

The Lords of Discipline: The Methods and Motives of Paramilitary Vigilantism in Northern Ireland

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Paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland have been involved in vigilantism since the earliest years of the Troubles. With the onset of the terrorist cease-fires in 1994, vigilante attacks dramatically increased in both frequency and severity. Showing no signs of diminishing, the vigilantism has now become one of the most sensitive and critical issues in the continuing peace process. This paper presents a detailed analysis of paramilitary vigilantism, describing first the diverse range of activities which the practice incorporates. More importantly, the paper also focuses on the complex forces and motivations which lie behind the paramilitaries' commitment to the vigilante role. The paper concludes with an assessment of the impact of the vigilantism on current developments in Northern Ireland.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1971, the main terrorist groups in Northern Ireland have involved themselves in often protracted campaigns of vigilantism. This is particularly true of the Provisional IRA, who have maintained a constant commitment to vigilantism in the past 25 years. At a time when virtually all of the disparate terrorist groups have declared cease-fires¹ the terrorist involvement in vigilantism is increasing. Since the first cease-fires were declared in 1994, the vigilante campaigns have been at their most sustained levels since the beginning of the Troubles.

William Culberson observed that '[V]igilantism, like conflict and politics, is a constant social struggle to contain victimization. Vigilantism is a part of politics because it is a desire to maintain an established social and

legal tradition and at the same time a desire to bring about a prelegal condition for a new order.² For the Irish terrorist groups, vigilantism is a result of their efforts first, to contain victimisation among their own ranks and second, to contain victimisation among their communities. The North's paramilitaries are not nihilists. By in large they are surprisingly conservative organisations, with vested interests in maintaining the social traditions of their disparate communities.

Vigilantism in Northern Ireland is a remarkably sophisticated phenomenon, and it reflects both the diverse motivations of its perpetrators and the peculiar pressures they face both from without and from within their organisations. Paramilitary vigilantism manifests itself in a complex range of forms, and as a phenomenon it has evolved considerably in the course of the past thirty years. This article attempts to describe the diverse range of activities that are carried out under the umbrella of paramilitary vigilantism. More importantly, the article also attempts to highlight the motivations which drive the North's paramilitaries into conducting campaigns of vigilantism, when their stated agendas revolve around very different needs and desires.³

THE VIGILANTES' ARSENAL

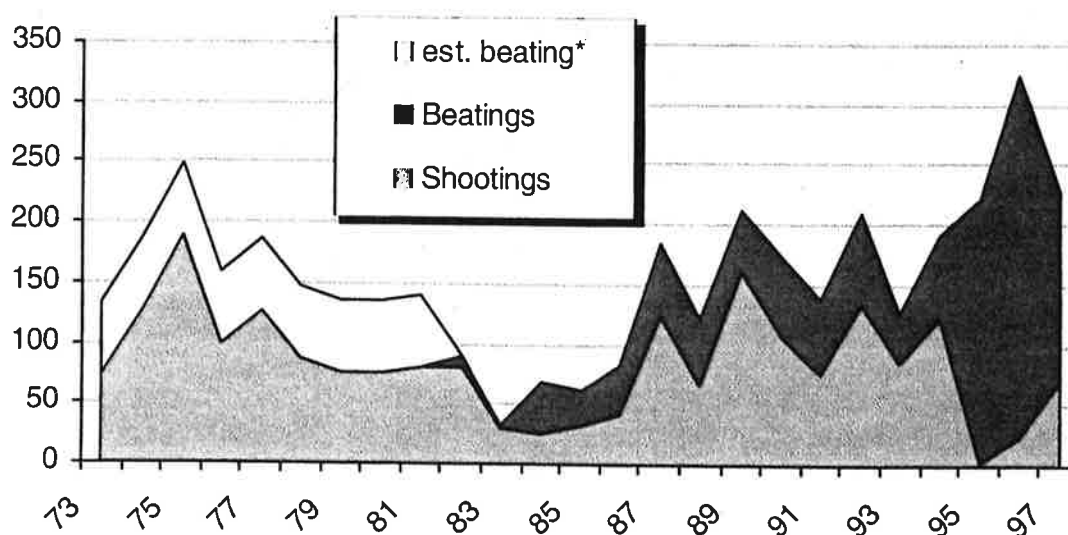
Not all forms of vigilantism in Northern Ireland are the same, nor has the vigilante activity of the paramilitaries remained constant over the last three decades. Various forms of punishment have both come and gone, depending first, on the incidence and relevance of the behaviour being 'policed' and second, on the broader political milieu of any given period.

In the three decades of vigilantism in Northern Ireland, some 2,149 people have been the victims of punishment shootings, *at least* a further 1,328 have been the victims of punishment beatings⁴ and approximately 114 people have died as a result of punishment attacks.⁵ Figure 1 describes the ebb and flow of the vigilante beatings and shootings since 1972, and it is significant to note that since the cease-fires of 1994, the vigilante campaigns have been at their most sustained levels in the history of the Troubles.

Because of the prominence of punishment beatings and shootings, the relative sophistication of the 'justice' system operating behind the violence is often overshadowed. When the violence is as extreme as this vigilantism often is, it is often difficult to appreciate that most of the vigilantism is neither indiscriminate nor haphazard.

However paramilitary vigilantism is not limited to just the two forms described in Figure 1. While the vast majority of outsiders only consider the beatings and shootings, the vigilantism incorporates a far richer diversity of

FIGURE 1
CASUALTIES OF PARAMILITARY VIGILANTISM 1973-97



*Figures are not available for punishment beatings prior to 1982. Mathematically our analysis (based on the proportionality of beatings to shootings) shows that if the trend in the years from 1982-94 was repeated from 1973-82 it would conservatively average at approximately 60 beatings per year.

activities. Table 1 describes the principle forms of vigilantism found in Northern Ireland. The vigilante activities are ranked in order of seriousness, with the least seriousness (from the victim's point of view) at the top and the most serious (assassination) at the bottom. As Liam Kennedy has noted '[F]or some of these categories there are no reliable statistics, official or unofficial, whatsoever'.⁶ The categories for which statistics are strongest (because victims tend to be hospitalised in these cases) are beatings, shootings and assassinations, but, for the rest, frequently almost nothing is known.

The paramilitaries and their supporters often claim that vigilantism is graded. The less serious sanctions (e.g. warnings) are used first, and then only gradually are the more serious 'punishments' brought into operation. It is claimed that the move from one extreme to the other is a gradual process, and indeed there is some evidence to suggest that this is frequently the case. However, there is also plenty of evidence to suggest that in many – if not most – cases this graduated system is either ignored entirely (the victim receives a serious punishment with no prior warning or sanction) or else the vigilantism jumps from a very minor punishment to a very severe punishment. For example, in one case, two teenagers from west Belfast,

were ordered to leave Northern Ireland by the IRA. The teenagers were told this was because they had broken an 8:30pm curfew the IRA had imposed on them. In paramilitary terms, expulsion from Northern Ireland is the most severe punishment after execution. Curfews, on the other hand, are the most lenient after verbal warnings.

TABLE 1
THE RANGE OF PARAMILITARY VIGILANTISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1. Warnings
2. Curfews
3. Fines/Victim Restitution
4. Acts of Public Humiliation
5. Punishment Beatings
6. Punishment Shootings
7. Expulsions
8. Assassination

To be fair, the severity of any given act is generally moderated. The paramilitaries try not to go too far (though sometimes they fail and many attacks are clearly carried out in too extreme and brutal a fashion). Eamon Collins noted that the IRA perceived that there were limits imposed on them from the wider community on what they could do. As he said: 'The IRA ... tried to act in a way that would avoid severe censure from within the nationalist community; they knew they were operating within a sophisticated set of informal restrictions on their behaviour, no less powerful for being largely unspoken.'⁷ The same restrictions almost certainly apply to the loyalist paramilitaries, who are more politicised now than they have ever been in their history.

In the case involving the two teenagers, expulsion was used so that the paramilitaries could avoid having to inflict physical punishment. This was about more than a moral reluctance to inflict violence on young individuals. It also reflected an underlying realisation that there are limits to what the paramilitaries can do. The need to work within what Collins called the 'informal restrictions' has seen a sophisticated system of vigilantism emerge in Northern Ireland. The dynamics of this system are most clearly illustrated in the types of punishment used by the vigilantes, and it is to these that the focus of this paper turns.

Warnings

As stated, the issue of warnings is the least severe form of action the paramilitaries take. The warnings can be issued in face-to-face encounters between paramilitary members and the intended victim, or they can be issued more indirectly, for example as letters published in paramilitary newspapers or as leaflets handed out in local areas. A good example is provided by the IRA who have frequently issued warnings to alleged criminals from the pages of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, warning them that if they did not desist from the behaviour more serious action would be taken. The first many people learn that they are in trouble with the paramilitaries is when their name appears in a list of people 'under threat of punishment'. Such lists appear relatively frequently in areas where there is a strong paramilitary presence.

Probably more significant than such published threats are the face-to-face warnings which are issued. The paramilitaries or their political representatives can call at the homes of people who have been accused of 'anti-social behaviour'. A verbal warning will be issued to the alleged offender and, if the individual is a teenager, the parents will be warned to control their child's behaviour. At other times the accused may be called to attend a formal meeting. In the case of the IRA, these meetings are usually held at Sinn Fein offices under the auspices of a Civil Administration Officer.* All of the main loyalist paramilitary groups operate 'welfare' offices which are nominally run under the guise of a cover organisation (typically concerned with supporting loyalist prisoners), and it is at such offices that their equivalent meetings are typically held. Such 'formal' meetings increase the seriousness of the warning. If the offender is prepared to sign a statement admitting their crimes, the IRA at least, will often grant an amnesty from any punishment. However, such leniency is off-set by the threat that future offences will be dealt with particularly harshly.

