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Politics

Hain: too much cash is spent on inquiries

Thursday, April 19, 2007

By Sam Lister

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Too much money is being spent on public inquiries into the past, the Secretary of State has told a powerful committee of MPs.

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

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While agreeing that inquiries 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."

He added: "£167m has gone on Bloody Sunday so far and half of that is lawyers' fees."

The SDLP's Alasdair McDonnell said 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."

Earlier this year the Belfast Telegraph revealed a £300m cost-cutting plan had been tabled for policing services in the province. The proposed savings for the PSNI budget for the period 2008-2011 are part of the Government's UK-wide Comprehensive Spending Review.

It would lead to a dramatic reduction in police overtime, cutting 3,000 additional daily hours to reach a total of 5,850 by March 2011. Mr Hain told the committee that the PSNI would have fewer demands on it due to paramilitary ceasefires.

He added: "There are pressures on all budgets. The policing budget is one that we have to be very, very careful to maintain."

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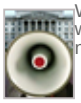

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