

Bloody Sunday: Britain finally admits its crime

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On June 15, something amazing happened: British Prime Minister David Cameron apologised for the British army shooting Irish people.

"It was wrong", said Cameron, after a government inquiry found the British army was responsible for the killing of 14 unarmed civil rights demonstrators, seven of them teenagers, in the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre in Derry.

On January 30, 1972, up to 30,000 people marched in Derry, in the six Irish counties occupied by Britain, to demand an end to internment, a policy that allowed for the jailing of people without trial.

British soldiers opened fire without provocation, shooting 26 people. Some were shot in the back while trying to flee. One victim was shot dead while waving a white flag and another with his hands in the air shouting "Don't shoot!"

Yet another victim, James Joseph Wray, lay bleeding on the ground when a British soldier shot him again at close range.

On the face of it, it is astonishing that it has taken 38 years and a 12-year-long inquiry headed by British judge Lord Mark Saville to establish the simple truth that the responsibility for the mass murder lay with those who did the shooting rather than those getting shot.

The inquiry cost £191.2 million, which seems a remarkable amount to spend on a case in which the facts speak for themselves.

The reason it has taken so long is because of Britain's sustained efforts to cover it up. The victims were slandered as violent terrorists.

Cameron has denied there was a British cover-up, but the only explanation for it taking 38 years for British authorities to admit the obvious truth is a sustained effort at denial.

This belated acknowledgement of what happened is long-overdue for the families of those who died in the atrocity, those who were injured and the entire oppressed Catholic community in the six counties.

And 38 years doesn't seem too bad when you consider that it was only in 1997 that then British PM Tony Blair apologised for Britain's role in creating the Irish famine of 1845-1852.

During the "famine", potato crops failed across Ireland. However, that wasn't the only food available in the British colony — just the only food available to peasants. There was plenty of perfectly good food grown on large estates that was sent to England.

About a million Irish people starved to death and another million fled overseas.

It took 150 years for Britain to apologise for creating the famine. By this measure, the British state is getting quicker to acknowledge its atrocities.

But with Britain having violently occupied Ireland for centuries, there must be some in the British establishment who feel upset at the apparent loss of another grand tradition. It seems they can't do anything these days, from hunting foxes to shooting the Irish — they probably fear polo will be banned next!

However, the 12-year inquiry did not actually rule the killings were “unlawful”, the June 16 Age said on. It did not recommend criminal charges against the soldiers involved (although these weren't ruled out).

Nor would Cameron comment on whether or not anyone involved should be charged over the murders. In the lead up to the Saville inquiry releasing its findings, some commentators in Britain warned that potential prosecutions over Bloody Sunday, would “demoralise” British soldiers serving in Afghanistan.

This is an indication that the occupying forces in Afghanistan are massacring civilians. In Afghanistan, atrocities on the scale of Bloody Sunday are repeatedly perpetrated by the occupying soldiers.

This helps explain the prolonged attempts to prevent the truth about Bloody Sunday being officially recognised. It was not just one unfortunate massacre. The British empire was built with massacres and massacres remain the stock-in-trade of imperialist armies.

On May 31, Israel committed its own massacre — of nine unarmed activists bringing humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. Backed by the United States, Israel will establish its own inquiry into the atrocity.

By the form Britain has shown, we could expect a ruling by 2050 accepting that acknowledged that Israeli commandos were, after all, the ones responsible for the deaths (without admitting it was “unlawful”).

A better alternative is to challenge the “right” of imperialist states to use violence to further their political and economic interests.

Acting to end the Afghan war and Israel's occupation of Palestine are good places to start — otherwise there will be more Bloody Sundays for politicians to apologise for decades after the fact.

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P.S.

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