



The Burning Bush - Online article archive

To what extent does the Free Presbyterian church owe its present prosperity to the events of 1966?

On the 6th June 1966, a Free Presbyterian protest march of witness which had been given permission by the police to take place and its route approved, was attacked by Republican rioters in the Cromac Square area of Belfast. The route the parade followed was the main route into the centre of Belfast and there was no alternative route available.

Preparation

The rioters had prepared themselves for the ambush by collecting railway bolts from a section of a nearby railway which was being demolished and delivering them by lorry to side streets in the Cromac square area. Police were informed of these activities but took very little if any action.

Long before the witness march arrived in the Cromac Square area and before it could be seen, the Republicans had begun to attack the police.

The witness marchers had to walk through a lethal hail of stones, bottles, railway bolts and other deadly missiles.

At no time did any member of the march attack the rioters. That was acknowledged by the police though every attempt was made by Romanists and Ecumenists to lay the blame for the riot on the Free Presbyterians.

What followed that incident and the subsequent court case and imprisonment of three ministers, was a stirring of Ulster and an awakened interest in the gospel witness and the anti-ecumenical stand of the Free Presbyterian Church.

In truth, for a prolonged period, our little church enjoyed a breath of revival. The article, "**A time to Remember**" has been compiled in order to encourage people to become acquainted with those days and, on this 50th anniversary, to render unto God the honour, the praise and the glory for His great mercy displayed to us back then. We would not be what we are today but for that time of revival.

The article has also been written to give heart to those today who long for a divine visitation and encourage them to keep praying, for the events of 1966 and succeeding years were very much a wonderful answer to prayer. The initial means by which the country was stirred was totally unexpected, but the events that followed, the conversion of sinners, the awakening and separating of believers from dead churches and the planting of Bible-centred congregations around the country, all came about in answer to prayer.

Here is a little of the story set forth in the article "**A time to Remember**" which I hope will encourage you to read the whole article and perhaps obtain a printed copy when it becomes available in a few days' time. This 'snippet' comes from some of the local newspaper reports which appeared the next day following the attack upon the witness march.

Ivan Foster.

3rd June 2016.

200 BAR WAY TO PAISLEY MARCH

By our Political Correspondent

More than 200 people formed a human wall against the parade led by Rev Ian Paisley as it crossed the Albert Bridge into Cromac Square. They were dispersed by police, but for hours after the marchers had passed, bricks and other missiles were still being hurled.



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Four police and a 12-year-old girl were taken to hospital, and thousands of pounds worth of damage was done.

I understand that the subject was also taken up at the London meeting between the British Home Secretary, Mr Roy Jenkins, and Premier O'Neill and Home Minister Mr McConnell, which is being regarded as a preliminary to the "informal talks" on Northern Ireland affairs suggested at Westminster by Mr. Harold Wilson.

It is likely that Stormont will be asked for a comprehensive report on recent incidents connected with street parades, which - like last night's - have received wide coverage on national television.

When Mr. McConnell was asked in London today whether he had considered banning the procession because of the possibility of trouble arising on the route, he said:

"This is a matter for judgment on each occasion. It is always very difficult to apprehend whether there will be any trouble of this nature or not, and in this case, it follows that I judged there was no case for interfering."

Both Capt. O'Neill and Mr. McConnell were in London when the trouble broke out, but they received reports of the incidents before going into the talks at the Home Office.

- **Belfast Telegraph, 7th June 1966.**

Rioters clash with protest march in Cromac Sq. battle

TEN PEOPLE ARRESTED, four policemen and a 12-year-old girl hospitalised and several thousand pounds worth of damage. That was the outcome of last night's disturbance in Cromac Square, Belfast, where more than 200 rioters clashed with a protest march of nearly 1,000 supporters of Rev. Ian Paisley, moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church.

The attack on Mr. Paisley's marchers lasted only a few minutes but for several hours afterwards sporadic violence erupted in the markets area of the city as bricks, nuts, bolts, lumps of iron and broken glass were hurled at the police from side streets around the square.

The marchers were crossing the Albert Bridge when a crowd of about 200 — half of them youths and young girls — formed a wall across the road to stop the parade.

The police flanking the procession moved in to break it up, and there were some scuffles before the crowd dispersed into Lagan Street and Verner Street.

One young man armed with an iron bar got to within a few feet of Mr. Paisley before being grabbed by some of Mr. Paisley's followers.

Then the hail of missiles came from the far side of the square. Head Constable Robert Finlay went down as he was struck on the head and chest with pieces of brick. Other policemen were hit and the marchers were forced to the far side of the street.

But the parade did not break up. It continued on through the square up into May Street.

One middle-aged woman, with bricks smashing at her feet, continued to sing "Onward Christian Soldiers."

More police were rushed into the area armed with shields and riot sticks, as the crowd lined up on the Lagan Street side of the square continued to throw missiles at passing traffic and shop windows.

The windows of the post office in Cromac Square were shattered by a fusillade of bricks.



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Cars damaged

Cars parked in side streets had their windows broken and several parked in the centre of the square were badly damaged before they could be got away.

While the riots were still going on, Mr. Paisley led his marchers, who were protesting against "Romanising tendencies" in the General Assembly, to the Assembly Buildings.

As they marched round and round the block there were some jeering exchanges with Presbyterians leaving the Assembly. The catcalling continued for some time and there was a brief clash between some of the demonstrators and police when Howard Street was roped off to allow the Governor, Lord Erskine, the Lord Mayor of Belfast, Alderman Geddis, and the new Moderator, the Rt. Rev. Dr. Allred Martin, to cross the street to the Presbyterian Hostel.

'Victory'

Asked about his reason for parading through a Nationalist area Mr. Paisley later said: "If the Tricolour can fly there throughout the Easter Rebellion celebrations, then the Union Jack, should be able to fly there."

- **Belfast Telegraph, 7th June 1966.**

Comment:

Much was made of the 'provocative' nature of the parade by the republicans and their apologists. It should be noted that the above report states that the riot began while the Free Presbyterian parade was crossing the Albert Bridge. That means that the parade was over half a mile away from Cromac Square and completely hidden by the elevated section of the road where it crossed the old railway lines.

The character of the parade is wonderfully illustrated by the report of the "middle-aged woman, with bricks smashing at her feet," continuing to sing "Onward Christian Soldiers."

The fact that passing cars and those parked in the area were attacked and damaged as well as homes damaged shows the character of the lawless residents of the area who needed little excuse for civil disorder.

(Pages 21-22 of "A time to Remember")