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Massereene gunmen represent no one

Pro fide et patria

Editorial

09/03/09

The news, when it came through late on Saturday night, brought back sickening memories and was accompanied by a dark sense of foreboding.

We already knew of the evil in our midst, and the determination of twisted minds to cause further

miscommemorate those who died, but the slaughter in Antrim was still a devastating development.

The thoughts and prayers of every decent person, of all religions and none, will be with the victims, both the dead and the wounded, as well as with their families and friends.

Two young British soldiers were shot dead and two more were wounded at the entrance to Massereene barracks, while two pizza delivery drivers were also injured, one, a Polish citizen, critically.

The soldiers were due to leave their base yesterday for a posting in Afghanistan, but instead found themselves attacked by fanatics from much closer to home.

The comparison between dissident republicans and the Taliban is not a glib one, as both groups reject democracy, have close links with the drugs trade and believe they have the right to forcibly impose their own discredited views on others

While Afghanistan has a complex history, it should be stressed that recent political events in Ireland are relatively straightforward and logical.

Decades of upheaval and confrontation gave way to the dialogue and compromise epitomised by the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the emergence of a partnership government at Stormont.

The concept of a power-sharing administration has the support of the overwhelming majority of the population and only a handful of extremists from the fringes of republicanism have been left clinging to violent means.

They have been attempting to escalate their sordid activities and the events of Saturday night, while disgusting, could not have come as a particular shock.

Indeed, less than four months ago, we said in these columns that there were two stone-cold certainties about the dissident republican campaign.

The first was that it would cost lives, sooner rather than later, and the second was that it would achieve nothing, other than suffering and despair.

In the same special edition of The Irish News on November 17, Cardinal Sean Brady said unequivocally that the use of the bomb and the bullet challenged 'the very principles of a just and free society'.

The Cardinal also said correctly that anyone with information about such outrages had a clear moral duty to forward it to the PSNI or the Garda.

Our police services, north and south, deserve the assistance of every right-thinking person as they set out to investigate the Massereene massacre.

If the perpetrators are not brought to justice, they will simply go on murdering those they perceive through a warped philosophy to be their enemies.

In the process, they will also destroy any hope of progress towards what they claim to be their goal of a united Ireland for many generations to come.

The debate over the deployment of British special forces which had been taking place over recent days looks utterly juvenile in the light of the carnage in Antrim.

While members of the Northern Ireland policing board were entitled to expect that they would receive some form of briefing about the decision, it should not have been regarded as a surprise in the prevailing circumstances.

If the carefully monitored involvement of undercover surveillance units can prevent further deaths in any section of the community, it will obviously be fully justified.

A lack of proper scrutiny led to a series of calamities in the past but the agreed structures which are now in place should prevent a repetition and will have the opportunity to prove their value in the months ahead.

An even greater challenge faces our politicians, who must display not only firm leadership but also the ability to work together closely on a range of issues.

However, as they approach their tasks, they know that they have been provided with a firm mandate to negotiate a better future for all of us. The Antrim gunmen represent no one and can only drag us towards the nightmares of the past.

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