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Contents

Assembly Business

Resignation of Dr William McCrea.....143

Ministerial Statement

British-Irish Council Summit: 25 June 2010.....143

Executive Committee Business

Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Bill: Second Stage151

Housing (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill: Second Stage.....175

Welfare Reform Bill: Final Stage190

Private Members' Business

Victims and Survivors (Disqualification) Bill201

Adjournment

Reavey Family Murders, January 1976202

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Northern Ireland Assembly

Wednesday 30 June 2010

The Assembly met at 10.30 am (Mr Speaker in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

Assembly Business

Resignation of Dr William McCrea

Mr Speaker: I have received a letter from Dr William McCrea, notifying me that he will resign as a Member of the Assembly with effect from Thursday 1 July 2010. I have notified the Chief Electoral Officer.

Ministerial Statement

British-Irish Council Summit: 25 June 2010

Mr Speaker: I have received notice from the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister that the First Minister wishes to make a statement.

The First Minister (Mr P Robinson): In accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, I wish to report on the fourteenth summit meeting of the British-Irish Council, which was held in Guernsey on 25 June 2010. All Northern Ireland Ministers who attended the summit have agreed that I should make the statement to the Assembly on their behalf.

The States of Guernsey hosted the summit. The heads of delegations were welcomed by the Chief Minister of Guernsey, Deputy Lyndon Trott. The Irish Government were represented by the Taoiseach, Brian Cowen TD, and the United Kingdom Government by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt Hon Owen Paterson MP. The Welsh Assembly Government were represented by the First Minister for Wales, the Rt Hon Carwyn Jones AM. The Scottish Government were represented by the First Minister for Scotland, the Rt Hon Alex Salmond MSP. The Government of Jersey were represented by the Chief Minister, Senator Terence Le Sueur, and the Isle of Man Government were represented by the Chief Minister, Tony Brown MHK. In addition to the deputy First Minister and me, the Northern Ireland delegation consisted of Minister Poots, Minister Attwood and junior Minister Newton. A full list of participants is attached to the statement that has been provided to Members.

The British-Irish Council plays a unique and important role in furthering, promoting and developing links between its member

[pages 144 – 200 deleted]

need who are entitled to the benefits. Therefore, I will take the compliment, but I will note the criticism, because you are playing both sides of the fence, and that ill serves people who need all Members to be on the right side of the fence.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Welfare Reform Bill [NIA 13/09] do now pass.

4.15 pm

Private Members' Business

Victims and Survivors (Disqualification) Bill

Mr Deputy Speaker: The next item of business is the First Stage of the Victims and Survivors (Disqualification) Bill. I call Mr Peter Weir.

Mr Weir: Mr Deputy Speaker, due to technical issues that have been raised with me and that require clarification, it is now my intention to bring the Bill forward in autumn 2010. Consequently, the First Stage of the Bill is not introduced.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The First Stage of the Victims and Survivors (Disqualification) Bill has not been introduced.

Motion made:

That the Assembly do now adjourn. — [Mr Deputy Speaker.]

Adjournment

Reavey Family Murders, January 1976

Mr Deputy Speaker: I remind Members that the proposer of the topic will have 15 minutes in which to speak. All other Members will have approximately eight minutes.

Mr D Bradley: Go raibh míle maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. Gabhaim buíochas leis an Choiste Gnó as an am a thabhairt domh a bheith páirteach sa díospóireacht seo. I thank the Business Committee for providing the time for the Assembly to debate this important issue.

John Martin Reavey, aged 24, and his brother Brian, aged 22, were murdered in their home on 4 January 1976. Gunmen broke into their home near Whitecross and sprayed the living room with bullets, killing John Martin instantly. Brian tried to escape. However, he made it only to the bedroom door before he, too, was murdered.

Anthony Reavey, who was 17 years old, threw himself under a bed for protection, but was shot and left for dead. Seriously wounded, he managed to crawl from the house to try to raise the alarm at a neighbour's house. Having survived for some weeks, Anthony later died.

I know the Reavey family well. I am aware that other Members of the House also know the family. They are a highly respected family in south Armagh. When that dreadful deed happened, no one in the locality could understand why the family had been targeted and attacked.

On the same night, another Catholic family, the O'Dowd family, who lived at Ballydugan near Gilford, was also attacked. Three members of that family were murdered. They were Joseph O'Dowd, aged 61, and his two nephews Barry, aged 24, and Declan, aged 19. Barney O'Dowd, the father of the two boys, was seriously injured. As it happens, all of them were SDLP members. They are related to Mr O'Dowd, Member for Upper Bann.

