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Police violence and judicial bias in the age of mass democracy: Glasgow, 1933–1935

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ABSTRACT

Using the example of an impoverished, so-called ‘slum’ district in Glasgow, this article argues that poorer, working-class people were subjected to aggressive and frequently violent policing along with systematic hostility from the judiciary and the press in Britain during the 1930s. In Glasgow, attempts to challenge police methods and police officers’ courtroom testimonies met with a highly punitive response from the city’s legal establishment. Despite enjoying the rights of citizenship, working-class people found it difficult to find politicians to take up their complaints about police incivility and brutality, embodied in the conduct of a police constable known locally as ‘Hitler’. Those few politicians willing to do so, whether in Glasgow Corporation or in the House of Commons, found themselves marginalized as mainstream politicians of all parties refused to accept that the British police were capable of inflicting ‘terror’ on civilians. Press sympathy extended only to those working-class women jailed for perjury and separated from their children in the wake of trials of ‘rioters’ at Glasgow Sheriff Court. Human-interest coverage of the plight of their families gave working-class people a voice as victims of misfortune. They were not permitted to speak as victims of miscarriages of justice.

KEYWORDS

Police; community; judiciary; violence; press

In the 12 months from July 1933, a series of disturbances took place on the streets of the Garngad district of Glasgow. Through a case study of the brutal conflict that erupted between the police and local residents, this article demonstrates that police violence was both pervasive and routine in the poorer working-class communities of interwar Britain. Contrary to contemporary depictions of Britain as a ‘uniquely peaceable kingdom’, which were promoted with renewed vigour in aftermath of the First World War,¹ members of the judiciary, politicians and the press all sanctioned the use of violence to repress a community that had repeatedly been labelled as lawless. This is especially significant since, by the 1930s, even

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¹J. Lawrence, ‘Forging a peaceable kingdom: war, violence, and fear of brutalization in post-First World War Britain’, *Journal of Modern History*, 75 (Sept. 2003), 557–89.

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the inhabitants of Britain's so-called 'slum' districts enjoyed the rights of citizenship.² As V.A.C. Gatrell pointed out, the 'question of how poorer people regarded the law and its enforcers' is 'central to all assessments of the legitimacy of the state'.³ Exploring how one impoverished community experienced policing during the 1930s, this article argues that in reality many poorer working-class people were treated as outsiders in the peaceable kingdom; the vote had brought them few new rights and policing reinforced their view that the state worked for class interests diametrically opposed to their own.⁴

The mutual antipathy between beat constables – the most visible agents of state authority – and the urban poor during the Victorian and Edwardian periods has been well documented.⁵ Studies of policing in interwar Britain, however, suggest that while conflict between police and working-class communities persisted, outside of industrial disputes it was sporadic and characterized by reciprocal violence in which police officers and civilians alike 'gave as good as they got'.⁶ Joanne Klein's study of beat constables in Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham concluded that 'serious' violence towards the police significantly diminished from the 1920s onwards.⁷ Other historians, who have deployed oral testimonies from retired police officers, have found former 'bobbies' to be unusually reticent when questioned about their resort to their batons.⁸ Existing studies tend to focus on the experiences of police on the beat. They do not attempt to interrogate the wider relationships – with the judiciary, politicians and the press – within which local conflicts took place and were dealt with.

²As Selina Todd has commented, the Equal Franchise Act, which granted equal voting rights to women and men, meant that Britain became 'truly a mass democracy' for the first time in 1928: S. Todd, *The People. The rise and fall of the working class, 1910–2010* (London, 2014), 64. See also H. McCarthy, 'Whose democracy? Histories of British political culture between the wars', *Historical Journal*, 55, 1 (March 2012), 221–38.

³V.A.C. Gatrell, 'Crime, authority and the policeman-state' in F.M.L. Thompson (ed.), *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750–1950. Volume 3: Social Agencies and Institutions* (Cambridge, 1990), 281.

⁴Here my argument diverges sharply from Ross McKibbin's influential assessment of the 'relative class neutrality of the British state': see B. Jackson, 'An ideology of class: neo-liberalism and the trade unions, c.1930–79' in C. Griffiths, J. Nott and W. Whyte (eds), *Classes, Cultures, and Politics. Essays on British history for Ross McKibbin* (Oxford, 2011), 263; R. McKibbin, 'Why was there no Marxism in Great Britain?', *English Historical Review*, 99, 391 (April 1984), 297–331, here 317–22. For an angry denunciation of endemic 'class-bias' in the administration of the law in Glasgow, see the reader's letter signed 'JUSTICE–WITHOUT BIAS' published in the *Glasgow Eastern Standard*, 23 July 1932, 2.

⁵Gatrell, *op. cit.*, 268–70, 284–7; C. Emsley, *The Great British Bobby. A history of British policing from the 18th century to the present* (London, 2009), 144–53; D. Churchill, "'I am just the man for Upsetting you Bloody Bobbies": popular animosity towards the police in late nineteenth-century Leeds', *Social History*, 39, 2 (May 2014), 248–66, here 248–50.

⁶J. White, 'Police and people in London in the 1930s', *Oral History*, 11, 2 (Autumn 1983), 34–41, here 37; B. Weinberger, *The Best Police in the World. An oral history of English policing from the 1930s to the 1960s* (Aldershot, 1995); 158–9, 190–91; N. Davidson, L. Fleming, L. Jackson, D. Smale and R. Sparks, 'Police and community in twentieth-century Scotland: the uses of social history', *British Journal of Criminology*, 57, 1 (Jan. 2017), 18–39, here 28.

⁷J. Klein, *Invisible Men. The secret lives of police constables in Liverpool, Manchester, and Birmingham, 1900–1939* (Liverpool, 2010), 178.

⁸M. Brogden, *On the Mersey Beat. Policing Liverpool between the wars* (Oxford, 1991), 110; Davidson et al., *op. cit.*, 28.

These studies provide valuable insights into police–public relations during the 1930s, but the sources that underpin them – official records, such as police complaints books, and oral testimonies – provide only sporadic glimpses of the violence that continued to characterize encounters between the police and Britain’s urban poor. It is clear that police officers chose to downplay or omit violence both in official records and in their oral history testimonies.⁹ More important still, historians’ emphasis on the reciprocity of violence risks obscuring the profoundly unequal power relations that shaped these encounters. To understand these dynamics, we need to understand the extent to which the police were actively supported by the judiciary, with the overwhelming support of politicians and the press. This requires us to track confrontations from the streets to the courtroom.

By examining incidents that took place within a specific locality, and tracing their judicial repercussions, this article demonstrates that it is possible to develop a very different analysis of police–public relations that foregrounds the enduring prejudices against the urban poor within the criminal justice system. In Glasgow, the judiciary frequently condoned police violence during the 1930s while simultaneously stigmatizing ‘slum’ dwellers and undermining their attempts to challenge police methods and police officers’ testimonies in court. Violence between police and civilians was reciprocal in these disturbances, but its consequences were disproportionately suffered by civilians – irrespective of their status as perpetrators, victims or witnesses.

Responses to the civilians involved in these disturbances demonstrate how class antagonism continued to shape both the operation of the judicial system and press depictions of the inhabitants of Britain’s ‘slums’ in the age of mass democracy. Allegations of the abuse of police powers, which had created a series of ‘celebrity victims’ during the Metropolitan Police scandals of the late 1920s,¹⁰ met with a much more hostile response when they emanated from a Glasgow ‘slum’. When working-class people made collective attempts to challenge what they experienced as a system of policing by intimidation they had to contend with a highly punitive judicial response. Viewed from the Garngad, the law and its enforcers appeared to be anything but even-handed.

The analysis that follows utilizes official records – police complaints books and personnel files, along with legal case files and prison registers – but in a departure from the existing historiography much of the crucial information is drawn from newspaper coverage of trials held at Glasgow’s Northern Police Court and the city’s Sheriff Court.¹¹ While press reports

⁹Klein, *op. cit.*, 173; Weinberger, *op. cit.*, 159; Brogden, *op. cit.*, 104–10.

¹⁰J. Carter Wood, ‘Press, politics and the “police and public” debates in late 1920s Britain’, *Crime, Histoire et Sociétés*, 16, 1 (2012), 75–98, here 76–8.

¹¹Scotland’s sheriff courts dealt with cases deemed too serious to be dealt with by a magistrate at a police court, but not serious enough to warrant trial before a judge at the High Court: see A. Arnott and J. Duncan, *The Scottish Criminal* (Edinburgh, 1970), 3–4.

did not contain full transcripts of the hearings, they frequently carried lengthy extracts from both police evidence and testimonies by prisoners and their witnesses.¹² As might be expected, accounts of the same event were frequently wildly contradictory, making it impossible to discover the truth of what happened. However, the gulf between police and civilian testimony revealed by these press reports enables us to see grievances that were deeply felt on both sides. This provides powerful evidence of the alienation of many working-class people from the law and its enforcers. A clear ‘hierarchy of credibility’ operated in the courts, whereby police evidence was generally regarded as providing factual versions of events. Prisoners and their witnesses, by contrast, were frequently afforded little credence.¹³ Nonetheless, for the historian willing to read sources against the grain,¹⁴ trial reports provide vital snippets of working-class, civilian testimony on incidents that can no longer be reconstructed from living memory.

