**ARKIV**

**Collecting evidence in whatever form is sensible enough but it should complement, not contradict, a Historical Commission**

1. The flip side of truth recovery is truth publication. Simply collating witness statements etc leaves open the question of what to do with these testimonies and how they are presented. Collected evidence only becomes ‘history’ when subjected to historical analysis. Unless you have some historical/academic expertise and rigour the result will be a thousand blooming flowers which could well choke any sensible perspective. We could end up with nothing more than competing propaganda with footnotes.

2. Furthermore, the moral/political argument that follows from this is that people will just select the testimonies that best suit their received views about the past. This isn’t ‘truth recovery’ but ‘prejudice confirmed’. That looks more like 'a Rorschach blot'.

3. ‘Oral histories’ have the potential to politicise and instrumentalise. It has already happened, on the one side the Duchas oral history archive on the Falls (run by the Falls Community Council) and on the other, the Andy Tyrie Interpretative Centre in East Belfast. In both cases, popular memory is very selective.

4. Of course, it is impossible to prevent politicians cherry picking for their own purposes but at least the findings of a Historical Commission can provide a measure of ‘control’ to which those cherry-pickings can be referred. Of course, a Historical Commission isn't a panacea – no proposal is – but that it would at least help to control partisan readings of the past.

5. Funding may be an issue but it would certainly be less costly than retaining teams of lawyers. Both Governments should contribute and reports should be made to both. The resulting archive could be housed in PRONI – but the publication of historically informed reports can provide one answer to the question of what to do with the 'truth' that has been recovered.

6. To call this ‘official history’ would diminish the enterprise. The value of the Historical Commission idea is to take the heat out of the politics of the past while assuring the parties that the purpose is to contextualise not to demonise, creating space for the parties to get on with the business of governing. Dr Haass, if he’s a classical scholar might appreciate Lucretius ‘Qui capite ipse suo instituit vestigia retro?’ ('Who in his folly seeks to advance backwards'.)

7. Historians traditionally are rightly wary of state-sponsored commissions, except perhaps where there is broad unanimity of purpose as in an official war history of the victors. While a commission would require government support for access to the public record, it should also ensure maximum independence for its own formation, composition and brief.  Ideally funding would come from charities. The relationship with government should be at the length of the longest arm. The commission might be convened by the British Irish Council supported by the Northern Ireland Assembly after a conference of British and Irish professionals under the auspices of the British-Irish Association.

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