



Friends Of Sinn Féin



**NEWS UPDATE FROM IRELAND
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Methodists Church Leader Warns Against British Preconditions

The president elect of the Methodist Church in Ireland this week warned against preconditions blocking meaningful and all-inclusive peace talks scheduled for June 10.

Derry minister, the Reverend Kenneth Best will become President of the Methodist Church, the third largest Protestant denomination, at its annual conference on June 11.

Reverend Best, 52, was born in Portadown, County Down within the British occupied section of Ireland and has also served in the 26 counties at Clonakilty in west Cork. His present "parish" straddles the border reflecting the pre-British nature of all Ireland structures. Included in his area are, on the 26 county side, Inishowen, Donegal and Limavady and Strabane on the 6 county side.

Rev. Best has stated that he fully supported the stance of the Methodist's key politics committee (the Council on Social Responsibility) that unionists should talk to Sinn Fein. And rev. Best continued sounding an ominous warning to the British government's long standing position setting preconditions on Sinn Fein's participation in the June 10 peace talks. Rev. Best went on to say, "I can see the difficulties, preconditions can be a block rather than a help and if we are going to go back into the spiral of violence than five years from now we may not have the luxury of preconditions."

Loughall Inquest

The families of eight IRA Volunteers ambushed by British Special Forces in Loughall, County Armagh in 1987 are appealing a British high court decision to turn down their bid for a new inquest into the shootings. In addition to the Volunteers civilian Anthony Hughes from Caledon was also killed. Friday's application for appeal was brought by Mrs. Amelia Arthurs from Galbally, County Tyrone who's 21 years old son, Declan, was one of the Volunteers killed. The others were Volunteers Seamus Donnelly, 19; Michael Gormley, 25; Eugene Kelly, 25; Patrick Kelly, 30; Patrick Kearney, 32; Gerard O'Callaghan, 29 and Jim Lynagh, 32.

At a hearing Friday May 24, Diplock Court Judge McCollum took one minute to say No to the families' request saying he would not interfere with the decision of Coroner James Rodgers not to release advance copies of statements of witnesses, most SAS members, who had been in concealed positions around Loughall RUC barracks.

Mairead Kelly, who's brother Paddy was one of the eight IRA Volunteers shot down in a fusillade of bullets said this latest ruling was basically the state protecting itself from any notion of natural justice and served to reinforce the families' view that the British inquest system employed in the six counties was "a complete sham." At the time it was reported that the Volunteers had been "finished off" with a shot to the head.

"We have waited eight years for these documents and the hearing was over in one minute," added Ms. Kelly. Outside the Belfast court other relatives vowed to appeal the decision and fight on "until the public knows the whole story of Loughall."

The lawyers had argued that the Coroners decision meant that they could not effectively represent the families and properly pursue the crucial questions as to why, given that the British knew early on of the Volunteers movements and so the subsequent Loughall stake out, why were all shot dead instead of being captured and arrested.

As a result of the Coroner Rodgers actions not advance copies of the witnesses statements, (including what was described in court as, "expert" forensic evidence) were made available thus truncating their ability to prepare important and pertinent questions. This refusal by the Coroner led to a walk out by the disgusted families at Craigavon court last year.

They have been kept waiting over a year for Judge McCollum's one minute judgment, widely seen by human rights observers as a totally cynical and dismissive move, compounding the families grief, sense of injustice and distress. The case is now expected to move onto the European Court calendar.

On a news program earlier this week former undercover masked members of the SAS, most of whom had served several "tours" in the six counties, confirmed that shooting to kill nationalist suspects was nothing new. Earlier this month an embarrassed British Ministry of Defense moved to counter further admission by a warning of legal action against former SAS soldiers who publicize damaging details. This warning was issued in the May 1996 Defense White Paper at Westminster.

European Court Rejects British Government Legal Loophole

Irish anti-discrimination job campaigners have won a significant victory in their 10 year battle to abolish a legal loophole in flawed British anti-discrimination legislation following a decision by the European Commission on Human Rights to allow the Fair Employment Commission(FEC) to take the British government to court over the notorious section 42 of the Fair Employment Act.

Section 42 of the 1976 Fair Employment Act gives any British six county ruler the authority to issue a certificate of immunity to employers which bars the FEC from pursuing complaints of discrimination when the appellant is excluded from a position of employment on 'security' grounds. The FEC believes that the use of Section 42 certificates to prevent cases from being heard may be shielding genuine discrimination. One of those who succeeded in taking a case was Sinn Fein justice spokesperson, Barry McElduff who successfully argued that British Ministers consistently blocked fair employment cases using Section 42 certificates.

Sinn Fein's northern spokesperson, Gerry O'Eara explained that it was an absolute misnomer to describe British legislation as "fair" while Sections 42 and the equally famous Section 57 exist. Mr. O'hEara remarked after the European court's ruling that after 25 years of struggle for an end to job discrimination the British government is still treating the nationalist community as second class citizens.

Inquest Into Murdered Sinn Fein Official Reveals British Forces Contradiction

The RUC denied medical access to a murdered Sinn Fein election worker it was revealed this week during the inquest into the murder of Patrick Shanaghan, 33. The dead man was ambushed by a gunman as he drove to work along the Learmore Road on August 12, 1991. An RUC inspector admitted that a local doctor was twice denied access to the wounded and dying man. The revelation follows an admission that the RUC failed to alert medical assistance as part of their routine response to reports of a shooting incident.

There were emotional outbursts from the Shanaghan family members at Strabane Coroners court when RUC inspector Robert Woods told the hearing that he had "declined to admit" the doctor to the scene

shortly after the shooting and again when the doctor returned and requested access for a second time. The doctor was finally allowed to examine the gunshot victim at 10am, more than 90 minutes after the shooting.

The victim's family have always maintained RUC collusion in the death of Patrick. The shooting took place shortly after the victim had been informed by the RUC that his personal details and photo montage were "missing" from a British Army armored personnel carrier and could be in the hands of a loyalist death squad. The murder followed constant British forces harassment, including death threats after Shanaghan's name appeared as a nominator for a Sinn Fein election candidate, Robert Moore. Four months before his murder an RUC sergeant named Norden had visited the Shanaghan home and told Patrick he knew he was going to be killed.

At the hearing, RUC inspector Moore said he was "totally satisfied" that the victim was dead and insisted that his decision to deny medical access was the right decision. Despite the fact that a qualified medical practitioner is required to establish time of death, the RUC officer said his duty was to "preserve the scene."

During an emotional scene, the victim's brother in-law shouted, "My first priority would have been to get a doctor." The court heard that the medically unqualified RUC man had been "totally satisfied" that the wounded man was dead after he failed to find a pulse. The RUC man admitted the victim was still warm when he "checked" his pulse by reaching through the window of the van.

Inexplicably the RUC delayed this formal procedure for over an hour and a half.

In a further revelation, the RUC admitted that they knew the identities of Patrick Shanaghan's killers. RUC Detective Superintendent Brian McVicker told the inquest; "I know who killed Mr. Shanaghan." Remarkably no one has been charged with the murder. McVicker said four known people were involved in the shooting but when they were arrested they refused to answer any questions, so they were released.

The court also heard that the weapon used in the shooting was part of a South African shipment to loyalists, a shipment orchestrated by the British Intelligence agents, Brian Nelson and Charles Simpson. The hearing continues.

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