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Monday, 3 November 2008

Plans to save one of the Maze prison's infamous H-Blocks should not be used to create a shrine to republicans, Northern Ireland Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness said today.

The senior Sinn Fein figure defended plans to create an International Centre for Conflict Transformation (ICCT) at the site, despite unionist fears it would be used to promote republicanism.

The prison is closely associated with the images of the 1981 hunger strike when 10 republicans died after years of prison protests demanding political status.

One of the H-Blocks, the prison hospital and cells which held loyalists are among buildings that have been listed for preservation as part of a wider plan to create a centre where the lessons of the peace process can be passed on to an international audience.

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What are these?

Today, Mr McGuinness addressed unionist concerns over the Maze/Long Kesh site and said: "I don't know anybody who has argued for a shrine at Long Kesh.

"I have heard people from the unionist persuasion articulating that that's what republicans want. But let me state here and now, that is not what republicans want."

In 1976, the Government phased out the special category status of paramilitary prisoners in Northern Ireland in a move aimed at treating them in the same fashion as ordinary criminals.

Republicans refused to wear prison uniforms and remained naked except for blankets, before later launching the dirty protest that saw them refuse to slop out cells.

Unionists have said the protests and the eventual hunger strike would be immortalised by the creation of the ICCT.

In the Northern Ireland Assembly today, Ulster Unionist David McClarty called for the delisting and demolition of the remaining buildings.

The Democratic Unionist Party's Nelson McCausland also said students associated with Sinn Fein had visited the site and recorded the experience on a website hailing the legacy of the hunger strikers.

He asked Mr McGuinness: "Would he agree with me that with words such as 'homage' and 'inspiration', it is clear that members of his party already regard the H-Blocks as a republican shrine?"

Mr McGuinness said the proposed ICCT had already secured European Union support and would house conference facilities, political research, summer schools and exhibitions aimed at encouraging peace building around the globe.

He said he was unaware of the students' comments and added: "No doubt people will record their own individual experiences when they go there, but the important thing for me is that we don't have a shrine at the Long Kesh site.

"What we want is a meaningful centre for conflict transformation where people from other parts of the world, can come, can learn from our experiences and in doing that also bring enormous benefits to ourselves in the north.

"Because I think such a centre would be a massive focus for international attention and bring more and more visits to this part of our island."

Mr McGuinness said he and unionist politicians had visited areas such as Sri Lanka and Iraq to share the lessons of the Irish peace process.

He said: "I want a viable meaningful centre which will contribute to world peace, not a shrine to anybody.

"If anything, what will happen at the site has to be a shrine to peace building, not just here in the north of Ireland, but in the world."

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You're quite right Barry, your post is not exactly what this story is about.

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Posted by mickey | 05.11.08, 12:10 GMT

Mickey you say. 'Plus why mix sports with politics? Crazy.' Quite right too. However, I am curious to know if you felt the same when David Murray of Rangers FC made sure that rangers publicly celebrated the 300 anniversary of the Act of the Union. I know it's not exactly what this story is about but like I say I'm curious to know if you felt the same way about this public act of mixing politics and sport.

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Posted by Barry | 05.11.08, 10:31 GMT

Although I am far away from Ireland, I have watched over the years to what was happening in N.I.. and was distrubed and shocked to see what was taking place there, but thank God there is some assemblance of peace now.

For what it is worth, I am still pertubed from what I read in these posting and I do agree everyone has the right to their opinion, but whether right or wrong, those men and women (Protestant and Catholic) were convicted by a legal governing body.

I believe it should be levelled. It is not like the camps in Germany (Bergen-Belsen, Dachau) where we should keep a reminder of the suppression of innocent people and never allow those atrocities to happen again.

Yes, some will argue that the catholics were discriminated against and that is true as history dictates. But should the Maze should be left as a monument? I don't believe so.

But we should respect other peoples beliefs and try to understand why they do things dissimilar to our own.

