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## Sands vote was not a vote for IRA: Morrison

By Claire Simpson

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THE election of Bobby Sands as MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone in 1981 was not a vote for the IRA, former Sinn Fein director of publicity Danny Morrison has claimed.

Mr Morrison, who is secretary of the Bobby Sands Trust, was responding to a report commissioned by the Church of Ireland on the experiences of Protestants living in the Clogher diocese during the Troubles.

The report, published last month, found the majority of those interviewed saw the election of the IRA hunger striker as “a clear and unambiguous vote of support for the retention of the ‘armed struggle’ and the purging of Protestants from the land”.

In a letter to The Irish News Mr Morrison,

pictured, said he did not “wish to diminish their or their community’s real suffering during the conflict or how those in border areas perceived their isolation and

vulnerability against a backdrop of IRA activity”.

However, he said it was a “complete distortion to say that the nationalist people in Fermanagh and South Tyrone by voting for Bobby Sands voted for armed struggle”.

“That charge was made at the time in a crude effort by unionist and British politicians to intimidate the nationalist electorate into voting for a candidate acceptable to unionists or face being demonised,” he said.

Mr Morrison said voters elected Sands to encourage the British government to negotiate with prisoners and at “no time after that election did republicans interpret the vote for Bobby Sands as a vote for the IRA”.


“People choose to vote for particular candidates for a variety of reasons,” he said.

“But in this by-election one of the candidates was on hunger strike whose life might be saved if a solution was found.

“He was on hunger strike as a last resort because the authorities refused to engage or talk.”

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