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Opinion

Viewpoint: This is a dangerous, last-resort tactic

Tuesday, August 21, 2007

David Simpson, the DUP MP for Upper Bann, has put the cat among the pigeons with his threat to name, under parliamentary privilege, a prominent Sinn Fein representative whom he believes was involved in a murder in 1979.

Sinn Fein have described the claim as "baseless", even before any details are given, and clearly it threatens to upset the cosy relationship between the leading Assembly parties.

There are also grave doubts about the morality of using parliamentary privilege, which allows MPs to name individuals without risking libel.

There are other reasons, of course, why the MP may have chosen this particular course of action. The murdered man, former RUC reservist Frederick (Eric) Lytton, was a cousin, whose family have been thwarted in their efforts to discover the truth.

Dealing with the past, after a civil conflict that lasted more than 30 years, is an enormously difficult and delicate task, which the last direct rule administration referred to an independent commission under Lord Eames and Denis Bradley.

Time will tell if Mr Simpson carries out his threat, but it is a dangerous, last-resort tactic - to accuse, without having to produce proof.

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