According to the paramilitaries, a warning is sufficient in most cases to deter 'anti-social behaviour'. Joe Austin, a Belfast Sinn Fein Councillor, describes a typical scenario:

For instance, if a seventeen-year-old is accused of housebreaking ... and there's proof of it, the parents will be visited by the IRA. They'll

*A detailed analysis of IRA and Sinn Fein vigilantism has already been extensively covered elsewhere (see Andrew Silke, 'Rebel's Dilemma: The Changing Relationship between the IRA, Sinn Fein and Paramilitary Vigilantism in Northern Ireland', *Terrorism and Political Violence* 11/1 (Spring 1999). Readers interested in how Sinn Fein and the IRA have organised themselves to carry out vigilantism, and how this has affected internal structures and attitudes, are directed to this article.

give the evidence to the parents, and advise the parents that their son is involved in bad company, or is drinking, or is a substance-abuser, and tell the parents to keep an eye on the boy ... In 99.9 per cent of the cases, the first visit is enough.⁸ In most of the rest of the cases, the second visit is enough.⁹

Curfews

After a warning has been issued, the first option available to the paramilitaries is to impose a curfew on the offender. Curfews are used fairly regularly for dealing with teenage offenders. They vary both in the severity and in the range. The curfew could begin at any time from 6pm to 11pm and might apply to just specific individuals or could apply to every teenager in an area. The curfews can also ban the individual from certain areas. Joe Austin describes the process:

If there is a second incident with the boy, the IRA will visit the parents again, and the boy will be curfewed – he might have to be home by 10:00p.m. every night for about three months. If it's drink related, he won't be allowed to be served in the local pubs; all the pubs will be visited and told not to serve him ... But if there's another recurrence, the boy will usually be physically punished. But it depends on the offense.¹⁰

The curfews can generate considerable hostility among the teenage population, particularly when the ban is a wide-ranging one. As one west Belfast teenager described the situation:

We are regularly run off our own streets for playing football or just talking. Some innocent teenagers have been beaten and threatened with having their names put on punishment lists. ... People playing football have been questioned why they are on the streets. A youth was beaten with a hammer. We know of others who were harassed by gangs of people while one teenager was even chased with a starting pistol. There is a terrified atmosphere among young people.¹¹

Fines/Victim Restitution

The paramilitaries have long realised that there is a need for non-violent methods of punishment, which go beyond simple warnings or curfews. One solution has been to impose fines on offenders. The 'fine' can be exactly that, a demand that the individual pays money. As Joe Austin puts it '... a person who has stolen something could be ordered to repay the amount – maybe at a rate of £5 a week.'¹² Here, the individual is required to pay back

the victim. In other cases, the offenders are required to pay the paramilitaries. In a recent case in Belfast, it emerged that loyalist paramilitaries were imposing fines of over £1,000 on suspected drug-dealers, and were then keeping the money for themselves. Some have argued that this is simply extortion under another name. Offenders can also be sentenced to do 'community service'. For example, the individual may have to carry out repairs on the houses of pensioners, or pick litter from the streets. Such sentences are backed up by the threat that failure to comply will result in a physical punishment.

Acts of Public Humiliation

Public humiliation is the next most serious punishment available to the paramilitaries. In its less serious – and most common – form, it involves no physical injury whatsoever against the victim. Again, this lack of injury means that it is frequently used when dealing with younger offenders.

'Branding' (or 'placarding' as it is also known) is the most common form of this type of punishment. The victim is ordered to stand in a public area (for example, outside a church or a shopping centre) holding a large sign which details his crime. The victim will generally have to stand there for a few hours. While it is a comparatively mild punishment, many victims report huge embarrassment at the experience and state they would rather receive a moderate beating. However, the policy does provide a sufficiently lenient option for punishing particularly young offenders when warnings have failed. This is reflected clearly in the words of one local youth worker:

The rule is that the Provos don't 'punish' – that is, don't shoot or severely beat – kids under sixteen. Some of our younger kids have been 'branded' – that is, made to stand against a lamppost, or outside a church on a Sunday, with a placard around their necks saying, 'I am a hood', or 'I am a joyrider'. Its the softest option the Provos can take – public shaming. The kids don't like it – some of them would rather be beaten.¹³

'Tarring and Feathering' represents a much more serious form of public humiliation and was one of the first forms of vigilantism to appear in the current period of violence. Here, the victim's body and hair are 'doused with hot bitumen and then covered with feathers'.¹⁴ Having the tar poured on to the body and then having it removed at hospital are both extremely painful experiences. The paramilitaries usually cut off the victim's hair prior to tarring. The victims are normally left tied to lampposts on public streets, sometimes with signs attached again describing their alleged crimes. In the 1990s, this punishment is generally just used for women. Typically, these women have been accused of 'associating' with members of the security

forces or with members of the other religion. In the past, men who were punished in this way, were generally beaten or shot as well. Further, in the 1990s the use of paint has largely replaced the use of tar and feathers, but in other respects the procedure remains the same.

Punishment Beatings

As has already been mentioned, official records show there have been over 1,300 punishment beatings carried out by the paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. This is almost certainly a gross underestimation of the real number. To start with, official statistics on beatings only began in 1982 and even then, these statistics generally only recorded the more serious beatings (i.e. where victims required hospital treatment). The more prevalent 'minor' beatings rarely make their way into official statistics, which is in itself significant as probably far more than 10,000 of these have been carried in the last three decades.

Up until the 1994 cease-fires, the beatings were used as a more lenient form of punishment to punishment shootings. The beatings can be carried out by attackers using just their fists and legs, or the attackers can use a very wide variety of weapons. These weapons can include: metal bars, baseball bats, cricket bats, hurley sticks (these resemble large, flattened hockey sticks, though hurleys are more robust, and are used to play the Gaelic field-sport of *hurling*), pickaxe handles, sledgehammers, golf clubs, crowbars, hatchets, knives and an assortment of other makeshift weapons. In recent years it has become common practice for the paramilitaries to hammer nails through baseball bats and the other weapons before using them to beat someone. This adds greatly to the severity of the injuries the victim will suffer as the nails leave deep puncture wounds and tears in the body. Several victims have suffered collapsed lungs as a result of such attacks, and the injuries can look so severe that they are sometimes mistaken for gunshot wounds by medical staff.

Assaults can vary greatly in their severity. Victims of beatings typically curl into a ball in an attempt to protect their head and vital organs. When an attack is intended to be particularly punitive the punishment squad will tie the victim with ropes to prevent this from happening. In recent years, tying spread-eagled victims to upright fence railings has become popular in many Belfast beatings.¹⁵ The bound victim – who is often tied upside down – is entirely unable to shield any part of his body and such attacks tend to result in especially severe injuries. Even more severe methods can be used to restrain victims, the most extreme form is called the '*crucifixion*', and it involves hammering nails or metal spikes through the victim's limbs in order to pin them to the ground.¹⁶

Another more specialised form of punishment beating is known as '*Breeze-*

Blocking'. A breeze block is a heavy cement block used in construction work and this punishment assault is performed by dropping a breeze block on to the limb of a victim who has been forced to lie on the ground. There are variations on this theme. For example, in a few cases the paramilitaries have driven over victims' limbs with a car in order to break bones.

An extremely rare form of punishment is known as the '*Black'n'Decka*'. In this extreme scenario an electric power drill is used to inflict injuries on the victim's limbs. During the mid-1970s it was widely reported that the loyalist paramilitaries were using this form of punishment.¹⁷ While the '*Black'n'Decka*' has achieved near-legendary status, in more recent years there has been only one reliable report of it being used. In that case, the drill was a last minute replacement for a jammed handgun.¹⁸ Surprisingly, the injuries were ultimately not too severe and the victim made a good recovery.

Punishment Shootings

Punishment injuries inflicted with guns were traditionally known as '*knee-cappings*'. The term originated from the practise of shooting victims through the back of the knee, fracturing the patella and doing extremely serious damage to the joint in the process. Such injuries can be potentially fatal – one of the body's biggest arteries, the popliteal, runs behind the kneecap and if this is ruptured an individual can very quickly bleed to death. This has happened on a number of different occasions, the most recent being the death of Andy Kearney, a Belfast man who was killed by the IRA in July 1998. Kearney was attacked by an eight-man-strong punishment squad and was shot three times in his legs below the knee. An artery was severed and Kearney bled to death before he could be taken to hospital.¹⁹ For others, death can be a more lingering experience. For example, John Collett, a 36-year-old Derry man, was shot in both legs at his home by an IRA punishment squad in 1992. He managed to crawl to his front door where he was eventually found by a neighbour. In an effort to save his life both of Collett's legs were amputated, however he died in hospital a few days later.²⁰ While the term '*knee-capping*' became used to describe all punishment shootings, the reality is that shootings specifically directed against the kneecap itself are relatively rare. In one published review of victims, such injuries were only found in three per cent of punishment-shooting victims.²¹ Most victims were shot elsewhere, either close to the knee region, or else in the area of the thigh or calf.

As a result, in the 1990s '*knee-capping*' as a term, has almost entirely been replaced with the more accurate '*punishment shooting*'. While all punishment shootings are considered a more serious form of punishment than punishment beatings, it is important to stress that again there are different categories of shootings.

Shootings can vary considerably on a number of different measures. The first of these measures is the location of the wound. For example, a gunshot in the fleshy area of the thigh will heal very quickly and the victim can expect to be up and about in a matter of days. However, any injury which damages bone will take considerably longer to heal and the victim may be permanently maimed. The paramilitaries are fully aware of this and will shoot the victim in more vulnerable places (e.g. in the joints or directly at a bone) if they view the alleged crime as being particularly serious. The most vulnerable target is chosen in a 'Fifty-fifty' punishment shooting.²² When the paramilitaries threaten someone with a 'fifty-fifty' they are threatening to shoot them in the spine (the name originates from the paramilitary claim that there is a 50 per cent chance that the victim will die).

As well as choosing more vulnerable places to shoot, the paramilitaries can increase the severity of the punishment by inflicting multiple gunshot wounds. For example, one especially traumatic punishment is known as 'The Six-Pack'. For this, the paramilitaries shoot the victim six times, generally shooting both knee joints, both ankles and both elbows. Victims are normally left permanently maimed after such injuries. In July 1998, one unfortunate individual was the victim of both a 'six-pack' shooting combined with a 'fifty-fifty' (i.e. he was shot a total of seven times by the punishment squad). He was shot three times in each leg and once into his spine. Doctors reported that the young man was extremely lucky to have survived the attack.²³

The final variable is the calibre of the gun used by the paramilitaries in the shooting. 'Normal' shootings are usually carried out with a small calibre handgun (.22) which leaves relatively moderate injuries. However larger calibre handguns (.45) are also used when the intention is to inflict more serious wounds. Unfortunately for many victims, the paramilitaries have constantly suffered from a shortage of light handguns, and as a result they are sometimes forced indiscriminately to use large calibre handguns because no smaller calibre weapons are available.²⁴ In some cases, the paramilitaries will abandon handguns altogether and use shotguns instead. At close range, a shotgun blast literally shreds flesh from the bone. In medical terms, a punishment shooting involving six gunshot wounds from a small calibre handgun is preferable to a shooting involving just one shotgun blast at close range. Limb amputations are relatively rare for the smaller calibre handguns, but are frequently needed when a shotgun has been used on the victim. In more extreme cases, the paramilitaries may even use an assault rifle to administer the shooting. This happened in 1992, when the IRA used G3 assault rifles to inflict punishment shootings on over 20 members of a rival republican group, the Irish People's Liberation Organisation (IPLO).²⁵

Expulsions

In ancient Rome, convicted criminals were often exiled as punishment for their crimes. The UK too has used this practice in the past to punish crime, and thousands of British criminals were exiled to penal colonies in distant lands. Paramilitaries on both sides issue 'expulsion orders' to individuals (with the accompanying threat of serious injury or death if they refuse to leave). In Northern Ireland, exiling is an extremely attractive punishment from the paramilitaries point of view. To begin with, the paramilitaries are always at a disadvantage compared to the formal justice system, in that they lack the resources needed to operate detention centres for convicted offenders. The paramilitaries can and have held individuals prisoner often for long periods of time, but the effort involved is so great that the practice is used only in isolated and exceptional cases.²⁶ In short, no-one is held prisoner purely as a form of punishment. As a result of this lack of resources, the paramilitaries have generally had to resort to cruder and more violent methods to punish crime. However, such brutal methods carry a constant political cost for the terrorist groups. One effort to create a more politically acceptable punishment has been to use the practice of exiling people as much as possible as a form of punishment.

