was sitting speaking to **D** most of the night but he would have got up and danced with me for an odd dance and laughed and carried on and we'd a great night in the Hall. And we'd a real good night in the Hall you know it was a real good atmosphere and all in St Patrick's Hall that night.

**5:07 F**: I'd never ever seen Robert up dancing before and of course he got **E** up and them two were messing about and laughing. We had a good night and, I don't drink you see and I was sitting watching these ones do you know what I mean having a good laugh

**5:48 D**: Well, we'd phoned for a taxi but the taxi said they'd been all booked up and so we took it upon ourselves to go for a walk we'd walk it down home it's only a short distance down two streets. From St Patrick's Hall we're walking up Thomas Street we're talking away the girls were talking and the boys were talking. Me and Robert were slightly in front of the girls. Chattering going on having a laugh

**6:28** [REDACTED]: It's a short walk across Market Street into Woodhouse Street which leads to the tunnel and the Catholic district of Portadown. According to witnesses youths were standing in small groups in Market Street but Robert Hamill and his friends thought they were safe because there was an RUC land rover parked at the top of Woodhouse Street.

**6:48 D**: We're walking down Thomas Street and we'd came to the top of it and seen a couple of people sort of knocking about around the bottom of Thomas Street but we didn't think nothing of it and we walked on

down and then we noticed the police jeep sitting on the top of Woodhouse Street. So we said to ourselves well it must be safe enough because the police are sitting there so we decided we'd walk across the road.

**7:08** [REDACTED]: But, as they crossed the main road the group was set upon by up to thirty youths.

**7:23 E**: And the next thing I remember **D** was knocked out and Robert was over not a few steps away from **D** so he was lying out cold too. I ran and lay on top of **D** and just kept begging the crowd not to kick him any more. I lifted my head and turned it and I seen Robert lying and I knew he was injured because he was just lying there he wasn't even moving and I just lay with **D** and kept squealing for an ambulance and for help and please somebody get an ambulance.

**7:58 F**: A crowd come from nowhere and **D** was lying knocked out and Robert and I run and I was squealing please somebody help us and shouting for an ambulance and I ran over and I lay on the top of Robert and the crowd was still there and I just kept my head down and I was afraid to lift my head in case they were going to do something to me so I just kept my head down and I kept saying [*whispering*] "Robert, Robert, Robert", but he wasn't moving or anything and I was lying saying [*whispering*] "Oh Robert please, Robert you're alright". And then I was that afraid I was saying are we going to get out of this alright. The police were sitting across the road we were squealing, **E** was squealing, I was squealing. The police didn't get out of the jeep.

**8:55 D**: I never got across the road. All I remember is waking up in an ambulance. I walked down to near the end of Thomas Street I got near the end and that's as far as I can remember.

**9:05** [REDACTED]: One man was walking down the street behind Robert Hamill. He saw the attack unfold.

**9:12 'PETER' (COLIN PRUNTY)**: There was a crowd came running from the left hand side from the town clock end and rushed over towards Robert and gripped him and brought him, trailed him over to thing and started beating him. By that time me and the other fella' who was with us we ran down to try and break it up but the other fella' was hit too and by that time they had started kicking Robert and I went in to see what I could try and do but I was hit a couple of times too. They were kicking at him and kicking at him and saying "Kill him, Kill him" and just beating the head clean off him. The police were sitting towards the Halifax with the back of the land rover, land rover door was closed it was a good... it was at least a good three or four minutes before they got out to try and do something about it.

**10:06** [REDACTED]: The **E, F** sisters cradled Robert and **D**'s heads as the crowd, which by then had discontinued the assault continued to threaten.

**10:15 F**: I can mind, I heard somebody shouting "Die you Fenian bastard". I can mind that being shouted, I can mind them shouting that. I was afraid to lift my head or even turn around to look at **E** or what I'm going to do or whatever because she was over there and I was over here with Robert on my own and it was that frightening I haven't got over it, from it, because I haven't been out from it happened that's the way it has left me because there was nobody there to protect me and my sister and **D** and Robert there was nobody there to help us. I just can't get over that night that the police sat there and watched four innocent people, for them to let them to do that on four innocent people, they didn't get out of the jeep to help us and as what I said at

the start if we'd have been four dogs we would have been brought to the vet quicker or we'd have been seen to quicker. That's the way I feel. That's the way they made me feel.