Sectarian violence and police violence in the Garngad

The Garngad district – generally known by its residents as ‘the Garngad’ – lay north-east of Glasgow city centre. The district was notoriously unhealthy: its tenements were the most densely populated in a city infamous for its overcrowding. Three chemical plants in close proximity had created a noxious atmosphere in which respiratory diseases were widespread. Frequently described as a ‘slum’, the Garngad was further renowned as both ‘Irish’ and ‘Catholic’, although in reality the local population was more mixed in terms of both ethnicity and religious affiliation than outsiders generally supposed. The disturbances during 1933–34 were concentrated in four adjacent residential streets – Turner Street, Villiers Street, Bright Street and Cobden Street – bounded by Charles Street to the north and the busy thoroughfare of Garngad Road to the south. Most of the households in this portion of the Garngad were

¹²The records of Glasgow Sheriff Court held at National Records of Scotland (hereafter NRS) do not include transcripts of trial proceedings. No records from the city’s Northern Police Court appear to have survived. However, verbatim ‘Notes of evidence’ were taken by shorthand writers during trials at the High Court in Glasgow. A comparison of press reports on trials conducted during the 1930s with surviving ‘Notes of evidence’ indicates that newspapers published faithful – if inevitably selective – accounts of statements made by witnesses in court. See, for example, the lengthy report on the trial of John Traquair for mobbing and rioting, and assault, in the *Glasgow Herald*, 1 May 1934, 3, alongside the corresponding ‘Notes of evidence’, NRS, JC34/1/179. Trial reports were generally compiled by specialist crime reporters, for whom police court hearings provided staple fare: J. Rowbotham, K. Stevenson and S. Pegg, *Crime News in Modern Britain. Press reporting and responsibility, 1820–2010* (Basingstoke, 2013), 118–19.

¹³The phrase ‘hierarchy of credibility’ is Howard Becker’s: ‘Whose side are we on?’, *Social Problems*, 14, 3 (Winter 1967), 239–47. On the production of ‘truth’ in legal processes, see P. Scraton, ‘Policing with contempt: the degrading of truth and denial of justice in the aftermath of the Hillsborough Disaster’, *Journal of Law and Society*, 26, 3 (Sept. 1999), 273–97, here 274–6. Weinberger, *op. cit.*, 193–4, made a similar observation based on her interviews with retired police officers in England. See also C. Emsley, *Hard Men. Violence in England since 1750* (London, 2005), 138–40.

¹⁴E.P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters. The origins of the Black Act* (London, 1975), 16.

composed of Catholics of Irish descent, but by no means all: Cobden Street, in particular, was noted for the ‘Orange’ – militant Protestant – sympathies of some of its residents.¹⁵

In common with many of the thoroughfares in Glasgow’s poorer districts, Garngad Road was the site of regular sectarian skirmishes. Disorder tended to peak on the night of the annual Twelfth of July parades, when supporters of the Orange Order processed through Glasgow on their return to their home districts. Confrontations between the ‘Orangemen’ and hostile Catholic crowds frequently led to multiple arrests.¹⁶ On Saturday, 8 July 1933, disturbances flared across the city following the ‘Orange Walk’ at Bothwell as more than 1000 police struggled to maintain order. Most of the ‘guerilla warfare’ – as the *Sunday Mail* termed it – took place in the streets, but in the Garngad, ‘the two factions engaged in raiding one another’s homes, smashing in the doors, breaking their way into the houses and assaulting the residents’.¹⁷

The following week saw allegations that the police had resorted to brutal methods to quell the disturbances. These stemmed from the arrest of three young men – Thomas Wright, Samuel McDowall and Thomas Johnstone – following a fight in Wright’s tenement flat in Cobden Street.¹⁸ The prisoners, who were remanded in custody following their first appearance at the Northern Police Court on 10 July, took the unusual step of hiring a solicitor to represent them.¹⁹ Wright’s head was still heavily bandaged when they made their next appearance at the Northern Police Court, four days later. Inspector McColl told the court that he had gone to the flat following a report that Wright and his friends had smashed in a neighbour’s door. According to McColl, Wright struck him on the arm with a bottle. When he returned with a sergeant and six constables, they were attacked by Wright and his friends and drew their batons to defend themselves. At the police office, Wright explained that the trouble arose due to resentment at ‘mixed marriages’ (between Catholics and Protestants). The magistrate, Bailie John Ratcliffe, accepted the inspector’s account. (Bailies were local councillors appointed to preside at the city’s police courts.²⁰) Ratcliffe found all three prisoners guilty of committing a breach of the peace and further convicted Wright of assaulting a police

¹⁵*Scotsman*, 14 Nov. 1933, 6; S. Damer, *Glasgow. Going for a song* (London, 1990), 95; P. Dudgeon, *Our Glasgow. Memories of life in disappearing Britain* (London, 2009), 25–7. The *Evening Citizen*, 13 July 1925, 5, reported that Cobden Street was ‘mostly representative of the Orange party’.

¹⁶B. Murray, *The Old Firm. Sectarianism, sport and society in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1984), 154–6; A. Davies, *City of Gangs. Glasgow and the rise of the British gangster* (London, 2013), 141–3.

¹⁷*Sunday Mail*, 9 July 1933, 1; *Scottish Daily Express*, 10 July 1933, 2.

¹⁸The account that follows is drawn from reports in the *Evening Citizen*, 10 July 1933, 1; *Evening News*, 14 July 1933, 7; *Evening Times*, 14 July 1933, 7; *Scottish Daily Express*, 15 July 1933, 3.

¹⁹Most working-class prisoners brought before the city’s police courts had no legal representation: see the *Sunday Mail*, 20 March 1938, 11.

²⁰Only Glasgow’s Central Police Court was served by a stipendiary magistrate. On the role of bailies, see the *People’s Journal for the West of Scotland*, 21 Nov. 1936, 13.

officer. He fined Wright two guineas; McDowall and Johnstone were each fined one pound. Ratcliffe told the prisoners that these relatively lenient sentences took account of the injuries that they had suffered. In effect, Ratcliffe's sentences incorporated – and thus endorsed – the summary punishment that the police had inflicted at the scene.

Ratcliffe's handling of the case provides a prime example of the way in which the judiciary habitually disregarded the evidence of defence witnesses. According to the prisoners and their witnesses, attention had been drawn to the Wrights' orange curtains during a row in the street below. Wright's wife, Rachel, told the court that she and her husband had been 'sitting down to tea' with friends when the lock on her door 'suddenly flew off' and the police burst in. She insisted that her husband had not wielded a bottle, and further alleged that she had been 'thrown aside' by Inspector McColl with such force that she 'fell into the fireplace'. She was then dragged down the tenement stairs by one of the constables, who only released her when told that she was in a 'delicate condition'. Under cross-examination by the Wrights' solicitor, the inspector admitted that Thomas Wright had been struck on the head with a baton by one of the constables, while he had batoned Wright three times himself – albeit not on the head. Faced with wildly conflicting accounts, Bailie Ratcliffe had given the police his staunch backing, unequivocally endorsing their testimonies – which effectively served as institutional 'truths' – as well as their resort to overwhelming violence.

The onslaught against the Wrights provides an unusually vivid illustration of police violence. Wright and his friends were Protestants. However, allegations of police brutality in the Garngad were more commonly made by Catholics. The local street gang, the Cheeky Forty, was avowedly Catholic.²¹ By contrast, the city's police force was overwhelmingly Protestant.²² Tensions between the 'gangsters' and beat constables, fuelled by competing claims to ownership of the streets, were exacerbated by sectarian animosity.²³ From December 1931, the 'rough justice' that characterized much local police work was boosted considerably when Percy Sillitoe was appointed as Glasgow's Chief Constable. By Sillitoe's own account, at the time of his appointment the city was 'over-run' by gangsters. Sillitoe had forged a reputation as a gang-busting 'cop' in Sheffield. Under his leadership, Glasgow's police were firmly encouraged to meet force with superior force. Sillitoe gloried in his officers' prowess in 'rough-houses' and stood by them when their aggressive tactics led to periodic outcries against police 'brutality'.²⁴

²¹*Evening Times*, 31 May 1934, 1.

²²Davidson et al., *op. cit.*, 29.

²³See the case of 23-year-old Joseph McDade, reported in the *Evening Times*, 13 June 1934, 7.

²⁴P. Sillitoe, *Cloak without Dagger* (London, 1955), 107, 130–33; R. Colquhoun, *Life Begins at Midnight* (London, 1962), 36. On 'rough justice', see Davidson et al., *op. cit.*, 28.

Of course, violence between the police and civilians in Glasgow remained reciprocal. As the *Evening News* declared in July 1934, the intensity of hostility to the police ‘in many districts of Glasgow’ remained ‘one of the most disturbing problems’ the city faced.²⁵ Crucially, while gang members were prominent among those involved in assaults both on and by the police, they held no monopoly. In the city’s poorer districts, people of all ages and both sexes – including many with no record of involvement in gangs or crime – found themselves embroiled in these conflicts. Here, police violence was a fact of everyday life.

Police prejudice and community resistance

In the months that followed the 1933 Orange Walk, hostility to the police in the Garngad intensified significantly. The catalyst was the arrival in the district of a new beat constable, PC James Robertson. Aged 23, and a Protestant, Robertson was an imposing figure: at six feet, two inches tall, and weighing more than 16 stone, he was a colossus compared to most residents of the Garngad.²⁶ He had worked as a blacksmith for two years prior to a two-year stint as a police constable in Dundee. He joined the City of Glasgow Police in May 1933, and patrolled the Garngad following his transfer to the Northern Division on 3 July.²⁷ The posting of such a physically intimidating recruit to the district during the build-up to the Orange Walk fitted with Sillitoe’s policy of meeting force with superior force. However, Robertson’s intimidating manner, inflammatory language and undisguised disdain for Catholics caused considerable disquiet. Within weeks of his arrival, local residents nicknamed him ‘Hitler’.²⁸

PC Robertson’s conduct did not go unchallenged: he was quickly targeted both on the streets by local ‘fighting men’ and through official channels. The first recorded assault on ‘Hitler’ took place during the early hours of the morning on Tuesday 22 August. John McKay, aged 29, and 35-year-old John Callaghan were brought before Bailie Matthew Armstrong at the Northern Police Court two days later. Robertson told the court that he had been approached by three men, who used ‘filthy language’ to him before one of them declared: ‘Come on, Hitler – you are going in the canal.’ The men seized hold of his tunic and attempted to wrestle him over the parapet of a bridge and into the Forth and Clyde

²⁵*Evening News*, 25 July 1934, 4.