A group comprising loyalist paramilitaries who acted in collusion with members of the police

force, the RUC Reserve and the UDR, known as the Glenanne gang, was responsible for at least 18 gun and bomb attacks, in which 58 people were murdered. That group had its headquarters in the farm of James Mitchell, who is now deceased, which was situated just outside the village of Glenanne, around two miles from where the Reavey family lived. One of the gang's members, former RUC sergeant John Weir, confessed to his part in its activities and exposed the gang's members. I have already dealt in detail with the activities, victims and membership of that gang in a previous speech that I made in the House on 24 May 2010. The gang was responsible for the murder of the Reavey brothers, the O'Dowds, and many others.

On the day following his sons' murders, their father Mr Jimmy Reavey appealed that there be no retaliation for his sons' deaths. Unfortunately, that appeal fell on deaf ears. That night, the murders continued. Ten Protestant workers, who were on their way home in the mill works' minibus, were murdered by a group that called itself the South Armagh Republican Action Force. The bus was stopped by a group of armed men who were dressed in camouflage jackets. Richard Hughes, who was the only Catholic on the bus, was picked out of the group and told to run up the road.

Many of his fellow workers, with the murders of the Reaveys from the previous night in mind, thought that he was to be the victim and tried to shield him. Richard was spared, because of his religion. His fellow workers were sprayed with bullets until all except one lay dead on the road. Alan Black from Bessbrook was the only one to survive.

I knew most of those who were murdered that night. They were from my native village of Bessbrook; I played football with some of them in the pond field. They were ordinary working-class people returning home after doing a day's work. I also played football with members of the Reavey family. Brian Reavey was a student at the same school that I attended, St Paul's in Bessbrook, where he was renowned as the top sportsman of his year group. His younger brother Anthony was also a talented footballer. Those young people had many things in common.

When the Kingsmill massacre was taking place, the Reavey family were on their way to Daisy Hill Hospital in Newry to bring home the remains of their murdered brothers. They came across

the scene of the massacre at Kingsmill, and one of the surviving brothers helped to divert traffic from that terrible scene. On reaching the hospital, Eugene Reavey, in the midst of his grief, did what any decent person would do: he went to the room in which the relatives of the Kingsmill victims had gathered, introduced himself and offered the condolences of his family to the victims.

Anthony Reavey became friends with Alan Black, who was one of the two survivors of the Kingsmill massacre, when both were in hospital recovering from their wounds. Alan was broken-hearted when he heard that Anthony Reavey had died on 30 January 1976. The original verdict at his inquest was one of death by natural causes, but that was later changed to an open verdict.

There was no real investigation of the Reavey murders, and the family was left to try to come to terms with the murders without any help whatsoever from those in authority. That was the case until Commander Dave Cox of the Historical Enquiries Team (HET) investigated the murders. Difficult as it was to come to terms with the murders, it was made even more difficult by a statement that was made by a Member of this House, Dr Paisley, in another place on 27 January 1999. He said:

"It is interesting to note that a police dossier carefully prepared on the Kingsmill massacre has recently come to light."

Dr Paisley continued:

"According to the dossier, Eugene Reavey, a well-known republican, 'set up the Kingsmill massacre'".

The Reavey family have been victims of collusion, not once, but twice: first, when three members of the family were murdered by the UVF, acting in collusion with elements of the security forces; and, secondly, nearly a quarter of a century later, when the name of one of the surviving brothers, Eugene, was blackened under the shield of parliamentary privilege. None of those accusations was true. Former RUC Chief Constable Ronnie Flanagan said that no police file contained any such allegation. Immediately upon hearing that report, the sole survivor of the Kingsmill massacre, Alan Black, phoned Eugene Reavey's home and told him that he knew that what Dr Paisley had said could not be true.

More recently, the HET has stated definitively that neither Eugene Reavey, his murdered

brothers, nor any member of his family had any connections with any paramilitary grouping or crime. Therefore, one must ask why Dr Paisley said what he said. Where did the supposed dossier come from? Who would have a motive to create it and plant it on a gullible MP? Dr Paisley did not question the provenance of the dossier, so he must have believed that it came from an authoritative police source, of which he has utilised many over his long political career.

Therefore, decades after the actual collusion, it seems that well-placed persons were still in action, covering up crimes and spreading lies and malicious slander that were based on tittle-tattle in an attempt to justify organised, systematic sectarian murder on a large scale.

The Reavey family are as satisfied as people in their circumstances can be with what the Historical Enquiries Team has done. However, one thing still rankles with them: the false allegation that Dr Paisley made against their brother Eugene. They would like to see that slur removed in their now 88-year-old mother's lifetime. It is not too much to ask. Eugene Reavey has written to Dr Paisley on several occasions, but he has received no reply. Dr Paisley is aware of the situation.

