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We need to remember why Saville was set up

(Jim Gibney, [Irish News](#))

Maurice Hayes has spent his entire life working in the public service. He is an author, a columnist and twice a member of the Irish Senate.

He has a keen intellect and a social conscience and is a close observer of the mood within the nationalist community.

With such a notable background, why did he raise questions about the Saville inquiry into the Bloody Sunday massacre, the cost of that inquiry and whether the money could have been put to better use for relatives of those who lost loved ones in the conflict?

Hayes's remarks, no matter how he couched them, caused great hurt to the families of those killed on Bloody Sunday and to the many thousands of people who have supported the families' campaign for justice and truth.

Hayes's comments fit into a unionist-led campaign against the Saville inquiry.

The choice of venue where Hayes made his speech – a few miles from the scene of the killings – was particularly insensitive.

The 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre was the single biggest killing by the British Crown forces of nationalists since a similar massacre in Croke Park in Dublin in 1920.

The relatives of those killed on Bloody Sunday in 1972 are not responsible for the duration of the Saville inquiry and the consequent costs. Yet they are treated by unionist politicians and sections of the media as if they are.

The relatives' sole concern since January 1972 when the massacre took place is to establish publicly and irrefutably the innocence of those who were killed.

Those commenting on the Saville inquiry need to remember the reason why Saville was set up.

The relatives of those killed on Bloody Sunday not only had

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to absorb the trauma of losing a relative in such violent and shocking circumstances – they also had to deal with their loved ones being criminalised by Lord Widgery, who was appointed to investigate the massacre.

Widgery was an apologist for the actions of the British army on that day. He exonerated them and impugned the innocence of those who died.

His words were every bit as cruel as the bullets that tore through the crowds of peaceful protesters on the streets of Derry.

The relatives of those killed are looking to Saville to right this appalling wrong by comprehensively repudiating Widgery's findings.

Bloody Sunday was a watershed moment in this country's history. It had a huge impact on the conflict.

The people of Derry were devastated by the killing of 14 of its citizens and the injuring of many others. The killings also had a huge impact on the people of this island. Lives were changed forever and not just those families who lost loved ones.

It is impossible to calculate how many people lost their lives in the ensuing conflict here due to Bloody Sunday. The massacre undoubtedly plunged the north into a vortex of violent upheaval.

The civil rights movement, with its non-violent popular appeal, could not and did not survive Bloody Sunday.

For many people and not just republicans, the only answer to the violence of Bloody Sunday was armed insurrection. Hundreds of young people joined the IRA.

The task facing Lord Saville is a formidable one. He is dealing with a very powerful political and military establishment.

We got a glimpse of that last week when a former senior member of the British army, Mike Jackson – who on Bloody Sunday was second in charge of the Paras, the regiment responsible for the massacre – refused to apologise for the killings even though he said he accepted that innocent demonstrators had been shot dead.

Hayes's questioning the efficacy of the Saville inquiry coincided with remarks by Al Hutchinson, the police oversight commissioner, and Chris Patten, whose report led

to the establishment of the PSNI.

Hayes, Hutchinson and Patten are undermining the argument promoted by relatives' organisations that the British Crown forces should be held to account for the killing of civilians during the conflict.

The protracted nature of the Bloody Sunday inquiry, the source of the spiralling costs, resulted from a deliberate attempt by the British government to frustrate the inquiry's efforts to unearth the truth about the massacre.

Maurice Hayes should be careful not to be mixed up in that plan.

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