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‘Roving Vultures’. Television News and the Outbreak of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.

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Abstract: In October 1968, an illegal civil rights march in Londonderry in Northern Ireland was broken up by the local police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary. Hitherto, Northern Ireland, although a constituent part of the United Kingdom, was an unknown quantity for most British people, who knew or cared little about its endemic sectarian problems, and its one-sided and discriminatory system of government. Had the march taken place in 1958 rather than 1968, it very likely would have remained an item of local interest and controversy only. However, the presence in 1968 of three television crews, who recorded what transpired, meant that the problems of the province were cruelly exposed, leading to a spiral of violence known as ‘the Troubles’ which would cost the lives of some 3,600 people in the succeeding decades.

On Saturday, 5 October 1968, a civil rights march in Londonderry in Northern Ireland was dispersed by members of the local police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). It had been the object of the protestors to demonstrate against alleged discrimination in the allocation of public-sector housing and jobs in the city. The considerable violence visited by police upon the demonstrators shocked many of those on the march, including a number of members of the regional and Westminster parliaments who were present. Also present were three television camera crews, one from the Irish state broadcaster, Radio Telefís Éireann (RTE), another from Ulster Television, the local Independent Television company and a third from the local BBC station, BBC Northern Ireland. The development since the early 1960s of relatively light-weight 16mm film cameras, such as the Arriflex 16BL and the Éclair NPR, which could be readily synchronised with a portable tape recorder such as a Nagra, had revolutionised television news gathering. A two-man crew could shoot pictures, with synchronised sound, of events as they unfolded. The exposed reels of film were then rushed back to labs for processing, with sound and images appearing on viewers’ sets only hours later.¹ In the case of the Londonderry episode, all three crews present used just such equipment to record scenes of police violence, and it has often been said that the broadcasting of these images on television news bulletins had a profound impact.²

Northern Ireland was a political, economic and social backwater in the United Kingdom of the late 1960s, and its endemic problems were ignored outside of the province, despite the attempts over many years by various political and civil rights activists to bring them to wider attention. For Nationalists and Catholics in Northern Ireland, Londonderry (known locally as

Derry) was symbolic of the endemic discrimination which they believed they suffered at the hands of the Unionist government. A systematic gerrymander of local ward boundaries kept political control in Unionist hands, despite a sizeable Nationalist majority in the city. The local government franchise was restricted by a property qualification and included plural votes for business owners, both of which had long-since been abandoned in the rest of the United Kingdom. And since the allocation of public housing meant the allocation of votes, there was a strong political incentive on the part of the local authorities to discriminate in the allocation of social housing, and to allocate homes to Catholics within the already overcrowded South Ward. Indeed, the very poor record in the building of social housing and the discriminatory manner in which limited stocks were allocated, were undoubtedly the key grievances in enflaming Nationalist opinion in Derry in this period, alongside wider allegations of systematic bias against the north-west in general and local discrimination in the distribution of public sector jobs.

A Derry Housing Action Committee was formed in the city in March 1968 by a group of young socialist activists, and had begun a sporadic campaign of squatting, sit-down protests and 'occupations' of the local council chamber. Interestingly enough, many of those involved in the early days of movement, cited the inspiration of the black civil rights protests in the United States, explicitly stating that 'we had seen it on the TV'.³ In August 1968, the Derry group invited the Belfast-based Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) to hold a march in the city, and an October date was agreed. From the beginning, such control as there was over the Derry march was exercised by the local activists. However, shortly before the parade was due to take place, the Minister for Home Affairs, William Craig imposed a partial ban, claiming that it was likely to lead to serious public disorder. Nevertheless, the local activists were determined to go ahead, and managed to convince the nervous NICRA leadership to proceed.

Craig had been warned by the RUC of possible trouble from local loyalists and the subsequent official investigation by Lord Cameron pointed out that the route 'traversed certain Protestant districts'.⁴ And while there was nothing especially 'protestant' about the part of the Waterside ward the marchers proposed to walk, the old walled heart of the city had a special symbolic significance for loyalists, and the decision to hold a meeting in the Diamond was deliberately provocative. Moreover, the RUC's attitude was that the parade

was far from 'non-sectarian', informing Craig that several of its key organisers were well-known members of the IRA and the Communist Party.⁵

Craig's ban seems however, to have played into the hands of the organisers and to have served to antagonise many of the moderate Nationalists in Derry, such as Eddie McAteer and John Hume, who were themselves suspicious of the activities of the local leftists and Republicans. At the same time it provided an opportunity for those who, as Cameron puts it, 'had decided that their campaign would benefit from violent conflict with the authorities'. The latter group might include such individuals as Michael Farrell of the Young Socialists group at Queen's University, who figured prominently in the mêlée which ensued. Gerry Fitt MP had also secured the attendance of three Westminster Labour MPs, Russell Kerr, Anne Kerr and John Ryan. Cameron ascribes to Craig's ban also, the presence of 'mass television and press coverage'.⁶

The size of the crowd which assembled outside the Waterside Railway Station on the afternoon of the 5th October is difficult to ascertain. Cameron put it at about 2,000 while the principal local organiser stated that only some 400 showed up to march, while another 200 stood on the pavements to look on.⁷ *The Times* gave a figure of 600 to 800.⁸ Mary Holland estimated the crowd to be no fewer than 3,000.⁹ There were approximately 130 RUC men present, many having been brought in from outside the city to supplement the sixty normally available there. These included two platoons of Reserve Force, equipped with two water cannon. The local County Inspector being on leave, County Inspector Meharg, head of the Special Branch was drafted in to replace him. This officer rather nervously recited the terms of the Minister's banning order through a loudhailer, but then ominously warned that women and children should not remain in the area. Since Betty Sinclair, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association had not yet arrived from Belfast, Ivan Cooper of the Derry Labour Party remonstrated with Inspector Meharg on the right of the people of Derry to march in their own city. Then, using the police loudhailer, Cooper made an impassioned plea to the crowd to demonstrate to the authorities that they had no interest in bringing violence or bloodshed to the streets of Derry. These scenes were captured by at least two of the three television crews present, and Cooper's articulate and impassioned plea for peace, strangely enhanced rather than undermined by a squealing loudhailer, made for a poignant prelude for what was to follow.