The Reavey family want no recompense other than to see the record set straight and their brother's name cleared. It is within Dr Paisley's gift to respond positively to the request from an 88-year-old mother and grandmother and her surviving sons and daughters, whether that is done in a face-to-face private meeting, in the House of Lords when he takes his seat there, or by whatever means with which Dr Paisley feels most comfortable. Ian Paisley is known as "The Big Man". He now has the opportunity to show that he is big, not just in stature but in heart and mind. I hope that, for the sake of Sadie Reavey, he takes that opportunity.

Many people died in south Armagh during the Troubles, and I want to remember them all here today, from whatever background they came. I hope sincerely that their loved ones get the truth that they deserve. I ask the House to join me in that sentiment and to recognise the innocence of the murdered Reavey brothers and the whole Reavey family. I ask the House to join me in urging Dr Paisley to do the right thing by the Reavey family. Perhaps, too, the Chief Constable, Mr Baggott, could take time

out of his busy schedule to visit Mrs Reavey and apologise in person on behalf of the police.

I am glad to welcome members of the Reavey family who have come here today to hear this debate. I trust that other Members who participate in the debate will do so in the spirit in which I have entered into it.

Mr Boylan: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I apologise on behalf of Conor Murphy, the MP and an MLA for Newry and Armagh, who cannot be here because of another engagement. I thank Dominic Bradley for securing the debate, and I welcome the opportunity to speak on the matter. I got to know the Reavey family through my previous job, and I got the opportunity to work with and know people in the communities in Whitecross, Drumnahunshin, Greyhillan and Glenanne. Those people treated me well, and I want to put my appreciation for that on record.

I also want to put on record that the three members of the Reavey family — John Martin, Brian and Anthony — who were gunned down in cold blood at Greyhillan, Whitecross on 4 January 1976, were completely innocent. They were ordinary people who became victims of collusion that was carried out by members of the RUC, UDR, UVF and British intelligence. Part of that group became known as the notorious Glenanne gang.

I do not propose to repeat everything that Dominic Bradley said. Instead, I want to concentrate on the broader picture, which is closely linked to the murders of members of the Reavey family in Whitecross.

The murders of the Reavey family were not carried out in isolation. That notorious gang carried out a number of atrocities, and I would like to speak, if I may, on some of those incidents, such as the bomb at the Step Inn Bar in Keady, the shooting at the Rock Bar in Granemore outside Keady and the attacks on Donnelly's Bar in Silverbridge and Tully's Bar in Belleeks.

I want to put it on record that I had the privilege as a young boy of working as a paper boy for the McGleenan family, who owned a paper shop. One of their sons was killed in the Step Inn bomb. On the evening of Monday 16 August 1976, a no-warning bomb exploded outside the Step Inn in St Patrick Street in Keady, which is commonly known as Chapel Street. There were 15 to 20 people in the bar at that time. A blue

Ford Cortina hijacked three days earlier from the Shankill Road had been packed with more than 200 lb of explosives and was parked against the gable wall of the bar.

I want to put those events in context so that Members can understand. Paddy McGleenan's son and James McDonald's wife were killed in that attack. Those two men would have walked around and checked the streets for suspicious cars. The car that was stolen on the Shankill Road had been fitted with Armagh plates, so no remarks would have been passed on it. The bar owner, James McDonald, told the inquest that he had also noticed that street lights in Chapel Street had been turned off when he left the bar. It was common practice in those days for the lights —

4.30 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. The Member is straying way off the topic of the debate. I ask him to return to the substance of the debate, which is the murder of the Reavey brothers.

Mr Boylan: I was just setting the context so that Members have a clear understanding, but I take your point, Mr Deputy Speaker. Betty McDonald, who was 32 years old and the mother of three young children, was in the bar when the bomb exploded. Her husband found her lying behind the bar after the explosion with their youngest child standing over her, crying. Gerald McGleenan, who was 22 years old, was standing outside his home opposite the Step Inn in Chapel Street when the bomb exploded. He was hit by shrapnel and died within minutes. A keen hurler, he had played in the county senior final the week before his death. Members of the team were pallbearers at his funeral.

Some 22 other people were injured in the blast, including a pregnant woman. Her unborn baby survived uninjured, only to be shot dead —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I have to remind the Member to come back to the substance of the debate. I know that you are trying to put the debate into context, but the matter that is being debated is the murder of the Reavey brothers. I ask the Member to take that into consideration.

Mr Boylan: With your indulgence, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am trying to set that murder in context because it did not happen in isolation. I said that at the very start.