²⁶Glasgow City Archives (hereafter GCA), City of Glasgow Police, Registers of Police, SR22/57/22/G218. In contrast to Robertson, the average height of 16 men arrested following ‘riots’ in Garngad Road on 26 May and 9 June 1934 was five feet, seven inches: NRS, HH21/70/67, nos 3355–61, 3687–95.

²⁷GCA, SR22/57/22/G218.

²⁸Events in Germany frequently made the front pages of Glasgow’s evening newspapers. The *Evening News*, 31 July 1933, 4, described Hitler’s domestic policies as ‘brutal, oppressive and bellicose’. This was not far removed from characterizations of PC Robertson by his critics in the Garngad. For a brief discussion of local attitudes to ‘PC Hitler’, see Davidson et al., *op. cit.*, 29.

Canal. He managed to thwart them until a second constable, alerted by the commotion, rushed to the scene and the men fled. McKay and Callaghan were subsequently arrested in their own homes. The third assailant was not identified. Both prisoners denied the charge, with Callaghan telling the magistrate that ‘it was ridiculous to think that even three men would try to throw a man like the constable over a parapet six feet high. It would need a crane to do it.’ Bailie Armstrong was unmoved. Accepting Robertson’s version of events, he found both prisoners guilty. He jailed McKay for 60 days and Callaghan for 30.²⁹

Two weeks later, an official complaint was lodged against PC Robertson by George Devlin, a 36-year-old labourer from Garngad Road. Devlin was politically ambitious – a self-styled ‘independent socialist’, he had already announced his intention to stand as an independent candidate in Glasgow’s forthcoming municipal elections.³⁰ He claimed that he had been asked to call a public meeting to protest against ‘the continuation of Constable Robertson on this beat or in the Garngad district’. Devlin organized an open-air meeting in Villiers Street on the evening of Monday 4 September. The meeting drew a crowd of between 600 and 700. Stressing their right as citizens to be treated with civility and respect, Devlin told the crowd that:

... the Police were paid to give protection to the people as well as to property and that they had a right to lodge a complaint against a Constable if they felt that was necessary. A Constable had no right to use obscene language in putting them away from the corners.³¹

Devlin pledged to take the matter to the Chief Constable. He also reported Robertson’s ‘overbearing and oppressive’ conduct to a local Labour councillor, Jean Mann. She immediately wrote to Sillitoe, suggesting that Robertson might be transferred to a different district.³²

The complaint against PC Robertson was investigated by Inspector William Cowie of the Northern Division. Cowie interviewed both Devlin and Mann. He then spoke to a number of local people identified by Devlin as witnesses to ‘Hitler’s’ alleged misconduct. Faced by a police inspector, the witnesses were understandably circumspect, but their statements nonetheless testified to Robertson’s casual resort to insulting language. Forty-seven-year-old Rose Ann Romeo described an incident that had taken place on the night of Sunday, 27 August. A group of Garngad residents alighted from a bus at around half-past 11, having returned from a picnic. As they gathered at the junction of Charles Street and Villiers Street

²⁹*Evening News*, 24 Aug. 1933, 1.

³⁰In the event, Devlin stood for election in the Provan ward only to withdraw his candidacy at the last moment: see the *Scotsman*, 28 Oct. 1933, 17; 31 Oct. 1933, 13.

³¹City of Glasgow Police, ‘Deputations and Complaints’ letter book, GCA, SR22/63/18, 812–13.

³²*ibid.*, 811–12.

awaiting the arrival of a second bus carrying the rest of their party they were approached by PC Robertson, who told them: ‘There’s too much f...ing carry on among you lot.’ Romeo insisted that the crowd had done nothing to provoke the constable’s ire. The organizer of the buses, James McNally, aged 52, described how ‘Hitler’ told the crowd to ‘get to hell out of here’.³³

More damning – though still circumspect – testimony was provided by 20-year-old James Kelly from Villiers Street. Kelly described how he had been walking along Garngad Road on his way to chapel at around 11 o’clock on a recent Sunday morning when he saw two constables, one of whom was ‘Hitler’. According to Kelly: ‘As I was passing him he asked me where I was going and told him I was going to the Chapel. He then said, “A bomb in that chapel would do no harm”.’ Kelly explained that he took ‘Hitler’s’ comment as ‘a joke’, but added that Devlin ‘took it to be serious’.³⁴ Given that the Garngad had been the site of bitter sectarian violence only weeks earlier, Robertson’s ‘joke’ was at the very least ill-judged. ‘Hitler’ had shown himself to be a bigot as well as a bully. Significantly, only one of these witnesses to Robertson’s alleged misconduct was a young man. Rose Ann Romeo and James McNally were middle-aged, law-abiding citizens, but this had not exempted them or their companions from Robertson’s abuse.

Robertson had his supporters among the residents of the Garngad as well as his critics, as Councillor Jean Mann quickly discovered when she raised the constable’s conduct at a meeting of Provan Ward Committee. (Glasgow’s municipal ward committees served to ‘draw the attention of the Council to the wants and aspirations of their locality’. They were ‘nominally independent of political parties’ and any municipal elector could stand for election to them.³⁵) When Mann informed the Provan Ward Committee that she had supported Devlin’s complaint, she found little support for her action. Quite the opposite: 44-year-old Patrick Byrne – a resident of Turner Street in the Garngad, and a member of the Scottish Socialist Party – told the Committee that:

... he was sorry to hear that such a complaint had been lodged as he had never been able to get to sleep until all hours of the morning until this Constable came to the District. His opinion was that another half dozen ‘Hitlers’ was required – not the removal of a man who was doing his duty well.³⁶

³³*ibid.*, 815–16.

³⁴*ibid.*, 816.

³⁵C. Johnstone, ‘The Tenants’ Movement and Housing Struggles in Glasgow, 1945–1990’ (Ph.D., Glasgow, 1992), 388.

³⁶GCA, SR22/63/18, 811. The Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) was formed by members of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) who disapproved of the ILP’s disaffiliation from the Labour Party in July 1932. When Labour and the ILP contested wards in subsequent municipal elections, the SSP supported the Labour candidates: J.J. Smyth, *Labour in Glasgow, 1896–1936. Socialism, suffrage, sectarianism* (East Linton, 2000), 191.

Mann told Inspector Cowie that Byrne's intervention was received by the Committee 'with acclamation'.³⁷ Byrne told Cowie that 'it is only the younger and irresponsible element' who objected to Robertson's conduct.³⁸ Labour activists like Byrne, determined to show that socialists could be trusted to maintain public order, frequently deplored rowdyism in terms that echoed pronouncements by police officials.³⁹ Mann, who had initially endorsed allegations of police misconduct, quickly backtracked when she heard Byrne's account.⁴⁰

In the wake of the inquiry, Robertson received resolute support from his senior officers. In his report to Chief Constable Sillitoe, James Mair – Acting Superintendent of the Northern Division – was unequivocal: Robertson was 'a young Constable of good physique', who had 'discharged his duties in a satisfactory manner and without complaint'. According to the superintendent, the recent friction in the Garngad stemmed not from any misconduct on the part of the constable, but from rowdyism by local youths:

Garngad District which is situated in Provan Ward, is a densely populated slum area frequented by a large number of unemployed youths who loiter at street corners, indulging in horse play until the early hours of the morning, and in consequence a number of letters of complaint have been received regarding the annoyance caused.⁴¹

Mair's report detailed cases tried at the Northern Police Court during the 10 weeks from 1 July – coinciding with Robertson's transfer to the district. They included 99 people dealt with for breaches of the peace; 12 for assaults on the police; 21 for assaults on civilians and 22 for housebreaking. According to the superintendent, all of the defendants were from 'that District' – the Garngad. Mair concluded that 'it would not be judicious to transfer Constable Robertson from his present beat in Garngad Road'.⁴² His recommendation was upheld.

Robertson had been patrolling the Garngad for just seven weeks. His nickname was already well established. The statements gathered following Devlin's complaint help to explain both the moniker 'Hitler' and the forlorn attempt to humiliate Robertson by throwing him in a canal. The constable's 'overbearing and oppressive manner', his casual resort to obscene language – directed at local residents in general, not just rowdy youths – and his anti-Catholic prejudice, however 'jokily' expressed, smacked of 'policing with contempt' rather than consent.⁴³ Mair's report

³⁷GCA, SR22/63/18, 811.

³⁸*ibid.*, 816.

³⁹Davies, *op. cit.*, 355. See also P. Cohen, *Rethinking the Youth Question. Education, labour and cultural studies* (Basingstoke, 1997), 121.

⁴⁰GCA, SR22/63/18, 811.

⁴¹*ibid.*, 810.

⁴²*ibid.*

⁴³I have borrowed this phrase from Scraton, *op. cit.*

rode roughshod over local concerns about Robertson's demeanour. The superintendent's report portrayed the Garngad as a fractured community, in which the antics of disorderly youths prompted complaints to the police from tormented householders. In reality, older, more 'respectable' residents were among those angered by 'Hitler's' conduct. Mair's characterization of 'that District' as a hotbed of violence and criminality evidently persuaded Chief Constable Sillitoe that Robertson was precisely the type of officer the Garngad required.

