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## Northern Ireland peace rallies: The silent majority takes to the streets

Thursday, 12 March 2009

Tens of thousands of people have brought towns and city centres across Northern Ireland to a standstill to demonstrate a united rejection of violence.

>> **In Pictures:** Click the image to launch gallery

>> **In Video:** Watch report from Belfast rally

Peace vigils were held yesterday in Belfast, Newry, Londonderry, Lisburn, Downpatrick and Craigavon to show the public disgust over the killings of Sappers Mark Quinsey, (23), Patrick Azimkar, (21) and Constable Stephen Carroll (48) by dissident republicans.



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Police were last night continuing to question a 17 and a 37-year-old man over the murder of Constable Carroll.

He was gunned down three days ago as he responded to a call for help from a distressed woman who said her house was being attacked.

His funeral will take place tomorrow.

A Requiem Mass will be held in St Therese Church in his home town of Banbridge.

There were emotional scenes as the officer's widow Kate watched as a police escort brought her husband's body back to the couple's Banbridge home yesterday.

As people gathered in their thousands to demonstrate against violence across the province, the same message was delivered by Prime Minister Gordon Brown in the House of Commons and by Irish premier Brian Cowen in Dublin.

Mr Brown told MPs: "The peace marches today on the streets of Northern Ireland show what I saw in Northern Ireland on Monday and what we are seeing right across the country.

"The unity against violence of the people and their representatives; the defiance and the determination to stand up to the evil and criminal violence; and the unyielding resolution to say with one voice that the peace that the people of Northern Ireland are building no murderers should ever be allowed to destroy."

MPs later held a rally against the violence outside Westminster, while a cross-community vigil was held last night at the scene of the policeman's murder in Craigavon.

Taoiseach Brian Cowen told the Dail, where politicians backed an all-party motion against the violence, that co-operation between police on both sides of the border had never been closer.

He said he would be joining Northern Ireland First Minister Peter Robinson and deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness in the US to continue the united front politicians have shown in opposition

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to the violence.

"It is important that the voices of the democratic representatives of the people are heard loud and clear at this moment, when the democratic institutions which have been established by the Irish people are being challenged," he said.

"Those institutions are being challenged by a tiny and unrepresentative group of evil people who have no mandate and no support for their actions.

"Their actions are futile. They cannot succeed and they will not succeed."

A Peace Book was opened in Derry's Guildhall by Mayor Gerard Diver for people to register their revulsion.

Earlier yesterday, the Pope denounced the murder of the three security force members as "abominable acts of terrorism".

Benedict XVI condemned the shootings by dissident republicans during an address to pilgrims in St Peter's Square in Vatican City.

He said the murders seriously endangered the political process aimed at achieving peace and justice.

First and Deputy First Ministers Peter Robinson and Martin McGuinness yesterday flew to the US. They had twice previously postponed their investment trip following the three murders earlier this week.

## Belfast peace rally: A dignified silence that spoke volumes

By David Gordon

It was a subdued protest at Belfast City Hall, with silence in the crowd and a lone piper playing.

But the thousands who assembled broke into enthusiastic applause at one point to support sentiments voiced by one speaker.

John Corey from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions said that "most of all" the protest showed that the people of Northern Ireland "want only peace and absolutely no return to violence of any kind".

His statement struck an obvious chord with the crowd.

The piper played Abide with Me and Amazing Grace at what was certainly the biggest union-organised demonstration Belfast has witnessed for many years.

Among the crowd was Jo Marley from west Belfast, who told the Belfast Telegraph how she had felt "sick" on hearing the news this week.

"I grew up in the Troubles. I couldn't believe we were going back to that."

She added that she felt proud of the stand taken by Stormont's politicians this week.

Mrs Jean Kane from south Belfast summed up her reason for being there in one short sentence: "We all want peace."

Mark Cunningham (21) from Cookstown, who remembers very little of the Troubles, said: "I'm here to show support for the community. A very small minority are trying to drag us back, but we are going to keep moving forward."

