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## Quinn murder causes south Armagh split

Sunday, October 28, 2007 - By Colm Heatley in Belfast

Republicans deny any involvement in the killing of Paul Quinn, which they blame on the struggle for control of south Armagh in the North's changed political climate.

The voice on the other end of the phone assured Paul Quinn that everything was all right and that he should meet his friends at a farm near Oram in Co Monaghan.

What enticement was given still isn't clear, but there have been suggestions that Quinn was told that, if he came quickly to Oram last Saturday evening, there was some easy money to be made.

Quinn, 21, a lorry driver from the small town of Cullyhanna in south Armagh, drove the short distance to Oram almost immediately.

He was expecting to meet three of his closest friends. Instead, when he arrived at the isolated sheds on the farm, he was met by up to 10 people armed with iron bars and bats. Quinn's friends, one of whom made the call, had already been beaten and were in fear for their lives. But the greatest savagery was reserved for Quinn, who had virtually every bone in his body broken in the beating administered by the gang.

He died from his injuries. His three friends were later treated in hospital for their injuries. Quinn's family quickly blamed republicans for the attack and said those who lured him to the farm were "members of the republican movement".

According to the family, Quinn said he had been ordered out of the area a number of weeks ago but had ignored the order.

Security sources said that a number of former IRA members were part of the gang which beat Quinn to death. At Quinn's well-attended funeral on Thursday, a poem he had posted on the internet site Bebo was read out. His poem said it was better to live his own life than do what others wanted.

The killing has been condemned by Sinn Fein, which described it as the work of criminals, and encouraged anyone with information to come forward to the PSNI or Garda.

Taoiseach Bertie Ahern said that the murder should not affect the political process in the North. This was interpreted in some quarters in the North as an exoneration of republicans by the Irish government. However, a number of sources close to the Quinn family said that the survivors of the attack had given statements to the police implicating republicans. They claim that a "political cover-up" is taking place.

The murder has caused divisions in the already chaotic border area around south Armagh. Late last week, the words "IRA are murderin' scum" was daubed in three-foot-high letters on a wall in Cullyhanna, the staunchly republican town where the Quinn family lives.

Theories abound about the murder. Some people in the area who oppose Sinn Fein's political strategy insisted that Quinn was killed by republicans because he had beaten a number of them in fights in recent months and because "he had no respect at all for Sinn Fein".

The sources say that Quinn was the driver of a lorry that was carrying illegal fuel when it went into a ditch outside Belfast last month. It is alleged that Quinn then set the vehicle on fire.

In another recent incident, it is alleged that Quinn was the driver of another illegal fuel lorry, which crashed and had to be abandoned in south Armagh. It has been claimed that these incidents may have led to his murder last weekend. However, senior republicans vehemently deny the allegations.

They say that some of those alleging republican involvement in the Quinn murder were themselves involved in the murder of Keith Rogers, an IRA man who was shot dead after a row in south Armagh in March 2003.

"The people behind this killing are in no way connected with the republican movement," said a senior republican in south Armagh. "They are dangerous people who wouldn't think twice about something like that. In years gone by, they wouldn't have been tolerated, but these are changed times."

There are other allegations that the gang responsible for Quinn's death are mostly based in the Republic and some republicans believe the killing was a deliberate attempt to cause divisions in the area. In south Armagh last week, tensions were building, with mainstream republicans increasingly angered by the allegations against them.

But some former republican prisoners, who have left Sinn Fein in protest in recent years, insist that Quinn was killed because he beat up the son of a local prominent republican. The republican, who is in his late 50s, was told last week by the PSNI that his life was under threat.

"He was told by the son of a prominent republican that he was going to be sorted out, and Paul Quinn let it be known to him that he didn't care," said one source. "He was killed because of all of that, not because of his involvement in fuel smuggling. He let republicans know that he wasn't going to take any hassle from them, so he was beaten to death."

The former republicans claim Quinn was killed as a direct result of his fights with republicans and say that , although he may have been involved in small-scale fuel smuggling, "he was not a big player".

Jim McAllister, a former IRA prisoner, was a Sinn Fein MLA in the 2003 Assembly, but left the party in protest at the political direction it was taking. He said Quinn had received at least two death threats from republicans.

Whatever the truth of the allegations, it is clear that serious tensions exist in south Armagh, an area renowned for its republican cohesion throughout the Troubles.

For decades, the IRA controlled south Armagh and was the undisputed force in the area. But the operations of the IRA and wider republican movement in south Armagh have changed immensely since the first act of weapons decommissioning in 2001.

Despite the allegations that Quinn was killed by republicans, his death did not cause the political crisis that it once would have.

In the recent past, the murder, and the claims about who was responsible, would have been seized on by unionists, especially members of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), to paralyse the political process.

But as Quinn was being buried on Thursday, the DUP deputy leader and finance minister, Peter Robinson, was making his budget announcement in the Stormont chamber, just feet away from his Sinn Fein ministerial colleagues.

Changes in the North now mean that, not only is the DUP's political project tied in with the success of power sharing, but that Sinn Fein is encouraging people to go to the PSNI with information.

In fact, a number of republicans who were alleged to have been behind the killing have already given statements to police to clear themselves.

The murder has also again highlighted the prevalence of fuel smuggling in south Armagh and the increasing involvement of criminal gangs in the area. Smuggling of one sort or another has been a way of life for some people in south Armagh since the border between the Republic and the North was established.

There is a widespread belief that the IRA used smuggling to raise money for weapons during the Troubles. Thomas "Slab" Murphy, who was alleged to be the IRA chief-of-staff, was accused of involvement in this activity.

In recent years, the smuggling has almost entirely focused on illegal fuel and, with the changed political climate, criminal gangs have been quick to seize the initiative.

The political divisions that exist between republicans in south Armagh only serve to exacerbate the situation. Despite the progress in the peace process, it remains to be seen who can control south Armagh.

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