

October 8 1968

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THREE EYE-WITNESSES REPORT ON LONDONDERRY.

At the request of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association we attended the march in the city of Londonderry on 5th October. At the outset we should stress that we took no part in the demonstration other than acting as observers. We positioned ourselves throughout at points where we could most readily watch the course of events. We can only describe what we saw, which was as follows:

The demonstrators assembled from about 3.20 p.m. onwards at the open space beside the railway station at the waterside in Londonderry. They formed up and left the site at 3.45. They marched along Duke Street towards Craigavon Bridge. As to the composition of the march, we can say that the march was extremely orderly in its early stages, with a substantial number of stewards, mainly provided by the Derry City Labour Party. The Chief Steward was Mr. Ivan Cooper, Secretary of the Derry City Labour Party. The marchers were five or six abreast, and about one in ten carried a placard of some sort or other.

Among those prominent on the march were senior representatives of the Northern Ireland Labour Party, including the Chairman, Mr. Paddy Devlin. There were

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Republicans, the most notable of whom was Mr. Kevin Agnew of Maghara, a solicitor and Republican politician. There were also Nationalists, in particular Mr. McAteer, the Leader of the Nationalist Opposition at Stormont, and there were members of the Republican Labour Party, in particular Mr. Gerry Pitt, M.P. for Belfast West. In addition to these, there were representatives of the Liberal Party from Belfast, and of the Belfast Trades Council.

It was a non-sectarian procession consisting of people of all religions and of none and seemingly every shade of opinion in Ireland was represented, with the exception of the Unionist Party. (We strongly suggest you consult the photographs taken by press representatives who were present which will illustrate the nature of the people on the march). In general, although judgement of numbers is never easy, we would say there were around three thousand people present and, in the main, they were elderly and middle-aged people. There was no particular predominance of students or young people.

The march proceeded along Duke Street. There is a photograph in the Irish Times of the 6th October which shows the position quite clearly. At the end of Duke Street, near the junction with Craigavon Bridge, the R.U.C. had positioned two large tenders to block the road and there

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were three lines of policemen positioned in front of them. At the very front of the march were Mr. McAteer, Mr. Devlin, Mr. Pitt and Mr. Cooper.

The marchers approached the police and when they were about a yard from the police ranks and obviously slowing up, the police opened up a passage into which were pulled Mr. Devlin and Mr. Pitt. Mr. Pitt was struck twice with a baton and Mr. Devlin was struck twice as well. They were then taken away, Mr. Pitt to have three stitches inserted in a head wound.

Meanwhile, police with sticks came in from both flanks and began to belabour the leading marchers and to seize their banners and placards. There was some scuffling at this point and the police across the roadway drew their batons and forced the crowd back a short distance. Physical contact between the police and the crowd stopped after several minutes.

Duke street is a narrow street of shops, in the main commercial or industrial properties with housing above. Some minutes after the above action, some dozens of policemen were positioned across the road behind the marchers, about 100 yards from the head of the march, thereby effectively preventing a retreat and resulting in people who had nothing to do with the march being trapped inside - people shopping or people normally resident in

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the street, for example.

The incident involving Mr. Devlin and Mr. Fitt took place at 4.03. From this point, until 4.34, the crowd settled down in Duke Street and there was a series of speeches including one from Mr. McAteer, one from Miss Betty Sinclair, Chairman of the Belfast Trades Council, and one from Mr. Ivan Cooper, N.I.L.P., local Secretary, urging restraint on the crowd. The mood of the crowd was one of shock at the violence handed out to Mr. Fitt and Mr. Devlin but, at this stage, it was not an ugly mood and the stewards and others were urging the crowd to stay calm and to continue with the meeting.

Two of our number were in a position inside the police cordon to see very clearly what was happening at this stage. At 4.34 the police on the Craigavon Bridge side of the street moved in closer to the crowd and the second baton-charge took place. We should say at this stage that in our view about ten or twelve members of the crowd threw their placards at the police and we did see one policeman's hat go up in the air and some quite serious fighting break out.

The police then charged the crowd, using their batons vigorously and indiscriminately. At the same time

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the police at the bottom of the street moved up to separate the crowd so that instead of the crowd being sandwiched between the police they were now hemmed in on the pavements and in the shops on either side of the roadway.

