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From The Times November 7, 2008

Bloody Sunday inquiry delays report again, four years after hearing evidence



David Sharrock, Ireland Correspondent

The chairman of the Bloody Sunday inquiry caused a storm of anger yesterday when he said that he would not deliver his report until next year – more than a decade after it began.

Lord Saville of Newdigate faced demands for a meeting with victims' families to explain why the tribunal, already Britain's costliest, was taking so long.

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The 14 people fatally injured on Bloody Sunday, all innocent Roman Catholic civilians, were killed in January 1972, when paratroopers opened fire during an illegal civil rights march.

John Kelly, whose brother Michael was shot dead, said that the families want the law lord to tell them why, four years after the inquiry finished gathering evidence, he has still not completed his report.



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“We are astounded, devastated, frustrated and very angry by this latest delay,” Mr Kelly told *The Times*. He was informed of the delay by letter through his solicitor.

Lord Saville apologised in the letter, saying that the previous indication of the timescale “was a substantial underestimate”. He added that he was “determined to deal fairly, accurately and thoroughly with the issues before us.

“We have always found it difficult, given the scale and complexity of the material with which we are dealing, to predict accurately how long it will take us to complete our task,” he wrote.

The Government, which has spent more than £181 million of taxpayers’ money on the inquiry – half of that on lawyers’ fees – is furious about the length of time that it has taken. Christopher Clarke, QC, counsel to the inquiry, was paid more than £4 million. One lawyer admitted off the record that “this has been a financial godsend”.



1972: 13 civilians are killed as soldiers storm the Bogside

Civil rights leaders taking part in the march accused troops of indiscriminate firing

- As the smoke clears in Derry the question is: who fired first?

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Lord Saville himself is not paid to chair the inquiry, but receives a salary of £198,700 as a law lord.

Shaun Woodward, the Northern Ireland Secretary, said he was “surprised and disappointed” and that he shared the “understandable concerns” of families and others. His officials would be meeting Lord Saville’s team “as a matter of urgency”, he added.

In February Mr Woodward disclosed that the inquiry was still costing £500,000 a month, although it had not sat for four years.

Mr Kelly said: “What we can’t understand is that in May we got a letter

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from Lord Saville saying that the bulk of the report was to be handed over to editors to get ready for publication and that the rest was to follow shortly.

“We were gearing up for publication – there was finally light at the end of the tunnel. Then we got this bombshell. I couldn’t believe it. Bear in mind that his letter says the report will be handed to the Government in a year’s time, so we may have to wait until 2010 before we get to see it.”

Owen Patterson, the Conservatives’ Northern Ireland spokesman, said: “To the public it looks like a complete gravy train for lawyers.”

The chairman of the Bloody Sunday Trust, Eamonn McCann, said that the families’ confidence in the inquiry was being eroded. “This is an enormous task and it’s understandable it should take some time, but this amount of time? The publication date has been pushed back repeatedly, and I think that some people are beginning to ask themselves, what’s going on?”

The Saville inquiry was established in 1998 by Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, as part of the peace process.

Martin McGuinness, the former Provisional IRA leader in Londonderry on Bloody Sunday, who was accused by an agent during the inquiry’s public hearings of having fired the first shot, said recently that an inquiry had been unnecessary and that an apology from the Government would have sufficed.

The inquiry’s costs include salaries for two colleagues of Lord Saville, supported by two junior counsel and ten administrative staff servicing offices in London and Londonderry.

Elizabeth Johnson, the inquiry’s secretary, said yesterday that further economies were being sought, with the possible closure of the Londonderry office.

She confirmed that Lord Saville did not intend to produce an executive summary of his report, which is expected to run to several volumes in length. “I think that it will take a while for people to draw conclusions from it,” she said.

A complete gravy train for solicitors? What an understatement! More like "Xmas Day" everyday, for a decade plus.

And I used to think all the pirates were in Penzance!

Mike O Connor, Plymouth,

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