

24/10/12

A Chara,

The Tyrone ex-prisoners organisation Éirí na Gréine would like to register our outright opposition to the Private Members bill on the employment of Special Advisors within the local political institutions.

Éirí na Gréine represents a considerable number of former political prisoners in the mid and East Tyrone areas, many who have been to the fore in the development of the peace process. The contribution by former political prisoners to the peace process has been widely recognised, as has our input into the development of our local communities. The fact that the release of political prisoners was integral to the GFA demonstrates the importance our input into the process. There is no doubt that former political prisoners have been central in bedding down the political institutions and building support for them, not only on a national level but also at a very basic grassroots level.

We oppose clauses 2 and 3 of the Bill.

We believe these are a blatant attack on former political prisoners despite the very influential role they have played in the developing political situation over the last number of years. Indeed the bill is very specific in its aim of frustrating the positive influence of former political prisoners in the political institutions.

Éirí na Gréine believe that the bill is contrary to the Good Friday Agreement which, despite its shortcomings, was committed to assisting former political prisoners and their families. Similar commitments were once again made in the St Andrews Agreement of 2006. This bill represents yet another employment barrier to political ex prisoners who still face a myriad of barriers and blockages when it comes to issues of employment, travel and many other 'bread and butter' issues. This bill represents yet another employment barrier to us, as political ex prisoners, and also calls into question, if passed, the equality within the political institutions locally.

So we believe this bill is divisive, discriminatory and sends of a very negative message.

In closing, we believe this bill alienates a significant proportion of the population to the path of conflict resolution and engagement with the political process. According to a report compiled by George Quigley (OFMDFM) in 2007 there were up to 30,000 political ex prisoners in the north of Ireland. These people, many of whom are trusted by their communities to be their councillors, MLAs, MPs and TDs should not be targeted in this very dilate and unapologetic manner by those who are opposed to the political process and the out workings of the Good Friday Agreement.

Is sinne le meas

Kevin McGrade  
(Cathaoirleach)

Glenn Campbell  
(Rúnaí)