Mr T Clarke: When the Member is putting things in context, will he acknowledge the complete context of murders in Northern Ireland, some of which his party and members of his party committed? If we are to stray off the topic for debate, which is the murder of the Reavey family, perhaps the Member will focus on the murders that some of his comrades conducted.

Mr Boylan: I am putting in context exactly what happened at the time. The murder of the Reaveys did not happen in isolation; it was joined together with operations carried out perhaps over a 12-month period. That is what I want to talk about today, because I am well aware —

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand what the Member is saying, but the substance of the debate is the murder of the Reavey brothers; therefore, the main part of a speech should be about that. If the Member wishes to talk about the entire context of that period, he is at liberty to table a motion for debate in the House at another time.

Mr Boylan: Thank you very much for that guidance. I am just speaking about what happened at Greyhillan, Whitecross. There is a connection between what happened to the Reavey brothers in Whitecross and other incidents in south Armagh in that year. I want to put into context some of the cases where some of the weapons that were used in the murder of the Reaveys were also used in the murder and attempted murder of other people in south Armagh. Look at the unfortunate incident of two GAA supporters shot dead in Altnamackan, coming home from Dublin. It was proved that the 9 mm Luger that was used in the double murder had been used in other incidents. That is why I have to put what happened at that time into context. I referred to the bombing of the Step Inn because this gang was all part of that. We cannot deny what happened at that time.

It started in December 1975 in Donnelly's in Silverbridge. Unfortunately, the Reavey brothers were then killed in January 1976, and it continued for six months. It is clearly stated in the records and reports that the same weapons were used in a number of those incidents. That is why I wanted to bring that up today. The weapons that were used on the Reaveys were also used in the attack on the Rock Bar in Granemore, when Michael McGrath was shot in the stomach. The same weapons were shown

to be used and the same people involved as in the crimes committed against the Reaveys in Whitecross. That is why I am bringing that up today. I want Members to recognise that. There was an attempted murder in the Rock Bar in Granemore in June 1976, as well.

There is strong evidence that those attacks were carried out by what became known as the infamous Glenanne gang, which — whether or not people like to recognise it — was state-sponsored and state-led terrorism. The gang was a consortium of UDR, RUC and UVF personnel supported by military and British intelligence. It is due to the involvement of state bodies that the murders of the Reavey brothers and many other people, some of whom I have spoken about today, have never been resolved. That has blackened not only the characters of some of those families and some of the people in that area but the area itself.

In a debate earlier today, some Member was encouraging us to go to Dungannon and talking about the civic reception and civic issues and about what they were doing in Dungannon. I want to put south Armagh in that context, because the character of that area has been blackened, and that is not right. Atrocities have happened on both sides, and my party has stood up and said that it is willing to move forward and to work together on that issue. However, Members must recognise exactly what happened during that time, and I tried to set that in context. I will finish by saying that that situation must change.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member should draw his remarks to a close.

Mr Boylan: I hope that the families and people of south Armagh, some of whom are in the Public Gallery today, find out the truth, receive an apology and get the recognition that they deserve.

Mr Kennedy: Clearly, very strong emotions are attached to the issue. I recognise Mr Bradley's right to table this topic for Adjournment debate. Unfortunately, Mr Boylan's contribution has not helped to deal with many of the issues involved.

Mr T Clarke: I thank the Member for giving way. He referred to the contribution of Mr Boylan, who suggested that the people concerned should get the apology that they are due. I have no problem with that. However, does the Member agree with me that Sinn Féin should

also apologise for the cowardly murders that it carried out in the same period?

Mr O'Dowd: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. The political party of which I am proud to be a member has not been responsible for the murder of anyone. I can understand that there are strong emotions in the Chamber, as Mr Kennedy said. However, we must not let the debate degenerate into a slanging match.

Mr Deputy Speaker: The Member is quite right, and I thank him for that point of order. Sinn Féin is a political party and was not responsible for any murders in itself.

Mr T Clarke: I accept that ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker. I should have said, "the members of Sinn Féin who were convicted of murder". Does the Member agree with the point that I have just made?

Mr Kennedy: The Member makes an important point, and I hope to address the issues involved as I progress with my speech.

The early and mid-1970s were a truly dreadful time in the south Armagh area and, more particularly, in Whitecross and Newtownhamilton. It involved the murders of security force personnel and ordinary individuals who were caught up in a cycle that was mostly tit-for-tat deaths. The murders created an atmosphere of fear and distrust that stalked the region, and the consequences were severe. Lives were taken, lives were broken, and lives were changed for ever. In the south Armagh area, which I am proud to represent, we live and deal with that legacy today. Therefore, I do not want the debate to descend into a tribal jamboree of blame, counterblame and "whataboutery". However, it is important to put into context some of the events that all of us struggle to come to terms with and make sense of. None of those events should have happened.

