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Wednesday, September 24, 2008

DUP says Maze film was platform for republican boasting

DAN KEENAN

THE MAKERS of the BBC1 documentary about the 1983 Maze prison escape were more interested in providing republicans with a platform on which to boast of their deeds than in a proper and balanced assessment of the escape, DUP deputy leader Nigel Dodds has claimed.

The North Belfast MP and Stormont Finance Minister said innocent victims of the 38 prison escapers portrayed in the documentary "will feel this was the glamorising of criminality".

Ulster Unionist leader Sir Reg Empey also criticised the broadcaster, calling the programme "chilling" and criticising the timing of the programme which coincides with the 25th anniversary of the escape.

The escape was the biggest in UK prison history and included Gerry Kelly, now a junior minister at Stormont. The BBC has defended the programme.

"The BBC displayed very poor editorial and commissioning judgment," Sir Reg said. "Northern Ireland is still at a settling-in stage and the very last thing we need is primetime reminders of the past: particularly when it involved junior minister Gerry Kelly displaying no remorse or regret . . ."

Mr Dodds said the BBC might want people to view the Maze breakout as some kind of heroic escapade.

"But let us look at the facts. Like so many of the so-called 'romantic episodes' in republican myth, it was characterised by bloodshed, brutality and murder."

He said the 38 IRA prisoners "broke out of lawful custody and, in the process, were determined to murder or maim anyone who got in their way".

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"Having previously smuggled guns and knives into the prison, they injured 20 prison officers, four of whom were stabbed and two shot. One of the stabbed officers, James Ferris, subsequently died from a heart attack."

He said the BBC programme vindicated the DUP's position that it would be unacceptable to have Sinn Féin in control of any element of policing and justice in Northern Ireland.

Last night a BBC Northern Ireland spokesman said: "The aim of this documentary was to provide a detailed account of the Maze escape. It was based on contributions from some of those who were involved and included a prison officer's perspective."

"The programme sought to describe what happened in a fair and impartial manner."

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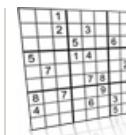
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