

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

Northern Ireland



HOME OFFICE

WHITEHALL, S.W.1

Pal
8th October, 1968

Dear Peter,

... The Home Secretary has asked me to send the attached note in response to the Prime Minister's request for a report on the disturbances in Northern Ireland over the weekend.

The Prime Minister and the Home Secretary discussed the matter last evening.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Cubbon

P. Gregson Esq.

E.R.

DISTURBANCES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

It was announced on 3rd October that the Minister of Home Affairs for Northern Ireland had made an Order under Northern Ireland legislation prohibiting the holding of all public processions or meetings in certain parts of Londonderry on 5th October. The occasion for this was a march and demonstration intended to be held in Londonderry by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, which was likely to have clashed with a parade of the Apprentice Boys of Londonderry, an element of the Orange Order. The Northern Ireland Government took this action because serious apprehensions were felt that a demonstration of the Civil Rights Association through strongly Protestant and Unionist areas of Londonderry would lead to serious rioting. The action by the Northern Ireland Government caused resentment in Unionist circles as in the Civil Rights ranks, for the Apprentice Boys of Derry have been accustomed to holding this kind of parade for many years.

2. Under the constitution of Northern Ireland, as laid down in the Government of Ireland Act 1920, maintenance of law and order in the Province is a matter for which the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland are solely responsible; no responsibility in this respect devolves upon Her Majesty's Government. Section 75 of the Act of 1920 reserves the supreme authority of the Parliament, but not the Government, of the United Kingdom.

3. The parade of the Apprentice Boys was cancelled although great regret was expressed at the necessity for doing this. The Civil Rights Association demonstrators assembled near the railway station in the Waterside area and prepared to defy the Government's Order. A cordon of police was drawn up to prevent their following their intended route and at this point the demonstrators were addressed by their leaders, one of whom at least advised the demonstrators to disperse. Some did so but certainly those carrying banners were intent on breaking through the police cordon and were led forward, with Mr. Gerard Fitt M.P.

E.R.

in the van. Attempts were made to break through the cordon by force, in the course of which Mr. Fitt suffered injury and was removed to hospital. Eventually an order was given for the police to draw their truncheons, and later water cannons were used to disperse the demonstrators and bystanders.

4. Sporadic outbreaks of violence occurred later during Saturday night and Sunday. Petrol bombs were thrown at policemen and police premises; there was a scuffle in Castle Dawson where a party of demonstrators from Falls Road, Belfast, sought to remove a Union Jack; barricades were erected and set on fire in the Roman Catholic area of Londonderry where the firemen were stoned as they sought to put out the fire; and there was indiscriminate damage to shops.

5. In all it would seem that some five or six hundred persons were concerned in this demonstration and about thirty of them had to be taken to hospital for attention but none was detained. Further injuries needed hospital attention as a result of the later outbreaks.

6. On Monday evening, 7th October, there were some isolated incidents, and petrol bombs were thrown at the police. All was quiet by midnight.

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