**11:18** [REDACTED]: Robert Hamill was rushed to hospital where he spent twelve days in intensive care. At first his family thought he'd win his fight for life.

**11:28** DIANE HAMILL: He was very, very slow about doing anything but each day there would be some wee thing he would do. You know, they done various tests on him to show how damaged he was but as each day gone on he seemed to improve a little bit. After about eight days his eyes started to, you know, his lids started to move up a little bit and on, like, the eleventh day his eyes were fully open, but he wasn't looking at us. When his little boys come, Robert, when he was in the bed he was very agitated, he would move around a lot and he would push you but when the boys came he just patted them on the head and he held their hand really lightly and the boys would say "Daddy wake up". They would ask Daddy to wake up but Daddy wouldn't wake up. And all they knew was the bad boys hit Daddy

**12:38** [REDACTED]: The day he died Diane arrived as doctors struggled to save her brother's life.

**12:43** DIANE HAMILL: We got onto the ward and I could see his bed from the bottom of the ward where we were coming in and I could see that the curtains were round him and I thought for a second they must be doing something with him, you know the nurses, but then I noticed doctors kind of hovering around and I could see a trolley sitting beside him, beside the curtains, the emergency trolley and I know what an emergency trolley is. And I thought, God forgive me, I thought please let it be that wee man in front of him, please let it be that wee man because he was ill the day before. We got right down the corridor and people relatives with other patients one of them approached us and said "Don't go down there love, don't go down there" and we went on and when one of the nurses eventually spotted us we were about five steps away from Robert's bed and she said "Come up, come up and sit down". I said "Why?" she said "Come up and sit down" and I says "Is our Robert alright, is he alright?" and she kept looking us to sit down and wouldn't tell us what was wrong and I said "Tell me, is he alright?" and she said "No, he's not". Just at that I ran past her and went into the curtains and Robert was there and there was doctors standing and nurses standing and Robert was dead. They said they had did everything they could but he had died.

**14:16** PRIEST: How can such brutality, such hatred take root in human hearts as to drive people to callously and deliberately pick on four innocent young citizens walking home from a social evening and cruelly attack them kicking one so viciously that he dies from his injuries. What can rid us of such sectarianism, such inhumanity, such hatred, such bigotry.

**14:55** [REDACTED]: It wasn't until after the funeral that the Hamill family started to ask publicly, serious questions about the RUC's actions the night Robert was attacked.

**15:06** DIANE HAMILL: The very least they had to do was to fire one bullet in the air, that would have scared anyone off and what I'm extremely worried about here is the fact they felt safe to attack my brother within yards of a police jeep. Why didn't they go up and warn my brother that there was this gang of people down there, why when Robert was hurt, why did they let the attack happen why didn't they intervene to help Robert in any way?

**15:35** [REDACTED]: So what is the RUC's version of events? In the days between the assault and Robert Hamill's death the RUC issued five statements apparent inconsistencies in some of them has caused anger, hurt and controversy.

In the first statement released hours after the assault the RUC said there had been "A clash between rival factions" and "...police themselves had come under attack by a section of the crowd" when they moved in to separate the groups involved.

**16:07 E**: Well, if four people constitute a mob and a rival fraction (*sic*), I don't know. I was doing nothing to provoke anybody that night I was going home to my children and to let my baby-sitter go home and to go to work.

**16:23 PETER (COLIN PRUNTY)**: There was never a clash. How could it be a clash when a lynch mob just set upon one fella' and beat him to death and people look around and the police sitting in the land rover.

**16:39** [REDACTED]: Three days later the police said "An RUC land rover crew in Portadown town centre were alerted to a disturbance and immediately intervened to gain order and prevent assaults. The numbers involved, however, were such that these officers were unable to contain the situation and became themselves the subject of attack. Police reinforcement arrived and calm was restored."

**17:02 F**: I don't know how they were attacked when they didn't get out of the jeep and we weren't doing anything on them cos we were lying squealing for help. I was in no fit state to be fighting with anybody.

**17:17 PETER (COLIN PRUNTY)**: They didn't immediately intervene. There's no doubt they sat in the land rover they didn't immediately intervene. They seen what was going on because they were obviously looking out. The back of the land rover was closed; they were bound to have seen what was going on.

