



CNI

COMMENT - Sinn Fein denials have made fools of the Irish people

Only a public inquiry where counsel can cross-examine Gerry Adams and his comrades will reveal big picture about Sinn Fein.

Maria Cahill writes in Sunday Independent

It should come as no surprise to anyone that Sinn Fein is a party of shameless contradictions, saying what suits it at whatever given time. It relies on the gullibility of its voters, and often, in the public political fallout of events, the real detail gets lost as the party deflects blame onto everyone else but itself.

Take its view on IRA criminality for example. Gerry Adams once described a notorious republican suspected of tax offences as "not a criminal", while, when another republican, Sean Hughes (named under parliamentary privilege as a senior IRA man) had properties confiscated at

the request of the Serious Organised Crime Agency in 2009, Sinn Fein's Conor Murphy said: "Sean Hughes is a sound republican...the raids today on Sean's home...have caused deep anger in south Armagh. There is no justification for the deliberate targeting of Sean and his family today." Hughes had previously been convicted of fraudulently claiming income support.

In 2005, SF's Mitchel McLaughlin said the murder of Jean McConville was "wrong, but not a crime", and when Gerry Adams was arrested by police investigating this case, Martin McGuinness stood on a public platform as former IRA Director of Intelligence, and Northern Sinn Fein Chair Bobby Storey roared: "How dare they (the PSNI) touch our leader, the leader of Irish Republicanism!"

In 2013, Ursula Halligan made an insightful documentary entitled Sinn Fein - who are they? for TV3, where Dr Kevin Rafter of DCU made this observation on the IRA. "They were involved in drug-dealing, they were involved in bank robberies. That didn't just stop because of the peace process."

But it is SF's own words which illustrate its attitude to certain IRA activity. In response to a

question from Halligan on criminality playing a "big role" in the IRA, Caoimhghin O Caolain said he didn't "believe" it did, and when she cited IRA activists robbing banks as an example, he had this to say: "Ah yeah, and so did Michael Collins."

Gerry Kelly, in the same segment, stated: "You can't have it both ways, you see, you can either criminalise the conflict...or you can accept that in 1916, it was not criminal, because they did bank robberies then too, you know..."

Former Justice Minister Alan Shatter called it right in response to the above: "If they're saying that, isn't it a classical illustration of the extent to which this party still has mental reservations as to its engagement in democratic politics, and the lack of insight as to what is required of those who are engaged to uphold the rule of law."

The problem for SF is its definition of criminal is different from everyone else's, and, when the IRA is involved in something which results in condemnation of their political wing, SF expects the public to believe it wasn't the IRA, just because it says so. And, now, Gerry Adams has the cheek to issue a statement saying that Sinn Fein "has no special or particular or specific

responsibility to respond to the allegations made about the IRA".

Who else has been providing a political cloak for the IRA for the last number of decades?

Remember the phrase "with a ballot paper in this hand and an Armalite in the other?" Adams has consistently denied being a member of the IRA, but has also stated "I've never distanced myself from the IRA".

This year, the decibels of duplicitous doublespeak reached whole new levels. SF has proven on countless occasions why it has no credibility in relation to anything it says. In 2013, in response to whether the IRA carried out investigations into sexual abuse, Pearse Doherty replied, "unfounded and untrue". It was a spectacular denial, considering Sinn Fein was forced to U-turn on the issue one year later, when my own case forced it to admit it.

During the 1994 ceasefire, Frank Kerr was murdered while the IRA robbed £131,000 in a postal raid. Gerry Adams said: "Many people will be concerned also at the way in which the RUC has sought to blame republicans for this killing. The RUC is engaged in a transparent attempt to damage the peace process." The IRA admitted responsibility just 10 days later.

When Garda Jerry McCabe was murdered, Adams and Sinn Fein denied the IRA were responsible, yet had no problem lobbying for special treatment for those convicted when they fought, and failed to have early release extended to them under the provisions of the Good Friday Agreement.

Sinn Fein invented possibly its best excuse yet when it said the 'Colombia Three' were "eco-tourists". "The IRA has said they did not do it. In my opinion they are telling the truth," said Adams on the Northern Bank Robbery. And piggy banks flew.

In November 2011, Sinn Fein TD Brian Stanley said: "The IRA didn't murder Brian Stack, whenever the IRA did anything, they always admitted it." The IRA admitted that it murdered him, after Gerry Adams travelled with Stack's sons to a meeting with a senior IRA representative - in 2013 - at a time when Sinn Fein's Gerry Kelly and Adams himself said they had "left the stage".

The IRA was also supposed to have left the stage when they beat 21-year-old Paul Quinn to death in 2007. Adams said there "was no republican involvement whatsoever" in the

murder. The proverbial dogs on the street knew that to be a cruel untruth.

In July 1999, Sinn Fein said the IRA was not responsible for Florida gun-running. Last year, BBC Spotlight carried an interview with Mike Logan, an American given immunity by the FBI in return for information about how he had ordered guns for the IRA post-1998 ceasefire. Logan named former senior IRA man and now senior Sinn Fein strategist Sean 'Spike' Murray as his main contact in Belfast. He has denied this. Spike, incidentally, was part of the SF delegation meeting the Chief Constable last week to be told the IRA still existed. You really couldn't make it up.

Last year, Spotlight also exposed how £700,000 of public money was drawn down from Stormont by 36 different SF MLAs, and paid into 'Research Services Ireland', a private company run by none other than SF's finance managers. SF said that they couldn't use any other research facilities because the work was "too sensitive". The BBC stated it could find no evidence of any research undertaken.

We could go on and on. Sinn Fein politicians have made fools out of themselves with each one of these denials, but they've made fools out

of the Irish people even more, and they have treated victims' families, and voters, with outright contempt.

Maybe the only way to get to the bottom of the truth on SF and its relationship with the IRA is to hold a public inquiry.

One which puts Gerry Adams and his comrades in the dock, which tracks the finance path and other activity from the IRA to its destination, and which allows for Garda and PSNI intelligence to be introduced into the public legal framework, along with witness evidence. Where counsel can compel attendance and cross-examine those who should have been held accountable years ago.

Only then, will the bigger picture emerge.

Opinion in Sunday Independent - First published 30th August, 2015