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From The Times January 24, 2009

Families of victims from Northern Ireland's Troubles to get £12,000 compensation

David Sharrock, Ireland Correspondent

The price of dying as a direct result of Northern Ireland's Troubles has been fixed at £12,000.

That is the figure two former churchmen believe the Government should give as recognition payments to the families of every victim of the Troubles, regardless of whether those who died were civilians, members of the security forces or terrorists.

Lord Eames, a former head of the Church of Ireland, and Denis Bradley, a former Catholic priest, were asked by the Government 18 months ago to find a way to lead Northern Ireland out of its conflict-driven past and have submitted their conclusions to Gordon Brown. They believe that the payments, which could cost £40 million, will bring to an end the “hierarchy of victims” and show that the pain of all those bereaved is equal.

If the Prime Minister accepts the recommendations, it would mean that the family of Thomas Begley, the “Shankill Bomber” who blew himself up while planting a bomb inside a fishmongers in Belfast in 1993, would receive the same amount of money as the families of the nine people he murdered in the attack. It would also mean that the family of Lenny

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Murphy, who ran a loyalist gang that tortured and murdered dozens of Catholics, would receive the same recognition as the families of his victims. Murphy was shot dead by the Provisional IRA in 1982.

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Northern Ireland's largest political party, the Democratic Unionists, rejected the proposed payments, saying that they would betray innocent victims of terrorist violence.

Jeffrey Donaldson MP, a minister in the Stormont power-sharing government, said: "To suggest that a policeman or

soldier is to be equated with terrorists is entirely unjustified and will send out the wrong message to others.

"It is the very antithesis of justice and with all due respect the authors of this report have got this entirely wrong."

Raymond McCord, whose son was murdered by the Ulster Volunteer Force, described the proposed payment as "disgusting blood money — I would not touch it with a bargepole". He said: "This is the equivalent of the US Government setting up a fund for the victims of the 9/11 and making sure that the families of the hijackers got compensation as well."

Lord Eames and Mr Bradley announced the conclusions of the Consultative Group on the Past in Belfast yesterday. In addition to the payments scheme, which is similar to one implemented by the Republic of Ireland, they recommend that the Government sets up a legacy commission to investigate murders during the Troubles with a view to securing prosecutions. The commission would be chaired by an international figure, run for five years at a cost of £160 million and replace the work carried out by the Police Ombudsman and the historic inquiries team.

However, the group's recommendations could end up costing £300 million. That is in addition to the £185 million already spent on the Bloody Sunday inquiry and hundreds of millions being spent on four other public inquiries into controversial killings linked to the Troubles.

Lord Eames and Mr Bradley argue that their scheme could be completed within five years and that savings would be made when the Government stands down the special police units examining the past. The Irish Government would also play a key role in the scheme and would be expected to make a substantial contribution to the cost. However, the proposal is being made at an inauspicious moment, with the British and Irish governments desperately seeking cuts to ride out the recession.

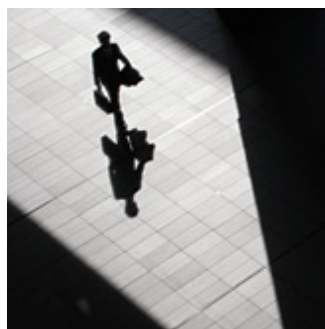


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The past is the past and no amount of money is going to change this. Is it not time a line was drawn in the sand and the past put to rest. Could this 300 million not be better spent on providing better health care and education for all in Northern Ireland.

Marie, Carrickfergus, Northern Ireland

What's the moral premise here?
That suffering deserves money? People suffer every day from relative's deaths.
That suffering through conflict deserves money? Soldiers and civilians die every day.

We are all victims of something. This link with money is madness whether for victim or terrorist family

Laura Roberts, London, United Kingdom

Where does this stop? IRAQ, Falklands, World War 1 and 2?
Pay us £12K and we will forget it ever happened? Ha ha ha ha ha.

steve tea, manchester, cheshire

Anyone undertaking illegal activity shouldnot be receiving a penny. Perhaps the Paramilitary organisations and associated political parties should be made to pay their victims compensation.

Martin, Bath, UK

It's very sad that men of the cloth should come out with this idea - accepting all in the world believe money is always the answer.
It's a ludicrous unworkable greedy idea and let's hope this ThinkTank weren't paid to come up with it after 18 months consideration. Imagine the family squabbles!

Peter, York, England

The problem with this group is that it is chaired by a liberal Anglican and a hard line Nationalist ex-Roman Catholic priest. The hard line Nationalist obviously won. It's a sad day for justice when the family of murdering terrorists are given money. Remember the real victims:Airey Neave,Ian Gow etc

Charlie Stevens, London, UK

It always comes down to money, never forgiveness. Perhaps the church might like to contribute to this, not with their usual passion but money.

Gary, Colchester, UK

This just proves once and for all that it was a 'war' after all.

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Given the time elapsed surely we have better uses for this money right now.
We already hose money all over Ulster to keep it quiet. No more.

Philip C, Wallingford, Oxon

Why did we do our best? this is not right.

Bri, northampton, england

Paying the families of terrorists who died is the sickest thing I have heard in my life. I had to read this article several times in order to believe what I was reading. Killers should never be put in the same bracket as victims. Should we give the 7/7 bombers families £12,000, we live in sick times

J Nowland, Leeds, United Kingdom

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