



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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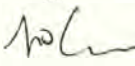
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P21/5

Analysis of Sinn Fein/IRA reaction to the Enniskillen bombing

1. One of the notable aspects of the aftermath of Sunday's tragedy in Enniskillen has been the unprecedented level of criticism of the IRA operation from within its own and Sinn Fein ranks. In the eye of the public storms which inevitably follow IRA murders, the uninterrupted pattern has been for Sinn Fein leaders to stand over the actions of the IRA and certainly at the very least, refuse to condemn them. Esprit de corps demanded that no matter how heavily the "flak" flew, one stood by the IRA and as recently as two weeks prior to Enniskillen, Gerry Adams had emphatically re-enunciated the principle in his Ard Fheis speech that "we will never desert those volunteers in life or death". Enniskillen, if not quite shattering the principle, certainly provided it with a severe jolt.
2. The first Sinn Fein representative to break ranks was Paul Corrigan, the Chairman of Fermanagh District Council, who on Monday morning - and prior to the IRA statement and that of Gerry Adams - described the IRA action as a "very, very bad mistake" and expressed his "shock and regret" at the deaths and "horrific" injuries. Such an explicitly negative public reaction to an IRA operation by a Sinn Fein leader was unprecedented, certainly in recent years. Even more explicit was to follow. Two weeks after his Ard Fheis speech, Gerry Adams found himself saying "I do not try to justify yesterday's bombing, I regret very much that it occurred". The IRA's own statement on Monday afternoon, complete with convoluted "explanation" of how things had gone wrong, said "we deeply regret what happened". The fact that the statement took some 30 hours to produce was also unusual - normally claims of responsibility by the IRA are issued within hours of the incident in question.
3. Other internal condemnations of the atrocity continued to reach the media as the week progressed. In complete contrast to normal practice, Sinn Fein councillors observed a minute's silence at various district council meetings as a mark of respect for the Enniskillen dead and injured. At the Derry City Council's meeting, for instance, Sinn Fein Cllr. Barney McFadden said that "on behalf of the Republican people of Derry" he wished to extend the "deepest sympathy and heartfelt condolences to the victims of the bombing". On Tuesday, a "senior Republican source" was quoted in the "Irish News" as saying that "politically we haven't so much shot ourselves in the foot as shot ourselves in the head". Another "Republican source" was quoted in the same article as saying that the bombing team involved at Enniskillen "would never operate again" and that they would be "called before our internal inquiry to explain what went wrong".

4. Meanwhile, a "senior IRA figure" told the London "Independent" that the organisation's morale, credibility and reputation had suffered badly as a result of the Enniskillen bombing, adding that it would have a long term effect politically, "possibly for years". He said that while the IRA's "central base" of support was "secure though demoralised, the outer reaches of its political and international support have been just totally devastated". He predicted particular damage to Sinn Fein in the South, saying: "we were trying to convince people there that what's happening in the North is a legitimate armed struggle. But the name we've attracted cuts the ground from under us". Echoing similar suggestions from other IRA/Sinn Fein sources, he said he believed that one of the outcomes of Enniskillen would be the ratification of the Extradition Act.
5. This week's "An Phoblacht", published yesterday, described the bombing as "an appalling tragedy that should never have happened..... That was a monumental error for which Republicans have paid, and will continue to pay dearly". The editorial declared that "the Republican movement, its members and supporters everywhere have been shocked and shaken by what happened in Enniskillen last Sunday. We do not try to excuse or defend the action which caused the deaths and injuries inflicted by the IRA bomb. The most telling criticism of this disastrous IRA action has come from Republicans themselves".
6. The operation may not have been a bungled "maverick" action, as Sinn Fein and the IRA have suggested. It may have been a carefully planned, premeditated attack on Remembrance Day, aimed at provoking a loyalist backlash, driving a wedge between the two Governments and bringing the Protestant community and the British back together. There are also suggestions that it may have been a revenge attack for what the IRA regarded as the "desecration" of its ceremony honouring its dead at the Derry funerals on 2 November.


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