



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Unrepentant Terrorist May Become Ulster's Justice Minister!



Gerry Kelly - a convicted terrorist

In what can only be seen as an outbreak of political madness, the House of Commons has turned down a unionist bid to bar Sinn Fein's Gerry Kelly or any other convicted person from holding the posts of justice and policing ministers or their deputies in a power sharing Executive.

An amendment by the Ulster Unionist Lady Sylvia Hermon, which was defeated by a Government majority, would also have required whoever won election to the posts to support the police.

Kelly spent 19 years in prison as a member of the IRA team responsible for the first London bombs in 1972 and for shooting a prison warden during an escape from the Maze in 1983.

Ministers have yet to begin talks with the parties on how the justice and policing ministerial roles might be shared between them in the event of their being able to form an Executive.

Transferring the powers to the Assembly is likely to be a major bone of contention over the next six months. The DUP are refusing any suggestion of an early timetable for taking over the powers, as it would mean sharing them with Sinn Fein.

Sinn Fein, on the other hand, has demanded their share of police and justice powers as a condition of giving support to the PSNI.

Rejecting the amendment, the junior minister David Hanson said he favoured the Assembly adopting the Westminster rule of barring office to a convicted person for one year after the completion of the sentence.

Referring to Sinn Fein, he added: "Ultimately those individuals, however much we may dislike the views that they bring forward, have had crosses put by their names on ballot papers by individuals in their communities."

Police Recruitment

A majority of MPs also defeated another united unionist cause, the overthrow of the system of 50:50 police recruitment. In a heated argument over statistics between the DUP and the SDLP, the DUP's Gregory Campbell claimed there were "thousands" of Protestants who had been denied the opportunity of serving in the PSNI because of their religion.

Disagreed

Mark Durkan disagreed, claiming that recruits were turned away mainly because of the large number of applicants. By 2010, the proportion of Roman Catholics in the PSNI would be 30%, still less than the Roman Catholic share of the population.