The number of people given expulsion orders has always been one of the great unknowns in Northern Ireland. Victim support groups have been aware that the practice was widespread but found it very difficult to get detailed figures on the phenomenon. The most accurate figures available have been provided by Base 2, a Belfast-based victim support group. In the three year period from 1994 to 1996, they have reported that at least 453 people were expelled.²⁹ They caution that these are only the cases which they know about and that there are almost certainly many more cases which were never brought to their attention.

As with beatings and shootings, the expulsions can vary in their severity. The first variable is the geographical size of the area the person is excluded from. Base 2 report that in 1995, 38 per cent of those expelled were required to leave their home area, 20 per cent were required to leave the town or city, and 42 per cent were required to leave Northern Ireland altogether. The most common option – exile from Northern Ireland – is the most serious. Most victims are young, poorly educated and unemployed and lack the finances and skills required to successfully establish themselves abroad. Indeed, many of the younger victims have never left their own area and often have never left the town or city where they live.²⁸ As a result, they are poorly equipped to deal with an expulsion order forcing them out of the province entirely.

Together with this geographical factor, there is also a question of the

length of the expulsion order. Expulsions can involve permanent lifetime bans from a specific geographic area, but normally, they range from three months to two years. The length of the term again depends on the individual's alleged criminal history as well as on other factors such as their age and family background.

Sinn Fein and the IRA have been quick to try and take advantage of the formal justice system in the operation of their informal one. For example, a number of sources report that one young-offenders institution in west Belfast always has a few boys there who were not sentenced by the courts but are there under threat from the IRA:

They have effectively been sent there by the IRA, nominally under threat of physical punishment. They have been told that if they are seen out on the streets within a fixed period, usually three months to a year, they will be shot. Probation and social services realize they are being manipulated. Often as an alternative, they try to find places for the youths on Outward Bound courses. One boy was sent on two three-month courses to keep him out of Belfast until his 'sentence' expired ...²⁹

The expulsion orders are usually issued with just 48 hours notice, which obviously leaves victims with very little time to prepare, either in emotional or practical terms. Research carried out by this author, indicates that expulsion orders can frequently be issued in a very arbitrary manner. In a high proportion of cases where a punishment squad has attempted to administer a beating or shooting, but has failed to find the victim at his home, the squad will issue an on-the-spot expulsion order, telling those present to pass the message on. Had the victim been present, the squad almost certainly would have been content to inflict the beating or shooting and leave the punishment at that. But because this effort was thwarted – either intentionally or through chance – the squad issues a more punitive sentence.

The paramilitaries have a tradition of escalating the severity of punishment in the face of resistance. For example, many punishment shootings or beatings are 'by appointment'. Victims are told to be at a certain place at a certain time. Such appointments can include coming to one of the offices run by a paramilitary's political-front organisation, or it could simply entail the victim waiting at his own home on a particular afternoon until the paramilitaries call for him. Incredibly, many – if not most – victims issued with such 'appointments' actually keep them, even though they know they are going to be punished. However, there is a clear logic to their stoicism. If they fail to meet the appointment – and some do – the paramilitaries will treat them much more severely when they do eventually

catch up with them. For example, an individual who originally had been earmarked for a beating, might instead be shot in both legs because he failed to make such an appointment. If the paramilitaries fail in an attempt to carry out a shooting or beating, they frequently respond by issuing an expulsion order against the intended victim. Failure to comply with this order, will result in the individual being severely attacked – or perhaps even killed, if they are discovered in the proscribed area during the duration of the expulsion order.

Assassination

Execution is the most severe punishment used by the paramilitaries. In the history of the troubles over 112 people have been executed by the paramilitaries for alleged crime. Most of the victims have been accused of collaborating with the security forces. The paramilitaries attitude to executions, is summed up well in the following comments from an IRA member:

The older the hoods and the worse the crimes the harder the punishment. It goes right up to the ultimate, execution, but that has only been used against informers. It may be used against a hood who has been involved in trying to undermine the movement by informing, but it has never been used for straight hooding.³⁰

While it has been claimed that execution is not used for straight hooding,³¹ this policy has clearly changed in the 1990s. Since the cease-fires in 1994, ten individuals connected to the drug-dealing trade in Northern Ireland have been systematically assassinated by the PIRA.³²

THE VIGILANTES' MOTIVES

Why should terrorist groups be interested in upholding law and order? The general ideological motivation for terrorism is to undermine the fabric of society, not to support it.³³ It is perhaps understandable why the loyalist groups, who are essentially pro-state terrorists, might feel inclined to support the state's laws, but the loyalists are not the most important vigilantes in Northern Ireland. The strongest involvement in vigilantism has always been displayed by the Provisional IRA. Why an organisation whose stated aim is to undermine the State's authority and control over Northern Ireland, by disrupting the security, legal and economic activities of the Province, should then devote so much effort to 'community policing' requires some answers.

Surprisingly, in the end it is largely the same motivations which drive loyalist vigilantism and which are also behind republican vigilantism. The paramilitaries are ultimately reluctant vigilantes. Their *raison d'être*

revolves around entirely separate needs and their agendas are set by political ambitions. Despite this, both sides in the conflict have become heavily involved in organised vigilantism.

Ronnie Munck raised a very interesting point in relation to how paramilitary involvement into vigilantism should be considered. 'Coercion as a protective measure is an act of pure expediency, and, as such, can be governed by technical regulations (Pashukanis, 1978: 181). These rules express clearly the goals which society – or in this case a political movement – sets itself. It remains a strategy which aims at the mechanical elimination, or reform, of the *dangerous individual*' [italics mine].³⁴

Ultimately, all the acts which are policed by the paramilitaries are seen as either directly or indirectly dangerous to them. One could argue that the political offences (e.g. informing) are directly dangerous to the paramilitary organisations and the civil offences (e.g. robbery) are indirectly dangerous, as they can work to undermine the paramilitaries' community support should they fail to respond adequately.

Like most other acts of vigilantism, that of the paramilitaries can be first explained as a response to crime. It is important to stress that when the word 'crime' is used here, it is used not simply in society's general understanding of the term, but also in the paramilitaries' understanding of crime. While it is true to say that most victims of paramilitary vigilantism are guilty of crime as it would be generally understood by most of society, many victims of punishment attacks are targeted because of their opposition to the paramilitary groups.

To begin with, the paramilitaries use vigilante violence as a way to control – or attempt to control – the other paramilitary groups. This is well illustrated by two recent examples. In June 1998, Kevin McQuillan was attacked by an IRA punishment squad on the grounds of a Gaelic Athletic Association club in west Belfast. He suffered a fractured skull, and was left blind in one eye and partially deaf following the assault. McQuillan was a leading member of the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP), the political wing of the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).³⁵ He claimed the attack was motivated by criticisms he had made of Sinn Fein.³⁶

A few weeks later, Michael Donnelly, chairman of Republican Sinn Fein (RSF) in Derry, suffered a broken leg and bruising when he was set upon by an IRA punishment squad. The RSF is the political wing of the dissident terrorist group, the Continuity Irish Republican Army (CIRA) – currently the only terrorist group in Northern Ireland which are not observing a cease-fire. During the Forum Elections, Republican Sinn Fein campaigned for nationalists to boycott the Assembly elections. It is thought this policy cost Provisional Sinn Fein a seat in Derry, and the IRA retaliated by attacking the leading RSF figure in the city.³⁷

It has also been claimed that attacks such as these against individuals connected with the smaller republican terrorist groups, was also an indirect way to discourage disgruntled PIRA members from defecting to then active groups.³⁸

