Eames-Bradley payments termed a 'mistake' by SF

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DAN KEENAN, Northern News Editor

A SINN FÉIN Minister has branded the Eames-Bradley proposal to offer a £12,000 payment to all families bereaved in the Troubles “a mistake”.

Gerry Kelly, a Stormont junior minister, says it was “unfortunate” the Eames-Bradley group, which was tasked with examining means to deal with the legacy of the conflict, “fell down” on the issue of the £12,000 payment.

In an interview with BBC News 24 to be broadcast tonight, Mr Kelly criticises the proposal, suggesting instead that families really want access to the truth.

The British government had a particular responsibility to divulge that truth, he added.

He accepted that Denis Bradley and Lord [Robin] Eames had made it clear the payment was not compensation and that it was being proposed simply in recognition of the loss felt by all the bereaved.

“They said it was in acknowledgement of the suffering across the board,” Mr Kelly said.

“I think personally that it was a mistake. It’s easy in hindsight to say that, but clearly it was a mistake because it caused so much controversy.”

He added: “The real issue is that there has to be truth . . . What people want to know is the truth and that’s on all sides. There are many different views on what would bring peace to people’s minds who have lost loved ones. But the one thing which goes through it all is the simple issue of truth. They want to know what happened. There are some
people who want prosecutions, some people may want compensation, other people may want people going to court.”

He called on the British government to admit its role in the deaths of many during the conflict.

“The British government has a great responsibility in producing truth because they have the archives, they have the information,” he said.

“What they should do is open it up. People who complain about the millions that are paid over the Saville inquiry [into Bloody Sunday] – it wouldn’t be necessary if the files were opened up.”

The criticisms are the strongest yet from Sinn Féin.

Party president Gerry Adams, speaking on the day last month of the unveiling of the Eames-Bradley findings, criticised the proposal for a legacy commission rather than the £12,000 payment.

He said such a body “appointed by the British government” was “not the independent and international commission established by a reputable international body like the UN that Sinn Féin believes is necessary”.

The Pat Finucane Centre in Derry, which raises victims’ issues, said: “For us, the important thing is the truth recovery, it isn’t about a one-off payment.” “It is a horrible discussion,” said the centre’s Paul O’Connor, “it is just about money.”

Unionists have also criticised the payment suggestion, arguing that it equated “the terrorist and the terrorised”.

DUP leader and First Minister Peter Robinson said the proposal was “a betrayal”.

The British and Irish governments have given the report by the former Church of Ireland primate and the former Policing Board chairman a cautious welcome.

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