Police cordons had blocked the proposed route of the march, up Distillery Brae, and across Simpsons Brae which abuts it. The alternative and rather obvious route towards Craigavon Bridge, along Duke Street, was not however blocked, apparently because it was a one-way street with traffic flowing towards the station and because the police had not been notified that the marchers proposed to take this route. But at about 15:35 they decided to do precisely that, behind a blue and white banner reading 'Civil Rights March', and sporting dozens of placards inscribed 'Police State Here', and 'The Proper Place for Politics is on the Street'.

A force of Police Reserve (popularly known as the Riot Squad), under the command of Head Constable Kerr Patterson, was hurriedly moved from Distillery Brae to head them off, taking up positions about fifty yards from the bridge. Two large tenders were placed across Duke Street behind the police, meaning the approaching marchers would walk straight into the first row of two sergeants and fifteen policemen. Fitt, McAteer and Currie, as the three local MPs present, were pushed to the head of the march, giving it a Nationalist complexion of precisely the type which the radical organisers had said they aimed to avoid. Alongside them were Ivan Cooper and Paddy Devlin. The BBC and RTE camera crews took positions in advance of the march, and filmed the three MP's at the head of it as it approached the police lines. The UTV crew meanwhile sought overhead shots, by filming from the upstairs window of a house in Duke Street, the camera being operated by Kenneth Orbinson. The BBC crew consisted of Dick Macmillan operating the camera, with Alan Reid recording sound.¹⁰

Pooling arrangements between the various broadcasters make it difficult at this remove to be sure exactly which crews shot which scenes. The well-known footage of Cooper's speech was probably shot by the RTE crew, with Gay O'Brien operating an Arriflex 16BL camera, and Eamon Hayes recording sound. Dick Macmillan of BBC Northern Ireland can clearly be seen with his own Arriflex, filming the same scenes. **[Insert Fig 1 here with caption "The BBC's Dick Macmillan, probably captured by RTE's Gay O'Brien"]** Both RTE and BBC crews appear to have been just behind the police lines as the marchers barged straight into the police lines, with some pushing from behind.¹¹ As is clear from O'Brien's footage, police batons immediately began flailing as the crowd clattered into their lines, despite no order to draw truncheons having been given. County Inspector Meharg was not present at this initial confrontation, having decided to make his way from his position at the top of Distillery Brae to Duke Street via Spencer Road.¹² Fitt, McAteer and Currie were all struck by batons at this point. Fitt was hauled off to Victoria Barracks and thereafter to hospital, where three stitches

were inserted into a head wound. It seems that at this stage, most of the marchers were unaware of what had happened, and a confused stand-off ensued. There were ironic chants of 'Sieg Heil' at the police from sections of the crowd, with Michael Farrell and the student contingent from Belfast strongly to the fore. Police discipline had already broken by this stage, and it is at this moment that both the BBC's Dick Macmillan and RTE's Gay O'Brien filmed an RUC officer violently jabbing a man in the gut with his truncheon. That the man, Paddy Douglas from Donaghmore, was appealing to the police for restraint ('Gentlemen, gentlemen, please! God save us!') only adds to the shock of the scene.¹³ The two cameramen were standing right next to one another, as the scene is shot from two similar but slightly different angles. This famous scene is often re-shown on television documentaries on the civil rights movement. **[Insert Fig 2 here with caption "Paddy Douglas being struck by an RUC officer, as filmed by the BBC's Dick Macmillan"]** Very often however, a misleading version of events is conveyed by bleeding this and subsequent episodes together and showing them out of sequence. For instance, the 'Sieg Heil' sequence is often shown after the scene in which Douglas is struck, although it actually occurred just before the assault.¹⁴ Also obscured is that the violence subsided at this point, with the arrival from Belfast of Betty Sinclair of NICRA. Someone produced a chair, and an impromptu meeting took place before the police line. Meanwhile, another line of police had formed up behind the crowd near Cochrane's Row, effectively pinning them into Duke Street (then much narrower than it is today), and making dispersal difficult.

After a number of speeches had been made, Chief Steward John Gallagher and then Betty Sinclair, attempted to draw the meeting to a close, using the police loudhailer. Gallagher apparently, did not operate the device properly, and his message to the crowd that 'the meeting is ended. Kindly disperse and go to your home' seems not to have been heard.¹⁵ Sinclair said: 'I want to ask you to be with me and grow up. I'm too old in this game to let Bill Craig take me on. Having registered your protest, I now ask you to disperse quietly'. However, according to Detective Constable Eakin of Castlereagh, Belfast, not all members of the crowd were pleased to hear this and there were shouts of 'Go home Betty!' and 'You are a communist!'¹⁶ At this point, some of the protesters, probably members of the Belfast-based Young Socialists Alliance, threw their placards over the heads of those in front of them and at the police. There was a good deal of bad-tempered shouting, jostling and swearing at the police. The chair which had been used by the speakers can be seen in television

footage to be tossed back and forth between the police and the crowd. One demonstrator can be heard to shout 'use your fucking baton, you Gestapo cunt, you!' There were also cries of 'Get into them! Get stuck into them!' That there was violence and provocation on the part of the crowd here is clear enough, although this rarely is apparent from re-screening of the events on television.¹⁷

