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# Tories reject proposal for 'blood money' payouts

Henry McDonald and Gaby Hinsliff  
The Observer, Sunday 25 January 2009

A conservative government would scrap proposals from a key working group to award what terrorist victims' families have labelled "blood money" to the relatives of paramilitaries killed in Northern Ireland's Troubles, amid signs of growing reservations within government over such compensation.

The Tories told the Observer they would not support recommendations from the Consultative Group on the Past, which include offering £12,000 to the families of everyone who died in the conflict, because it would include IRA and loyalist gunmen and bombers.

Downing Street sources declined to comment on the report before it is published this week. But it is understood that while Shaun Woodward, the Northern Ireland Secretary, will study the findings, there is concern in government about the difficulty of securing agreement for such a plan and about its cost during tough economic times.

"A lot of questions will be asked including: is there a consensus?" said a senior Whitehall source. "And with the best will in the world, we want to do the right thing, but anyone has got to think about the economic climate now: taxpayers would expect it."

Relatives of some of those murdered by paramilitary groups have described the compensation idea, in the report written by the former head of the Anglican Church of Ireland Dr Robin Eames and ex-Policing Board deputy Denis Bradley, as "dirty blood money".

Seamus Mallon, Northern Ireland's former Deputy First Minister, said there was "something really wrong" with the concept. "It really cheapens the whole thing," he added at the SDLP party's annual conference in Armagh yesterday.

Responding to reports of the group's findings, the Tories' shadow Northern Ireland secretary Owen Paterson said: "I look forward to reading the full report next week, but I cannot support this proposal to reward all victims indiscriminately. Those people who used quite vicious violence against innocent civilians and members of the legally established security forces cannot be put on the same level as other victims." Paterson confirmed that if the scheme was about to run when the Tories took power, they would scrap it.

Activist Raymond McCord, whose son, also called Raymond, was murdered by the UVF in 1997, has described the Eames-Bradley plan as "a deep insult to the real, innocent victims of the Troubles". McCord, whose campaign to bring his son's killers to justice exposed a web of collusion between the UVF gang and RUC Special Branch, said at the SDLP conference he would refuse the money if it meant that families of killers received the same compensation, adding: "This is the equivalent of the American government setting up a fund for the victims of the 9/11 atrocities and making sure that the families of the suicide-hijackers get compensation as well."

However, SDLP leader Mark Durkan declined to condemn the proposals. "We appreciate the work of their group on such a vexed and sensitive area," he said. "We encourage all other parties to give it honest and honourable thinking space."

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