



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

IRA accused of breach of cease-fire with £3m cigarette robbery



A senior police officer linked the robbery in Belfast to republican paramilitaries and the DUP has blamed the IRA. Assistant Chief Constable Sam Kincaid did not specify which group was involved in the weekend raid, during which a family was held hostage. Mr. Kincaid, in charge of crime operations, told a meeting of the Policing Board it had been a well organised raid linked to paramilitaries from a republican background. During the meeting Sam Kincaid went on to say: "All paramilitary groups in the last

five to six months have been involved in serious robberies in Northern Ireland. That's on both sides of the community."

He said that he would be passing on details of the robbery at the cigarette warehouse to the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC), which looks into paramilitary activity.

The DUP's Ian Paisley Jnr told the Board he believed the warehouse robbery was carried out by the IRA. He said: "I am utterly convinced that the cigarette robbery at the Gallagher cigarette warehouse could not have occurred without the sanction of the Provisional IRA. I say that for these reasons - information which I have, but also the fact of where the family were held hostage, the writ of the Provisional IRA runs." "They, the dogs in the street, know that the IRA have their hand in this." During the weekend robbery, a masked gang burst into the home of a warehouse worker. He lived in the Ardoyne area in West Belfast — an IRA stronghold. The man was ordered to go to work while the gang escaped with cigarettes estimated at a value of between £2m and £3m.

Ulster Unionist Michael McGimpsey said the robbery "comes at a critical time in the peace process". "It carries all the hallmarks of the IRA and begs serious questions of the Sinn Fein leadership," he said.

However, Sinn Fein/IRA made a characteristic response. A Sinn Fein spokesman said: "It is clear that there are those who do not want a political deal and will seek at every opportunity to throw up reasons and create obstacles to that deal being achieved."

The SDLP said they would be seeking an urgent meeting with the IMC to confirm if the IRA was involved in a cigarette robbery which netted a gang almost £3m. SDLP policing spokesman Joe Byrne said: "As with similar raids the IMC must tell the truth about any organisation that is involved. The SDLP is arranging to meet the IMC in advance of their October report to urge that all the truth of paramilitary activity be told, both that which is no longer happening and that which is continuing to occur."

If the IRA are prepared to engage in illegal activities at a time when the future of the talks between London/Dublin and unionists are at a crucial stage, then it manifests the contempt with which republicans consider the views of unionists. They believe that so desperate are London and Dublin to avoid a return to terrorism, that they will pressurise unionists into an acceptance of Sinn Fein/IRA in government, no matter what the IRA is doing!