According to County Inspector Meharg, the officer in overall control of policing on the day, after Sinclair had tried unsuccessfully to dismiss the crowd, the meeting descended into a general mêlée. Placards were being ripped from poles, and broken staves were being flung at his officers. It was now that he twice gave the order that police should 'hold their hands', that is, they should refrain from aggressive action. 'I held the police for two minutes and they were subjected to a fusillade of missiles. ... I [then] decided that in order to restore order and clear this mob, it was necessary to order the police to draw batons.'¹⁸ Ivan Cooper reported that he remembered a police order, 'give it to them'.¹⁹ Republican Labour MP Harry Diamond accused County Inspector Meharg in Stormont of having ordered his men to 'give it to the bastards'.²⁰

The police (as Cameron pointed out) had already used their batons on Fitt and McAteer 'entirely without justification' and at this point their discipline seems to have broken down entirely. Many of them had individually drawn their batons in advance of the County Inspector's order to disperse the march, and several officers now laid into the crowd with considerable violence for a period of up to a quarter of an hour. According to one journalist present, police 'punched, batoned and pursued civil rights demonstrators in a brutal and sickening display of what can only be called concerted violence.'²¹

Dick Macmillan had followed the UTV crew to an upstairs window by this stage, so it was left to O'Brien and Hayes to film the violence at street level. They found themselves in the midst of the pandemonium entirely by chance, as individual policemen launched savage attacks on members of the crowd, aiming their truncheons at heads and at testicles. Hayes has recalled his astonishment as policemen 'beat the shit' out of members of the crowd.²² As the crowd fled from the police at the bridge end of Duke Street, they clattered into second line of police blocking their exit via the station side of the street. O'Brien's pictures clearly showed officers ferociously striking non-violent demonstrators on the head with batons, with one blow producing an audible crack on Hayes' soundtrack. District Inspector McGimpsey can be seen

to thrash a prostrate demonstrator with his blackthorn stick, while another officer aims a blow at the same man's head as he sprawls on the ground. Accompanying these highly disturbing images are Hayes' sound recordings of the horrified screams of women. **[Insert Fig 3 here with caption "RTE's Gay O'Brien and Eamon Hayes, captured by the BBC's Dick Macmillan"]**

As the crowd was breaking up in chaos, County Inspector Meharg gave an order to District Inspector Hood to call out the water cannons because, during the baton charge, 'the police were still being subjected to a fusillade of missiles.'²³ The first of the two vehicles drove through the crowd towards the station with both jets spraying freezing, filthy brown water at high pressure. Another water cannon then drove up Duke Street towards the bridge, sweeping both sides of the street, at one point playing its jet through the open window of the first floor of a house, where Kenneth Orbinson had been filming for UTV. His camera was put out of action by the water, and he had to spend twenty minutes repairing and reloading it. The water cannon then continued over Craigavon Bridge, with its jets spraying both sides of the pavement. 'Hundreds of afternoon shoppers, many of them women and some accompanied by young children, were caught in the deluge as the water carrier travelled to the Derry side of the bridge and continued round the roundabout at the foot of Carlisle Road, more than a quarter of a mile from the scene of the trouble.'²⁴

RTE's Hayes and O'Brien had become separated from their reporter, Pat Sweeney, before the day's events had properly begun, but decided now to get their material back to Dublin as quickly as possible without waiting to do a 'piece to camera'. They had driven up from Dublin the day before and had enjoyed the Friday night atmosphere in the bar of the City Hotel. Hayes recalls that Ivan Cooper told him that they would get 'some good pictures' on the march, but none of them had anticipated anything as shocking as what happened. After the meeting had been broken up, O'Brien wrestled with his camera in the large lightproof cloth bag (known as 'the nun's knickers') to extract the film, while Hayes phoned RTE from a call box to tell his colleagues to be ready to process 'good material'. However, since they were worried that their film might be confiscated by the police or B-Specials before they reached the border, O'Brien hid his film under the spare tyre in his boot, while he put some blank film into a tin on which he wrote 'Derry riots'. As it transpired, they had no difficulty in getting the film back to Dublin, and the shocking material they recorded was broadcast that night on the main nine pm news on RTE. Unfortunately the transcript has not survived.

ITN's early evening broadcast at 18.10 carried nothing on the still-unfolding story from Derry, but by the late evening broadcast at 21.45, read by Gordon Honeycombe, it was the lead item. Honeycombe said that police had clashed with demonstrators protesting against what they said was religious discrimination in Northern Ireland. Footage from Derry followed, with Honeycombe informing viewers that as demonstrators threw stones and placards at the police cordon, batons were used to break up the crowds. A group of Labour MP's watched the demonstration, while water cannon were used to spray the crowd. An interview with Gerry Fitt, conducted by a UTV reporter was shown, with Fitt's blood-stained shirt prominently in view.²⁵ The whole sequence on the Derry events lasted one minute and forty-five seconds. The main BBC evening news was broadcast slightly later, at 7.20pm, read by Peter Woods, and the Derry story was run as the third item, with film from BBC Northern Ireland. Woods said that the protestors were demonstrating against alleged discrimination on religious and political grounds, particularly in jobs and housing. Country Inspector Meharg's warning was reported, along with the fact that the parade had been banned in certain parts of the city. The marchers defied the ban. 'The marchers walked straight into the police cordon, and this was when the trouble started. There were violent scuffles with police and marchers sometimes rolling on the ground, and many people were hurt. More than thirty people were treated in a local hospital and three policemen were injured, but none seriously.' It was reported that Gerry Fitt was amongst the injured, and he was quoted as saying afterwards that he was 'amazed at the violence of the police'. The story was run again on the late evening news at 10.29 pm, with Richard Baker, again with commentary over pictures from Belfast. This time the comment was included that 'stones were thrown and the police drew their batons'. A still image of Gerry Fitt was shown over a quotation to the effect that he was amazed by the police violence. 'In my opinion they went mad'.²⁶

