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## Armed actions have no place in today's Ireland

**Jim Gibney**

By Jim Gibney The Thursday Column

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The killing by the Real IRA, of two British soldiers and a police officer (claimed by the Continuity IRA) and the wounding of a third soldier and two civilians is not only wrong, it is morally unjustifiable and indefensible.

The nationalist community lives in real time. A time of peace, not conflict, where there has been real change.

The partition of this island and the presence of some British garrisons are unacceptable to me.

I am not a pacifist. I supported the IRA at a time when the nationalist community was really oppressed.

I have supported other armed struggles in Vietnam and South Africa, to name but a few. Armed struggle can only be legitimate when measured against the real level of oppression and suffering and must enjoy real support.

The north we live in today is not the same north of Ireland in which we grew up, where we suffered discrimination, where we were curfewed and interned and shot down on our streets when we protested, where political expression was censored and banned and nationalist votes did not count.

The actions of the Real IRA and the Continuity IRA this week caused widespread shock, anger and demoralisation among nationalists and republicans in whose name these Unreal IRAs claim to be acting.

Their leaderships are contemptuous of the opinion of the vast majority of republicans, men and women who really risked their lives, who sacrificed the best years of their lives in prison for freedom and who in their collective wisdom believe in the peace process.

Does all that really count for nothing in their minds?

I repeat, the six counties that I and my parents grew up in does not exist any more. Then, there was a one-party sectarian state where unionists dominated. A society in the grip of a powerful system of armed forces backed by repressive laws, where nationalists had no place in their own country, a society where our cultural identity, our language, was criminalised. A society where our choices were limited to sitting at the back of the bus and voting for constitutional nationalist parties that sat at the back of the benches, or fighting for our civil and national rights.

The peace process and republicans changed all of that. Today nationalists and republicans have significant political power and influence. In the first executive, Martin McGuinness and Bairbre de Brun between them controlled 70 per cent of the budget. Today Martin McGuinness is joint first minister with the DUP's Peter Robinson and nationalists are in other ministerial positions.

Real change is represented by the all-Ireland ministerial council, by nationalist MLAs in the assembly and various committees and in the strength and growth of the Irish language across the north.

It is represented in the absence of British soldiers on our streets, in the absence of British fortresses, in the

absence of a royalist mind like the ODI of 1916 and in the dismantling of repressive laws.

It is represented in the existence of the human rights and equality commissions, in the presence of republicans and nationalists on the Policing Board and in the new police service, the PSNI.

Oppression cannot be contrived or manufactured.

It cannot be conjured up out of history books or carried forward from a deep hurt, personal or political. It cannot be a figment of one's imagination nor can it be made real through political doggerel.

Oppression is felt as a result of actions by state forces, as a result of unjust laws, as a result of people being deliberately forced to the margins of society.

That form of oppression no longer exists in the six counties.

There is of course a legacy of wrongs to be rectified as a result of partition and conflict but Sinn Féin and others are overcoming that legacy by using their political power and influence.

The people of this island are in a new place and there is no space in that place for those who used violence in the perverse claim that by taking lives they can add to our lives.

They will not. Armed struggle or armed actions have no part to play in bringing about a united Ireland. In fact, in today's Ireland, they will delay and hinder that very objective.

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