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Saturday, January 24, 2009

£12,000 payment plan for all killed in Troubles criticised

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GERRY MORIARTY, Northern Editor

THE EAMES-BRADLEY Consultative Group on the Past has proposed a £12,000 payment to the next-of-kin of those killed during the Troubles, even if the fatalities were involved in paramilitary shootings and bombings.

The compensation package is part of a blueprint aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation, which will cost £300 million (€319 million) and is to be financed by the British and Irish governments.

The proposals will address such matters as providing information for the bereaved on how and why their loved ones were killed, tackling sectarianism, providing support for victims and bereaved, and investigating past killings.

The proposal to pay £12,000 to all the families of the 3,700 people killed in the conflict, regardless of the circumstances of those killings, has generated huge anger from unionist politicians in particular.

DUP First Minister Peter Robinson portrayed the proposal as a “betrayal of innocent victims”.

The so-called “recognition payment” will alone cost £40 million.

Unionists complained that there could be no moral equivalence between republican and loyalist paramilitaries killed while attempting to carry out killings themselves and

“innocent victims” of the conflict.

DUP junior minister Jeffrey Donaldson queried how could there be a comparison between Thomas Begley who was killed planting the Shankill bomb and the nine people he killed in that attack.

Former Church of Ireland primate Lord Eames and former vice-chairman of the policing board, Denis Bradley who head the group are determined to press ahead with their proposals. They discussed them with British prime minister Gordon Brown on Thursday. They argued that the £12,000 payment was justified because the issue of a “hierarchy of victims” must be put aside.

Under the Eames-Bradley plan, all current inquiries will be concluded, and there will be no future inquiries. This, if accepted by the British and Irish governments, would undermine the campaign by the Omagh families for a cross-Border tribunal of inquiry into the 1998 Real IRA bombing.

Eames-Bradley also propose the creation of a Legacy Commission, costing £160 million, headed by an international commissioner and two other members, which would oversee a reconciliation forum designed to address the legacy of the past. The commission, which would be wound up after five years, would be appointed next year by the British and Irish governments in consultation with Mr Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness.

Eames-Bradley also proposes the creation of a £100 million fund for “bursaries” which would be used for major strategic projects such as tackling sectarianism and devising a plan to bring down the so-called peace walls.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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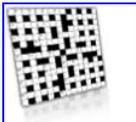
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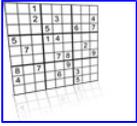
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