ITN, the BBC and RTE were all members of the European Broadcasting Union, who swapped news footage via the daily Eurovision news exchanges. And since no video recordings of actual broadcasts have survived, it is impossible to know at this remove exactly what scenes from Derry were broadcast by which station. However, we do know that graphic scenes of violence were transmitted, and had a profound effect upon the British public. A Mr Hawkes wrote from Paisley to a local paper that: 'Here in Scotland we viewed the recent Londonderry riots on television. Anyone who seen (sic) these films were left in no doubt whatsoever as to the fact that your police acted in a most brutal manner. At one stage we saw a policeman

deliberately strike a man on the head with his baton. In another picture we saw two police officers (if I can still use that term to describe these men), hold a rioter while a third officer struck him with a blunt instrument on the head. I have seen our Scottish police officers at football matches when they were alleged to act with brutality, but I have no doubt their actions were honourable compared with those of the RUC in Londonderry'. Mrs B. Lewis wrote from Birmingham: 'I've never been so shocked in all my life. It's about time something was done about the police in Derry.'²⁷ Bernard T. Clarke, from Moreton in Cheshire, wrote to Prime Minister O'Neill, protesting at the behaviour of the RUC: 'It occurs to me that the police force in Londonderry would have been far better employed in protecting the rights of individuals to protest in an orderly manner against conditions that they disagreed with, rather than being allowed to behave like thugs in suppressing such demonstrations. That the police of Londonderry behaved like thugs is very evident by the films that have been shown on English television, for I personally witnessed a so-called police officer using his baton at waist height in a forward thrusting manner. This type of activity is quite repugnant to me and I would wish to protest and state quite categorically, that I object most strongly when you class yourself and your administration as British. I am sending a copy of this letter to the editors of the "Belfast Telegraph", the Belfast "Newsletter" and the "Derry Journal" with the request that they publish, in the hope that this will demonstrate that the affairs of Northern Ireland do not go unnoticed outside the Province.'²⁸ Dr KS Walsh Brennan, grandson of a Head Constable of the old RIC, wrote to *The Times* to state that he was 'appalled at the brutality reported on television and in the national press of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to civil rights marchers ... in Londonderry. As a physician I am concerned at water hoses being aimed at infants and elderly infirm, police baton thrusts to males in the gonadal region and batons rained on persons already knocked unconscious. As a member of the Conservative Party, I am embarrassed by the lack of civil rights in a Province with a so-called Conservative Government'. F.A. Costello, an Irishman resident in Godalming, complained at the 'shameful Daleyism displayed in Londonderry last weekend'.²⁹ John G Quinn, a prospective Liberal Party parliamentary candidate wrote that 'it is saddening that the only commendable thing about Derry on Saturday was the vast publicity on British television and radio and in the press. Perhaps this may spur the Westminster government into long-delayed action'.³⁰ *The Belfast Newsletter* reported on the Monday morning that 'millions of television viewers and radio listeners throughout the UK and in Eire were given pictures and sounds of the disturbances in Londonderry in bulletins late on Saturday night and yesterday. Not since the riots outside

Crumlin Road prison, and the strife in Divis street years ago have events in Ulster been given such publicity.'³¹

Radio also had its part to play in spreading the news from Derry, and William Craig appears to have made matters much worse for his government by his stalwart defence of the actions of the RUC, and cementing the image of Northern Ireland as a backwater of bigotry and police brutality. He featured on the BBC's *The World This Weekend*, broadcast on Radio 4 at 1:00pm on Sunday 6 October, on which a number of interviews were conducted by William Hardcastle. Craig told Hardcastle that: 'I am quite satisfied that the police used no more violence than was absolutely necessary and, in fact, showed considerable restraint.' He said that did not attack until they themselves were attacked by the demonstrators. The march had been restricted because it might have caused countrywide riots. He denied showing favouritism to protestant marchers and declared that 'there will be no inquiry into the police methods used.' Gerry Fitt by contrast said that the police had used deliberate violence and brutality, and that he himself was injured by police batons. Conditions in Londonderry were a negation of democracy and the people of Londonderry would continue to fight for civil rights. Finally, John Ryan MP, gave his account of events, and said that he hoped never again to see police acting with the brutality he saw in Londonderry.³² He was particularly critical of the use of the water cannon, and said that he had seen women and children injured.³³ Craig appeared again in an interview with ITN later that Sunday at 18.02 and 22.10, once again robustly defending the actions of the RUC. In an interview with UTV's James Robinson, Craig complimented the police on 'their very fine work in avoiding what could have been a most disastrous situation. ... It was only when they [the demonstrators] tried to force their way through that the police found it necessary to draw their truncheons and to take positive action to stop them, and I think they did it with great tact and discretion'.³⁴ And flying in the face of what everyone had seen on television, Craig declared: 'part of the code of instruction in baton drill is that the police must aim at the legs. It is felt that in doing so you minimise the injury that would be caused to demonstrators. I reject completely that allegations that the police used their batons in any way contrary to the code'.³⁵ Craig's contributions prompted a scathing response from journalist Mary Holland a few days later: 'It is Craig's face which has grown familiar to British viewers this past week defending the actions of the police at Londonderry last Saturday. He has probably done more than any civil rights spokesman to

rouse English sympathies for the minority here. As one apolitical viewer said to me: “with an enemy like that, who needs friends?”³⁶

