



# The Burning Bush—Online article archive

## Television Programme lays blame for the “Northern Bank raid” at the IRA’s door



Police at the scene of the robbery

**Channel Four “Dispatches” programme has documented the involvement of the IRA and senior members of Sinn Fein in the December 20th, 2004, raid upon the Northern Bank headquarters in Belfast.**

**The following is taken from an article posted on “Timesonline” by the reporter on the “Dispatches” programme, Kevin Toolis, who is termed in the media as an “expert” on the IRA.**

\*\*\*\*\*

“ON THE NIGHT of December 20, 2004, the vault of the Northern Bank headquarters in Belfast was raided and £26.5 million in cash was stolen. It was a stunning, audacious crime. After holding two bank employees hostage overnight, the robbers forced both men, who had keys to the vault, to participate in the robbery of their employer out of fear of harm to their still-captive families. Under the noses of unsuspecting guards, a quarter of a tonne of money was simply walked out of one of the most secure banking vaults in the British Isles.

Even after stealing £14 million the robbers returned for another load. In fact they robbed the Northern Bank not once but three times. Not a shot was fired but the Big Heist, as it is known, was the biggest cash bank robbery in British criminal history.

For the last nine months, as part of a Channel 4 Dispatches investigation, I have tried to find out who precisely was behind the robbery and what has happened to all that stolen money.

The answers are both obvious and deeply dispiriting because at least some of the responsibility lies directly at the feet of the British Prime Minister and his chief Irish negotiator and Chief of Staff, Jonathan Powell. Without their political indulgence of the IRA’s leaders, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, the Northern Bank robbery would almost certainly never have happened. At its bluntest, Tony Blair betrayed the law-abiding citizens of Northern Ireland by ignoring the IRA’s robberies just so that Downing Street could get the semblance of an Irish peace agreement.

Within hours of the robbery British intelligence knew exactly who carried out the Big Heist. The gang’s hostage-taking modus operandi, the use of boiler suits and bleach to destroy DNA traces and the sheer size of the robbery team, were all signature marks of the Provisional IRA.

Earlier in 2004 the IRA had carried out a series of hostage-taking robberies in Northern Ireland that netted £3.2 million even as Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness were talking peace at Leeds Castle.

In public, for far too long, the British Government likes to operate a convenient political lie when dealing with the IRA’s leadership. The Prime Minister, and the hollow men he has in the past installed at Hillsborough Castle, talk of Sinn Fein and the IRA as if they are two distinct entities. But a lie repeated, even a thousand times, is still a lie. The reality, accord-



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

---

ing to Ireland's Justice Minister, Michael McDowell, whose intelligence services run a network of informers within the IRA, is far simpler. Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness are the IRA. "The Provisional movement is dominated and has been dominated up till recently by one body and that is the Army Council of the IRA," he says. "The IRA carried out those robberies, serious armed robberies, and had a separate fund-raising section. And the members of the Army Council must all have had knowledge of one kind or another of that campaign of robbery and violence and extortion which has kept the organisation going. Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness have been members of the Army Council throughout all of the relevant period we are talking about and it is inconceivable that as members of the Army Council they wouldn't know the finances of their own organisation and what they are based on."

According to Mr McDowell, Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness resigned from the Army Council two months ago and substituted placemen to do their bidding as part of the backroom deal surrounding the IRA's July cessation statement. But nothing has really changed. "They (Adams and McGuinness) are in overall control of the movement, and there is no challenge to their authority," McDowell, who is the equivalent of the British Home Secretary, says. Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness continue to maintain that they are not on the IRA Army Council and have no knowledge of the IRA's activities. But it is clear that, according to the Irish Justice Minister, the orders for the Northern Bank robbery came from the top, the IRA Army Council, whose two most important leaders are Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness. It is also inconceivable that the same information and intelligence was not available to Mr Powell and Mr Blair as they offered tea and biscuits to Gerry and Martin across the polished tables in Downing Street. So why did the Prime Minister not confront Mr Adams at Leeds Castle in September and say "Tell your men to stop thieving"? The answer, according to Alasdair McDonnell, the SDLP MP, is chilling political expediency. "The real bottom line is that the Prime Minister was prepared to sacrifice Northern Ireland. It didn't matter much what sort of circumstances the rest of us had to live in here, as long as there weren't bombs going off in London."

And that is why the IRA Army Council carried out the Northern Bank robbery. The IRA did because it could – and because it had got away with all the little robberies. The Big Heist was just another strike, another probe at the enemy. The entire peace process, the rule of law, still means nothing to the IRA's leadership. Sinn Fein claims to be a democratic party. But it is not. Its leadership, Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness, still bear allegiance to a secret clandestine army that robs banks, runs a criminal empire and is still prepared to use the threat of violence, even murder, to achieve its aims. Using the proceeds of that IRA empire, Sinn Fein has a plan to buy its way into power in Ireland. It is a growing political force and Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness are men of great capability. At the general election, Sinn Fein could easily enter into a coalition government in the Dail. Mr Adams is already within sight of his next goal – power in the Irish Republic. Mr Blair's days are dwindling but the IRA Army Council's goal is unswervingly the same: to take power in Ireland by all and every means. All that has changed is the tactics: The ballot box and the Armalite has been replaced by the ballot box and the bank robbery."