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Blood money

IT TOOK five years of public pressure, and the threat of legal action, before the Government agreed adequate levels of compensation for haemophiliacs stricken with the Aids virus as a result of being treated with infected blood products by the National Health Service.

That delay was shabby, not helped by the curmudgeonly way the settlement has been administered, which means that many of the victims will have died before they receive their final payments. But it will be even more shaming if Ministers now seek to resist the justified claims of a further group of 170 Aids sufferers who were infected by blood transfusions in the course of surgical operations. The campaign for compensation for these victims, which we report today on page three, is both compelling and urgent.

The Department of Health's claim that there is a distinction between the cases of the haemophiliacs and those infected through normal surgical procedures is such patent nonsense that it is extraordinary that it should have been seriously put forward. If the haemophiliacs had a strong case for compensation, so does this new group. The fact that they are few in number, lacking in strength, and unable to mount the kind of vocal public campaign that eventually brought success for the haemophiliacs, should be irrelevant.

As with the plight of the haemophiliacs, theirs is a tragedy for which the National Health Service is responsible. Nor, like the haemophiliacs, is it a dispute that should be fought out in the courts on its legal merits. No amount of money can erase the suffering of these innocent victims of Aids. But it will be a disgrace if they are forced to resort to the law and a long public campaign to secure justice.

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