In the face of this outcry, the political ramifications were immediate as the British government felt obliged to be seen to be doing something about the domestic situation in Northern Ireland, an urge successive governments had heartily resisted since the formation of the state in 1920. Prime Minister Harold Wilson immediately came under pressure from the three Labour MPs who had attended the Derry demonstration to launch a public enquiry. Instead Wilson invited O'Neill to a meeting in Downing Street, at which he pressed upon him the need to introduce significant reforms.³⁷ The Prime Minister also asked Mr Callaghan, Home Secretary, to report to him on the incidents. Meanwhile however, the reputation of Northern Ireland and its police continued to blacken as the week progressed. *The Times* on Thursday 10th carried a detailed story by Rita Marshall on the report by the three Labour MPs which had been submitted to Callaghan, including their account of Fitt's being hit by a police baton, the allegation that a policeman had brought his baton up towards the testicles of a young person in the crowd, and that a woman of about sixty 'who was hysterical on the pavement after having been hosed down by the water cannon', had her spectacles removed by a policeman with one hand while 'he hit her over the head with his baton with the other'.³⁸ There was no contradiction in the report of the MPs' allegations, which ended simply with a report that O'Neill had accepted an invitation from Wilson to come for talks on the riots.

The damage to Northern Ireland's reputation however, was not limited to the UK, and the Derry story also featured in a variety of foreign press and television outlets over the coming days. It seems unlikely that a relatively minor skirmish, in which no-one was actually killed, would have featured at all, without the indignation aroused by the television pictures. The CBS Evening News on Monday 7 October, read by Walter Cronkite, ran a short Derry piece, apparently accompanied by film footage. Cronkite said that weekend riots had left eighty people injured. The trouble stemmed from Catholic complaints of discrimination by the protestant-run government, while British Premier Harold Wilson had called for an investigation.³⁹ However, the extent of television news coverage in the US appears to have been exaggerated both at the time and since. None of the main US networks ran national news broadcasts on weekends and the Derry story was the twelfth item on CBS on the Monday. The nationalist *Irish News* carried a story on 7 October, that ABC in New York had rung Gerry Fitt to tell him that they had received pictures of the scenes in Derry over the

weekend and had relayed them to the American people. It was claimed that ABC had interviewed him, and that he 'gave them a full account of what had occurred'.⁴⁰ In fact, no such story appeared on ABC or NBC news on 7 October and there were only two Northern Ireland stories on the US networks for the remainder of 1968: a 03:30 report on Londonderry by Chet Huntley and George Montgomery on NBC on 7 November, and a twenty second piece on CBS News with Walter Cronkite on 11 December.⁴¹

However, there was a good deal of press coverage in America, probably generated by the furore provoked in the British papers. For instance, the *New York Times* featured the story in a short article entitled 'Northern Irish Police Rout a Catholic Rights Parade': 'the clashes erupted when 500 demonstrators waving banners and chanting civil rights songs tried to force their way past police wagons blocking a main road. The police charged with batons, tore down banners and rolled demonstrators to the ground.'⁴² Shortly afterwards, the *Times* returned with a much fuller story, prominently featuring a much-used photograph of three policemen belabouring with truncheons, a young man clinging to a lamppost. **[Insert Fig 4 here with caption "The much-utilised photograph of the RUC in action in Derry, New York Times, 9 October 1968"]** John M. Lee's piece reported 'the worst violence seen in Londonderry since the 1920s', and the widespread allegations of police brutality. He also quoted Craig to the effect that Communist elements, acting through the Irish Republican Army, had exploited the discontent of Londonderry Catholics to turn a civil rights demonstration into a riot. District Inspector McGimpsey was quoted as saying that 'the civil rights people are quite genuine. But knowingly or unknowingly they are being used. This is our danger. It is left wing, and it is Communism.' However, Lee also provided a pocket history of the city, and cast a light on its gerrymandered local authority and discrimination in housing and its undemocratic voting system.⁴³ Edward A Carew of New York wrote to the British Ambassador in Washington of reading the story in the *New York Times* and seeing 'a photograph of policemen clubbing a demonstrator. There have also been radio and television reports of brutal police attacks. It is a matter of deep regret that these incidents should be permitted to occur in an area controlled by Britain, and it is even more regrettable that people must take to the streets to demand their civil rights'. He urged the ambassador to impress upon the British Government the importance of redressing the conditions that have brought about the demonstrations and punishing the policemen who are guilty of brutality'.⁴⁴ A.B. Watson, also of New York, wrote of being 'shocked and distressed to read of the police brutality in Londonderry. Whether such acts of repression take place in Londonderry or

Chicago, corrective action must be taken'.⁴⁵ Williard Dingler, of the American Congress for Irish Freedom wrote to the State Department to complain about the police action in Derry, quoting Russell Kerr's account of the alleged assault on the elderly lady: 'well now, doesn't this make us all feel better to know that our State Department endorses a government which has such courteous and well-mannered policemen? Frankly, I think this is disgusting to think that the United States by refusing to speak out, endorses such a policy'.⁴⁶ Peter Keegan wrote from New Jersey USA, that 'for three days now, Oct 6, 7 and 8, newscasters here and taped messages from London are blaring out the recent disturbances in Londonderry, caused by discrimination against the Catholic minority. The tactics of the ruling party, the commentators say, would make the average American gangster drool'.⁴⁷

