# British veterans pressured to hide support for petition against Northern Ireland prosecutions



British veterans who served during the Northern Ireland Troubles are facing increasing pressure not to support a significant petition aimed at protecting them from prosecution. This troubling situation has been brought to light in discussions within the House of Commons, as Conservative MP Sir David Davis raised concerns about bureaucratic interference in veterans’ rights to engage in democratic processes.

The petition in question, which has garnered over 87,000 signatures, is entitled “Protect Northern Ireland veterans from prosecutions.” It calls for the government to maintain protections for veterans who carried out their duties during “Operation Banner,” which lasted from 1969 to 2007, amidst the complexities of addressing terrorism. Sir David alleged that directives have been issued to regimental associations, instructing them to erase any references to the petition from their social media channels. He expressed dismay at what he perceives as a silencing of voices advocating for veterans’ rights. “Veterans’ voices must not be silenced by bureaucratic interference, so can you advise me whether it’s appropriate to pressure regimental associations to remove content supporting democratic participation?” he questioned during a parliamentary session.

This unfolding drama occurs against the backdrop of the problematic Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023, enacted by the previous Conservative government. This legislation has effectively halted numerous civil cases and inquests regarding Troubles-related deaths, and it faced significant backlash for its perceived bias favouring perpetrators of violence over the victims and their families. Following the Labour government's assumption of power, there has been a commitment to repeal certain provisions of this contentious legislation, reflecting the necessity for an overhaul in how historical grievances are addressed.

Defence Secretary John Healey acknowledged the concerns raised by Sir David, promising to investigate the matter further. The Labour government appears keen to address the fears of veterans regarding potential bias against security forces. The previous administration’s changes have prompted further scrutiny as the legal framework for addressing the legacy of the Troubles is in a state of flux.

Complications mount as the government navigates continuing legal and ethical considerations surrounding the Legacy Act. Reports indicate that former Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams is seeking compensation for his imprisonment during the Troubles, a move discouraged by Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, who has drawn a line against such claims, suggesting that payouts to individuals associated with terrorism would be an inappropriate use of public funds in light of the current economic climate. Starmer's comments underscore a growing tension between different narratives of the conflict's history and the realities of seeking justice for all involved.

The need for a balanced approach to legacy issues has been articulated by various stakeholders. Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone has voiced concerns about the inquest processes, suggesting they disproportionately focus on actions of state actors, potentially leading to a sense of injustice within the veteran community. This perception of imbalance is further supported by criticism of the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR), which was established as an alternative mechanism for seeking truth and justice, yet has faced doubts regarding its adequacy and fairness.

The Labour government’s intentions to repeal and replace the Legacy Act suggest a shift towards more equitable consideration of all parties affected by the Troubles, with the aim of re-establishing inquests and civil processes. However, the ICRIR remains as a tool for reconciliation, prompting debates about its future effectiveness.

Veterans remain vocal in expressing their dissatisfaction with the treatment they have received, feeling abandoned by a system meant to protect them. Many attended protests in London, decrying the government's handling of veteran affairs and calling for recognition of their sacrifices. The narratives emerging from these protests illustrate deep-seated frustrations and a call for legislative clarity, as many veterans feel unjustly targeted for actions taken during their service.

