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Shaun

Woodward: decided to reject controversial proposal

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GERRY MORIARTY, Northern Editor

LORD EAMES and Denis Bradley have stood by their proposal for a £12,000 “recognition payment” to the families of everyone killed in the Troubles despite yesterday’s decision by Northern Ireland Secretary of State Shaun Woodward to reject the recommendation.

During tense exchanges at a House of Commons committee yesterday, DUP MP David Simpson also accused Mr Bradley of working to a personal agenda in helping draw up the report.

Lord Eames and Mr Bradley trenchantly defended their report. They insisted that while Mr Woodward had ruled out the payment inevitably it would come “back on the table”.

The payment would have been paid to everyone bereaved during the conflict, even if they were related to republican or loyalist paramilitaries or to those involved in killings involving official collusion. Mr Woodward said he decided to reject the controversial proposal because it had not achieved any form of political or public consensus.

“It is my view, having studied this very carefully, that very clearly there is huge disagreement about this particular proposal. I therefore think it would be helpful to make it clear that the government’s response to the Eames-Bradley report will not include accepting that recommendation,” he said.

Mr Woodward went on BBC Radio Ulster’s Stephen Nolan programme yesterday morning to announce his decision, just hours before the joint heads of the Consultative Group on the Past were questioned on their report by the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. Former Church of Ireland primate Lord Eames and former vice-chairman of the policing board Mr Bradley said they were not told Mr Woodward would be taking such a decision and announcing it on radio.

DUP MP and committee member David Simpson, in questioning Mr Bradley’s bona fides, described the report as “obnoxious” and “contaminated” by the £12,000 payment.

He added, “Lord Eames buried four of my family and when I look at the detail of this report I am somewhat disappointed, Lord Eames, that your fingerprints and thumbprints are all over this.

“I can’t say that, I have to say, with Mr Bradley because I believe that Mr Bradley, before going on to this group and in this group, had an agenda and I believe that when you read this report he has certainly got his agenda.”

SDLP MP Dr Alasdair McDonnell stood up to protest at the comments. Chairman Sir Patrick Cormack said he would not countenance attacks on a person’s integrity. Mr Bradley did not respond to this criticism but afterwards said he thought the politicians had dealt “obnoxiously, to use a word that was used earlier on” with the issue. “I think they have led people to bad places. I think they keep fighting this issue. I think that they keep using it as a reason for the fight to continue to go on,” he said.

“Thank God the violence is gone. But I think that this one actually faces you, faces all of us, with the issue of reconciling ourselves to a new place, of moving forward, and recognising that a mother’s tears is a mother’s tears no matter where they exist,” he added.

Lord Eames said that if they had not made the proposal they would have been “breaking faith” with those who called for such a payment, people who were of the “voiceless community”.

Mr Bradley said that while Mr Woodward had rejected the proposal, inevitably it would come on the table again. “You do not punish the victims and the victims’ definition is very clear: it is those who were bereaved and if you

do not grasp that nettle then you cannot really move forward to a new place.”

Mr Bradley also said he respected but disagreed with Belfast lawyer, Peter Smith QC, who in yesterday’s Irish Times said the Eames-Bradley proposals relating to truth recovery could threaten an individual’s “basic courtroom rights to face his or her accuser, and to challenge them by means of questioning their lawyer” and “would give rise to grave disquiet” among lawyers and human rights activists.

“I think his interpretation of the report is wrong,” said Mr Bradley. “In the truth recovery [proposals] there is no placing of blame on any individual. That is clear in the report: there is placing of blame on organisations and that is completely different.”

This article appears in the print edition of the Irish Times

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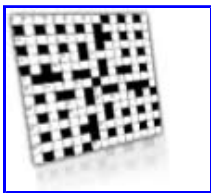
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