

Why has it proved so difficult to reach agreement essay



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The events known as ' Bloody Sunday happened on the 30th of January 1972. Some 20, 000 people marched under the banner of NICRA (Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association) to protest against internment, which had been introduced in August 1971. However the initially peaceful , yet illegal march degenerated into violence when the marchers were stopped at a barricade by British soldiers . Soon, soldiers from the 1stBattallion , The Parachute Regiment opened fire with live ammunition on the marchers .

The soldiers had wanted to break up leaders of the so-called Derry Young Hooligans (DYH) , but instead left 13 apparently innocent Catholic people dead (leaving another to die from his wounds). Internment was re-introduced in 1971 to try and keep the Nationalist community under control. It basically allowed the Government to detain individuals without trial or recourse to the principles of Habeas Corpus. The Catholic community, already bitter from years of oppression and prejudice, was angry.

Although the most prominent, the Bloody Sunday march was not the first protesting march against internment. A week prior to the events of Bloody Sunday, an anti-internment march was held at Milligan Strand, County Derry. This march was at first handled with peaceful good humour by the Royal Green Jackets and then degenerated into violence with the arrival of the 1st Parachute Regiment, who were also notably involved in the Bloody Sunday March. The actual series of conflicts surrounding the Nationalists and the Republicans dates back centuries, however.

The Catholics had already protested strongly in 1969, when the battle of the Bogside occurred. This protest was sparked by the Protestant Orange

marches that celebrated the victories of William III over the Catholics in the 17th century. Failure to ban these marches in July 1969 led to riots. In July, in the Bogside area of Londonderry (Where the Bloody Sunday March took place 3 years later) violence broke out following a March by the " Apprentice Boys". These riots broke out into what was to be known as the Battle of the Bogside. This was not just to avenge the Protestant marches.

It was unleashing all their hate for the poor conditions they had to live in, and all the prejudice directed against them: against the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the ' B' specials. It is interesting to compare the reactions the Orange marches are still having where they go into Catholic territories. Even today, one of the main apparent causes for the unrest that led to Bloody Sunday is still causing problems. The Bloody Sunday March can be seen to be part of a line of marches and protests that was sparked by Protestants, not the army. The evidence surrounding Bloody Sunday can be both sparse and unreliable.

As almost all the evidence is to be had from either the Catholic marchers or the soldiers involved, there can tend to be a deal of bias in the evidence. The Government-funded Widgery Report seemed to find that the blame centred on the marchers as opposed to the soldiers. This can be seen as unreliable, like a lot of evidence and reports surrounding the event. The report appeared biased in favour of the soldiers, to protect relationships with Northern Ireland. Whilst a report can sum up a deal of personal views and stalwart defence of a belief, the individual statements can seem biased in their own right.

As Bishop Edward Daly said afterwards, “ What really made Bloody Sunday so obscene was the fact that people afterwards, at the highest level of British justice, justified it. “. Obviously the soldiers saw Bloody Sunday as “ teaching the Derry Young Hooligans a lesson”, as Sir Harry Tuzo put it, whilst the marchers would obviously have seen the shooting as a pointless and blatant massacre. This is the main issue with regards to the evidence: people may only have seen what they want to see, rather than see their hopes dashed by the truth. One of the main issues when evaluating Bloody Sunday is to consider who fired the first shot.

The sources available conflict on this crucial fact: and they all could seem to be biased in their own right. Source A, the official army statement approved by Sir Harry Tuzo, appears to be primarily about protecting the reputation of the British Army. It seems to be taking an unlikely line, seeing what the army would want to see the massacre to be rather than the truth. As the Army was supposedly a peacekeeping force, they did not want to aggravate the situation. Generally the source seems to be unreliable. We know from earlier that General Ford had proposed that live ammunition be used on the Derry Young Hooligans, to “ Teach them a lesson”.

Besides, the 200 rounds that are claimed to have been fired at the soldiers seems a somewhat large amount, considering that many eyewitness reports claim that there was no Irish fire, from the IRA or anyone else... The statement also proposes the presence of gunmen in the flats nearby, which indicates an organised IRA set-up. This seems highly unlikely, especially since all the British fire seemed to be directed at ground-based targets. The main purpose of this statement would seem to be to go to the press and <https://assignbuster.com/why-has-it-proved-so-difficult-to-reach-agreement-essay/>

justify the army's role: to deny that they had killed British Citizens, and to discredit any further Catholic Eyewitness reports.