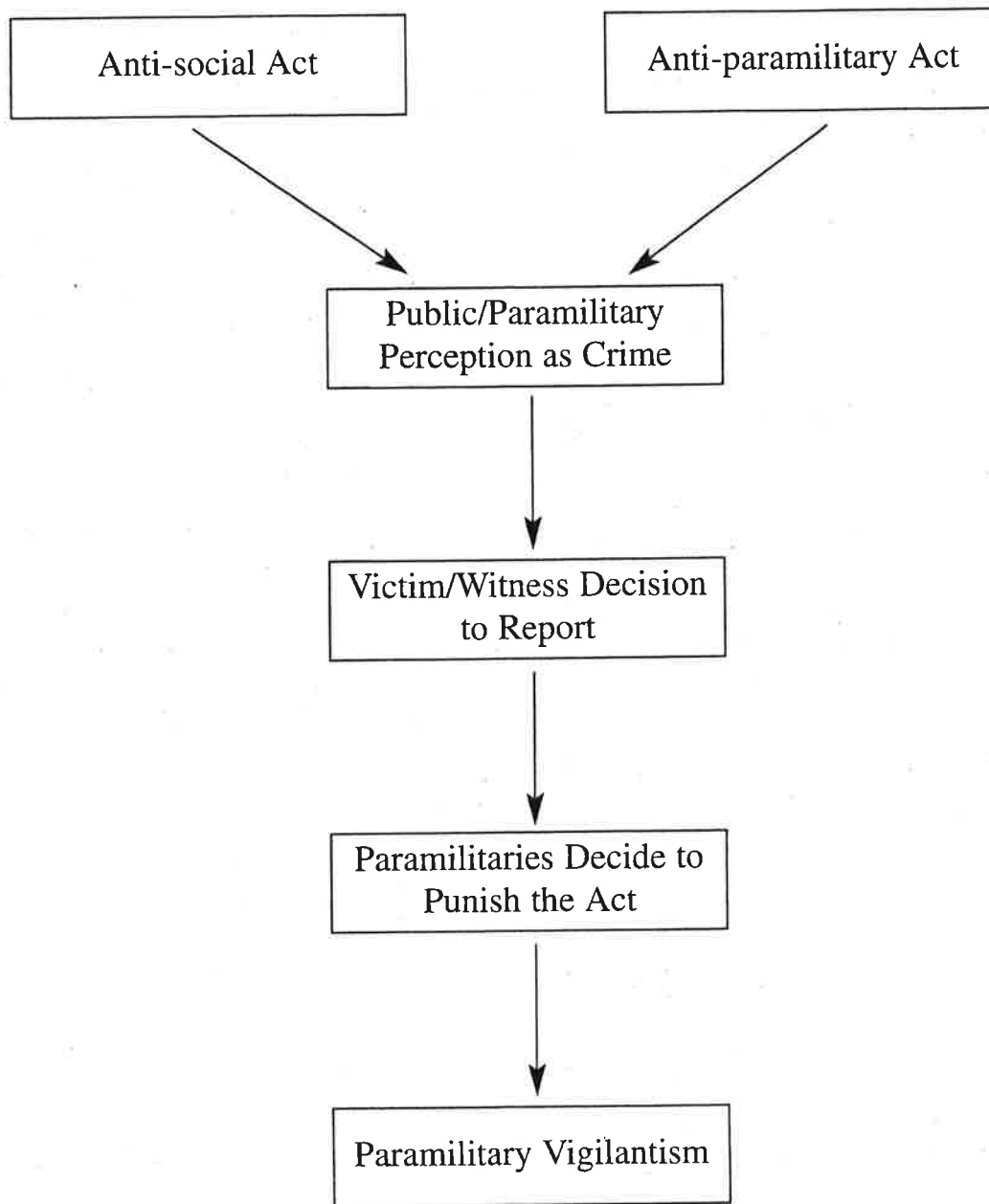
As well as intimidating the other paramilitary groups and their small political parties, the vigilantism can also be directed against the large mainstream political parties. For example, a number of elected SDLP* politicians have been the victims of IRA punishment attacks. They were targeted principally because they spoke out against the violent activities of the IRA. In 1994, John Fee, an SDLP Councillor in Crossmaglen, was the victim of a savage attack after he condemned an IRA mortar attack in the area. Fee suffered fractured ribs, broken fingers, head injuries, a broken leg and extensive bruising.³⁹ A year later, Hugh Lewsley, an SDLP Councillor in Belfast, spoke out against punishment attacks and shortly afterwards he and a friend were assaulted. Lewsley suffered severe bruising and a broken jaw, and was warned by his attackers to 'keep his mouth shut in future'. Lewsley refused to be intimidated, and a year later he appeared in a television documentary about punishment attacks. However, after the documentary was broadcast, in retaliation for his defiance the IRA attacked and vandalised his house.⁴⁰

Clearly, neither Fee or Lewsley had committed a crime in any legal or broader social sense, but from the IRA's perspective the two men had acted in a manner which was detrimental to their organisation, and as a result needed to be 'punished' for such behaviour. Fee described the motivation behind the attacks succinctly: 'The purpose of it was because of growing criticism of the IRA which is publicly being expressed by people in [nationalist areas]. The IRA, I believe, felt that they have to create a very high profile way of saying "keep your mouth shut"'.

This distinction in the type of crime has been something noted by most authors. Paddy Hillyard divided punishable offences into two categories: 'community crime' and 'political crime',⁴¹ and anthropologist, Jeffrey Sluka, also identified the same two broad categories, labelling them 'civil crime' and 'political crime'.⁴² Figure 2 illustrates this classification split, as it describes the typical route from behaviour to vigilante action.

*The Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) is the largest nationalist party in Northern Ireland and is the principle rival of Sinn Fein for Catholic votes. Unlike their republican counterparts, SDLP politicians have never supported the PIRA's campaign of violence and have consistently condemned the activities of all of the republican paramilitary groups. In recent years the SDLP has lost a considerable share of the nationalist vote to Sinn Fein, as the republican party has successfully used developments in the peace process to raise its profile positively.

FIGURE 2
FROM REAL WORLD ACTS TO PARAMILITARY VIGILANTISM



In short, the behaviours identified for punishment are first, those acts which are seen as being detrimental to the wider community (e.g. theft, drug-dealing, joy-riding, vandalism, muggings, etc.) and those acts which are seen to be detrimental to the paramilitaries (e.g. public criticism of the paramilitaries, collaboration with the security forces, intervention – accidental or otherwise – in paramilitary activities, etc.).

CIVIL CRIMES

Probably the bulk of paramilitary vigilantism is directed at policing 'civil crimes'. These crimes include serious offences such as rape, child abuse, physical assaults and muggings. More surprising is the willingness of the paramilitaries also to police relatively minor activities such as noise disturbances, truancy from school and littering. The seriousness with which the terrorist groups approach such offences is sometimes disarming. For example, in 1978 one company of the IRA in Belfast issued the following statement:

The condition of our streets and entries leaves much to be desired. To facilitate their cleansing, provision is being made for ten skips to be placed at strategic points ... it will be an offence to dump rubbish other than in the skips ... Na Fianna Eireann [Na Fianna Eireann were the youth wing of the Provisional IRA – now believed to be disbanded] will assist you in this work.⁴³

That a terrorist organisation would allocate resources to the policing of such behaviours seems bizarre, but not when one understands just how strongly the paramilitary groups are interconnected with their local communities.

Any crimes which provoke a strong reaction among local inhabitants will always generate a strong response from the paramilitaries. High profile crimes like rape and child abuse are especially emotive for both the locals and the paramilitaries. In the past after a series of rapes, the paramilitaries have operated an ad hoc escort service for women travelling at night. When caught, sexual offenders are treated particularly harshly. The last person to die at the hands of a loyalist punishment squad was a Presbyterian Minister who was attacked because videos of homosexual pornography had been discovered in his possession.⁴⁴

However, while a range of 'anti-social' behaviours are punished, the primary focus for civil vigilantism in the past three decades has been to curb joy-riding and drug-dealing. Joy-riding became a serious problem in Belfast towards the end of the 1970s and has been a constant problem in the city ever since. Joy-riders typically steal cars in the evening or at night, and then spend a number of hours speeding on roads around Belfast estates, doing hand-brake turns and blaring car-horns. The noise and disturbance prevents people from sleeping, and a great deal of damage is caused as the speeding cars hit other vehicles, and crash into property. Accidents are common, and many pedestrians have been killed or seriously injured when joy-riders lost control of speeding cars.

Despite the continuing problem of joy-riding in recent years, the principle focus for vigilante efforts has moved away somewhat from joy-

riders and shifted against those involved in drug-dealing. As the 1990s progressed, drug-dealing burgeoned in the North, driven by the spread of the rave culture among the North's younger population. While some within the paramilitaries attempted to use drug-dealing as a way to raise funds, eventually all the mainstream paramilitary groups distanced themselves from the practice. The IRA in particular have always had a very strong anti-drug stance, and have been very active in the past three years, shooting dead at least ten individuals alleged to be involved in drug dealing.

POLITICAL CRIMES

A substantial number of the victims of the vigilantism are targeted, not because of any alleged criminal activities, but because of how their behaviour has impinged on the paramilitary organisations and their members. For example, there are numerous examples of individuals being targeted after being involved in a dispute with a member of a paramilitary organisation. The original dispute may have been an entirely personal affair and nothing to do with the organisation or its aims, but because one side was 'involved' in the paramilitaries, the organisation stepped in and targeted the other individual/s for 'punishment'. Such examples send a clear message to the wider community: that paramilitary members are to be respected and crossed at your peril. This is a useful message to be sending out when you want to protect the position and authority of the organisation within the community. Protecting the group's status is not a trivial matter. The standing an individual gains within the community on becoming a paramilitary member is one of the most tangible rewards members receive, and is a major incentive for them to remain involved in the movement. Further, it also acts as a powerful inducement for potential recruits.

The paramilitaries also 'punish' people who do not co-operate with their political parties. For example, in recent years the lower Ormeau area of Belfast has been the focus of much tension. The area is mainly Catholic, but the Protestant Orange Order has carried out a number of highly controversial marches through the area during the Protestant Marching season. These parades occur on an annual basis, and when they travel through Catholic areas they frequently lead to riots and mass violence. In 1995, the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community (LOCC), a group dominated by republican activists, was trying to draw up local opposition to the marches.

Two people in the area had their cars vandalised with paint because they were seen to be in opposition to the group's aims. One person, Dougie Hegney, was targeted because he had attempted to mediate with the Orange Order over the marches. Another person, Rosaleen Hughes, was targeted

because she refused to sign a petition being conducted by the LOCC. She described what happened:

Certain people in the area came around people's doors asking them to sign a petition. I did not ask what the petition was for but I had a fair idea, and I refused. I think people should have the right to refuse ... An awful lot of people in the area signed that petition because they are terrified – and rightly so. ... They go around your doors, when the Orangemen are coming down to parade, at 5.45am – knocking your door asking you to get up to come out to protest. What kind of thing is that?⁴⁵

Clearly, neither of these individuals had committed a crime. Also, neither had they co-operated with the security forces or passed on sensitive information about the paramilitaries. They simply had not co-operated with the paramilitary's political agenda, and that lack of co-operation was perceived as a threat which warranted punishing.