Belfast's Sinn Fein Mayor Tom Hartley and leading loyalist Jackie McDonald were among those attending the City Hall rally.

Mr Hartley said: "This week has really demonstrated political leadership at its best. The First and deputy First Minister have to be congratulated for the very decisive leadership that they have given.

"They have sent out a very powerful message to this society about the way forward. You can see it has lifted people."

Among the trade union banners on display was one which read: "An injury to one is an injury to all."

## Derry rally

The people of Northern Ireland will never accept the violence of the past being revisited on future generations, thousands who gathered in Londonderry city centre have been told.

Guildhall Square packed up within minutes yesterday afternoon as over 1,000 people from across the North West took part in the 10-minute silent vigil held in response to this week's murders.

Political giants like John Hume and Ivan Cooper stood shoulder-to-shoulder with school children, families, religious leaders and workers out on their lunch break.

The majority of those gathered were from older generations who witnessed first-hand the

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violence of the Troubles.

Inside the Guildhall, the Mayor Gerard Diver yesterday opened a book of peace and urged other councils across Northern Ireland to follow suit to send a powerful message direct from local people to the dissidents who killed the two soldiers and the police officer in Antrim and Craigavon.

Speaking to the crowds outside from the back of a lorry, Eamonn McCann, speaking on behalf of the local branch of the rally organisers, the Irish Council of Trade Unions, said people were determined they were not going back.

He said: "We stood here in protest and in sympathy with the bereaved after the Shankill bombing, the Greysteel massacre, the city of London bombing which broke the original ceasefire, the cruel murder of David Caldwell in the Waterside, and it is our earnest hope that never have to come here again and stand in protest and in sympathy."

He added: "The message from this demonstration here today is never again; no more.

"We stand for peace between our people and an end to the cruel grief inflicted on so many families in this part of the world."

Also speaking at the rally, the secretary of Derry Trades Council Liam Gallagher, said: "The events at Antrim and Craigavon are by any stretch of the imagination despicable and we are asking workers today to send out a powerful, unambiguous message to those who carried out these acts that we are not going back to the past."

One of those who had gathered at the peace vigil in the city centre was 78-year-old Derry man Willie Curran. He said he did not want the children and young people of today to go through what he and others went through.

He said: "I do not agree first of all with murder and I have great sympathy with all the people suffering, the families of the army and the policeman who have been killed and those that are injured.

"I worked with the council and have been hijacked in Creggan under the gun a number of times and I wouldn't like to think it would come back to that again. Nobody wants it; we just want to live in peace."

Una McGuire, from Letterkenny, Co Donegal, was one of hundreds who queued following the rally to sign the book of peace, which will remain open until March 20. She said: "We don't want a small number of people to wreck what we have all voted democratically for: peace."

## Newry rally: A city determined to leave the troubled past behind

In a city which has seen more than its fair share of destruction in the past, feelings have been running high over last weekend's violence.

The mounting disgust at the prospect of a return to the old days was clear in the faces of those gathered at Newry's town hall.

Among them were a group of local firemen, attending under their trade union banner, but also keen to show a sense of professional comradeship with those others who put their lives on the line daily.

"There is a sense of solidarity with people in the security services, but also because if things kick off again we'll be at the sharp end too," said local station commander Dermot Rooney. "Some of us would have served through the Troubles and we are just disgusted with what's happened."

Newry woman Rosaleen Moore said it was important that workers and the public showed their opposition to the latest surge in violence. "I thought we had left all of this behind us. I tremble to think that we are back in similar situation," she said.

"It was a cowardly attack, just an easy way for them to make their point."

Fellow protester Kathleen Murphy described the events as "horrendous".

"I am a mother and a grandmother," she said.

"I don't want this for my children and grandchildren. I just want these people to go away.

"I would have supported the civil rights movement in the late 1960s and now we're protesting for the right to live."

