

RONNIE BUNTING MURDER – 30TH ANNIVERSARY

Documents shed more light on Burntollet attack

NEW documents have helped shed more light on the infamous attack on civil rights protesters at Burntollet in 1969 – when Major Ronald Bunting and his son Ronnie stood on opposing sides. The documents have been released by the Public Records Office in Belfast and made public days before the 30th anniversary of Ronnie Bunting's murder. Among them is an RUC document marked 'Confidential' which shows how the People's Democracy student marchers found themselves under threat from loyalists from the beginning of their four-day demonstration. The newly formed group, which had called for radical civil rights reform, had decided to march from Belfast to Derry to raise awareness of the cause. The documents – released to the University of Ulster's Conflict Archive on the Internet (Cain) – confirm that loyalists targeted the marchers as soon as they set off from Belfast. Dated January 13 1969 the documents state that the RUC was informed of the march in December 1968.

"Major Bunting's followers, carrying a Ulster flag and the Union flag, then preceded the parade through Belfast." It was noted that members of the People's Democracy had been carrying placards and banners with messages including: 'Civil rights 1969', 'Civil rights march', 'Anti-poverty march', 'Houses for all, jobs for all' and 'One house, one family'. The documents include the names and addresses of some

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Ireland in 1968 and 1969: "The windows of the Guildhall were smashed and the men inside the hall were apprehensive for their safety and that of the women and children who were present." He added: "Major Bunting, in addressing the audience and instructing them to organise for defence of their women and children as they left the hall, stated that the rioters outside were a civil rights mob. "Improvised weapons were obtained by breaking up chairs and stair bannisters and in a protective formation the audience attempted to leave the hall." Lord Cameron concluded that Bunting was wrong in claiming that the rioters were civil rights protesters. He also noted Bunting's rallying call to the Paisleyites to be close to Burntollet the following morning to "see the marchers on their way". It was said that on leaving Claudy on the final day of their march, the People's Democracy leaders chose to ignore police advice that they should avoid Burntollet bridge, five miles from Derry. At Burntollet the marchers were attacked by a well-organised loyalist mob

5. Those identified taking part were:-

People's Democracy

Paul Arthur, 113 Fitzroy Avenue, Belfast.
Kevin Doyle, address unknown.
Ronald Bunting (Junior), 6 Cumberland Drive, Dundonald.
Paul Campbell, 90 University Street, Belfast.
Patricia Drinnan, 49 Glen Road, Belfast.
Michael X. F. Farrell, 8 Strandview Street, Belfast.
Eilish McDermott, 17 Gransha Crescent, Belfast.
Mrs. Rebecca McGlade, 126 Ardilea Street, Belfast.
John H. McGuffin, 92 Eglantine Avenue, Belfast.
Louden Seth, 24 Osborne Park, Belfast.
Cyril J. Toman, 35 Kirkliston Drive, Belfast.

Major Bunting's Group

Major Ronald Bunting, 6 Cumberland Drive, Belfast.
Jack Davidson, 63 Francis Park Street, Belfast.
Francis Miller, 4b Mount Vernon Green, Belfast.
Rev. Robert T. J. McCrea, 91 Srinvals Avenue, Belfast.

■ **SAME ADDRESS:** A document just released by the Public Records Office in Belfast lists some of those present in Burntollet outside Derry in January 1969, with Ronnie Bunting on the civil rights side and his father Major Ronald Bunting, of the same address, on the opposing side



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Dated January 13 1969 the documents state that the RUC was informed of the march in December 1968. "At 8.50am on Wednesday, 1st January 1969, about 50 members of the People's Democracy assembled at the front of the City Hall, Donegall Square, north Belfast," one document says. "Simultaneously, a number of Major Ronald Bunting's or/and Rev Ian R K Paisley's supporters assembled at the same venue with a Union flag and the Ulster flag. "The People's Democracy supporters formed up at 9.15am and moved off along Donegall Place and as they did so, an attempt was made by some of Major Bunting's supporters to pull down a civil rights banner but they were prevented by police in uniform.

Democracy supporters formed up at 9.15am and moved off along Donegall Place and as they did so, an attempt was made by some of Major Bunting's supporters to pull down a civil rights banner"

of those involved in the march and protest. Among the marchers was Ronnie Bunting, of 6 Cumberland Drive, Dundonald, while the protesters included Major Ronald Bunting of the same address. What happened in the following days fiercely polarised communities across the north. On the night of January 3 serious rioting broke out in Derry after a meeting at the city's Guildhall led by Ian Paisley and his supporters. According to Lord Cameron, who compiled a report into civil unrest in Northern



■ **BEREAVED:** Ronald Bunting at his son Ronnie's funeral in 1980

the audience attempted to leave the hall." Lord Cameron concluded that Bunting was wrong in claiming that the rioters were civil rights protesters. He also noted Bunting's rallying call to the Paisleyites to be close to Burntollet the following morning to "see the marchers on their way". It was said that on leaving Claudy on the final day of their march, the People's Democracy leaders chose to ignore police advice that they should avoid Burntollet bridge, five miles from Derry. At Burntollet the marchers were attacked by a well-organised loyalist mob which included many members of the B Specials. The attackers had stockpiled stones and other missiles, including sticks studded with stones, with which they beat both male and female students.

"For moderates this march had disastrous effects," Lord Cameron said. "It polarised the extreme elements in the communities in each place it entered.

"It lost sympathy for the civil rights movement and led to serious rioting in Maghera and Londonderry." While he criticised the People's Democracy leaders, Lord Cameron also said the protection afforded them by police was "not always adequate".

Weeks before the attack, Major Bunting had also been at the frontline of another demonstration against the civil rights movement which resulted in him being jailed with Ian Paisley. The pair began a prison sentence in March 1969, having been found guilty of unlawful assembly at a march in Armagh in November 1968. The pair served two months and were freed under general amnesty in May 1969. Major Bunting broke away from Ian Paisley in 1970. He died in 1984.



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