

Fourthwrite

Special Supplement

November 2000

Comment

The SDLP party is led by the celebrated Nobel peace prize winner John Hume. The deputy leader of the party acts as Deputy First Minister in the Stormont Assembly. Throughout the long years of conflict in the North of Ireland, the two men were strong and frequent critics of the Provisional IRA. Both men were strangely silent when the same organisation was blamed recently for killing Joseph O'Connor in West Belfast. What has changed to alter their capacity for outspokenness?

Perhaps they felt that the Provisionals were not responsible. If that is the case, they did not say so in public. The suspicion lingers therefore that they preferred not to know than to be placed in the difficult position of saying something that might undermine the newly built Executive sitting at Stormont.

Whatever the reason behind their silence, they were not on their own. The RUC, so quick in the past to reveal forensic traces when republicans were involved, was dumbstruck for once. The Catholic hierarchy was equally reluctant to speak up. Dublin government officials would make no comment either. The list is longer than this but the point is clear - nobody was going to endanger the Good Friday Agreement by asking difficult questions.

The killing of Mr. O'Connor raises questions for republicans. However, it also raises questions for all groups claiming to be working for democracy on this island. What are the prospects for an agreed settlement arrived at through consensus if political stability hinges on remaining silent about murder. Democracy is not about silence. It is about honesty, transparency and freedom of speech. Can freedom of speech exist if investigation depends on the courage of two people speaking out while Nobel prize winners and Deputy First Ministers, and many others, calculate the cost of condemning murder?

SWP statement

The Socialist Workers Party wishes to express its deep concern at the intimidation of members of the Republican Writers Group in West Belfast.

After issuing a statement concerning the killing of Joe O'Connor in Ballymurphy, Anthony McIntyre and Tommy Gorman have been subjected to veiled threats and pickets of their homes. Anthony McIntyre, along with his wife and children, has been forced to leave his home as a result. We believe that these actions can only be designed to create an atmosphere of intimidation and to prevent free speech.

The Republican Writers Group members have made it clear that their statement was not intended to endanger anyone. However, it appears that others have seized on it as an opportunity to try to close down debate. This is a deplorable denial of freedom and should be opposed by anyone concerned with the democratic right to free speech.

The Republican Writers Group has provided a valuable forum for an open discussion of the future for republicanism, the struggle for socialism in Ireland and other political issues, while at all times rejecting any suggestion of a return to armed struggle. They are to be congratulated for having had the courage to do this. The interest which their magazine has sparked is clear proof of the wide desire for such a debate.

But this debate isn't welcome to those who feel they shouldn't have to establish their entitlement to the support of the Nationalist community but who rather claim authority over it.

It is a matter of concern that some members of Sinn Fein are reported to have been involved in the intimidation of the members of the RWG. It is ironic, to say the least, that members of parties which were once themselves denied the right to free speech by the British establishment are now involved in denying the same right to others.

Colm Bryce

Statement

We carry below the full text of a statement issued by the Irish Republican Writers Group on 14 October 2000, calling for an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the killing of Joseph O'Connor

IRWG calls for inquiry into shooting of Joseph O'Connor

The IRWG deplors the shooting to death of Joseph O'Connor. We understand that the late Mr. O'Connor was a member of the Rea IRA and while we profoundly disagree with that organisation's pursuit of an armed campaign, we condemn the murder of any republican. The IRWG believe that this incident raises a number of disturbing questions:

- Is it true that erstwhile Republicans now supporting the GFA and the new Stormont administration shot Joseph O'Connor dead?
- Did the BBC's recent Panorama programme isolating the RIRA influence the timing of the assassination of Joseph O'Connor?
- Why was the RUC so quick to confirm that the deceased was a 'key RIRA activist'?
- Why did the RUC initially credit the assassination to dissident feuding?
- Was the RUC raid on the RSF Belfast office, at or about the time of the shooting, done to deliberately sow doubt as to the perpetrators' identities?
- Why did SF Councillor Sean McKnight mention 'pre-existing tension' in his statement; who did this tension exist between, and what, if any bearing did it have on the murder?
- Unlike previous occasions, why did Alex Attwood of the SDLP refuse to speculate on the identity of the perpetrators?
- Is it a coincidence that the family at the centre of a public debate regarding state collusion in the murder of Francisco Notorantonio should be subject to murder again?

