

## One Illusion After The Other

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A SPOKESPERSON for the Rathfriland based Victims Support Group South Down Action for Healing Wounds (SDAHW), has said that the recent announcement by the head of the decommissioning body General John de Chastelain, that the IRA had decommissioned their weapons, reminded them of a stage act, similar to that of Illusionist, David Blain, when he performs unbelievable illusions, one after the other. He went on to say "destroying weapons would not bring back all the people murdered by the IRA over the decades."

The spokesperson stated: "I don't think there is enough clarity in the process so far. Yes, it would be nice to think that the IRA have disposed of their arsenal of weapons, however we as an organisation are not satisfied that this has been done completely and successfully. We don't have any evidence enabling us to judge for ourselves that they have indeed disarmed and that everything has gone beyond use.

"There is no transparency and this is where the whole process has failed, it might as well never have happened. It's very well for the Commission and the eyewitnesses to say that the job has been done, but how can it be related to families that have lost one or several members of their family throughout the years? We are in no way doubting the eyewitness's accounts, as we believe that they saw something. However, we are questioning the amount of arms being decommissioned."

"The victims can't be brought back, their day is gone. The murderous campaign of the IRA robbed many an innocent person of their right to life. There are numerous graves and graveyards throughout Northern Ireland, which are standing memorials to the atrocities.

"It's all very well giving us a statistic about the number of arms supposedly put beyond use, but do we know the original quantity that was at their disposal and the amount of weaponry that went to dissident republicans?"

"We believe that the destroyed weaponry could have been obsolete. One national newspaper reported that intelligence estimated the weaponry held by the IRA varies wildly, but they agree that many of the guns and ammunition that had been stored for up to 50 years had never been used. It would also seem to many commentators, that the much-debated list of weapons, which supposedly was put beyond use, were in fact largely unnecessary.

The spokesperson went on to say, "We also believe that the IRA's persistent refusal to allow photographic evidence of the decommissioning process is further evidence that the IRA has something to hide. Part of their refusal could quite possibly be, that the IRA has a further arsenal of weapons gathered over the past 10 years"

The spokesperson continued: "What is the British government going to do now? Where do the people of Northern Ireland stand? We have had the removal of the watchtowers, the disbandment of the RIR Home Battalion and the possible sale of Government buildings. Are we witnessing the early stages of the British withdrawal from Northern Ireland?"

"Look at the Northern Bank robbery. Where did that money go? The IRA have been a threat to Britain and, in order to safeguard the heart of London city, the Labour Government will do anything even if it means giving in to terrorists. Tony Blair is keen on defeating terrorists in London but he hasn't dealt with the threat of terrorism in Northern Ireland. The victims here in Northern Ireland are the forgotten ones. We are the second-class citizens. Our families have stood up against the threat of terrorism in order to protect our land and the people who reside in Northern Ireland. How are they being repaid? By giving in to terrorism."

"Our people need visible evidence as to what has been destroyed and they need to be convinced that the threat of that terrorism is gone. The lives of many families throughout Northern Ireland have been shattered and they have been victimised. There are still many issues to be addressed, such as the ethnic cleansing, with families pressurised into leaving the area where they were born and bred. Concluding the Spokesperson said, "The weakness of the current Labour Government and its inability to deal with the problem of terrorism in Northern Ireland, illustrates once again that Tony Blair and his Labour Party are so desperate for success that they will do absolutely anything in order to be accepted and gain world wide recognition. However the question we must ask is, what further price must we, the people of Northern Ireland have to pay, for his personal glory. "