'Mob' violence and the judiciary

Four months after the superintendent's report, another confrontation involving PC Robertson led to sensational newspaper headlines decrying the Garngad's lawlessness. On this occasion, Robertson received outspoken public backing from the judiciary. The furore stemmed from a routine Saturday night patrol. At around 11 o'clock on 27 January 1934, Robertson and a fellow beat constable, George McIntosh, told a group of young men to 'move on' from the pavement outside a fish supper shop. The masculine pride of police officers and civilians alike was at stake in such encounters and neither side could back down without losing face.⁴⁴ On this occasion, Robertson quickly became embroiled in a struggle with one of the men. As a crowd gathered, and the struggle escalated, Robertson's helmet was knocked off and he was struck on the head with a bottle.⁴⁵

Robertson's alleged assailants – Joseph McLean, aged 24, and Edward Glancy, 25 – stood trial at Glasgow Sheriff Court before Sheriff Haldane on 18–19 April. Haldane had taken up his appointment in Glasgow six months previously.⁴⁶ Both prisoners were charged with assaulting the police, and Glancy faced a second charge of attempting to rescue McLean from custody. The constables testified that the assault was entirely unprovoked: they told the crowd to move on and McLean responded by seizing PC Robertson's tunic, butting him in the face and kicking him. When PC McIntosh intervened, McLean attacked him too. During the struggle, Glancy stepped out of the crowd and smashed a bottle over Robertson's head. Heavily outnumbered, the constables nonetheless managed to arrest both of their assailants. Robertson was subsequently unfit for duty for 12 days.⁴⁷

Civilian witnesses told a different story, however. One of the shop assistants told the court that McLean had ordered two fish suppers, then went out onto the pavement while his order was being prepared. Two

⁴⁴Davies, *op. cit.*, 247–64; Davidson et al., *op. cit.*, 27–8.

⁴⁵*Glasgow Herald*, 19 April 1934, 9; *Evening Times*, 19 April 1934, 1.

⁴⁶*Scotsman*, 3 Oct. 1933, 8.

⁴⁷*Glasgow Herald*, 19 April 1934, 9; GCA, SR22/57/22/G218.

policemen came over, and one of the officers promptly took hold of him. She ‘did not see McLean do anything to justify him being arrested’. A male passer-by gave a very similar account, insisting that violence only erupted after one of the constables took out his baton. A third civilian witness, Catherine Donaldson, testified that:

She saw Constable Robertson put his arm round McLean’s neck, and she also saw the constable drawing his baton ... [She] told the constable that it was a shame to treat McLean like this as he had not done anything. The constables told [her] to mind her own business.

Asked whether she knew Constable Robertson, Donaldson replied: ‘Yes. I know him as Hitler.’ Both prisoners denied the charges, with McLean adamant that he had done nothing to warrant his arrest.⁴⁸ These civilian accounts suggest that, far from launching an unprovoked assault, the prisoners had responded in kind to police brutality.

Sheriff Haldane’s summing-up caused a sensation. Eager to publicly champion the police, Haldane declared that the jurors were no doubt familiar with the name of the district in which the incident had occurred on account of:

... the lawless proceedings which went on there and the mob violence which so often occurred ... Police constables performing their duty in such an area were frequently exposed to very great danger, not only of personal injury but danger for their lives, and he thought the jury would appreciate the difficulties in which they worked ...⁴⁹

Haldane added that it was difficult ‘in such a notorious area’ to find civilians willing to testify in support of the police, whereas witnesses were frequently ‘induced’ to undermine police testimony in court. The jury found McLean guilty. Haldane jailed him for three months. Glancy was found guilty of assaulting the constables, but the additional charge against him of attempting to release McLean from police custody was found not proven, despite Haldane’s insistent prompting. Glancy had already served nine terms of imprisonment. Haldane gave him another six months.⁵⁰

Sheriff Haldane’s outburst propelled the trial of McLean and Glancy onto the front pages of Glasgow’s evening newspapers. The coverage added significantly to the Garngad’s notoriety, but it did not go unchallenged. The *Evening Times*’ headline – “MOB VIOLENCE” IN GARNGAD’ – drew angry ripostes from readers across the city. ‘Justice’, writing from the wealthy suburb of Queen’s Park, protested that ‘the conduct of the Garngad public (juvenile and adult) compares favourably with the public

⁴⁸*Evening Times*, 19 April 1934, 1.

⁴⁹*ibid.*

⁵⁰*ibid.*; NRS, HH21/70/67, no. 389.

in any district in the city' and called for a public inquiry. James Wilson, who claimed to have preached in the Garngad weekly for 45 years, rubbished Haldane's claim that the district was unsafe. Wilson was adamant that 'Garngad folk compare favourably with other working-class districts of the city, and do not deserve to be thus stigmatised'. When 'Portia' wrote in support of Haldane, 'Justice' replied, urging his fellow correspondent to 'visit Garngad any Sunday morning from 8 o'clock, when he would witness a really edifying spectacle – the hourly exodus from divine service from the spacious church with hourly services until noon'. This rebuttal of 'Portia's' 'cowardly and unwarranted ... attack upon the morality of the people of Garngad' served equally strongly as a rebuke to Haldane.⁵¹

Councillor Jean Mann shared this unease. Having withdrawn her support for George Devlin's complaint the previous autumn, she now raised Sheriff Haldane's comments along with the conduct of 'a certain constable nicknamed "Hitler"' at a meeting of Glasgow Corporation. Mann's intervention might have been expected to carry considerable weight since she was now serving as a bailie, or lay magistrate, herself. However, support for PC Robertson among the senior ranks of the City of Glasgow Police remained firm. Mann was informed that Robertson 'had the confidence of the Chief-Constable'.⁵² Significantly, there was no appetite among Mann's colleagues on Glasgow Corporation to rebuke the sheriff. Labour had gained control of the Corporation for the first time in November 1933. For the new socialist administration, demonstrating support for the police and judiciary outweighed any concern with the grievances of the people of the Garngad.

'Riots' and police violence

To fully understand the depth of tensions between the police and local residents we need to examine two 'riots' that took place on 26 May and 9 June 1934. These larger-scale outbreaks of disorder – both of which occurred late on Saturday nights – led to multiple arrests, but civilian witnesses at the trials that followed made repeated allegations of police brutality and falsification of evidence. PC Robertson featured prominently in their accusations. By this time, police patrols of the Garngad were in turn the subject of surveillance by a local 'Vigilance Committee' – a sub-committee of the Provan Ward Committee – whose members monitored arrests made in the district in the light of complaints about 'Hitler's' conduct.⁵³

⁵¹*Evening Times*, 19 April 1934, 1; 24 April 1934, 6; 26 April 1934, 6; 1 May 1934, 6.

⁵²*Evening News*, 27 April 1934, 3. Mann had been appointed as a bailie earlier that year. See Y. Galloway Brown, 'Mann, Janet (Jean)' in E. Ewan, S. Innes, R. Pipes and S. Reynolds (eds), *The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women from the Earliest Times to 2004* (Edinburgh, 2006), 247.

⁵³*Evening Times*, 3 May 1934, 6.

The incident on 26 May took place at around 11.30 pm, when Robertson and PC Robert Wales arrested Patrick Kelly, a 48-year-old labourer, outside the fish supper shop at the corner of Garngad Road and Villiers Street. The chaos that ensued was described in the following morning's *Sunday Mail*:

Within a few minutes the officers were surrounded by a hostile mob, who attacked them with bottles. The mob [ran] wild, and, with but a few constables on the scene to control affairs, the crowd took the law into its own hands and wrecked window after window in the vicinity. Grocers' windows were wrecked and plundered; drapers' shops and fruiterers' received the same treatment ...⁵⁴

The *Mail's* report, apparently based solely on information provided by the police, noted that police reinforcements were delayed after the wires to the nearest police telephone box were cut as the disturbance erupted. When reinforcements belatedly arrived, the *Mail* reported, the streets were cleared within a few minutes. Readers were assured that: 'A strong force of police was left to guard the district after quiet had been restored, and at an early hour this morning they were still patrolling the vicinity.'⁵⁵

Violence had been meted out on both sides before order was restored. On this occasion, the police got the worst of it. Three officers required hospital treatment: Sergeant William Bell was detained in the Royal Infirmary suffering from head injuries, while PC Robertson suffered severe bruising to his right leg and thigh. In addition to Patrick Kelly, six young men aged between 19 and 26 were arrested at the scene. Police officers identified them as members of the Cheeky Forty, and claimed that the 'gangsters' had been supported by the 'large crowd'. Twenty-one plate-glass shop windows were smashed during the disturbance, leaving Garngad Road resembling 'a village in France after a bombardment' in the words of one police witness. All seven prisoners were remitted for trial at Glasgow Sheriff Court.⁵⁶

The incident on 26 May was eclipsed a fortnight later by another riot in Garngad Road. The 'trouble' arose at around 10 o'clock on the night of Saturday 9 June when police arrested John Callaghan – one of the two men jailed the previous year for attempting to throw Robertson into a canal. Once again, police fed an account of the incident to the *Sunday Mail*, whose report – headlined 'BATONS OUT IN GARNGAD' – duly depicted their resort to violence as unavoidable: 'Two Glasgow policemen were injured, nine persons were arrested, and the Garngad district was thrown into a state of wild excitement last night when trouble broke out in Garngad Road, and the streets had to be cleared.' In this version of events,

⁵⁴*Sunday Mail*, 27 May 1934, 1.