As the government contemplates its next steps, the challenge remains to address historical grievances while ensuring that the voices of those who served their country are neither diminished nor disregarded in the ongoing dialogue about the legacy of the Troubles. The path forward will require careful navigation, balancing accountability with compassion, as the spectre of the past continues to complicate the present.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/mp-british-veterans-being-pressured-to-not-support-legacy-act-petition/a2085608503.html)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/mp-british-veterans-being-pressured-to-not-support-legacy-act-petition/a2085608503.html)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/mp-british-veterans-being-pressured-to-not-support-legacy-act-petition/a2085608503.html), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-government-scrap-northern-ireland-amnesty-scheme-2024-07-17/)
4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/mp-british-veterans-being-pressured-to-not-support-legacy-act-petition/a2085608503.html), [[6]](https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/crime/labour-declines-to-reassure-veterans-in-their-fears-that-the-party-in-government-will-let-legacy-again-turn-against-the-security-forces-4616462)
5. Paragraph 5: [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/632dc897-b6fe-428b-9e3b-743f957f5a74), [[5]](https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2024/10/14/changes-to-legacy-act-risk-troubles-veterans-reputations--shadow-minister/)
6. Paragraph 6: [[4]](https://www.derrynow.com/news/northern-ireland/1796231/vast-majority-of-veterans-totally-opposed-to-reintroduction-of-legacy-inquests.html), [[6]](https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/crime/labour-declines-to-reassure-veterans-in-their-fears-that-the-party-in-government-will-let-legacy-again-turn-against-the-security-forces-4616462)
7. Paragraph 7: [[7]](https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2025/04/18/treatment-of-veterans-absolutely-disgusting-say-bikers-in-legacy-act-protest/)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/mp-british-veterans-being-pressured-to-not-support-legacy-act-petition/a2085608503.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/632dc897-b6fe-428b-9e3b-743f957f5a74> - The UK government is seeking to block former Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams from claiming compensation for his imprisonment during the 1970s Troubles in Northern Ireland. Sir Keir Starmer, leader of the opposition, stated intentions to prevent such claims, referring to Adams and others interned during that period. The Labour government has initiated the process to repeal sections of the Legacy Act, which had been criticized for potentially allowing payments to 'terrorists.' The Policy Exchange think-tank published a paper criticizing Labour's proposals, arguing that compensation payments would be a poor use of public funds amid a national economic crisis. The dispute arises as Adams faces a civil trial in 2026 for IRA bombing victims seeking symbolic damages. The Supreme Court had previously ruled that the interim custody orders used to detain Adams were unlawful, leading to further legal challenges when the legislation is changed.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/british-government-scrap-northern-ireland-amnesty-scheme-2024-07-17/> - The UK government, under the new Labour administration, announced plans to repeal an amnesty scheme for ex-soldiers and militants involved in Northern Ireland's Troubles. This decision follows opposition from major local parties and the Irish government, fulfilling a pledge from the Labour Party's election manifesto to replace the Legacy Act, which is seen as unjust by the Troubles' victims and their families. The repealed 'conditional immunity scheme' was deemed incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights by the Northern Ireland High Court. The previous Conservative government defended the law, suggesting it could close historical conflicts' chapters. The repeal coincides with a meeting between British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Irish PM Simon Harris, who has advocated for improved relations with Britain. The Troubles resulted in around 3,600 deaths over three decades until a 1998 peace agreement.
4. <https://www.derrynow.com/news/northern-ireland/1796231/vast-majority-of-veterans-totally-opposed-to-reintroduction-of-legacy-inquests.html> - Northern Ireland Veterans Commissioner David Johnstone told a Westminster committee there is a 'fundamental unfairness' in the inquest process for conflict-related deaths. Mr. Johnstone insisted veterans’ concerns were not based around 'any fear of past actions' but rather a sense that the coronial system was disproportionately focused on killings committed by state actors. A legal guillotine came into effect one year ago that halted inquests and civil court cases linked to the Troubles. That move came as part of the last UK government’s contentious Legacy Act. The Act established the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) as an alternative mechanism for families seeking truth and justice about the deaths of their loved ones. The Labour Government has vowed to repeal and replace parts of the Act and reinstate inquests and civil cases. However, it is retaining the ICRIR. Representatives of military veterans and former police officers gave evidence on Wednesday to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. However, he suggested that the ICRIR could 'do the same job'. 