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## Republicans and unionists side by side at Northern Ireland policeman's funeral

By Claire McNeilly  
Friday, 13 March 2009

Leading Sinn Fein figures today joined government ministers, unionists and senior police officers to stand shoulder to shoulder with mourners at the funeral of PSNI Constable Stephen Carroll in another watershed moment for Northern Ireland.

It was the first time party members have attended the funeral of a security forces officer killed by a republican group.



They heard the priest attack 48-year-old Constable Carroll's killers, saying they do not know patriotism means. [MORE PICTURES](#)

Canon Liam Stevenson, addressing hundreds of mourners in and around St Therese's church in Constable Carroll's home town, Banbridge, said the murders of the policeman and two soldiers in Antrim had been designed to destabilise the peace process but would fail because of the determination of ordinary people.

Describing 'patriotism' as "one of the most abused words in the English language," Canon Stevenson continued: "In this very way the killers of Constable Carroll have abused the term patriotism. I see patriotism more in terms of the love of people, and specifically here in Northern Ireland the love of all its people."

The priest added that the murders of Constable Carroll — the first PSNI officer to die at the hands of paramilitaries — and Sappers Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimkar, would not plunge Northern Ireland back into the troubled times of the past. "We certainly do not want to lose the peace," he said.

"We will not lose the peace because so many people are so determined to move forward."

And he added: "A united people cannot be waylaid. Today is a day for peace."

Canon Stevenson was speaking from an altar garlanded with yellow, pink and white spring flowers. From mid-morning mourners had been arriving at the small church and after it was packed to capacity many more stood outside to pay their respects to Constable Carroll, who was shot by Continuity IRA gunmen after responding to a report of suspicious activity in Craigavon on Monday night.

His death came just 48 hours after the murders of the two Royal Engineers by the Real IRA outside Massereene Barracks in Antrim.

Before the funeral, Canon Stevenson, along with scores of townsfolk and a boy and girl from each primary and post-primary school in the area, gathered at Downshire bridge to pray and observe a three minute silence — one minute for each of the victims.

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Earlier Sinn Fein's Upper Bann MLA John O'Dowd said: "Constable Carroll was helping to build the new environment created by the Good Friday Agreement which was about removing forces in our society including security forces."

"The PSNI is part of that new environment and it is therefore right and proper that we attend the funeral as a mark of respect to Constable Carroll and an act of solidarity."

Mr O'Dowd, joined by Policing Board member and former Belfast Lord Mayor Alex Maskey and Banbridge councillor Dessie Ward, added: "We are giving public voice to the unified community stance we have seen this week, with people clearly saying 'we are not going back'."

The Sinn Fein trio, as well as other rank-and-file members, were present alongside DUP representatives, including the MP for the area, David Simpson, Secretary of State Shaun Woodward, Security Minister Paul Goggins and other politicians.

The DUP's Gregory Campbell said: "There was a time, even after the republican movement realised the futility of their killing campaign, when they would have refused to speak to a police officer, let alone stand alongside the Chief Constable."

"This week we have witnessed republican leaders urging their community to cooperate fully with the police and provide them with information to bring dissident republican criminals to justice."

Referring to the Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness's characterisation of the republican splinter groups as 'traitors', the East Londonderry MP said that it demonstrated a gulf opening up within republicanism.

Banbridge came to a standstill during the funeral, as thousands of people descended on the town to pay respects to the long-serving police officer.

And there were emotional scenes as family, friends and colleagues said their last goodbyes after the death of yet another innocent victim in Northern Ireland.

In and around the area there was massive traffic disruption as roads were closed for several hours before and after the service.

Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde led a delegation of mourners from the PSNI at today's funeral, which saw a huge security presence.

SDLP leader Mark Durkan also attended, alongside prominent members of Northern Ireland's other main political parties, including the DUP MLA Jimmy Spratt and Ulster Unionist deputy leader Danny Kennedy.

First Minister Peter Robinson and Mr McGuinness, now in America after postponing their visit after Mr Carroll's killing and the attack on two soldiers in Antrim last Saturday, called at the Carroll family home on Tuesday to offer their condolences.


Constable Carroll had lived for several years in Newbridge, Co Kildare, before moving to England and then settling in Co Down. He was due to retire next year and was looking forward to taking up a new career as a personal trainer.

He is survived by his wife and 'best friend' Kate, stepson Shane and grandchildren Dean, Katelyn, Jordan and Jake.

A 17-year-old youth and a 37-year-old man have been arrested in connection with his murder. Constable Carroll's brutal death came just 48 hours after the two soldiers were gunned down by the Real IRA and died in a hail of 60 bullets in a pizza delivery ambush.

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