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Monday, October 20, 2008

## SF criticised over soldiers parade plan

GERRY MORIARTY

SINN FÉIN has been criticised for organising a protest against the homecoming parade for the British soldiers who have returned to Northern Ireland from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Sinn Féin has applied to the Parades Commission for a counterparade in Belfast on Sunday, November 2nd, that, if fully granted, could lead to direct confrontation in Belfast city centre between those attending and participating in the British army parade and those involved in the republican protest.

The potential for confrontation was further heightened with republican anti-agreement group Eirigi also planning to hold a protest in Belfast on the day. The protests may further sour the political atmosphere, with the DUP accusing Sinn Féin of attempting to damage community relations.

Sinn Féin Assembly member Paul Maskey said the protest would be a peaceful and dignified parade designed to highlight opposition to the "illegal wars" in Iraq and Afghanistan. "It is also to highlight the many victims of the British army, UDR and Royal Irish Regiment here at home; victims of collusion, intimidation, shoot-to-kill, torture and State murder. That is the legacy of the RIR here in Ireland. The British army track record in Iraq and Afghanistan, much like here in Ireland, is not one of heroism - it is one of murder and oppression," he said.

North Belfast DUP Assembly member Nelson McCausland said the Sinn Féin protest was a "sinister attempt" to intimidate the people who wanted to welcome home the soldiers. Traditional Unionist Voice MEP Jim Allister said: "All right-thinking people will be disgusted by this tricolour-trailing exercise."

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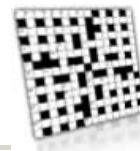
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