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Eames-Bradley: will it result in more questions than answers?

By Brian Rowan
Wednesday, 14 January 2009

It is so easy to picture the scene inside that Eames-Bradley Consultative Group right now — all the checking and reading and re-reading; every 'i' to be dotted and 't' crossed.

And after that will come all the worrying and wondering about how the now imminent report will be received.

In just two weeks' time it will be revealed for all to read — the end of 19 months of public meetings, consultation and research, writing and re-writing.

The final document needs to be a report of balanced words, thoughtful sentences and thought through recommendations — a piece of work that from front to back will look not just into the past but, also, attempt to

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make a path into the future.

This group, co-chaired by the retired Church of Ireland Archbishop Lord Eames and former Policing Board vice chairman Denis Bradley, has been given, arguably, the hardest task of the peace process.

Its work is to take Northern Ireland — or the north — beyond its ceasefires, the ending of the different wars and decommissioning.

And its challenge has been to find and make a process that will not only ask but answer the questions of the past and then, out of that learning, draw a map leading to a better future.

They know it is much easier said than done.

The writing of The Consultative Group on the Past will be set out in a 150-plus-page report.

Within the next fortnight, just a few days before its publication on January 28, the final report will be sent to Secretary of State Shaun Woodward and copied to the Irish government and the Office of First and Deputy First Minister.

Lord Eames and Denis Bradley have made clear in recent speeches that the process they will recommend will not be the Truth and Reconciliation model identified with South Africa.

So the Consultative Group will recommend The Legacy Commission working to a five-year deadline.

It has already been widely reported that under the roof of that commission there will be Investigation and Information Recovery Units.

What there won't be is an amnesty — both Lord Eames and Denis Bradley made that very clear in recent public speeches at Queen's University and on the Falls Road.

Their way of working has been to brief and inform as they go along. So it will not be a report of shocks or surprises.

The headline recommendations are already known.

The interesting bit — and the important bit — is what happens next, who will co-operate and who won't.

The UVF leadership met the Consultative Group — the IRA and UDA did not.

What will be the reactions in the world of politics, in the victims sector and across the wider community?

How does this report get past the cynics — those who are convinced that the truth of the conflict will never be told?

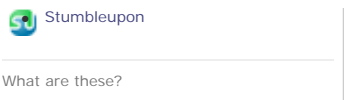
And if it does get to the next phase with recommendations implemented, how then do you get into the darkest corners of the conflict, into the decision making and doing of the security forces, the republicans and the loyalists?

There is much to hide and many reasons why the truth will not be told — not now, not ever.

Who were the leaders of the IRA who gave the orders for the bombs of Bloody Friday, Enniskillen, La Mon and the Shankill Road? Who were the loyalist leaders who ordered and allowed the killing of so many innocent Catholics?

And who in the places of security and politics know the story of collusion — the secrets of how "innocent people were allowed to die", to quote an Eames-Bradley speech of last year.

On January 28 the Consultative Group will pass the challenge of dealing with the past onto others. Recommending that the truth be told is one thing — but a recommendation is only a recommendation.



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