It is my belief that the three Reavey brothers, Brian, John Martin and Anthony, who died some weeks later, were murdered in a very cruel and callous manner and were entirely innocent victims. I place that on record and have no doubt of that in my mind. On the same evening, just outside Gilford, members of the O'Dowd family were also murdered in the cycle of tit-for-tat deaths that was so common throughout County Armagh and other places in Northern Ireland.

From the early to mid-70s, particularly in the Whitecross/Newtownhamilton area, there was a series of murders, particularly of security force personnel, atrocities such as the murder of five Orangemen at Tullyvallen Orange Hall on 1 September 1975 and individual murders. Today, we heard allegations about who was responsible for those. It is alleged by some, as was repeated today in the Chamber, that members of the security forces were involved in that collusion. However, it is my belief that no substantial proof has been provided to justify those remarks.

We also heard about politicians' intemperate remarks. I draw to the attention of the House the remarks made by a former deputy First Minister, Séamus Mallon, who, after the murder of two individuals returning from a GAA match in the Republic of Ireland, said that loyalist assassins were operating within the UDR in Newtownhamilton. That was a highly provocative statement that has caused great offence down through the years and continues to do so. All politicians have a responsibility to remember that what we say, how we behave and how we react can have significant influence.

We already heard from Mr Bradley about the Kingsmill massacre, which is close to my heart, given that I knew nine of the individuals and their families and continue to try to assist those who were caught up in that massacre. That had a profound effect on the village of Bessbrook and the wider area, which is still felt to this day. I say again that none of that should have happened.

4.45 pm

This debate revolves around a single event, when three innocent people were gunned down in cold blood. That event was not justified by anything, but neither was it isolated. Within 24 hours, 16 people died who should not have died. The previous year, 207 people died who should not have died; and 300 other people were to die in 1976 following the events of January 1976. None of that should have happened.

I live in the area of those deaths. I was a teenager at the time, and I know the effect that they had on myself and my community. I now live some three miles from the original Reavey home and, therefore, even less distance from the scene of the Kingsmill massacre. I travel on that road very often, and I always, always reflect on the events of January 1976 and the fearful

consequences with which so many families have had to deal.

The critical thing is that none of it should have happened. We have, of course, real concerns that, if we are asked to provide inquiries similar to the Saville Inquiry, it will simply create a hierarchy of deaths as we look back. Everyone in Northern Ireland wants to try to look forward, yet to remember the mistakes of the past and to be sure to take account and take care of the victims. Therefore, as we study those complex issues and pay attention to those so badly affected and although we should acknowledge the past, it is time for us to strive to move forward and create the better and shared future that all our people need and deserve.

Mr Brady: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. I, too, welcome the debate secured by Mr Bradley. I also welcome members of the Reavey family here today.

We have to keep it in mind that we are talking about the brutal murder of innocent people. As someone from Newry and not that far from Whitecross when it happened, I remember the aftermath vividly. Mr Kennedy alluded to the Kingsmill massacre. I, too, knew people who were killed and murdered in that. I knew the Chapman brothers through football and darts, and I know Alan Black, who fortunately survived, even though he was shot 18 times.

Recompense has been mentioned. I know Mrs Reavey well. As has been said, she is 88 years of age. She reared a family that was extremely respectable, well-got and popular in our area. I went to school with Eugene Reavey, albeit a couple of years behind him, and I am sure that he will not mind me saying that. It was a family that was never, to anyone's knowledge, involved in anything nefarious, as has been alleged. Allegations were made against Eugene in particular.

The family wants justice in the sense of real justice. They simply want the record put straight. The Glenanne gang was alluded to, and its activities are well documented. Other Members spoke about murders by other groups. What we are talking about here is murder by people who were entrusted with upholding the law. Therein lies the difference. We are constantly berated in this Chamber by Members talking about the upholders of the law and the people who stood in the front line against terrorism and all the rest of it. Sometimes, people need to stand

up and put their hands up and say, "Yes, that happened; it did happen".

The Reavey family is not looking for anything but an admission. Indeed, the Historical Enquiries Team, as Dominic Bradley alluded to, has accepted fully that the Reavey brothers were innocent. Everybody in Newry and the surrounding area of south Armagh knew that the Reavey brothers were innocent, as, indeed, were the O'Dowds and the other people murdered in Donnelly's bar at Silverbridge and the people at Kingsmill.

All that anyone is asking is for that to be put in context.