Source B is taken from Simon Winchester's report for the Guardian. This can seem rather transparent in places, but it has to be realised that this is a respectable newspaper and would want to retain credibility by appearing to be fair in its evidence. However, the source has some transparencies, which do not appear in any of the other sources. The use of Army armoured cars appears not to be mentioned in hardly any of the other sources, and this evidence occurred about six months after the incident.

There may also be a potential for bias: The Guardian is a Left of Centre newspaper, and may well have been sympathetic to the marchers, this could be picked up by the likely intellectual classes that read it. However the source seems not to be biased to any side, but is not totally reliable. In this way it could be compared to Source D, but the source is far less reliable in general: some of the points raised in this source are simply not justified, or proved by anything other than itself. There is also doubt over just how much could be seen: a bit like Source C. Source C is from a Catholic priest present at the march, Father Bradley.

His evidence has an obvious potential for bias, as he is Catholic: but not sympathetic to the IRA's violence at all. It would be easy to dismiss this evidence as blatantly biased, (The Widgery report certainly thought his evidence of little use) but as eyewitness statements provide a deal of the evidence, this statement, especially as it is from a 'reliable' source like a priest, this evidence can be useful. Father Bradley's evidence, though, has

holes in it as well. The use of " If anybody... " suggests that he is the one who saw everything. And it seems that he would have required good positioning to gather all the ' proof' that he did.

This source is useful, but it would have been just too easy for an angered Catholic to have heard only shots from the other side. Source C, along with source B, can seem to prove that A, the army statement, is wrong. Source B seems to imply that the marchers were too busy running to be concerned with returning fire, whilst Source C, somewhat boldly, says " I saw no one shooting at troops. " Whilst both source B and C have reasons to be biased, this further discounts Source A's statement, which puts the blame, unsurprisingly, on the Irish Republican Army and the Catholic populace.

Source D is evidence from various video sources. This could be seen to be the hardest type of evidence to form a bias on, and the source is one of the more reliable types: whilst eyewitness reports can depend on the person's views, untampered footage can provide the best evidence. The main failing is its somewhat unsupported view that we can see that the troops were firing somewhat recklessly, although the film can be selective about the footage shown. This can slightly dim the usefulness of the film, although it has much less obvious potential bias than any of the others.

One such example is where troops are firing, and the commanding officer, upon sighting a television camera, orders his troops to stop firing. This suggests that the shooting was revenge, rather than orders. In many ways, this source can partially negate evidence from any of the sources discussed. In conclusion, it is hard to find a definitive source for the Bloody Sunday

March. All, or at least most, of the sources have a potential to bias, and even in video evidence, selective footage can make certain amount of bias. But on the subject of the first shot, we can never really be sure.

These sources, in some parts, contradict each other. The first shot will always be one of the main issues to consider, given that the soldiers could be partially justified in their action if they were being fired upon. The biased nature of the sources makes it hard to come to a conclusion. Although many sources blame the soldiers, the reaction to Magilligan and other clashes with the British and the RUC may have led to a Catholic first shot. Just because the Soldiers may have killed innocent people, doesn't mean that a Catholic could not have started the violence.

The paratroopers were, and still are, one of the World`s most effective military units, recognised for their ability to fight and win in difficult circumstances. It is a regiment renowned for violence, and yet on Bloody Sunday, it was used for crowd control methods. Why, if this regiment was known for violence, even on Magilligan Strand a week earlier, were they used at Bloody Sunday? Source F is from a Nationalist author, Tim Pat Coogan. In it he gives evidence from the Milligan Strand march a week prior to Bloody Sunday.

Whilst there is an obvious potential for bias, it can be noted that the evidence is actually from a Daily Telegraph (a right-wing newspaper) reporter. It would be hard for someone to alter a reporter's evidence without arousing suspicion of bias, despite the biased nature of the man. But with the Paratroopers, this evidence proves to some extent that the Paratroops

were excessively violent: this is ' proved by the fact that the paratroops " were only brought back to a sense of discipline when their NCO'S began wielding their batons fiercely on their own men. It would seem that the main purpose of this is to create interest in Bloody Sunday and to challenge Widgery.

However the potential for bias is still there, and there are several places that the source does not totally cover the issue. The source neglects to mention if the firing of rubber bullets was standard at the time, or indeed if it was this violence that inspired the step-up to live ammunition in Bloody Sunday a week later. In some ways this source is backed up by the video source D. But in general it is a reliable source, which is not developed enough or free of bias enough to warrant it definitive.

