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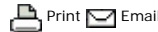
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Wednesday, 29 October 2008

Plans by Sinn Fein to stage a protest against a military homecoming parade for soldiers returning from a tour of duty in Afghanistan have been denounced as reckless and irresponsible after extra police officers had be drafted in for the event.

The Royal Irish Regiment is due to parade through central Belfast on Sunday to mark the return of its members, who have just completed a six-month deployment in Helmand province. Personnel from the Army, Navy and RAF are to take part in a



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service at St Anne's Cathedral.

What are these?

But Sinn Fein has objected to the event and plans to stage a protest. The republican party is opposed to British involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, and is highly critical of the Army's record during the Northern Ireland Troubles. Permission for the protest to go ahead has been granted, under some conditions, by the local Parades Commission which rules on contentious marching issues.

Extra police are expected to be in place for the event, which is regarded as the first serious parading dispute to break out in the city in recent years.

The Ministry of Defence has declined to respond to republican criticisms. Unionist politicians have been strongly supportive of the march.

While Unionists and Sinn Fein are in government together, the failure to resolve the issue of the parade by negotiation is seen as another sign of their deteriorating relationship.

Yesterday a number of organisations representing people whose relatives were killed by the Army during the Troubles appealed for the march to be called off. Clara Reilly, a campaigner against the use of plastic bullets, said the event should be held in private. "We are not objecting to anyone wanting to celebrate the safe return of their loved ones from these conflicts," she said. "We are anti-war but we don't have an issue with families wanting to welcome back their sons, husbands or dads. But it should be a dignified civic reception or church service. Holding a march through the city centre is insensitive, divisive and indeed sectarian. It will offend many."

The Sinn Fein MEP Bairbre de Brun said: "This parade is insensitive, rash and completely unnecessary. To date the MoD has been invisible on this contentious and divisive march, failing to put up any spokespeople or address the wider public concerns."

Sinn Fein said that its protest would be "dignified and peaceful". Another republican splinter group has also announced plans for a demonstration on the day.

Northern Ireland's First Minister, Peter Robinson, accused Sinn Fein of acting recklessly and irresponsibly by bringing people on to the streets.

He added: "I just believe that people believed that we had moved away from this kind of tit-for-tat parading where a deliberate attempt was being made to run a counter-parade and protest in order to disrupt the activities of the Army, in order to intimidate and to provoke.

"And I just don't think that, in the new society that we are trying to create in Northern Ireland, that was a sensible step to take and I don't think it can be justified."

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Remember Me

Lots of people are disgusted by the actions of the IRA during the "Troubles" yet SF is permitted to strut around Stormont in a daily display of contempt for peaceful political means to an end. If they (SF) want to be seen to be inclusive they should support the RIR who have placed their lives in danger in support of an international initiative. SF should support fellow Irish men and women in the RIR rather than segregating fellow Irish citizens.

Posted by *Patrick J. Corr* | 29.10.08, 12:38 GMT

SF has a right - and indeed a duty to signal the disapproval of a significant section of society here in Belfast to this example of British Army triumphalism in our city centre.

Those who argue that Catholics are also in the British armed forces completely miss the point - it's not about objecting to people on the basis of their religion. It's about objecting to this celebration of British military imperialism.

Posted by *gearoid* | 29.10.08, 12:14 GMT

The Moderator, Dr Patton really wants to go and educate himself instead by disgracefully bringing religion into this. What difference does it make that those involved in this triumphalism are either Catholic or Protestant? Does it matter if a Catholic or Protestant was involved in the slaughter of Afghan civilians? This is the usual sectarian ploy played by the British to ignorant people. First, I must state this again. This is not a SF protest. If anything, SF have jumped on the bandwagon because they saw the anger in nationalist and republican areas. Make no mistake about that. There is still anger at SF for asking for permission in the first place from the British to protest in their own city - shame on them. I don't care what Adams and his motley crew say. I and a load of my friends will be there, come rain, sleet or snow, and Adams won't be giving me any orders, one way or the other. His days are over in our areas...

Posted by *no longer fooled republican* | 29.10.08, 11:11 GMT

Here we go again, SF going on about what's right and what's wrong.

The only thing is they want to have the final word when they are supposed to be helping the peace agreement and share our views. These soldiers have been fighting for people who want to be helped. Not to overthrow a government but to fight against a band of terrorists.

What SF should do is support what we think is right, if they have views then keep them to themselves and do your job.

As a police officer, I have views and I do the right thing regarding them, when I come to work, I leave my views and beliefs at home, and you as politicians you should do likewise.

We are not asking you to march in the parade however we are asking you to do the right thing.

Remember, this parade will have both Catholics and Protestants, also soldiers from all walks of life but the main thing is that they have helped people who can not help themselves.

Kind regards. 'Fare Thee Well' (Inniskilling).

Posted by *David (Macca).* | 29.10.08, 05:14 GMT

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