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Opinion

Brian Rowan: a time to move on, not forget

Thursday, June 14, 2007

Next Thursday has been designated a Day of Private Reflection. Brian Rowan explains how it will be left up to individuals as to how they wish to remember the tragedy of the Troubles

It is a day that not so much forces us to think, but rather it asks us to reflect in private on what we have been through.

And, not just what we have been through, but what this place and its people have been through.

The date is this day week - Thursday, June 21 - and the initiative originates from the group that calls itself Healing Through Remembering.

There is much to think about, because there is not a calendar date that is free from death of one description or another.

So, this "day of private reflection on the conflict in and about Northern Ireland" could have happened on any date in that stretch from January 1 to December 31.

Think about it - The Troubles. That conflict, in terms of its killings, left its mark on every date in the calendar year.

Every date is an anniversary of the death of at least one person in relation to our war.

So while next Thursday, June 21, will have a particular relevance to particular people, this day of private reflection - on the longest day of the year - is about something much wider than that.

It is about giving all of us an opportunity to think - to remember, to reflect in different places at different times, to do it whatever way we want to do it.

And for many, I'm sure, this will be placing the war of yesterday into the peace of today, and maybe wondering, asking, in light of recent events, what it was all about.

That peace does not give back the lives that were taken in a very long conflict, and, in our moving on, that is something we need to remember.

There are many people who won't forget ? who can't forget, and who shouldn't be forgotten.

Next Thursday is about all of them and all of us. It's about everybody.

For some years now, the Healing Through Remembering group has been tiptoeing through the minefield that is our past.

It's a group that gets attention because of those who are part of it - republicans, loyalists, former police officers and soldiers, people who have lost loved ones in the conflict, but there are others, and there is much more to this group than the people who are a part of it.

Its thinking, its research and the initiatives - such as the one planned for next Thursday - make an important contribution to the process that is about both the past and the present.

And when Lord Eames and Denis Bradley begin their consultation on all of this, the Healing Through Remembering door is one of the first they should knock.

Inside they will find a range of people with a range of opinions and a bank of valuable experiences and research.

Kate Turner is the project co-ordinator.

She sees next Thursday as an "enabling" initiative.

"There are people who feel they aren't being given that opportunity (to reflect)," she said.

"Here's a chance for you to do it, in the way you want to do it and it's not being forced on you."

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But the initiative is not just about one day and next Thursday.

It's all part of a learning process.

" We want to see whether there is a mood or an appetite for it," Ms Turner told the Telegraph, "and if there is how that should be met."

So the feedback on this specific initiative will help shape future thinking.

Separate from this, what Lord Eames and Denis Bradley are about to become involved in is not our truth and reconciliation process.

It's about exploring possible ways forward.

If I understand it correctly, it is the phase of consultation before the decisions are made on how the past is to be addressed.

That consultation should seek to tell us who from all sides will sit at any table of explanation.

We need to know what kind of a process we can expect.

- For information on A Day of Private Reflection go to www.dayofreflection.com .

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