Earl. Canada.

Posted by Earl | 04.11.08, 19:48 GMT

The problem with message boards is you can write your thoughts and people can interpret them as they like.

I stand over what I originally said about the hero status of the hunger strikers, they were political fighters who showed their conviction by starving themselves to death. Stop and think about that for a second, they starved themselves to death, they didn't hide in shadows and shoot people in the back, or plant bombs that killed randomly, they showed strength of charactor by taking their own lives for their political cause. As a Unionist, without bigotry, have to respect that.

The hunger strikers were different to the thugs and mobsters we've had playing political armys for the past 30 years, fuel launders, drug smugglers and extortionists, and I am talking about both Loyalist and Republican thugs.

I believe we need to get over our inherant bigotry, accept we all played a role and move forward in a society of mutual respect, not ignorance.

Posted by Steven | 04.11.08, 17:41 GMT

Why should such peace centre be under the control of one political grouping? Surely such a venue should be under the control of neutral custodians. Then we can all be sure that a shrine will not be created to any terrorist grouping.

Posted by Sootie | 04.11.08, 16:53 GMT

Thankfully the Maze Stadium plan looks dead in the water and non-republican fans of sport will not have to suffer the glorification and martyrdom of republican terrorists and murderers in the shape of a shrine. Same too for visiting supporters. We should be doing all we can to close an inglorious chapter in NI's history and sweeping it all under the carpet probably does not go far enough. Plus why mix sports with politics? Crazy.

If republicans want shrines to terrorists, why not erect them at Casement Park for example.? If visitors really wish to go and see these shrines (which I doubt), can't they make the trip there instead?

Posted by mickey | 04.11.08, 16:40 GMT

A conflict transformation centre along with a 'troubles' section at the Ulster Museum would be of huge historical interest to

tourists.

Visit the Chu Chi Tunnels in Vietnam and you will find bombed out American tanks still sitting from the war. You can view some extremely nasty traps set for the Americans and you can fire an AK47 for a dollar. You can also visit the war museum in Ho Chi Minh which is extremely harrowing.

The point is that these are must see points of historical interest for tourists visiting that country. They are not tourist 'attractions' or shrines. Many people died. It happened and we should learn about it, learn from it, move on and hope it never happens again. As long as it tells the story from all sides I think it is a great idea and will be a tremendous success.

Posted by Leb Anon | 04.11.08, 15:06 GMT

Malachy,

"Equal rights and equal opportunities for every person in Ireland, no matter what race/sex/religion. "

Would this be the same declaration that also says

" The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman"

So equal rights except to disagree with those making the proclamation: your loyalty is demanded and failure to comply gets you shot as a traitor like the policemen at Slodohedbeg and legions of others since.

The hunger strikers and all their fellow travellers before and since totally failed to understand that unity cannot be forced through sectarian conflict. Stupid and futile. I hope we are all a little bit wiser now.

Posted by Steve W | 04.11.08, 14:57 GMT

colin, i agree with you that it should be completely ripped down.

You are also right about the present-day so called free state. At the end of the day, the republic that the hunger strikers were fighting for before being incarcerated, is a republic for the whole island of Ireland, outlined in the 1916 proclamation, against British oppression.

Equal rights and equal opportunities for every person in Ireland, no matter what race/sex/religion.

As Wolfe Tone (a Presbyterian I might add, and also the founding father of republicanism) said, "Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter".

Posted by Malachy | 04.11.08, 14:21 GMT

i feel worse for the people who had to clean out their cells

Posted by weev | 04.11.08, 14:14 GMT

Malachy says, "THEY WERE BEING TREATED AS CRIMINALS FOR A CONVICTION DUE TO POLITICAL BELIEFS."

Malachy, they were treated as criminals because they WERE convicted criminals. They were convicted of committing and planning murder against their fellow citizens, not because of their beliefs. Ironic that they committed and planned the murder of their fellow citizens precisely because they opposed these citizens' opinions and beliefs.

