

The Widgery report: a short critique

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/in_depth/northern_ireland/2000/bloody_sunday_inquiry/665100.stm

Background

30 January 1972

Thirteen civilians are killed by soldiers of the 1st Parachute Regiment during a civil rights march in Londonderry. A similar number are injured and another later dies from his injuries. The date becomes known as Bloody Sunday. UK Prime Minister Edward Heath announces an inquiry.

April 1972

Lord Widgery concludes his investigation and reports that the soldiers had been fired on first. He says there would have been no deaths if there had not been an illegal march, which had created "a highly dangerous situation".

Widgery report: Key problems

- There were inconsistencies in the report. The investigation found no conclusive proof that the dead or wounded had been shot while handling a firearm, yet Lord Widgery concluded that the soldiers had been fired on first. Widgery admitted that the soldiers' firing "bordered on the reckless".
- Many eyewitnesses were not called and testimony was not taken from wounded survivors.
- The interpretation of forensic evidence was flawed. Widgery concluded from firearms residue found on swabs taken from the bodies of the deceased that they had been in close contact with firearms. He dismissed any other possibilities.
- The possibility of shooting directed into the Catholic Bogside area of Londonderry from the city walls, hitting and killing victims, was not given proper consideration.

Campaign for new enquiry

Nationalists campaign for a new inquiry but meet with no response for many years.

1997

The Irish Government submits a detailed dossier of evidence to the UK to back demands for a new Bloody Sunday inquiry. The 178-page document incorporates an assessment of fresh information about the shootings - as well as a damning indictment of the Widgery report.

Some of the dossier is based on the new book, *Eyewitness Bloody Sunday*, which pulls together many previously unconsidered statements.

The UK Government spends seven months studying the evidence before agreeing to the new investigation.

January 1998

On the eve of the 26th anniversary of Bloody Sunday, Tony Blair announces an independent judicial inquiry into Bloody Sunday, headed by the British Law Lord, Lord Saville of Newdigate, and two judges from Commonwealth countries.

The inquiry will come under the 1921 Enquiry Tribunal Act, which means that it will have powers to subpoena witnesses and compel disclosure of documents. The inquiry's findings will be made public.

April 1998

Lord Saville opens the proceedings with a vow to fully investigate Bloody Sunday and events leading up to it. The naming of the inquiry as the Bloody Sunday Inquiry is viewed as having huge significance and a symbolic move to detach the new investigation from the Widgery inquiry.



'We must find the truth of Bloody Sunday', Tony Blair.
One of the many messages that urged him
to announce the new inquiry.