All of these questions raise the frightening probability that Joseph O'Connor was the victim of a political assassination carried out by forces loyal to the Stormont regime. In short, the execution of Joseph O'Connor may have the same rationale as that which led to the execution of Rory O'Connor in 1922. That is - the killing of an Irish republican in order to copperfasten an anti-republican treaty.

The IRWG believes that it is imperative that a thoroughgoing and credible inquiry be held to determine the truth of this case and that a report be published of its findings. Such a report should be coupled with recommendations to prevent further bloodletting.

Independent inquiry necessary says IRSP

The IRSP are supporting the call by senior non aligned republicans for an independent inquiry into the murder of O'laigh na hEireann Volunteer Jo Jo O'Connor in Ballymurphy. IRSP Ard Comhairle representative Paul Little said:

"The murder of Vol. O'Connor stands a damning indictment on those who claim to be representing mainstream Irish republicanism. There is little doubt that this was a state sponsored killing, the facts remain irrefutable: a republi-

can lies murdered in his own estate and the only people who benefit from his death are the British and their administration in Ireland. The republican family reject totally this cowardly action and those who carried out this foul deed should find no succour within the republican working class community. There can never be any excuse for republican killing republican. The IRSP say this fully conscious of our own past difficulties when the republican socialist movement came under armed attack." 17/10/00

John Meehan writes:

"It is essential to draw a line here - political differences among republicans are one thing, but killing political opponents must be rigorously and actively opposed. It is essential to mount a political defence of the elementary right to hold opinions that differ from the Provisional leadership. I understand the Irish Republican Writers' Group has called for an independent enquiry into the killing of Joe O'Connor - this should be supported."

John Meehan

"Own up to killing"

*Call in statement from
Republican Sinn Fein*

Republican Sinn Fein deplores the shooting dead of Joe O'Connor of Ballymurphy in Belfast today by an unknown element. We call on those responsible for this deliberate shooting to declare themselves and spell out to the people what their motives are. Local sources indicate that the deceased was associated with the 32-County Sovereignty Movement.

Republican Sinn Fein has no hesitation in condemning this action and points out the obvious dangers that lie ahead. We demand that those who killed Joe O'Connor take responsibility publicly for their action and we express sympathy to his family and friends.

Letter from Switzerland

To Sinn Fein Party Chairman

Dear Madam, dear Sir,

According to newspaper articles two members of the republican movement have visited the home of Anthony McIntyre in Belfast last Tuesday. And on Thursday there was a picket in front of his home. It appears that the two visits were thinly veiled threats - they occurred because Mr. McIntyre dared to speak his mind and write down his opinion.

According to some information members of your party have been involved. Is this what Sinn Fein means when it talks about democracy? Is this the new republican way of dealing with freedom of opinion?

Could you please explain to me what all this is about? A reply would be very welcome.

Yours sincerely

Dr. Peter Wuhrer
Foreign editor
Die WochenZeitung (WoZ)
Zurich Switzerland

Support in New York

The letter below indicates that the IRWG call for an inquiry has support from abroad

We the undersigned wish to express our growing alarm at the circumstances surrounding the recent murder of Joseph O'Connor in Belfast. Mr. O'Connor was reportedly associated with the 'Real IRA' and the dissident republican organization, 'The 32 County Sovereignty Committee'. Mr. O'Connor's family have held the Provisional Republican Movement responsible for his death. If this is the case it would mark a very dangerous turn of events in Northern Ireland. Members of the Republican Writers Group - former IRA prisoners who advocate a non-violent, free exchange of ideas about the Peace Process - were asked to conduct a preliminary investigation into the killing. The 'Writers Group' issued a statement published in the Irish News stating that their inquiries concluded that "the Provisional IRA carried out this assassination." We are not in a position to know whether this is the case or not. However, the fact that a prominent member of the 'Writers Group', Anthony McIntyre was subsequently threatened by senior Provisionals does little to allay suspicions and a lot to instil fear in the nationalist community in the North.

It is one of the unfortunate residues of the republican tradition that political disagreements are often "settled" by violence. The free and unfettered flow of ideas is fundamental to any democratic society and the right to dissent must be respected by all. The use of assassination and threat to intimidate those with whom you don't agree is a censorship that should be denounced by all democrats. Regardless of one's view of violent organizations like the Real IRA, the killing of Joseph O'Connor demands an independent inquiry by respected human rights leaders. An inquiry should attempt to both clarify the circumstances of his death and determine the organization responsible. It is in the interests of all those who value freedom of expression that such an independent inquiry should take place. Truth and accountability should always take precedence over fear and paranoia.

