



US Elections
Full coverage of the US Presidential election

Ireland
Asian influence
Is Asia the new global leader?
youngest ever world champion

THE IRISH TIMES.com

9 °C Dublin »

RSS Feed

Site Index

Home » Ireland » In the North »

Email to a friend | Email to Author | Print | RSS | Text Size: A A

Monday, November 3, 2008

Baying loyalists bring sense of menace back to Belfast streets

« Prev 1/3 Next »



The British army's Royal Irish Regiment parade through Belfast city yesterday under tight security from riot police. Photograph: Peter Morrison/AP

DAN KEENAN

The march and protest were peaceful affairs - but the reaction of one group was frightening, writes **Dan Keenan**

IT WAS the type of ugly, spitting behaviour that had powered long years of physical violence and political turmoil.

Baying loyalists, incensed by the Sinn Féin protest against the British army parade, were held in check by armoured PSNI vehicles and dozens of police officers in full riot gear.

Some had scaled the scaffolding of Church House from where they screeched provocatively the vilest abuse at the republicans.

"Scum, scum, scum," they chanted in football terrace fashion - the rhythm marked by stabbing fingers pointing towards west Belfast from where the republican protesters had marched.

They sang Rule Britannia and God Save the Queen, the verses punctuated with shouts of "No surrender". They danced pogo-style on the spot.

The chants switched from "The Famine is over - why don't you go home", "Take a bath you f***king scum," and "Do you want a chicken supper Bobby Sands".

Some treated it as a boisterous, leering laugh. But more than a few seemed possessed by a kind of nihilistic rage that is frightening.

ADVERTISEMENT

Latest »

- 16:05 Tanaiste in US in bid to attract firms to Ireland
- 15:54 Poll shows Obama ahead in six of eight key states
- 15:48 Warning issued over Palestinian faction talks
- 15:47 UK urges economic leadership from new US president
- 15:34 Green Dragon takes third in Cape Town
- 15:16 Vietnam warns of disease as flood toll rises to 65
- 14:52 New breast-cancer drug unveiled in Cork
- 14:44 GM request for merger assistance rejected - report

Popular Stories

Most Read

- 1 Germany's richest woman says she was blackmailed over sex tapes
- 2 Ryanair to offer EUR 10 transatlantic flights
- 3 Irish teachers have had it good for years
- 4 Keane in hot water as Blues blitz Black Cats
- 5 Hamilton wins championship at the death

The fury bubbled when the closely marshalled republicans, numbering no more than 1,000 and carrying funereal posters evoking those killed by British soldiers, released symbolic black balloons. These escaped upwards from the threatening din and into the blue.

A lone figure appeared on the street with a home-made placard which proclaimed "Jesus said: Love you're [sic] neighbour as yourself." He seemed about as clued in as the two Irish wolfhounds which headed the 250-strong parade of service personnel in desert camouflage and the military pipe band.

The music was drowned out by the building cacophony from the loyalists as the soldiers paraded by - arms swinging in unison.

Plastic lemonade bottles and some stones were thrown, a few fireworks exploded, but despite the edgy atmosphere it came to nothing.

Indeed the military march-past seemed to ease the tension of the crowd, switching the focus from the sombre republicans just 25 metres away.

Just around the corner on Howard Street and near City Hall the atmosphere was different.

Away from the Rangers shirts, the shaved heads and the Northern Ireland soccer emblems, many more thousands had congregated.

Little Union flags in hand and with welcoming yellow ribbons pinned to their coats, they were there simply to show by force of numbers their support for the British army.

Well before the small parade had even assembled, coach loads of middle-aged and probably middle-class people descended on the city centre to line the short route for the homecoming parade which had been branded an exercise in thanksgiving for a safe return from foreign fields of battle.

Fifteen and 20 deep they crowded the broad streets around City Hall, clapping warmly when Peter Robinson and Jeffrey Donaldson arrived at the platform accompanied by nameless dozens in chains of office and other finery. They were defiant, but quietly so. This was a show not of strength but of resolve - to stand by the British army, the British flag and the British connection.

The presence of so many police and the drone of helicopters overhead told the truth about the palpable sense of menace that hung over the scene.

It was all over in minutes. The growing tension of the previous week just dissipated, rather like the crowd which now simply melted away.

The soldiers with their fixed blank expressions stepped off towards an official reception at the Waterfront Hall. Only the police stayed put, those in riot gear looking like aliens, while Belfast regained its composure.

© 2008 The Irish Times

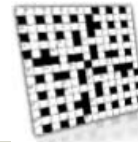


This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

Your Vote »

Do you think Enda Kenny would make a good taoiseach? [« Yes](#) | [No »](#)
Results

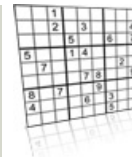
Crossword Club »



Today's Interactive Irish Times Crosaire and Simplex crosswords, plus 10 years of crossword archive.

ADVERTISEMENT

Sudoku »



Download and print the daily Irish Times sudoku grid

ADVERTISEMENT

CLASSIFIED

Homes



Ard Riadha, Geashill, Tullamore Price: €245,000

Bedrooms: 3 [See More »](#)

Select your categories

[Next »](#)



A throwback to the heady days of youth in VW's new Scirocco

[Find »](#)

I am a

Looking for a

Located

Only with photos:

[Next »](#)