

British Government Proposals All Cover UP - No Closure

Some weeks ago we all shared the joy of the Ballymurphy families when an inquest found what we had known all along: their loved ones were innocent. They were victims killed by the British Army without justification.

For 50 years the British Government covered up the actions of their soldiers, frustrating investigations, withholding information, and erecting legal barriers. The British Government knew what happened on the streets of Ballymurphy never admitted a thing. It was a coroner who made the judgment.

This week the British Government, in contravention of all previous agreements, made public their intention to end criminal investigations, stop inquests, and prevent civil actions in cases relating to the actions of their military. For legal reasons, the protection from criminal investigation had to be extended to all combatants.

The British claimed this was to promote reconciliation and allow society to move on. It was also suggested that prosecutions in these cases were unlikely.

The success of a prosecution rests with the courts and legal process, it is not for a government to decide or to refuse to investigate.

It is not about prosecutions, it is about ending police investigations, inquests, and civil actions.

It is not about Reconciliation. Reconciliation cannot happen absent of respect, truth, and acknowledgment. Reconciliation cannot be based on silence and the denial of the rights of citizens to access the legal system.

It is not about truth or information recovery. The South African Truth Commission offered Amnesty only after full disclosure by combatants. The British proposals turn this on its head and offer complete amnesty without any obligations on disclosure.

At every turn in every case, the British military has withheld information until they had no legal avenue to continue the coverup. They are now closing down those legal avenues.

From 1969 to 1998 over 10,000 Irish Republicans went through the British legal system, a system that consists of special powers, non-jury courts, and brutal regimes.

Most of the killings by the British Military were not fully investigated and only six British soldiers were convicted and given reduced sentences. Upon release, all rejoined the British Army.

The effective amnesty for the British Military continues. The British are willing to close down all prosecutions to protect their military, their agents, and those in power who issued the orders.

This did not start and end with soldiers involved in murdering people on the streets, it extended to those in command and control who picked the targets, imported weapons, colluded with loyalist paramilitaries and provided decades of cover up. It was military practice and the political policy of successive British Governments.

Rather than face an independent legal process they now seek to change the law.

All parties in the North and the Irish Government have opposed these proposals. They run contrary to the position of the US Senate and House. The US needs to let Britain know that its proposals are unacceptable.

There is an agreement in place to deal with the past that has widespread support. The Stormont House Agreement provides for truth and justice for the families of victims. It was signed by the British Government.

British Government plans for an amnesty are nothing to do with closure and all to do about coverup. Victims groups have vowed never to give up in the search for truth and justice.

Their campaign continues, and we stand with them.