I agree with Mr Kennedy that these things should not have happened, but the fact is that they did. We need to move on, but there are families such as the Reaveys who have to live with this every single day. Eugene Reavey's name has been blackened, and all that he wants is a simple apology. I see no problem with that. Dr Paisley rose in the British Parliament, using parliamentary privilege, and cast scurrilous allegations against Eugene Reavey. It is time that that was put to rest. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a LeasCheann Comhairle. The date of 4 January is marked indelibly on my mind. As a young lad of eight and a half years, I remember sitting on a Sunday evening watching television with my family. As in many rural homes, the whole family had packed into the room to watch the Sunday evening film. A knock came at the door. Even at that young age, we were under strict instructions not to open the front door unless we knew who was there. I looked out through the window to our yard where I saw a number of my cousins standing in what, even to me at that young age, was recognisable as a distressed state. I opened the door and my next memories are of my mother and father crying for the first time that I can remember at the news of the deaths of my cousin Barry, 24; Declan, 18; and my uncle Joe, who was in his 60s.

At that age, all those things do not immediately sink in but, as the night wore on, I became aware that another family had been visited by the same heartache and horror: the Reaveys. There is a connection with any family that loses a loved one: the horror, the pain and all that goes with it. I know that Members opposite have lost loved ones in similarly horrible circumstances. Their pain is no different from

any other family's, whether we are talking about innocent civilians, republican activists or members of one of the British services who lost their lives during the conflict. The pain to a family member is no different.

The connection between the Reaveys and the O'Dowds is that the same gang carried out the killings. I can understand Mr Kennedy's defence of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, and I accept that many people joined the Ulster Defence Regiment because they believed that they were doing the right thing. In their minds, they were serving all sections of the community. However, it is undeniable — beyond undeniable — that senior members of the Glenanne gang were also members of the Ulster Defence Regiment, the RUC and British military intelligence. To deny that does not serve the memory of anyone, whether they be former members of the British forces who believed that they were serving honourably and doing the right thing, or the victims of that gang.

Mr Kennedy: Does the Member accept that it is comparatively easy to make allegations without producing serious and credible evidence and that a great many families whose relatives served in the security forces will feel deeply offended by statements made not only in the course of this debate but in the past, and that some account should be given to substantiate some of the allegations that have been made?

Mr O'Dowd: I do not wish to cause offence to anyone's family, but there is evidence. The Barron Inquiry, a thorough investigation of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, showed that they were carried out by the Glenanne gang. That inquiry identified members of the gang as members of the British Army, the RUC, the UDR and British intelligence agencies. We have a statement from a former member of the gang who was a sergeant in the RUC. A Mr McCaughey was both a member of the gang and a member of the RUC. I do not say that to offend people who have lost loved ones or anyone else; I say it because the truth needs to be told.

Why did Dr Paisley stand up in the British House of Commons and make those allegations against Eugene Reavey? It is well known that Mr Reavey is not a prominent republican, nor a republican in the sense that was presented to the British Parliament.

Why blacken Eugene Reavey's name? Was it an attempt to divert attention away from the growing media and political interest in exactly what the Glenanne gang was about? Who was the motivating force behind the Glenanne gang and the atrocities that it carried out in south Armagh? Was that why such a prominent politician as Dr Paisley stood up in Westminster and read out a statement which was factually incorrect and had no basis in reality whatsoever? Perhaps Mr Paisley believed it at the time. Mr Bradley said that the information was given to Mr Paisley, in his terms, by a reliable source. However, surely Mr Paisley cannot stand over it now.

There is no basis to the allegations made against Eugene Reavey or the Reavey family. It not only reflects on the Reavey family and on my relatives who were killed that night, but casts murkiness over that whole episode. Neither does it do any justice to those people who were gunned down mercilessly at Kingsmill. The families of the people murdered at Kingsmill deserve to know the truth about the people who lined them up against a bus and shot them dead that night. If allegations are being made against Eugene Reavey, or anyone else, that are untrue, it does not assist the quest for truth for the families of the Kingsmill victims either.

I remember sitting in my mother's sister's house near Lurgan the following night, when the news of the Kingsmill massacre came through. The same horror that I witnessed the night before in my family home was witnessed in that home as well, because people were appalled at what had happened. I join the call for Dr Paisley to withdraw the comments he made about Eugene Reavey in order to allow Mrs Reavey, in her last years, to know that her family has been completely vindicated, and to set the record straight.

Mr Kennedy said that we cannot go through the expensive processes of Saville, etc. The Saville report would never have been necessary if the truth had not been hidden. If we just let the truth about many of those things out, there will be no need to go down the road of Saville. Give families such as the Reaveys the truth around the circumstances in which their loved ones were killed. The Reaveys and the O'Dowd family were killed to strike terror into the Catholic community.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: Just let me finish this point.

