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Another lurch into the grotesque, peace-process surrealism we've got used to over the years

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By Kevin Myers

Tuesday January 27 2009

The proposal from Lord Eames and Denis Bradley to give the relatives of the Northern victims of the Troubles £12,000 each (including families of dead paramilitaries) is merely another way of saying "I feel your pain", in £ signs.

Other people's pounds, naturally: for spending government money to 'solve' insoluble problems is a habit we've got into in Ireland over the past 20 years or so. Indeed, one could argue that the Bradley-Eames initiative doesn't go far enough.

Since by their logic, with paramilitaries as much victims of the Troubles as the people they've killed, is it not only right that paramilitaries who have been imprisoned -- and are therefore also victims -- are given compensation as well?

If they are being compensated, then logically an injustice must have been done to them in the first place. Who did the injustice? Why, the forces of law and order which imprisoned them.

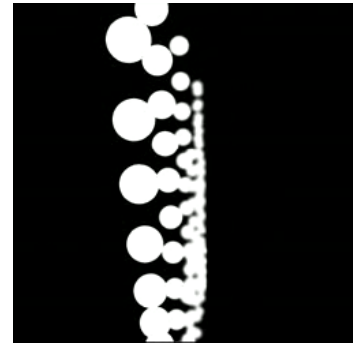
So it's clearly time to correct that great historical injustice, and to begin legal proceedings against every member of the RUC, the British army, and An Garda Síochána who was engaged in the foul business of the fighting paramilitaries from (say) 1969.

It is probably not necessary to imprison every policeman, soldier or garda engaged in security operations against what used to be called terrorism, but is now known as Cultural Assertiveness. Instead, show-trials of a sample of a few hundred soldiers and police officers will be enough, to be conducted under the watchful eye of that scrupulous jurist, exquisite theologian and profound moral philosopher, Danny Morrison, at the soon-to-be convened Historical Adjustment Tribunal.

Some trials, inevitably, will have to be conducted post-mortem. For example, it would be morally wrong to allow Fusilier John McCaig (17), his brother Joseph (18), and their friend, Dougal McCaughey, off the hook simply because they were shot dead in 1971. Their guilt is manifold. For they were British soldiers, which, of course, according to the norms of Sinn Féin's Cultural Assertiveness Tradition, makes them guilty of whatever they're accused of. They, therefore, must pay. Defence counsel for the three dead men might argue that they were befriended by some Culturally Assertive republicans in a pub, and that they were drunk.

He might suggest that they were lured to a car in the belief they were going to a party. He could well try to impress the inquiry with the knowledge that they were unarmed. However, all this is irrelevant. For there is little doubt that these three ruthless youngsters were urinating in a country lane outside Belfast when they were shot, which only adds to their guilt.

Clearly, they were an unprincipled trio of desperadoes, who not merely merited their fate, but



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they now deserve to be found guilty by the Historical Adjustment Tribunal, and posthumously imprisoned. Solitary confinement would be appropriate, until they have admitted the error of their ways, at which point they may mix with other inmates, provided they wear prison uniform.

The extension of the Bradley-Eames principles over the entire history of the Troubles, thereby transforming what we had otherwise thought of as culprits into victims, will no doubt have other side-effects.

Republicans in south [Armagh](#), for example, will find that if they'd had far more of their number killed, then they would have been getting infinitely greater compensation from the British government. What? Another example of British perfidy! Who fears to speak of '98? (Millions in compensation, that is).

For in recent decades, south Armagh has been really good at doing two things. One is killing British soldiers and RUC officers (most of them, one hopes, soon to be on posthumous trial), and the other is extracting money from the British government.

Which tendency suggests that south Armagh will soon discover that many more [IRA](#) men died in the Troubles than previously thought: a couple of thousand, at least: that'll be £24m please - cheque, made out to cash, as usual, if you don't mind. To reward the families of dead murderers in the same manner as the families of their victims is another lurch into the grotesque, peace-process surrealism which we've got used to over the years.

But now, in 2009, it is a lurch too far. We are now all sick and tired of throwing money at problems, in the form of uncountable tribunals and spurious compensations. The unspeakable evils of the Troubles are neither diminished nor softened by plastering £ signs over the dead, and anyway, nobody can afford to any more.

The British state is close to bankruptcy; and in the Republic, the receivers are in, the vaults are empty, and there's a long line of international creditors waiting at the door. Parachuting yet more money over the landscape of [Northern Ireland](#) is not merely useless, it is no longer even possible.

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