Sincerely,

Mary Elizabeth Bartholomew, Attorney
Sandy Boyer - Human Rights Activist
Kathy Byrne - Human Rights Activist
T.J. English, Author
Patrick Farrelly - Journalist
Brendan Fay - Lesbian and Gay Rights Activist
Laura Flanders, Journalist and Broadcaster
Mary Ellen Grogan - Human Rights Activist
Janet Noble - Playwright
Kate O'Callaghan, Journalist
Larry Ottway, Musician
James Ridgeway, Journalist
Mary Ann Wadden - Independent Curator
New York City

Is Gerry A McCarthy?

The article below was written by Anthony McIntyre in response to Gerry Adam's claim in the American newspaper Irish Voice that Anthony McIntyre and Tommy Gorman are fellow travellers of the Real IRA

Writing in the *Irish Voice* of 25 October 2000, Gerry Adams mentioned an article published in the Belfast morning newspaper, *Irish News*, which claimed that, the Provisional IRA shot and killed Joseph O'Connor. Mr. Adams described the authors as fellow travellers of the Real IRA. Since the only piece of writing of that nature was drafted by Tommy Gorman and myself, it must be assumed that Mr. Adams is pointing the finger at us. Let me make something plain, this dangerous "McCarthyite" like accusation has no basis in fact.

In the *Irish News* article, to which Mr. Adams refers, we spelled out not only our "stringent opposition to the Real IRA" but also said very clearly that:

"We reject totally any call made for revenge and state unambiguously that there are no circumstances in which RIRA activity against republicans or others could be justified."

If that was not clear enough for Mr. Adams, he had only to read the many public statements and other writings emanating from us since the Real IRA was formed. No seri-

ous commentator on the Irish situation - apart from Mr Adams it seems - believes that Tommy Gorman or I have any sympathy for the Real IRA.

The reality is that Joseph O'Connor was shot dead in broad daylight in West Belfast and by any standard, any such killing creates real cause for concern.

If Mr Adams believes that the Provisional IRA had no part in the death of his constituent and neighbour, surely he should support the call for an investigation. It would, without doubt, be better to ascertain from where the perpetrators come than to vilify those asking for clarification of a dangerous situation. A credible inquiry would not only clear the air but would also reduce tension.

Under these circumstances it is surprising that Mr. Adams did not condemn the murder (and the murderers) in his article in the *Irish Voice*. It would seem to be the normal reaction of any political representative when commenting on the slaying of one of his constituents, not to mention the grandson of a

personal friend. To issue a clear denunciation of the killers would send an unmistakable message to anyone condoning or contemplating bloodshed.

Furthermore, if the Provisional IRA is not responsible for the killing, as Mr. Adams says, why does he not demand to know the identity of this ruthless band of assassins roaming his constituency? Surely that would be one of the first questions that any representative should ask when daylight murder is committed in his or her district. It would also allow all of us living in West Belfast to be on our guard against these killers now on the loose.

It seems to me that when writing for the *Irish Voice*, Mr. Adams should give deep consideration to matters such as these before bandying unsubstantiated and unsustainable accusations. The blunt reality is that he appears more determined to chasten those calling for a credible inquiry rather than to expose the organisation culpable for a ruthless killing. The truth may be painful but honest people should never fear it.

Anthony McIntyre

The Gorman Statement

On Friday 20 October 2000, Tommy Gorman issued a statement to the Irish News in order to counter claims that he had acted dishonourably when he called for an inquiry into the shooting of Joseph O'Connor. Some people chose to interpret his second statement as a retraction on his original demand. We reprint his second statement in full below and leave our readers to make up their own minds as to what he meant.

Statement

Having talked with many of my friends and neighbours, I am now aware of the distress caused by the recent statement issued by myself and Anthony McIntyre on Tuesday 17 October 2000 and carried in the *Irish News* of that date. My purpose was not to cause distress and it was certainly not my intention to endanger anyone.

My only concern was to prevent further internecine bloodletting. It was and remains my opinion that this is best done by the achievement of two things.

First is the realisation that nobody can be shot dead without questions being asked as to the reason and the source of the action. Secondly, that by demonstrating

clearly that it is possible to use moral persuasion to prevent further loss of life, angry young men may be dissuaded from resorting to bloodletting in a misguided attempt to seek revenge.

My first objective has in some way been fulfilled and I pray that my second objective remains a reality. End

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