
STRIKE BULLETIN NO. 6

FACE-SAVING The time for the saving of faces is upon us; the
faces of Rees, Orme, Faulkner, and, above all,
the SDLP. The SDLP may not fully realise that its face needs
saving, in which case the operation is doubly difficult.

Yesterday these people saw themselves as heroic defenders of
liberty in the fight against fascism. Today they discover that
they are political bunglers whose faces have to be saved. The

bully boys and thugs against whom the great crusade was being waged yesterday are now discovered to be the substance of the society.

At the end of the day the only faces which do not need to be saved are the faces of the Ulster Workers Council, the strikers and their supporters. The great political problem now is how to accommodate the UWC as a major social power without destroying the bunglers and fanatics who were denouncing them as a bunch of fascists. Harold Wilson, whose irresponsible selection of personnel for the Northern Ireland Office is the original cause of all the trouble, is now faced with the problem of finding a line of retreat for himself and all concerned.

But there can be no simple retreat to an earlier position. The bungling of the Northern Ireland Office and the Executive provided the opportunity for a substantial new social development in the Protestant community which must be accommodated, and it has almost wrecked the SDLP.

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A SENSITIVE PLANT The SDLP is a carefully nurtured plant.
 Three years of the greatest intelligence and tact of which British politics is capable went into cultivating it and making it ready for power-sharing. Justice Devlin described the task very precisely at the second of the great "Television Trials" in 1972. It was to find a way in which the SDLP might abandon its anti-Partitionist principles without appearing to do so. William Whitelaw's great diplomatic skills and the best years of his life went into the accomplishment of this task.

But then Whitelaw was taken to apply his skills elsewhere (and less successfully), and the SDLP had to fend for itself. And not only that, but some of Gerry Fitt's old pals suddenly and unexpectedly appeared in the Northern Ireland Office. From that time forward the N. Ireland Office and the SDLP had an inflammatory effect on each other, and a chain of development was set off which led to the fiasco we have just witnessed.

The great problem now is how the SDLP is to be saved from becoming a political wreck. It is hardly capable of saving itself. But who will save it? not Rees and Orme. Not the Dublin Government, which is still trying to stir things up, and demanding that Britain put down these striking Protestants with a firm hand. (Who would ever have expected to see that suave, upper class, literary, socialist, Conor Cruise O'Brien, develop so quickly into a war-monger?)

The possibility that the SDLP will become a political wreck if concessions are made to the Ulster Workers' Council, and the fact that there is no sign on the horizon of a replacement for the SDLP, must now be a major factor tempting Wilson to try to preserve the existing political arrangement at all costs. But the UWC must be conceded to. So how can the SDLP be saved for constitutional politics?

Having overreached itself, the SDLP, in desperation, is indulging itself in an orgy of authoritarian fantasies. All its hopes are now focussed on the strong arm of the law. (It has even gone to the length of suggesting that the strikers might be arrested.) But the strong arm of the law won't save it.

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A PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT? Is the UWC a Provisional government? It has obviously been obliged to take over many of the functions of government. Since the Executive and the Secretary of State refused to co-operate with it in the provision of essential services at the onset of the strike, it had no alternative but to do so. There is no doubt that Rees tried during the first week of the strike to force a state of collapse. That was his only strategy for breaking the UWC. And the UWC responded by preventing collapse- which meant enforcing measures necessary to that end.

At this moment the UWC has civil executive authority in the Protestant community and in the economy. The Secretary of State has a very large army and nothing more. His "*Executive*" is badly misnamed. It shouts and jumps up and down, but nobody takes much notice. But when the UWC says that something is going to be done, then it is done. And the authority of the UWC is maintained chiefly by the moral force it has acquired.

Rees has been comprehensively outmanoeuvred by the UWC, which has shown itself capable of guiding the community in such a way as to defeat every one of his provocations. If he continues to escalate his provocations there is every reason to assume that the UWC will continue to counter them, and thereby increase its ability and its authority. And that, of course, is why Rees now gives vent to ineffectual rages.

Much surprise is being expressed that such a powerful, representative capable, self reliant and reasonable body as the UWC, [and many who were hostile to it a week ago, are now finding it hard to deny it these characteristics), should have come into existence unknown to the world. The UWC is obviously concerned primarily to be known to, and be effective within, the community

in which it developed. For the "world" (or the International press) it cares little. The Protestant working class has seen itself cleverly and sensationally misrepresented and insulted in the international press for seven years, and has learned to do without the approval of that press. Much of the power of the IRA depended on its success in manipulating the press. The very different kind of power exercised by the UWC depends not at all on the press. And the only surprising thing is that it has taken so long to evolve.

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' CONNOLLY SOCIALISM ' We have witnessed the end of "*Connolly socialism*"^f. James Connolly, a sound socialist in other ways, got caught up in the Nationalist movement. In 1912 he denounced the Ulster Protestants for organizing themselves to prevent the imposition on them of the Catholic nationalist Home Rule government. He ended up ridiculing the culture of Protestant Ulster, and demanding that the British Army put down the Unionists. Gerry Fitt has always declared himself to be a "*Connolly Socialist*", and when he entered the government he tried to act in the manner advocated by Connolly in 1914. "Connolly socialism" has now burned itself out. It broke before the organised power of the Protestant working class. This piece of action will have far-reaching consequences for working class development in Northern Ireland. It will remit in a greater clearing up of confusion than any amount of propaganda could have done.

WORKERS' ASSOCIATION

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