This negative coverage in the US was rapidly generating concern back in Northern Ireland. One civil servant reported that his son in California had told him in a letter that 'the disturbances in N. Ireland are quite frequently reported here, the civil rights workers are more or less equated with Martin Luther King in the deep south. They get a very favourable press against the iniquitous NI government. I don't know if American liberal opinion counts for much, but if it does the Unionists need a good PR man quickly.' He himself had heard much the same from an acquaintance who met the Ulster athlete, Mary Peters on her return from a lecture trip to the south and east of the USA after the Olympics. She said in effect that she had to play down her NI connections to protect her interests in the trip. He quipped 'you will be interested to see what a small world it really is'.⁴⁸ His colleague replied that 'certainly our information here bears out yours; the British Information Service in New York were, we understand, inundated with enquiries from all over the USA about our 5th October trouble'.⁴⁹

The story also made front-page news in regions of the world without America's Irish connections and it seems that television footage was used, in some places at least. A M. McAdam based in Geneva noted that the civil rights march in Derry, the 'clumsy mishandling' of the situation by the Minister of Home affairs and the subsequent protest march by Belfast students had all been given considerable coverage on Swiss radio and television'.⁵⁰ On 6 October, the *Jerusalem Post* reported: 'Hundreds hurts in Ulster clash ... when police using batons and high-pressure water hoses, charged a civil rights parade banned by the Government. The marchers were calling for more civil rights for Northern Ireland's Roman Catholic minority'.⁵¹ This was followed by a much bigger story in the *Post* on October 8, stating that Wilson had called for a report on the Derry riots, 'in which police were accused of

wading into demonstrators with “Chicago-style ferocity” ... police were accused of clubbing old women and of striking fallen males in the groin.” Again, the historical background was provided, and highlighting Catholic claims that their civil rights in jobs and housing ‘were being systematically whittled away by Protestant authorities.’⁵² The story continued the following day, with the *Post* reporting fear and anger lurking on Derry’s streets: ‘steel-helmeted riot police with pistols swinging at their hips moved in pairs through narrow side streets where the majority of the Roman Catholic population was. As they passed under archways and alleys, their presence drew taunts and jeers.’⁵³ There were more accounts of the Derry disturbances in *Le Figaro* on 7 October (‘Republicains contre policiers: Trente Blessés au cours de violentes bagarres’) and again the following day. The Derry story also featured in *Die Welt*, on Monday, Tuesday and again on the Wednesday (‘Spannungen in Nordirland halten an ...’).⁵⁴ A good-sized story in the *Frankfurter allgemeine Zeitung* on Monday reported how Fitt had been left beaten and bloodied by the police and quoted MP Russell Kerr to the effect that ‘die nordirische Polizei “spiele in der gleichen Liga wie die von Chikago”.’⁵⁵

Some of the most graphic overseas accounts appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. A dramatic picture dominated page four on 8 October, with the caption ‘Baton-wielding police send demonstrators fleeing in Duke Street, Londonderry, as they break up a banned march in support of Northern Ireland’s minority Catholic community’. The role played by the television pictures was also emphasised: ‘British TV viewers saw police club to the ground Mr G Fitt, a Northern Ireland member of the House of Commons, and women and children flattened by water cannon. On their screens were scenes similar to those showing the recent violence of Chicago, Prague and Biafra. Police were alleged to have deliberately clubbed fallen demonstrators in the groin. One eye-witness said he saw a policeman remove the spectacles of an elderly woman bystander and then hit her with his baton. Northern Ireland’s Home Affairs Minister, Mr W Craig, said he was satisfied that police used no more force than was necessary.’⁵⁶ On the 10th, there appeared a long article by Margaret Jones in London entitled ‘The Festering Sore of Northern Ireland’, replete with the lamppost photo, captioned ‘Baton-swinging police attack a Catholic demonstrator in the Londonderry riots’.

The outbreak of violence in Londonderry at the weekend caught everybody by surprise. Preoccupied by world problems like Rhodesia and Biafra, haunted by fears of local student uprisings, most people here had no idea Ulster was about to explode. Britain has also been startled by the viciousness of the clashes in Londonderry. On

the police side, there have been overtones of Chicago; on the demonstrators' part, echoes of the violence in America's negro ghettos. Eyewitnesses have insisted that the police disabled men and boys by batoning their testicles, that elderly women were clubbed, that babies were washed from their mothers' arms with the jets from water cannon and that streams of water were directed through the windows of innocent householders. ... Whatever the truth about the Londonderry riots, they have forced Britain to acknowledge overnight the unpalatable fact that Ulster is a festering trouble-spot. ... For the first time this week, Nationalists aired their grievances with the whole of Britain watching. ... Ulster will be lucky if it rides out the present troubles without some serious bloodshed. But the rioting is also giving the oppressed minority its best chance for years to present a case to the world'.⁵⁷

In Northern Ireland however, Captain Terence O'Neill, the relatively moderate reformist Prime Minister, seemed to be having difficulty in persuading his colleagues of the gravity of the situation. At a cabinet meeting on the Tuesday, O'Neill pointed out that the media reaction had been wholly adverse, and as a result Northern Ireland's standing and reputation had been most seriously damaged.⁵⁸ O'Neill tried again a week later, in a frank memorandum to his colleagues:

