

Bloody Sunday 'triggered decades of violence'

The republican Bernadette McAliskey yesterday accused the government of murdering 14 unarmed civilians in Derry on Bloody Sunday, and she claimed the killings triggered almost three decades of conflict in Northern Ireland.

5 At Lord Saville's inquiry, Mrs McAliskey admitted she changed her mind that day, January 30 1972, to support violence against the state. She denied, however, ever playing an active part.

"Three thousand and more coffins followed and years of imprisonment and torture and pain and sorrow, and it is highly arguable that without Bloody Sunday, where we are today we would have been in 1972," she said. "I cannot forgive the British government for that. The British army declared war on the people seeking justice in this country on that day."

10 Mrs McAliskey, then Bernadette Devlin, 22, and MP for Mid-Ulster, was on a makeshift platform on the back of a lorry, addressing 30,000 civil rights protesters in the Bogside, when paratroopers opened fire.

"The only clear memory I have, which I have now as I speak of it, is terror," she said. "My mouth was dry. I think I could taste coal dust. There was a pain in the bottom of my back. My stomach was like lead and yet I couldn't feel anything at all."

15 In the panic, she found herself under the lorry, and she recalled thinking: "There is nobody here, only me, dead people and the British army coming down in front of me."

Mrs McAliskey was infamous for punching the then home secretary, Reginald Maudling, on the floor of the Commons and accusing him of lying about Bloody Sunday.

20 Yesterday she told Lord Saville she did not believe a state-run inquiry could bring to book those she believed to be to blame. The only proper forum, she said, was the international court of justice in the Hague - "somewhere else where the accused is not running the party," she said.

25 "It is, on the basis of personal experience, my honest belief that, at the highest level, British government, military and significant sections of the media acquiesced, conspired, organised and/or participated in and covered up terror and murder for political gain on January 30, 1972, and repeatedly thereafter."

Mrs McAliskey lost her Westminster seat in 1974 and helped found the extreme Irish Republican Socialist party. She and her husband, Michael, were badly injured in a loyalist gun attack on their isolated County Tyrone home in 1981.