



Bloody Sunday: the background and the context

The build up

On 9th August 1971 internment without trial was introduced in Northern Ireland. Many died in the disturbances that followed. Ten innocent civilians were killed in August in what became known as the “Ballymurphy Massacre”. In November the Compton Report investigating complaints of brutality against those arrested in the early days of internment found the allegations to be true but referred to these as “ill-treatment”. Tribal sectarian violence continued with predictable death and injury. The unionist administration had lost all credibility, Faulkner’s Green paper offered no solutions and there was a political vacuum in which the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association came centre stage as a movement with potential to create real change.

The context

NICRA raised demands which were clear and uncomplicated and resonated widely. It accepted the constitutional framework of the Northern Ireland state but demanded equal civil and political rights for all citizens in Northern Ireland. NICRA called for a broad-based united campaign against internment. It condemned the policy of bombings and shootings which it declared held no relevance to the struggle for rights and democratic reforms. NICRA organised meetings and protests and made clear that the political unrest was deepened by the denial of basic demands for civil rights. This was the context of the civil rights march arranged for Derry on 30 January 1972.

The March

The march began in the early afternoon, when protestors set off from the assembly point at Bishops Field, Creggan. Blocked by CS gas, dye and rubber bullets at the lower end of William Street, the platform lorry and the bulk of marchers turned back past the Rossville Flats across the open ground to Free Derry Corner.

As the platform party assembled and the speeches began and as thousands more were moving towards the meeting point, the shooting began. Muzzle flashes could be seen and bullets flew. The events of that day are now well known. 13 people were murdered in cold blood by members of the Parachute Regiment, a 14th person died later from his injuries. Many were wounded and others arrested.

This was a brutal military effort to repress a peaceful campaign for civil and democratic rights. It was no accident. It was planned and deliberate. The government could deal with violence but it could not countenance peaceful and united mass democratic action.

Fifty years on

50 years on the Workers Party remembers the massacre at Derry and all those innocent people who were murdered and injured. They have waited a long time for justice but their names will stand as a memorial to the struggle for civil and democratic rights.

Marian Donnelly, a Workers Party stalwart and veteran of the civil rights movement, who was present at the Derry march that terrible day, believes that the struggle for civil rights was a mass struggle and that its legacy continues in those whose ongoing fight for social progress and peace is based on the unity of the working class, free from the taint of sectarianism and confident in their own future.



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