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A time too grave for point scoring

Tuesday, 10 March 2009

The fanaticism which fuels the Real IRA is undiminished even 10 years after the horror of Omagh in which 29 people died.

That seemed an atrocity to end all atrocities and one that would ensure dissident republicanism would wither away. But the events at Massereene Army Barracks at the weekend and last night's murder of a police officer show that the terror gang is beyond reason. It has no politics, so political argument is of no consequence.

The only way it can be halted is through the apprehension, trial and jailing of members when they step outside the law. The Prime Minister is right — those responsible for the two murders and four attempted murders in Antrim and the killing in Craigavon must be hunted down, tried and locked up for a very long time.

It is an indication of how much normality has returned to Northern Ireland, that the events of Saturday and last night are so shocking.

Young people who have little or no memory of the Troubles cannot understand why the murders oc

URRED and those with longer memories do not want to go back to the years of conflict. The peace process has also wrought another change. There was not one single dissenting or equivocal voice raised during yesterday's condemnation of the weekend murders. Republicans were as forthright as unionists in their rejection of what had happened and it was heartening to hear Sinn Fein president Gerry Adams say that his party would be bringing that same message back to their republican heartlands.

Given the petty bickering earlier over the deployment of special forces in the province in response to the heightened threat from dissident republicans

— a move roundly condemned by both Sinn Fein and the SDLP — it was encouraging that unionists did not try to make political capital out of it after the Antrim murders.

Instead, First Minister Peter Robinson, writing exclusively in this newspaper today, points out that the Antrim killings were a direct assault on the peace process and on all the political parties engaged in it. It is, he stresses, a time for unity among the parties and unity among the people of Northern Ireland. It is, indeed, a time too grave for point scoring.

The killings are a particular test for the nationalist and republican communities. Words of condem

nation will not change the minds of the fanatics.

The PSNI obviously did not have intelligence on either operation and now depends on information from within the nationalist and republican communities to help them find the gunmen.

Any society that deems to call itself normal must unequivocally support the forces of law and order in the face of terrorist threat. It cannot do otherwise.

As well, we must remember the families of the policeman and young soldiers killed and also those of the four men injured. It is a great irony that one of those is a Polish man, one of the large number from his country attracted here by the return to normality. He had not known this country in conflict, only in peace, and yet he now lies seriously injured in hospital, a victim of fanatics who cannot let go of the past. To all those families we say, those fanatics do not represent the new Northern Ireland.

There is united political and community will against a return to violence and this latest terrorist threat will be defeated just as previous terror campaigns failed.

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