⁵⁵*ibid.*

⁵⁶*Evening Times*, 28 May 1934, 1; 30 May 1934, 9; *Glasgow Herald*, 4 June 1934, 9; GCA, SR22/57/22/G218.

when the police arrested Callaghan a ‘menacing’ crowd gathered, and one of the officers was struck on the head with a bottle. This ‘seemed to be the signal for a general disturbance, and the police were forced to draw their batons’. As passers-by ‘fled into doorways and [tenement] closes for shelter’, an urgent request for reinforcements was relayed to the Northern Division headquarters. The *Mail* reported approvingly that ‘the “active zone” in the vicinity of Villiers Street to Cobden Street was heavily policed for several hours’. Police made nine arrests. The prisoners – all male, and aged from 23 to 69 – were remitted for trial at the city’s Sheriff Court. They joined the seven men arrested on 26 May on remand.⁵⁷ Of the 16 men held in Barlinnie prison awaiting trial, 14 were Catholics.⁵⁸

Before proceedings against the Garngad ‘rioters’ could be prepared, an alternative version of the events of the night of 9 June emerged from an unexpected quarter. On Tuesday 12 June, the *Evening Times* published a letter signed by 50 ‘ratepayers and shopkeepers of Garngad’ addressed to the Chief Constable and the ward’s three councillors, including Jean Mann. The signatories did not request increased police protection – the usual plea by shopkeepers following outbreaks of disorder and street violence. Rather, they drew attention to ‘the unwarranted assault by the police upon residents of this district on June 9, during which disturbance many residents – including cripples and aged – received injuries’. Demanding an inquiry into the incident, the signatories called for ‘the exercise of a little tact’ on the part of the police, arguing that that this ‘would go a long way to obviate much of the disorder evident in the district recently’. The shopkeepers feared that if clashes between the police and public were allowed to continue, ‘trade will be driven from the district’. If the Chief Constable failed to act, they would lobby the Secretary of State for Scotland instead.⁵⁹ The ‘ratepayers and shopkeepers’ effectively recast the latest outbreak of disorder in Garngad Road as a police riot.

Mob tyranny or police tyranny?

The trials of the two batches of ‘rioters’ at Glasgow Sheriff Court saw the police repeatedly receive powerful backing from the judiciary. However, the prisoners enjoyed legal representation – available by right to all those appearing at Scotland’s sheriff courts, irrespective of ability to pay – and sheriffs were not always able to sway their jurors, some of whom, like the *Evening Times*’s correspondents, were more sympathetic to residents of the

⁵⁷*Sunday Mail*, 10 June 1934, 2; *Glasgow Herald*, 8 Aug. 1934, 9; NRS, SC36/56/165. ‘Closes’ gave access to the common stairs and back-courts of tenement buildings and were conveniently out of public view: see Damer, *op. cit.*, 72.

⁵⁸NRS, HH21/70/67, 3355–61, 3687–95.

⁵⁹*Evening Times*, 12 June 1934, 3.

Garngad than to the police.⁶⁰ The first batch of seven prisoners appeared before Sheriff Haldane over three days from 9 July. They were charged with mobbing and rioting on the night of 26 May. Patrick Kelly, whose arrest sparked the disturbance, was also charged with causing a breach of the peace and assaulting constables Wales and Robertson. The younger prisoners – said by police to be members of the Cheeky Forty – were additionally charged with throwing stones, bricks, bottles, iron bars, axes, bolts, hammers and other missiles at the police, causing severe injury to Sergeant William Bell. They were further accused of smashing shop windows and looting in Garngad Road. The haul from one shop included 11,650 cigarettes along with household goods ranging from thermos flasks to cakes of soap.⁶¹

Police evidence was led by PC Robertson. He described how he asked Patrick Kelly, who was drunk and leaning against the window of the fish supper shop, to move to the side of the pavement for his own safety. Kelly refused, swore, and struck the second officer, PC Wales, on the shoulder with a bottle. He then challenged the constables to go with him into a tenement close, telling them that he would ‘knock them stiff’. Robertson claimed that he had followed Kelly into the close and ‘told him to behave himself and go home’, only for Kelly to come back out onto the street and ‘kick him on the knee and between the legs’. The constables apprehended Kelly, who lay down on the ground and kicked out at them. A crowd of between 150 and 200 people gathered and Kelly shouted to the onlookers for help. ‘The crowd surrounded us’, Robertson continued, ‘and bottles, stones and other missiles were thrown at us’. Local residents joined in the bombardment, flinging apples, eggs, jam pots and bottles at the constables from their windows. Prompted by the Procurator-Fiscal (public prosecutor), John Drummond Strathern, Robertson confirmed that he had ‘quietened’ Robert Taylor, who was ‘leading the crowd’, by striking him with his baton.⁶²

Robertson told the court that he and PC Wales had only been saved from serious injury by the arrival of Sergeant Bell and a third constable. In the event, Robertson stated, he had been off duty for a fortnight due to the injuries he suffered. Sergeant Bell had been off duty for 16 days. Under cross-examination, Robertson confirmed that he was no longer patrolling the Garngad district. He insisted that he had been ‘promoted’ to the ‘inquiry department’ at the Northern Police Office. In response to inquiries by the *Evening Times*, police officials were adamant that Robertson had not been removed as a result of complaints against him. They did concede,

⁶⁰On prisoners’ entitlement to legal representation, see the *Sunday Post*, 9 Aug. 1936, 14.

⁶¹*Glasgow Herald*, 10 July 1934, 7; 12 July 1934, 11.

⁶²*Evening Times*, 9 July 1934, 1; *Glasgow Herald*, 10 July 1934, 7.

however, that having been injured ‘rather badly’ on three recent occasions, the constable was due for a ‘rest’.⁶³

Close reading of the trial reports reveals that defence witnesses gave wholly different – and at least as credible – accounts both of the initial encounter between the two beat constables and Patrick Kelly and of the subsequent ‘riot’. A series of local residents – some of whom claimed to have watched Kelly’s arrest from the windows of their tenement flats – testified to PC Robertson’s brutality. By their accounts, ‘Hitler’ accosted Kelly ‘in a bullying way’, before repeatedly battering him on the head with his baton. According to one witness: ‘[It] was a wonder that Kelly was living after the beating he got.’ The most graphic account was given by James McNally, from Bright Street in the Garngad – one of the witnesses interviewed following the complaint against ‘Hitler’ the previous autumn. McNally described how Kelly ‘seemed to lose consciousness and collapsed on the ground. The two constables then dragged him along the street.’ McNally now identified himself as a member of both Provan Ward Committee and the associated Garngad Vigilance Committee. Questioned by the Procurator-Fiscal, he denied that the Vigilance Committee had been running a hostile campaign against the police and further denied promoting a petition against PC Robertson. McNally told the court that he patrolled Garngad Road on a nightly basis. Strathern countered McNally’s testimony by informing the court that PC Robertson had been ‘highly commended by the Chief Constable’.⁶⁴ The counter-allegations by the prisoners and their witnesses were not solely directed at ‘Hitler’. They insisted that the police reinforcements – none of whom had witnessed the initial disturbance – had made random arrests, inflicting considerable violence as they did so.⁶⁵

Judicial sympathy clearly lay with the police. In his summing up for the jury, Sheriff Haldane acknowledged the fundamental contradictions in the evidence. The prosecution case rested on ‘nothing but police testimony’, which was flatly contradicted by a ‘considerable number’ of civilian witnesses. Haldane insisted that such disturbances took place in the Garngad district ‘all too frequently’, while the stark discrepancy between police evidence and civilian testimonies was equally familiar. He concluded:

The obvious significance of that is this ... either on the one hand this district ... is in the grip of a very objectionable police tyranny, or, on the other hand ... it is in the grip of an even more objectionable mob or gang tyranny.

The weight that Haldane placed on the testimony given by police surgeons left no doubt as to his own view of what happened on the night of 26 May:

⁶³*Evening Times*, 9 July 1934, 1; 12 July 1934, 4; GCA, SR22/57/22/G218.

⁶⁴*Evening Times*, 10 July 1934, 3; *Glasgow Herald*, 11 July 1934, 8.

⁶⁵*Glasgow Herald*, 11 July 1934, 8; *Evening Times*, 11 July 1934, 5.

‘[I]n carrying out their duties on this occasion’, Haldane observed grimly, ‘police constables were in great danger of their lives’.⁶⁶

Faced with the stark choice presented by Haldane – police tyranny or mob tyranny – the jury opted for the former. They returned a unanimous verdict of not guilty against two of the prisoners, and the same verdict, albeit by a majority, against the remainder, including Patrick Kelly.⁶⁷ Despite the sheriff’s strong steer to the contrary, they found the evidence of ‘police tyranny’ more plausible. The jury’s scepticism appears to be borne out by the prisoners’ criminal records. Kelly had served five terms of imprisonment in Barlinnie, the most recent in 1928. By contrast, the six young men freed alongside him had had few previous brushes with the law. If, as the police alleged, they were members of the Cheeky Forty, they were certainly not among the gang’s leading figures. Five of them had not previously been in prison, while the sixth had served a single stint in Barlinnie eight years earlier.⁶⁸

In the wake of the trial, PC Robertson’s reassignment looked like a victory for the Garngad Vigilance Committee as well as for the local fighting men. While ‘Hitler’ had been moved in part for his own safety – as police officials admitted – it is hard to avoid the conclusion that his notoriety had become a problem for the Procurator-Fiscal. Transferring Robertson to desk duties promised both to help to pacify the district and to remove a difficult line of cross-examination for police witnesses at future trials.

When the second batch of Garngad ‘rioters’ appeared at Glasgow Sheriff Court on 6 August, the stakes were high. The police and Procurator-Fiscal were no doubt still furious following the acquittal of the previous batch of prisoners four weeks earlier. In addition, while initial reports of the disturbance on the night of 9 June had been sympathetic to the police, the heavily publicized protest by local ratepayers and shopkeepers had cast the incident in a wholly different light – as a police riot. The prisoners appeared before Sheriff MacDiarmid on 6 August. John Callaghan was charged with committing a breach of the peace in Garngad Road and throwing a bottle at a police patrol van. The remaining eight prisoners were charged with mobbing and rioting and assaulting the police.⁶⁹

The officer in charge of the van, Sergeant Charles Grant, told the court that the crowd numbered 600 at the height of the disturbance. The crowd, he explained, ‘appeared to be under the impression that there were prisoners in the van’. After he had ordered the crowd to move, without effect, he instructed the constables to step out of the van. He subsequently directed

⁶⁶*Glasgow Herald*, 12 July 1934, 11; *Evening Times*, 19 April 1934, 1.

