



## The Burning Bush—Online article archive

### Colombia 3 'are back' to trouble Dublin



**The Colombia 3 — Niall Connolly, Martin McCauley and James Monaghan**

Three Irish Republicans, sentenced to jail terms for training Marxist rebels in Colombia, have secretly returned to the Republic of Ireland. Niall Connolly, Martin McCauley and James Monaghan were sentenced to 17 years after an appeal court reversed their earlier acquittal on the charge. The men, who absconded in December 2004 while on bail awaiting a court of appeal decision, deny a deal was done in conjunction with the IRA announcement of an end to terrorism. Unionists reacted with anger to the development, which Sinn Fein, of course, welcomed.

The Irish state broadcasting network RTE, interviewed one of the men, Jim Monaghan, at a secret location. He denied that any deal had been done with the British or Irish governments following the IRA's statement the previous week in which it claimed it was ending its campaign of violence. He said he did not consider himself to be "on the run" and would not be hiding from Irish police.

Monaghan would not say how the three men got back to Ireland, but that they had got "a lot of help from a lot of people" and that he would not endanger them. He said he hoped the Irish government would not place any obstacles in the way of the three men staying in the country and the government "would be very remiss to send anyone back to Colombia".

Colombian Vice President Francisco Santos said: "They have a judicial sentence over their heads and we sincerely hope that they pay jail for it. We hope that the international police system will hand them over to Colombia even though that's difficult because there's no extradition treaty between Ireland and Colombia." Deputy Prime Minister Mary Harney said there were "very serious issues to be addressed, seeing as they were travelling on false passports".

An Irish government spokesman said: "This issue was not part of the government's discussions with Sinn Fein and we had no prior knowledge of their return to Ireland." However, Fine Gael leader Enda Kenny demanded an immediate statement from Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern on the circumstances surrounding the men's return.

A Northern Ireland Office spokesman said: "We have only just become aware of the presence of these men in the Republic of Ireland. That is a matter for the Irish authorities. If they enter the UK, an extradition request will be dealt with without delay." Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams said he welcomed the news. However, he added: "I want to make clear that this issue was not discussed with the Irish government, nor was it either a deal or a side deal related to recent developments in the peace process."

DUP deputy leader Peter Robinson said he had expressed his party's "grave concern" about the three men's return to the British government. "We are looking for their immediate ar-



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rest and for the Republic to hand them over to the Colombian authorities. Mr. Ahern must facilitate, by whatever means necessary, their swift extradition. If he does not, unionists in Northern Ireland will believe him to be complicit," he said. The Irish Government has a thorny problem facing them. It has two explanations as to why the men were in Colombia in 2001. There is the Gardai version, backed up by the United States' Congress, that they was there to train Farc guerillas in bomb and mortar-making and there is the three men's story as told by Monaghan. They were there on holiday to observe the "peace process" in Colombia.

According to Monaghan, while in a relatively poorly paid job assisting ex-IRA prisoners, he was on holiday in Colombia flying first class to Bogota on Air France at a cost of around £4000 for the return flights - to observe the failing peace negotiations between the Colombian Government and Farc. Niall Connolly and Martin McCauley were also carrying fake membership cards of the Dublin branch of the National Union of Journalists. The US government is putting the squeeze on the Dublin government to ensure the three men serve their 17-year sentences.

It has been reported that Washington was taken aback by the low-key approach adopted by the Irish authorities to the return