

# ON THIS DAY 5 October



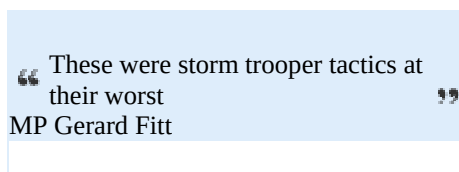
## 1968: Londonderry march ends in violence

Police have used batons and water cannon to break up a civil rights march in Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

At least 30 people, including MP Gerard Fitt and some children, have been injured.

Reports say police tried to disperse the protesters by using their batons indiscriminately and spraying water from hoses on armoured trucks.

The demonstrators retaliated with petrol bombs. A number of bonfires were lit in the Bogside area and when a fire engine arrived, the crowd turned on it and threatened to set it alight.



The march, organized with the support of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), was held in protest at alleged discrimination against the majority Nationalist (and mainly catholic) population in Londonderry by the mainly Protestant Unionist-controlled local authority.

The trouble began when the march headed for Duke Street, a road declared out of bounds by the Northern Ireland Minister of Home Affairs, William Craig.

When the protesters turned into the street they were confronted by a barricade of police officers, in rows three deep, all armed with batons.

Loudspeakers urged the crowds to disperse but the calls went unheeded.

Violent skirmishes broke out and very quickly the street was filled with police wielding batons against men, women and children

In the chaos the Stormont and Westminster Republican Labour MP for Belfast west, Gerry Fitt, was struck down by a baton. He was hurried to a police car with blood pouring from his head and taken to hospital, where he later received stitches.

Mr Fitt told reporters: "I was a marked man before the march started. These were storm trooper tactics at their worst. They hit me once, but that wasn't enough - they had to have another go, and this was the cause of the wound which had to be stitched."

Mr Craig has said he is satisfied there was no unnecessary brutality. He rejected suggestions that police had used their batons improperly.

NICRA formed in February 1967 to call for a number of reforms, including an end to the perceived discrimination against Catholics in the allocation of council housing and public sector jobs.

It wants the introduction of one man-one vote, rather than one vote per household, which was also seen as discriminatory against Catholic homes with multiple occupancy and an end to gerrymandering electoral boundaries which in Nationalist areas like Londonderry has led to the return of Unionist-led authorities.

And it wants the repeal of the Special Powers Act, which was aimed at suppressing the IRA and gave police the power to search any property, and was therefore seen as discriminatory against Catholics.



Demonstrators were confronted by a wall of police officers



[Irish police turn marchers back at Duke Street](#)

#### In Context

The march of 5 October 1968 is regarded by many as the official start of The Troubles.

It was followed by two more days of serious violence in Londonderry.

Reports of the rioting and the brutal way in which it was suppressed by police were broadcast around the world, provoking widespread condemnation and outraging Nationalists.

The Stormont government tried to prevent the situation getting out of control by announcing a series of reforms in November 1968.

The Minister of Home Affairs, William Craig, who publicly branded the civil rights movement a front for Republican activity, was dismissed in December 1968.

But the reforms did not go far enough for civil rights campaigners and divisions began to appear within the movement.

The moderate Derry Citizens Action Committee, of which John Hume was one of the leaders, mounted a series of non-violent protests.

But the extremist People's Democracy, which developed out of student protests in Belfast, organized a march to Londonderry and Newry in January 1969. Both were accompanied by rioting and violence.

As the violence continued, the British Government sent in troops in August 1969 and later supported the introduction of internment. The Bloody Sunday march of January 1972 - against the policy of internment - was the last big civil rights protest in Northern Ireland.