

Mickelbergs furious over \$1m payout

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THE Carpenter Government yesterday awarded \$1 million in compensation - the largest payment in the state's history - to two brothers wrongly jailed for almost a decade after they were framed by police for the notorious 1982 Perth Mint swindle.

West Australian Attorney-General Jim McGinty said police actions were "a perversion of the system of justice of the worst kind" and no amount of money would make up for what happened.

But the payout was criticised by Peter Mickelberg, 50, and his brother Ray, 62, as insufficient to cover the debts they accumulated during a decades-long fight to clear their names. Ray Mickelberg told The Australian they owed at least \$1.2million. He said the ex gratia payments of \$500,000 each were effectively gone without even acknowledging millions of dollars in lost assets, ruined careers and pain and suffering that resulted from the fit-up.

He was furious also that no compensation was offered to the children of a third brother, Brian, who has since died, but was also wrongly convicted and jailed for nine months. Peter Mickelberg spent more than eight years in jail and Ray 6 1/2 years.

Their convictions were quashed in 2004, 15 years after they were released, after detective Tony Lewandowski, who has since killed himself, admitted police fabricated evidence. Another corrupt officer exposed by Lewandowski, Don Hancock, was killed in a car bomb attack carried out by a bikie gang member in 2001.

Despite the brothers' anger yesterday, Mr McGinty said the payments brought to an end the state's involvement, following \$658,672 they received to cover the costs of two appeals.

The Mickelberg brothers were convicted of defrauding the mint of \$653,000 in gold bullion by issuing worthless cheques.

After his arrest, Peter was stripped, beaten and forced to sign a false statement by the two corrupt officers.

The pair failed in a series of appeals over decades because police continued to provide false evidence.

The extraordinary case even involved more than 58kg of bullion being dumped at the Seven Network's Perth studios in 1989, shortly after Peter's release, in an apparent attempt to implicate him. It was later shown to be South African gold that was not related to the case.

Ray Mickelberg said he and Peter were forced to agree to the \$1 million payout after Mr McGinty told them to take it or leave it.

"In the end, we had no choice," he said.

The pair criticised the decision to have taxpayers foot the bill. They said the money should have been seized from the superannuation funds of the corrupt officers.

The state police union was yesterday also on the warpath after Mr McGinty confirmed the brothers were free to continue civil claims against police allegedly involved in their case.

The Government initially tried to force the brothers to drop civil action against the seven former officers in return for the ex-gratia payments but failed.

The civil action was initiated 18 months ago, and includes claims against the estates of the two dead officers, Lewandowski and Hancock.

Union president Mike Dean has demanded the Government pay the legal costs of the former officers and claimed the continuing civil action should have been stopped.