Northern Ireland: ‘Bloody Sunday’ & the fall of Stormont

Tasks set in textbooks on the ‘Bloody Sunday’ & Fall of Stormont, 1972

- B. Doherty, *Northern Ireland since c. 1960*, Heinemann, 0-43532-728-3
- Austin Reid, *Ireland since 1923. Politics or Violence*, Longman, 0-58204-009-4,

Bloody Sunday

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When?</th>
<th>30 January 1972</th>
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<td>What happened?</td>
<td>The army opened fire on a civil rights demonstration against internment in Londonderry and killed 13 demonstrators, mostly teenagers.</td>
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<td>What is the dispute?*</td>
<td>Who fired first? Did the army respond to IRA fire, or did the soldiers fire recklessly?</td>
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| What do official enquiries say? | 1. A tribunal headed by a British judge, Lord Widgery, reported in April 1972 that it had great difficulty in reaching a definite conclusion about the events. In the report’s words the actions of some soldiers ‘bordered on the reckless’. The tribunal accepted that parts of the army believed they were being fired on, but stated that it was unlikely that most of those killed were ‘gunmen and bombers’.
2. The Saville enquiry, established in 1998 under another British Judge, Lord Saville, has yet to report. |

* Most of the basic facts are agreed.
What remains in dispute is whether or not the soldiers came under fire as they entered the area of Rossville Flats. The soldiers claimed to have come under sustained attack by gunfire and nail-bomb.
None of the eyewitness accounts saw any gun or bomb being used by those who had been shot dead or wounded. No soldiers were injured in the operation, no guns or bombs were recovered at the scene of the killing.

An excellent resource is the BBC News Bloody Sunday Inquiry site:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/northern_ireland/2000/bloody_sunday_inquiry/
The fall of Stormont
McAleavy, pp 72-5

- Look at following and explain in your own words how each of the three solutions - reforms, internment and the British Army - failed to solve the crisis.
- Do you think it was inevitable that these attempted solutions would fail?

Catholic complaints & Unionist reforms 1969-71

Long-standing Catholic criticisms
1. The armed B Specials were manned entirely by Protestants
2. People could be locked up without trial and mistreated in other ways under the Special Powers Act.
3. Catholics found it more difficult than Protestants to get a vote in local elections.
4. Council boundaries were fixed or 'gerrymandered' to give Unionist candidates a better chance of winning.
5. Catholics were unable to share in government power.
6. Protestants found it easier to get good council houses.

Response of the Ulster Unionist Government 1969-71
1. The B Specials were disbanded to be replaced by the Ulster Defence Regiment. The UDR was meant to be a mixed force but by November 1972 it was 96% Protestant.
2. The government did not change the Special Powers Act.
3. Election rules were changed to treat all people equally.
4. The government agreed to new, fair boundaries. They were not ready until May 1973.
5. One Catholic was brought into the Cabinet in October 1971.
6. A fair 'points system' was introduced for giving out council houses.

Solution 2: Internment

SOURCE 1
From a report by the Sunday Times 'Insight Team', 1972.
By mid-December 1971, 1,576 people had been arrested by the army under the Special Powers Act - virtually all of them Catholic. That meant almost 1,576 families who had experienced the shock of arrest often in the early hours of the morning and without much tenderness.

SOURCE 2
Anti-internment protest in London.

SOURCE 3
Extract from the 'The Compton Report' an official British Government report, 1971

- Hooding: detainees were kept fully hooded except when interrogated or in rooms by themselves
- Noise: when detainees were held together they were subjected to a continuous hissing noise
- Sleep: it was the general policy to deprive men of sleep during the early days of the operation
Solution 3: The British Army

SOURCE 5
It was not long before occasional clumsy brutality on the part of the British forces provoked an angry reaction from the population. It was not difficult for an IRA, trying to control Catholic areas of Derry and Belfast, to use this reaction for their own ends.

SOURCE 6
The Army was designed and trained to be aggressive... On 27th June, 1970, for the first time, armed Provisionals appeared on the streets to challenge the UVF. The gun battle which followed lasted all night. There were five dead, four of them Protestants. The army’s response was to get tough. On 3rd July a search for arms in Catholic areas led to allegations of damage to property by the soldiers. All the local people were forced by the Army to stay in their houses, this curfew lasted 36 hours. Four people were killed and the army’s conduct ensured the hostility of the Catholic Ghettos.