Source G is taken from the same book. In this source Tim Pat Coogan describes a meeting that took place between Lieutenant General Harry Tuzo and Faulkner, the Northern Ireland Prime Minister. He relies here on evidence gathered by Martin Dillon in his book, published in 1995. The evidence states that Tuzo did not want to use excessive force, but Falkner convinced him that force was needed to deal with the trouble makers. Whilst this source could be useful, it does not mention where the meeting took place.

And Tuzo may have been briefed by General Ford : would this have made a difference, could Ford really give orders like this? Something as serious as this would surely be made at the top. Yet the idea of Faulkner's ' Hard line' is backed up by Source D- making this a fairly reliable despite the Republican nature of the author. In relation to the Paratroopers, this evidence proves

little. It does tell us how the troops were possibly involved in the Bloody Sunday March, but does not tell us why they seemed to 'run amok': although the 'Hard line' could have gone too far.

Recently, with the new government-funded Saville inquiry into Bloody Sunday, new evidence about the use of the Paratroops has come to light. One such piece of evidence is a secret memo from General Ford to his superior, Lieutenant General Tuzo. In it he summarises that the rubber bullets and CS gas used are no longer having an effect on the DYH. This memo, three weeks before Bloody Sunday, had to make Ford decide whether to wait until serious rioting (the sort that turned patrols into targets for IRA snipers.) subsided, or to develop a new way of keeping the hooligans at bay.

As a result of this, General Ford justified the use of live ammunition, but was wary of collateral casualties. This backs up the 'hard line' theory that the Paratroops were there for a reason, to get the DYH. It is access to new evidence like this which is making the Saville inquiry at least worthy of recognition. We can draw several conclusions from this evidence. The use of Paratroops on Bloody Sunday was definitely a mistake. It is however, dubious that they just ran amok, shooting all and sundry in a psychopathic expression of revenge.

There was clearly an expectation of use of force on the march, as we see from Ford's memo. The use of such a aggressive unit that was knowingly violent (From Magilligan) was a mistake, but it would appear that anxiety in the upper regions of the British Army allowed them to be used at all. Still on the subject of Magilligan, there was an expectation of an out break of

violence following Magilligan, and the Army may have wanted to avoid British casualties by taking a unit capable of handling gun fights: which may justify the use of live ammunition.

The Widgery report followed several months after the Bloody Sunday massacre. It had the seal of approval from the government. Naturally, the report had to have a slight bias, not only to placate the Republican community, but also to maintain the United Kingdom's reputation in the world, as relations between the United States and Britain were very strained due to the Irish situation. As source A proves, the Widgery report did draw some valid conclusions. Source E is from the actual report, and admits, to a limited level, that some of the mayhem can be attributed to the Paratroopers actions.

Whilst the question of Paratroop actions is still central to the Bloody Sunday debate, Widgery appears to realise that the IRA and the Nationalists will dispute being to blame. We know that the Paratroops are fierce from Magilligan, so theoretically they could have caused an unnecessary massacre. These troops, use violence to their own means: they are highly disciplined and not likely to overreact on such a scale, but they could. As our knowledge of the event has increased, the reliability of the Widgery report is decreasing.

We now know from bullet trajectory reports that the army was not shooting at gunmen in the flats, as all the targets appear to have been on the ground, running. The selective targets in question also raise the question of how, if these soldiers were so well trained, they did what they appear to have done.

In this source, as with sections of the Widgery Report, there are too many gaps to warrant it a really good source. Lord Widgery had to write a report in a very short time : eleven weeks.

In this time, Widgery collected evidence that had more of an emphasis on maintaining democracy than getting a genuine evaluation. Prime Minister Ted Heath sent a memo to Lord Widgery, chief of the investigation, which read ' It has to be remembered that in Northern Ireland we are not only fighting a military war, but a propaganda war. ' . This can be seen as a statement typical of the Widgery report. As already stated, Britain was at a point of virtual war with America, and had to stop things getting any worse.

Even though Widgery may have wanted a fair deal, for many reasons, the Army's role had to be made less significant and bloody. Widgery preferred to take statements from soldiers in general, which led to varying stories of hardship, which the team is said to have even had to edit to make more in line with what they wanted. Even the forensic evidence is subject to cross-contamination, negating a valuable aspect of Widgery. Widgery, forced to take soldier's statements, ignored five hundred witness statements, including that of Dr.

