

# Unionist violence continues in Northern Ireland

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The political shock resulting from the arson murder of the Quinn brothers, Richard, 11, Mark, 9, and Jason, 8, continues to reverberate throughout Northern Ireland.

The funeral of the three boys at the Catholic Church of Our Lady and St Patrick, Ballymoney, held on Tuesday, was attended by thousands of mourners, both Catholic and Protestant. The tragic deaths of the children of Christine Quinn, a Roman Catholic woman living with a Protestant man, Thomas Craig, has become a focus of the desire of working people to see an end to sectarian violence.

Predictably, British Prime Minister Blair, US President Clinton and Irish Premier Bruton all called for the deaths to act as a spur to unionist opponents of the Northern Ireland Agreement, like the Orange Order, to abandon their mass protest at Drumcree, Portadown and accept the new constitutional arrangements that have been established.

The main unionist newspaper, the *Belfast Telegraph*, wrote disparagingly of the campaign to march through the mainly Catholic residential area, asking, 'Did they really not know that once they had set their protest in motion the bigoted extremists would embark on an orgy of lawbreaking and destruction?'

None of this display of handwringing has done anything to curb the atrocities being perpetrated by loyalist thugs, which amount to a systematic campaign of ethnic cleansing directed against Catholic families.

The deaths of the Quinn brothers followed days of organised violence against families on the Carnany estate and throughout Northern Ireland. The boys' uncle, Francis Quinn, said the family had been harassed for two years before this: 'Threats, letters, bombs through the windows, it goes on and on.'

Two men, one with connections with a loyalist paramilitary organisation, are being questioned about

the murders. They were arrested in police raids on two houses on the estate. Police believe the Quinn residence was attacked by a number of men who had earlier set up a burning barricade across the main road at the entrance to the Carnany Estate. A small number of loyalists are said to have left the barricade with the intention of attacking Catholic-occupied houses in the estate.

Five Catholic families on the estate received threats from a loyalist terror group, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), on the weekend of the attack on the Quinn's home. Envelopes containing bullets and the message 'UVF! Get Out' led one family who had lived there for 27 years to move out. The oldest of Christine Quinn's boys, 13-year-old Lee, was staying with his grandmother, Irene, who had fled the Carnany estate only days before. 'I'm a Protestant, my daughter's a Catholic, we are a mixed family. We felt uneasy because circumstances on the estate weren't the same as when we moved into it,' she said.

The previous week saw similar attacks mounted across the province. Churches, schools and businesses were targeted, as well as homes. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive was swamped with requests from families applying to be re-housed.

Such is the level of intimidation that police in riot gear accompanied Catholic families moving out of mainly Protestant estates; in Antrim petrol bombers even attacked the moving men. Protestant families who have shown sympathy to their Catholic neighbours have also been attacked. This has led to retaliatory fire bombings against Orange Halls.

Between July 4 and July 14, the days covered by the Drumcree siege, there have been 615 attacks on the security forces, including 24 shooting incidents and 45 blast bomb attacks, 284 arrests for public order

incidents, 76 Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) officers injured, 632 petrol bombings, 2,250 petrol bombs recovered, 178 vehicle hijackings, 144 homes damaged, 165 other buildings damaged, 467 vehicles attacked and 837 plastic baton rounds fired. The costs of policing this are already estimated to be upwards of £40 million.

Overnight on Monday and early Tuesday morning the level of violence and disorder at Drumcree was reduced in comparison to previous nights. There was just one petrol bomb attack on the security forces, seven petrol bombings and attacks on several homes, leading to only 18 arrests. Many Orange Order members stayed away from Drumcree, with the encouragement of their leaders.

Throughout the province, however, there was no lessening of violence. Roy Greenslade in the *Guardian* notes that in the 24 hours leading up to 6.00 a.m. on Wednesday, there were 191 attacks on police and British troops, 412 petrol bombings, 73 houses damaged, 93 other buildings attacked and 136 vehicles hijacked.

All of this has had a disastrous impact on the economic life of the province. Coupled with fears of a descent into all-out civil war, this has provoked divisions within the Orange Order.

The chaplain for County Armagh, Reverend William Bingham, has repeated his call for the protest at Drumcree to end. Three Orange Order grand chaplains and about 15 deputy grand chaplains supported him. The Grand Master of the Orange Order, Robert Saulters, said the situation at Drumcree will now 'probably quiet down into a Greenham Common-type of protest,' referring to a pacifist protest outside US air bases in Britain in the 1980s.

The main opponent of the Northern Ireland Agreement, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leader Ian Paisley, rejected this climb-down. The Portadown Orange Lodge is also opposed to such a move and has attacked both Bingham and Saulters. Joel Patton from the 'Spirit of Drumcree' group said Bingham was a traitor, and heckled the chaplain during a demonstration at Pomeroy in County Tyrone on Monday, where there were scuffles between Orangemen.

Saulters and others have raised their fear of a possible break-up of the Orange Order itself and the entire

Unionist movement. Saulters warned, 'splintered unionism is no match for tightly-knit [Irish] nationalism.' He added that, after the referendum and the Assembly elections, unionists had moved into 'a new and very different political environment,' requiring a 'positive approach to these new political circumstances and structures.'

The dissident Ulster Unionist MP, Jeffrey Donaldson, opposes the Agreement in defiance of the official line of the Assembly's First Minister David Trimble. He now says it is time 'to urgently reassess the situation' because the unionist share of the vote is declining as a result of disillusionment, brought on by infighting 'and our continual failure to win.' 'The sense of defeatism within unionism is palpable,' he added.

Whatever the immediate outcome of the infighting in the unionist camp, the new political arrangements established by the Northern Ireland Agreement cannot provide a genuine and lasting resolution to the political antagonisms so brutally revealed in the past fortnight. The agreement rather accepts and reinforces the divisions along sectarian lines behind a smoke screen of 'respecting different cultures.'

See Also:

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