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End of a chapter in Northern Ireland



Roddy Evans

Dr Roddy Evans writes from Northern Ireland about the findings of Lord Saville's Report on the events of 'Bloody Sunday'. Lord Saville concluded that the 14 killed by the British Army on 30 January 1972 in Derry/Londonderry were innocent. On 15 June when the report was published, Prime Minister David Cameron, apologized in the House of Commons to the bereaved families on behalf of his Government.

There can be no doubt that what happened in Derry on that day in January 1972 dictated the course of events which followed. The events of that day were compounded by the 1972 Report of Lord Chief Justice Widgery who transferred the blame from the soldiers on to the murdered victims.

Everyone knew that it was a travesty of justice, but this travesty was the official British version for 38 years.

The manner in which history developed from that time can be illustrated from some remarks by Garret Fitzgerald, a former Taoiseach. Three days after the events on that day he attended funerals in Derry. He recalled, "After the funeral we were brought to an SDLP home for a meal. But when afterwards I brought plates into the kitchen a woman said to me, 'Isn't it great that so many are joining?' 'Joining what?', I asked bemused. 'The IRA of course', another woman answered. It was clear that the killings were already destabilising the North and our state also."

The bereaved families and the City of Derry have campaigned for four decades to have this wrong officially righted. In 1997 Dermot Walsh, Professor of Law at the University of Limerick, analysed the Widgery Report, and this became the basis of the Irish Government's submission to the British Government in 1998. And in that year Prime Minister Tony Blair appointed Lord Saville to head an inquiry. While Lord Saville was a brilliant Law Lord many people felt that he was the wrong man for the job as his field of expertise was civil law and not criminal law; also the cognoscenti said that 'the inquiry took too long and cost too much, and that when it finally comes out it will satisfy no one'. How wrong they all were!

The bereaved relatives were checked into the Derry Guildhall at 8 a.m. on the morning of June 15 and were kept incommunicado until 3.30 in the afternoon when Prime Minister David Cameron was to make a statement in the House of Commons. Inside the Guildhall through this period of waiting those relatives were being briefed by their lawyers on Saville's findings. Huge crowds gathered in the square including the world's press. I, like many others, watched on TV.

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There was tension and heightened apprehension in the waiting masses. Then two hands appeared at a window high up in the Guildhall with 'thumbs-up' signs. Huge applause arose from the waiting crowds.

At 3.30 sharp, on a giant screen, David Cameron made his address to Parliament. Cheering filled the square. Then the relatives spoke one by one from a platform each shouting the verdict on their dead son, father or brother - "Innocent!"

In the space of an afternoon that sunny day one witnessed the healing of a weeping, festering sore at the heart of a whole city and, I might add, a whole nation. It was a wound, which unhealed, would have lain forever festering relations between the two countries.

[This Report](#) is 5,000 pages long in 10 volumes. Its meticulous attention to detail and the utter clarity and unambiguous quality of its conclusions have made the Report impregnable to attack. The cost and the time taken to produce it were time and money well spent.

The Church of Ireland Bishop of Derry, Ken Good, and the heads of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches went to meet with the bereaved families the following day. It was a visit deeply appreciated, as well as muting the voices of surprisingly few begrudgers.

It has been said that it all began in Derry (1968/69) and it has ended there with the Saville Report. It is, I think, the end of a chapter. That does not mean that the road ahead may not be rocky and bumpy. But it will be a new chapter.

Dr James Roderick Evans was born in County Meath, Ireland, in 1923. Graduating from Trinity College Dublin in 1947, he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland in 1951. He practiced medicine in Dublin and London and later in Asia and South America and travelled widely in the Middle East and Southern Africa before returning to live in Belfast in 1971. There he experienced at first-hand the unfolding of the historic developments in Northern Ireland over the last thirty years. He has written three pamphlets and a book which are available in pdf and html and can be read in full at his new website at <http://www.rodध्येvans.net>.

NOTE: Individuals of many cultures, nationalities, religions, and beliefs are actively involved with Initiatives of Change. These commentaries represent the views of the writer and not necessarily those of Initiatives of Change as a whole.

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