

Monday 27 October 2008

## NORTHERN IRELANDS LARGEST POLITICAL PARTY



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## DODDS ADDRESSES WESTMINSTER ON LIBYAN SPONSORSHIP OF TERRORISM

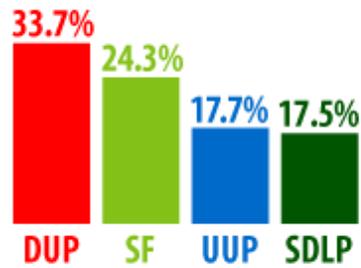
Below is the text of a speech delivered by Nigel Dodds MP MLA in a Westminster debate on the role of Libya in sponsoring international terrorism:



*"State sponsored terrorism has been and remains one of the most alarming trends in international terrorism. But it isn't a new phenomenon. This sort of terrorism did not just appear on 11 September 2001 when the western world experienced the nightmare of international terrorism on a scale never before seen in the USA or any where else.*

*In Ulster, and throughout the United Kingdom, we suffered over many decades from the appalling consequences of IRA terrorism, heavily funded and sponsored by rogue states such as Libya. Fuelled by a hatred of Britain, Colonel Gaddafi supplied the Provisional IRA with weapons and cash for many years. One of the most lethal of those weapons was the deadly Semtex explosive that made one of its first appearances in Enniskillen in November 1987, was used to bomb towns and cities throughout N Ireland, tore the heart out of the city of London, and left a trail of death*

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*and destruction in Omagh in 1998.*

*As a result of Libya's prolonged and persistent support for the IRA, many innocent men, women and children are dead, and their relatives scarred, physically and psychologically, for life. We may be living in more peaceful times in Ulster today, but those scars will never heal, and the victims must never be forgotten.*

*Faced with the threat from Islamic terrorism, the Western powers have worked towards a restoration of diplomatic relations with Libya, and Colonel Gaddafi is being brought in from the cold. Progress towards abandonment of terror and support for terrorists is welcome but Libya must not be allowed to escape its moral responsibility to make reparation for its past involvement in terrorism.*

*Michelle Williamson, whose parents Gillian and George were killed by the 1993 IRA bomb in a fish shop in Belfast's Shankill Road, said two years ago, "Libya can't wash its hands of responsibility. It's like the pub owner who knowingly supplies drink to a customer knowing he or she is going to drive home drunk. If that driver kills someone, the person who plied him or her with drink bears some responsibility." And she was quite right.*

*It was in 2006 that almost 200 British survivors of IRA terrorism, most of whom were from Northern Ireland -including Michelle Williamson and Jim Dixon, who was seriously injured in the 1987 Remembrance Day bomb in Enniskillen - joined with a very small number of American victims in taking a class action against Libya which was filed and pursued through the courts in the USA. The aim was to ensure compensation along the lines of the Lockerbie air disaster in Scotland. Those who took this action were representing not only themselves, but thousands of others murdered and maimed by Libyan-sponsored IRA terrorism.*

*This was a crucially important and highly symbolic legal action, and those who have suffered so much at the hands of the IRA were surely deserving of the support and encouragement of our Government. But the Government seemed reluctant to become involved, and we were told that this was because the proceedings were being brought by private claimants under US law. But, with respect, this seems strange to me, given that the Government has seen fit to become involved in a number of other matters relating to Libya. For example, the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, intervened in relation to the criminal/civil actions in Libya against Bulgarian nurses (accused by Gaddafi of poisoning Libyan children.) The Government has intervened, rightly, on behalf of British and foreign victims of the Lockerbie air disaster, including criminal proceedings in the Netherlands and civil proceedings in Scotland and the USA.*

*It is also worth noting that other European Governments such as France and Italy have taken a pro-active approach to secure adequate compensation for their citizens those who have suffered as a result of Libyan supported terrorism. For example, the French Government intervened in litigation brought by its own and foreign citizens against Libya regarding the French flight UTA 772 which exploded mid-air over the Sahara desert in September 1989.*

*The inactivity of our Government in seeking compensation on behalf of the victims*

***and survivors of Libyan-sponsored IRA terrorism contrasts sharply with the various precedents it itself has set. But it also contrasts sharply with the pro-active approach of the US Government. I commend the American administration for its determination to see right done by its citizens, but, sadly, that determination has turned out to be something of a two-edged sword, for, it has taken the view that it can only look after its own. That approach means that, two years on, the civil case has hit a massive brick wall.***