Protesters such as Vincent Penrose, who attended along with his son Aron, even came from as far away as Dublin.

He said: "We came up to show our support at the protest. I can't believe this is happening again. It's an absolute horror and I'm disgusted."

Following a minute's silence at the front of the town hall, the crowd remained for a short time in reflection at the weekend's events and to talk amongst one another as citizens of a concerned and angry city.

## Craigavon: Candles lit for peace at scene of evil murder

THE people of Craigavon came together last night in a defiant show of unity and solidarity against the murderers who brought terror to their community.



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Hundreds gathered for the short prayer vigil just yards from the spot where Constable Stephen Carroll (48) was brutally murdered.

They heard representatives from the four main churches in the area condemn the violence of the last few days and make a heartfelt plea for peace.

The service took place against a backdrop of police activity in the Ardowen estate as the hunt for Constable Carroll's killers continued.

A few yards down the road, a dozen small bouquets of flowers were bunched around a lamppost along with messages of sympathy and support.

As night fell, people began spilling out of the neighbouring estates towards the roundabout leading on to Lismore Road, the scene of Monday night's shooting.

Others had travelled from towns and villages across the region — families, young and old, Catholic and Protestant, but all united in their outrage at recent events.

They included Mary Dougan from the nearby Lakelands estate, who said the community was united in its support for the peace process.

"We have all been horrified by what has happened," she said. "We're a community here, all the churches work in partnership, and this has just cut us open. Tonight is about sending out a message that we just want peace."

During the service, Myrtle Morrison from St Saviour's Church of Ireland in Craigavon said that symbolic acts were only part of the healing process.

"We need to do more than symbolism, we need to work together," she said. "Everybody can positively and creatively work towards a better future."

She said every one of us has a role to play in building peace, not just promoting tolerance but positively affirming what is good in our different traditions and cultures.

The headmasters from two local schools, Brownlow Integrated College and Lismore Comprehensive School, also read verses while prayers were said for the Carroll family. Speaking afterwards, Fr Martin McAlinden, the parish priest in Craigavon, said he hoped it would send out a powerful message that people wanted an end to violence.

"These prayers are just our way of saying that we don't want to go back to the troubles of the past," he said. "What we have tonight is a symbol of the other side of Craigavon."

## Downpatrick

The Lord's Prayer was the simple but powerful form of opposition from Downpatrick yesterday to the killings by dissident republicans.

Church leaders in the town reacted to the horrors of the last five days by organising a gathering for peace outside St Patrick's Visitor Centre.

The service, led by Dean of Down Rev Harry Hull, was also attended by politicians from all parties and members of the public, from babies in their parents' arms to the elderly.

Everyone huddled together in silence for five minutes to contemplate the losses inflicted on three families and to pray for peace. Canon Sean Rogan, Downpatrick parish priest, then led the gathering in the prayer, Our Father. Rev Hull said: "I am pleased to see such a large number of people here today at such short notice. This is the message that we need to send to the people who carried out the attacks.

"We have had peace in our country and it's peace that we wish to have."

Eddie McGrady is SDLP MP for South Down, a role he filled through some of the worst times of the Troubles.

"We are here because of the grief of three families and the grief which has been resurrected for other families. People are determined that we are just not going there again."

He described his first reaction to the murders.

"It was a sinking feeling of dread and horror, of 'good God, not again'."

Martin Whitehead, a retired communications engineer who lives in Strangford, said: "We want to show the world that their bloodlust does not flow through everybody here."

Downpatrick Methodist Minister Ross Harte felt the message of peace was particularly resonant in Downpatrick.

"It makes sense that we are here a week before St Patrick's Day. It's part of what St Patrick came to Ireland for, to bring the God of peace and love to this island," he said.

## Lisburn

Their collective silence said more than any words could ever express.

The once unthinkable events of the past few days had shocked so many, that it came as no surprise to see the large numbers gather in the centre of Lisburn yesterday.

