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We Say

Andersonstown News

15/03/2007

An echo of the past

The brutal events of the weekend, when two men's bodies were found at separate locations in West Belfast and Ardoyne, came as a devastating blow to the victims' families and to the community at large. But the fact that the murders had the power to shock us so profoundly was a reminder in itself of how far we have travelled in the past decade.

It's not that very long ago since a double murder would have commanded a few minutes on the teatime news and we would all have moved on to the next atrocity. But the prospect of a return to paramilitary violence on the streets of nationalist Belfast has shaken this community to the core – and also filled it with a determination to let the feuding groups know in no uncertain terms that they are not wanted and not supported.

The background to the murders remains confusing and unclear. It would appear to be the case that some of the republican micro-groups are involved in a round of in-fighting. Perhaps even it is micro-groups within those micro-groups, we don't know because in stark contrast to the usual lofty rhetoric with which dissident republicans go about their business, the actors in this bloody drama are maintaining a deathly silence. Doubtless they have correctly assessed the public mood in the wake of the killings as one of disgust and abhorrence.

It's just a week since dissident republicans of every stripe were unceremoniously rejected at the ballot box by the nationalist and republican people of these six counties. They rightly calculated that the 'independent republicans' and the various organisations that they represented had nothing to offer but division and conflict.

Just four days after the election, voters were proved right in the most distressing fashion when two people were murdered in the most horrific circumstances.

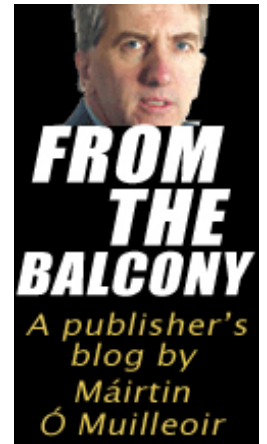
In the belief that it puts mainstream republicans on the spot, the question has repeatedly been asked in recent weeks: Would you inform the PSNI if you witnessed a republican operation in progress? Well, this was a republican operation, and we have no hesitation in saying that anyone who knows anything about these murders should bring what information they have to the PSNI straight away. There's the answer – it can't be any more unequivocal than that.

Nationalists and republicans firmly rejected a return to conflict a week ago; they reject it with even more conviction today.

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