***The US administration concluded that it was in its best interests - in both security and economic terms - to engage in a process of rapprochement with Colonel Gaddafi. But as the US Government engaged in negotiations with Gaddafi, they were also acutely aware of the demands of Congress that any rapprochement could only take place in the context of ensuring compensation for US victims in its courts. In order to secure a successful outcome to the negotiations, the American Government unashamedly interfered in domestic litigation and recommended a stay of civil actions on the basis of agreeing a compensation settlement for US citizens only. (It was not in a position to settle claims on behalf of those who were not its citizens).***

***The American deal with Libya was enshrined in "The Libya Claims Settlement Agreement" of 14 August 2008 and followed up last month when Condoleezza Rice, the US Secretary of State, visited Libya to settle the deal. The Agreement means that three Americans (the only US claimants) will be well compensated, and rightly so, but the remaining 139 UK claimants (and the class action of 3450 British) are now back to square one.***

***Not surprisingly, this has caused dismay and very considerable anger among those who now find themselves no better off than when they embarked upon their case. As Willie Frazer of the Ulster-based pressure group, Families Acting for Innocent Relatives (FAIR), has said, "We tracked down the American victims to allow us to take the case in the first place. They will now be entitled to get compensation. I don't begrudge it to them. We have been working on this for six years, to hold Colonel Gaddafi responsible. We thought there was some justice in the world". Ronald Motley, of the legal firm Motley Rice, which took the class action, said the Agreement "selfishly settles some plaintiffs' claims and throws the rest to the wolves". That is the grim reality, and such is the depth of feeling at the present time. And the Government's present "do nothing" stance as far as pursuing compensation is concerned will simply infuriate them all the more.***

***If it was important for the British Government to intervene in a more pro-active manner than they did during the past two years of this case, it is absolutely imperative that they do intervene now that the case has come to such an abrupt and totally unsatisfactory end.***

***The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary must rise to the challenge , and I ask them today - what will you now do to ensure that the Gaddafi is made to face up to his responsibility to compensate the victims of Provisional IRA terrorism? I read recently that Gaddafi has denied that he ever was a terrorist! Well, he might be in denial, but Her Majesty's Government cannot afford to be in denial. However Gaddafi is regarded today, and however he might wish to be regarded today, he cannot be allowed to,***

*quite literally, get away with murder.*

*But I am not exactly filled with confidence that the Prime Minister will rise to this challenge. In his letter of 7 October to the solicitors representing those who have taken the civil case in America, the Prime Minister stated, "the UK Government does not consider it appropriate to enter into a bilateral discussion with Libya on this matter. Thus remains the Government's position". He also says, "I assure you that the UK in no way condones Libya's past sponsorship of terrorism". "It is, however, important that we recognise the fundamental changes Libya has made in recent years. It has dismantled its Weapons of Mass Destruction programme and renounced its support for international terrorism, including the IRA. With the support of the UK, Libya has returned to the heart of the international community".*

*That is all very good, but it will bring little comfort to those British citizens who suffer, day and daily, as a result of IRA atrocities. The Prime Minister's attitude is a classic case of "let's not rock the boat" At a time when there has been unprecedented intervention in the banking and financial sectors it is simply not tenable for government to say that it can and will do nothing to achieve justice through compensation for the victims of Libyan state sponsored terrorism.*

*The Government must fulfil its moral obligations to the victims. Such action will actually help to bring closure to the deep and long-standing tensions between the UK and Libya, and smooth the way to improved trade and business relations. But the boil must be lanced before we can move on. If it is not, the spectre of the victims and their suffering will continue to haunt us. They will not simply melt away.*

*There are precedents for Government intervention, as I have already outlined. The new special relationship with Gaddafi has not prevented the US, French and Italian Governments from addressing the needs of victims in their recent agreements with Libya.*

*I have heard it mentioned that Colonel Gaddafi will be visiting the UK before the end of this year. If that is indeed the case, the Government should commence immediate negotiations with Libya on behalf of British victims whose hopes have been so cruelly dashed by the ending of the class action in USA. If and when Gaddafi does come to the United Kingdom, he must be made to face up to the reality that it is in his interests, as well as those of the victims, that this matter is resolved as soon as possible. But more importantly than the mutual economic and political interests of Libya and the United Kingdom, is that justice for the innocent victims and their families must be done, and be seen to be done."*

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