


[HOME](#)
[History](#)
[NewsoftheIrish](#)
[Book Reviews
& Book Forum](#)
[Search / Archive](#)
[Back to 10/96](#)
[Papers](#)
[Reference](#)
[About](#)
[Contact](#)

Survivor labels McDougall plan a sop to the DUP

(Catherine Morrison, [Irish News](#))

A survivor of a loyalist gun attack in which five people died has said a proposed fund for families of UDR members killed in the Troubles reinforces a "hierarchy of victims".

Mark Sykes was responding to a report by the former Interim Victims' Commissioner Bertha McDougall.

In the 140-page document, Mrs McDougall, whose RUC reservist husband was shot dead in 1981, has made a series of recommendations aimed at helping victims and survivors of the Troubles.

One proposal was for further consideration to be given to the establishment of a fund, similar to the 'police fund', for families of murdered UDR men and women.

Mr Sykes, who survived the Sean Graham bookmakers' shootings on Belfast's Ormeau Road in 1992, said this was a sop to DUP demands.

"Many families find this completely offensive and consequently feel excluded – their experience at the hands of this notorious sectarian organisation not being taken into consideration at all," Mr Sykes, a spokesman for the group Relatives for Justice, said.

"Rather than supporting victims' and survivors' needs across the community equally, Mrs McDougall has managed to resurrect the hierarchy of victims, reinforcing the hurt and pain of so many families affected by state violence."

Mrs McDougall defended her decision to make special provision for UDR families.

"My report has been looking at individual victims," she said yesterday (Thursday).

"I am addressing the needs of everyone. I have said that I based this on need."

Meanwhile, Alan McBride, of victims' group Wave, said

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another recommendation – an annual £2,000 payment to widows and widowers bereaved before 1988 – could be very useful for some families.

"There are questions around it, such as how it will be administered, but it must be welcomed," he said.

"Through my work here, some of the people I have met are in dire straits and this could be very helpful to them."

Sinn Féin general secretary Mitchel McLaughlin said all British government initiatives to date on victims had been "geared towards unionists".

"Bertha McDougall's recommendation that a special fund be established for UDR families underlines the reasons why her appointment was challenged and successfully challenged in the courts," Mr McLaughlin said.

The SDLP's Alban Maginness welcomed the recommendation for a new and better compensation fund for early victims of the Troubles.

However, he said: "A figure of £2,000 a year does not seem to be enough to make a real difference to many of these victims' standard of living.

"If government is to make a real difference it needs to allocate more money to any fund."

Alliance leader David Ford said the report had given a voice to victims and survivors.

"I am glad that this publication gives us a starting point from which to proceed in order to address victims' concerns," he said.

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[BACK TO TOP](#)

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