At 4.37 two water-cannon vehicles appeared on the roadway, which had been cleared, and began to hose bystanders on either side of the street in order to clear them from the pavements. At the same time the police continued to use their batons on the people (demonstrators, spectators and residents) who were on the pavements, in the shops, and in entrance passages.

At this point we should perhaps place on detailed record some of the things which we saw - for example, the incident at 4.03 when the march met the police for the first time. Mr. Ryan saw the police use their batons on Mr. Fitt and Mr. Devlin after they had been seized and although they had offered no physical resistance. He also saw one policeman bring his baton upwards to the testicles of a young person in the crowd. (We were unable, regrettably, to get any numbers of the police as, with few exceptions, they were not displaying them.)

In the second baton-charge at 4.34, another policeman was seen by Mr. Ryan to strike a man in the testicles with

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a baton. The man was already bleeding from head wounds. He immediately collapsed and was carted off. He also saw a woman around 60 who was hysterical on the pavement after having been hosed down by the cannon. A policeman approached her, removed her spectacles with one hand and hit her over the head with his baton with the other.

Shortly after the above incident, all three of us entered a cafe at 75 Duke Street which had been converted into a sort of casualty-ward. In the back room of this cafe was a young person in his mid-twenties who was bleeding profusely from injuries to his head and shoulders and who was covered in blood. He was lying on the floor since it was felt unwise to move him. The cafe-owner had telephoned for an ambulance which came through the police and took him away.

Regarding the use of the water-cannon^d, which were used quite indiscriminately against all and sundry, we witnessed one incident where the jet was aimed through the open window of a house on the first floor, apparently at a television camera. After the cameraman had been removed by it, the cannon was played there for enough seconds to do damage to the property. (This property was almost opposite 75 Duke Street.) We also saw young children who

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were soaking wet and obviously shocked and hysterical who had also been hosed with the cannon.

The police used considerable violence in clearing the pavements and we stress that in the main we saw very little evidence of retaliation from any member of the crowd, although there was a bit of scuffling as people tried to get away from the clubs and the water. By 4.57 the street, by and large, had been cleared. The police had emptied the shops on either side of the people who had taken refuge there and the traffic was flowing again on Craigavon Bridge.

There were many people who told us of incidents ~~of~~, ^{of}, for example, a child washed out of her mother's arms by the police hoses. We did not see this ourselves and therefore cannot corroborate these allegations. We did, however, see children who were pressed up against walls by the force of the water and we also saw young children, girls of about 13, helping other even smaller children who were in a shocked and hysterical state.

Mr. Ryan went to Altnagelven Hospital in Londonderry immediately afterwards in order to find out something of the extent of the casualties. He was unable to get a list of the casualties suffered but we feel it may still be possible

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to get such a list of the injuries recorded.

Whilst Mr. Ryan was away at the hospital, Mr. and Mrs. Kerr crossed the Craigavon Bridge and walked towards the Diamond, the principal town square, where further disturbances had been reported. A large crowd was present there, apparently angry at reports of the events across the bridge, and sporadic clashes were occurring between the police and the crowd, with the police using batons and making a number of arrests. The action spilled out of the square and down one of the side streets, which resulted in a number of shops having their display windows broken.

A little while later, Mrs. Kerr talked to a considerable number of people who had been witnesses of this part of the action and who were clearly incensed with the police. One shopkeeper who had lost his window explained that police had rushed into his shop batonning people inside and that stones were then thrown from outside by local people trying to retaliate at the police.

One young woman showed Mrs. Kerr a badly bruised shoulder and people gathered around saying that "it was No. 81 who did it" and asking her to "make it known at Westminster."

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Fortunately, there is a great number of press photographs available to corroborate much of what we saw and we hope the Home Secretary will give instructions for them to be collected and studied. We would respectfully suggest to the Home Secretary that he listen carefully to the BBC sound recording of the demonstration in last Sunday's "The World This Week-end," which illustrates the hysteria and terror experienced, particularly by women who were sandwiched in the activity in Duke Street. Mr. Ryan, Mr. Pitt and Mr. Kerr were interviewed in the same programme and a transcript of their testimony might be useful.

May we say, in conclusion, that the great majority of the incidents here described were witnessed by at least two of our number and that we have gone to great trouble to eliminate from this brief statement anything other than those incidents about which we can speak with certainty. We shall of course be pleased to amplify the above if requested.

Russell Kerr

John Ryan

Alice Kerr