**17:32** [REDACTED]: By May 7<sup>th</sup>, the day before Robert Hamill died, the latest RUC statement made no reference to rival factions, immediate intervention or attacks on police. Instead it said four people had been set upon by a large crowd and two men had been viciously beaten. It wasn't until Robert Hamill died the next day that the RUC referred to the attack as sectarian.

**17:57 DIANE HAMILL**: They released statements initially saying that it was a fight between rival factions or rival gangs. They immediately damned my brother as being in a fight and he wasn't they tried to mar him by saying that it was gangs that was totally wrong it's lies. They eventually changed their statements to say that they were totally innocent victims of an attack. That's because it become clear to everyone that they were innocent and we knew all along they were innocent and they just tried to cover their tracks there. I don't know why they give those initial statements or who authorised or where they had come from or why they had tried to do that.

**18:39** [REDACTED]: The police accounts leave many questions unanswered about the events of April 27<sup>th</sup>. The time at which police were first seen on the ground is a matter of some dispute even among eye witnesses. The **E, F** sisters maintain police did not leave their land rover until the ambulance arrived. Other witnesses say that police were on the scene before the ambulance but after Robert Hamill had been fatally assaulted.

**19.03 UNKNOWN WOMAN (MAUREEN MCCOY):** [*reading from statement 19.6.97*] “After a few minutes I noticed the crowd backing off and I went over to see the person who had been attacked. I sat down and **F** shouted at me ‘watch him for me’ I asked her who it was and she said it was Robert. Then I noticed a policeman standing to my left a bit behind me. I seen that he was watching the crowd who had started moving towards us again. The crowd were directly behind me and one of them was shouting ‘I hope you die you Fenian bastard ... I stood up and said that was a terrible thing to say with this fella’ lying here. He said to me ‘Fuck up’”

**19:34 [REDACTED]:** According to witnesses police apparently detained one man after the assault then let him go.

**19.41 PETER (COLIN PRUNTY):** This fella he was in the crowd he had a Rangers’ scarf on, he could easily be seen with a Rangers’ scarf on tied up in a knot. He was in the crowd that was kicking Robert Hamill. Next minute he was led away after police lifted him, brought him down to the land rover and he was put in the back of the land rover for a couple of minutes. By that time I went down to make sure the police got him and next minute the police let him out. I hit him when he was in the back of the land rover... I struck... he got out of the land rover he’s smirking and laughing and he says to me ‘Up the UVF’. He knows who he is and I know who he is.

**20:30 [REDACTED]:** Insight has taken a sworn statement from another witness which corroborates this version of events. The key question is how exactly the RUC acted that night. Witnesses say the **E, F** sisters were screaming for help so loudly they could be heard by people in Woodhouse Street further from the scene of the attack than the land rover.

**20.51 ‘STEPHEN’ (COLIN HULL):** They couldn’t hear it or they couldn’t see it? Well, where the land rover’s parked outside the Halifax where the two boys were beat was at the bottom of Thomas Street near on the main road that’s about twenty two feet and I was away down Woodhouse Street and I could hear it. How the RUC couldn’t hear it from twenty two feet and I could hear it from approximately one hundred feet, I don’t know what they’re talking about. There’s no way they couldn’t have seen it. I was shouting too “What are youse doing are you not going to do anything about this here? It’s ridiculous you’re sitting watching it, get out and do something”.

**21:39 [REDACTED]:** A number of witnesses claim at least one woman banged on the back of the land rover for help.

**21:50 [REDACTED]:** What makes the situation all the more disturbing is that officers were warned. One man who says he left the club fifteen minutes before the Hamill party told police of the potential for trouble when he spotted Loyalist youths gathered in Market Street.

**22.04 UNNAMED (THOMAS MALLON):** I left St Patrick’s club about fifteen minutes before Robert Hamill. There were clusters of youths around Market Street and it looked to me like there could be trouble. I saw a police land rover parked outside the Alliance & Leicester building society. It began to move off as I approached it so I flagged it down and told the police that people were leaving the club and there was a good chance of an attack. They didn’t really see to respond so I just walked on home. It’s unbelievable when you look back and think what happened afterwards.

