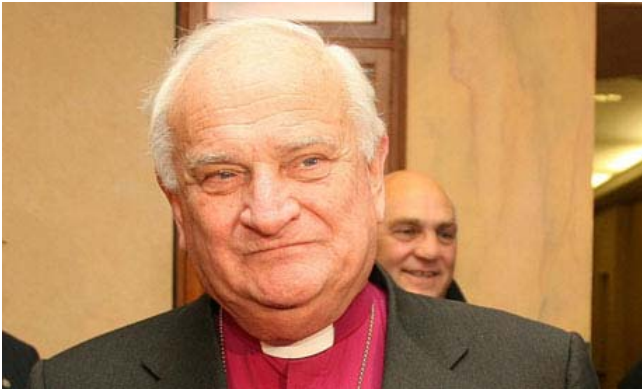


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Backers of Northern Ireland Troubles payouts to face MPs

Proposed £12,000 compensation to families of all victims of the conflict has been surrounded by controversy

Henry McDonald in Belfast
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Lord Eames: likely to face tough questions. Photograph: Paul Faith/PA Archive/PA Photos

The authors of a controversial report into Northern Ireland's violent past that has proposed a £12,000 cash payout to the families of all victims of the Troubles are to be given a rough ride at Westminster tomorrow.

The Tories have pledged that, if elected to office, they would scrap the scheme because it puts terrorists who died in the conflict on the same par as politically uninvolved civilians and members of the security forces who were killed.

Lord (Robin) Eames and Denis Bradley will face tough questions over their proposal from the Northern Ireland affairs select committee when they appear at 3pm in the Palace of Westminster.

Among the members of the cross-party committee are four Northern Ireland MPs – Lady (Sylvia) Hermon, Alasdair McDonnell, Iris Robinson and David Simpson.

The committee is chaired by the Conservative MP Sir Patrick Cormack, whose party's Northern Ireland spokesman, Owen Paterson, has already attacked the payout scheme.

Paterson said the Tories would scrap the £12,000 payment if they won power at the next general election but would retain the Historical Enquiry Team, despite the proposal by the Eames-Bradley report to shut it down.

He said: "The HET is doing very good work and has been giving value so it should be retained. Their role should be expanded – they could, for instance, do a new inquiry into the Omagh bomb."

The HET is an independent police unit working with the Police Service of Northern

Ireland with the sole task of investigating unsolved murders of Ulster's Troubles.

Eames and Bradley – who co-chaired the Consultative Group on the Past – made a number of proposals in their report on how to deal with more than 30 years of violence in Northern Ireland.

They suggested the creation of a Legacy Commission, to deal with the past, and a Reconciliation Forum.

However, the most controversial proposal was payment of a five-figure tax-free sum to the families of all those who died during the Troubles, including IRA, UDA, INLA and UVF terrorists.

The "recognition" money will cost the public purse about £40m if it is accepted by the British government.

The proposal has met with bitter opposition across Northern Ireland and now the cross-party group of MPs will get their chance to question the report's authors on the reasons behind the payment plan.

Last week, Sinn Féin's junior Stormont minister, Gerry Kelly, said the payment proposal was a "mistake".

Sally Craig, whose UVF son Colin Craig was murdered by the Irish National Liberation Army in 1994 while apparently under house arrest by the terror group, has also condemned the plan. "I wouldn't accept any money. I don't think it is right," said Craig, who is being treated for cancer.

Even the message board on the Consultative Group on the Past's website has not been wholeheartedly in support of the £12,000 award.

One message from Anon says: "My partner's brother was murdered by 'rogue' RIR soldiers. This proposed compensation has brought to the fore all the hurt and outrage again particularly for his now elderly parents. It should be condemned by all sides of the community."

And a message from Francis reads: "This debate on the compensation has stirred up a lot of trouble and will forever continue to do so. It is still not too late to consult."

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