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Wednesday, January 28, 2009

Time to put hierarchy of Troubles' victims firmly in its place

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NEWTON OPTIC: IT MIGHT seem like an audacious proposal, but giving £12,000 to every family bereaved by the Troubles does not go far enough, writes **NEWTON EMERSON**.

If we really want to abolish the hierarchy of victims then those who claim their loved ones were “innocent” should pay £12,000 to the families of those they presume to call “guilty”.

The Troubles only occurred because certain people felt superior, thereby requiring certain other people to kill them. Permitting superior attitudes to continue via the false consciousness of “innocence” and “guilt” will just store up more problems for the future.

It is therefore imperative that the relatives of these so-called “innocents” are put firmly in their place. Their judgmental arrogance can no longer be tolerated in a post-conflict society still struggling with the legacy of struggle. The only way to bring clarity to this painful period is for all sides to accept that everyone was equally guilty and innocent of everything, except those who felt superior and were thus more equally guilty, or those who suffered imprisonment and are thus less equally guilty.

Despite what the “innocent victims” lobby tries to claim, this is not about implying moral equivalence between people blown up by their own bombs and people blown up by other people’s bombs. This is about implying that morality is more dangerous than bombs. Sentimentality is far, far safer.

For example, are every mother’s tears not equally bitter? Even if every mother’s son is not equally bitter? Naturally, this is not to suggest that a parent bears any responsibility for their son, because that would be superior, judgmental and arrogant. Anyone even thinking such a thing should feel deeply guilty, unless they have killed someone, in which case they should feel deeply innocent at the same time.

But this is all a distraction from the fundamental principle of fining uppity families £12,000, inasmuch as there is such a thing as a fundamental principle. It would obviously be quite wrong, inasmuch as there is such a thing as “wrong”, to treat one section of the bereaved community differently.

Therefore, it is quite right to render every section of that community the same through a compulsory equality-of-outcome adjustment. It is exactly this sort of sophisticated reasoning which reveals that some people are still more sophisticated than others, inasmuch as there is such a thing as "exactly".

The plain fact is that abolishing the hierarchy of victims means abolishing the hierarchy of bereavement, which in turn means establishing a hierarchy of four victims commissioners, a legacy commission, the Community Relations Council and anyone else who can get their snout in the trough.

Truth is the ultimate objective of this exercise. The truth is that once this exercise is under way it will ultimately sideline everyone who objects to it. The question of arms took many years to resolve and the legacy of the past will be no different. Some day we will look back on these issues and realise that they cost us all an arm and a legacy.

Meanwhile, we must insist that elitist bereavement costs £12,000. We must also insist that any relatives imprisoned for non-payment do not apply for ex-prisoner's funding upon their release.

That would be completely outrageous.

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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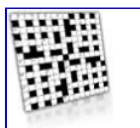
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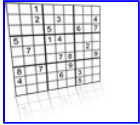
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