

Unlawful occupation of Council Houses in Dungannon and Caledon, Co. Tyrone.

Headquarters,  
The Royal Ulster Constabulary,  
"Brooklyn", Knock Road,  
Belfast, BT5 6LE

19th June, 1968.

The Secretary,  
Ministry of Home Affairs.

The unlawful occupation of council houses at Dungannon and Caledon, Co. Tyrone, came to light as follows:-

1. On the morning of the 9th October, 1967, Mr. Austin CURRIE, M.P. for East Tyrone, called with District Inspector STERRITT, R.U.C. Station, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, and informed him that a Matthew McKENNA had taken possession of a council house at 5 Fairview Park, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone. Later on that date the police interviewed McKENNA who admitted taking possession of the house which he said he had entered through a window he had broken. This window was subsequently repaired by McKENNA at his own expense.

McKENNA vacated the dwelling-house about the 25th October and it was re-let to another tenant. No proceedings were taken against McKENNA for unlawful possession of the house.

2. On the 13th October, 1967, Sergeant DUNCAN, R.U.C. Station, Caledon, received a complaint of a disturbance at a new housing site off Mill Street, Caledon. This site is now known as Kinnaird Park, Caledon, and consists of a terrace of 10 houses, 3 old-peoples' houses and 2 bungalows. The houses, which were nearing completion, were allocated to various people at the Rural District Council meeting at Dungannon on Thursday, 9th October, 1967. The police went to the site, accompanied by Mr. William SCOTT, Rural District Councillor, on 13th October and found that squatters had occupied Nos. 9 and 11 during the night of 12/13th October. Brian McKENNA, 20 years, plasterer, and his wife, Kathleen, who have previously lived with his father, Brandy McKENNA, 2 Churchill, Caledon, was occupying No. 9. Francis GOODFELLOW, 30 years, labourer, his wife, Mary, and two children, who have previously lived with Mary GOODFELLOW's mother, Mrs. GILDERNEW, Crievelough, Caledon, were occupying No. 11. Newspaper reporters and photographers were on the scene followed by B.B.C. and U.T.V. cameramen and interviewers. Mr. Austin CURRIE, M.P., introduced himself to Sergeant DUNCAN and said he was representing the squatters in the cause against discrimination in housing. The take-over appeared to have been a well-staged affair and it is understood Mr. Austin CURRIE took a leading part. It was suggested in the locality he actually arranged the affair and tried to have other families moved into the vacant houses, but no evidence was obtained to substantiate this. The squatters had apparently entered the houses through the open doors as there were no signs of a forceable entry.

The Rural District Council instructed its Solicitor, Mr. E. IRWIN, Dungannon, to take proceedings against Brian McKENNA and Francis GOODFELLOW under Section 1 of Summary Jurisdiction (M.P.) Act (N.I.) 1946. At Caledon Magistrates Court on Tuesday, 14th December, 1967, Commander MULLAN, Resident Magistrate, convicted both defendants and imposed a fine of £1 in each case. He granted a stay of execution of the Eviction Order for a period of six months and Mr. LENNON, Solicitor, who represented the defendants said the Council would be at no loss of rent during this period. Brian McKENNA's wife left the house after a family row and did not return, and about 20th April, 1968, McKENNA also left the house and went to England. This house was later occupied by a family named BRADY to whom it had been allocated by the Rural District Council. On the

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morning of 18th June, 1968, the Under-Sheriff, Mr. ROWNTREE, and three bailiffs arrived at No. 11, Kinnaird Park, Caledon, to execute the Eviction Order. On arrival the squatters, Mr. and Mrs. GOODFELLOW, pleaded for time to prepare a meal for their children. This concession was readily granted. While the bailiffs were waiting Francis GOODFELLOW, the husband of Mrs. GOODFELLOW, walked out of the house saying that he was taking no act or part and did not return again. When the bailiffs had given the occupants ample time to have a meal they went to enter the house, but found that the doors were barred against them. One of the bailiffs, Mr. ABERNETHY, had to use an iron bar to force open the door. When he forced the bar through the door it was pushed back by one of the occupants with the result the bailiff received a bad gash in his hand. On entering the house they found the occupants were Mrs. GOODFELLOW and her two children. Thomas Edmund BURKE on holidays from England and Mrs. Annie GILDERNEW and Patrick GILDERNEW, a brother of Mrs. GOODFELLOW were also in the house. They refused to leave the house with the result they had to be carried out of it. The Eviction was completed about 3 o'clock. Thomas Edmund BURKE and Patrick GILDERNEW were taken into custody for a short time for assault on the bailiffs. The facts are being reported with a view to a prosecution.

The tenant, Alexander BRADY, and family to whom the house was allocated by the Rural District Council took possession of it on the evening of the 18th June. The BRADY family are Roman Catholics. Since the Eviction the area remains peaceful, and the police are continuing to give it adequate attention.

One of the cameramen, E. G. McVEIGH, 9 Drumrainey Avenue, Castlecaulfield, Co. Tyrone, had his camera broken during a scuffle between the squatters and the bailiffs.

3. On 1st February, 1968, a house at No. 23 Fairmount Park, Dungannon, was unlawfully occupied by a family of squatters, Mrs. Mary McCORMICK, (nee HAMILTON), 26 years, and her two children, Martin D. McCORMICK, born 5.5.62, Mary Catherine McCORMICK, born 16.4.63 and Miss Brigid McDONALD, 60 years, Cavanaw, Pomeroy. They were discovered in the house by the rent collector. He reported the matter to Mr. David HAMILTON of the Urban Council yard. He collected four men and they went to the house and asked the occupants to leave. They refused to do so. He and the men removed the property the squatters had in the house and left it on the footpath. The squatters then left and their whereabouts are unknown. They had only been in occupation of the house for about 2 hours before they were removed by the Council men. The Council men secured the house and no further attempt has been made to enter it.

(Sgd.) R. J. KERR D.I.  
for Inspector General.