Posted by Cliff | 04.11.08, 14:05 GMT

The Maze would be a perfect place to have an International Centre for Conflict Transformation (ICCT), not only does it represent the history of some of the Troubles, but shows the wider world that we have come on a lot and starting to show hospitality to them and to each other.. Build a stadium here for all sports to, so when visitors coming here to see sports they can also visit and see the ICCT...

Regarding the comments about a shrine, these were heroes to some, villains to others, but in a whole, the majority of the world sees them as brave men who died for what they believed in.. got rights for both sides inside prison.. if Margaret Thatcher had taken her head out and realised what she was doing wrong this wouldn't have been part of history.. so blame her

Posted by Phat Tony | 04.11.08, 13:48 GMT

Peace.

Posted by fed up | 04.11.08, 13:44 GMT


Malachy - please remember that the 'Protestant government for Protestant people' is no different than the government that the ROI set up. The whole constitution was based on RC beliefs and even blessed by the Vatican. Honestly, the H-blocks should be ripped down and leveled. Without them both sides might make strides forward.

Posted by Collin | 04.11.08, 13:44 GMT

The hunger strikers found themselves in jail because they were violent hate-filled sectarian criminals. They lost their lives,

their many victims suffered and died heroically. These criminals deserve to be forgotten. Standing up for what you believe in is not heroic when you believe in hatred and murder.

Posted by Peter | 04.11.08, 13:33 GMT

 lullabelle
i suggest you go back to sleep, any wonder we cant move on with people like you among us..

Posted by us2 | 04.11.08, 13:11 GMT

 Give it back to Boomer's sheep, much less problems then

Posted by UNIONCRUISER | 04.11.08, 13:00 GMT

 They found themselves in jail because of fighting oppression.


And what do you mean "what glory is there in starving yourself to death?"

They did this to get Political Status within the H-Blocks and they eventually achieved this after their deaths.


I think this is a Great act of Heroism in anybodys books, Standing up for what you believe in.

But I suppose you know better.

Posted by The Bhoy, Armagh | 04.11.08, 12:55 GMT

 Lullabelle - these men tried to live by the law and found themselves being attacked for asking for political status. They were after all fighting a political battle - i.e. Republicanism.
Or were you not aware of that.
Perhaps a visit to a Peace Centre(perhaps located at the Maze) would enlighten you!
Think for a moment. Why would a human smear excrement on the wall of their cell? Answer - they were passionate about their view.
They may have been wrong in that but the point of this article is that Peace is more important for the future of NI. YOU do want Peace, Lullabelle, dont you?

Posted by John | 04.11.08, 12:48 GMT

 IM SORRY LULLABELLE, WHY ARE YOU STUCK IN THE PAST?

THE REASON THESE MEN WERE INCARCERATED IN THE FIRST PLACE, WAS THAT THERE WAS "A PROTESTANT GOVERNMENT FOR A PROTESTANT PEOPLE!" DO YOU THINK THIS WAS RIGHT!

I BELIEVE IN EQUAL OPPORTUNITES FOR ALL, NO MATTER WHAT RACE/RELIGION ETC. WE ARE LIVING IN THE 21ST CENTURY NOW. CIVIL RIGHTS FOR ALL!!

AND YOU SAY THIS WAS A FILTHY AND DISGUSTING WAY TO BEHAVE, THESE MEN HAD NO OTHER CHOICE, THEY WERE BEING TREATED AS CRIMINALS FOR A CONVICTION DUE TO POLITICAL BELIEFS.

THESE MEN FOUGHT AND DIED IN LONGKESH GAOL FOR POLITICAL STATUS; I.E. ANYONE THAT WAS CONVICTED DUE TO THEIR POLITICAL BELIEFS, WHETHER THEY WERE REPUBLICAN OR LOYALIST!

Posted by Malachy | 04.11.08, 12:47 GMT

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