'Our view is that there’s no reason why the ICRIR could not effectively discharge the responsibilities which were once envisaged for it in respect of inquests,' he said. Last year the Court of Appeal in Belfast part allowed an appeal taken against the Legacy Act, ruling there were breaches of both human rights law and the Windsor Framework that governs post-Brexit arrangements in Northern Ireland. Among its findings, the court found that a Government veto power over what sensitive material can be disclosed to bereaved families by the ICRIR is unlawful. The court also ruled that the ICRIR does not provide victims and their next of kin adequate means to participate in its processes. The Government has appealed the case to the Supreme Court. However, Northern Ireland Secretary Hilary Benn has also vowed to make reforms to how the ICRIR operates. Axel Schmidt from Ulster Human Rights Watch, a group that supports families bereaved by terrorism, told the committee that the ICRIR had more power than a coroner.
5. <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/uk-news/2024/10/14/changes-to-legacy-act-risk-troubles-veterans-reputations--shadow-minister/> - Shadow veterans minister Andrew Bowie also paid tribute to those killed in the Brighton Hotel bombing on the 40th anniversary of the attack. Speaking in the Commons on Monday, Mr. Bowie described the attack as 'one of the most appalling and audacious attacks of terrorism on British soil'. The Conservative MP referred to the previous government’s Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act, which was passed despite being widely opposed by all parties in Northern Ireland as well as victims’ groups. The Act provided some legal immunity to perpetrators of crimes in Northern Ireland during the Troubles in return for their co-operation with a truth recovery body – the Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR). On coming into Government after the election, Labour pledged to repeal the Act but has said it will retain the ICRIR.
6. <https://www.newsletter.co.uk/news/crime/labour-declines-to-reassure-veterans-in-their-fears-that-the-party-in-government-will-let-legacy-again-turn-against-the-security-forces-4616462> - The Labour Party has sidestepped the concerns of ex-soldiers over how it will handle the legacy of the Troubles if it forms the government. Military veterans told the News Letter of their concern at reports that a future Labour government would reverse key aspects of the new legislation to deal with the past, which many people who served in Northern Ireland during the violence feel is needed in a bid to end bias in favour of terrorists, and against the security forces. An Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICIR) has been set up to help ‘draw a line’ under the Troubles – offering a conditional amnesty to those accused of serious crimes committed between January 1966 and April 1998.
7. <https://www.irishtimes.com/world/uk/2025/04/18/treatment-of-veterans-absolutely-disgusting-say-bikers-in-legacy-act-protest/> - Veterans who served in the British army during the Northern Ireland troubles take part in a protest against the repealing of the Legacy Act in London on Friday. Photograph: Lucy North/PA Wire. Veterans who served in the British Army during the Northern Ireland Troubles face 'absolutely disgusting' treatment, protesters have said as they called for the retention of the Legacy Act. More than 1,000 people gathered in Whitehall, central London, on Friday to protest against the Labour government repealing key elements of The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023. The Act, introduced by the former Conservative government, halted scores of civil cases and inquests linked to the conflict and offered conditional immunity for perpetrators of Troubles crimes in exchange for their co-operation with a new truth recovery body. But Labour plans to axe the immunity provision and other key elements of the Act that would see the legacy inquests and civil cases return. Many of the protesters, belonging to the Rolling Thunder group, drove black motorbikes through Westminster carrying military flags before gathering for speeches in Parliament Square. Jack (63), a flight sergeant from Lincolnshire who served in the military for 34 years, said veterans had been 'cast aside' with no provisions once their service ended. Speaking at the protest, he told the PA news agency: 'As a young man, when we signed off and pledged our allegiance to the military, we didn’t expect to be sold down the river by our government. It’s absolutely disgusting. 'Our message is stop trying to bring claims against soldiers that were merely doing their jobs. It’s outrageous.' Jack added: 'As young men, we were trained to follow orders, we were trained to be aggressive and now we’re being prosecuted for it. It’s out of order.' Ian Brown (59) from Hertfordshire, said he wanted to prevent any future veterans from other war zones from being prosecuted by joining the protest. He said: 'We’re here to try and stop the government, which is allowing the Northern Irish government to prosecute Northern Ireland veterans from when we went over there to do our job, which this government sent us over there [to do]. 'The Irish are now trying to prosecute veterans, who are in their 70s and 80s, for crimes that happened while they were out there serving the country.' Organisers said they intended to hold another protest in London in July.