

Sectarian violence continues in Northern Ireland despite the "peace process"

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The following article was submitted by a correspondent in Belfast.

Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in April 1998 by both constitutional political parties and those who represent the mainstream pro-British loyalist and republican organisations, violence has continued.

Although it was a commitment of the parties that signed up to the Agreement that they would use only peaceful and democratic means, both loyalist and republican organisations have continued to murder and mutilate at will. However, the violence now being carried out has shifted from outward sectarianism to the internal policing of the working class ghettos that are controlled by republican and loyalist death squads.

The IRA have murdered four people since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, shot 53, beaten and mutilated 136 and exiled 409. The loyalist terrorists who signed up to the Agreement have murdered three people (another man died six weeks after a UDA beating), shot 62, beaten and mutilated 149 and exiled 353. Between them, the loyalist and IRA terrorists have played their part in the intimidation of 1,531 families.

It is also important to note that UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) personnel were involved in the murder of the three young Quinn brothers in July 1998, and that the IRA in South Armagh played their part in helping the "Real IRA" murder 29 men, women and children in the Omagh bombing of August 1998.

Outside of this mainstream violence, republican splinter groups continue to pose a threat to life, although their numbers are small and access to military equipment limited. These include the "Continuity IRA", which is comprised of former members of the provisional IRA who split in 1986 over the recognition of the Irish Government as a legitimate seat of Government, and the "Real IRA", which is made up of

members of the provisional IRA who split in November 1997 after the provisional leadership declared a second cease-fire.

On the loyalist side there are two new groups, the "Red Hand Defenders", who are a small group made up of former UVF, LVF (Loyalist Volunteer Force) and UFF (Ulster Freedom Fighters) personnel, along with the "Orange Volunteers", a small group of religious fundamentalists who have maintained a constant campaign of terror against the nationalist community over the past year. While these splinter groups have access to hand grenades and guns which were imported by Ulster Defence Association (UDA) member Brian Nelson (a British agent) in the 1980s, most of their attacks have been carried out with home-made blast bombs and pipe bombs. It must be pointed out that the two killings claimed by the Red Hand Defenders (lawyer Rosemary Nelson and Elizabeth O'Neil) were in fact carried out by the UDA and LVF respectively.

The British Government have not only ignored the continued violence against the working class community by republican and loyalist terror groups that are supposed to be on cease-fire, but are funding so-called "Restorative Justice" programmes run by the terrorists to the tune of millions of pounds. These programmes have made it much easier for the terrorist organisations to maintain and increase their control over as many as two hundred thousand men, women and children in Northern Ireland.

Restorative Justice is a scheme that was adopted by police forces in Britain to reduce the number of young people going to prison for first offences and petty crime. The Restorative Justice programmes in England are controlled by the police and work in conjunction with other statutory and voluntary agencies. The intention of the scheme is to bring offenders face to

face with their victim, so a form of restoration (compensation) can be agreed for the crime committed. For example, if a young person broke a window, all parties may agree to the offender cutting the victim's grass, or painting their windows under supervision of one or more appointed persons.

In Northern Ireland, the schemes are really the antithesis of the concept of Restorative Justice. Anyone in the community where the terrorists have control that challenges their authority is summoned to the office where they are sentenced to be beaten or shot.

One such case was Andrew Kearney, who was involved in a fight with a leading member of the IRA in early 1998 when he defended a young man being beaten by the IRA member. A few days later at Sinn Fein's Head Quarters in West Belfast, Andrew was sentenced to be shot for fighting with the IRA member. Although Andrew's mother went to Sinn Fein and pleaded for her son not to be shot, she was told that nobody challenges the IRA.

On July 19, 1998 eight members of the IRA entered Andrew's home, took his two-week-old baby from his arms and shot him dead. He leaves behind four young children, all under the age of seven. Even though the IRA admitted that it was responsible for Andrew's murder, the British Government took no sanction against Sinn Fein in the Northern Ireland Assembly. This is not Restorative Justice, but state-sponsored terrorism.

People who have offered a different political viewpoint than Sinn Fein within the republican community have been kidnapped, beaten and shot by the IRA. At the height of this activity in November 1998, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, thanked the IRA for policing the process.

The British and Irish Governments know that dissatisfaction with the current "peace process" is most likely to come from working class areas. They are quite happy to allow the republican and loyalist terrorist organisations to police the areas where they have taken control by terror and intimidation over the past 30 years.

Both governments are determined to impose a deal on Northern Ireland so that the creation of political stability would allow for further transnational investment into an area that has a highly skilled and cheap workforce that is situated close to the European

"mainland" and can allow for expansion and contraction as the global market dictates. This political stability, alongside inward investment, would mean that British government subsidies to the region could be reduced and responsibility for reductions in health care, education, Social Services, etc., would rest with local representatives.

The sponsorship of community-based terrorism by the British government means that when the Assembly's Minister for Health (Martin McGuinness of Sinn Fein and the IRA Army Council) reduces health care spending in working class areas, there will be little challenge from community and voluntary sector organisations.



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