Actively interfering in paramilitary activities can result in considerably harsher treatment. For example, in order to carry out operations, paramilitaries frequently need to steal cars or other vehicles, and may often need to take over houses as well. Raymond Gilmour, who was an active IRA member in Derry, described that hijacking cars was a major problem for the IRA. For obvious reasons people are often reluctant simply to hand over the keys, and Gilmour recounts that several operations had to be abandoned when his unit failed to find a suitable car. Once hijacked, the IRA would sometimes be careful to ensure the safe return of the car to the owner but not always. Vehicles are often covered in petrol and set ablaze in order to destroy any forensic evidence. Some owners understandably resist the attempts to apprehend their property, but there are risks to such confrontations. Malachi O'Doherty describes a good case in point:

Damien McCartan was a taxi driver in the Markets area of Belfast. The IRA attempted to hijack his taxi for 'an operation'. He resisted and was taken hostage by them. He escaped and rallied friends who then confronted the IRA and retrieved the car. [*Shortly afterwards, McGartan was 'kneecapped' by the IRA.*] In the IRA's statement in An Phoblacht, 1 April 1993, explaining why he was kneecapped, the IRA said that he had 'risked the capture of our materials' and 'endangered the lives of our Volunteers'. The Volunteers were wholly in the right, by this view, and McCartan was wholly in the wrong, though they had attacked him first, with weapons, and he had retaliated to save his own property.⁴⁶

The situation is very similar with the loyalist paramilitaries as well. For

example, on 8 August 1996, Kenneth Bankhead, a 26-year-old Protestant was shot in the leg by the UDA. He describes in an interview the circumstances behind his shooting:

Three to four weeks before I was shot, the UDA were rioting in Rathcoole, burning out buses. I was driving home to my flat during the riot and three UDA men tried to hijack my motor. I saw them coming at me with the hoods on and I reversed and almost hit them. I just sped away. I had to go over a field to get away from them. A few days later, I was pulled into a UDA interrogation. They threatened to shoot me because I near hit two of their members. There were seven of them. The two at the door were hooded and five weren't. They were a UDA brigade staff. They threatened me that they were gonna shoot me, break my arms, break my legs. The head guy told me I'd never play football again. They let me go but he said, 'I guarantee you, you'll not play football again.' Three weeks later I was shot. They tried to justify it by saying that I was a police informer.⁴⁷

The paramilitaries are very sensitive to perceived threats to their authority. One of the major incentives to become and remain a paramilitary member, is the degree of respect you gain within your local area. As a result, the paramilitaries are very protective of their status and can respond violently to any show of 'disrespect'. Gerry Conlon describes a fairly typical example:

The first time I got in trouble with the Ra [slang for IRA] it concerned the officials. It was over nothing at all, just a petty argument and a piece of macho posturing. I was with a group of mates on a street corner ... having a drink, when this kid came over and told us to move away from the corner because we were annoying some people. When we didn't move they came back and started to jostle us, and try to punch us. In the end we came out of the skirmish on top and they slunk away, but in a matter of days we were paying the price for a small victory. The next Saturday night I was on my way to a dance when a car drew up next to us with four guys in it. Bang, they hustled us into the car, and drove us off to a piece of waste ground. We were told we'd been arrested for fighting with members of Official Fianna, and we'd got to take a beating. Which we did. It wasn't a severe one, but it was a warning and my mother and father were very worried.⁴⁸

Clearly, one result of this policy is that it is fairly easy to conduct personal vendettas under the guise of vigilantism. Members of the paramilitaries can falsely accuse people of crimes in order to justify 'punishing' them. Both the loyalist and the republican paramilitaries have

tried to install safeguards to prevent such abuses of the system, but it is a flawed system and every year a significant proportion of vigilante attacks are carried out for purely personal reasons.

While individual paramilitaries may abuse the system, the organisations in turn use exactly the same system to discipline their own members. For example, an IRA man who robs a post office for the organisation's benefit is simply doing his job, but if he robs purely for his own gain, then he is likely to be punished. Attitudes to the 'freelance' activities of members have varied from organisation to organisation and from time to time. In general, the IRA have been consistently opposed to members committing crime for purely personal gain. In comparison, the main loyalist groups have tolerated quite a large degree of criminal activity among members. Indeed, corruption became so rife in the 1980s that the loyalist groups – and the UDA in particular – came very close to ruination and only survived because of radical internal reorganisation.⁴⁹

Other crimes can clearly never be for the organisation's benefit. For example, Eamon Collins describes how the commander of the Newry IRA was dismissed from the organisation in disgrace after he was accused of raping a married woman. Collins reports that in a purely military sense the commander was 'the best ... the area had ever had', but this did not protect him when he was found guilty by an IRA court martial of such a serious civil crime.⁵⁰

How formal criminal justice systems view the seriousness of any given crime, can be seen in the level of resources devoted to policing specific crimes. Crimes which are viewed as especially serious by either the wider community (e.g. attacks on the elderly) and/or by the police (e.g. the murder of a police officer) receive more attention and are allocated greater resources, even if in real terms there are more costly crimes occurring (both in terms of personal suffering and financial losses). The manner in which the paramilitaries allocate resources clearly illustrates which crime they view as being the most serious – the undisclosed collaboration of a member with the security forces.

The presence of informers, both within the organisations and among the wider community, represents the most potent threat facing the paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. Effective counter-terrorism is driven by good intelligence, and in Northern Ireland the best intelligence has always been provided by informers. Allowing the flow of intelligence to continue is the surest way for a paramilitary organisation to mire itself in a campaign of failed operations and high attrition among genuine members. The best organised of the paramilitary groups, the PIRA, has always shown a keen awareness of this fact. The Provisionals created specialist units specifically to detect and punish informers, both within the organisation and among the

nationalist community. These specialist units are known within the IRA as the 'Nutting Squads'. [To 'nut' someone in IRA parlance, is to shoot the individual at close range in the back of the head. The unit picked up its name because of its deserved reputation for executing suspected informers.] Informing, is the only crime for which any of the paramilitaries have felt the necessity to create specialist units. It comes as no surprise either, that the most serious sanction available to the paramilitaries, execution, is overwhelming, used against suspected informers. Of the 115 killed in the vigilante campaigns of the paramilitaries, 85 per cent were alleged informers.⁵¹

CONTROL

As can be seen in some of the examples above, paramilitary vigilantism is about much more than a simple response to crime. The paramilitary's are very concerned with punishing those who question or resist their local authority. These victims have not committed a crime in the normal sense of the word. They have simply voiced criticisms of the paramilitary's policies and behaviour, or they have refused to comply with paramilitary requests – such as taking part in political protests. The violence that is inflicted on them and on their property is not about controlling crime, but about maintaining *control*. As one of its many functions, the vigilantism provides a powerful tool to exercise control over local areas. The organised violence helps to create and foster an atmosphere where people will be reluctant to openly defy or voice disapproval of the paramilitaries. One resident describes this darker side to the paramilitaries' informal justice system:

The idea of Sinn Fein being community police is an absolute sham. It has to do with one thing: controlling the areas through the use of terror, because the level of fear of the people in the areas where paramilitary influence is the strongest is unbelievable.⁵²

Developing an extensive and organised vigilante network benefits a terrorist group by increasing its dominion over a local population. As the paramilitaries increase their control, it becomes more difficult for other organisations to continue to exercise authority in the area, as the RUC have found to their cost. An accessible vigilante network provides a ready alternative to official policing organisations. The paramilitaries back up such accessibility with an ever-present threat that anyone who does contact the RUC – for whatever reason – risks coming under suspicion of being an informer. As a result people are reluctant to be seen to be dealing with the security forces.

Reducing contact between locals and the security forces has several

benefits for the paramilitaries. First, the lack of contact keeps the two sides alienated. Local journalist, Malachi O'Doherty summed up the situation :

Through policing and political activism, republicans are able to generate an impression of a coherent republican community in an area like west Belfast. It is not easy for someone who rejects the beatings to declare that openly. It is not a small thing to disagree on. If you oppose the beatings then you oppose the notion that the RUC are a rejected force in west Belfast. If you want the RUC to police the area, that implies that you want them to arrest republicans. You are coming dangerously close to declaring yourself a potential informer. What meaning does your support for the RUC have if you are not prepared to help them?⁵³

Effective policing would considerably reduce the traditional animosity felt towards the security forces. If local attitudes towards the RUC improved, tolerance for paramilitary activities against the same police officers could diminish and the paramilitaries could find their position in the community undermined.

By reducing contact, the paramilitaries also prevent possible opportunities for the security forces to gain intelligence about terrorist activities. Nationalists are frequently asked about the paramilitaries when they come into contact with the RUC, even when the reason for the contact has no obvious terrorist link. This is particularly true in the case of criminals. In return for acting as informers and supplying information on paramilitary activities, charges are dropped. The criminal is released back into the community and can become a potent source of information. Rather than expose criminals to the RUC's influence, the paramilitaries prefer to handle them themselves.

The third element of control concerns the threat from within faced by the paramilitary groups. The threat from without, i.e. the security forces and the opposing paramilitary groups, is well understood, and traditionally the terrorist groups have been viewed in relation to such adversaries. However, the paramilitaries are not the only underworld existing in Northern Ireland. When they emerged in the 1970s, the paramilitaries' first targets were not the security forces, but the established criminal powers within their own communities. Leading criminals were purged and criminal networks were disrupted. Since then, the paramilitaries have kept a tight control over Ulster's criminal underworld.

Harsh repression by the paramilitaries prevented the development of independent organised crime in Northern Ireland. The main focus of this repression has traditionally been directed against the 'hoods', a local term denoting a juvenile delinquent element. The 'hoods' have coalesced into

local gangs but paramilitary intimidation prevents them from becoming truly organised, getting involved in serious crime or acquiring weapons. The rivalry between the two groups can be intense. Hoods can and do attack paramilitaries, for example, by vandalising businesses owned by the paramilitaries. In return, they are targeted by punishment squads and face death threats. The advantage lies firmly with the paramilitaries. They are better organised, more disciplined and far better equipped. The effect the punishment attacks have as a crime control measure is debatable, but if the vigilantism was to end tomorrow one of the first effects is that the 'hoods' would be free to organise into serious criminal networks. As it is, the paramilitaries are under more threat from criminals than they have been in nearly 30 years.

While both mainland Britain and the Republic of Ireland succumbed to the emergence of powerful, organised drug rings in the 1970s and 1980s, Northern Ireland remained a virtually drug-free zone. It was not until the 1990s and the spread of the rave culture among the younger generation that drugs finally established themselves in the Province. The arrival of rave drugs saw the emergence of drug pushers backed by suppliers in Eire, the UK and the continent. Weapons are frequently included with supplies of the drugs, and profits from the sales are high.

Despite RUC claims to the contrary, republican paramilitaries are not significantly involved in the drugs trade. In particular, the IRA has always regarded drug pushing with abhorrence and deserves much, if not most, of the credit for having kept Northern Ireland drug-free during the 1970s and 80s. When one nationalist paramilitary group, the IPLO, became heavily involved in drug dealing, the IRA moved against the smaller group, killing its leader and forcing the rest of its members to disband. The loyalist paramilitaries have a more chequered history but in recent years they have distanced themselves hugely from the drug trade and officially no longer tolerate it. Individual figures on both sides may still be involved in drug dealing but they generally lack official sanction and face severe penalties if discovered.