Hundreds, both young and old, full of hope and despair, stood side by side to express one single thought — peace.

The murders of Constable Stephen Carroll in Craigavon and sappers Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimkar in Antrim by republican splinter groups brought back horrific memories of the past to



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many who had gathered at the Sunken Gardens on Market Street.

Fear of slipping back to the darkest days of the Troubles was foremost on everyone's minds, however so was peace.

As the clock at the top of the Irish Linen Centre Museum struck 1pm, hundreds of people from all different walks of life fell silent as a mark of respect.

Some were shoppers who were passing through, some were students too young to remember the violence of the past, while others, such as Thomas Reed, came with a written message.

The Ballymacash man walked into the middle of the crowd and held up a white piece of A4 paper which read: "RIRA scum, CIRA scum".

Co Antrim mother-of-two Gwyneth said the horrific events of the last few days brought tears to her eyes.

"I went to university in Scotland to escape the violence and only came back after the ceasefires," she said.

"It makes my heart break at the thought of going back to those days. That is why I am here, to make my voice heard and to say this is not what we want."

Lisburn woman Pamela McIlroy, who was one of the first to arrive, said that she had come down to show support for the families of the murdered soldiers' and policeman as well as out of fear.

She said her daughter was a police officer and she was worried that what had happened to Constable Carroll could happen to her.

"My stomach turned when I heard what happened," she said. "It was absolutely terrible. I just thought it could be her or anyone. I just don't want this starting all up again, no-one does."

Among the hundreds who stood in silence at the rally were many local politicians including the Lisburn mayor Ronnie Crawford, DUP MLA Jonathan Craig and Junior Stormont Minister Jeffery Donaldson.

## Westminster

A cross-party group of MPs hold a silent vigil in honour of the three men murdered by dissidents WESTMINSTER politicians gathered outside parliament yesterday to hold a vigil in honour of three security force members shot dead by republican dissidents.

Former Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain, the Conservative's Ulster spokesman Owen Paterson, Lady Sylvia Hermon and the SDLP's Alasdair McDonnell were among the gathering at 4pm at St Stephen's entrance.

They held a two minute's silence before Northern Ireland Affairs committee member David Anderson, who had organised the event, made a speech praising the unified position taken by political leaders in London and Belfast.

He said: "We must show that we are united. We must send a very clear message they will not stop us or the people of Northern Ireland. We will never give in."

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Ok no longer fooled... How do u know if people from West Belfast where there or not there in numbers? If u were there you could not possibly have been able to scan the entire crowd for people from that area. If you were not there the task of scanning the crowd for people from that area would have been made all the harder. If you were not there and were in West Belfast at the time did you do a census style survey of the people of west Belfast to see who was there or not? A mighty task given the size of West Belfast. Also given the fact that it was a rally organised within a short space of time many people would not have been able to make it. I'm sure many people from East, South and North Belfast were unable to make it. Does this mean that they disagreed with the sentiments of the rally or are you the official spokesperson for West Belfast and know something that the rest of us from the other areas dont? I'm sure many dont agree with it but your generalisation is somewhat unhelpful.

Posted by Barry | 12.03.09, 12:21 GMT

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and that is why we will never be united No longer fooled... bitter bitter words from the few who wont move on!

Posted by Pixie | 12.03.09, 11:18 GMT

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'Ulster' did not stand 'united', as your reporter's propoganda stated. Very few actually attended the protests – hardly anyone from the nationalists areas in Belfast. Why? Simple. Where were all these people when young Catholics boys were murdered in Ballymena, recently? Answer: nowhere. And as far as the spineless so-called Irish Congress of Trades Unions, never once have they condemed British terrorism in the north of Ireland. Any wonder nationalist pay little head to this publicity stunt? Oh, and as for the pope. He has never opened his mouth about British Terrorism, either. Any wonder the Catholic churches are empty in Belfast?

Posted by no longer fooled republican | 12.03.09, 07:42 GMT

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