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Human rights and human wrongs



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The announcement by the Director of Public Prosecutions that no one will be charged as a result of the Stevens 111 investigations into political assassinations, will not come as a surprise to relatives, who have fought a long and continuing battle to expose state collusion in the deaths.

Nor will there be any surprise among organisations that have supported them and campaigned over decades to establish the truth and expose the Human Rights abuses by a state that even in the context of the peace process, still refuses to acknowledge its involvement in political murders.

In a week marked by International Human Rights Day, the British Government condemned the abuse of human rights in Zimbabwe. And rightly so. But while British politicians fixed their sights and condemnation on human rights abuses in Zimbabwe and Burma, the relatives of eight people shot dead by British Crown forces were once again denied the opportunity of an inquest into their deaths. The huge mote in the eye of the British establishment has not yet extended to establishing the truth of the years of human rights abuses in this their first and last colony.

The truth, if it is ever allowed to be told, is that British forces actively colluded in the murder, torture, and brutality of Irish citizens and did so with the knowledge and co-operation of their Government. Those who live in glass houses are the last people to point fingers at anyone.

The evidence of human rights abuses in the North of Ireland, revealed in dozens of reports by credible Human Rights organisations including those set up by the British themselves, should evoke a sense of shame in any Government let alone one who is forever pontificating about the lack of democracy in other countries.

No other country can match the historic violation of human rights or the brutality of the British regime in Ireland over hundreds of years. The occupation of this island, against the wishes of the Irish people as a whole, is in itself an abuse, leaving aside the military suppression needed to maintain that occupation, described by the historian Professor AJP Taylor, 'as a policy and structure of planning that was a form of genocide.

Never more was the nature of the British establishment structure and planning more evident than in the 6

Counties over the past forty years.

Over 88% of those killed during that time by British State forces, were civilians from the Nationalists community and included a significant number of children.

All were unarmed and posed no threat at the time they were killed. More than half of all the other violent deaths were as a direct result of collusion between British State forces and Unionist paramilitaries.

Aside from state killings, the structure and planning led to the arrests of thousand of people, many of whom were subjected to abuse and ill treatment which amounted to torture, and which prompted Amnesty International to declare that the 'maltreatment of suspects by the RUC has taken place with sufficiency frequency to warrant the establishment of a public enquiry'.

The public enquiry like all the other enquiries demanded by families and human rights organisations did not happen but in 1979 when the British Governments own enquiry, the Bennett Committee did report, over 1600 formal complaints of assault and battery by the RUC had been lodged. Nevertheless, not one member of the RUC was ever convicted of human rights abuses then or since.

Between the years 1972 and the IRA cease fire in 1994, some 122, 000 people, mainly from the nationalist community would see the inside of police cells. Even the regimes in Burma and Zimbabwe would be hard pressed to compete with such a volume of arrests in a place with a total population of one and a half million.

Convictions secured by ill treatment and torture, in the Special Diplock Courts, set up by the British Government, resulted in 15, 000 republican and nationalist prisoners, collectively serving a total of 100, 000 years in prison, while only four serving members of the British Army, convicted of the killing of civilians, served between them, just 15 years.

At the beginning of International Human Rights week, the inquest fifteen years on into the killing of Pearse Jordan, an unarmed IRA volunteer shot dead in November 1992, was adjourned again, a situation that did not surprise his Father, Hugh Jordan or the Coroner, John Leckey. The three British military witnesses wanted to give evidence from behind screens while the RUC sought anonymity.

Leckey, who has been charged with conducting inquests into the 1982 assassinations of Gervaise Mc Kerr, Sean Burns, and Eugene Toman, has been told by Hugh Orde that the Stalker/ Sampson report will be made available to him but that he will not be permitted to disclose the information contained in the report to the legal teams, representing the relatives.

This in itself is a violation of the right of relatives of the deceased to the truth surrounding the deaths of their loved ones but is also in direct breach of the European Convention on Human Rights, which concluded in 2001, that every aspect of the domestic investigation procedure in the North was in breach of the Convention and that the inquest court was massively restricted and merely per functional.

In a scathing comment earlier this year, Amnesty International stated its concerns that the refusal by the prosecutorial services to bring to justice those State forces that have been involved in cover up in respect of collusion with Unionist paramilitary organisations, is in itself an indictment of the Criminal Justice

system and a serious abuse of human rights.

Too many generations of those born in this partitioned entity, lived with this abuse of rights, with harassment, discrimination, imprisonment, torture, racism, inequality, spies, lies, and the general contempt of being treated as second class citizens in our own country.

Collusion is at the centre of it all but the ongoing attempts by the British Government to prevent the truth is being challenged by Relatives for Justice who have been instrumental in Orde having to permit the Coroner access, however limited to the Stalker and Sampson enquiry report.

It's a small step but in the right direction.

As the Coroner John Leckey stated, 'after many decades of stagnation the coronial landscape is very different to what it was twenty years ago and the key is the Human Rights Act'.

Does this mean that the British Government can no longer, as they have done in the past trample over Human Rights Organisations, victims, lawyers and indeed anyone who threatened to expose the States role in the 'dirty war' in the North.

Many still believe that Human Rights in the North of Ireland, died before they were born. The British are concerned about Zimbabwe but as the old saying goes, clean up you own house first.

The full article contains 1152 words and appears in n/a newspaper.

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Page 1 of 1

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