
STRIKE BULLETIN no 7

WILSON BACKS DOWN: INSULTS BUT NO ACTION Harold Wilson
insulted the
strikers in his broadcast last night. Apart from that he did
nothing. And doing nothing is a great improvement on what the
Government has done so far. Up to now they have been offering one
provocation after another, and trying to bring about confrontations.
Last night, for the first time, the Government restrained itself.
Having been out-maneuvred by the Ulster Workers' Council for
eleven days, it has finally learned to be a bit more cautious.

The SDLP call for the "*fascists*" of the UWC to be put down with a
strong hand has not been met. The SDLP has now suffered a major

political defeat from the UWC.

VULGAR ABUSE Wilson described the strikers as "people who spend their lives sponging on Westminster and British democracy". What did he hope to achieve by such a vulgar and ridiculous insult? When some emotional fringe elements in Unionist politics made such remarks about the Catholic community there were demands that they should be prosecuted under the Race Relations Act. When Wilson descends to the same level by describing the industrial working class of Ulster as spongers, will those who demanded the prosecution of John McKeague remain silent?

THE UWC DOES NOT WANT A SECTARIAN STATE Wilson accused the UWC of using "*undemocratic and unparliamentary means in order to set up a sectarian and undemocratic state from which one-third of the population will be excluded*". Has he taken the slightest trouble to find out what the UWC is and what it wants? It is perfectly willing to tell him. But he doesn't want to listen.

It is not the aim of the UWC to set up a sectarian state or to exclude Catholics from representation in the Government. The purpose of the strike is to end the Council of Ireland, not to kill power-sharing. Can Wilson cite a single statement of the UWC against Catholic representation in the Government? The UWC categorically deny that they have such an aim, and the UWC now have much greater political credibility than Wilson or Rees.

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TO THE CATHOLICS OF NORTHERN IRELAND You have long feared the "*Protestant backlash*" against Republican terrorism. The Provos have sought to provoke that backlash in order to make you dependent on them as your defenders. Well, the "Protestant backlash" has come.

But did you ever imagine that it would be like this? Where is the burning and the looting: where are the pogroms and assassinations? The "Protestant backlash" has now been in full swing for eleven days. The entire social life of Northern Ireland is in its grip. But you are safer in your houses and on the streets than you were before it began.

Brian Faulkner, following Wilson's speech, said: "*Last night as a*

direct result of this situation four people were killed". Faulkner is a liar. The people killed on Friday night were not killed at the behest of the UWC. People have been killed regularly on the Streets, in pubs and in their homes for five years. That killing has not increased since the UWC asserted its power: it has decreased in a remarkable manner. The killings on Friday night were a remnant of the old ways, not a product of the new.

When Faulkner governed Ulster he could not restrain the para-military factions in the Protestant community, which had been provoked into being by the IRA. Neither could William Whitelaw or the new Executive. The UWC has done more to restrain them in the last eleven days than was done in the previous five years.

The press cries out about Tartan gangs. But the Tartan gangs and the para-military factions have to a great extent been shown the error (or at least the ineffectiveness) of their ways by the UWC. Much of their earlier behaviour resulted from feelings of frustration, and from the lack of coherence and social purpose in the politics of the Protestant community. The UWC have put an end to all of that. They have brought about a purposeful exertion of economic power by the community, and therefore have been able to exert a progressive influence on Tartans and para-military factions in a way that Faulkner could never do.

But instead of thanking them for it, Faulkner slanders them by blaming them for killings which are, in fact, an inheritance from his period of government which the UWC have not yet been able to overcome completely.

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NO SECTARIANISM INVOLVED Wilson whines that this is not a strike about wages. It was never pretended that it was. It is a political strike of a highly original and effective kind.

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Its purpose is NOT to establish the UWC as a Provisional Government from which Catholics are excluded. The UWC has in fact assumed many of the functions of government because Rees and the Executive abdicated them in an effort to precipitate chaos and thus break the UWC. But it has not proclaimed itself to be the Government of the province, and has no intention of doing so.

Wilson said: *"They seek to allocate food: to decide who shall eat and who shall not"*. If the British press is worth its salt it will expose this lie to the British public. There has NOT been sectarian distribution of food. Of course a general strike

involves hardships. But there certainly has not been a sectarian distribution of hardship.

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AN OPPORTUNITY The emergence of the UWC in the Protestant community presents an unprecedented opportunity for a settlement of the national, or sectarian, conflict. An agreement arrived at with the UWC would be an agreement with the mass of the Protestant working class. It could be depended upon. And the UWC is the most open minded, as well as the most powerful, political organisation in the Protestant community.

When Gerry Fitt denounces the Council as "*a bunch of fascists*" he declares himself to be politically bankrupt. The SDLP have shown themselves over the last two weeks to have been thoroughly deceptive over the question of a united Ireland. It WAS their purpose to use the Council as a stepping stone to a united Ireland.

We know from experience - and it was borne out by the BBC opinion poll - that a majority of Catholics are not at all anxious to come under the Dublin Government, and would be perfectly satisfied with participation in a democratic Northern Ireland government within the UK.

The hysterical Government propaganda about UWC fascism has been shown to have no basis in fact. The Government is infinitely closer to fascism than the UWC. A sober assessment of the past few days by the Catholic community would show it that there is a far greater prospect of arriving at a democratic settlement by negotiating with the UWC than by relying on the flimsy Executive which has been howling for the blood of the UWC.

The UWC are determined to avert the doomsday situation that they have slanderously been accused of desiring: and they have the ability to avert it despite provocation. Such an organisation, in a situation like this, deserves a lot of serious thought.

Workers' Association.

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