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From The Times

January 29, 2009

Victims from either side struggle to put Northern Ireland Troubles behind them

Case study



David Sharrock

With rage etched across her face, Michelle Williamson, whose parents were killed by an IRA bomber, yesterday confronted Daniel Bradley, whose brother, a Provisional IRA volunteer, was shot dead by soldiers.

Both are victims of the Northern Ireland Troubles and both still grieve.

Yesterday, as attempts were made to find a "way forward out of the shadows of the past", they clashed. After denouncing Gerry Adams, the Sinn Féin leader who in 1993 carried the coffin of the IRA bomber who murdered her mother Gillian and father George, Ms Williams said that the proposal to give £12,000 to every victim's family was intolerable.

The Good Friday agreement had been a "bitter pill" to swallow, she told the conference. The £12,000 payment was "simply disgusting".

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"This is the product of a very sick mind, putting my mum and dad in the same category as an IRA terrorist. Everything has been done in the last 15 years to appease the terrorists," she shouted.

Mr Bradley argued with her, telling her to sit down and stop interrupting the conference.

For five minutes they traded angry words as the years of bitterness and pain exploded. But then Mr Bradley tentatively reached out his right hand. She cautiously accepted.

"We need to move on," he said clasping her palm. "We have to put this behind us."

He later said: "At the end of the day my brother's killer has to meet his maker. I would love to meet the soldiers who did kill my brother, mostly to forgive them. Because they do need to be forgiven."

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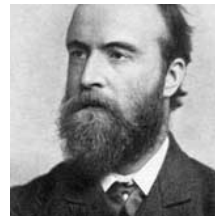


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Her parents were among nine victims of a bomb detonated without warning which also killed the man planting it, inside a busy fishmonger's on a Saturday in the Shankill Road, Belfast.

Ms Williamson would have been with them had it not been for a last-minute decision to stay home that day, sewing curtains.

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