



The Burning Bush—Online article archive

Magistrate threatens to jail Protestants.

The RM's threat arose from an incident that took place in the foyer of the courthouse. While other cases were being heard within the court, many of the defendants in the martyrs' parade protest were waiting in the vicinity of the foyer. A verbal altercation of a few seconds in length arose between two police officers, involved in the prosecuting of the protesters, and one of the defendants. As the officers moved away into the courtroom a short cheer went up from some of those who witnessed the verbal exchange. The Impartial Reporter takes up the story. "The RM immediately turned to the solicitors in front of him and said that if, as he suspected, the shouts had come from those involved in the Rosslea Martyrs' case, "I'll jail any of them involved. If that sort of behaviour continues I'll put them all in the cells."

IF TRUE

If this report of the words of the RM, Mr. Brian McElholm, is correct, then it appears to a layman that it shows a great measure of prejudice against the Protestant defendants referred to. If the cheer had come from persons other than those referred to, the RM's words suggest that he was not of a mind to jail them for contempt. Is the cheer from Protestants more offensive to a resident magistrate than one from anyone else? I repeat, it appears to a layman that Mr. McElholm was revealing prejudice against Protestants.

That being so, there can be little hope for Protestants obtaining justice, when such prejudice can be manifested in our courts and go unchallenged by those charged with the duty of preserving justice for all in a British courtroom. I do believe that, were such a statement made against Roman Catholic defendants, then everyone from the Pope down would have been lodging complaints and, in the interests of "justice", the charges would have been dismissed. The fact that the report in The Impartial Reporter of February 11th has not been challenged, suggests that the report is accurate.

If it is not accurate, then doubtless The Impartial Reporter will be obliged to print a correction and those Protestants who are due to have their cases heard in April and May will once again entertain, rightly or wrongly, some little hope of justice. Thirty-five defendants (of whom the editor of "The Burning Bush" is one) have been divided up into three groups and the hearing of their cases will begin in Omagh court in April and May. The dividing of the group and the move from Enniskillen to Omagh is to accommodate the large number of defendants and the various witnesses who will be called. A Resident Magistrate other than Mr. McElholm is expected to preside.