

## Starmer Faces Backlash Over Troubles Legacy Plans

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The Prime Minister's recent phone call with Irish Taoiseach Micheal Martin, described by Downing Street as a "constructive discussion," has done little to quell growing unease over the government's approach to the Northern Ireland Troubles legacy. The conversation, which focused on finding a "consensus" for addressing the 30-year conflict's lingering wounds, comes amid mounting criticism of plans to overhaul existing legislation.

The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023, introduced by the Conservative government, has been widely contested since its royal assent in September 2023. It effectively halted investigations and civil actions into most Troubles-related cases, providing conditional immunity for those who cooperate with the new ICIR, but Northern Irish courts found key provisions incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights. The current administration has pledged to repeal and replace what it calls a “flawed and failed” law, but this move has sparked fierce opposition, not least from within its ranks.

Veterans’ groups and former British servicemen have warned that repealing the Act could trigger a surge of prosecutions and civil claims against those who served during the Troubles. The Times reported that Alistair Carns, Veterans Minister and former Royal Marine, has considered resigning over the proposed repeal.

A Ministry of Defence source told PA the issue was “tricky” and acknowledged internal debate, while suggesting that Carns is unlikely to resign imminently.

The Prime Minister’s call with Martin also touched on economic matters and the UK-EU relationship, but the Troubles legacy remains the sticking point. Martin, in a tweet, mirrored Downing Street’s language, noting a “constructive discussion” on a framework for moving forward. Yet, the lack of clarity on what this framework entails has only deepened scepticism. Critics say the government’s emphasis on seeking “consensus” risks sidelining veterans and victims’ families, who remain deeply concerned about justice and accountability.

Some Labour MPs, including Carns, reportedly fear the repeal could unravel years of delicate progress in Northern Ireland. Human rights campaigners, meanwhile, continue to slam the original Act for shielding perpetrators, leaving the government caught between competing demands. Downing Street insists it is “working in lockstep” on the issue, but the absence of a concrete plan has fuelled doubts about its ability to navigate this complex and emotive issue.

As pressure mounts, the Prime Minister’s commitment to replacing the Legacy Act will test his ability to balance justice, reconciliation, and the protection of those who served. With dissent brewing even among his MPs, the path to consensus looks anything but straightforward.