



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

So few killers are really sorry for our Troubles

By Gail Walker [Belfast Telegraph]

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With a dread-thumping inevitability, 'controversy' rears its head as the 25th anniversary of the Brighton bomb draws near as to whether Patrick Magee, the chief Provo bomber, should be invited to take part in the ceremonies of remembrance.

In one corner, Jo Berry, whose father, the Tory whip Sir Anthony Berry, was killed in the carnage at the Brighton Grand. She'd planned to invite Magee to a screening of a reconciliation documentary, *Soldiers of Peace*, which features their strange friendship. It's narrated by Michael Douglas, by the way.

In the other corner, Norman Tebbit, who has said he'll never forgive Magee for murdering his friends and colleagues and for paralysing his wife, Margaret, from the neck down. I know whose side I'm on.

Before seemingly withdrawing her planned invitation to Magee, Berry was convinced of the rightness of her decision: "I'm sure it will be a controversial move, but I've thought long and hard about it. The reason why I feel okay about inviting Pat down is because the film is bigger than the two of us and it is about creating something positive from conflict. Pat's in a very different place to where he was 25 years ago."

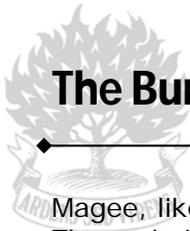
Pat? Bigger than the two of us? In a different place? What fresh psychobabble is this? The truth is that Jo Berry has generally been lauded for her willingness to forgive Magee and to move on. But Tebbit is portrayed as a dinosaur for refusing to bury his grief so we can all pretend it never happened.

Remember when the BBC had the gall to air the radio programme *The Reunion*, featuring Magee and Berry? Tebbit had to spend a lot of energy explaining that, no, he didn't want to meet Magee and chat about old times, because, well, he was a mass murderer and responsible for putting his wife in a wheelchair. But he was the 'odd man out', a voice from a past we'd rather forget.

Obviously, Berry is very forgiving, but that doesn't make her morally superior to Tebbit. Indeed, there is a case for saying that she's a dupe.

In the little cottage industry of lectures, talks and films that she and Magee have grown, never once has the Provo bomber expressed what you or I would call contrition or remorse.

Indeed, Magee — in standard SF garb of beard, polytechnic lecturer glasses and suit — resolutely, if polysyllabically, defends his reasons for the bomb. At most, he now sees the human dimension to his actions. But that isn't the same as saying he's sorry. The reconciliation seems to consist of Jo reconciling herself with why her father was a 'legitimate target'.



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Magee, like many reformed murderers in our midst, takes the Albert Speer line of defence. They admit to responsibility but not guilt. Or is it guilt but not responsibility? They yammer on about context, motivation and how they were, too, victims of 'the situation'. They want to 'move on'.

The Brighton spat is, of course, a mere microcosm of what many here have had to live with since the ceasefires — the pressure to bury their grief, to 'forgive' the murderers in power or fronting the community association up the road. In the manner of light-touch Stalinists, the powers-that-be airbrush the hapless innocents out of the picture as quickly — and as tastefully — as possible.

How else do you explain the Eames/Bradley debacle where —in a semi-state document — it is suggested to make no differentiation between the killer and his victim? How else do you explain the lack of public recognition of innocent victims of the Troubles? How else do you explain that —judging by media coverage — the Troubles in essence was just a few 'controversial' events: Bloody Sunday, (but not Bloody Friday), Rosemary Nelson, Finucane, Billy Wright, the Omagh bombing...

What about the grubby un-spectaculars that no one has done time for or stepped forward to claim in our new dawn of reconciliation and contrition? Don't be crazy. They got away with it. Nothing to be contrite about.

And that's the point. Were paramilitary killers who hadn't been identified now emerging out of the jungle, blinking, to attach their names to this punishment murder and that school gate assassination, well, we might be close to the universe Berry lives in. Sadly, there remain thousands of relatives yet to be matched with their respective widow or orphan-maker counterparts.

Of course for the vast majority of deaths, there was no controversy. It was the IRA, UDA and UVF. Families just have to learn to live with that. No public enquiries for them. And, let's face it, it's all getting so long ago and, sure, nothing's that black and white. Best to say that everyone was equally guilty/innocent. It's so much tidier administratively, isn't it? In our headlong rush for reconciliation, we should never forget that Norman Tebbit speaks for the vast majority of those bereaved through the conflict.