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Monday, January 26, 2009

## Proposals on legacy of the Troubles to get a 'fair wind'



Alex Attwood: SDLP must press for devolution of policing

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GERRY MORIARTY

**JUSTICE:** THE SDLP will give the Eames-Bradley proposals on dealing with the legacy of the Troubles a "fair wind", the SDLP Assembly member for West Belfast, Alex Attwood, told the annual SDLP conference in the Armagh City Hotel in Armagh at the weekend.

Amid continuing controversy over the Eames-Bradley proposal to pay £12,000 (€12,600) to the families of everyone killed in the Troubles, Mr Attwood said the report from the Consultative Group on the Past, which is to be published on Wednesday, must provide an ethical basis for addressing the fallout of the Troubles.

"Eames-Bradley is the last best hope of dealing in cohesive and open ways with the issues of the past," he added.

He said the SDLP must also continue to press for the devolution of justice and policing to the Northern Executive, and exploit the issue as a defining matter, just as the SDLP had led the charge on policing.

"The community is crying out to have responsibility for justice in local hands," he said.

Mr Attwood said Sinn Féin had mishandled its negotiations with the DUP over when policing and justice would be devolved to the Northern Executive. "Eighteen months after devolution was restored we still don't know if devolution of justice will arise in the next 18 months."

He said that the DUP would not budge on the issue in the short term, because ahead of the June European elections that party wanted to "sandbag Diane Dodds from the slings and arrows that Jim Allister will throw at her".

And referring to recent comments in which First Minister Peter Robinson proposed the diminution of the role of the North-South Ministerial Council, Mr Attwood said that for nationalists, the council was a central element of the Belfast Agreement.

"Peter Robinson needs to know that the North-South Ministerial Council is non-negotiable," he said.

Paul Hoban, from Newry, said the DUP was seeking to destroy the council, and SDLP members appeared to be doing little to resist that threat. The party had to galvanise SDLP Assembly members and other MLAs to challenge the DUP's attempt to undermine the council.

South Down Assembly member PJ Bradley proposed a motion, that was adopted, calling on the Government to provide office space in Leinster House to all Northern parties that required such a facility.

Conal McDevitt, from south Belfast, said that in addition to policing and justice, the SDLP should also seek the transfer of additional powers from Westminster to Stormont, such as tax raising powers and local financial regulation of the banks and other financial institutions.

Conal McGrath from south Down said the party must reaffirm its commitment to a united Ireland, a policy that the SDLP could pursue without alienating unionism. The party must develop a strategy "to remind the electorate that we are the only party that can deliver a united Ireland".

Brian Duffin, from Randalstown, Co Antrim, said he was an "old-style republican", and that the SDLP should reclaim the word.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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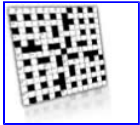
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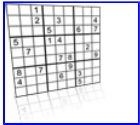
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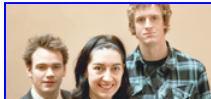
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