



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Sinn Fein's unfinished business in Columbia



The three IRA men arrested in Columbia

A key witness in the case against three Irish republicans, detained in Colombia, has disappeared. The sinister disappearance comes as Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams admitted one of the men was the party's representative in Cuba, something he had denied repeatedly. Niall Connolly, Martin McCauley and James Monaghan were charged with training Marxist guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the FARC, in explosives and urban terrorism.

The key prosecution witness, a former police inspector, said he had seen one of them with FARC guerrillas in 1998. But he has now disappeared and without his testimony, legal sources say, circumstantial and forensic evidence suggesting the men had been in contact with explosives, while with the guerrillas, would not be enough to convict them on terrorism charges.

The republicans' defence lawyer fled the country after receiving death threats from right-wing paramilitaries who said he must pay for helping international terrorists. The arrest of the trio in Bogota in August for travelling on false passports led to calls for Sinn Fein to be excluded from the Northern Ireland Assembly. McCauley and Monaghan have served sentences in Britain for IRA activity. Gerry Adams acknowledged that Connolly was appointed as the party's representative in Cuba without his knowledge or the authorisation of the international department of his party. He said that while his party had denied claims by the Cuban authorities that Mr Connolly was their representative, an internal investigation revealed that 'one of our senior members asked Niall Connolly to represent the party in Cuba'. 'This decision was taken without the knowledge or authorisation of the international department or any other party structure including the party chairperson or myself.' The Colombian Attorney General, Luis Camilo Osorio, said Mr Adams' admission enhanced 'the investigation and confirms many of the investigations that have already taken place.'