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13 August 2007

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Lá Nua

Conrad Atkinson
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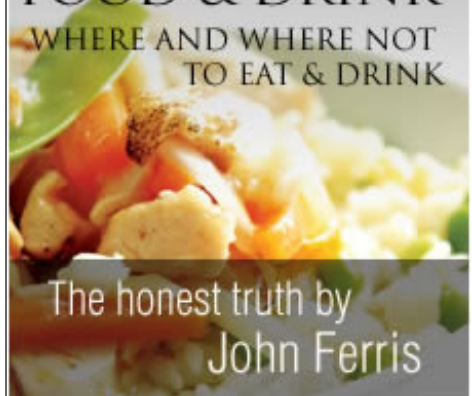
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Headlines

Pace quickens in the search for tragic truth

by **Damian McCarney**

Gerry Adams this week urged the West Belfast community to support families bereaved through collusion by wearing a black ribbon during Sunday's national hunger strike commemoration march.

Thousands of nationalists and republicans are expected to march from the various quarters of the city to congregate at Belfast City Hall for the event, which is themed the 'March for Truth'.

Numerous families bereaved through the British government's policy of collusion will take part in the mass rally, carrying photographs of their murdered loved ones.

The West Belfast MP is urging the community to show its support for the families by wearing a black ribbon.

Flanked by people who have lost loved ones at the hands of British state forces colluding with loyalist murder gangs, Mr Adams insisted there cannot be a hierarchy of victims.

"The relative of an IRA volunteer is as entitled to compassion and respect as is the relative of someone killed from the British state agencies," he said.

"And the relatives of those victims whose deaths have not been acknowledged by the state have a right to the truth and to have their loss acknowledged by the state."

Teresa Slane is one of those demanding that the state acknowledge the truth - in her case about the murder of her husband, Gerard, in 1988. The father-of-three was gunned down by loyalists in front of Teresa in their Waterville Street home in the early hours of the morning.

The lack of a subsequent police investigation has understandably led Teresa to suspect collusion in Gerard's death, and she is not going to rest until the truth is finally laid bare.

Half an hour

"An army foot patrol was outside our door five minutes before he was killed but none of that foot patrol was ever questioned - did they see the gunmen, or did they hear anything?"

"On the actual morning of the killing it took the RUC half an hour after they were called to arrive at our house.

"I know that Gerard wasn't involved in any paramilitary group and I know myself that there was collusion in his murder, and all I want is the truth, that's not too much to ask for - for me, for my kids, and for all the victims. That's all we want."

Teresa's sentiments were shared by other families speaking in Sinn Féin's Falls Road offices.

"We are entitled to know what happened," said Jim Clinton, whose 33-year-old wife, Theresa, was killed in 1994 when loyalists sprayed their South Belfast home with gunfire.

"Some families want prosecutions, some just want to know the truth, and they are entitled to that - they are the people who suffered, they are the people whose loved ones were taken away, they are the people who have to try to live with that down through the years.

"We are entitled to know why and who ordered the killings of our loved ones."

Gerry Adams said that Sinn Féin are carefully considering the creation of an internationally-based, independent truth commission which has been mooted by some of the victims' groups.

Process of truth

"However," stressed Mr Adams, "what is clear is that any process of truth and reconciliation must be victim-centred. Victims have a right both to acknowledgement of their pain and to contribute to a changing society.

"And full co-operation and disclosure by all relevant parties is essential to the success of any truth process."

The West Belfast assembly points for Sunday's March For Truth are: Twinbrook (Gardenmore Road Monument) at 12pm; bottom of Lenadoon Avenue at 12.30pm; the Busy Bee at 1pm; Trinity Lodge (Monagh Road) at 1pm; top of the Whiterock Road at 1.30pm; and bottom of Clonard Street at 2pm.

Gerry Adams will be the main speaker and the rally commences at 3pm at Belfast City Hall.

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