⁶⁷*Glasgow Herald*, 12 July 1934, 11.

⁶⁸NRS, HH21/70/67, nos 3355–61.

⁶⁹*Glasgow Herald*, 7 Aug. 1934, 7.

his men to draw their batons ‘to protect themselves and try to restore order by clearing the street’. Grant claimed that he had himself been struck by missiles during the melee. Under cross-examination, Grant denied repeatedly kicking one of the prisoners in the police station and further denied that some of the accused ‘were carried face-downwards and thrown bodily into the van’. He also denied that the disturbance only began when ‘the police came out of the van and assaulted the crowd’.⁷⁰

Witnesses for the defence gave an entirely different version of events, claiming that the police had displayed considerable brutality when making a series of indiscriminate arrests. Some of the civilian witnesses gave exaggerated accounts of the tranquillity of the district prior to the arrival of the police patrol van. Fifty-eight-year-old John Taylor ‘had never seen Garngad Road so quiet’; another witness claimed ‘it was just like a Sunday morning’. Accounts of the violence meted out by the constables were more plausible. Prisoner Joseph Shields was thrown ‘head first into the van like a dog’. Another of the prisoners, 57-year-old Richard Kerr, was almost blind. Kerr’s wife, aged 71, claimed that when she remonstrated with the police officer who had apprehended her husband she was told: ‘We will – soon make him see.’ She was then ‘pushed into the roadway and nearly trampled on’. She told the court that she knew this officer only as ‘Hitler’.⁷¹

The youngest prisoner, 23-year-old Thomas Etherson, claimed that ‘Hitler’ punched him repeatedly before challenging him to ‘put up his hands and fight’ when they reached the Northern Police Office. Etherson also claimed that he was kicked on the way to the cells. John Callaghan told how he was batoned in the street until he was unconscious. When he came around in the police van, Callaghan alleged, he was ‘punched on the face and jaw’.⁷² The beatings inflicted on the prisoners were no doubt intended as retribution for the injuries suffered by the police two weeks previously.

Concluding the case for the prosecution, Procurator-Fiscal John Drummond Strathern stated that the trial had been ‘stalked’ by perjury. He ridiculed the evidence given by defence witnesses:

Were the jury seriously to believe that a police van came into a peaceful street, as the defence alleged, that policemen came out and began to baton Tom, Dick, and Harry, and then threw their prisoners head first into the van?⁷³

Strathern acknowledged that while defence witnesses had displayed nothing but ‘venom’ for the police in general, they had frequently singled out PC Robertson: ‘[T]he constable’s presence seemed to act like a red rag to a bull so far as these people living in Garngad Road were concerned.’⁷⁴ The

⁷⁰*Evening Times*, 6 Aug. 1934, 1; *Glasgow Herald*, 7 Aug. 1934, 7.

⁷¹*Evening Times*, 7 Aug. 1934, 1; *Glasgow Herald*, 8 Aug. 1934, 9.

⁷²*Evening News*, 8 Aug. 1934, 1.

⁷³*Glasgow Herald*, 9 Aug. 1934, 7.

⁷⁴*ibid.*

solicitor for the accused responded by highlighting the ages and physical frailties of some of those caught up in the disturbance: ‘You have people of 68, 69, and 71 years of age, lame, blind, sick, and these are the rioters of Garngad.’⁷⁵ As for the discrepancies between police and civilian witnesses, he insisted that: ‘[A] policeman was every bit as capable of telling a deliberate lie as an ordinary civilian.’⁷⁶

Sheriff MacDiarmid commenced his summing-up by declaring that ‘on one side or another very serious perjury had been committed’. The defence’s suggestion that the police had ‘framed’ the riot was ‘very serious’, Macdiarmid declared. Abandoning any semblance of impartiality, he continued:

You are asked to believe that the police force of Glasgow, or this portion of it, in the discharge of its duty, acts in a manner which is impossible in this free country. You are asked to believe that this body of police officers went into Garngad Road, and, for no reason . . . at all, stopped their van; that a bevy of them came pouring out, went mad, and ran up and down the road batoning everyone they could get hold of. As sensible men and women, you must take that story into consideration, comparing it with that of the Crown, and decide which is the more likely.⁷⁷

Like the Procurator-Fiscal, the sheriff made little attempt to disguise his contempt for the defence witnesses.

The jury found all nine of the prisoners guilty. John Callaghan was sentenced to eight months’ imprisonment for breaching the peace. The other prisoners were all convicted of mobbing and rioting and assaulting the police. Five were jailed for 12 months. The remaining three got four months.⁷⁸ In contrast to the prisoners acquitted the previous month, Callaghan and most of his co-accused had substantial criminal records. Between them, they had amassed 33 previous convictions for assault, breach of the peace or disorderly behaviour prior to their arrest on 9 June.⁷⁹ Several of them were hardened fighting men, although on this occasion they had been worsted by the police.

Macdiarmid’s ‘salutary’ sentences were applauded by the local press. Like the sheriff and the Procurator-Fiscal, columnists simply refused to believe civilian accounts of the police conduct in Garngad Road. The *Evening Times* acknowledged that individual officers might make ‘serious errors of judgement’, but the prospect of a number of them ‘deliberately provok[ing] a disturbance’ was ‘frankly incredible’.⁸⁰

Buoyed by the conviction of the second batch of ‘rioters’, the Procurator-Fiscal’s office took the highly unusual step of preparing charges of perjury against three witnesses. The intent was clear: to teach the

⁷⁵*ibid.*

⁷⁶*ibid.*

⁷⁷*ibid.*

⁷⁸*ibid.*

⁷⁹NRS, SC36/56/165.

⁸⁰*Evening Times*, 9 Aug. 1934, 4.

troublesome population of the Garngad a lesson. Three local men – Robert Burns, William Madden and John Kelly – appeared at Glasgow Sheriff Court before Sheriff Haldane on 21 January 1935. At the trial on 7 August 1934, they had each described seeing ‘Hitler’ from the windows of their tenement flats between half-past one and two o’clock in the morning – two to three hours after the ‘riot’ had subsided. All three testified to having seen ‘Hitler’ walk down Bright Street with a pail in his hand, put something into the pail, then place the pail in a ‘Black Maria’ (police van) at the corner of Garngad Road. Taken together, their testimonies were crucial to the defence claim that the missiles allegedly thrown at the police during the riot had in fact been ‘put on the street late that night or early on Sunday morning by the police’.⁸¹ The gulf between civilian and police evidence was maintained during the trial of Burns, Madden and Kelly: the alleged perjurers stood by their initial statements; PC Robertson refuted their claims; more residents of Bright Street now came forward to corroborate the prisoners’ testimonies.⁸²

Councillor Jean Mann, called as a defence witness, caused a sensation when she revealed that contrary to earlier police denials PC Robertson had been removed from his beat in the Garngad due to local resentment. Mann explained that she had received a telephone call around midnight on 9 June asking her to go to the district on account of ‘an unprovoked attack by the police’. She went to Garngad Road at noon and was immediately surrounded by people clamouring to tell her what had happened. One of the prisoners, Robert Burns, told her that he had seen ‘Hitler going down Bright Street, picking up a pail, and putting stones into it’. The crowd was so numerous that Mann convened an impromptu meeting in a local hall to collect names and addresses. Local people were adamant that the riot had been provoked, or ‘framed’, by the police. She subsequently told Chief Constable Sillitoe that ‘she intended to bring the matter before the magistrates for an inquiry unless the constable nicknamed “Hitler” was removed from the district’. Sillitoe ‘had the man removed’, she explained, ‘so I took no further action’. Prompted by the solicitor for the accused, Mann confirmed that the district had ‘quietened down’ since PC Robertson’s removal. In his summing-up for the jury Sheriff Haldane lambasted Mann, insisting that she had had ‘no right’ to highlight the antipathy towards the constable.⁸³

The jury found the prisoners guilty. Passing sentence, Haldane was vehement in his condemnation both of the prisoners and of the defence witnesses at the present trial, whose ‘obviously perjured’ evidence, he declared, represented ‘an organised attempt to defeat the ends of justice’.

⁸¹*Evening Times*, 21 Jan. 1935, 5; *Glasgow Herald*, 22 Jan. 1935, 10.

⁸²*Scottish Daily Express*, 22 Jan. 1935, 7; *Glasgow Herald*, 23 Jan. 1935, 4; 24 Jan. 1935, 6.

⁸³*Glasgow Herald*, 24 Jan. 1935, 6; *Scottish Daily Express*, 24 Jan. 1935, 7; *Evening Times*, 24 Jan. 1935, 6.

