

Northern Ireland: Loyalist paramilitaries had security intelligence files

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A clampdown on loyalist paramilitaries carried out by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) resulted in the discovery of some 300 security files in an Orange Hall in Stoneyford, Co Antrim.

The source of the files is still in dispute, but reports indicate that they came either from the RUC itself or from British Army intelligence. They contain photographs, and the names and addresses of republicans from Belfast and South Armagh. It is believed they were used by loyalist paramilitaries opposed to the Good Friday Agreement to draw up lists of targets for their ongoing terror campaign against Catholics.

Although Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Mandelson praised the RUC for its discovery, the find is particularly embarrassing for the police force. Long regarded as merely the judicial arm of the Protestant ruling class, its drive against loyalist paramilitaries was meant to give it a more "neutral" image. This is considered essential by those campaigning to "Save the RUC" in the wake of the Patten Report, which recommended the establishment of a new Northern Ireland Police Service.

In addition, the find raises new questions regarding the longstanding allegations of collusion between the security services and the loyalist paramilitaries. In the murder of civil rights lawyer Pat Finucane 10 years ago, and the more recent killing of Rosemary Nelson, also a lawyer, the issue of such collusion has been central to the demands for a public inquiry.

A spokesman for the Pat Finucane Centre told the *World Socialist Web Site*: "There is no doubt that there was collusion in Pat Finucane's death. There was collusion both from Army Intelligence and the RUC Special Branch. What has to be seen is at how high a level this collusion was."

The spokesman said that the discovery of the documents "places the whole issue of police reform in perspective", and in particular the issue of cross-border police collaboration. "Should the Garda [Southern Irish police] be providing information to the RUC under conditions where 300 files go missing?" they asked.

Sinn Féin has called on the Irish Justice Minister John O'Donoghue to halt the flow of information from the Garda to the RUC and other British intelligence agencies. They have demanded a meeting with Northern Ireland Security Minister Adam Ingram, condemning the fact that the 300 people in the files were not immediately told of the danger they faced.

Security sources have linked the documents to a group known as the Orange Volunteers, which has been carrying out sectarian attacks on Catholics across Ireland. The Stoneyford Orange Order has denied any connection with the group, claiming no knowledge of how the documents came to be in its premises.

The suspected leader of the Orange Volunteers gave himself up to police last week after 10 days on the run. He was arrested at his home near Stoneyford Orange Hall. A former soldier in the Royal Irish Regiment and a prominent member of the Magheragall district of the Orange Order in Co Antrim, the suspect is a key-holder of the hall where the documents were found.

If he is charged with terrorist offences, it will prove another embarrassment for the Orange Order. The suspect has been a prominent campaigner against re-routing Orange marches away from nationalist areas, has attended meetings of the organisation's ruling body, the Grand Lodge of Ireland, and has been interviewed on television criticising the policies of Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble.

This development also poses problems for the Unionist camp in the ongoing talks to resolve the

deadlock over the so-called peace process. As the talks entered their tenth week Monday, the Unionists were still insisting that the IRA's refusal to decommission arms, and the continued threat of Republican terrorism, justified their opposition to Sinn Fein taking up ministerial seats on the new power-sharing Northern Ireland Assembly executive.



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