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## State can take a lead on past

### Pro Fide et Patria

Editorial

30/05/08

In the not-too-distant past, there would have been outrage over any claim that innocent victims were allowed to die in Northern Ireland because elements within the British state acted illegally.

The person making the suggestion would have been denounced by unionist politicians as a republican fellow-traveller, and senior police and British army officers would have defended their record to the hilt.

Yesterday, Lord Eames, the former Church of Ireland primate, quietly but firmly outlined his belief that the forces of the state had indeed operated beyond the law on occasions and it could be said that innocent lives had been lost as a result.

Lord Eames's comments were effectively unchallenged by official sources and there was an almost total lack of surprise surrounding the grave issues which he raised. The change of climate over these issues was undoubtedly caused by all the comprehensive investigations and well-documented revelations of recent years but it remained striking.

Lord Eames and Denis Bradley – who are the joint chairmen of the consultative group on the past – also had a direct message for both loyalists and republicans.

The main loyalist organisations were told that their failure to make even a token gesture on decommissioning, 14 years after calling a ceasefire and expressing what was presented as heartfelt remorse, was unacceptable.

Republicans, together with all other past and present paramilitary activists, were urged to declare that they would never again take up arms in pursuit of political objectives.

These were entirely reasonable demands to put to the rival factions which have been responsible for the vast majority of the violence here over the past 40 years and beyond.

However, the symbolism involved in the state displaying leadership by openly acknowledging its previously hidden role in a range of events would still be powerful.

The proposals to be made by the consultative group in this regard will be eagerly awaited.

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