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From The Times January 29, 2009

'Victimhood industry' will remain alive in Northern Ireland

David Sharrock: Commentary

It would take a heart of stone not to feel compassion for the relatives of victims as they gathered at the Europa Hotel to hear from two veteran figures of peace how they proposed to bring Northern Ireland out of the shadows of its past.

Take Joe Holbeach. He was 25ft from the Cenotaph in Enniskillen on Remembrance Sunday when a Provisional IRA bomb blew it up. Eleven people died but he managed to dig himself out. He got £250 compensation and a lifetime of depression-related consequences.

However sincere Lord Eames and Mr Bradley may be in their aim of demolishing the hierarchy of victimhood, Mr Holbeach is living proof that they have not succeeded. One might have felt more sympathy for Lord Eames had it not been for his non-apology for the commission's most controversial proposal: the "recognition" payment of £12,000 to relatives of the 3,700-plus dead, regardless of their roles in the conflict.

"Maybe we did make a mistake in our timing — maybe we forgot that we had been at this for 18 months and if so we apologise," he said, the petulance only emphasised by his repetition of "18 months".

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pain or the thousands of other lives destroyed, 18 months' work pales into insignificance.

One of the Government's chief motives in commissioning the report was to stop what some describe as a victimhood industry, which has replaced the violence. But it is hard to see Gordon Brown committing himself to a plan with

an estimate of £300 million.

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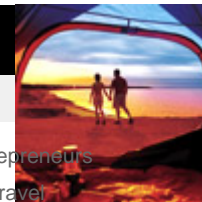
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