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Thursday, 30 October 2008

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The Prime Minister has appealed for calm on the streets of Belfast this Sunday when republicans will protest against a homecoming parade for troops returning from Afghanistan.

Gordon Brown appealed for a "peaceful Sunday" during Question Time in the House of Commons yesterday amid concerns of heightened tensions at the weekend.

DUP leader Peter Robinson has been ferocious in his criticism of republican plans to protest, claiming they have made it even more difficult to break the deadlock that means Stormont's executive has not met since June.

Sinn Fein has said it will stage a peaceful protest, but dissident republican groups are to hold separate demonstrations, while unionist politicians have urged the public to come out to support the Royal Irish troops.

During question time in the Commons yesterday the DUP leader told the Prime Minister Sinn Fein had heightened tension across Northern Ireland with its "preposterous" decision.

"Would you join with me in welcoming a decision by the Army to organise a homecoming parade in the city of Belfast?" he said.

"Would you recognise that the troops, who have performed so well and so bravely in Iraq and Afghanistan from Northern Ireland come from both sections of our community?"

"It becomes all the more preposterous the decision taken by Sinn Fein to run a counter parade and protest which has heightened tensions in Northern Ireland as a whole.

"Would you join with me in urging people in Northern Ireland to ensure that we have a peaceful Sunday, that everyone has due respect for the role that has been played by our brave troops, particularly in Iraq and Afghanistan?"

"Will you urge everyone to do nothing to drag us back to the bad old days?"

Mr Brown told MPs: "I want every Sunday to be a peaceful Sunday in Northern Ireland.

"I want us to work together to make sure that we can undertake the remaining stages of devolution that makes possible stability for the longer term.

"But I also agree with you that our troops, our Armed Forces, deserve the support of every community from which they come.

"Where there have been parades in different cities and towns in this country, not only have they been peaceful but large numbers of people have turned out because they want to give support to our troops and show that they have the confidence of the British people."

But a spokesman for Sinn Fein said: "The British Ministry of Defence has organised and filed for this parade.

"Belfast is not like any other part of what he (Mr Brown) calls the United Kingdom. It is not as British as

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Gordon Brown

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Finchley.”

The Sinn Fein spokesman said many people had suffered at the hands of British troops in Ireland.

“They are opposed to this coat-trailing exercise,” he said.

Earlier Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams said: “I very publicly want to acknowledge that the families of the soldiers involved are pleased to see their loved ones return from a dangerous situation. This is very understandable and acceptable.

“But the decision by the British Ministry of Defence to organise a military parade through Belfast city centre is totally unacceptable.”

A breakaway republican group opposed to Sinn Fein's policies and its support for policing has said it will also stage a demonstration on Sunday.

A spokesman for the group Eirigi — Irish for “rise up” —called for supporters to turn out in large numbers to oppose the parade.

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Remember Me

 There are many incidents I'm sure people will always remember and cling onto, from both sides of the divide. This parade is to show support for those brave people who went abroad to fight.

Its coming near 2009 people, time to put pasts behind us and move on or else there will never be any progress in the North.

Posted by Sinead | 30.10.08, 13:49 GMT

 I would just like to say that i hope that Sunday passes off peacefully and that those who intend attending the Welcome home parade hold their heads up high and show the troops the respect they deserve, don't be dragged into confrontation with the narrow minded Republicians because thats what they want to happen.

No loyalist flags or chants remember we are there to show support for the troops and their families and to those who have been injured or killed.

FAUGH A BALLAGH

Posted by mal | 30.10.08, 13:14 GMT

 The people opposed to this parade need to be deeply ashamed of themselves, this has nothing to do with any of the "people

who have suffered at the hands of the British army in Ireland" - it is about some very very brave men and boys in some cases who were selfless enough to go to these places and try to rid the world of evil men who are set on destroying it.

I'm sure many of these soldiers are from Nationalist communities themselves and none of that nonsense entered their minds when they were risking their lives for EVERYONE regardless of religion!!

Bow your heads in shame Sinn Fein

Posted by Ibbydolla | 30.10.08, 12:58 GMT

Here here. There is never going to be any pleasing the cowardly members of sein fein so why bother. Forget all this power sharing nonsense, its all played out. Stick to your own and stick to your rights.

Posted by Tommy Britten | 30.10.08, 10:51 GMT

Completly agree with your comment Ian, but you know no matter how sunday goes it will be the british working class in belfast that will recieve the brunt of the so called un-biased media in this country. I want this parade to pass off peacefully and with great spirit but sadly i fear the Northern Irish/British community have been pushed to far by the media and so called politians.

FAUGH A BALLAGH

Posted by ProudBelfast | 30.10.08, 10:44 GMT

Good to see the Sinn Fein PR machine, normally so sharp, has scored an own goal on this one on the national stage. This isnt about being anti the war in Iraq (I dont remember there being any problems with the laudable anti war protests) this is good old naked anti British bigotry and the national media will be there to witness it. Suppose the mask is bound to slip from time to time....

Posted by Ian | 30.10.08, 09:05 GMT



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