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Eames/Bradley launch an exercise in naivety

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By Tom Kelly

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THE furore over the Eames/Bradley Report has not died down. If there ever was an exercise in how not to communicate with an audience this shambles will become the template.

By holding a briefing a full five days before their scheduled launch they allowed pressure to build up unnecessarily and unwittingly let anger, uncertainty and political partisanship reign.

The approach demonstrated an unbelievable naivety by two fairly accomplished media-savvy public figures.

Naturally, the actual launch would be overshadowed by protest and the presence of serial protesters. Cedric Wilson and Willie Frazer ensured proceedings lurched between force and farce.

Yes, it was raw and the authors say they expected it to be so. Amid the appeals for calm by the organisers and attack and counter-attack by various victims groups, the media could not believe their luck as this three-ringed circus unfolded before them. Lord Eames attempted to express regret at the misunderstanding or the presentation of what some called the 'cash for conscience' offer.

It was hard not to feel some sympathy for him. Denis Bradley is the media performer of the two and his folksy manner did much to calm the crowd. He is a poetic wordsmith and his line about politicians having found a political accommodation but, yet they were preventing society from finding a human accommodation was classic Bradleyism.

Both men and one assumes the rest of their panel don't seem to understand the cash issue did not just affront some of victim groups but it affronted the rest of us; all 1.7 million citizens of Northern Ireland; ordinary people who are not caught up in the growing industry that surrounds victimhood.

Nevertheless both Eames and Bradley were dignified throughout the proceedings, though media interviews which juxtaposed cuts to actual victims on UTV seemed particularly unfair to both men and in particular Lord Eames.

Bradley in one interview appeared to concede that the Bloody Sunday tribunal was a not going to achieve anything for the families involved. He may be right.

The political responses were fairly predictable. The DUP cannot afford to be outflanked by Jim Allister and his Traditional Unionist Voice and this is one issue which could serve to do just that. So a raft of DUP ministers took to the air to condemn the Eames/Bradley report.

Like many of the victims groups on the unionist side they seem genuinely bewildered by the position of Lord

Eames. One suspects having had experience of Denis on the Policing Board they were less surprised.

The Ulster Unionists were less forthright but equally dismissive. Alliance wanted its 'wait and see' cake but then ate it.

The SDLP position was nothing short of bizarre. Rank-and-file members were probably at one with Seamus Mallon's Friday night declaration that the process had been cheapened by the cash references.

Mark Durkan's appeal though reasonable was redundant after that.

However, it was Alex Attwood's elongated response to Stephen Nolan that was perplexing, confusing and complicated – though Attwood said the SDLP unlike other parties preferred 'crafted' answers these days.

Hopefully, its European messages will be much clearer and less crafted.

Sinn Fein was by normal standards pretty muted though the decision by Gerry Adams to attend the launch of Eames/Bradley was unnecessarily provocative.

At the heart of Eames/Bradley, in between the references to legacy commissions, victims support, 'cash for conscience' and a call for integrated education are the real reasons we are going nowhere with truth recovery in Northern Ireland – a) it is too soon and b) we are too small a place with too many of our protagonists now too busy rewriting the history of the last 30 years to have the honesty to tell

the truth.

Denis Bradley threw out an honourable challenge to the paramilitaries to respond with grace and state that they will participate in a truth recovery process.

He knows, they know and we know that is not going to happen.

According to the excellent book of remembrance Lost Lives some 536 paramilitaries from both sides died during the conflict; a further 1036 members of the security forces were killed but of the total 3635 unnecessary deaths from a war never needed or wanted; 2063 were ordinary men, women and children – who were innocent.

The manner of their deaths through indiscriminate bombings and sectarian murders by cowardly individuals, terrorist organisations and at times by the sinister machinations of the state means that a perverse web of self-interest will collude to protect the guilty and bury


the truth.

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