

Cost of the Troubles: £40m for victims' compensation, £170m for inquiries

Controversy over £12,000 settlement as killers to get same payout as victims

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A plan to give £12,000 to the family of each person killed in the Northern Ireland Troubles – including dead loyalists and IRA members – was last night condemned by politicians.

The £40m plan would be in addition to a £170m proposal to set up a commission to investigate old murders. Under the plan, the families of the IRA Shankill bomber, Thomas Begley – who died when planting a bomb that killed nine in 1993 – and the leader of the loyalist Shankill Butchers, Lenny Murphy, who killed Catholics before the IRA shot him dead, would receive the same payments as victim families. The finding is part of a report from the Consultative Group on the Past, led by the former Church of Ireland Primate Lord Robin Eames and the former Northern Ireland police board vice chair, Denis Bradley.

They said they wanted to end the "hierarchy of victims" because the pain of all bereaved was equal but unionist politicians reacted angrily.

The Democratic Unionist Party leader, Peter Robinson, said:



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"I think people in Northern Ireland who have gone through decades of violence will be very hurt indeed at any proposal which allows people who have been engaged in the most heinous acts in society being put on a level playing field with those who have been victims of those horrendous events."

The commission would investigate deaths resulting from the Troubles

Any plan to deal with the past had to have the needs of innocent victims and the maintenance of justice at its core "however, the reported proposals do not represent an approach which would be in any way acceptable to the Democratic Unionist Party and the people we represent," he said.

The payment scheme is based on a programme in the Republic of Ireland where victims received €15,000 (equal to £12,000 when the plan was drafted).

Under the plan for a Legacy Commission, individual deaths would be investigated, with paramilitary groups such as the IRA and extreme Protestant organisations approached and asked for information on each.

The investigations would continue whether or not they cooperate. It is anticipated that few new prosecutions would result, since deaths have already been investigated by police, but bereaved families say they draw comfort from receiving as much information as possible about the deaths.

The commission would also look into and issue reports on themes such as sectarianism and patterns of violence and collusion between security forces and loyalist groups. The Eames/Bradley report will recommend that there should be no new public inquiries into controversial incidents but those which are already under way, such as the Bloody Sunday Inquiry, should continue. The group declined to comment on its report. It asked the public to wait for all proposals to be released on Wednesday before drawing conclusions.

Alex Attwood, from the nationalist SDLP, said people should not rush to pass judgment, but wait for the full report and decide if its overall content represented an ethical way forward.

The Ulster Unionist MEP Jim Nicholson said the plan was immoral: "The proposal endorses the morally flawed notion that a terrorist killed while undertaking a mission of murder has the same status as an innocent civilian murdered in a bomb attack or a member of the security forces murdered in front of their family."

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