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## Opinion

### How Republic let IRA get away with murder

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Friday, April 25, 2008

By Kevin Myers

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Garret FitzGerald — a former Taoiseach — recently condemned journalists for not publicly naming Gerry Adams as being a member of the IRA. Excellent! But when he was either Minister for Foreign Affairs, leader of the Opposition or Taoiseach, throughout so many years of the Troubles, he had ample opportunity to name all sorts of people as IRA men, and in the privilege of the Dail. However, he chose not to do so.

'Slab' Murphy, for example, was known to the authorities since 1970 as the most deadly IRA terrorist in the Louth area — but Dr FitzGerald never named him. One might adjudge such reticence as prudent reluctance to prejudice a forthcoming trial: except, of course, there was no such trial. 'Slab' Murphy was only charged, for the first time in his life, earlier this year.

Now, I do not single out Dr FitzGerald for mention because he was especially negligent or hypocritical or insufficiently forceful in his attitude towards the IRA.

I do so because he mentioned the failure of journalists to do our duty in outing prominent members of the IRA.

And he is right. Journalists have their fair share of the moral responsibility for the catastrophe of the Troubles. So too do lawyers, both for their timidity in interpreting the libel laws, for the role of some as sympathetic legal advisers to the IRA, and most of all, as a profession, for their failure to pro-actively defend the rights of the victims of terrorism. It could have been otherwise. Take the Veronica Guerin murder, when the state, the media and the legal profession moved heaven and earth to ensure the culprits were caught. But the same combined will was never evident in dealing with the IRA, or indeed, with other terrorists.

How was it possible that the government in which Garret FitzGerald was foreign minister did not seek the extradition of the UVF men responsible for the Dublin and Monaghan bombings in 1974? The Garda had the names of nine of them. Was it for fear that if this state successfully brought northern loyalists to book in the Republic, they should then have to extradite republican terrorists to the North? And of course, this was not what we were prepared to do.

In the round, as a society, we preferred for the IRA campaign to continue, rather than for us to take the necessary measures to quash it. No one can single out any individual or group here. It was a generalised condition. But Garret FitzGerald was Minister for Foreign Affairs when the IRA arms vessel, the Claudia, was captured by the Naval Service in 1973. The response of the government of the day was contemptibly abject.

"A protest might spur Col Gadafy to provide further supplies," said a Department of Foreign Affairs internal memo. Libyan involvement with the IRA was probably "due to a misunderstanding by Colonel Gadafy of the position in Ireland".

Good. So Dr FitzGerald said nothing. Our ambassador did not confront that Gadafy goon in his den to clear up that misunderstanding.

He did not declare that in arming the IRA, he was arming the enemies of the government of Ireland, ones that had already murdered one of Dr FitzGerald's Oireachtas colleagues, Senator Billy Fox.

The result of our do-nothing policy was that Gadafy was to supply another 130 tons of guns and explosives to the IRA in the next 25 years. Another 3,000 people died in the course of a campaign largely maintained by Libya. La Mon, Warrenpoint, Mullaghmore, Enniskillen: all done with Gadafy's Semtex. Hmmm. Quite a foreign policy triumph.

Moreover, the government — in which, may I remind you, Dr FitzGerald was foreign minister — allowed the gun-smuggling crew of the Claudia to depart, without charge. The IRA leader, Joe Cahill — arrested in the

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course of this seminal arms-smuggling operation — was later given a mere three years' imprisonment by that risible anti-terrorist instrument, the Special Criminal Court, before which not even a kindergarten infant would quail. As it happened, he didn't even do that time (a poor heart, the poor dear), was soon released, and returned to his happy life of organising murder and grieving for another two-and-a-half decades.

Two years after the Claudia debacle, and still while Dr FitzGerald was in government, the IRA murdered the British ambassador Christopher Ewart-Biggs and his secretary Judith Cooke, despite Garda intelligence that such an attack was likely.

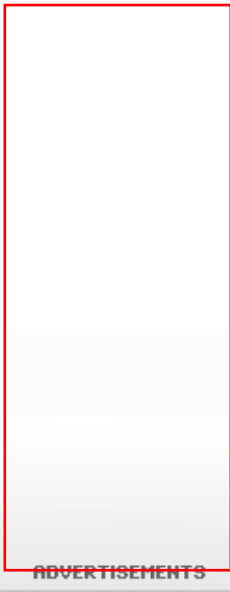
It was one of just many atrocities which should have led to the state rolling up the entire apparatus of the IRA. But no one was ever arrested for this heinous crime against civilisation. However, a garda was later found to have been passing information about the Ewart-Biggs/Cooke murder inquiry to the IRA. He was charged under the Official Secrets Act and appeared before the Kilmainham District Court, where he admitted supplying numerous confidential documents to the IRA. Having heard his guilty plea, the court let him walk free, under the Probation Act. And that's one example of how the Republic treated treason and terrorism, at the very time that Garret FitzGerald was in government.

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