**22:35** [REDACTED]: The RUC says that due to legal constraints it can't comment about what happened but Insight has established what we understand to be their version of events. It's believed the police contend they moved their land rover across Woodhouse Street in anticipation of trouble, that contrary to witnesses three officers were on the ground a matter of minutes before the assault happened and when trouble broke out those officers intervened immediately as a female colleague radioed for back-up. That back-up arrived within two and a half minutes it's understood the police say their officers had to contend with a number of skirmishes during the incident. Three people were questioned and released following the assault. After Robert Hamill died six men were charged with his murder. One of them is still in custody the other five were freed when the charges were withdrawn. The reason believed to be the withdrawal of witness statements and confusion over identification evidence. In a statement this afternoon, the Director of Public Prosecutions said in relation to the five the evidence was insufficient to provide a reasonable prospect of conviction. It went on to say police enquiries continue in relation to certain matters but did not say what those matters were.

**23:46** DIANE HAMILL: If you can ever imagine somebody really close to you dying and then they die two more times. That's what it's like our Robert has died three times. Each time they let someone out they kill him again and they kill us again. That's the only way I can explain it. They don't care. The police authorities and Government authorities whatever there is whoever can make a difference don't care, don't seem to care at the minute. We're trying to make them care.

**24:19** [REDACTED]: To compound their grief the Hamill family has suffered a sustained hate campaign since Robert's murder. Diane has been goaded in the street by a man who simulated the attack jumping up and down as if on someone's head. Another family of the same name in Portadown has had at least one late night call asking for Robert followed with abuse and the comment "We know he's not f\*\*\*ing there".

**24:43** DIANE HAMILL: Well after Robert died mummy wanted us to put flowers up where he'd been attacked and we did that. Every night without fail they would disappear, every petal. We used to sellotape them round the pole, every petal and every piece of cello tape would disappear. It was almost as if they wanted to remove every trace of it so that the people of Portadown wouldn't be reminded of what had happened there. We did that for about a month but it was just breaking our mummy's heart. It's very, very hurtful but I'm not surprised by it we're not surprised at all. Portadown has a special kind of bitterness in it and a special kind of badness directed at people of my kind as such, you know, amplified in my brother's murder. I said before to someone that my brothers and sisters we can handle it you now but it's tearing my mum apart.

**25:36** [REDACTED]: The Hamills' have mounted a vigorous campaign to keep their brother's case in the public eye. A twenty thousand strong petition has been presented to the Secretary of State. Their complaint about the RUC is being overseen by the Independent Commission for Police Complaints the Hamills having made the complaint say they have no faith in that investigation; of the fifty seven civilian witnesses the ICPC requested statements two came forward most others simply refused to participate

**26:14** [REDACTED]: [REDACTED] the mother of Robert Hamill's three children had known him for nine years. After he was attacked she sensed he wasn't going to survive.

**26:25** [REDACTED]: The doctors didn't really... they didn't build our hopes up or anything. They didn't know the full extent of the injuries either but they just, they sort of knew the last week like that he wouldn't be back home again. You know, I knew he would never be himself again, you know, but he wouldn't have wanted to have been lying the way that he was. Somebody so big and strong you just wouldn't have believed they would have been left in that state. [REDACTED] knows he sort of guessed on his own you know with people calling to the house and that, what had happened. Then eventually we told [REDACTED] but [REDACTED] didn't seem to understand but [REDACTED] knew like that everything wasn't fine.

**27:02** [REDACTED]: How long after Robert's death was [REDACTED] born?

**27:04** [REDACTED]: Exactly twelve weeks to the day. She was born twelve weeks after Robert died, so she was so we were happy that day but at the same time we were sad. You just don't know what to think, you know, it's just ... even myself you just keep thinking he's going appear, like. It's just so hard to take in.

**27:25** [REDACTED]: When the criminal proceedings are over the question of possible disciplinary action against the police involved will be decided but the Hamills' aren't convinced that either will provide them with the answers to their many questions. They are suing the RUC for negligence and considering other legal options in the hope that that can get the full facts of the night of April 27 1997 into the public domain.

**27:48** DIANE HAMILL: You know, the Hamill family's not going to lie down and take it. If I have a breath left in my body I'm not going to lie down and take it. I've nothing to lose now.