Is Northern Ireland terrorism state-sponsored terror?

by Mary Jane Freeman

The March 15 murder of Northern Ireland human rights attorney Rosemary Nelson, known for her aggressive defense of Catholics and nationalists, brought to the fore the decades-long debate as to whether British intelligence, its British Army counterparts, and Britain's Northern Ireland police force—the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC)—are responsible for terrorism in the North. That is to say: Are the bloody "Troubles" of Northern Ireland a result of state-sponsored terrorism? It has long been suspected that British Special Air Services forces used Northern Ireland as a test tube to experiment with irregular warfare tactics.

Since the Nelson assassination, a battle has emerged, between those pressing for investigations into the evidence pointing to the RUC's and the British Army's role in political assassinations, and those, particularly the British government and its minions, working to suppress any such investigations.

On the one side, are: 1) the re-release of an expanded version of *The Committee: Political Assassination in Northern Ireland,* by author Sean McPhilemy, a devastating book which documents tales of terror (see *EIR,* July 24 and Aug. 7, 1998); 2) an article entitled "Secret Conspiracy To Destroy Peace in Ireland," by British Member of Parliament Ken Livingstone, in the May 21 London *Independent,* reasserting his charges that MI5 and MI6 colluded with loyalist paramilitaries to wreck the 1975 negotiated cease-fire; 3) international demands for an independent inquiry into the 1989 murder of Belfast attorney Pat Finucane, based on new evidence alleging RUC officers' collusion in his murder; and 4) resolutions and hearings in the U.S. Congress House International Relations Committee concerning the Nelson murder and proposed drastic reforms and/or abolishment of the RUC.

On the other side, is the British government's propaganda smear campaign against McPhilemy and Livingstone, tagging the latter as "Red Ken." And, David Trimble (First Minister-designate of the new Northern Ireland Assembly and leader of the Ulster Unionist Party [UUP]) has entered the fray, according to the London *Sunday Times,* saying that he will sue Amazon.com U.K. to halt Internet access to McPhilemy's book, which is already banned in Britain and Ireland.

The overwhelming adoption of the Good Friday peace accord, by the peoples of Ireland, North and South, who voted in May 1998 to remove bullets from politics, begs for a resolution of the hundreds of unsolved murders, and the charges of state collusion in them. Such a resolution is critical at this juncture, because it has been the insistent demand of Trimble and the UUP that no duly elected representative of Sinn Fein, the political party of Catholic nationalists and the republican movement, will be allowed to hold an executive position in the Assembly unless the IRA agrees to turn in its weapons. The Trimble-UUP demand is contrary to procedures set up by the Good Friday accord for decommissioning of both IRA and loyalists' weapons within the larger framework of establishing a N. Ireland government. But, the demand has stalemated the peace process, and threatens to end it.

Demands for investigation

The day after the murder of Rosemary Nelson, U.S. Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.) said of Nelson, "She was murdered because she represented nationalists in high-profile cases. . . . Last September [she] testified before the House International Relations Subcommittee on International Operations and Human Rights . . . about harassment and intimidation of defense lawyers who represented republicans and nationalists, and she accused the RUC of threatening her and her family. . . . Attacks on the judiciary . . . are intolerable and represent . . . the gravest threat to the fragile peace . . . over Northern Ireland. There can be no permanent peace in Northern Ireland if these charges regarding the RUC are true. RUC complicity in political assassinations would be state-sponsored terrorism." Moynihan noted that Nelson was "not alone" in her charges, and said that McPhilemy had impressed him as a "principled, and exceedingly careful journalist." Another reason for silencing Nelson may have been that she was McPhilemy's legal adviser in Northern Ireland.

The Finucane murder is one of many featured in McPhilemy's book as allegedly planned by the "Committee." Since the 1998 release of the book—a revised and expanded edition was issued May 24, 1999—numerous other sources have leaked bits and pieces of corroborating evidence supporting aspects of McPhilemy's thesis, which is that "since 1989, senior members and officers of the . . . RUC, unionist establishment figures from the business world, members of the Protestant clergy, the security forces, and the British secret service, have operated a secret committee which systematically has colluded with paramilitary assassins . . . to commit these murders," his attorney writes. In April, the Irish govern-

ment delivered a formal request to the British government for an independent inquiry based on new evidence. The London *Independent* reportedly saw the secret Irish government document on which the request is based, and said that it includes allegations that named RUC officers "procured the murder of Pat Finucane and that RUC Special Branch had detailed advance knowledge of the murder plot."

