

CONFIDENTIAL

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Our reference: C.S.2/1/104.

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Any replies to this communication
should be addressed to:

INSPECTOR GENERAL, R.U.C.

29th August, 1968.

The Secretary,
Ministry of Home Affairs.

Forwarded for information is a police report regarding the Civil Rights march and meeting in Dungannon on Saturday, 24th August, 1968. It might be more correct to describe it as a Republican parade rather than a Civil Rights march. It was composed largely of Republicans and sympathisers under the command of a prominent local I.R.A. man. Thomas MITCHELL, (I.R.A.) an ex-Omagh raid prisoner was also there and on the platform. From the conduct and behaviour of some of the speakers and organisers it is clearly evident that the Civil Rights organisation is allowing its platform to be used by extremists and trouble-makers for the purpose of preaching violence and stirring up hatred amongst the people.

The speech of Mr. FITT, M.P., was most provocative when he announced from the platform that the ban imposed by the police made his blood boil and called the County Inspector and District Inspector "a pair of black bastards". He went on to say that he did not fear their blackthorn sticks or batons and if it weren't for the presence of women and children he would lead the march into The Square. These utterances by Mr. FITT inflamed the crowd to such an extent that the marshals had to force them back resulting in a number of scuffles and the police had to bunch tightly together in order to prevent the demonstrators from breaking through the police cordon which was positioned between 2,000 and 3,000 Civil Rights marchers and about 2,000 Unionists who had gathered to oppose the marchers entering the Market Square, Dungannon.

The police were under great pressure to contain the demonstrators and those opposed to them. There is little doubt that a serious riot would have occurred had the police not exercised their powers under Sec. 2 Public Order Act (N.I.) 1951 in excluding the marchers from entering the Market Square, Dungannon. Even with the imposition of this restriction great difficulty was experienced in controlling the crowds and preserving the peace.

At the present time feeling is running high in the area and it would be very easy to create an incident which could lead to serious disorder throughout the Province. One thing certain is that the Civil Rights organisation has set off on the wrong trend in trying to create better community relations in the Dungannon area. It now seems that many of those who attended the march and meeting are disillusioned and will have nothing further to do with demonstrations of this nature.

Some of the press accounts are very distorted as to what actually did take place. The Irish News (attached) alleges that 400 police were on duty and batoned Civil Rights marchers and used tracker dogs. This is a false and misleading statement. There were about 100 police on duty and they

used neither batons nor tracker dogs. No one was arrested or injured at the demonstration, and the police have not received one complaint of anyone being injured or assaulted.

The article under "Viewpoint" in the Belfast Telegraph of 26th August (attached) creates a very false impression of the situation in Dungannon. Had the police fallen in line with the views expressed in this article and allowed the marchers to enter the Market Square in Dungannon a large-scale riot would have taken place. The article is also misleading in suggesting that no restrictions are imposed on parades organised by the Free Presbyterian Church and that they only apply to Roman Catholic demonstrations. This is a most damaging allegation that there is a law for the Free Presbyterians and a different law for the Roman Catholics. The attached list shows the number of occasions on which restrictions have been imposed on parades and demonstrations organised by the Moderator and members of the Free Presbyterian Church. A list is also attached showing the results of prosecutions against members of the Free Presbyterian Church and the Paisley faction.

Mr. Austin CURRIE, M.P., is constantly subscribing misleading information to the press in the hope that it will be published in order to serve his own purposes and policy. There is little doubt that he is one of the prime movers behind this upsurge of alleged discrimination in housing and employment. A copy of a police report dated 19th June, 1968, in relation to his activities concerning the unlawful occupation of Council Houses in Dungannon and Caledon, Co. Tyrone, is attached.

In District Inspector STERRITT's report dated 28th August he refers to earlier reports dated 19th and 20th August. I have read both reports and their salient features may be summarised as follows:-

The District Inspector first received intimation of the proposed march and demonstration on 28th July, 1968. Notification of the march and demonstration was published in several newspapers circulating locally.

Following publicity, feeling in Dungannon ran very high and exception was taken to the suggestion that the meeting was to be held in Market Square, Dungannon. The District Inspector spoke to the local representative of the organisers on 14th August and informed him of the tension which existed and suggested that the march be re-routed to avoid Market Square. At this time the District Inspector was satisfied that the march and demonstration could not enter the square in Dungannon without serious trouble. The local representative said he would put the District Inspector's views before the Organising Committee.

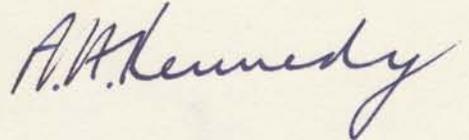
On 15th, 16th, and 17th August various people made representation to the District Inspector pointing out that feeling was rising very quickly and that all sections of the community in Dungannon were becoming involved. It was quite clear that grave apprehension existed about the situation and there was a strong volume of opinion that serious trouble would arise if the march and demonstration were allowed in to Market Square, Dungannon.

On 17th August the District Inspector met a delegation from the organisers and explained the situation to them. He left them in no doubt that in his opinion the march and demonstration could not be permitted to enter Market Square, Dungannon, because to do so would lead to a serious breach of the peace. They would not agree to re-route the march.

It is, therefore, quite clear that the organisers were aware from an early date that the parade would not be allowed into Market Square and that the reasons were fully explained to them. They were not taken by surprise at the last moment.

It is also important to note that the meeting was held and that all the speakers were able to talk freely. To allege a ban on the parade and a restriction on free speech is sheer nonsense.

I may say that I fully support the District Inspector in all the actions he took and I am entirely satisfied that the police action was correct and that it had the desired effect of maintaining the peace in this very touchy area.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "A.A. Kennedy". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the typed name.

Inspector General