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Gerry Kelly speaks on Motion 10

Published: 20 February, 2009

Géaróid Ó Ceallaigh, Ard Chomhairle ag caint ar Rún a deich.

Tharr tréimhse tá an lán focus curtha ar an fhirinne, is ábhar tábhachtach é seo, go háirithe do na hiospartaigh ón choimhlint le tríoch bhlian anuas.

There has been an understandable focus in recent weeks on the issue of truth and truth recovery, with the publication of the Eames/Bradley report. This also addressed a number of other issues. We are currently engaged in a consultation on the detail of the report. However sometime ago Sinn Féin made it clear that the establishment of an independent and international commission established by a reputable international body like the UN is necessary to properly address this issue.

The appointment by the British Government of a Legacy Commission as proposed by the Eames/Bradley report falls very short of these fundamental criteria.

But this is not a new issue for Republicans. Sinn Féin have consistently supported families in their efforts to uncover truth. In 2003, Sinn Féin published a discussion document on Truth. Its purpose was to set out our view of the purpose of a truth recovery process and the nature and form of such a process.

The principles we identified are:–

- All processes should be victim-centred and deal with victims on an all-Ireland basis and indeed with victims outside Ireland;
- Full co-operation by all relevant parties is essential to the success of any commission;
- There should be no hierarchy of victims;
- All processes should be politically neutral;
- Any future panel should be international and independent;
- One of the purposes of any future panel/commission should be to examine the 'causes, nature and extent' of the conflict;
- An objective of any process should be healing – both for direct victims and for society in general;

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- A common aim should be to enable society to build the peace;
- Reconciliation should be the core aim of any truth process; and respect and generosity should inform the parties seeking to reach agreement.

The British Government was the major protagonist in the conflict in Ireland. They therefore cannot be the objective facilitator of any truth recovery process. They also cannot with any honesty write the remit of any group tasked with that role.

Any truth process which has the finger prints of the securocrats in Whitehall anywhere near it simply will not work. History shows that their contribution has been one of cover-up and concealment.

Bheadh seo go hiomlán do-glactha dúinne.

Last week marked the 20th Anniversary of the murder of Pat Finucane. Few cases demonstrate more clearly the approach of the British State to truth recovery than this one. British State Agents planned, carried out and covered up the truth of the murder of Pat Finucane. Successive British governments have joined in with the cover up in the 20 years since. That includes the current British Government. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown did not create the problem. They inherited it. But if they do not deal with British responsibility for these matters then they become part of the problem. Tony Blair already failed that test. Gordon Brown is set to follow suit.

To this day the British State refuses to come clean. In tandem those who share their objective of concealment point to the cost of inquiries into the past as their excuse for doing nothing. It is not inquiries into the past which cause the expense – it is the policy of concealment and cover-up which must be tackled.

For too long some have tried to promote a hierarchy of victims. This attempt to criminalise the republican dead and ignore the grief felt by their families is unacceptable. There are 355 republican activists on the roll of honour. These men and women are victims of the conflict too. Most of them were IRA volunteers who were killed in action. We grieve for them and we share that grief and sense of loss with their families and friends. They were decent, selfless and honourable. There are also many British soldiers and members of the RUC whose death has caused great trauma and grief for their families and friends. No matter what their role in the conflict, the loss at a personal level is massive and regrettable. If we are to have a real healing process then anti-republican sentiment will have to recognise that families of IRA volunteers or Sinn Féin members go through exactly the same pain and grief. If we are to move forward there needs to be a recognition that no section of our society has a monopoly on suffering.

For our part, Sinn Féin is very mindful of all of the difficulties involved in truth recovery, particularly for victims and their families. But we believe that as society seeks to leave conflict behind and to move forward there is a requirement that all of us address the tragic human consequences of the past.

Those of us charged with political responsibility must agree and deliver a process that is meaningful and substantive. There is an onus on all political leaders to promote this. This includes the Irish Government, which has a constitutional and legal responsibility to actively promote the rights and

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interests of citizens and the nation.

The establishment of an Independent International Truth Commission is the best way of taking this issue forward. The United Nations or another reputable agency could be involved.

Is é seo an dóigh is fearr chun próiseas firinne a cur i bhfeidhm ar mhaithe le saoranaigh.

Of course, it won't be easy. There are vested groups who will not want the truth and who will oppose the creation of a meaningful truth recovery process. Others are propagating the fanciful notion that the Eames/Bradley Report is the last chance saloon: a take it or leave it situation.

Tell that to any of the Birmingham Six and their families. Tell that to the Guildford 4 and their families. How many times were they told that they were at the end of the line? So this is going to be a continual and immensely difficult and painful struggle. But it is one which will be necessary for a genuine process of national reconciliation to take place. We must pursue it relentlessly.

Is é sin an dúshlán atá romhainn, sin an dúshlán atá roimh Rialtais na Breataine, caithfidh siad é a dhéanamh.

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