I would be failing in my duty if I did not make it clear to you that, in my view, Londonderry has dramatically altered this situation to our great disadvantage. Whether the Press and T.V. coverage was fair is immaterial. We have now become a focus of world opinion; indeed we know through official channels that the Embassy and B.I.S. in America have been under intense pressure from the American press. Within the next month or so, we must face Harold Wilson again. Now I ask my colleagues to be realists about the situation we are likely, indeed in my view, certain to face there. We shall be told that unless we can give a definite undertaking that we will introduce further reforms, H.M.G. will no longer be able to stand aloof from the situation. ... I think we must be seen to temper firmness with fairness. Of course there are anti-partition agitators prominently at work, but can any of us truthfully say in the confines of this room that the minority has no grievance calling for a remedy?⁵⁹

And as the year drew to a close, an increasingly desperate O'Neill went public, acknowledging the impact of the Derry events in his famous 'Ulster at the Crossroads' broadcast: 'As I saw it if we were not prepared to face up to our problems we would have to meet mounting pressure both internally from those who were seeking change and externally from British public and parliamentary opinion which had been deeply disturbed by the events in Londonderry.'⁶⁰

The story of how Northern Ireland descended into desperate and chaotic violence over the coming months is wearily familiar. O'Neill, under pressure from the British Government, directly as a consequence of the television coverage of the Derry events, struggled to

convince his colleagues to support a meaningful programme of reforms.⁶¹ By December, he was 'profoundly tired and depressed', telling a British official that five years of hard work had been ruined overnight, and that worse was to come. The events in Londonderry had come upon him without warning. The IRA, having totally failed on its former military approach, had now achieved remarkable success through its new strategy of working on 'civil rights' through penetration and incitement of student and other left-wing groups. The outlook was extremely bad, and indeed, O'Neill predicted the break-up of his government within a week, in all probability to be replaced by one far to the right of his own. When asked what the consequences would be, O'Neill replied that 'the Catholics trust me. When they see me go, they may well decide that their best hope lies in joining in direct action. It is a miracle we have had no bloodshed up to now. With a reactionary Cabinet bloodshed could scarcely be avoided, perhaps on a serious scale.'⁶² Terence O'Neill resigned in despair in April 1969 as the province continued its slide towards the 'violence on a serious scale' that he had predicted.

Back in October 1968 Martin Wallace had noted wryly that:

the organisers of Saturday's civil rights demonstration in Londonderry must be fairly satisfied with their afternoon's work. I hope they offered up a prayer for the continued health of Mr William Craig, who made their success possible. A few broken heads was a small price to pay for the kind of coverage the television networks have given to the protest and its aftermath. I was in England at the weekend and a friend said: 'I see your lot are at it again.' I tried to explain the subtleties of the Ulster situation, but how can you compete with television pictures of policemen's batons, indiscriminate jets of water and a poster saying 'Vorster, Smith, Craig?'⁶³

Craig himself complained that the media coverage of the Derry episode was misleading. 'The impression was given that the march started off, reached Duke Street, and immediately the police used physical force to disperse it. This is just not so'.⁶⁴ Some went even further in denouncing the television crews, one Unionist calling them 'roving vultures ... clearly responsible for much of the distorted reporting of the truth ... totally immune to the deliberate damage they leave in their wake'.⁶⁵ In this if little else, Craig was right. The police did allow a half-hour, illegal meeting to take place, and were subjected to some abuse and violence from a section of the crowd. The endlessly recycled footage continues to obscure this point, and continues, still to be shown out of sequence.⁶⁶ But to blame the film crews for the damage done to Ulster's reputation by the fists and batons of the RUC, is surely absurd.

And the Derry march provides an interesting example of the extent to which by the 1960s television, almost immediate and uncensored and delivered directed to the family home, could inform and influence public opinion to a hitherto impossible extent. Morley Safer's footage on CBS, of US Marines torching the village of Cam Ne, shocked audiences in America, and began the 'living-room war' for domestic support for the war in Vietnam. Television pictures of the bloated bellies of starving Biafran babies startled viewers across the western world into a new awareness of the horrors of the Nigerian civil war, about which most had previously known or cared little. It was because of television that the Ulster civil rights marchers sang 'We Shall Overcome' rather than 'A Nation Once Again'. It was because of television, that Derry joined Baltimore and Prague and Chicago in the list of the world's trouble spots. The sights and sounds recorded by Orbinson, Macmillan, Hayes, Reid and O'Brien, inflamed opinion and sectarian tensions in Ulster. It was not their fault that others failed to produce political solutions to its problems, before yet others took advantage of the situation to incite yet greater violence. The terrible consequences of that violence were to be a dreary and depressing feature of television news for the next forty years.

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¹ For more detailed technical information, see ADAPT. Researching the History of Television Production Technology at <http://www.adapttvhistory.org.uk/16mm/> (accessed February 13, 2019).

² '[W]hat happened was seen on television all over the world and provoked widespread criticism.' Grace McGrath, *A General Political History of Northern Ireland 1921 to Present*, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (hereafter PRONI), Departmental Information Project, August 1999, p.17.

³ McClenaghan, interview, 13 June 2015.

⁴ Disturbances in Northern Ireland. Report of the Commission appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland. Chairman: The Honourable Lord Cameron, D.S.C. *Presented to Parliament by Command of His Excellency the Governor of Northern Ireland, September 1969, Belfast HMSO, 1969.* Cmd. 532, 4.30.

⁵ Cabinet of Northern Ireland, CAB/9B/205, *Peacocke to Ministry of Home Affairs*, 19 December 1968, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland (hereafter CAB, PRONI).

