

MOTION ON BRITISH CULTURE TUV CONFERENCE 8TH NOVEMBER 2008

Speech by Karen Boal, Traditional Unionist Voice Secretary

Culture has often been referred to as “the way of life for an entire society” and the Ulster Protestant Culture is no exception. It is a culture which instils great pride and self confidence within our community, it is our heritage and therefore must be protected at every turn. In light of this it is therefore no surprise that the Republican movement has in recent years intensified their belligerent campaign to eradicate our culture and heritage. This sustained attack is nothing less than an attempt to remove every vestige of Britishness from our province. They realise that to remove our cultural identity and thus condition the Protestant people into an ‘Irish’ mindset will make it easier to ultimately remove the border. They are demanding the removal of the Union flag as well as plaques and memorials to the Security force personal who so bravely stood as the front line of defence against the murderous campaign of terror waged by the IRA.

The vehicle which is being used by Sinn Fein to drive forward this campaign comes in the form of the Equality Commission and the so-called Equality Agenda which flows from it. The Equality Commission was established as a direct result of the Belfast Agreement, it is an unelected quango which at best is over eager but at worst can be perceived as pedalling a Republican agenda to purge government buildings, courts and public facilities of all British symbols. The Equality Agenda which it expounds has been enshrined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The statutory obligation to pursue “equality” and the statutory prohibitions on “discrimination” which are contained therein have provided Sinn Fein/ IRA with a powerful weapon in their campaign to eradicate British culture in Northern Ireland. In some cases simply the fear of this legislation and the Equality Commission has been enough to trigger the removal of flags and symbols from Council offices, as demonstrated most recently in Banbridge where it was reported in the media that plaques and an RAF themed painting had been removed from public view prior to the completion of the consultation period. In most Council areas we now have the situation where the National flag, the Union Flag, can only be flown on designated days of the year. Yet while the Equality Commission is only too willing to deal with British and Unionist flags and symbols they fail to deal with those council areas who allow shrines to Republican Hunger Strikers to be erected. Indeed in some cases Nationalist controlled Councils have even been known to name public parks after convicted IRA terrorists. The inherent flaws which have been so clearly demonstrated through its work to date have resulted in a complete lack of confidence in the Equality Commission within the Unionist community resulting in a situation which needs to be addressed immediately.

A further campaign against Protestant/ Unionist culture has manifested itself in the form of attacks on the Loyal Orders, most noticeably in the form of attacks on Orange Halls and parades. Sinn Fein manufactured residents groups have for many years sought to have Orange parades banned and re-routed. Many of these parades take only a matter of minutes to pass any given point yet the Republican movement is unwilling to tolerate our Protestant culture for even a few minutes. The failure of the Parades Commission to

recognise that the problem with parading lies not with the Loyal Orders but rather with the sectarian intolerance demonstrated by residents groups - which are often headed by convicted terrorists - is just one of its fundamental failures. Each year numerous Orange Order parades are banned yet on Sunday past the Parades Commission allowed the Republican protest march against the homecoming of those brave military personal who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. This only serves to further highlight the need for the abolition of such a flawed quango. It was hoped by many that the Strategic Review of Parading would seek to redress the balance and provide a more tolerant approach to this expression of our culture, however instead the proposed changes are potentially as bad if not worse. Their proposals would appear to put into place a system of cumbersome bureaucracy which is anything but cost effective. Moreover the Review by seeking to introduce an artificial link between the issue of parading and the transfer of policing and justice powers, is further politicising this issue thus achieving quite the opposite of what one of their aims should have been. Under the proposals there is a requirement that all public assemblies of 15 or more people notify a nominated officer of the local council. This will obviously affect not only protests organised at the last minute but also any church or person wishing to hold an open air service. The right to worship is a fundamental right and the fact that these proposals would severely curtail that right is unconscionable.

In conclusion I believe that we need to counter this campaign against our cultural heritage, we should be seeking to maintain the freedom to express our cultural identity and practice the Reformed Faith and it is because of this that I have great pleasure in seconding the motion put before conference today.