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BRADLEY SPEECH QUINN MURDER MOTION

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Saturday 20th October 2007 may stand out in some people's minds as the date of the Rugby World Cup. And probably around the time that I got a phone call from my colleague SDLP Slieve Gullion Councillor Geraldine Donnelly 8.45 pm, most people here like me were watching that match.

Councillor Donnelly told me that she had had a call from a member of the Quinn family to say that Paul had been savagely beaten and was in hospital in Drogheda fighting for his life. Councillor Donnelly and I were asked by the family to meet them at the hospital but before we reached Drogheda we were informed that Paul had died of his injuries.

You can imagine the scene at the hospital where we gathered to pray around Paul's broken and battered body in the little mortuary chapel. His distraught parents, brother, sister, relations, friends and neighbours were there. Gradually we heard the story of how Paul had been lured to a lonely barn just over the border in Co. Monaghan and beaten unconscious with clubs and iron bars; of how, even when he had stopped crying out for mercy, the dull thuds of the blows continued to reign down on his broken body until he lay motionless.

Even that was not enough. Paul's killers then proceeded to spray his body and the crime scene with a substance which would help render DNA evidence from the scene unusable. They wore forensic suits and gloves, and smashed the mobile phones of those present before leaving the scene. This was no ad hoc gang hastily convened to beat a young man. These were people, up to ten of them, who knew what they were doing, who probably had been involved in similar beatings previously, and who organised, planned, and executed this dreadful deed with military precision. Ten men against one young man to show who was boss in the area.

I don't think anyone in South Armagh actually believes that the IRA were not involved in Paul Quinn's murder. At least no one present at the hospital in Drogheda, Paul's family, friends and neighbours, believed they were not involved – the opposite, in fact, everyone there believed, on the basis of events leading up to Paul's death, that the IRA murdered Paul.

In fact, in statements I released after the murder I didn't accuse the IRA of murdering Paul - what I said was that the apparatus of paramilitarism had been used in the murder. Gradually though, it became clear from Garda, PSNI, and IMC sources that what the family had told me was the truth - that the IRA was involved in the murder.

It was particularly upsetting for Paul's family to hear him branded after his murder as a criminal by his local MP Conor Murphy. Conor Murphy said that he went to the IRA who gave him 'solid assurances' that they were not involved. What did he expect them to say? Did he expect them to put their hands up and admit to the murder and to tell Conor to go out into the highways and byways and tell everyone the IRA murdered Paul Quinn. It would be naïve of anyone to expect them to do so.

It is equally naïve to expect people to believe that the murder was the result of a dispute between two criminal gangs considering the fact that Conor Murphy berated Seamus Mallon some years ago for suggesting that there were any criminals in South Armagh and accused him of supporting Merlin Rees's castigation of South Armagh as bandit country. He should tell us where they all the criminals have suddenly come from, and how they have so conveniently – not only one gang but two gangs - appeared to bolster up his arguments.

It is shameful that Conor Murphy has not withdrawn the criminalising remarks he made about Paul Quinn after his death. In the past members of Sinn Féin have complained about being demonised but yet here we have a member of Sinn Féin using the same tactic against someone who is no longer with us to defend himself.

The Irish Foreign Minister, the Taoiseach and the Secretary of State have set the record straight on that issue and that has been some consolation to the family. Conor Murphy should now also set the record straight in this regard.

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With regard to Conor Murphy's assertion that the IRA was not involved in the murder of Paul Quinn - the Gardaí do not agree with him, Hugh Orde, Chief Constable of the PSNI does not agree with him, and the IMC do not agree with him.

Yes, the Irish Government are saying that the IRA were not involved in the murder of Paul Quinn as a corporate entity and indeed no has argued that they were. Neither do I do believe that the Chief Executive of the IRA - who may very well sit in this house made a corporate decision to have Paul Quinn murdered. I do not even believe that the management team of the IRA – the so-called army council - made that decision but what I do believe is, as this motion states, that present members of the IRA were involved in his murder.

These nuances may be of particular interest to the members of this House, and so they should be, but they are merely academic to the family of Paul Quinn who only know that their son was brutally murdered by those who included members of the IRA.

What they want more than anything else is that those responsible for Paul's murder be apprehended and brought to justice. And there are people in south Armagh who know who murdered Paul Quinn. I would ask them as did the Garda Superintendent to examine their consciences and come forward to the Gardaí with what information they have.

There are those who have said that the murder of Paul Quinn has been politicised and they are right. The involvement of members of the IRA in his murder politicised it from the very moment of his death. Paul Quinn's murder poses questions for us all.

Are the political parties of this house who have endorsed the policing arrangements here willing to accept paramilitary groups who think that they are the law, that they can act as judge, jury, and executioner over our citizens if and when they decide it is necessary?

Is this house happy that one of its members, a minister in the Executive, feels it necessary to act as message boy, as the new P. O' Neill, for the IRA to help exonerate its members in murder? How can consulting with the IRA be reconciled with his pledge of office?

Gerry Adams said 'they haven't gone away you know'; Conor Murphy said that they continue to exist as part of the transition between conflict and peace. I say that is past time for them to go away and go away for good. And murder does not complete the transition from conflict to peace – it only prolongs the suffering.

The solid assurances that I want are that they have gone away, that their violence and intimidation has come to an end and that they will murder no more.

The whole politicisation of this case revolved around denial of reality. The reality is that we have a functioning murder machine in South Armagh . It is fairly clear that the Army Council has prohibited actions such as organised beatings, and it is equally clear the South Armagh Provos don't give a damn. They don't take orders from Dublin , and they don't take them from Gerry Adams in Belfast either. If this case shows anything, it is that the orders are probably flowing the other way. Even if the Provisional IRA has theoretically been stood down, individual members still have access to its structures, skills and experience. And the group as a whole is still trying to exercise community control – and worst of all it can still draw on political support from Sinn Fein in exercising that control. Even if we get the murderers of Paul Quinn locked up for a long time, we will still be faced with that problem. That is a challenge for the local community, and indeed for the whole community, for all of us and for our whole democratic system. That is why this Assembly must make its voice heard on the murder of Paul Quinn – in order to ensure that no more young men are battered until every major bone in their body is broken.

ENDS

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