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Allegations of misbehaviour against the RUC

In recent months a number of RUC officers have been found guilty of serious crimes including murder, kidnapping and bombing. In addition several cases alleging maltreatment by the RUC in the period 77-78 have reached the Courts and have gone against the RUC. The following is a list of incidents and Court cases from January 1980 which have involved the RUC.

April 1980

Edward Brophy was acquitted on 12 charges of murder arising from the bombing of the La Mon Restaurant in 197 . In dismissing the charges the Judge ruled that statements signed by Brophy admitting to the crime were inadmissible in evidence and he was not satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt that they had been extracted by the use of inhuman and degrading treatment while Brophy was under detention at Castlereagh.

The Northern Ireland Congress of the ICTU voted to withdraw its representatives from the police Authority. The Congress expressed dissatisfaction with the Authority's handling of complaints of maltreatment during interrogation.

June 1980

Former RUC Police Constable William McCaughey and Sergeant John Weir were sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of Ahoghill shopkeeper, Mr. William Streathearn in April 1977. During the course of the trial McCaughey changed his plea from not guilty to guilty. McCaughey provided the gun for the murder and together with Weir drove two members of the UVF to Mr. Streathearn's home. The murder was carried out by the UVF and those responsible have not been apprehended. Mr. McCaughey's father received a one-year suspended sentence for concealing the murder weapon and withholding information.

McCaughey was also found guilty of kidnapping Father Hugh Murphy, Parish Priest of Ahoghill, in June 1978. Together with Sergeant Gary Armstrong, McCaughey kidnapped Father Murphy in retaliation

for the kidnapping by the PIRA of Constable George Tibbet. Father Murphy was released following an appeal to the kidnappers by Dr. Paisley. McCaughey received a 3-year sentence concurrent with his life sentence, Alexander received a 10-year suspended sentence. McCaughey's father received a one-year suspended sentence for withholding information.

McCaughey and two other former RUC constables, Ian Mitchell and Laurence McClure were found guilty of causing an explosion at the Rock Bar, Keady, Co. Armagh in June 1978 during the course of which a customer was shot in the stomach. McCaughey received a 7-year concurrent sentence, Mitchell and McClure each received two year suspended sentences and former RUC Reserve Constable David Wilson received a one year suspended sentence for withholding information.

In an application to the High Court in Belfast the RUC attempted to quash a tribunal investigation into the complaints of James Rafferty. Rafferty alleges that he was ill-treated during an interrogation at Omagh RUC Station in November 1976. The High Court refused to dissolve the tribunal.

Mr. Bernard O'Connor an Enniskillen school-teacher was awarded £5000 damages against the RUC for ill-treatment at Castlereagh in January 1977.

Thomas John Holland claimed during the course of his trial on charges of shooting and bombing that he had been released from RUC custody in December 1978 after agreeing to become an informer. The trial Judge suggested that Holland's allegation be examined by the Director of Public Prosecutions and the RUC Chief Constable.

Three RUC policemen pleaded not guilty to assaulting Francis Grant at Coalisland Police Station in October 1978. The case was dismissed when Grant failed to show up on the final day of the trial.

July 1980

Michael McCartan (16) was shot dead by an RUC policeman in Belfast. McCartan was daubing the slogan "Provos, Provos" on a wall and, it is claimed, the policeman mistook the paintbrush for a gun. Following the shooting representatives of the SDLP led by Mr. Michael Canavan met Michael Allison, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, to express alarm at the increasingly indiscriminate use of arms by the security forces. In addition the leader of the SDLP on Belfast City Council, Dr. Alistair McDonnell, met the Secretary of State, Mr. Atkins, to convey the complaints of the local population at the killing. The RUC have promised a full investigation and all relevant papers will be sent to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

August 1980

Detective Sergeant Charles McCormick of Ballymena was charged with killing Police Sergeant Joseph Campbell at Cushendall Police Station, Co. Antrim in February 1977. McCormick is also accused of armed robbery at the Northern Bank, Cushendall and at Knockagarry Post Office in November 1974. He has pleaded not guilty to all the charges.

On 13 August the RUC Chief Constable, Mr. Jack Hermon, in a response to growing concern about the activities of the RUC, issued a statement to reassure public opinion and possibly to prepare the ground for further unsavoury revelations (McCormick was charged the following day). Mr. Hermon's statement said in part:

"In recent months certain disgraceful matters involving former members of the RUC were the subject of criminal court proceedings. It was shocking to the public and to the RUC itself. These matters were exposed by the police itself, by the professional determination and integrity of fellow police officers, who did not hesitate to do their duty. I am satisfied that such matters are grossly untypical of the general character of the RUC".

The Chief Constable also said that there "will be no hiding place in the RUC for those members who break the law".

In reply to the statement the SDLP leader Mr. Hume said that the RUC would only gain full acceptance when there were political structures acceptable to both communities in Northern Ireland.