SOURCE 7
A Belfast docker, John Benson, painted ‘No Tea Here’ on the wall of his street — a reference to the practice of giving tea to the troops. The army complained to the police. Deciding that the slogan was ‘an obvious attempt to intimidate people’, the magistrate gave Benson six months for breach of the peace.

Bloody Sunday - ‘the last straw’

SOURCE 9
Civil Rights marchers on Bloody Sunday.

SOURCE 10
Civil Rights marchers confront the army at barricades before the shootings on 30 January 1972.

SOURCE 11
When the army started shooting that day the first reaction, after fear, was bewilderment. Why were they shooting? At Free Derry corner, where most people had gathered, the crowd flung themselves to the ground. Looking up one could see stragglers running panic-stricken, bounding over the barricade, three of them crumpling to the ground. An hour and a half later no one knew for certain how many were dead. Some said three, some five. (It was actually thirteen.) Later an IRA man said ‘Our military orders after ‘Bloody Sunday’ were to kill every British soldier we could’.
What was the effect of internment & ‘Bloody Sunday’ on the nationalist community?
Walsh, p. 92

**Internment**

Support for the IRA amongst the nationalist population of the Six Counties has been . . . the sea in which the people’s army [the IRA] has swum and, like the sea, it has its tides, its ebbs and flows, but it is always there. The nationalist people withdrew their consent to being ruled by Stormont . . . and proceeded, in succeeding years, to make the Six Counties ungovernable, even in an environment of British military saturation of nationalist areas.

**SOURCE 3**
An extract from The Politics of Irish Freedom by Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams.

**SOURCE 4**
British troops round up suspects under the internment laws, 1971.

1. Is it fair to say internment did more harm than good? Explain your answer.
2. How reliable would you consider Source 3 to be as a view on support for the IRA? Explain your answer.
3. Explain how Source 4 could be used to increase support for the IRA.
Bloody Sunday

To this day, it is difficult to convince Nationalists in the city that the killing of their fellow citizens was anything other than premeditated murder by the army, authorised by Stormont and the British Government. How else, they ask, would soldiers slaughter thirteen innocent people taking part in a peaceful anti-internment march? The only explanation that makes sense to them, and there remain few voices to the contrary, is that there were orders from on high to teach the rebels of ‘Free Derry’ a lesson they would never forget. This lesson, as the evidence of their eyes told them, was to send a good number of the marchers back home in boxes. After much research, I do not believe this ‘conspiracy’ theory to be true. ‘Bloody Sunday’ was a dreadful mistake and should never have happened, but there were no orders or directives from on high instructing the paratroopers to do what they did. But ‘Bloody Sunday’ cannot be seen in isolation. It was a tragedy waiting to happen. For many months there had been endless rioting in the city. Every day, at tea time, there would be a confrontation at the corner of William Street and Rossville Street between soldiers guarding the entrance to the city centre and the rioters operating out of ‘Free Derry’. Day der day soldiers would stand there being pelted by rioters and the stone throwers would get in plenty of practice. The junction was known, with good reason, as ‘aggro corner’.

SOURCE 5
Extract from Provos by Peter Taylor, a journalist with a lifetime’s experience of reporting on Northern Ireland.

SOURCE 6
A mural in Londonderry commemorating Bloody Sunday.

SOURCE 7
SDLP politician John Hume’s reaction to Bloody Sunday, 1972.

4. List the different reactions to Bloody Sunday and explain those reactions.
5. Explain how Bloody Sunday helped the IRA in terms of
   a) practical help
   b) discrediting its opponents.
**Similarity & difference: the two Bloody Sundays**

