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# Republicans agree to differ at Bloody Sunday event



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By Staff reporter

Republicans of differing viewpoints came together and agreed to listen to each other's views at an event organised as part of the Bloody Sunday commemorations this week.

The "Truth and lies" discussion event, which was organised by the Republican Network for Unity, an umbrella organisation bringing together various anti-Agreement republican organisations, was attended by more than 300 local people in the Gasyard Centre on Monday night.

The discussion was chaired by Paul O'Connor from the Pat Finucane Centre and the panel was made up of Eamonn McCann, Socialist Environmental Alliance, Francis Mackey, 32 County Sovereignty Movement, Gary Fleming, Sinn Féin, and independent republican Tony Catney.

While the tone of the discussion was heated on occasion as the supporters of the various republican groups argued over the use of armed struggle, support for the Good Friday Agreement and whether republicans should stake their seats in Stormont, and support for the PSNI, all participants agreed on the need to find common ground.

Policing was a major source of argument among the various groups, with all panelists agreeing that the issue has not yet been solved. Sinn Féin's Gary Fleming acknowledged that the PSNI are not perfect but defended his party's endorsement of policing last year. "Is anyone surprised that there are still members of the PSNI who are prepared to lie in court? of course not. We know there is massive opposition to change from certain quarters but we also know that there will be change. Sinn Féin are committed to that. Every instance of political policing will be challenged and exposed," he said.

Disagreed

Local republican Tony Taylor disagreed with that position and claimed policing had not changed since it was endorsed by Sinn Féin. "At the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis in 2006, Gerry Kelly said the old RUC would be unrecognisable in the PSNI but what has changed? If anyone thinks the police have changed could they explain how the details of republicans which continue to be held by the RUC/PSNI are still falling into the hands of loyalist paramilitaries. That seems like a kick back to the bad old days of the RUC to me" he said.

Francis Mackey also claimed republicans should not be supporting the PSNI. "What we have in the North at the minute is what we have always had; political policing. Sinn Féin may talk about accountability but what sort of accountability is it when you ask questions but get no answers. The DPPs are a cosmetic sop. Those who signed up for them are now obliged to call republicans criminals," he said.

Despite the disagreements, all panelists accepted that dialogue between the various groups would be good for republicanism. Independent republican Tony Catney called for the establishment of a republican forum where various viewpoints could be expressed and listen to. Sinn Féin's Gary Fleming also advocated dialogue between the different factions of republicanism. "We would like to explore common ground and move forward on that basis. The more of that the better," he said.

The full article contains 521 words and appears in Journal Friday newspaper.

Last Updated: 31 January 2008 2:49 PM

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