



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Two Courtrooms - Two Laws

Protestants refused the legal aid granted to republicans

Last month we reported on the comments by a Resident Magistrate which appeared to show prejudice against the Protestants who were appearing in his court on charges arising from protests against a parade, commemorating the 1798 rebellion in Ireland in which many thousands of Protestants were slaughtered, passing through Protestant villages.

When many of the same defendants appeared back in court, seeking Legal Aid in order that they might obtain the services of barristers to fight their cases, another Resident Magistrate, Mr. Mark Hamill, turned down their applications. This is despite the fact that, in the courtroom next door, 18 Roman Catholics who were facing similar charges arising out of the disruption of a loyalist parade in Newtownbutler were granted the free services of barristers.

Protest

Lawyers (some of whom are Roman Catholic) for the Protestant defendants protested strongly at the decision. The case was adjourned until March 29th in order to give the legal representatives of the loyalists an opportunity to consider their options.

These incidents cast doubts upon the fairness of the trial that the loyalists will receive.

Editor

The Editor is one of those charged with offences arising from the loyalist protest. He has seen the sworn statement of a police officer who is a witness for the prosecution in which an individual is identified by the officer as one of the defendants, yet the person he points out has a beard and is about 5 feet 6 inches tall, while the person he claims he is identifying and whom he claims he knows, is clean-shaven and just under 6 feet!

The whole episode tends to underscore the placating of republicanism and the discrimination against Protestants that is a growing feature of Ulster under the "Peace Agreement."

The trial begins in April and will continue until mid-May.