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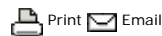
Tuesday, 28 October 2008

Sinn Fein opposition to a parade for British troops returning from Iraq has damaged efforts to secure political agreement in Northern Ireland, First Minister Peter Robinson claimed last night.

The Northern Ireland Executive has not met for four months as a result of a split between republicans and the DUP over the transfer of policing and justice powers to the Assembly.

Mr Robinson told a Northern Ireland Affairs Committee hearing at Stormont that agreement was made more difficult by Sinn Fein plans to protest at a homecoming parade for troops scheduled for Belfast on Sunday.

Sinn Fein said it will hold a peaceful protest to highlight the impact of British military collusion with loyalist paramilitaries during the Troubles.



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But Mr Robinson yesterday said: "I think it is hard for people to envisage how we can devolve powers for policing and justice, when one of the parties in the Assembly behaves in such a reckless way as Sinn Fein are proposing to do.

What are these?

"And it indicates that there are people certainly within Sinn Fein, who have not pulled themselves into the new era.... who aren't prepared to allow people from our community, who have put their lives in harm's way and thankfully are coming back, and are able to parade in Northern Ireland."

On the wider political front, Mr Robinson told the Westminster Committee it was possible the Secretary of State might eventually have to step-in to resolve the dispute between Sinn Fein and the DUP, but he stressed the issues could and should be dealt with by Stormont ministers.

He said the Secretary of State had powers to sanction parties in default of their duties and he also warned that Sinn Fein could yet face a legal challenge if it continued to block Executive meetings.

Mr Robinson repeated his offer to hold an Executive meeting with an open agenda and added that he would be happy to hold a meeting dealing only with economic issues.

Sinn Fein, meanwhile, has branded the planned homecoming parade a 'catwalk' for the Ministry of Defence.

Republicans have said their demonstration against the march is prompted by opposition to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan where the homecoming Royal Irish Regiment troops have served.

Sinn Fein MLA Alex Maskey said the Army parade was offensive to victims of state violence and accused the First Minister of making excuses for the political stalemate.

"Hundreds of families who have lost loved ones directly or through collusion between the British Army and Loyalists still have many unanswered questions," said Mr Maskey

"There have been hundreds of thousands of people killed in Iraq and Afghanistan and undoubtedly many families there will be asking exactly the same questions.

"The evidence of collusion and British state murder is colossal.

"The attempt to glorify British crown forces in the centre of Belfast is an affront to victims across this island," he added.

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Remember Me

Will all British soldiers be the enemy for ever and ever?

Posted by *Graham* | 28.10.08, 14:18 GMT

I have been reading Republican websites to try and understand why some people feel the need to protest on Sunday. It is clearly NOT about the wars in Iraq and Afganistan, Sinn Fein laughed and joked with George Bush last summer and at every St Patrick's Day celebration in New York since the wars began, so knock that notion on the head. At this point, I would like to point out that the majority of Unionists do not support the wars.

These protests are about British soldiers on the streets of Belfast, because Republicans don't believe that Northern Ireland exists or that it should be governed by the UK. This is not equality for all, this is not inclusiveness for all Irish men, this is bigotry, there is no other way to describe it.

It is okay for Sinn Fein who represented the IRA to be in the Assembly, but it's not okay for an Irish Regiment of the British Army be welcomed home from a war they did not chose to fight in?

Explain to me how this is simpy not just bigotry?

Posted by *Steven* | 28.10.08, 13:38 GMT

Billy from North Belfast - that would be a 'red herring' - which by the way will cost us all an extra £3-5m to administer Policing and justice. As for justice - exactly when did the IRA show any justice on Bloody Friday, La Mon, etc etc or to their own community.

There are demos nearly every other week in England to welcome home soldiers - so get your facts right Jerry.

As for 'no longer fooled Republican' - I too opposed the war in Iraq - the war in Afghanistan where these people are returning from was sanctioned by the United Nations which includes the Republic of Ireland. Sinn Fein and their supporters are clearly shameful narrow-minded bigots with no factual knowledge.

Posted by *Paedar* | 28.10.08, 11:28 GMT

What a ridiculous load of old you-know-what from Robinson. My heart bleeds for him t- hat we dare protest against his marching boys. By the way, Peto. This isn't a SF protest. This is a protest by all descent-minded people against the war and the atrocities carried out by these 'brave' boys coming back from Afghanistan. I don't care if SF hold a protest or not. I will be, regardless of what they do or how it hurts poor Peter's feelings. Unlike SF, I won't be asking for permission from the British to walk in my own city! See you on Sunday, lads! Be there or be square!

Posted by *no longer fooled republican* | 28.10.08, 10:51 GMT

To JerryF, You need to watch the news a bit closer as regards to homecoming parades. There have been parades in England, Scotland, Wales and America. Which all been welcomed by people living in the area. I cannot see the same for the mindless people in Northern Ireland on Sunday who do not want the parade to go ahead peacefully. They only want people around the world to see some people of Northern Ireland have not grown up and do not want to move on from the last 30 years.

Posted by *HD* | 28.10.08, 10:29 GMT

Nice one Billy From North Belfast. You hit the nail perfectly on the head.

Posted by *Fresh Air* | 28.10.08, 10:01 GMT

Michael, very well said. All the people of the north, deserve better political representation, instead they get the old politics of hate.


Posted by *Tim Conroy* | 28.10.08, 09:38 GMT

What a red heron (or is that orange heron?) Robinson is waving now. So, if nationalists don't allow the DUP and the loyalists to have their way, Robinson sulks about sharing power with strong, no-nonsense Catholics and nationalists. Dear Peter, this was tried in the bad old days of pre-69 when unionists and Orangemen ruled the roost. Those days are long gone, old chap. Wake up and smell the aroma of democracy. The City belongs to everyone now – not just loyalists, Orangemen and unionists...

Posted by *Billy from North Belfast* | 28.10.08, 08:47 GMT

The whole argument over the devolution of police and justice powers is pathetic. Immature politicians grandstanding to feed their bigoted ego's is not what the politics of today should be about. There is no leadership in evidence, the first and deputy first ministers represent their narrow interests in an outrageous display of yesterday's speak. The people deserve better but as in the past their interest are secondary to the inflated conflict characteristics of spent and useless politicians. On this occasion no intervention by Governments should be advanced to settle the issue, Sinn Fein and the DUP should become responsible and lead the way. The cost of not ending the impasse should not be borne by decent people who need leadership at this point and not old bigoted chants. To the politicians the message should be clear, get on with it and do your job properly and give us all a break from your incessant disputes which feed your egos that did so much damage in the past.

Posted by Michael | 28.10.08, 08:46 GMT

 Americans have not had a parade for returning soldiers, nor, to my knowledge, has England. People could differ on whether a parade is a good idea even if they thought the war in Iraq was a good idea. People opposed to the war could honor soldiers with a parade or believe a mistake should not be paraded before the people. It seems particularly provocative to march British soldiers through the streets of a city still divided over which country it should be part of. On the other hand, as long as the six counties are part of the UK, one could argue that British soldiers should march there. But for Peter Robinson to use Sinn Fein's opposition to this march as an excuse to condemn them is to say that no reasonable person could have an objection to the march for any reason. This is not the position of a person who favors free speech or any of the other political rights that the "Anglo-American" culture has traditionally supported. Rather, it is the position of an autocrat.

Posted by JerryF | 28.10.08, 01:48 GMT

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