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## A time for courage and resolve

Monday, 16 March 2009

It is only a week or so since the murders of two soldiers and a policeman, but the days since then have been a watershed in the history of Northern Ireland.

The sense of shock is still palpable, and the condemnations of the killings from all parts of the community have left no doubt that the vast majority of people of this province are united in rejecting the past, and embracing a shared future.

It is the nature of things that intense publicity surrounds such atrocities, and then — inevitably — the focus moves to the aftermath and beyond. However, the Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde set the tone at the funeral of the murdered Constable Stephen Carroll when he told his widow Kate that she and her late husband would not be forgotten.

Our thoughts are with Mrs Carroll and her family, and also with the families of Sappers Patrick Azimkar and Mark Quinsey, as well as those who were injured in the dastardly attack in Antrim.

The past week or so has shown the province at its worst, but also at its best. The revulsion at the killing was deep-seated on all sides, and the politicians reacted with dignity and restraint, while clearly showing their abhorrence at what happened.

The First Minister Peter Robinson and the Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness showed leadership at a time of great challenge. Mr McGuinness showed particular courage in branding dissident republicans as "traitors" to Ireland, and it is significant that the Rev Ian Paisley has noted that "Mr McGuinness and politicians across the board have shown real leadership."

The church leaders have also shown leadership, not only in their individual and joint statements, but also in their initiative in asking people to display a symbolic purple ribbon or similar colour of clothing as a strong outward symbol of their commitment to working together and of their revulsion towards violence. It is an initiative which this newspaper strongly supports, and which is reflected on our front page.

Despite the overwhelming rejection of violence, it is depressing to witness some old patterns of behaviour, which are reoccurring. These include the street protests following the arrest of certain individuals in connection with police investigations

into the murders. At the time of writing, nine people have been arrested and this shows the intensity of the police activity. It is important that the law takes its course, and that those responsible for these atrocities — whoever they may be — are brought to justice, and as quickly as possible.

As we enter another week where people on every side celebrate St Patrick and acknowledge his massive and unifying example to all the people of this island, we must remain on our guard, and do everything we can in thought, word and deed which will nurture the hard-won peace which has brought such hope in the recent past.

This is a time for a re-dedication to the principles and characteristics which we share in common, and for assisting the security forces with all possible information to help track down the killers. It is a time also for resolution, and for individual and political courage to move forward together. This is the best way to ensure that Stephen Carroll, Patrick Azimkar and Mark Quinsey have not died in vain.



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