



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

IRA members accused of “cleaning-up” a serious crime scene



Eileen Calder

Members of the IRA have been accused of “cleaning-up” the scene of a rape in order to remove all forensic evidence that would link the perpetrators to the crime. The Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre has made the allegation following the attack upon a young woman. “It was the gang rape of a young woman,” says the centre’s codirector, Eileen Calder. “The perpetrators’ families were associated with the Provisional IRA and CRJ (Community Restorative Justice).” Known IRA men were seen cleaning up the scene. “These people did their utmost to prevent this young woman reporting the crime to

police. Crown counsel told the victim he wouldn’t be willing to raise the actions of the IRA and CRJ unless she made arrangements to leave the country afterwards.”

Eileen Calder is alarmed at reports that the British government is about to fund CRJ which operates 14 schemes in nationalist areas across the North. In 2003, CRJ secured almost £1.4m, over a three-year period, from Atlantic Philanthropies . . . US billionaire Chuck Feeney’s charity. That money ends in March so CRJ has applied for state funding. On paper, CRJ seems a great idea, dealing with 1,700 cases in the past year, and presenting itself as resolving conflicts between the perpetrators and victims of local crime. A stated aim is to reduce “punishment” attacks. Some CRJ members have a history of paramilitary involvement, such as Harry Maguire, convicted of the 1988 murder of two British Army corporals at an IRA funeral. CRJ is often seen as an “alternative police force”. Serious concerns about its activities have been raised by a range of organisations and individuals. Two west Belfast families claim CRJ members were intimidatory, and reinforced IRA threats against their relatives.

Eileen Calder of the RCSA Centre stresses she is not anti-republican: “We supported the campaign to end the stripsearching of IRA women prisoners. I’ve stood on a platform beside Sinn Fein’s Bairbre de Brun supporting republican women’s right to march in Belfast city centre. But I have to speak out on this.” CRJ hampered cases by interfering with evidence which meant the perpetrators weren’t brought to court. “At worst, they’ve threatened women and attempted to cover up crimes committed by those with IRA, Sinn Fein or CRJ connections. Allowing such people power is like letting the lunatics run the asylum.” SDLP policing spokesman, Alex Attwood, says that after a planning application in Andersonstown was refused “someone who didn’t like it tried to use restorative justice muscle to get local people, whose legitimate objections had been upheld, to change their minds.” Victor Notorantonio from Ballymurphy says: “Our family has no love for police but we’d be happier dealing with them any day than with CRJ.” He says a CRJ member called his family to a meeting at which two other community activists . . . an ex-IRA prisoner and a Sinn Fein representative whose names are known were present. Notorantonio’s son Frank (18) and his nephew Billy (21) were given 24 hours to leave the country. “They wanted me to sign a form saying I wouldn’t shelter my son. I told them they could wreck my house and burn my car, but the boys were going nowhere.

Anthony McIntyre, a former IRA prisoner opposed to violence by mainstream and dissident republicans, says CRJ began as a good idea: “It had an element of independence . . . and



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some of those involved are genuine people . . . but it's been largely colonised by the Provos."

SDLP

The SDLP believes restorative justice schemes work well elsewhere but adequate safeguards don't yet exist in the North. It maintains such schemes shouldn't be funded until Sinn Fein signs up to policing. It raised these concerns at a meeting with the Prime Minister. The SDLP suspects that, to secure IRA decommissioning, the British government has already promised Sinn Fein funding for CRJ. The government denies this. The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) has issued draft guidelines which CRJ would need to endorse to secure potential funding. The SDLP dismisses these as inadequate. They allow for an internal complaints' system, rather than an independent statutory one, says Alex Attwood: "The police can be investigated by the Police Ombudsman but if someone's rights are abused by a CRJ member they're meant to go higher up in CRJ to complain, which could be going from the frying pan into the fire."

Investigation

The Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) is now investigating the report of Provisional IRA members cleaning up the scene of a gang rape and attempting to prevent the victim reporting the crime to police. The IMC's next report will be presented to the British and Irish governments in January. The IMC delegation which met with the Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre staff included former Assembly speaker, Lord Alderdice; former Metropolitan Police deputy assistant commissioner, John Grieve; and former Department of Justice secretary general, Joe Brosnan. "The meeting went well. It was very thorough and we believe what we said was taken seriously," said a RCSAC member. An independent member of the Policing Board also met Eileen Calder following the newspaper reports. "That was a very positive meeting as well and I am now hoping to address the full Policing Board on the general issue of the policing of rape, including the involvement of these community restorative justice schemes," she said.

What is Community Restorative Justice?

According to newspaper reports, Community Restorative Justice is often seen as an alternative police force in nationalist areas, particularly in Belfast and Londonderry. It has dealt with 1,700 cases in the past year, and presents itself as resolving conflicts between the perpetrators and victims of crime. Fourteen CRJ schemes operate in working-class, nationalist districts. Critics say it's just another tool of paramilitary control, and accuse it of human rights' abuses and of selectivity. Comment :— The reports highlight the underhand and deceitful deals that Blair and co. have made with the Republican criminal underworld which are aimed at retaining their cooperation in political affairs at the expense of law and order, decency and democracy. The community that supported the campaign of Sinn Fein/IRA is now beginning to pay a heavy price for that support. "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn," Proverbs 29:2.