However, as the North's drug trade burgeoned in the 1990s, the paramilitaries have watched very wealthy, internationally backed criminal networks emerge. Traditionally, joyriding was the most common reason for administering a punishment beating, but in recent years that has changed to drug pushing. Joyriding is still very common, particularly in west Belfast, but the number of pushers has increased enormously. During the recent paramilitary cease-fires, this new drug network began to flex its muscles, a development which provoked a violent response from the most anti-drug of the terrorist groups, the IRA. In the past three years, this group has assassinated at least ten figures linked to the North's drugs' underworld, and

has issued death threats against dozens of other individuals alleged to be involved in drug-dealing. The loyalist groups, though riven by internal divisions on the policy, have hardened their attitudes towards drug-dealing. As organisations, they are probably more opposed to the practice than at any other time in the past twenty years.

POLITICS

Paramilitary vigilantism is also partly driven by political ambitions. Punishment attacks are popular. West and North Belfast, the two most important paramilitary centres in Northern Ireland, also have the Province's worst crime rates. Harsh treatment for criminals is a popular anti-crime measure. For example, joyriders are endemic on many estates, and several pedestrians are killed or injured every year by the speeding cars. In such an environment, paramilitary action against joyriders is seen as justifiable and desirable. The joyriders themselves are clearly aware that this is the case. As one of them put it: 'There's a lot of sleekit oul dolls putting in complaints, and they want to see results if they're going to support [the paramilitaries].'⁵⁴

The degree of wider support the vigilantism can generate is clearly illustrated in the following case. A joyrider had spent several nights in a row speeding cars on an estate, deliberately blaring horns and doing hand-brake turns. Eventually, he was caught by an IRA punishment squad and taken to the area where he had caused the most disruption. In full view of the inhabitants, the IRA announced who he was and proceeded to beat him. However, the assault was stopped prematurely, not because of bystander disapproval, but because the locals tried to join in on the beating, and the IRA squad were afraid the joyrider would be killed.

In short, carrying out punishment attacks wins support for the paramilitaries, and, if they were to cease doing it, they would lose this support. A study carried out by Jeffrey Sluka revealed that up to 77% of residents in one nationalist area believed the paramilitaries were *needed* by the community because of their vigilante role. However, the vigilantism also carries costs. While it may be popular in certain quarters, the North's middle-classes have traditionally abhorred the practice and shunned giving any support to those associated with the practice. As a result, the loyalist paramilitaries have struggled badly in their attempts to establish a political support base, and on the republican side, Sinn Fein – despite its wealth and sophistication – has been unable to match the popularity of the SDLP.⁵⁵ Realising that vigilantism causes political damage on a broader level, the paramilitaries (encouraged by their political representatives) have made several attempts to end the practice over the years. However, these attempts

have always failed. One Sinn Fein councillor describes an example:

The IRA doesn't want to be in the policing business. Last year at Easter, the IRA announced that it would no longer take responsibility for crime in West Belfast, and that they would no longer punish people for petty crime. That was on Sunday. By Wednesday, there were two hundred women with placards on Andersonstown Road, [the location of the Sinn Fein headquarters in Belfast] demanding that the policy be reversed. Without ever saying anything, the IRA went back to taking complaints.⁵⁶

Paramilitary vigilantism is very much in the same boat that capital punishment has found itself in the United States. Several studies have shown that the death penalty has no particular value as a crime deterrent. However, as a political weapon it has great significance. Politicians who claim to support the death penalty are seen as being strong on crime and win votes. When it comes to dealing with crime, politicians who oppose the death penalty (on the not unreasonable ground, that it does not work) are seen as being weak and as a result lose votes. The outcome is that politicians who are morally and intellectually opposed to the death penalty, publicly support it in order to ensure that they will not lose votes.

The same scenario has occurred in Northern Ireland. Even though leading paramilitary figures have privately said that punishment attacks do not work, the paramilitaries cannot cease their involvement because of the popular support that exists for the vigilantism.

Another aspect of the political dimension of punishment attacks is the role it plays in smoothing relationships between the various paramilitary groups. Consider the following account from Gerry Conlon, who found himself involved in a street fight with members of the Official IRA:

... it was a street corner affair on the Falls Road. It started as an argument we were having with some Stickies [Official IRA], and then escalated when a bunch of Provisional Fianna [Provisional IRA] joined in to help us. At the finish there was nearly a pitched battle between the Provos and the Stickies, with people pulling guns. ... because, I was in at the start of the fight, it was decided somewhere inside the Provisionals that I, along with my mates, had to take a beating for being a part of this disorderly behaviour. It was an effort to smooth things over with the Stickies. So I was taken down and given a much worse slap than the last time – I got a busted eye and needed seven stitches. All I could do was accept it.⁵⁷

The various groups can be required to punish members for transgressions committed against members of other paramilitary groups.

This is done because if the group does not take responsibility for punishing its own members, the other paramilitary group may attempt to do so, and this may ignite a feud between the two groups. Such feuds erupted on a regular basis in the 1970s and in order to try and avoid them, paramilitary leaders started to punish their own members. In one memorable case from 1985, a PIRA punishment squad kneecapped a suspected criminal in the Markets area of Belfast. The Official IRA claimed that the injured man was one of their members and made indications that they would seek revenge against the leader of the punishment squad. To avoid conflict, the PIRA conducted a hearing on the case, with a senior Sinn Fein figure acting as judge, after which each of the four punishment squad members were themselves shot in the leg.⁵⁸

Some people, aware that the paramilitaries are often reluctant to 'punish' members of other paramilitary groups, deliberately join a paramilitary group solely for the degree of protection it gives them. There are many cases, particularly from the loyalist side, of individuals who, having fallen foul of one of the paramilitary groups (e.g. the UDA), rush to join another group (e.g. the UVF), so that the original organisation will think twice before following up on any threats.⁵⁹

However, the paramilitaries are not always reluctant to attack members of the other groups.⁶⁰ As we saw earlier, the IRA has been quite willing to target members of the political parties linked to the other republican terrorist groups, but sometimes groups are willing to go further and target known members of the other paramilitary groups. The best example of this happening is seen in the case of the Irish People's Liberation Organisation (IPLO).⁶¹ The IPLO was a splinter group from the INLA which emerged in the 1986. The group turned to drug-dealing as a way to raise funds for its campaign of violence against the security forces. However, the wealth accrued in this way quickly corrupted the organisation and plagued by internal feuds it gradually degenerated into gangsterism. On Halloween night in 1992, the PIRA – who always had stern attitudes towards drug-dealing – moved against the corrupt splinter group. In a co-ordinated series of attacks, over 100 PIRA members systematically ambushed nearly 30 members of the IPLO throughout Belfast. Some people connected with the IPLO were ordered to leave the country, but over 20 people received punishment shootings in their legs or hands. Samuel Ward, a leading figure of the IPLO in Belfast, was murdered. The purge became known as '*The Night of the Long Rifles*' in republican circles, because the IRA used assault rifles to administer the punishment shootings instead of the usual handguns. The rifles were used so as to cause greater injuries to the victims limbs. As an organisation the IPLO folded, and within days the PIRA had received unconditional surrenders from the group's surviving leaders.⁶² However, by

1994, former elements of the IPLO had reorganised their drug-dealing activities. This provoked yet another PIRA backlash, and on 25 April 1994, the Provisionals carried out another purge, knee-capping 16 individuals in Belfast and killing a leading drug-dealer – and former IPLO member – Samuel Rice.⁶³

THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

It would be unfair to say that the paramilitaries have become involved in vigilantism solely for purely pragmatic reasons. As well as the political and security reasons for such involvement, there is also unquestionably a moral dimension to the vigilantism. In short, the paramilitaries believe it is right that they carry out acts of vigilantism. As a number of commentators have pointed out, the paramilitaries 'regard themselves as fundamentally decent, community-minded people'.⁶⁴ Jeffrey Sluka, who spent a year researching life in the nationalist Divis area of Belfast, had the following to say on the usually ignored morality of the paramilitaries:

To say that the reason why the IRA make efforts to avoid civilian casualties is because they recognize that these alienate public support is a 'pragmatic' explanation. It is only rarely suggested, and seems almost disreputable to do so, that there could be a moral explanation for the IRA's concern for avoiding civilian casualties. However, Burton (1978) argues that there is in fact a strong moral element to this, and my research bears this out. The government, Security Forces, and other critics of the IRA 'terrorists' scoff at any suggestion that there could be morality among them. Their view is that the IRA is made up of people who are entirely unscrupulous, pragmatic, and immoral, and for whom any means are justified by their political ends. This is neither the view presented by the IRA, nor that which is held by the residents of Divis Flats. The IRA denies that they will resort to 'any means' to achieve their goals, and they have a well-elaborated code of what may be termed 'operational ethics'. They believe that murder is wrong, but make a distinction between murder and killing in a just war, and IRA Volunteers can be courtmartialled for murder. The IRA chooses to make efforts to avoid death and injury to innocent civilians, not simply because of a pragmatic realization that it alienates their public support, but because they consider it to be not only practically but also *morally* wrong.⁶⁵ [italics mine]

Sluka's point is a well made and timely one. In the history of the troubles, the paramilitaries have frequently acted to assist the wider community. This is most clearly seen in the activities of the IRA, who have

always tended to set themselves and their neighbours relatively high moral standards. The following account of life in Belfast in the 1970s and 1980s, clearly reflects the tenor of IRA morality:

Matters came to a head when Republicans began hijacking trucks containing TVs, videos and fridges, for most families on the estate longed for brand-new electrical goods. Most of the families, all working class, were renting their TVs for a few pounds a week, a lot of money for people with several children surviving on unemployment pay. But once again the men of violence would have none of it, refusing to listen to the pleas of the womenfolk to permit the goods to be taken out of the vehicles and offered to anyone on the estate. '*That's looting,*' the IRA men would argue. '*We are a disciplined military organisation, not a bunch of criminals thieving anything we can get our hands on.*' The few people who did succeed in looting a TV or video would not get away with their booty for long, for the IRA would go from house to house searching for stolen gear. When they found a stolen machine they would rip it from the wall and throw it out into the street, deliberately smashing it to pieces.⁶⁶ [italics mine]

This theme is also reflected in the comments of Gerry Conlon, who in the 1970s was an active petty criminal in Belfast. He noted that '[E]ven when you went shoplifting in the city centre it was dangerous to bring the stuff back to the Falls. The IRA had such a down on anything like that – it was out of order. Almost everything we lifted we sold before we came back, in pubs like Kelly's Cellar and the Bank Bar.'⁶⁷

The morality of the IRA went beyond an abhorrence of criminal behaviour. At a number of different levels the IRA have attempted to provide community services for the people living in their areas. For example, in Belfast the IRA established a large taxi company to ferry people to and from nationalist areas in the city. The profit the IRA made from the taxis was very modest, as the fares were considerably lower than those on public buses. However, as one police officer explains, the IRA did not operate the taxis purely for money:

[the IRA] are not prepared to put their prices up to match the buses, as they have taken a decision that what they are providing is a *service to the community* and, as such, they should continue to subsidise it if possible.⁶⁸ [italics mine]

This community-minded attitude is seen in a number of different places. It is clearly reflected in the thinking of one IRA commander from the 1970s, who was considering what to do with the men under his command during a cease-fire:

To keep my explosives officers at work of some sort ... I thought up a useful community service which they could do with me. There was a row of pensioners' houses ... and it occurred to me that it would be a service to these old people ... to install a bell and/or a light above the front door, with many switches or pushes around their houses, which they might use to call for help if they were taken ill or fell while alone indoors.⁶⁹ [*italics mine*]

However, it is appropriate to stress that such high moral standards are not always a feature of IRA activists – and are less a feature of the other paramilitary groups. There are numerous accounts of IRA and loyalist activists abusing their positions for personal gain. The corruption of many loyalist paramilitaries is legendary.⁷⁰ The IRA are regarded as being hugely less corrupt but even here there are many examples of dubious activity. For example, Eamon Collins described how, after an IRA bombing of a hotel, he discovered that the leader of the IRA unit had robbed the hotel's till before leaving, for his own personal benefit.⁷¹ The theft caused embarrassment and disgust among other IRA members involved in the attack, but the incident provides an indication that standards vary within the paramilitaries.

