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## Eames-Bradley may help us all

Monday, 2 February 2009

At the start of a new month, it is time to reflect a little more on the significant implications of the Eames-Bradley Report which was introduced amid such frenzy a few days ago.

Perhaps it was inevitable that the official launch in the Europa Hotel would be virtually taken over by the various victims' groups who were demonstrating the deep hurts that still exist in our society.

It was a disturbing spectacle, but in the aftermath of such raw emotions, there were hopeful indications of some rapprochement among a number of relatives of those killed in the Troubles. The harsh fact remains, however, that Northern Ireland still remains a long way from a deeply-established peace which people on all sides would welcome.

One of the most unfortunate aspects of the introduction of the Eames-Bradley Report was the recommendation that a payment of £12,000 should be given to each of the victims' families as a recognition by the state of the suffering on all sides.

This was a well-meaning gesture, but deeply flawed. The reception to this idea has been largely negative, and there is no way that it will be accepted on all sides in the spirit in which it was intended. There may be some relevant manner in which such suffering can be recognised, but this is not it. Accordingly the idea of a £12,000 payment should be quietly dropped, before it inflicts irreparable damage on other worthwhile aspects of the report.

At this stage, it is perhaps worth asking whether those who have been most vociferous in their criticism of Eames-Bradley have actually read the report

in full. Lord Eames and Denis Bradley are clever, thoughtful and caring men, and they — and their colleagues — deserve the thanks of all of us in taking on such a difficult task.

The major question now is: "Where do we go from here?" Those who advocate the scrapping of the entire report are misguided, because it contains ideas and recommendations that are worth consideration — and not least the suggestion that a line be drawn under the costly tribunals and other forms of inquiry which seem to bring no satisfaction to anyone.

In reality Eames and Bradley have done their

work, and their report now lies firmly with those in London, Dublin and Stormont who can help make it or break it. This will require careful consideration on all sides, a willingness to take hard decisions, and difficult compromises in areas where a failure to do so could deal a fatal blow to the entire process.

A number of senior Stormont politicians have already made known their views in public, but the onus is on them to try to construct a way forward which will help, and not hinder, their colleagues in London and Dublin.

The Eames-Bradley Report is not without its flaws and detractors, but the blunt truth remains that it may help all of us, however painfully, to confront those things which we may not want to face, and in the process to inch ourselves forward together.

The alternative, as Eames and Bradley so chillingly pointed out, is to perpetuate the divisions which will confront future generations who need to be freed from the past. The Eames-Bradley Report still provides the best basis for moving forward.

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