

News and Articles

Ulster Unionists still seeking to amend definition of 'victim' to protect the innocent.

E-mail to a friend *April 1st, 2008 Alex Benjamin*



The Ulster Unionist Party is seeking to amend the Victims and Survivors (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 to change the current definition of a 'victim' to protect innocent victims of the Troubles from being lumped together with convicted terrorists. The UUP have also outlined their extreme disappointment that the DUP have failed to put forward any amendment on the issue in light of their long-standing claims that they are against the existing definition. Currently a victim can mean anyone who has been affected physically or psychologically as a result of a conflict-related incident. This leaves the door open for former terrorists to claim that they are 'victims' of the Troubles. The opportunity to change the definition has arisen due to the need to introduce legislation that will accommodate four Victims' Commissioners which was tabled in the Assembly today.

Speaking after the debate in the Assembly Ulster Unionist deputy Leader Danny Kennedy said.

"Under the current definition a perpetrator of acts of terrorism is given the same legal status and potential compensation as an innocent victim of an act of terrorism; as the Ulster Unionist Party has consistently stated this is clearly wrong and we are confident that most people believe this should be changed. We thought we had the support of the DUP on this issue but they have failed to introduce any amendment; this is especially disappointing when you consider their long history of statements which position themselves against the current definition and indeed earlier today Simon Hamilton speaking on the Bill of Rights Forum criticised the Draft Bill of Rights for using the current definition. He stated:

"the DUP rejects the definition on the basis that it places victims and perpetrators on an equal footing. This is entirely unacceptable to us".
(DUP press release 31st March 2008)

Well I am afraid that Mr. Hamilton has been deserted by his ministerial colleagues in OFMDFM.

The Ulster Unionist Party now faces some logistical difficulty in tabling an amendment as we are not the sponsors of the Bill. However, we will be seeking to table our amendment at the consideration stage which will be next week, this will be our only opportunity to get the definition changed and I am still hopeful for DUP support. The DUP have two Minister's sponsoring the Bill and have four members on the OFMDFM committee, yet they have failed to table any amendment and have subsequently failed innocent victims in Northern Ireland.

I for one am very disappointed and I know I will not be alone.

Fermanagh and South Tyrone MLA Tom Elliot, who has been a leader in the recent campaign for the Ulster Unionist Party, also expressed his desire to see the definition of a victim changed, in a statement Mr. Elliot said.

“It is almost a year since the restoration of the Assembly and I think that it is clear to see that very little has been achieved for victims. However now that we are finally seeing movement in this area the flawed definition of a victim is being ignored by Sinn Fein and the DUP. If we do not have a definition of a ‘real’ victim created soon we could find ourselves with former IRA members championing themselves as victims of the troubles in Northern Ireland. The very thought of that makes me and many other sick to our stomachs, and it simply cannot be allowed to happen.

The UUP are bringing forward an amendment to the legislation to provide for the real victims and change the definition. Instead of cutting deals with Sinn Fein/IRA the DUP should make sure that the definition of a victim is as it should be, someone who suffered because of paramilitary violence and not the sickening terrorists who brought suffering to so many”.

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