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Daily

Victims' families hit back at Hain

Thursday, April 19, 2007

Families of the victims of Bloody Sunday today reacted angrily to comments by Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Hain that too much money was being spent on public inquires into the past.

Quizzed over budget pressures faced by the PSNI, Mr Hain told MPs that more than £200m was being spent on investigations and around half of that was on lawyers' fees.

While agreeing that inquires had to be carried out, he questioned whether the province wanted to continue paying out to examine events over recent years or if it wanted to invest in the future instead.

He told Parliament's Northern Ireland Affairs Committee: "We are spending an awful lot of money on the past.

"One hundred and seventy six million pounds has gone on Bloody Sunday so far and half of that is lawyers' fees."

Spokesman for the families bereaved on Bloody Sunday, John Kelly, whose brother Michael was among those killed, said he thought the NI secretary's comments were scandalous.

"We have heard these sort of comments before but the fact of the matter is that you cannot put a price on life and you can't put a price on truth," he said.

"My brother is lying in a cemetery. This inquiry is about our future. We need the truth so we can move on with our lives.

"The point is that if my brother and the others hadn't been murdered on that day there would be no need for a public enquiry.

"Frankly, I think Mr Hain should apologise for these comments."

Mr Kelly also revealed that a recent letter from Lord Saville predicted the inquiry would not be completed until late this year, or likely 2008.

Tony Blair announced the inquiry in 1998, saying: "Bloody Sunday is different because, where the state's own forces are concerned, we must be sure about the truth."

The SDLP's Alasdair McDonnell agreed it was "unfortunate" that the cost of the public inquiries was being "played off" against the budget pressures.

He added: "Most of these inquiries are very necessary.

"There is a need for some sort of closure for people.

"I would be concerned if we try to bury the past and put our heads in the sand. There are certain aspects of the past that need to be dealt with."

The Telegraph revealed the £300m cost-cutting plan for policing services in the province earlier this year.

The proposed savings for the PSNI budget for the period 2008-2011 are part of the Government's UK-wide Comprehensive Spending Review.

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