**News Letter**

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**William Matchett**

***An amnesty for the security forces will only help Sinn Fein legitimise the IRA***

On a trip to Lebanon a lovely lady who runs a local NGO told me of Hezbollah’s 100-year strategy to take over the place. They have no real interest in making the nation work until this happens and are quite open about it. The IRA cannot stand the fact that almost all state killings were legitimate, such as above at Loughgall in 1987, when the SAS stopped eight IRA men as they attacked a police station. Picture Pacemaker The IRA cannot stand the fact that almost all state killings were legitimate, such as above at Loughgall in 1987, when the SAS stopped eight IRA men as they attacked a police station. There is no rush. They have milestones. This loosely mirrors Sinn Féin’s strategy. Aim for the ceiling to hit halfway up the wall. This was the mantra of the republican leadership in 1992 and the means of influencing outcomes in upcoming talks. The IRA was internalising how to turn defeat into victory. They had to hide a humiliating climb-down and sectarian ‘armed struggle.’ This was one of their secret milestones. The rest, as they say, is history. They went on to well and truly wipe the ‘Brits’ eye. And we are where we are today because of it. For at least seven years before the Belfast Agreement IRA leaders were planning a peace deal. This is unsurprising. They had sustained the conflict. Once they decided to give up, peace would follow. Insider knowledge gave them a head start on the competition. While the peace deal occupied others, they were on to the next move. At no stage have they been behind. The philosophy and personalities of the IRA leadership are alive and well in Sinn Féin. ‘They have not gone away, you know.’ So, what is the next secret milestone? One needs to look no further than a disputed past. This is the hottest political issue. Nationalism’s broad church is happy with the current setup, whereas the British government and unionists are not. Since 1998, public inquiries have focused almost exclusively on the state. The same applies to coroner’s inquests. Historical investigations by the Police Ombudsman only look at the police. A new criminal justice arrangement has discriminated against the state on a scale that would make an old unionist Stormont blush. Martin McGuinness, left and Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams carrying the coffin of former senior IRA commander Brian Keenan in west Belfast in 2008. Photo: Paul Faith/PA Wire Martin McGuinness, left and Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams carrying the coffin of former senior IRA commander Brian Keenan in west Belfast in 2008. Photo: Paul Faith/PA Wire The Inquiry into the murder of Rosemary Nelson cost £46.1 million and took eight-years. Northern Ireland took almost twice the time over one victim of the Troubles that South Africa did for 19,000 victims of apartheid. The cost per victim in the latter was £2,500. The price for all this is somewhere near a billion pounds and dwarfs the ‘cash for ash’ scandal. If the intent is to deliver justice through criminal prosecutions, it has failed. No soldier or police officer has been convicted, and are unlikely to be. The chances of the British allowing a Chelsea pensioner to go to prison are nil. Yet, the ‘witch hunt’ juggernaut against Troubles veterans rolls on and nationalists do not complain. Incensed by this, Conservative MPs blame anti-British bias in Northern Ireland’s Public Prosecution Service, a claim the PPS rejects. Unlike controversial Police Ombudsman’s statements, the PPS element travels. Belfast summonses for British soldiers affect votes in Westminster. From experience, we know republicans believe that this hits the ‘Brits’ were it hurts. The real target halfway up the wall is an amnesty for the security forces. Sinn Féin wants equity at arms for the IRA. They see the criminal justice arrangement, whose design they painstakingly influenced, as their ‘Trojan horse.’ Yes, they have more than one, all of them trundling toward the same goal – retrospectively legitimising the IRA. This is the secret milestone. Sinn Féin has gone into overdrive to get there, particularly on the numbers. They detest the facts as they stand. That is, the IRA is responsible for 60% of deaths and the security forces 10%. They are especially annoyed that nearly every state killing was lawful, such as the eight IRA men shot dead by the SAS at Loughgall and the innocent civilian caught in the cross-fire. To change the numbers, the tactic is to attribute killings by loyalist terrorists to the security forces. This is to say; the security forces were also responsible for these deaths. It depicts the security forces and loyalist terrorists as a single entity. Sinn Féin’s calculation is that the ‘witch hunt’ will provoke the British into an amnesty for police and soldiers, the same as that given to the IRA. This will end the inquisition but in the process will taint the reputation of the security forces and most victims of terrorism. It is what Sinn Féin hopes for. It also keeps them ahead of the SDLP in the nationalist pecking order. ‘Blame the Brits’ has become a cultural norm in nationalism to an extent that it is political suicide to go against it. This is the platform Sinn Féin uses to persuade the world the IRA was a bona fide army. But if the IRA was an army, where did it hold its prisoners? What was its policy on captured enemy forces? Did it prohibit torture and summary executions? How many injured civilians or enemy forces did it treat? What were its guidelines on recruiting children into its ranks? Now ask the same questions of the RUC and British Army, or for that matter, the Garda and Irish Defence Forces. And if the security forces and loyalists were part of a grand conspiracy, why were there nearly as many loyalists as republicans in prison when it came to releasing them early? Northern Ireland’s criminal justice arrangement has produced a one-sided approach to the past. This has been the main source of ‘dirty war’ claims sure to grab the headlines. At the same time, it largely excluded the 90% of murders by terrorists. Almost certainly, a fair approach would have put more IRA men in prison. That this did not happen benefited Sinn Féin. The system was rigged to produce pro-republican results and must remain if the next destination is to be reached. The British can stop this by cutting the finance that drives it. This will slow the juggernaut. For the first time Sinn Féin will have to compete on a level playing field. London must also resist the amnesty option. The brave men and women of the armed services and RUC who protected all sections of society against an array of deadly threats, often at great personal cost, do not fear justice, but injustice. The ‘peace process’ causes them concern. An acceptable level of political dysfunction has replaced an acceptable level of violence. The ‘ash for cash’ train wreck is a poor reflection on the DUP, but it is probable that their power-sharing partner saw this coming and was happy to let it happen. The people deserve better.

Dr William Matchett is author of ‘Secret Victory: The Intelligence War that Beat the IRA’   
  
Read more at: <http://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/opinion/william-matchett-an-amnesty-for-the-security-forces-will-only-help-sinn-fein-legitimise-the-ira-1-7815535>m