Rea, p. 51-2

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<th>Bloody Sunday, 21 November 1920; 29 killed</th>
<th>Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972; 13 killed</th>
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<td><strong>The events</strong></td>
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<td>Just after nine o’clock in the morning, twelve British officers were shot dead in their beds or breakfast. Two Auxiliaries who interfered with one of the shootings were also killed.</td>
<td>Catholic Civil Rights marchers were demonstrating in Derry. They were confronted by police and soldiers at the barricades at Free Derry corner. The soldiers were ordered to clear the streets.</td>
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<td>In the afternoon, some Auxiliaries and police opened fire on the crowd at a Gaelic football match in Croke Park. Twelve civilians, including a woman, a child, and one of the players were killed.</td>
<td>Soldiers from the Parachute Regiment moved in and began shooting. Some of the crowd flung themselves to the ground, others panicked. Thirteen unarmed men were shot dead.</td>
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<td>That night two IRA men and another prisoner were killed by Auxiliaries in Dublin Castle jail.</td>
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<td><strong>What had brought about these events?</strong></td>
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<td>a. Tactical causes. The IRA’s main advantage in the war against the British was its undercover agents. The police had brought in a number of intelligence experts from England, who were working with Irish detectives in an attempt to uncover these agents. Michael Collins, the organiser of the IRA, had learned that the British secret police possessed details of him and his leading agents.</td>
<td>a. The escalation of violence. Soldiers had been attacked by Catholic youths. The occasional brutality from the soldiers had provoked an angry response. In 1970, armed IRA had appeared on the streets to challenge the troops. Soldiers were armed with both rubber bullets and live ammunition.</td>
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<td>b. Political causes. Collins also thought the time was right to send a firm message to the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. Negotiations for a cease-fire had begun. Lloyd George seemed to be gaining confidence; two weeks before Bloody Sunday he had made a speech in which he said he ‘had murder by the throat’.</td>
<td>b. Fear. Before January 1972, a number of British soldiers had been killed by gunmen in Northern Ireland. It was said after the events of the day that shots had been heard. If the paratroopers thought they were being shot at by an IRA sniper, it is possible that they may have panicked themselves.</td>
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<td>c. Poor planning. The heavy policing of the Croke Park football match had been planned days before. But the Auxiliaries who were sent there had lost two of their comrades that morning. Their mood was ‘ugly’. It was reported afterwards that the first shots came from the crowd, but this is not proven.</td>
<td>c. The Paras. The army was trained and designed to be aggressive, but the Parachute Regiment was one of the toughest in the army. Paratroops were specially selected and trained for difficult operations. They were not trained for crowd control situations.</td>
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<td>d. Revenge. Richard McKee and Peadar Clancy were the IRA men killed in Dublin Castle. They had nothing to do with the assassinations, having been arrested 24 hours before. The authorities say they were shot trying to escape. Their bodies were dumped on the street the next day, riddled with bullets. The third man killed, called Clune, was not even a member of the IRA.</td>
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February 1997, the 25th Anniversary of AM the second Bloody Sunday. Crowds gather at Free Derry corner and pictures of the victims are spread on the grass.

1. What similarities can you find in the causes of these two events? Are there any differences?
2. Why do you think commemorations like those in the photograph are held?
3. Do you think the Anniversary of the first Bloody Sunday is also commemorated? Give your reasons.
Why did unrest in Northern Ireland get worse, rather than better, after British troops arrived in August 1969?

Gillespie, pp 112-17

The political implications of putting British troops onto the streets of Northern Ireland under the control of the government at Stormont had not been thought through. The troops could gain a breathing space for the politicians but the army could not impose a solution, because there was no political solution to impose.

Arms searches
The army was placed under the control of the Unionist government and found itself in a complex situation.

It had been sent into Northern Ireland to prevent civil war but its presence provided the IRA, determined to destroy the state, with an ideal target. If the army did nothing but wait, the IRA might gradually acquire the resources to mount an aggressive campaign against it. If the army moved against the IRA it could be interpreted that they were on the side of unionists and against Catholics. In effect, the army became piggy in the middle (a phrase used by D Hamill in the title of his book, Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland, 1985).

The decision was taken to search Catholic areas for arms. The arms searches were an attempt to crush the IRA before they became a serious threat, but they served only to increase IRA recruitment.

In 1970, a 34 hour curfew was imposed on the Catholic Falls Road to allow arms searches to take place. In 1971, 17,262 house searches were carried out. Of the 1,183 houses searched between November 1971 and January 1972, arms were found in only 47.

Arms searches ‘a political disaster’
The army made more enemies by using CS gas against the rioters, thus achieving the Provo objective .... The 34 hour curfew imposed on the Falls in July 1970 to facilitate arms searches was .... in political terms, a disaster.

Arms searches alienate the population
Without inside information as to the exact whereabouts of terrorist weapons and documents, the security forces have little option but to search on the vaguest suspicions - nothing is more certain to alienate the population.

SOURCE A
D Hamill, Pig in the Middle: The Army in Northern Ireland, 1985, with the permission of Methuen London Ltd (adapted)

SOURCE B
R Evelegh, Peacekeeping in a Democratic Society: The Lessons of Northern Ireland, 1978, with the permission of C Hurst & Company Ltd

Initial welcome of army quickly disappeared
That the Provisionals achieved widespread support among Belfast Catholics .... was due more to the British army than to themselves. For the army made rapid progress in translating the initial Catholic welcome firstly into suspicion and then into hate.