He jailed the prisoners – none of whom had previously been in prison – for six months.⁸⁴ They attempted to appeal against their convictions, protesting that Sheriff Haldane’s statements in court had been ‘prejudicial to a fair trial’, but leave to appeal was refused by the Scottish Court of Criminal Appeal.⁸⁵

The conviction of Burns, Madden and Kelly did not satisfy the Procurator-Fiscal. Further proceedings were initiated against eight of the witnesses – five women and three men – who had testified on their behalf. They in turn were charged with perjury. They appeared before Sheriff Robertson (no relation to the notorious constable of the same name) on 24 June 1935. The women included 26-year-old Mary Kelly, whose husband, John, had been jailed for perjury in January. None of the women had previously been in prison. The men included George Devlin, who had lodged the complaint against ‘Hitler’ in September 1933. The prisoners pleaded not guilty.⁸⁶ Sheriff Robertson was notably hostile towards the defence witnesses as well as towards the prisoners during their cross-examinations, interjecting when a civil engineer confirmed that the corner of Garngad Road was visible at night from the prisoners’ windows – ‘I take it you are not a Professor of Optics?’ – and joking in response to the testimony of prisoner Michael McLaughlin that: ‘If things go on are they are doing [the police] will have to [increase] the size of their vans!’ The prisoners were found guilty, albeit by a majority verdict. Sheriff Robertson jailed them all for six months, telling the court that while he was ‘distressed’ by the case of Mary Kelly – an expectant mother – a female perjurer was ‘just as dangerous’ as a male one.⁸⁷

Politicians, the press and a miscarriage of justice

Following the ‘Garngad Perjury Trial’ the prisoners and their supporters fiercely contested both the jury’s verdict and the sentences. Allegations of a miscarriage of justice were accompanied by humanitarian appeals for the reduction of the sentences imposed on the female prisoners, four of whom were mothers with young children. Campaigners repeatedly highlighted the children’s suffering along with the condition of Mary Kelly. Councillor Jean Mann, who led the campaign, made skilful use of the press to publicize the devastating effect of the sentences on the prisoners and their families. The local Unionist MP, Charles Emmott, was conspicuous by his silence, but the prisoners’ cause was taken up at Mann’s behest by John McGovern, outspoken Independent Labour Party (ILP) MP for

⁸⁴*Glasgow Herald*, 25 Jan. 1935, 6; NRS, HH21/70/67, nos 7960–62.

⁸⁵*Glasgow Herald*, 6 Feb. 1935, 11; 30 March 1935; 19.

⁸⁶*Glasgow Herald*, 25 June 1935, 19; 5 July 1935, 6; NRS, HH21/32/88, nos 711–15.

⁸⁷*Evening Times*, 26 June 1935, 7; *Glasgow Herald*, 27 June 1935, 9.

Shettleston in Glasgow's East End.⁸⁸ Positioning themselves far to the left of the Labour Party in parliament, ILP MPs were much more willing than their former Labour colleagues to publicly denounce class-bias in the administration of the law.⁸⁹ Mann, who had opted to stay within the Labour Party when the ILP disaffiliated in 1932, nonetheless worked with McGovern to raise the profile of the prisoners and their families. As convener of the Housing Committee of Glasgow Corporation, Mann was a prominent figure in the city's first Labour administration.⁹⁰ However, when she and McGovern claimed that the prisoners were victims of a miscarriage of justice they quickly found themselves marginalized politically: McGovern's allegations of police tyranny and judicial bias were denounced both in the House of Commons and by influential members of the controlling Labour group on Glasgow Corporation.

Mann met with Sir Godfrey Collins, Secretary of State for Scotland in the Conservative-dominated National Government, two days after the trial ended to press for Mary Kelly's release. She also began to prepare an appeal on behalf of the prisoners in collaboration with their solicitor.⁹¹ At the same time, she exploited the growing interest in the case in the Scottish popular press. Journalists had noted that that the female prisoners had relatively large families – one of them, Helen Dempsey, had eight children.⁹² Newspapers which routinely reported on street disturbances from the perspective of the police began to run feature articles on the jailed women and their families. In effect, the crime story of lawlessness in the Garngad was transformed into a 'human interest' story – written, increasingly, by female journalists.⁹³ Mann told the *Scottish Daily Express* that the women, whom she knew well, were 'suffering severe mental agony at being torn from their families'. Their children were 'ill and hysterical'. A 'special representative' of the *Express* visited two of the families in their homes the following day. Her report, under the headline 'Boy of 4 Cries for "Mummy" – Jailed', focused on Daniel, the youngest child of expectant mother Mary Kelly.⁹⁴

⁸⁸On McGovern, see T. Gallagher, *Glasgow. The uneasy peace. Religious tension in modern Scotland* (Manchester, 1987), 210–11.

⁸⁹On the ILP, see K. Middlemas, *Politics in Industrial Society. The experience of the British system since 1911* (London, 1979), 237.

⁹⁰For Mann's career as a councillor and her stance on the ILP's disaffiliation from the Labour Party, see Irene Maver, 'Mann [née Stewart], Jean [Janet] (1889–1964)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004): <http://www.oxforddnb.com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/view/article/50056> (accessed 12 July 2016). Her relationship with ILP members of the Corporation was anything but harmonious: see the *Scotsman*, 17 May 1935, 15.

⁹¹*Scottish Daily Express*, 1 July 1935, 3.

⁹²*Sunday Post*, 30 June 1935, 5. By the mid-1930s, most British families had two children: see S. Todd, *Young Women, Work and Family in England 1918–1950* (Oxford, 2005), 222.

⁹³On 'human interest' journalism, see J. Carter Wood, 'The constables and the "garage girl": the police, the press and the case of Helene Adele', *Media History*, 20, 4 (2014), 384–99, here 395. On the corresponding rise of women reporters during the 1920s and 1930s, see A. Bingham, *Gender, Modernity, and the Popular Press in Inter-war Britain* (Oxford, 2004), 38–40.

⁹⁴*Scottish Daily Express*, 1 July 1935, 3; 3 July 1935, 3; 24 Sept. 1935, 13; *Thomson's Weekly News*, 6 July 1935, 16.

The humanitarian approach fostered sympathy for the female prisoners, but overshadowed the political dimension of protests against their treatment. The prisoners' parish priest, Father Edward Lawton, also took up the women's cause. However, his intervention undermined Mann's attempt to build the case for an appeal against their convictions. Lawton told the *Sunday Post* that he had appealed to the Prince of Wales to lend support to the women but emphasized that he had made the request on 'humanitarian' rather than legal grounds. Lawton had 'no doubt' that the women were guilty; he was concerned about 'the hardship being endured by the children'. Invoking the spectre of witness intimidation – previously raised by Sheriff Haldane – Lawton suggested that the women had given their statements in 'a moment of excitement' and were afraid to retract them. He also warned of the trial's repercussions within the Garngad: the district's prevailing poverty was being exacerbated, Lawton asserted, by contributions to the distress fund set up for the children, while a meeting held by a 'revolutionary body' had been permitted by 'the loyal people of Garngad' for the first time.⁹⁵

The prisoners' case was raised in the House of Commons on 4 July by ILP MP John McGovern, who launched a blistering attack on integrity of both the police and the judiciary. McGovern demanded inquiries into the police forces of both Glasgow and Lanarkshire and announced his intention to put down a motion for the removal from office of Sheriff Robertson on account of his 'biased and prejudiced' statements during the trial of Mary Kelly and her co-accused. McGovern told the House that the people of the Garngad had been subjected to 'police terrorism', describing how officers had begun to patrol the district on Saturday evenings in a 'Black Maria' van 'before disturbances of any kind had taken place'.⁹⁶

According to McGovern, the sequence of events on 9 June 1934 was clear: 'This patrol van was moved into the area and then there was a breach of the peace.' Among those apprehended, McGovern pointed out, were 'a blind man of indifferent health' and 'a cripple with only one leg', who was charged with waving his crutch in a 'threatening' manner. Men and women had been arrested 'wholesale', he claimed, as punishment for disputing police accounts of these events. Other witnesses had been intimidated by the police:

A system of terrorism was set up as the result of which a large number of people who could give evidence said they were not prepared to go to the court because the police had made it known that everybody who dared to swear against the police would be arrested for perjury.⁹⁷

⁹⁵*Sunday Post*, 30 June 1935, 5. For Haldane's comments, see the *Glasgow Herald*, 12 July 1934, 11.

⁹⁶*Hansard*, HCD, vol. 303, cols 2035–9 (4 July 1935). McGovern alleged that two Lanarkshire officers had committed perjury in a separate, unrelated, case.

⁹⁷*Hansard*, HCD, vol. 303, cols 2036–7 (4 July 1935).

McGovern demanded an independent inquiry into ‘police terrorism’ in Glasgow.⁹⁸

Secretary of State for Scotland, Sir Godfrey Collins, strongly refuted McGovern’s claims. Collins assured the House that Scotland’s Chief Constables would ‘not allow any conditions to continue which are not in keeping with British justice’.⁹⁹ McGovern’s allegations were further refuted by Labour councillor John Stewart, Convenor of the Corporation’s Police Committee. Invoking the Soviet secret police, Stewart told the *Scottish Daily Express*: ‘It is ridiculous to allege the police are guilty of terrorist tactics. There is no Ogpu in this city.’ Echoing comments made the previous year by Sheriff Haldane, Stewart insisted that police work was ‘dangerous’ in ‘certain districts’ of Glasgow. However, he further insisted that the city’s chief constable had instilled the maxim ‘Be courteous’ as ‘the first lesson to be taught to policemen’.¹⁰⁰ This was propaganda, calculated to defuse the controversy ignited by McGovern.

The motion to remove Sheriff Robertson was put forward on 5 July by McGovern and his ILP colleagues – and fellow Glasgow MPs – James Maxton and George Buchanan. The MPs accused the sheriff of interrupting cross-examinations by counsel for the defence, implying the prisoners’ guilt through his statement that the ‘Black Maria police vans would need to be doubled in size’, and stating in his summing up that ‘the prosecution had proven their case without the shadow of a doubt’. As the MPs pointed out, this ‘was a question to be determined by the jury and not by the sheriff’.¹⁰¹ Putting the motion forward was a largely symbolic exercise – the MPs acknowledged that there was little prospect of a debate before the House of Commons adjourned for the summer recess – but it gave McGovern a platform to publicly criticize the conduct of the trial of Mary Kelly and her co-accused.