The Kingsmill victims were killed to strike terror into the Protestant community. The circumstances around all those killings were wrong and the killings of individuals were wrong.

Mr Kennedy: I am grateful to the Member for giving way. How does he think that we can achieve truth for the families of the Kingsmill victims?

Mr O'Dowd: It is not up to me to dictate what the Kingsmill families want. They may want continuing custodial justice around those sorts of things. I believe that a fully independent, international truth inquiry would allow families such as those of the victims of Kingsmill, and other families who have never had the full truth around the death of their loved ones, to have the truth delivered to them. I am not saying that that is all that the Kingsmill families deserve. It is up to the Kingsmill families to decide what level they want to go to.

The reason why I support the peace process and will stand against those people who are trying to drag us into the past is that, as a young boy, I buried my neighbours and my friends, like so many other people did. I am not going back there. I am not letting anyone else drag us back into that society, because we all deserve better.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Orders, an Adjournment debate is to last for one hour. We have already had 45 minutes, and I have to allow 10 minutes for the Minister of Justice to respond. I therefore call Mr Alban Maginness to speak for five minutes.

Mr A Maginness: I apologise for not being here earlier, but I had other duties to attend to. I followed a large part of the debate on a monitor.

There are three points to be made. The first is that there is unequivocal recognition in the House of the innocence of the Reavey brothers and family. I think that that is of great comfort to the family. The fact that the Assembly says that without equivocation is very important to the family. The general recognition that this House has given to the Reavey brothers' innocence is very important; it is a significant decision on the part of the House.

5.00 pm

Although everyone that we are talking about was a victim of terrorism and, in particular, of

sectarian and counter-sectarian violence, it has to be said that the slur on Eugene Reavey occasioned by Dr Paisley speaking in the House of Commons and associating him with the Kingsmill massacre hurt very deeply. It behoves all of us in this House to encourage Dr Paisley — who has made hard political decisions that nobody would have countenanced in his political life — who is big in stature, personality and persona to become an even bigger man by admitting to his error in so describing Mr Reavey in the House of Commons. This House should urge him to resile from what he said in the House of Commons. That would go a long way towards reconciling the Reavey family, particularly Mr Reavey and his mother, who, I think, would gracefully accept such a retraction.

I take issue with what Mr Kennedy said about Seamus Mallon. Seamus Mallon spoke with knowledge about what had occurred. There is no equivalence between what was said by Mr Mallon and by Mr Paisley, and there should be no attempt to make their statements equivalent. Mr Mallon expressed views that were widely held in the community. Indeed, the activities of the Glenanne gang have been well documented; the gang included a former RUC sergeant who confessed to his part in its activities and who exposed other gang members. There is no doubt that what Mr Mallon suggested was proven to be correct. If there is any doubt, further investigation should take place, and if an inquiry is needed, let us have one to clear the matter up. However, collusion in the murder of the Reaveys is, in my view, demonstrably clear. A sad aspect of those murders is that people who should have been dedicated to the rule of law and order betrayed the trust that the community had given them.

This debate is important because it allows the Reavey family and the community at large to recognise that people care for them, for their reputation and for the fact that the family has suffered grievously, not just through physical injury and death but also through damage to their reputation. However, today, their reputation has been restored.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Minister of Justice (Mr Ford): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate and congratulate Dominic Bradley on securing it.

I met Eugene Reavey in May of this year, when he raised with me the findings of the Historical

Enquiries Team. It was absolutely clear that, 34 years on, the pain of the loss of his brothers remains very real for him and for his family. Therefore, first, I would like to express publicly, as I have already expressed privately, my sympathy for him and his wider family circle on the loss of his three brothers: John Martin, Brian and Anthony.

As other Members, Mr Bradley and Mr Kennedy in particular, said, 4 and 5 January 1976 were two of the most tragic days in the history of the Troubles, with the murder of three Reavey brothers, the murder of three members of the O'Dowd family and, the following day, the terrible events at Kingsmill, where 10 workers were singled out on their way home from work and gunned down.

When I met Eugene Reavey, I was not aware of the contents of the review summary report that the Historical Enquiries Team had prepared for him and his family. That is because the HET's commitment is to the families of the victims of the Troubles. No one is entitled to see an HET report without the prior approval of the family concerned. At that meeting, Mr Reavey gave approval for me to be given a copy, which is why I am able to speak about it today.

