

Injecting Reality into 'On the Runs' Debate

Vision and reality in a peace process – that's why even though we want sectarian divides not to be relevant in NI, but they are, justice, victims and on the runs, difficulties of dealing with our past,

All of us have a vision of how we want to see Northern Ireland and its peace process. What is required is the ability to work within the less than ideal reality that faces us as we come out of years of conflict, and everything that was done during them. We have to hold on to our vision, but to delude ourselves that it is going to be easy to get there is not only misguided but dangerous for the peace process.

[think about whether we are blameless of this....]

While we may not want difficult issues like 'on the runs' to raise their controversial head, our peace process must confront them. Neither can this issue be dealt with by a single wave of a magic wand – they are not purely legal, legislative, or security problems. Decommissioning was achieved with a combination political pressure,

Its important that the debate on on the runs reflects the real situation. The Alliance suggestion is to bring them into court, have them admit their guilt and be released on license. There is no precedent for this in international law, and there are serious questions about how it could work in practice. We also need to ask if it is desirable. On the runs include some who have not been questioned, charged or found guilty for crimes. Releasing people without sentence – would that not be equally difficult for the victims?

ask any lawyer

There was nothing in the Agreement about how to deal with those people who were wanted for involvement in terrorist activities or cases that were not resolved. We should not be surprised that it has come up and that it is a difficult issue to deal with. However, we have to deal with it in the right way.

Alliance party tabled an Assembly motion last week which sought to suggest that it could be – apart from their proposals being unworkable they will raise the expectations of victims and the general public.... [this is the most powerful argument]

The issue of 'on the runs' can not be dealt with out of the context of the peace process and the Troubles, and being selective with that context, and linking it to just one other issue – that of exiles – is not helpful. We should know by now the danger of tying issues together, blocking progress on one outstanding issue until your own demands are met. A number of parties in Northern Ireland are guilty of this approach, but it is the stuff of blackmail, not negotiation. Work must be allowed to continue in parallel on all the difficult issues that still face our peace process.

*and worked on the ground to NI
V. Collins
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★ To attempt to portray any person who opposed their proposals as an opponent of the peace process is ^{sour grapes} ~~is~~ we disagreed with the basis, effectiveness and wisdom of their motion, ~~we have a~~ we have clearly stated our ^{opposite} ~~opposite~~ to ^{intricate +} ~~intricate~~ ^{vital} ~~vital~~ activity