Features in the popular press over the weekend of 6–7 July again highlighted the plight of the female prisoners and their families along with Jean Mann’s continued campaign on their behalf. A reporter from *Thomson’s Weekly News* visited John Dempsey, who described how his eight children had been ‘scattered’ as a result of his wife’s imprisonment. Five of their children, including their seven-month-old daughter, were living with relatives while John cared for their three eldest at the family home in Bright Street. ‘My family is broken up’, he lamented. ‘The children are crying

⁹⁸*ibid.*

⁹⁹*ibid.*, col. 2054; *Glasgow Herald*, 5 July 1935, 6.

¹⁰⁰*Scottish Daily Express*, 6 July 1935, 3. As Carter Wood pointed out, criticisms of the British police during the interwar decades were frequently assessed in relation to the more brutal methods of foreign forces: ‘Press, politics and the “police and public” debates’, *op. cit.*, 75–6, 88; J. Carter Wood, ‘“The third degree”: press reporting, crime fiction and police powers in 1920s Britain’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 21, 4 (2010), 464–85, here 471–2.

¹⁰¹*Scotsman*, 6 July 1935, 16; *Scottish Daily Express*, 6 July 1935, 9.

their hearts out for their mammy and she is pining for them, and I am powerless to do anything.¹⁰²

More than 600 people turned out to hear MPs John McGovern and George Buchanan address a public meeting in the Garngad on Sunday 7 July. The meeting passed a resolution demanding the release of the prisoners jailed for perjury on 26 June along with an inquiry by Glasgow's magistrates into police brutality. A petition in support of the call for an inquiry gathered 9000 signatures in the weeks that followed.¹⁰³

Sir Godfrey Collins waited for seven weeks before notifying Jean Mann that Mary Kelly was to be released once she had completed half of her sentence. The sentences for the remaining prisoners were to stand.¹⁰⁴ Kelly's return to the family home on 23 September was reported sympathetically throughout the British press.¹⁰⁵ In an interview with the *People's Journal*, she insisted that the testimony she had given at Glasgow Sheriff Court was genuine. The *Journal* glossed over Mary's conviction, dwelling instead on her reunion with her husband and children as a happy ending to their ordeal. No mention was made of John Kelly's term of imprisonment for perjury.¹⁰⁶ Press interest in Mary Kelly's story was briefly reignited five weeks later when the child she had carried in prison was still-born. Once again, journalists converged on Bright Street. The family's doctor confirmed that Mary was 'very ill', while the *Sunday Mail* reported that her husband, John, was 'almost worn out by the ordeal of the past few months'.¹⁰⁷ The tragedy brought the human-interest story that had grown out of the 'Garngad Perjury Trial' to a close, and eclipsed the political dimension of the case, which – as dissident socialists had repeatedly emphasized – reflected a deeply troubled relationship between the state and its citizens.

Official truths and working-class voices

Violence between the police and residents of the Garngad was certainly reciprocal during the 1930s. However, the terms of this conflict were profoundly unequal. Confident in the backing of the Procurator-Fiscal and the judiciary as well as the Chief Constable, beat constables meted out summary punishment with little fear of sanction. They were themselves victims of violence at the hands of local fighting men, but the injuries sustained by 'Hitler' and his colleagues paled in comparison to the beatings inflicted by the police. If PC Robertson's removal from the

¹⁰²*Thomson's Weekly News*, 6 July 1935, 16.

¹⁰³*Scottish Daily Express*, 8 July 1935, 3; *Scotsman*, 27 Aug. 1935, 7.

¹⁰⁴*Glasgow Herald*, 27 Aug. 1935, 4; *Scotsman*, 27 Aug. 1935, 7.

¹⁰⁵*Daily Mail*, 24 Sept. 1935, 11; *Scottish Daily Express*, 24 Sept. 1935, 13.

¹⁰⁶*People's Journal*, 28 Sept. 1935, 14.

¹⁰⁷*Scottish Daily Express*, 2 Nov. 1935, 1; *Sunday Mail*, 3 Nov. 1935, 2; *Sunday Post*, 3 Nov. 1935, 7.

Garngad looked like a victory for local people in the summer of 1934, it had been earned at great cost – not just in beatings administered in the streets, tenement closes and police cells, but also in the lengthy terms of imprisonment imposed at the city’s Sheriff Court and the huge disruption to the lives of the families affected.

The legacies of PC Robertson’s stint in the Garngad were unevenly felt too. Robertson’s own official record was unblemished: no misconduct was registered in his personnel file. Upon retirement in 1965, his character was recorded as ‘exemplary’.¹⁰⁸ His namesake, Sheriff Robertson, similarly faced no disciplinary proceedings despite the fierce criticism of his handling of the ‘Garngad Perjury Trial’ made in the House of Commons. By contrast, 20 local residents – 18 of them Catholics – served prison sentences arising out of the ‘riot’ in Garngad Road on 9 June 1934. Most had no previous convictions.¹⁰⁹ The damage to the reputation of the Garngad was such that the district was renamed ‘Royston’ in 1942.¹¹⁰ According to local residents, the change was made because young people with Garngad addresses were struggling to obtain work.¹¹¹

PC Robertson was exceptional, both in the extent of his incivility and in the ferocity of his violence. While he had his supporters in the district, his conduct met with a furious response from law-abiding residents of the Garngad as well as local gang members. So far as his senior officers were concerned, however, ‘Hitler’ was no ‘rotten apple’ – even if they felt it prudent to remove him from the Garngad beat within 12 months of his appointment.¹¹² Significantly, at the height of local protests against his conduct ‘Hitler’ was commended by Glasgow’s Chief Constable, while his colleagues in the Northern Division backed him up with equal vigour on the streets and in the courtroom. In effect, ‘Hitler’s’ aggression ratcheted up the mutual antipathy between the police and residents of the Garngad, with calamitous consequences for local people.¹¹³ In Glasgow police lore, ‘Hitler’s’ exploits were still celebrated decades after his retirement. His fighting prowess was reputedly such that some of his adversaries ‘walked backwards with a limp when they came out of hospital’, while his anti-Catholic bigotry had become the stuff of canteen humour. Police reminiscences, relayed decades later, lend substance to allegations that were strenuously denied at the height of local protests during the 1930s.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸GCA, SR22/57/22/G218.

¹⁰⁹NRS, HH21/32/88, 711–15; HH21/70/67, 3687–95, 7960–62.

¹¹⁰See http://www.roystonroadproject.org/archive/history/garngad_royston.htm (accessed 18 August 2017).

¹¹¹*Evening Times*, 4 July 1981, 5.

¹¹²On police forces’ habitual resort to the ‘exculpatory doctrine of the rotten apple’, see Gatrell, *op. cit.*, 274–5.

¹¹³Criminologist Tony Jefferson’s observation that police officers possess ‘a conception of supportive teamwork and an occupational culture which requires that the most aggressive and bull-headed individuals be supported in the field and in the aftermath’ seems pertinent here: T. Jefferson, ‘Beyond paramilitarism’, *British Journal of Criminology*, 27, 1 (Winter 1987), 47–53, here 52.

¹¹⁴J. Pieri, *Tales of the Savoy. Stories from a Glasgow café* (Glasgow, 1999), 81–3.

In the early years of mass democracy in Britain, the citizens of the Garngad were not listened to when they complained of ‘Hitler’s’ prejudice and brutality. Their allegations were dismissed not just by senior police officers but – with equal vehemence – by the Procurator-Fiscal and the judiciary. In effect, Glasgow’s legal establishment closed ranks against the denizens of the city’s worst ‘slum’. The Catholic allegiance and Irish antecedents of the majority of local residents undoubtedly counted against them. Glasgow’s Irish-Catholics were by no means the only targets of police violence during the 1930s, but they were widely stigmatized as violent and disorderly – not least by the police – and the surnames of the Garngad ‘rioters’ were evidence enough of their guilt for some readers of the local press.¹¹⁵ The two politicians who took up the complaints against the police were marginalized: Jean Mann by her colleagues in the Labour group on Glasgow Corporation, John McGovern by all but his two ILP colleagues in the House of Commons.

The local and national press provided the police with further powerful backing. Crime reports were frequently based largely on information provided by the police – either directly to journalists or in officers’ courtroom testimonies. A clear hierarchy of credibility applied in trials, whereby police evidence effectively formed official truths – treated, overwhelmingly, as factual accounts by magistrates, sheriffs and journalists alike (although jurors occasionally questioned them). Emboldened by support from the judiciary, politicians and the press, the police aggressively pursued those Garngad residents who challenged their authority, clamping down not just on ‘rioters’ but on those civilian witnesses who contested police evidence in court. Sympathetic coverage of the families of the women jailed for perjury in June 1935 in the Scottish national press gave a fleeting voice to working-class residents of the Garngad. However, the ‘democratizing impulse’ that historians have located ‘seemingly everywhere’ in culture and society in interwar Britain was barely evident here.¹¹⁶ Human-interest features downplayed allegations of police brutality and judicial bias. Working-class people were only allowed a voice in these stories when they spoke as victims of misfortune. They were not permitted to speak as victims of miscarriages of justice.

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¹¹⁵*Evening Times*, 9 Aug. 1934, 4. See also the *Evening Citizen*, 9 April 1935, 6; 31 Aug. 1936, 1. For an account of a violent police ambush on a Protestant marching band and its followers in 1936, see A. Davies, ‘Sectarian violence and police violence in Glasgow during the 1930s’ in R. Bessel and C. Emsley (eds), *Patterns of Provocation. Police and public disorder* (Oxford, 2000), 49–56.

¹¹⁶McCarthy, *op. cit.*, 234.

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