The IRA perceives itself as 'a *mature* and *disciplined* and *caring* revolutionary organisation'⁷² and frowns on any unsanctioned behaviour which may bring the movement into disrepute. This carries over into an expectation that members will behave appropriately in their personal lives as well as when they are 'on active duty'. For example, many former paramilitaries have noted that there is considerable status in being a paramilitary member. As one IRA man put it, 'for those Provos who look for sexual advantages from it, there is no shortage of women willing to give more than the time of day to IRA volunteers'.⁷³ However, this raises serious issues of morality, and individuals who take advantage of their position are generally frowned upon by other members. This is clearly seen in the comments of one IRA member on a former commander in his area:

Sean, although married, started playing around. I thought badly of him for this. Commanders were expected to display exemplary behaviour in both their professional and personal lives. There were, in any case, simple pragmatic reasons why IRA leaders had to be purer than pure: illicit affairs caused anger among local people, among our supporters but also among those who perhaps might come over to us.⁷⁴

CONCLUSIONS

The motives for paramilitary vigilantism are complex. The vigilantism revolves around a practical need to control criminal behaviour as perceived

by the community and to control behaviour within that community which may threaten the authority of the paramilitaries. The vigilantism also fulfils a very important function of keeping the community and the security forces alienated. On a political level, there is a practical and moral obligation on the part of the paramilitaries to respond to community requests to police crime in the area, and to take the initiative even when the community has not requested it.

The various motives driving the vigilantism intertwine in a mesh of competing agendas, personal, political and tribal. They are about the need to protect the paramilitary group's authority and standing within the community, and to protect itself from corruption and infiltration. Importantly, it is also about serving and protecting the community. The motives can be noble. They can also be contemptible and entirely selfish. In the grim world of Northern Ireland's paramilitaries, telling the difference is rarely easy.

As the current peace process has steadily developed, the British and Irish governments have effectively overlooked vigilante violence, ignoring the fact that such actions are expressly forbidden under the Mitchell Principles and the Good Friday Agreement. Each act of vigilantism is technically sufficient to justify excluding the political parties associated with the paramilitaries from the political process. However, the governments have decided not to do this. Indeed, for the time being, the governments show no real indication that they are interested in punishing these acts of violence. While the vigilantism represents a continuing violation of the conditions for prisoner release as outlined in the Northern Ireland Sentences Bill, this has not prevented the British government from releasing 15 convicted paramilitaries to date under the Bill, with plans to release a further 200 before the end of 1998.⁷⁵ For now, the vigilante violence of the paramilitaries is being quietly tolerated. That over 20 people have died as a result of terrorist vigilantism in the past four years is overlooked. From groups who have a long history of relentless campaigns of assassination and destruction, vigilantism is seen as a relatively trivial crime.

The more astute among the security forces and politicians realise that the vigilantism serves important functions within the larger paramilitaries: the UVF, the UDA and in particular the PIRA, the group on which the peace process ultimately depends. Serious efforts to curtail and punish the vigilantism now, would undermine the doves within these organisations. The vigilantism fulfils many needs for the North's terrorist groups, and in particular – as we have seen – it protects the status and standing of the terrorists within their own communities. With the cease-fires in operation, there is no other way for the terrorists to protect their positions and reputations. So long as these are not diminished, the incentive to return to full-scale violence remains poor.

The vigilantism is tolerated, not because the security forces sympathise with the paramilitaries' so-called war on crime, but because there is a realisation that if serious efforts were made to block this violence, it could result in a backlash of more extreme violence. The North's paramilitaries are adjusting to a new way of life. A degree of tolerance for the vigilantism certainly eases the transition for the paramilitary members, protecting their status in the community and maintaining a clear reward for the years of commitment and service they have given the organisation.

However, in time, the governments must eventually move against the vigilantism. Inevitably the vigilante campaigns must end. Until this happens, the disparate paramilitary groups will remain a force in Irish politics. A force which in the appropriate environment can effortlessly ignite into campaigns of relentless and costly violence. If the governments are prepared to tolerate this presence indefinitely, they risk losing everything that the current peace process has worked so hard to establish. The more astute politicians associated with the paramilitaries will not resent the end of the vigilante campaigns. On the contrary, there is clear evidence they have been working for some time to end the practice. The vigilantism is popular, but only to a limited degree and only to a limited audience. For real political growth to happen, Sinn Fein and the fringe loyalist parties, the UDP and the PUP,⁷⁶ know that the vigilantism must eventually cease. As long as it continues, their support among the North's conservative majority will remain constantly stifled.

For now, the vigilantism will continue, and more importantly it will probably continue at its current extremely high level. Certainly, more people will die because of it, hundreds more will be maimed, and thousands will almost certainly be punished in some way. This is the sacrifice. Vigilantism is more obscure than the acts of terrorism we traditionally associate with Northern Ireland. Its victims are more deeply buried in the North's culture, and remain obscured to outsiders. Their suffering is quieter. Issues of guilt and community justice cloud the morality of the paramilitaries actions, and, in the current climate of change, the governments are displaying unofficial tolerance and patience. This policy is almost certainly the correct one. If there is one lesson from the Troubles it is that lasting peace is not achieved easily or quickly. After years of slow progress and many setbacks, the peace process has achieved much. However, notwithstanding their enormous significance, the paramilitaries' self-proclaimed cease-fires remain disturbingly incomplete. Considering the underlying forces driving the vigilantism, only one thing is certain: it will be many more years before we can finally see the end of the terrorist role in Northern Ireland.

NOTES

1. At the time of writing the only terrorist group in Ireland which has not declared a cease-fire is the Continuity IRA (also known as the Continuity Army Council). This is a very small group of about 30 members who are almost entirely based in the Republic of Ireland, with a few members in border areas of Northern Ireland.
2. William Culberson, *Vigilantism: Political History of Private Power in America* (London: Greenwood Press, 1990), p.8.
3. While most of the North's paramilitaries have engaged in vigilantism to at least a limited degree, this article primarily focuses on the three largest paramilitary organisations in Northern Ireland. These are also the groups which have displayed the most consistent commitment to vigilante activities. These groups are the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).
4. These figures are based on statistics provided by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the victim support group, Families Against Intimidation and Terror (FAIT).
5. These figures are based on statistics provided by Malcolm Sutton, *An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Northern Ireland 1969-1993* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1994); and by a media review of deaths for the years since.
6. Liam Kennedy, 'Nightmares within nightmares: paramilitary repression in working-class communities', in L. Kennedy (ed.), *Crime and Punishment in West Belfast* (Belfast: The Summer School, 1995) p.71.
7. Eamon Collins (with M. McGovern), *Killing Rage* (London: Granta Books, 1997), p.296.
8. If Joe Austin is to be believed here, the IRA only need to take further action in 0.1% of the cases they encounter. Considering that the IRA have carried out at least 2,500 punishment attacks in the past 25 years, Austin is implying that the IRA have been involved in 2.5 million cases! This would require every Catholic in Northern Ireland to have been personally warned by the IRA at least six times because of 'anti-social behaviour'! The reality of course, is that warnings are rarely the end of the matter, and for many offenders they have no lasting deterrent effect whatsoever. Also, it is worth stressing again that warnings are not always given and many credible victims claim they were never warned by the paramilitaries and some indicate they are still unsure about the reasons they were singled out for punishment.
9. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, *Children in Northern Ireland: Abused by Security Forces and Paramilitaries* (London: Human Rights Watch, 1992), p.40.
10. Ibid.
11. Robert Love, 'Teenagers in terror over "night curfew"', *Irish News*, 24 January 1997, p.1.
12. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, op. cit., 1992, p.41.
13. Ibid., p.47.
14. R.M. Nicholas, R.J. Barr, and R.A.B. Mollan, 'Paramilitary punishment in Northern Ireland: A macabre irony' *The Journal of Trauma*, Vol.34, No.1, 1993, pp.90-95.
15. For an example of such a case, see Rory Carroll, 'Friends tell of vicious beating', *Irish News*, 13 December 1996, p.1.
16. R.M. Nicholas, R.J. Barr, and R.A.B. Mollan, op. cit., p.91.
17. See Jim Cusack, 'IRA draws back from policy of knee-capping', *Irish Times*, 21 December 1991.
18. R.M. Nicholas, R.J. Barr, and R.A.B. Mollan, op. cit., p.92.
19. For an account of this case see Tim Brannigan, 'Murdered in cold blood', *Irish News*, 18 July 1998, p.1; and Jim Cusack, 'Killing may end the blind eye to IRA brutality', *Irish Times*, 25 July 1998, p.7.
20. Peter McKenna, 'Shooting victim dies after legs amputated', *Irish Times*, 14 December 1992, p.9.
21. R.J. Barr and R.A.B. Mollan, 'Kneecapping: A misnomer' *Journal of Bone Joint Surgery*, 71B, 1989, p.875.
22. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, op. cit., 1992, p.47.
23. See Jim Cusack, 'Killing may end the blind eye to IRA brutality', *Irish Times*, 25 July 1998, p.7.
24. Raymond Gilmour, *Dead Ground: Infiltrating the IRA*. (London: Little, Brown, 1998), p.146.

