


[HOME](#)
[History](#)
[NewsoftheIrish](#)
[Book Reviews
& Book Forum](#)
[Bookstore](#)
[Search / Archive](#)
Back to 10/96

[Papers](#)
[Reference](#)
[About](#)
[Contact](#)

Ex-IRA prisoner's criticism unjustified says Tar Isteach

(Allison Morris, [Irish News](#))

An ex-prisoners' group has hit back at "uninformed and unjustified" criticism by a former hunger striker, who claimed such organisations only cater for those who conform to Sinn Féin's politics.

Tar Isteach in north Belfast was responding to comments by former IRA prison leader Brendan 'The Dark' Hughes earlier this month.

Mr Hughes (58) is currently receiving treatment for severe deterioration in his eyesight brought on by the effects of 52 days without food in 1980.

He told *The Irish News* that other men are "still suffering in silence today" and many ex-prisoners have not been given enough help to adjust following their release.

"Ex-prisoners' groups are fine as long as you conform to the present political situation. If you voice dissent then you're cast aside," the west Belfast man said.

"They are not doing enough because they are too selective as to who they'll help."

However, former IRA prisoner Tommy Quigley of the New Lodge-based Tar Isteach insisted claims that ex-prisoners' groups are excluding some republicans are unjustified.

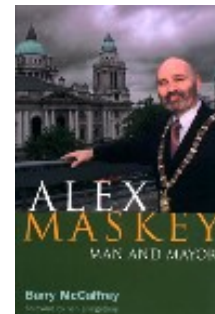
"We have all sorts of people who hold vastly differing political views using our group," he said.

"People don't come to our door and say 'I'm anti-peace process, can I come in?'"

"Ex-prisoners and family members with the most diverse and opposite political views use Tar Isteach offices."

Mr Quigley said when the group started and got funding for a counsellor, it didn't know if anyone would use the service.

"Republicans by their nature are secretive and not quick to



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by Barry McCaffrey

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show their emotions but the demand was immense," he said.

"We could have three counsellors and it still wouldn't be enough to cater for the demand.

"The Dark isn't alone in the way he feels – there are plenty of other people out there who are still suffering – but our aim is to do what we can to help them.

"There are people out there who are fiercely opposed to the Good Friday Agreement and they use Tar Isteach and that's not a problem.

"We get opposition from unionists who argued against any ex-prisoner group receiving funding but that is to be expected.

"What we don't expect is to have to defend ourselves from uninformed and unjustified criticisms from people within the republican family."

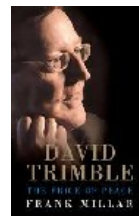
October 18, 2006

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[About](#)

[Home](#)

[History](#)

[NewsoftheIrish](#)

[Books](#)

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[Contact](#)