



Expert says Belfast paramilitaries forced children into pogroms to clear drug debts

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Belfast

Belfast – The [Commissioner for Children and Young People](#) in the north of Ireland has said loyalist paramilitaries pressured children to engage in [violent racist pogroms](#) in return for writing off money owed to those same gangs.

[Chris Quinn was speaking to the Irish News](#). He said the money owed might be “drug debts” or “could be loans”. He gave examples of what he came across first hand when present at [racist disorder in Glengormley](#). Quinn said:

We have been informed by reliable people working with these young people, that some of those were brought there to clear debts.

I heard an account of one young person who was told to go and partake in this, and it would wipe £500 off their debt.

Belfast Paramilitary threats: “We know where your mummy lives”

In other cases, Quinn suggested children were being threatened with potential violence if they refused to take part. The commissioner gave an example of what paramilitaries would tell their victims:

We know where your mummy lives, we know where your house is, your mum owes such and such money, you need to get down there and partake in this.

Quinn was adamant that paramilitaries were running the show. Others who were on the ground during the pogroms backed this view, including the *Belfast Telegraph*'s Sam McBride who was [attacked by rioters while attempting to investigate the disorder](#). Leader of the SDLP Claire Hanna [spoke out in Westminster](#) about the "continuing grip of paramilitaries" in the Six Counties.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) said they have [seen nothing to indicate paramilitaries being behind the wave of ethnic cleansing](#). This indicates they aren't looking hard enough, given the widespread accounts by observers not-side on who and what they saw.

The commissioner described in detail the precise movements he saw during rioting:

We know in East Belfast there were paramilitaries on the streets and what I saw with my eyes was masked people, young people and lots of not so young people.

It looked to me like there was instructions being given, and in Glengormley at a certain time, everyone was stood down. It was like a switch was clicked.

Everyone started jumping and disappearing. No one involved in that violence was from the area. I'm mindful of putting myself in danger and my family in danger, because we are talking about very dangerous paramilitaries.

It's vile. It's almost like we're on repeat, we're seeing time and time again that children are being coerced. We saw in Derry this past few years, shocking pictures of very young children with petrol bombs in their hands.

Someone has given that child a petrol bomb, someone has told them how to make a petrol bomb. It's happening over and over again, and it's child abuse.

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Coercion by gangs is a form of human slavery, says report

There's no question that it is indeed serious abuse. [As pointed out by the Department of Justice:](#)

Child criminal exploitation (CCE) is widely recognised across the UK as a form of modern slavery.

They were reporting on a study they helped fund, which argued that child victims of paramilitaries are not always being recognised as victims of modern slavery and human trafficking. They found 11,000 British children had been identified as potential cases of modern slavery in England, Scotland and Wales. Yet in the north of Ireland, where [organised paramilitary gangs still hold significant sway:](#)

until the end [of] 2024, no UK or Irish male child had ever been referred to the NRM for criminal exploitation in Northern Ireland.

The NRM is the National Referral Mechanism. It is:

â?la UK-wide mechanism designed to respond to potential cases of modern slaveryâ?!

There is increasing awareness of the issue, as the [PSNI referred 50 children to social services](#) after previous summer outbursts of loyalist race hate. The Home Office are less helpful. [As the Canary recently reported](#), the incompetent department is seeking to deport an activist playing a key role in identifying this abuse of children.

Similarly obstructive are the unionist parties at Stormont, who [continue to want to criminalise children](#) despite overwhelming evidence of the dangers of that approach. Their failure means continuing to punish countless young people in their own areas, suffering from addiction issues and poverty, only to then be cynically exploited by paramilitary thugs.

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By [Robert Freeman](#)

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