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Republicans must do what is right

Tuesday, 23 December 2008

Danny McIlhorne was 19 years old when he died. According to the IRA he was killed by one of its gunmen during a struggle as he was being held for questioning about stealing weapons from one of the terror organisation's arms dumps. That was in 1981 and Mr McIlhorne was buried on a lonely hillside in Co Wicklow, many miles from his west Belfast home.

The IRA, the self-styled defenders of the nationalist people, could not even admit its

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dastardly crime, never mind
hand back the young man's body for burial.



It took the IRA until 1999 to confess that it had killed Mr McIlhone — 18 years after the shooting. During all that time, the family did not know exactly what happened their son, their brother. They couldn't even be totally sure that he was dead, never mind the circumstances in which he died. He was one of the Disappeared, the young men and one woman, who the IRA killed and buried in secret locations. It was only recently, apparently after fresh information from the IRA and search teams using new techniques, that his body was found. Yesterday he was finally given a Christian burial.

Mr McIlhone never really got to know some of those who grieved most for him yesterday. He never had a chance to see his daughter grow up, nor his many nephews and nieces. His life with his seven surviving siblings was cruelly cut short.

Most poignantly of all, his mother, Lily and father, Dan, died before his body was finally recovered. Now he lies alongside his parents, reunited in death

after being savagely separated in life. A family, whose many and disparate lives were to some extent put on hold during the long years of wondering and waiting, can now close the book on a sad and needless chapter.

But as the priest at Mr McIlhone's Requiem Mass said, time does not necessarily heal the family's anguish. Healing comes through truth, justice and righting a wrong, but the McIlhone family, like the families of the other Disappeared whose bodies have not yet been found and like the families of the vast majority of victims of the Troubles, will prob

ably never see justice or the wrongs done to them righted. The chances of anyone ever being convicted of involvement in those deaths are so remote that it would be cruel to even suggest that justice will be done.

While the IRA cannot undo its murderous past and inhuman concealment of the victims, it, as a slight signal of repentance, can continue to work with The Independent Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains to help uncover the graves of the Disappeared.

That is a difficult task but as the recovery of Mr McIlhone's remains shows, not an impossible one given full co-operation from republicans.

They, and they alone, know exactly what happened to those unfortunate enough to cross their path or who offended their warped sense of right and wrong. They can demonstrate that they have at least learned what is right in the intervening years by addressing the terrible wrongs they visited on their victims.

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