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Politics

Differences emerging within DUP over Maze plans

Friday, June 22, 2007

Differences appear to be emerging within Ian Paisley's DUP over proposals to turn the Maze jail into a sports stadium and conflict transformation centre.

The party was represented on the panel which drew up the plans but two leading members are now opposing the project.

The panel's proposals are that the huge site of the old top-security jail be turned into a prestigious stadium along with hotels, housing etc.

The prison hospital, where the ten hunger-strikers died, would be turned into an international centre on conflict resolution.

But although the panel included DUP members, Nigel Dodds and Sammy Wilson, two DUP MPs, are now vehemently opposing what they say would be a glorification of the hunger-strikers.

The DUP's Nigel Dodds has criticised calls for the retention of one of the H-Blocks at the former Maze Prison as a so-called conflict transformation centre.

Mr Dodds, the Stormont Enterprise Minister, says unionists will not accept the building of a new sports stadium at the site if it also contains "a shrine to IRA terrorism".

He said the conflict transformation centre appears to be a pre-requisite for Sinn Fein supporting the stadium project and would become a shrine to the IRA hunger strikers who died at the Maze in the 1980s.

"It is quite clear now the price for Sinn Fein support for the Maze project including the stadium is a shrine to IRA terrorism," said the North Belfast MP.

"However it is dressed up, whatever spin is deployed, the preservation of a section of the H-Blocks - including the hospital wing - would become a shrine to the terrorists who committed suicide in the Maze in the 1980s (the republican hunger strikes).

"That would be obnoxious to the vast majority of people and is something unionist people cannot accept.

"But that appears to be the prerequisite as far as Sinn Fein is concerned if a stadium is to be built at the Maze."

Sinn Fein said the proposal doesn't amount to glorifying anyone.

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