Let us remember that we are discussing only one of 782 cases, involving 1,007 victims, that have been completed so far by the HET. It was established in 2005 and is tasked with reviewing all 3,261 deaths that occurred as a result of the Troubles between 1968 and 1998. It has the two-fold aim of striving to bring a measure of resolution to families and ensuring that all investigative and evidential opportunities are subject to thorough and exhaustive examination.

Every one of the deaths that occurred during the Troubles is a tragedy. Each case is also unique, and families will have markedly different views and perspectives and different questions and issues of concern. As I said, the HET approach is family centred. In the review of the murder of the Reavey brothers, it attempted to answer more than 30 questions from family members. To carry out that work effectively, the HET developed a five-phase process that includes the collection, assessment and review of all relevant material, followed by a focused reinvestigation and resolution. In this review, as in all others, the HET accessed witness

statements, forensic reports, the original police case papers and intelligence information.

In summary, the HET reached the following conclusions about the murder of John Martin, Brian and Anthony Reavey: the Reavey family was well respected in the local community; the attack happened at a time of spiralling sectarian violence in south Armagh; and there was no evidence, nor were there any evidential opportunities, that could bring about the identification or prosecution of those responsible. The inquiry found that John Martin, Brian and Anthony Reavey were entirely innocent victims who had no criminal convictions or links to any paramilitary group.

As the Minister of Justice elected in 2010, I have no responsibility for the events of 1976. However, I repeat the conclusions of the HET: the three Reavey brothers, John Martin, Brian and Anthony, were entirely innocent victims who had no criminal convictions or links to any paramilitary group. I particularly welcome the fact that Danny Kennedy, as a unionist representative of that area, acknowledged that this afternoon.

Some Members: Hear, hear.

The Minister of Justice: The report further stated that no member of the Reavey family had any verified links to any paramilitary group, which is contrary to later speculation. I know, from the meeting in May, about the particular hurt that has been caused to Eugene Reavey by the repetition of that speculation. This afternoon, Mr Bradley and other Members referred to the feelings of Mr Reavey's mother. We all wish those feelings to be taken into account.

The HET report also states that there are sufficient accounts from the Reavey family members and from independent observers to evidence the harassment that the family endured from some members of the security forces after those terrible murders. They were the subject of disinformation, rumour and innuendo, which caused them great distress for many years. That issue has been well aired this afternoon.

Northern Ireland has moved a long way from the dark days of the Troubles. For most of us, those days are memories, and, for younger members of society, they are history. However, there is no doubt that some of those who suffered directly still suffer to this day.

The report, I believe, underlines the positive role that the HET is playing in providing a measure of resolution to families who lost loved ones during the Troubles. It pledges to deal with families with honesty, trust and confidentiality and to carry out its work with great sensitivity and professionalism. Its commitment to families has resulted in its seeking to answer more than 6,200 questions raised by families seeking answers about the death of their loved ones.

An independent survey carried out last year, and which will be repeated this year, found that 95% of families who engaged with the HET viewed it as professional; 86% were at least satisfied with its performance; while only 5% were dissatisfied. That has also been recognised internationally. The secretariat to the Committee of Ministers in the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) believes that the HET can be considered as:

“a useful model for bringing a ‘measure of resolution’ to those affected in long-lasting conflicts”.

As a result, the ECHR has financed the visit of a delegation from Russia to meet the HET so that it can learn from the HET’s expertise in bringing resolution to those affected in long-lasting conflicts, such as the one in Chechnya.

The HET was established in 2005 and scheduled to last for six years. With one year left of the project, only 782 cases, involving 1,007 victims, out of 2,561 cases, have been completed. It is clear that the work will not be completed within the time allocated, although it expects to complete more than 1,000 cases by the end of the six years originally proposed.

I am pleased that the Chief Constable has given his commitment to continue the work of the HET with a targeted finish of March 2013. He has also indicated that more time will be given if it is required.

Reports, such as those produced by the HET and, indeed, the Saville report into the events of Bloody Sunday, which we talked about last week, bring into sharp focus how best we can address the legacy of Northern Ireland’s past and how we can move forward as a society.

Although the Northern Ireland Office has retained policy responsibility for addressing the past, there are many issues for the Executive to consider. I am committed to working with the Office of the First Minister and deputy First

Minister and other Executive colleagues to ensure that the rights and needs of victims are fully met and that those parts of the justice system that fall to me play their part. We owe it to the memory of John Martin, Brian and Anthony Reavey, and to the memory of all other victims of the Troubles, and to Mr Eugene Reavey, his family circle and the others who were bereaved and suffered during the Troubles, to commit the Assembly and all the institutions of government to promote reconciliation and to seek to work together to build a shared future. I will ensure that the Department of Justice plays its part.

Adjourned at 5.13 pm.



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