

News

Republican gang

REPORTS BY
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A GANG of up to 60 young men hurled petrol bombs, bottles and bricks at homes in north Belfast on Monday night injuring one resident and forcing a pregnant woman to jump over her yard wall to safety.

The trouble erupted at around 8.20pm when a group of men were alleged to have left a pub at the Ardoyne interface laden with petrol, petrol bombs and other weapons.

The young men poured petrol over a nearby roundabout and set it alight, before launching a vicious attack on a number of houses situated in the unionist area of Twaddell Avenue.

Residents living in the area yesterday heavily criticised the PSNI for taking 20 minutes to arrive at the scene despite their urgent pleas for help.

DUP councillor Diane Dodds told the News Letter yesterday that a number of questions need to be asked about how to stop continuous violence in the area.

"It was a completely unprovoked attack. There has been a lot of internal tension in the Ardoyne and that spilled over to a purely sectarian attack on homes in Twaddell Avenue last night," she said.

"There are a number of questions that have to be asked. The most important one is how can we stop this? The only people who can stop it are republicans in Ardoyne and the way they can do that is by supporting the police and giving information on the culprits to the police.

"No ifs, no buts - it doesn't matter whether they are young republicans or who they are, the rule of law must prevail and Sinn Fein must show their commitment to this."

Cllr Dodds stressed that the attack on residents living in Twaddell Avenue was premeditated.

"It was absolutely premeditated and we need to nail the lie that it was between two rival groups. It was completely unprovoked."

Local parish priest the Rev Aidan Troy yesterday condemned the attack but said he did not want to enter into a "tit for tat" argument regarding events in the area over the past few weeks.

While residents living on Twaddell Avenue said the attack on their homes was unprovoked, Fr Troy said that this was not entirely the case.

"I have no reason to argue with what they are saying. It was a bad attack. There's nothing we can say to justify it. For the last two weeks there has been tensions in the area but it's not totally true to say nothing has happened to provoke the attack," he said.

"What we have to do is go to the root of this to ensure community leaders on each side tell their young people that this is not the way forward. There's no



'PREMEDITATED': Cllr Diane Dodds, speaking at Twaddell Avenue yesterday, said the attack was unprovoked.

Pictures: Bernie Brown

place in our community for this type of violence. We have been free of it for so long and it's disheartening to go back to this type of violence."

Fr Troy said by the time he arrived at Twaddell Avenue on Monday night the violence had been quelled, but it later moved on to Alliance Avenue.

Reacting to complaints over the PSNI's slow reaction to the incident, he added: "If it takes 20 minutes, it's not acceptable. However, the police are often accused of escalating the situation. They stand back and see if community leaders will quell the situation before coming in. Obviously they would get there immediately if a house

was on fire or people's lives are at risk."

He added: "They become the meat in the sandwich and they often say: 'We could come in but do we help the situation?' They are watching it from CCTV cameras and see everything that's happening. I'm not vindicating them, but they watch everything and then make their judgment on what they see."

The police said last night that they have no reports of any serious injuries after the incident on Monday night.

A spokesperson said they received a report of a petrol bomb being thrown at 8.20pm and were "tasked immediately" to the scene.

The police in north Belfast are urging all those with

influence within the community to continue to work with them to ensure the area remains calm in coming days.

North Belfast DCU Commander Chief Supt Gary White stressed that since the weekend there had been a number of disturbances involving groups of youths at interface areas.

"A small number of petrol bombs and other missiles were thrown during some of the incidents."

"Fortunately, there have been no serious injuries reported to us. However, let me make it clear, such incidents are totally unacceptable and have to stop. They have no place in any civilised society," he said.

"Community leaders have been working very closely with police in bringing the situation under control and preventing the incidents from escalating. I would like to thank them for their efforts."

"I understand that there may be tensions in the community, but I would appeal to anyone with influence in the community to continue to work with police in ensuring there are no further incidents."

He added: "Everyone has the basic right to live in peace, and we will continue to have a high visible presence in the area and work with the community in preventing further disturbances from occurring."

