

'I, Dolours' - The Backstory

By Ed Moloney

The origins of this film on the life of the late Dolours Price, directed by Maurice Sweeney, lie in an interview that she gave to the Belfast daily, *The Irish News* in which she spoke, for the first time publicly, about her part in the saga of the IRA 'disappeared'.

That interview set in motion a cascade of crises that culminated in an agreement between herself and myself in which she made a promise not to reveal any more about the 'disappeared'. In return she would record her story on tape and video and it would not see daylight until she died. That way the truth could eventually be told without causing harm to herself.

The journey to that agreement was a long and complicated one, so for the purpose of brevity I will tell the story in bullet points:

- For around three or four years I was the director of the Boston College Oral History Archive which was established in 2001 to collect and record interviews with participants in the Northern Ireland Troubles, primarily Republican and Loyalist activists;
- I had been a journalist in Belfast until 2001, most recently for the Dublin-based *Sunday Tribune*. That year I moved to New York. In 2003, Penguin published my study of the IRA's journey to the peace process, a book called 'A Secret History of the IRA';
- Dolours Price was one of several former IRA members who I spoke to for the book. Amongst other things, she confirmed the existence and role of 'the Unknowns' and told me about the 'disappeared';
- When the Boston archive was set up, Dolours Price agreed to give a series of interviews about her life and times in the Provisional IRA. Both myself and the researcher knew that she had been involved with 'the Unknowns' in taking people away to be 'disappeared';
- Before the interviews began Dolours was given the opportunity to exclude subjects she did not wish to speak about at all or fully in her interviews, matters that she did not want her family to know about. She chose 'the disappeared' as one of those subjects.
- In 2009, I was asked to write a book based upon interviews given to the archive by Brendan Hughes, a former Belfast commander of the IRA, a hunger striker and a onetime close friend of Gerry Adams. RTE and the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland also accepted a proposal to make a documentary based on the book;
- In late 2009 we approached Dolours Price in Belfast for an interview and she agreed. She and Brendan Hughes had been close comrades. Shortly afterwards I was contacted by a family member who told me that Dolours had been ill with PTSD. I was asked not to interview her and immediately agreed. There the matter would have ended but for events;
- I have always believed that one event in particular pushed Dolours Price over the edge. In late 2009, the Belfast daily, *The Irish News* reported that the IRA had lied when it had admitted 'disappearing' people during the Troubles. A list of victims prepared by the organisation, the paper reported, was incomplete. Missing was Joe Lynskey, the IRA's chief of intelligence in Belfast and the first 'disappeared' victim to be driven across the Irish Border by Dolours Price;
- Joe Lynskey was a friend of Dolours Price. He believed utterly in the IRA, believed he had been rightly sentenced to death and went willingly with Dolours across the Border. He could have escaped but didn't. I think the reminder of all that disturbed her intensely and led to the next fateful step;
- In February 2009, Dolours Price gave an interview about the 'disappeared' to *The Irish News* reporter who had broken the Lynskey story, but her family intervened with the editor to reduce the harm. I visited her in hospital that day only to learn that she had scheduled another interview, this time with *The Guardian*. Her family didn't seem to know about this. I knew the journalist; he was good at his job. Nothing, it seemed, was going to stop her from telling her story to the world;
- It was clear that a major effort would have to be made to stop her from a course that would be disastrous for her and her family;

- So, I made the proposal that has led to this film. She could sit down and tell her story on tape and video; it would then be stored away until her death. Only then would the world hear what she had to say about that period - and I told her that if she predeceased me, and I was able, I would ensure that her story was told. She agreed;
- Although subsequently she gave interviews to CBS and The Sunday Telegraph, Dolours Price never revealed publicly the full, untold story of the 'disappeared' which is disclosed in this documentary. She kept her word. And I have now kept mine;

The result is this film, 'I, Dolours'.