SOURCE C
The army carries out a search.
J J Lee, Ireland 1912-85,1990, with the permission of Cambridge University Press

New political groupings
New political groupings began to emerge. The break up of the Unionist Party became more pronounced when Ian Paisley won the Bannside by-election on 17 April 1970. Four days later, some liberal unionists who were dedicated to reform and reconciliation, formed the nucleus of the Alliance Party which aimed to bridge the growing divide between Catholic and Protestant Shortly afterwards, in August 1970, nationalist, socialist, liberal and labour politicians came together to form the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) which, although it did have a few Protestant members, immediately became the principal voice of the Catholic minority.
**Internment**

In August 1971 the Unionist government used the Special Powers Act to introduce ‘internment’, the power to arrest, interrogate and detain without trial anyone suspected of being involved in the IRA. The army relied on information which the RUC had on the old IRA. As a result, of the 2,357 people arrested during the first six months, 1,600 were released after interrogation. Few senior members of the Provisional IRA were detained. The Northern Ireland Prime Minister, Brian Faulkner, actually refused to sign detention orders for 97 of the first 337 suspects and later admitted that many of the most wanted escaped the net.

Internment not only failed to stop the violence, but increased support and sympathy for the IRA. Casualties soared in the months immediately after internment. Thirty people had been killed before 9 August 1971, the date of the introduction of internment. By the end of 1971, 143 had been killed. Internment became a new focus for civil rights protests as well as a nationalist rent and rates strike, called by the SDLP.

**Bloody Sunday**

In January 1972, a huge civil rights march took place in Londonderry to protest against internment. Rioting broke out as the rally broke up. Claiming that they were fired on, British army paratroopers opened fire on the marchers and 13 civilians were killed. The subsequent Widgery inquiry, set up by the British government, failed to establish that any of the victims were armed.

This incident, known as Bloody Sunday, was followed by rioting in nationalist areas and an increase in the IRA’s bombing campaign.

*Continued next page ...*
1. In what way did arms searches and internment affect the attitudes of Catholics in Northern Ireland towards the Unionist government and the army?
2. Identify as many reasons as you can to explain why the army’s role in Northern Ireland became increasingly difficult.
The fall of Stormont

Focus
What was the reaction of different sections of the population in Northern Ireland to the imposition of direct rule in 1972?

Fearing that law and order was about to break down completely, Brian Faulkner, the Northern Ireland Prime Minister, demanded authority to rearm the RUC and re-establish the B Specials. Instead, the British Conservative Prime Minister, Edward Heath, insisted on complete British control of security, including the RUC, as well as full responsibility for law and order, justice and the appointment of judges. When Faulkner and his Cabinet refused, Edward Heath took the decision in March 1972 to suspend the Stormont parliament and to introduce direct rule of Northern Ireland from Westminster.

Direct rule
Direct rule from London was intended as a temporary measure until a new system of government for Northern Ireland could be agreed. For the time being, decisions and laws governing Northern Ireland were to be made in Westminster. A Secretary of State and a small team of junior ministers were appointed to take control of departments, such as education, health and social services. Unionists were assured that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only be by the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland while nationalists were promised the same rights as other British citizens.

Reactions to the introduction of direct rule
There was a wide range of reactions to the British government’s decision to introduce direct rule.
• Many in the unionist community felt betrayed by the British government and some began to support more extreme parties. Support for Protestant paramilitary organisations increased and the paramilitary Ulster Defence Association (UDA) was formed. There was an increased spate of sectarian murders, particularly in Belfast.
• Many nationalists were pleased, as it brought an end to unionist control and gave hope for a better future but the Civil Rights Association and the People’s Democracy movement continued their campaign for reform.
• The Dublin government welcomed direct rule and called for an IRA cease-fire.
• The IRA viewed direct rule as Britain seeking to claim a country to which it had no legal right. It escalated its campaign of violence.

Temporary truce
Neither internment nor direct rule had any significant effect on the violence. Four hundred and sixty-seven people were killed in Northern Ireland in 1972, the highest death toll for any of the 25 years of the troubles. The escalation of IRA violence was so severe that the new Secretary of State, William Whitelaw, consented to talks in London with the IRA. A temporary IRA ceasefire was called but the terms of the IRA deal, a complete withdrawal of British troops and an amnesty for all political prisoners, were unacceptable. The IRA signalled the end of the ceasefire by exploding 26 car bombs in Belfast on Bloody Friday, 21 July 1972. The toll of that one day was 11 dead and 130 injured.