SF chief

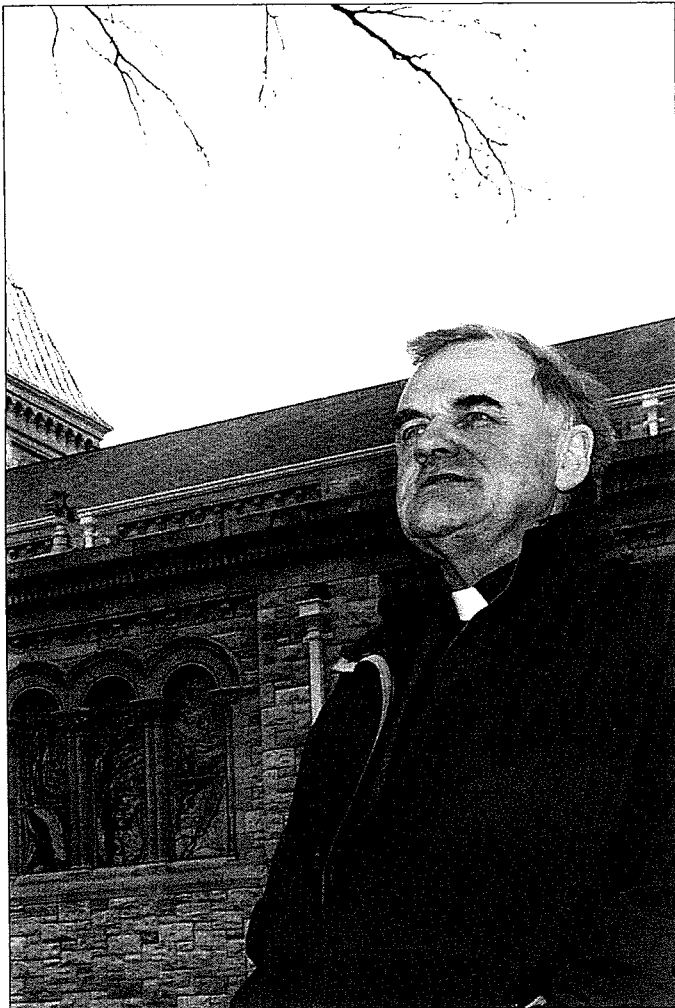
SINN FEIN yesterday condemned the petrol bomb attacks on a number of homes in north Belfast on Monday night and urged community groups to pull together to help put an end to sectarian violence in the area.

Speaking yesterday, Sinn Fein MLA Gerry Kelly said that, while in comparison to the past the attack was relatively minor, he hoped it would be the last incident that they would see in the area for some time.

"I condemn every sectarian attack and I don't care

on the rampage

Residents seething over PSNI response



'DISHEARTENED': Fr Aidan Troy at Holy Cross, on the Crumlin Road

Kelly condemns attacks

what side it's on," he said. "My view of it is that there is a good network of community workers on the ground who were able to sort the situation out. People were out straight away. Community workers have been working at this for some time, and while it could have been serious, the situation was sorted out relatively quickly."

He stressed that it was not the first incident in recent weeks and drew attention to at least three other attacks in the surrounding Ardoyne area.

"Hopefully we can work at it to ensure that this type of crime does not escalate." Sinn Fein councillor Margaret McClenaghan called into question the age of the group of youths who carried out the attack. She said it was her opinion that the perpetrators were aged between 13 and 16 and not much older. She also said that "there was no way" 14 petrol bombs were thrown, as alleged by residents living on Twaddell Avenue. "I got a phone call yesterday and was at the road

within five minutes. When I got there one of the local priests was already there with two or three residents. She said there was no way that 14 petrol bombs could have been thrown in the area on Monday night in such a small space of time. However, she resolutely condemned the attack at Twaddell Avenue. "The conduct of these young people is a disgrace. I am also appealing to the parents of these children to make themselves aware of where they are."

RESIDENTS who were on the receiving end of violence in the unionist area of north Belfast on Monday night were still seething yesterday, claiming that police did not take their calls for help seriously.

One man, who had his car windscreen smashed, said his girlfriend came close to losing their baby after injuring herself as she scrambled over their yard wall to safety.

Another distressed woman living on Twaddell Avenue sustained injuries to her lower back after a concrete block was hurled at her by a young man.

Another resident said he tried to scare the gang of young nationalists off, only to find himself on the receiving end of a snooker cue.

Each also said that they felt bitterly let down by the police response to their emergency calls, but police said they responded immediately.

A PSNI spokesman said: "Police received a report of a petrol bomb being thrown at 8.20pm and were tasked immediately to the scene."

Gerald Solinas, a community worker for the Ulster Political Research Group, yesterday described events at Twaddell Avenue as they unfolded on Monday night.

"It took place at about 8.30 last night. The residents were in their homes and about 50 to 60 young men who were armed with petrol bombs and snooker cues came across the roundabout (at the interface) and poured petrol on the road and set it on fire.

"Meanwhile, the other ones threw about 14 petrol bombs in the direction of the houses," he said.

"The men then proceeded to come into the first three houses (on Twaddell Avenue) and obviously people came out of their houses and the men then attacked them with bricks. They hit one lady in the back with a breeze-block."

He added: "The residents rang the police and the police said they were too busy, even though they said there were petrol bombs flying. It took them 20 minutes to turn up, which was absolutely delightful.

"The police have said that rival groups clashed. They made a mistake, it was actually Protestant houses they attacked."

Unionist residents who were on the receiving end of the violence on Monday night told the News Letter that they were fearful for their homes and lives.

One resident said: "I was in the house playing with my

PlayStation when my girlfriend told me they were throwing petrol bombs. I came out and chased them and a fella from a bar came and tried to attack me.

"About 60 men ran into the area and came around onto Woodvale Drive and smashed up my car windscreen. My girlfriend's five months' pregnant

and she ran into the house and straight out the back."

He described how, after she clambered over the wall, she fell and hurt her ankle and also hit her stomach.

"She went to hospital and everything seems to be all right. The police eventually turned up at around 8.50 and all the men dispersed."

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