

The Troubles Are Back

By Conn Hallinan

The “Troubles” in Northern Ireland are back, courtesy of an unholy Trinity of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Protestant loyalists who refuse to share power with Ulster’s Catholics, and the Bush administration.

The current crisis, which has seen the British suspend the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and reassert direct control over the province, was sparked by a recent raid on Sinn Fein headquarters. Sinn Fein represents Catholics, and is associated with the Irish Republican Army (IRA). The police foray allegedly uncovered information that the republican organization was spying on the British military and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC).

In the raid’s aftermath, Blair accused the IRA of threatening “violence,” and a “senior Bush administration official” (according to the *New York Times*) joined Northern Ireland Secretary John Reid in blaming Sinn Fein for not reining in the IRA.

What is this all about? What did the police find that was so terrible it required derailing the peace process? Police say they discovered that Sinn Fein had names and addresses of police and military officials in Northern Ireland. So what? Has Sinn Fein or the IRA targeted such people or engaged in any terrorism for the past eight years? No. Has the Independent Commission verified that the IRA put stores of guns, rocket launchers, and explosives “beyond use”? Yes.

Have Protestant paramilitaries done the same? No. Indeed, the Ulster Defense Association (UDA), the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) and the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) ended their cease-fire last October. Do Protestant organizations keep the same files? Yes. Do they engage in terrorism and target the people on those lists? They sure do.

When Loyalist leader John Pilling was arrested in September with information on Sinn Fein National Chair Michael McLaughlin, along with the names, addresses, and car registrations of seven other Republican leaders, there were no threats from London. Pilling is a member of the Ulster Political Research group, an arm of the UDA, and its hit squad, the Red Hand Defenders.

When Northern Ireland police warned Sinn Fein Member of Parliament Michelle Gildernew that the Loyalists had taken out a contract on her life, did Blair accuse Protestants of fomenting “violence”? When the Red Hand Defenders gunned down journalist Marty O’Hagan last year, did the Bush administration denounce the Loyalists for not controlling their paramilitaries? No to both.

Where were the threats to toss the loyalists out of the government when the UFF and LVF were throwing pipe bombs at four-year-old girls on their way to attend Holy Cross School, while crowds chanted, “No school today, ya wee whores”?

Maybe Sinn Fein has reason to mistrust the intentions of the Protestant police and the British authorities. It was these same authorities who could never seem to find out who gunned down republican solicitor Pat Finucane in 1989 in front of his wife and three children. Maybe they couldn’t find the murderers because the police arranged it. At least that is what UFF gunman, Ken Barrett (now living in England under police protection) told the BBC in June. Barret claims the RUC told him Finucane was an IRA member (he wasn’t) and had to be eliminated. Then he said a British Army undercover agent gave him a photo of Finucane and his address.

Barret says he wouldn’t have killed Finucane without pressure from the police. “Solicitors

were kind of taboo, you know what I mean?" he told the BBC. "We used a lot of Roman Catholic solicitors ourselves."

The one person finally charged with Finucane's murder, William Stobie, was acquitted, only to be assassinated by the Defenders last December. Needless to say, no one has been arrested.

The fiction here is that while Sinn Fein is held responsible for the IRA, Protestant parties like Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party and

David Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party get a pass on the violence of the loyalist paramilitaries.

The whole raid business is damned suspicious. As Roy Greenslade of the British *Guardian* points out, how did Protestant politicians know the content of the seized documents just minutes after the raid? The answer is that the police gave them the information, just like they have been doing for years. Suspending the Northern Ireland government also gives convenient cover for the

Protestants to withdraw from the peace process.

The only parties celebrating this recent move are the madmen on both sides who would plunge Northern Ireland back into civil war. And this time around they have an ally in the White House.

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