

£250m: cost of raking over the Troubles

Bloody Sunday inquiry bill alone runs to £180m

By David McKittrick, Ireland Correspondent
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The cost of inquiring into deaths during the Troubles in Northern Ireland, including the huge Bloody Sunday inquiry, has reached more than a quarter of a billion pounds and is set to rise still further.

Five major investigations are under way while two more have yet to be set up. None of the existing inquiries is due to report within the next 12 months, while those yet to be launched are expected to take years to complete.

The authorities have been grappling for years with the question of how to deal with the historical residue of the Troubles. Until recently the prevailing theory was that past incidents should be examined in an attempt to obtain closure for families and all involved. But the cost and duration of the Bloody Sunday inquiry has produced a significant swing in opinion away from the idea of open-ended investigations.

This inquiry, announced in January 1998, has already cost more than £180m but is not expected to report until late next year, with 17 staff still at work. These include three judges, headed by Lord Saville, and three senior counsel. One of the original judges and various witnesses have died while it has been underway. The overrun has been spectacular, since it was envisaged to last two years and cost £11m.

Over half the total spent – almost £100m – has been on legal costs. While Lord Saville receives the standard salary of a law lord, about £200,000, some of the other legal figures have been paid millions. The principal counsel to the inquiry was paid more than £4m while chief counsel for the Ministry of Defence earned more than £3m.

Both the duration and the cost have caused official concern, with Northern Ireland Secretary Shaun Woodward declaring "we are all staggered" by the costs. Conservative Northern Ireland spokesman Owen Paterson said: "To the public it looks like a complete gravy train for lawyers." Meanwhile a Historical Enquiries Team has been set up by police to re-examine more than 3,000 Troubles killings. With a budget of £32m, it works closely with bereaved families, providing a detailed report of every death. At the same time, separate public inquiries are going on into three controversial Troubles deaths. These are Rosemary Nelson, a solicitor killed by loyalists, Robert Hamill, a Catholic killed by a loyalist mob, and Billy Wright, a loyalist killed by republicans while held at the Maze prison.

These have to date cost more than £50m. An inquiry has also been announced into the complex case of



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Soldiers round up civil rights protesters in Derry on Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972, after British paratroopers opened fire on the demonstrators

solicitor Pat Finucane, shot dead by loyalists with alleged intelligence involvement.

The Government is awaiting a report from a group, headed by former Church of Ireland Archbishop Lord Eames, which is expected to recommend a commission to look into Troubles deaths, a project which would be a major undertaking taking years.

An Act introduced in 2005 has restricted cost and duration to prevent a repeat of the Bloody Sunday phenomenon and produce what ministers call "better, quicker inquiries". Its provisions include a cap on fees, maximum fees levels for publicly-funded lawyers and ensuring representation is limited to interested parties or key witnesses whose evidence is in dispute.

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