
STRIKE BULLETIN NO, 4

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE? The Executive's decision to reduce the scope of the Council of Ireland can be summed up as, too little, too late. If it had reached this decision two weeks ago, and if it had averted the vote on Sunningdale on June 14th, in the manner proposed by David Bleakley, it would not now be an a state of panic-stricken confusion.

For all its cleverness, the SDLP leadership has made great trouble for itself. It is known that John Hume fancied that the SDLP could govern Ulster on its own, using the Faulkner Unionists as a front. But SDLP behaviour over recent weeks did not help it to achieve that ambition. If it wanted to be the power behind the scenes it should have taken good care of the scenery. It was never on for it have both great political influence in Northern Ireland and a strong Council of Ireland. It has overreached itself. It failed to get its priorities in order.

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A REVEALING LIGHT ON THE SDLP The great struggle within the Executive to water down the Council of Ireland throws a revealing light on the aspirations of the SDLP. If it had not been looking on the Council as a stepping stone towards a united Ireland in the not too distant future, it is hard to see why it should have made such a fuss, and threatened the existence of the Executive, over the proposal to water down the Council.

We always took the Council of Ministers to be the substance of the Council. The second tier - the Parliamentary assembly - seemed to be a very insubstantial thing, since it could take no decisions. So why did the SDLP make such a fuss about dropping it?

It is known that the Dublin Cabinet had been reckoning on a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland at the first opportunity. And in the context of that reckoning, the importance of an elaborate Parliamentary structure for the Council is greatly increased. What is unimportant and rather pointless in the context of Union with Britain continuing ad infinitum (that is,

while a majority demands it) , becomes much more important and pointed on the assumption that the British Government is only waiting for an opportunity to shed Northern Ireland. It would seem that the old Anti-Partitionist Adam of devious sheming in power politics was not quite dead in the SDLP leadership.

But by agreeing to the Council of Ministers minus the Parliamentary foliage, and making further developments of the Council dependent on elections, the SDLP must have de-escalated its ambitions considerably. But : too little, too late, and in the wrong circumstances.

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AN AMERICAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM? What sense is to be made of Brian Faulkner's statement on radio last night, that it is impossible under the Constitution Act to hold elections before 1978? He said that the Act lays down that Assemblies will last for a fixed period of four years, as is the case in the American electoral system. But last January, when the Executive took office, he said that, in view of the great Constitutional developments since last summer's elections, it would be in order for new elections to be held after about six months in order to sanction ^{the} new system. Hadn't he read the Constitution Act then?

A politician who invents principles as expedients, and who refuses to deal with the reality that is all around him, is in desperate straits.

If the American system is in operation here, we should have been told about it before now: it should not have been saved up as a final trump to play in a moment of crisis.

The Americans are having great trouble with their system at the moment. It is an inflexible system, and is quite alien to the spirit of the British Constitution. The genius who told Faulkner that line had better think again.

The British constitution is based on no set of rigid formalities. Its great virtue is that it takes account of substantial social powers regardless of formalities. If the only way Faulkner can deal with the major social power that has shown itself in this strike is to devise rigid Constitutional rules in an effort to safeguard himself against the public for four years, he is reaching the end of his tether.

It is certain that the Executive will not be able to last for four

years without Assembly Elections. The relevant question is whether it is going to be able to last with elections. Faulkner still denies that the Executive has lost its majority in the country. But if he really thought it had not lost its majority he would not be panic stricken at the thought of an election. And if he has really despaired of being able to win a majority in an election by the end of this year he should adopt a policy of full integration with Britain.

FAULKNER AND THE SDLP

Faulkner's political bungling in recent months has, presumably, resulted from the intransigence of the SDLP on the Council of Ireland. He went much too far to accommodate them, and alienated the major social power in this community: the Protestant working class. The SDLP have pushed him out on a limb. They must now be regretting their blind intransigence. If Faulkner cannot regain his following they are all in trouble.

Despite their short-sighted intransigence over the Council, the SDLP are undoubtedly committed to power sharing within the United Kingdom. There is no doubting the conviction with which John Hume now speaks of "our economy". But Hume, when talking about the UWC, is beginning to sound like a bad parody of William Craig on the CRA in 1968. They have "*no mandate from anybody*" he says, and declares that he will not tolerate "*anarchy in our streets*". But the UWC has as clear a mandate to speak for the Protestant working class today as Hume had to speak for the Catholic community in 1968. As for "*anarchy in our streets*". . .

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DISCOVERING EVEREST Wonder of wonders! The Ulster Workers' Council is being discovered by the power powers-that-be (or used-to-be?). Rees and Orme are still too panic stricken to talk to them, and declare them to be untouchables, yet we are beginning to hear them on radio and TV, and a distinct note of respect for them, as a power in the land, is noticeable. And they are discovered to be fully paid up, active trade unionists, who know both the function and limits of trade unionism; and who know that Len Murray was abusing his function as TUC leader by interfering in a political situation of which he had no understanding.

If Rees could screw up enough courage and intelligence to deal with the UWC in the way that any government worth its salt would

would deal with a major social power. the crisis would be well on the way to being resolved. (Observe, Merlyn, that Harry Thomson talked to Harry Murray last night and has lived to tell the tale. So might you, if you don't die of your imaginary terrors.) If he, or the Executive, do not recognise them and deal with them the crisis cannot be resolved no matter what gimmicks are tried.

"certain workers influenced by certain politicians have taken certain actions", is all that Hume will say today. If he is to survive politically he will have to learn to do better than that. Here is how he might survive: Put the entire Council of Ireland to a popular vote, and in the meantime deal with Dublin merely as a neighbouring Government; Recognise the UWC as a fact of political life which he cannot escape from; Negotiate the best conclusion of the strike he can with them. No other defence of power-sharing is possible. They are the people he has to share power with if power is to continue to be shared.

Workers' Association

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