

Appendix C

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Appendix C

For Truth and Justice, Signed Statement by Citizens' Committee of St. John's

[*Evening Telegram*, April 19, 1932, p. 7]

Following the deplorable events of Tuesday, April 5th, at the House of Assembly in St. John's, and during the ensuing civil disturbances in the city, numerous messages and reports were circulated throughout the country which completely misrepresented the nature and causes of the disorder itself and of the movement and demonstration which preceded them. We, the undersigned, representing the Committee formed to organise the public meeting of April 4th, deem necessary, in the interests of truth and justice and of the honour and good name of the people of Newfoundland, to make this public statement, setting out briefly the exact truth of these matters.

The public meeting of April 4th was not political. It was not called in the interest of any party. It aimed at no political charges. It did not, and could not, presume to demand or suggest the resignation of the Government or of any person, nor did it attempt to exercise an influence which can only belong to the electorate as a whole. Its purpose was concerned solely with questions of law and morality; and we have evidence that both the meeting itself and the movement that has grown out of it were and are supported by men of all political opinions.

All this should be abundantly clear from the resolutions which were unanimously passed at the meeting, and which formed the subject of the petition presented on the following day to the House of Assembly. They have already been published. After reciting that serious charges had been made in the House against certain Ministers, they resolved as follows (we need only give the last of them):

"BE IT RESOLVED ...Thirdly, that, in order to give effect to such protest, a petition be forthwith drawn and presented by this meeting, and such other citizens of the country as may be of the same mind, to the House of Assembly, now in session, humbly praying that it take such steps as may seem to it necessary or desirable for the full and proper consideration and investigation of the said charges, to the end that they be finally and conclusively proved or disproved and such other action be taken thereon as justice and the dignity of the people may require."

What is true of the meeting is equally true of the procession and gathering of citizens before the House on April 5th. The outbreak that occurred, the destruction of property and the other acts of lawlessness that followed during that night and the next day, were all the work of a very small and irresponsible number, most of them youths and boys. Very few of them were in the actual procession; the rest had assembled before it arrived and thus were enabled, when the agitation began, to force their way up the steps of the House in front of the genuine petitioners. Irritated by an unfortunate delay on the part of the House in admitting the deputation and in receiving and debating the petition, this small and lawless element became restive and noisy. In the extremely difficult circumstances the police, in their endeavour to preserve order, angered them further, and in a few minutes they resorted to violence, with the result that everyone now knows. No one will need to be told how easily such outbreaks occur in a large and congested concourse of people, nor how difficult they are to control before they assume serious dimensions. It is, however, common knowledge how

splendidly and effectively the Great War Veterans and hundreds of other private citizens restored order and preserved the peace throughout the city. In no way whatever did the few rioters reflect the feeling of the vast majority of citizens, whose conduct and demeanour were as orderly and impressive as their purpose was serious.

Besides endeavouring to give these events a political colour, the messages above referred to have stated or insinuated that they arose out of sectarian differences and motives. We do not need to point out the manifest absurdity of such a suggestion when applied to a gathering of 10,000 or more citizens, including as it did clergy and laymen of all denominations. We can only deplore and condemn propaganda of this sort; it would be insulting to the public of Newfoundland to think it necessary to deny or combat it.

The whole movement represented by this meeting and procession had in view one supreme object – the purification of our public life and the establishing of a higher standard of conduct and ethics in places of public trust and duty. The movement is still there. It is gathering force and strength daily. We are convinced that it will win support and recruits to its ranks in every part of Newfoundland.

This statement is both a protest and an appeal. We protest against the falsehoods that have sought to distort the plain truth: we appeal to all who love the truth and honour uprightness to stand behind us in the effort we are making. In conclusion, we cordially and earnestly invite all to whom this message may come and who may feel disposed to do so to communicate to this committee in some way an expression of their approval and support.

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