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This payment is a grave mistake

Monday, 26 January 2009

Lord Eames and Denis Bradley were handed a very difficult task when they were asked to head up the Consultative Group on the Past.

Finding a way to come to terms with almost 30 years of violence and well over 3,000 deaths would task the wisdom of Solomon, given that there is no community consensus of the root causes of the violence; no consensus on the roles played by republican and loyalist terrorists and security forces in the turmoil of the Troubles and no common ground on the way forward.

The Eames/Bradley group consulted widely, listened to a variety of views and considered many alternative proposals on how to help people come to terms with the death or injury of loved ones. The group has now produced a report of more than 200 pages, covering a range of topics and making some radical proposals. While the detail of the report will not be known until Wednesday, one recommendation has already overshadowed the whole exercise. The group decided to tackle the vexed question of a hierarchy of

victims — whether some deaths during the troubles should be regarded more seriously than others — by suggesting a £12,000 payment to the families of every victim, be they uninvolved by-standers in the wrong place at the wrong time or loyalist or republican killers who were themselves killed.

No-one can doubt the good intention of Lord Eames and Mr Bradley in making this suggestion but putting a price on the loss of a life was a grave mistake. While families of security force members or innocent targets of paramilitary gangs will balk at any suggestion that those deaths were the same as those of terrorists

killed in the commission of crime or in internecine feuds, they have reacted with predictable fury to the suggestion that their equivalence should be marked by similar payments. One wonders how men of the political nous and humanity of Lord Eames and Mr Bradley could have come up with a recommendation that was bound to be so controversial. Would America make a payment to the families of those who blew up the Twin Towers or Gordon Brown give money to the London tube and bus bombers?

It must be stated clearly that the proposal for a £12,000 payment to the relatives of every person who

died in the Troubles is wrong; it will only create further division between the survivors and it runs the danger of tainting the whole Consultative Group on the Past in the way that the early release of terrorist prisoners led to some rejecting the Good Friday Agreement. Even when something is done for the best of intentions, it still can have negative consequences.

However, no-one should reject the report because of this one controversial recommendation. They should read the rest of the recommendations and see what benefits are to be gained. The creation of a Legacy Commission which, among other things, will take over the investigations into past murders currently conducted by the Historical Enquiries Team and the Police Ombudsman, still offers the hope that some killers could yet be brought to justice. For those relatives who just want to know why and how their loved ones died there will be a separate information recovery process with immunity granted to witnesses. These processes, unlike the payment recommendation, may help to heal old wounds.

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Have you noticed how all of those rushing to condemn the E12k proposal are all in good, well paid jobs? It's true that the idea that bereaved families should receive a payment is hard to take for some, especially those who believe that the pain and loss of members of the security forces is somehow worse than the others who suffered bereavement. But might it not be the case that there are families who face real need and who are not in good well paid jobs. For them the E12k will be a real help, even though it can never compensate adequately their pain and heartbreak.

Posted by *Robin Percival* | 27.01.09, 10:42 GMT

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have some victims families not received monies frm government already, and some of these payments being very high as age and occupation etc., taken into account. surely E12,000 should only be given to victims families who had only been given say less than one thousand which had hardly covered cost of funeral expenses. also, since when is the terrorist a victim?

Posted by *one of the quiet people* | 26.01.09, 20:44 GMT

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what about all the good guys that suffered 30 plus years of conflict stayed out of trouble and behaved like people should .

what do they get ????????

Posted by *FEELING LET DOWN* | 26.01.09, 11:52 GMT

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