Raymond Maclean, who pronounced four victims dead and was present at post-mortem examinations. They claimed that these statements were too late: which has been challenged. The eventual finding of nail bombs on Gerald Donaghy, one of the deceased, has also been challenged, as two examiners had failed to spot the bombs before a RUC officer found them. Nationalist Internet sites I have seen describe the ' framing' of one of the

deceased is both immoral and offensive to the deceased's family. The Irish Government was bound to disagree with Widgery right from the start.

It would seem that their views are being ignored in favour of the British who they never wanted there in the first place. They, in relation to potential bias, would see everything the British do as wrong and an offence to Ireland.

Obvious potential bias ignored, the Government cannot be too damning in its criticisms, as they are now on an international stage. Source H, from the Irish government's investigation into the Widgery report in 1998, claims that the army attacked with little or no provocation, by mentioning that they took 'no obvious precaution against IRA fire'.

Obviously this implies that there was no IRA fire, making the British guilty of a massacre that they think it is. The quote also mentions that there were British snipers in the buildings, using ballistics evidence to back the point up. The Irish Government has several reasons for opposing the Widgery report as a whole, as they found the lack of proper research offensive. Thus the purpose of making these suggestions is to discredit Widgery further with new evidence, and unleash the debate in the path of the 'peace process'. The Irish Government's views are probably going to contain a deal of bias.

When you consider that the Catholics feel hurt by Bloody Sunday, the report has to maintain a degree of political correctness to avoid dismissal by the opposing sides. But when political correctness means bias, it casts a shadow over the entire report. Just like in some ways the Widgery report was perhaps bent towards one side, so is this report. Although using reliable evidence such as ballistics, the Irish government are not really going to look

at the British side of things when they are challenging something that is British biased. Widgery itself is still one of the key issues with the Bloody Sunday debate.

If it is found to be all a big lie, as the Irish Government wants it to be, then the British have lied to the world and will be in shame for doing so. Yet looking at some of Widgery's evidence, I can come to several conclusions about just how comprehensive a report it was. When you consider the need for reassuring the public over the role of Britain in the world, and the precarious situation it was in with America, there is also a need for something like Widgery. Without Widgery, tempers could have rose to a much higher level, negating all hopes of peace.

Whilst Widgery wasn't really comprehensive, it has no need to be: it was more reassuring propaganda to a certain point rather than a detailed analysis of Bloody Sunday. Recently, new developments have changed many people's view on the whole Ireland Conflict. Just as the Irish report was published, Tony Blair called the victim's families together and announced a new, unbalanced inquiry into the Bloody Sunday tragedy. In the light of the public outrage at some of the 'evidence' used in the Irish report, the government had to do something.

But this was supposed not to be a propaganda exercise as Widgery was claimed to be, but a genuine inquiry. Tony Blair announced in this meeting, on the 29th of January in 1998, "... that a tribunal be established for inquiring into... the events on Sunday, January 1972... taking into account of any new information relevant to events on that day." This inquiry, headed

by Lord Saville of Newdigate, has been called the 'Saville inquiry' and has access to a wide range of powers including the authority to subpoena witnesses and compel the disclosure of documents in line with the 1921 Tribunal of Inquiry Act.

This report is now facing a developed problem (like the Ireland issue itself), that the truth, if found out, may anger Nationalist communities even more than Widgery did. These are the difficulties facing the Saville inquiry, if its purpose is to give a fair evaluation. Consider also the fact that much of the evidence has been destroyed, and several witnesses have died. If this report is really genuine, then it could have been better done near the time. As I have noticed, the problem of finding unbiased evidence with which to evaluate Bloody Sunday is as significant as the event itself.

Most of the eyewitness statements are from one side or another, either Nationalistic or British. If there was more relation between some of the statements on either side, we might have the truth by now. The problem of bias is central to the whole Ireland debate. Whilst for a lot of the time, Britain has made all the choices for Ireland, the introduction of things like Gladstone's Home Rule Bill has widened the range of options for Ireland, but have got through political prejudice to get there.

Because politicians will invariably have vastly differentiating opinions, the route for Ireland will never be certain. Certainly it will mean direct conflict between Loyal Protestants and the largely Nationalist Catholic community. While the peace process continues, the IRA are still about and in force, and the Stormont parliament has lots of conflict to resolve. It would seem that

time, ever since the first invasions in 1598, has wound up too complicated and conflicting a knot for the British or the Irish to untie.