What British MP Livingstone's May 21 commentary reminds us, is that such collusion did not begin in 1989. He writes, "The allegations I made back in July 1987 read like a Frederick Forsyth novel. If true they were a time bomb ticking away at the heart of Mrs. Thatcher's government. . . . My allegations were that a small group of MI5 and MI6 officers conspired to wreck the cease-fire negotiated between the Labour government and the IRA in February 1975. Captain Robert Nairac led a group of loyalist paramilitaries across the border into Ireland to assassinate John Frances Green, a leading IRA figure. A few months later, in July 1975, Nairac again led loyalist paramilitaries, disguised in Ulster Defence Regiment uniforms, in an attack on the Miami Showband who were . . . Ireland's most popular group. . . . When arrested, one of the loyalist para[s] was revealed to be a sergeant in the UDR [Ulster Defense Regiment]. . . . The MI5 plotters were successful. The IRA reacted, . . . unleashing a wave of tit-for-tat killings that escalated until the Northern Ireland Secretary . . . terminated the cease-fire on 12 November."

Livingstone says that he has submitted more than 300 questions in Parliament on the "dirty war" in Ireland; all met with denials until finally "the government was forced to admit that the intelligence services had engaged in a covert black propaganda campaign, code-named Clockwork Orange." He, too, ties the resolution of these troubling allegations to the peace process. "The current cease-fire and peace process in Northern Ireland hang on a thread in part because of republican suspicions that the security services are not impartial," he says. He calls for a truth and reconciliation commission to examine the horrors, irrespective of who committed them. The MP concludes that if this were done, "there is also the much more explosive issue of the trail leading to the outer office of Mrs. Thatcher. . . . A full investigation could reveal that [former MI6 officer and MP] Airey Neave, the man who organized Thatcher's seizure of the Tory party in 1975, was also guilty of treason and an accessory to murder."

Trimble doth protest too much

Trimble announced through the pages of the May 23 *Sunday Times* that he will sue Amazon.com U.K. for its role in promoting *The Committee: Political Assassination in Northern Ireland*. Amazon's advertising for the paperback edition of the book, just released, says that the book is "a gripping story of terrorist atrocities and political corruption" which "makes clear that [the IRA's] opponents have been just as capable of committing evil in the name of their cause."

Trimble is mentioned in the book as one who provided political cover for members of the Committee who colluded with the RUC and loyalist paramilitaries in their targetted murders. The book carefully avoids describing Trimble as having a direct role in any murder per se.

According to the *Sunday Times,* Trimble is suing for libel in Britain "over allegations that he was associated with a loyalist murder conspiracy." Two of Trimble's constituents, named as members of the Committee, sued McPhilemy and his publisher, Roberts Rinehart, in a $100 million libel action last summer in the United States. Their attorney, Russell Smith, told *Ireland on Sunday,* "Trimble has injected himself into the case by writing a letter to Roberts Rinehart demanding that they not publish the book. He also denigrated the allegations in the book from the floor of the House of Commons. . . . He has openly defended individuals named as members of the Committee in the book, including known terrorists and evidently has relevant information about them." Publisher CEO Jack VanZandt has invited Trimble "to debate the allegations of our book . . . with the author . . . in a national public forum," but Trimble has not agreed. Rinehart says that "if Mr. Trimble truly wanted the facts to come out, he would have joined McPhilemy in calling for a public inquiry. Instead, he devotes his time and energy to trying to stop the book."

In July 1998, when *EIR* reviewed Irish author Sean McPhilemy's book, *The Committee: Political Assassination in Northern Ireland,* it had gone to press in the United States, but was banned in Britain, in part because his source had recanted his tale. The source, Jim Sands, had provided the inside information on collusion, at the highest levels of the RUC with loyalist paramilitaries and prominent "citizens above suspicion," in the murder of Catholics and republican paramilitaries. On May 14, 1999, Sands explained "how the RUC stage-managed his 'recantation.' "

Sands's newly filed affidavit reads in part: "After the RUC learned of my identity, I was detained and held against my will in British Army barracks and various police stations for a week. I was told what to say by RUC officers. . . . The RUC made it clear to me that if I did not cooperate . . . I would be prosecuted or possibly even killed. I never would have freely given any of the statements which I made to the RUC. By 'made it clear,' in relation to death threats, I mean that the RUC officers told me that if I did not 'recant,' I could be assassinated by loyalist paramilitaries."

On May 13, the Washington, D.C., Superior Court judge presiding over the case refused to allow a fishing expedition into McPhilemy's research files. Efforts have begun in this case to obtain testimony from Trimble.