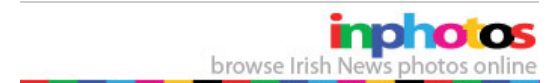


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Charge or free those held for 7 days says Sinn Fein

DISSIDENT ARRESTS

By Diana Rusk

20/03/09

SINN Fein has called for police to charge or release anyone held for more than a week, as two suspects in the murder of Constable Stephen Carroll begin their 10th day in custody.

A 17-year-old man and a former Sinn Fein councillor, Brendan McConville, have now been detained without charge for the longest time in Northern Ireland since internment in the 1970s.

Under the Terrorism Act 2006 – introduced after the London suicide bombings – police can apply to question suspects for up to 28 days before they must charge or release them. Previously the maximum was seven.

Alex Maskey, who attended Constable Carroll's funeral on behalf of Sinn Fein, said the party was opposed to anyone being held for more than a week.

“Regardless of who is involved or what they are suspected of doing, Sinn Fein have consistently opposed the detention of suspects beyond the existing seven days,” Mr Maskey said.

“We have repeated this position to the British government in recent days.

“If there is evidence against an individual then that person should be charged and that evidence put before the courts. If there is no evidence then that person should be released.”

It is the first time Sinn Fein has shown disquiet about the way the PSNI has handled the Carroll investigation, which Martin McGuinness said was carried out by “traitors of Ireland”.

Eleven people are being held in connection with the recent murders in Craigavon and Antrim.

Seven of those are being questioned about the shooting of Constable Carroll (48).

Mr McConville and the 17-year-old can be held until next Tuesday before police will have to apply for a further extension, while detectives must today ask for more time to quiz a 21-year-old arrested last Friday.

Three other men – aged 37, 31 and 27 – and a 30-year-old woman are also being held in connection with Constable Carroll's murder.

A further four people including former IRA prisoner Colin Duffy as well as Declan and Dominic Og McGlinchey jnr – sons of murdered INLA leader Dominic McGlinchey – and a 21-year-old are being held over the killing of British soldiers Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimkar.

Yesterday afternoon around 50 republicans took part in a protest at Antrim Serious Crime Suite where the suspects are being held.

Relatives of Colin Duffy and the McGlinchey brothers were joined by groups including the INLA-linked Irish Republican Socialist Party, the Real IRA-linked 32 County Sovereignty Movement and the Republican Network for Unity.

They held makeshift placards declaring '28 Day Detention – Internment By Another Name', 'Birmingham 6, Guildford 4, Who Will Be Next' and 'No Trial By Media'.

Former IRA hunger striker Marian Price, of the 32 County Sovereignty Movement, said she was there to protest against the detention of the teenager, which she said was an "unacceptable way to treat a child".

She said she could not understand why people were "so surprised" at the three murders.

"Any loss of life is regrettable but it was something that was going to happen and so long as Britain claims jurisdiction, these things will happen," Ms Price said.

At one stage, Progressive Unionist Party member Ken Wilkinson stopped his car as he was driving past and confronted the protestors.

He shouted: "Hang your heads in shame for what you are here for. You are nothing but a disgrace."

Mr Wilkinson's words were met with whistles, cheers and shouts of the republican slogan Tíocfaidh ar la (Our day will come).

DUP South Antrim MP William McCrea later condemned the protest, saying it was designed to cause "maximum offence" to the people of Antrim.

"One of the issues these apologists for murderers claimed to be protesting against was the length of pre-trial detention for terrorist suspects," he said.

"I was proud to support measures extending that period and I hope they are used as a valuable and useful weapon to help break the back of the dissident republican groups."


Arrested men 'refuse food'

REPUBLICAN Sinn Fein last night claimed that two men arrested in north Armagh on Monday by detectives probing the recent security-force murders had been "refusing food" since being taken to Antrim Serious Crime Suite.

A party spokesman called for their immediate release.

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