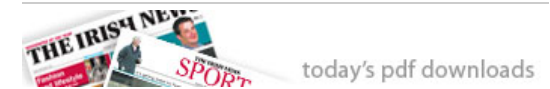


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Hiring of Eames and Bradley criticised

EXCLUSIVE

By Diana Rusk

26/02/08

A senior adviser on public jobs has criticised how the government appointed the co-chairs of a group charged with finding a way to deal with the legacy of the Troubles.

Lord Eames and Denis Bradley were appointed to chair the Consultative Group on the Past without the positions being advertised or interviews being held.

They are paid £680 a day for a maximum of three days' work a week, meaning they could earn up to £106,080

each for the job.

Their role in dealing with the legacy of the Troubles was yesterday undermined when republican sources said the IRA had refused to meet the group.

The Catholic bishops in Northern Ireland have also said they will not cooperate because of concerns about the membership of the advisory group and how it was set up.

In an interview in The Irish News today the north's commissioner for public appointments, Felicity Huston, says there was no "openness, transparency or independent scrutiny" in the process of appointing Lord Eames and Mr Bradley.

Her comments come amid growing public disquiet over the proportion of MLAs from the four main political parties who have appointed family members as office and research staff.

Mrs Huston also reveals that her office is fast-tracking an audit into how the four victims' commissioners were hired due to the controversy surrounding the posts.

The investigation is expected to be completed within three weeks.

Lord Eames and Mr Bradley were appointed last year by the then secretary of state, Peter Hain, following consultation with First Minister Ian Paisley and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness.

Mrs Huston, who is also part of the House of Lords body that unveiled the 2006 'cash for honours' scandal, criticises the appointment process.

"The reason we need to have an open process, particularly for things that are so important to us all, like this sort of work, is because people want to know how they got there and feel that they have been tested and that it is open," she says.

"The principles behind public appointments include openness, transparency and independent scrutiny. None of those

happened."

Last night a spokesman for the Consultative Group on the Past said the appointment process was a matter for the NIO.

An NIO spokesman said membership of the consultative group was not part of Mrs Huston's remit.

"Given government's intention to establish the group without undue delay and considering its ad-hoc nature

and short duration, it was not considered proportionate to embark in a public recruitment process," he said.

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