⁶ Cameron, *op.cit.*, 4.44.

⁷ Eamonn McCann, *War and an Irish Town* (London 1993), p. 97.

⁸ *The Times*, 7 October 1968.

⁹ *The Observer*, 6 October 1968.

¹⁰ Dick Macmillan, interview with author 23 February 2007.

¹¹ Fitt stated in subsequent interviews that he was pushed into a policeman, while another rushed forward to strike him.

¹² Northern Ireland Ministry of Home Affairs (hereafter HA), HA/32/2/26, *Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association Parade and Meeting in Londonderry on Saturday, 5th October, 1968*, Memo from W. Meharg, 7 October 1968, PRONI.

¹³ In Ireland, 'God save us!' implies indignation rather than despair. This subtlety is likely to have been lost on viewers outside the country.

¹⁴ See for instance an RTE website showing clips from O'Brien's original footage, much of which is out of sequence at <http://www.rte.ie/archives/exhibitions/1031-civil-rights-movement-1968-9/1034-derry-5-october-1968/319387-derry-civil-rights-demonstration/> (accessed 14 October 2016).

¹⁵ Evidence of Ivan Cooper, *Londonderry Sentinel*, 11 December 1968.

¹⁶ *Irish Times*, 7 October 1968.

¹⁷ One eyewitness from Strabane, describing himself as a 'passer-by' condemned Saturday's 'revolting display of hooliganism and filthy language' and commended the RUC for their 'admirable restraint in the face of severe provocation'. *Londonderry Sentinel*, 16 October 1968.

¹⁸ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 11 December 1968.

¹⁹ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 11 December 1968.

²⁰ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 30 October 1968.

²¹ *Irish Times*, 7 October 1968.

²² Eamon Hayes, interview with author, 14 February 2007.

²³ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 11 December 1968.

²⁴ *Londonderry Sentinel*, 9 October 1968.

²⁵ Transcript formerly available at Newsfilm Online. Since removed.

²⁶ Transcript available at BBC Written Archives Centre.

²⁷ *Derry Journal*, 18 October 1968.

²⁸ *Derry Journal*, 15 October 1968.

²⁹ *The Times*, 9 October 1968

³⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 7 October 1968.

³¹ Belfast Newsletter, 7 October 1968.

³² Journalist Dick Walsh was particularly impressed by the radio coverage: 'the screams of people you can't see are almost always more terrifying than visible violence'. *Irish Times*, 10 October 1968.

³³ Hardcastle's interviews on *The World This Weekend* can be heard at the National Sound Archive, London, BBC reference LP31983.

³⁴ Transcript formerly available at Newsfilm Online.

³⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 7 October 1968.

³⁶ *The Observer*, 13 October 1968.

³⁷ Cabinet, CAB 164/334, *Discussions between Harold Wilson and Captain Terence O'Neill, Northern Ireland PM, concerning the Londonderry demonstrations, 1968 Jul 10-1969 Jan 20*, National Archives, London (hereafter CAB, NA).

³⁸ *The Times*, 10 October 1968.

³⁹ Vanderbilt Television News Archive at <https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/broadcasts/198267>, accessed 19 September 2017 (hereafter VTNA)

⁴⁰ *Irish News*, 7 October 1968.

⁴¹ VTNA at <https://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>, accessed 20 September 2017.

⁴² *New York Times*, 6 October 1968.

⁴³ *New York Times*, 9 October 1968.

⁴⁴ Foreign and Commonwealth Office (hereafter FCO), FCO 33/762, *Carew to British Ambassador*, 8 October 1968, NA.

⁴⁵ FCO 33/762, *Watson to British Ambassador*, 8 October 1968, NA.

⁴⁶ FCO 33/762, *Dingler to State Department*, 14 October 1968, NA.

⁴⁷ *Derry Journal*, 15 October 1968.

⁴⁸ CAB/9B/205, *Green (at the Ministry of Health and Social Services) to Black*, 25 November 1968, PRONI.

⁴⁹ CAB/9B/205, *Black to Green*, 27 November 1968, PRONI.

⁵⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 18 October 1968.

⁵¹ *Jerusalem Post*, 6 October 1968.

⁵² *Jerusalem Post*, 8 October 1968.

⁵³ *Jerusalem Post*, 9 October 1968.

⁵⁴ *Die Welt*, 9 October 1968.

⁵⁵ *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7 October 1968.

⁵⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* Herald, 8 October 1968.

⁵⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald* Herald, 10 October 1968.

⁵⁸ CAB/4/1405, *Cabinet Conclusions*, 8 October 1968, PRONI.

⁵⁹ CAB/4/1406, *Cabinet Conclusions, Memorandum by the Prime Minister*, 14 October 1968, PRONI.

⁶⁰ Prime Minister's Office (hereafter PREM), PREM 13/2841, *Government of Northern Ireland, Press Notice, Television Broadcast by Captain Terence O'Neill, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland on BBC (Northern Ireland) and Ulster Television, Monday, December 9, at 6.0 PM*, NA.

⁶¹ PREM 13/2841, *Wilson to O'Neill*, 19 November 1968, NA.

⁶² FCO 33/762, *Gilchrist to FCO*, 9 December 1968, NA.

⁶³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 October 1968.

⁶⁴ HA/32/226, *Speech by the Minister of Home Affairs, House of Commons, 16th October 1968*, PRONI.

⁶⁵ The Marquis of Hamilton, MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone, *Belfast Telegraph*, 18 October 1968.

⁶⁶ For one egregious example, which has been viewed over 9,000 times, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7F_ildLdmRo&t=219s, accessed 20 September 2017.