

June 2009 Belfast News

June 4th has become a decisive day in the North's history, with politicians being held to account for their expenses in the wake of the recent economic downturn, voters stayed away in numbers in the European elections to Parliament.

For the first time since partition in 1921, a republican has topped the polls in an election well above the Unionist candidates. Bairbre de Brun was comfortably elected as the first of 3 MEP's to Brussels. The general disinterest led to a very low turn out for voters who have been disgusted by recent claims that politicians both here in the North and in the UK have been over charging for their expenses whilst sitting at Westminster.

To be honest there were people who prior to the revelations would not have batted an eye in thinking about politicians but the economy struggling to cope with pressure from widespread bankruptcy and liquidation from some of the biggest employers in Europe, people have become fed up with the over paid egotists aka local politicians.

For example the claim that the First Minister Peter Robinson (who I might add is an MP) as well as his MP wife Iris being dubbed not just the North's but the UK's "Swish Family Robinson" claiming a total of £550,000 in expenses and pay as well as employing their 3 adult children and partners as employees.

Therefore when voters turned out on Tuesday the DUP were the last party to be elected. Dianne Dodds had to wait for fellow MEP's Bairbre and Jim Nicholson of the Unionist and Conservative Unionists New Force (UUP and UK Conservatives joined ranks in recent months) to be elected. The DUP left the count with their tail firmly between their legs, as for the past 20 years their former Party President, Ian Paisley Sr. topped every MEP election.

So the expenses row claimed their first Northern Irish victims in the DUP.

However on the same day, history was made when the Omagh Families had won a landmark civil action claiming that the 4 suspects previously arrested were found liable for causing the 1998 explosion where 29 people and 2 unborn babies were killed in a Real IRA explosion.

Relatives of the Omagh bomb victims won damages of £1.6 million in the first case of its kind after four alleged Real IRA activists were found responsible for the atrocity.

A judge ruled in the landmark civil case that Michael McKevitt, was the leader of the Real IRA and was responsible with three other men for the worst terrorist attack in Northern Ireland. Mr. Justice Morgan found that McKevitt, Liam Campbell, Colm Murphy and Seamus Daly were responsible for the car bomb attack.

The families had launched their case against the five men they blamed for the killings after the police and public prosecution service failed to secure any criminal convictions.

It was the first time that alleged members of a terrorist organization had been sued and the families said they were delighted by their victory but did not expect to "collect a penny". The claim the case was not about financial reward but about naming the men responsible.

The judge's conclusions were largely based on evidence obtained by an undercover FBI agent who infiltrated the organization in the years after the attack.

Meanwhile the families have said they will go to the Appeal Court to try to overturn Mr. Justice Morgan's ruling that it was not appropriate for him to order the payment of exemplary damages.

If they successful this could lead to an order of many millions in damages made against the Real IRA and the four found responsible for the bombing.

However the families ultimately want to find out how and why their loved ones had been caught up in the massacre in 1998 where claims and counterclaims of security forces involvement in allowing the bombing to go ahead even though they had been notified prior to the incident.

The families' just want truth and justice for their parents, siblings, children, neighbours and friends. No amount of money will be enough to buy their silence according to sources close to the families.

Thanks

Orla Adams