IRA lost an opportunity; for peace, an historian’s view
It is arguable that the (Provos) lost their best opportunity of acquiring a political prole at that time by failing to announce a ceasefire immediately on the introduction of direct rule, and publicising realistic conditions for a cessation of hostilities. That they did not do so presumably indicates how close to forcing British withdrawal they thought themselves to be. And they may, of course, have been racked by internal disension on the matter. The safest way to avoid disension was to insist on total victory .... In June 1972 (in talks after the ceasefire) the IRA pitched its demands unrealistically high, and the more militaristic elements quickly resumed hostilities.

Opportunity for peace lost after the ceasefire: an historian’s view
By breaking their ceasefire the Provisionals lost their best opportunity in two decades to negotiate terms for the people they claimed to protect. Their ruthless bombing campaign gave the SDLP the opportunity to climb down from its unproductive abstentionist position.

SOURCE A
J Bardon, A History of Ulster, 1992, with the permission of The Blackstaff Press Ltd

SOURCE B
DPS, Tasks on Bloody Sunday, 10
1. Why did Edward Heath take the decision to suspend Stormont?
2. Explain the reasons for some of the different reactions to the fall of Stormont and the imposition of direct rule from Westminster.
3. To what extent do Sources A and B agree about the opportunities for peace in 1972? What reasons does Source A suggest to explain why the Provisional IRA did not use the opportunity?
A. Pressures on the Unionist government

**SOURCE A**
A letter from a Protestant worker, *Belfast Telegraph*, 3 August 1971

A lot of concessions have been granted to the minority by the Stormont government and there are now equal rights for everyone regardless of class and creed. We say intern all IRA members, rearm the RUC and bring back the B Specials.

1. How does Source A illustrate the pressures on Brian Faulkner? What threat to his position in the Unionist movement does it suggest?

B. Two contrasting images

**SOURCE B1**
British troops in West Belfast, 1969

**SOURCE B2**
The Provisional IRA in command in ‘Free Derry’, 1972

2. Explain how the photographs in B illustrate the change in Catholic attitudes to the British army. Which events were most important in bringing about this change?

C. Two statements about Bloody Sunday

**SOURCE C1**
A group of Catholic priests who were in the Bogside. *Irish Times*, 1 February 1972.

We accuse the soldiers of firing indiscriminately into a fleeing crowd, of gloating over casualties, of preventing medical and spiritual aid reaching some of the dying . . . these men are trained criminals. They differ from terrorists only in the veneer of respectability that a uniform gives them.

**SOURCE C2**

In each case soldiers fired aimed shots at men identified as gunmen and bombers in self defence or in defence of comrades who were threatened. I reject entirely the suggestion they fired indiscriminately or that they fired at a peaceful or innocent crowd.

3. Is it likely that
   a. all soldiers could be classified as trained criminals or
   b. that no soldier fired indiscriminately?
D. Unionists & the suspension of Stormont

**SOURCE D**

A Unionist letter on the suspension of Stormont.  
*Belfast Telegraph*, 12 April 1972.

The decision by the British government to suspend the Northern Ireland Parliament must surely rank with some of the more infamous acts of history. . . . It is not surprising that Catholics North and South are exultant over this victory. The suspension of Stormont has been one of their prime targets. 

The British Government wilted in the face of the enemy . . . Protestants do not submit to this infamous act imposed upon you by cowardly and weak men. Give Westminster your answer loud and clear, for unless you make a stand today, tomorrow you will be ushered into a united Ireland.

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4. **What does this tell you about the fears of Unionists for the future?**

5. **Explain why you agree or disagree with the writer that the suspension of Stormont was a Catholic victory.**

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6. **How would you explain the failure of internment during the 1979s?**
Why was there so much violence in Northern Ireland between 1969 & 1972?
Brooman, pp 33-6

1. How could an IRA member in 1970, who wanted to turn public opinion against the British army use Source 2 to help do so?
2. How can you tell from Source 3 that the Provisional IRA had considerable power in Londonderry in 1972?
3. Look at Source 1, then use the information in this section to answer these questions:
   a. How can the rise in deaths by political violence between 1969-1972 be explained by religious factors?
   b. What other factors need to be considered when explaining the rise in deaths?
   c. Are any of these factors more important than others? Explain your answer

SOURCE 1
Deaths by political violence in Northern Ireland, 1963-27.

SOURCE 2
Soldiers in Londonderry in 1972

SOURCE 3
Armed IRA men checking the occupants of cars entering and leaving a ‘no go’ area in Londonderry.