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## SDLP and SF clash on murder of McCartney

By William Graham Political Correspondent

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AN assembly debate yesterday on housing in the Markets area of Belfast turned into a bitter clash between SDLP minister Margaret Ritchie and Sinn Fein's Alex Maskey over the murder of Robert McCartney.

During one exchange the minister told Mr Maskey – who is due to meet Ms Ritchie on the matter next month – that all she will see when he walks into her office “is the image of Robert McCartney holding his two young

At one point Mr Maskey warned the minister to “be very careful and choose her words” as his lawyers would be scrutinising her comments.

The bitter exchange arose after Mr Maskey and Sinn Fein’s Caral Ni Chuilin tabled a motion “calling on the minister to fulfil the commitments given by her department to the local community in relation to the environmental schemes in the Markets area”.

The motion was eventually defeated by 50 votes to 28.

Mr Maskey rose to his feet on a point of order after the minister said that when she saw the proposer of the motion in the context of the Markets she thought of one thing only – “and that is the events surrounding the cruel murder of Robert McCartney”.

Mr Maskey said it was very regrettable that the minister wanted to introduce the tragic murder and accused her of seeking to distract attention from the £2 million environmental scheme in the Markets.

“If the minister is in any way trying to align me with what was a brutal murder, which I have repeatedly condemned, then she will be listening to my lawyers in very quick time.

“I am advising the minister to be very careful and choose her words because my lawyers will be looking and scrutinising Hansard.

“This minister will not run off at the mouth at my expense,” Mr Maskey said.

In reply Ms Ritchie said: “I think of Mr Maskey’s remarks in the immediate aftermath of that event, and his stance in relation to the violence that greets the police when following up their investigations in the Markets area.

“And more than that I think of Robert’s partner and his two sons now exiled in England and of his brave sisters who have been forced from their homes, yet still denied justice.

“I think of the so-called republicans who saw nothing that night.”


She then said: “When he walks through the door of my room next month all I will see is the image of Robert McCartney holding his two young sons.”

Ms Ni Chuilin said wanted to put it on record her “disgust at the minister’s remarks”.

“This is completely out of order,” she said.

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