
STRIKE BULLETIN NO. 10

THE COLLAPSE OF COLONIALISM At the moment of writing all that has happened officially is that the Executive has resigned. But the tide of influential public opinion has turned decisively against Rees and Orme. Just over a week ago the London "Times" was in full support of Rees' policy of confrontation, Today (Wednesday) it declares that the Government bungled the whole affair, and calls on Rees to concede to the UWC demand for early elections. It argues that since *"the attempt to break the strike has instead broken the Executive, no purpose is served by refusing to deal with the strike leaders or refusing their demand for elections."*

If Rees persists in refusing to deal with the UWC or to call elections he can only be classified as a political maniac. And since his political career in Northern Ireland must be virtually finished anyway, persistence in his pig-ignorant attitude can only hasten his departure. A member of the Ulster Workers' Council told Orme, at the only meeting held between the two parties, that he needed to be psychoanalysed. The Workers' Association had a meeting with Orme while he was in opposition, and we have no reason to disagree with that view. The man is impenetrable to reason.

The attempt by Rees and Orme to treat Ulster as a colony has collapsed in disgrace: and so we bid adieu to these "socialist" who aspired to be colonial administrators.

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THE PROSPECT FOR THE FUTURE

But what of the future? Various people in Britain, (like the Labour MP Paul Rose, for example), are trying to generate an

atmosphere of gloom, and to whip up feeling in support of a British separation from Ulster. But these despicable trouble-makers will be frustrated once again. They predict that the Loyalists will now try to "return" to a "Protestant ascendancy" arrangement. In fact there is scarcely a sign of Protestant triumphalism to be seen. The general state of mind brought about in the Protestant community by the strike offers greater opportunity for the working out of a democratic political settlement than has ever existed before.

The SDLP will now have to make up its mind once and for all whether it is an anti-Partitionist party, or a party which will represent the interests of the Catholic community within the Union. The arrangement of the past six months, whereby it has been an anti-Partitionist party participating in government within the Union for anti-Partitionist objectives, has been shown to be unworkable.

What is now required is a definite division between anti-Partitionist politics and power-sharing politics in the Catholic community. And there is no doubt that in such a division the anti-Partitionist tendency would be in a minority. It was the political ambition of the SDLP leaders, not pressure from the Catholic community, that was responsible for extremist SDLP behaviour in the recent period. The SDLP might have led the Catholic community into a democratic power-sharing arrangement. It chose to do otherwise, and put anti-Partitionist maneuverings to the fore.

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UNREASONABLE ?

The "unreasonable fears" of the Protestant community about the Council of Ireland have been shown in the past two weeks not to have been so unreasonable after all. Even "The Times" now says: "*So inept has been the Government's handling of the crisis in the last few days...that doubts have been sown about the deeper intentions of the Government. If the conduct of affairs has been so unhelpful to the realisation of its declared intentions, has it undeclared intentions?*"

And even though "The 'Times" concludes that it has not, it is acknowledged that the suspicion of devious intentions was a reasonable suspicion,

There must be no confusion surrounding essential matters the next time round.

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A BIT OF
HI STORY

Much is now being said about "No going back to the old Stormont". . . But a word about "the old Stormont" is needed. The idea seems to be generally accepted in the British press that the old stormont was "Protestant ascendancy" by Unionist design, and that the Catholic community was denied participation in government as a matter of policy. In fact what happened was that when Stormont was set up, the Northern Catholic community was in the grip of the Sinn Fein politics that had just then come to dominance in the South, and it refused to participate in Stormont politics. For many years the Nationalist Party boycotted Stormont completely. (And when it gained majorities in local government areas it refused to operate local government.) It did eventually agree to attend the Stormont Parliament, but on a completely obstructionist policy. It was not until 1966 that it would agree to accept the status of official opposition, and it did so reluctantly under pressure from Lemass, (the then Dublin Prime Minister).

Craigavon, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland in the twenties and thirties, was anxious to change the basis of politics from the issue of Partition, on which Catholics would be a permanent minority, so more general social issues, on which political parties would cut across religious grounds. But While the Catholic community remained in the grip of anti-Partitionist politics that could not happen, and so the "Protestant ascendancy" resulted.

The Civil Rights Association of the late sixties Was for all practical political purposes a mere anti-Partitionist tactic It included some genuine civil rlighters who wanted to shift the ground of politics away from the question of Partition, but they quickly lost all influence in it, and it simply became a clever new way of playing the anti-Partitionist game. The Provo campaign was a logical development out of it. (Lest the gentlemen of the press wish away this account of things as "Orange propaganda", we should say that the Workers' Association includes people who were active for a time in the Civil Rights movement - and on the Executive of the CRA and who left it because of its policy of provoking sectarian clashes for anti-Partitionist purposes.)

If the British Press want to contribute to the establishment of a democratic political settlement, (which up to the present their activity has tended to impede), they should start by getting their historical facts straight, and stop chattering about "Protestant ascendancy".

A substantial proportion of the Catholic community is now thoroughly fed up with the dead-end of anti-Partitionist politics.

The working of a democratic settlement only requires adequate political representation for this large and increasing part of the society. (Of course, in the long run the democratic aim must be for forms of politics which cut across the community division, but that can only happen on any large scale after there has been a democratic settlement between the communities.)

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How can the Dublin Government contribute to a democratic settlement? It can occupy itself with the implementation of progressive reform in the South (such as imposing £100 fines on unmarried for the purchase of contraceptives?, and stop interfering. Or, if it has the nerve, it can call a referendum for the abolition of Articles 2 and 3 of the Southern Constitution which claim sovereignty over the North. Until those articles are abolished, the only useful thing that the Cosgrave government can do is shut up.

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The action of the Ulster Workers' Council has cut through a lot of nonsense, and has pulled the mass of the Protestant community out of the swamp of frustration, and given it a sense of confidence in itself. What the leadership of Carson and Craig did in 1912, the Ulster Workers' Council has done today.

29.5.1974

(This is, of course, the concluding issue of our Strike Bulletin. during the coming months, which are critical to the future of Northern Ireland, we will be issuing a weekly publication called WORKERS WEEKLY.)
