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Friday, March 27, 2009

Dissidents are criminals who will not succeed, says Cowen

GERRY MORIARTY, Northern Editor

DISSIDENT REPUBLICANS responsible for recent killings were “criminals” and “murderers” who would not succeed, Taoiseach Brian Cowen said in Belfast last night.

Before addressing the Northern Ireland section of the Confederation of British Industry’s annual dinner, Mr Cowen said the killings of two British soldiers and of Constable Stephen Carroll were “acts of murder, pure and simple”.

Earlier in Belfast, Republican Sinn Féin said the Real IRA killings of British soldiers Patrick Azimkar and Mark Quinsey and the Continuity IRA killing of Constable Carroll were “acts of war”.

Before attending the dinner, Mr Cowen paid a courtesy visit to First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness at Stormont and pledged that co-operation “between the Garda Síochána and the PSNI will continue to be of the highest possible level so that we can deal with this threat”.

Mr Cowen spoke at the dinner at the La Mon hotel on the outskirts of east Belfast where in 1978 12 people were killed in an IRA bombing.

Mr Cowen said the RIRA and the CIRA had no place in contemporary Ireland. “They don’t represent anybody, they had no mandate,” he said.

“I stand with the people of Ireland in total opposition to the tiny minority who want hatred and division to overcome peace and progress. They did not succeed. They cannot succeed. They will not succeed,” he said.

Earlier, Republican Sinn Féin (RSF), which security sources say is linked to the Continuity IRA, called the recent murders “acts of war” and refused to condemn them.

The organisation, which broke away from Provisional Sinn Féin in 1986 when Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness succeeded in ending the party’s Dáil abstentionist policy, said the killings were “regrettable” but “inevitable” due to the “British occupation of Ireland”.

Richard Walsh, the 27-year-old publicity director for RSF, held a press conference in west Belfast where he was joined by three young men from Craigavon, Co Antrim, who complained that their homes had been raided by the PSNI, with one man saying all his clothes were taken away.

RSF said that two of the men who were questioned by the police about the murders but subsequently released were also in the building where yesterday’s press conference

was held. They initially agreed to speak to reporters off camera but, according to spokeswoman Josephine Hayden, they then changed their minds.

Mr Walsh, who said RSF did not have an armed wing, responded to Sinn Féin Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness's statement that the dissident republican killers were "traitors".

Mr Walsh said: "Republican Sinn Féin are not sitting at Stormont. Republican Sinn Féin are not administering British rule in Ireland, nor are we supporting the armed forces of occupation in our country. He is a man who has been guilty of the most severe treachery to this country."

This was an allegation he also levelled against Mr Adams and his "fellow travellers", adding that "the Provisionals indeed have become unionists, in that they seek to uphold the union. They can no longer be described as nationalists, and certainly cannot be described as republicans."

Asked about the murders, Mr Walsh said: "It is regrettable that anyone has to lose their life, but the reality is that when we have occupation within a country there is very deep resistance, including armed resistance.

"We have always upheld the right of the Irish people to use any level of controlled legitimate force to drive the British out of Ireland. We make no apologies for that. It is regrettable that loss of life occurred, but sadly it is an inevitable fact," he added.

Asked what right RSF had to speak for the people of Ireland when people on both sides of the Border voted for the Belfast Agreement, Mr Walsh repeated that the "reality is that so long as British rule continues in Ireland, there will be resistance to it".

A PSNI vehicle was positioned close to the RSF offices on the Falls Road in west Belfast where the press conference was held yesterday, filming those who entered and exited the building.

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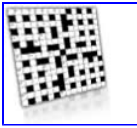
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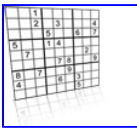
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