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Cllr Declan O'Loan

5th January 2007

O'LOAN: UNIONISTS NEED TO COME TO TERMS WITH THEIR PAST

Ballymena SDLP councillor Declan O'Loan says that the rejection by both unionist parties on Ballymena Borough Council of any process for coming to terms with the past bodes poorly for attempts to create a shared future.

He said: "This was a very disappointing outcome. I had at least got on the agenda a discussion of the very important Healing Through Remembering document on "Making Peace with the Past". But the unionist parties rejected any such process outright. Their whole attitude showed the fundamental lack of trust in this society which a process of dealing with the past is a key ingredient of tackling.

"The difference between the two parties is striking too. The DUP had produced a detailed response, and it is significant that Councillor Robin Stirling said that his views reflected central party thinking. The UUP on the other hand do not read the material in advance, do not discuss it internally, do not reflect on the issues and produce a simplistic knee-jerk reaction. It is not enough to say that a process costs money, and therefore we are against it. Can any sane person say that the division in our society is currently cost-free? At a time when we need to see progressive unionism to counter the backwardness of the DUP, it is disappointing to see a policy vacuum in the UUP.

"I point out a contradiction in the DUP stance. Councillor Robin Stirling wants to know what happened to the Protestant population in the South of Ireland, and Councillor William Wilkinson wants to know about the Irish Government supplying guns to the North in the 1960s. Yet they are against a truth recovery process. If the issues that they raise are of concern, let them be put on the table for consideration.

"Finally, the issue of cost cannot be ignored. This can be handled without Bloody Sunday type inquiries which line the wallets of top-paid lawyers very handsomely. There are mechanisms here and elsewhere for doing this."

ENDS

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