25. The IRA carried out this purge in a successful attempt to force the smaller group to disband. The IPLO purge (or 'Night of the Long Rifles' as it is also known) is discussed in more detail later in the article.
26. Normally, there are just two scenarios where the paramilitaries will detain someone for long periods of time: (1) when the person has been kidnapped for a ransom payment, or (2) when the person is a known security force agent. In the latter case, the prolonged detention is simply to allow the paramilitaries time fully to interrogate the individual. One interesting case which does not fit either category is provided in the case of Raymond Gilmour. Gilmour was a security force agent who infiltrated the Derry IRA. In the early 1980s most of the Derry IRA Brigade were either arrested or went into hiding as trials based on Gilmour's testimony began. In retaliation, the IRA kidnapped Gilmour's father and threatened to kill him unless Gilmour withdrew his evidence. The IRA kept the father prisoner for several months, holding him at a number of safe-houses in the Republic of Ireland. Eventually, he was released when it became clear local public opinion in Derry would not tolerate the continuing threat to the elderly man. For an account of this case, see Gilmour, *op. cit.*, 1998.
27. Quoted in Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, *To Serve Without Favor: Policing, Human Rights, and Accountability in Northern Ireland* (London: Human Rights Watch, 1997), pp.130-31.
28. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, *op. cit.*, 1992, p.46.
29. As quoted in Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, *op. cit.*, 1992, pp.52-3.
30. 'Provisionals set to carry out series of kneecapping', *Irish Times*, 18 August 1981.
31. In Belfast terminology, a 'hood' is a juvenile delinquent - though the phrase is also frequently used with reference to older criminals. To say someone is 'hooding' is to say that they are engaged in criminal activities. Importantly, the hoods do not engage in crime for political reasons, but for their own personal gain and excitement.
32. Most of these drug-related killings have been claimed by a group calling itself Direct Action Against Drugs (DAAD). However, DAAD is widely recognised as a transparent covername for the Provisional IRA.
33. An interesting and relevant exception to this rule are the loyalist paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. They are actually striving to maintain the traditional social and political structures, and are doing so by attacking those whom they see as the enemies of this structure. However, in the process of trying to protect the system, they have of course, broken the laws and rules which govern the system, an act, which of itself, ironically has also worked to undermine the system and has done much to tarnish the legitimacy of the loyalist cause.
34. Taken from R. Munck, 'Repression, insurgency, and popular justice: the Irish case', *Crime and Social Justice*, No.21 and 22, pp.81-94.
35. At the time of this attack, the INLA were not observing a cease-fire. The INLA eventually declared a cease-fire on August 22, 1998, shortly after the Omagh bombing.
36. Suzanne Breen, 'Republican SF man attacked in North', *Irish Times*, 1 July 1998.
37. Seamus McKinney, 'Assault victim blames IRA', *Irish News*, 30 June 1998.
38. See Liz Walsh, 'Inside the Real IRA', *Magill*, September 1998, pp.30-7.
39. Niall Blaney, 'Savage beating sickens parties', *Ulster News Letter*, 26 March 1994, p.5.
40. Michael Hanlon, 'Second attack on SDLP man's home', *Irish News*, 15 August 1996, p.4.
41. Paddy Hillyard, 'Popular justice in Northern Ireland: Continuities and change' taken from S. Stitzer and A.T. Scull (eds.), *Research in Law, Deviance and Social Control, Volume 7* (London: Jai Press, 1985), p.257.
42. See Jeffrey Sluka, *Hearts and Minds, Water and Fish: Support for the IRA and INLA in a Northern Irish Ghetto*, (London: Jai Press, 1989).
43. Quoted in R. Munck, *op. cit.*
44. The Presbyterian Minister was David Templeton (43). He was attacked on 7 February 1997 by a three-man-strong UVF punishment squad. The attackers used baseball bats which had spikes driven through them, and they left Templeton with a fractured skull and two broken legs. He was released from hospital but he died six weeks later when a blood clot from his leg injuries caused a heart attack. For more on this case see Phelim McAteer, 'Minister dies after loyalist beating', *Irish News*, 25 March 1997, p.1; and 'UVF blamed for attack which killed minister', *Irish News*, 13 November 1997.

45. Chris Thornton, 'Residents in fear "of Provo thug"', *News Letter*, 6 September 1995, p.3.
46. Malachi O'Doherty, *The Trouble With Guns: Republican Strategy and the Provisional IRA* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1998), p.146.
47. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, op. cit., 1997, p.121.
48. Gerry Conlon, *Proved Innocent: The Story of Gerry Conlon of the Guildford Four* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1990) p.35.
49. For on loyalist corruption, see for example, Jim Cusack and Max Taylor, 'The Resurgence of a Terrorist Organization – Part 1: The UDA, a Case Study', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 5 (1993) pp.1–27; and more recently, Andrew Silke, 'In defence of the realm: Financing loyalist terrorism in Northern Ireland – Part one: Extortion and blackmail', *Studies In Conflict and Terrorism*, Vol.21 (1998), pp.331–6.
50. Eamon Collins, *Killing Rage*, pp.164–5.
51. These figures are based on statistics provided by Malcolm Sutton, op. cit., and by a media review of deaths for the years since.
52. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, op. cit., 1997, p.109.
53. Malachi O'Doherty, op. cit., p.155.
54. *Ibid.*, p.151.
55. Sinn Fein is the wealthiest political party in Northern Ireland (and the second richest political party in the Republic of Ireland). However, the groups' enormous financial resources have failed to translate into votes. In Northern Ireland, the much poorer SDLP consistently receives more nationalist votes than Sinn Fein. For example, in the recent Assembly elections, Sinn Fein finished as the fourth largest party whereas the SDLP finished as the second largest. In the Republic of Ireland, the situation is far worse for Sinn Fein, who hold just one seat – out of a possible 166 seats – in the Irish parliament, *Dail Eireann*. (For more on Sinn Fein finances see John Burns, 'Sinn Fein raises £1m in America', *Sunday Times*, 5 July 1998.)
56. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki, op. cit., 1992, p.41.
57. Gerry Conlon, *Proved Innocent*, p.37.
58. For an account of this case, see Jim Cusack, 'Provisional IRA sentenced four to placate Officials', *Irish Times*, 17 September 1985. There were rumours that the Officials were still not entirely happy with this outcome as the injuries were relatively minor ones made with a small calibre weapon (i.e. the most lenient form of punishment shooting available to the Provisionals).
59. However, once an individual leaves the paramilitary organisation this protection vanishes. Without the terrorist group behind them, former members are often seen as 'safe' targets for their enemies. This is starkly demonstrated by the case of Tommy Stewart, who was a UVF commander in north Belfast. In October 1996, he was suspended from the organisation after allegations were made that he was misusing UVF funds. Within a matter of days, he was assassinated by members of a criminal gang, who believed (incorrectly as it turned out) that the UVF would not retaliate if the former leader was attacked. For more on this case see Darwin Templeton, 'Fugitives from the UVF', *Sunday Life*, 10 November 1996; and Phelim McAleer, 'Expelled UVF man killed by criminals says Billy Wright', *Irish News*, 30 October 1996.
60. It is important to stress here that when we talk about paramilitaries punishing other paramilitaries, we are essentially referring to those paramilitary groups who share the same ethnic background. In loyalist terms this would mean groups like the UVF, the UDA and the Red Hand Commando (RHC). On the republican side, it would mean groups like the Provisional IRA, the INLA, the Continuity IRA, the Real IRA, the Official IRA and the IPLO. So, for example, republican groups would not bother knee-capping members of the loyalist groups, but would instead try to assassinate them for political reasons. However, in normal circumstances they would think twice before assassinating a member of another republican group and would be more likely to be satisfied with injuring them instead.
61. A more recent – but less well known – case is provided by the UVF, who conducted a purge of the Red Hand Commando (RHC). The RHC is a small Belfast-based loyalist terrorist group which in recent years has been heavily involved in drug-dealing. In April 1994, RHC members tortured and killed a Protestant woman, Margaret Wright, mistaking her for a Catholic. In retaliation the UVF killed two RHC members, including the leader of the RHC

- unit responsible (who was killed nearly 18 months after the original murder). The UVF also forced other RHC members to plead guilty to the woman's murder at a subsequent court case, threatening to kill them if they pleaded innocent. For more on this case see: Stephen Gordon, 'Elliot was "executed by comrades"', *Sunday Life*, 8 October 1995, p.2; 'Summary execution for slaughter of Protestant', *Irish News*, 29 February 1996; and 'Men start appeal of bandhall conviction', *Irish News*, 9 April 1997.
62. An excellent account of the rise and fall of the IPLO can be found in Jack Holland and Henry McDonald, *INLA: Deadly Divisions* (Dublin: Poolbeg, 1994).
 63. For more on this purge see Chris Thornton, 'IRA purge sparks wave of revulsion' *Ulster News Letter*, 27 April 1994, p.4. For an interesting account of the IRA's own opinion of the attacks see 'IRA moves against drug barons in Belfast', *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, 28 April 1994, p.2.
 64. Malachi O'Doherty, *op. cit.*, p.21.
 65. Jeffrey Sluka, *op. cit.*, pp.96-7.
 66. Martin McGartland, *Fifty Dead Men Walking* (London: Blake, 1997), p.16.
 67. Gerry Conlon, *op. cit.*, p.36.
 68. James Adams, *The Financing of Terror* (London: New English Library, 1986) p.174.
 69. Shane O'Doherty, *The Volunteer: A Former IRA Man's True Story* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), pp.179-80.
 70. Again, for more on this see Andrew Silke, *op. cit.*, 1998.
 71. Eamon Collins, *Killing Rage*, p.103.
 72. This is a direct quote from a poster produced by the Belfast Brigade of the Provisional IRA. In the poster - which was produced sometime in the early 1980s - the IRA briefly explained their rationale for carrying out punishment attacks. A copy of this poster is available from the author.
 73. Eamon Collins, *Killing Rage*, pp.164.
 74. *Ibid.*, pp.164-5.
 75. Suzanne Breen, 'Loyalists angry at slow pace of prisoner release', *Irish Times*, 17 September 1998.
 76. The Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) is the political wing of the UDA, and has been led by Gary McMichael, son of a former UDA leader who was murdered in 1987. The more successful Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) is the political wing of the Ulster Volunteer Force. The PUP's growth in recent years, is largely a result of its leader, David Ervine, who is generally recognised as being one of the most articulate and intelligent loyalist politicians to have emerged in recent years.