
STRIKE BULLETIN NO. 3

THE GOVERNMENT IS THREATENING POWER-SHARING The

The contortions of the Government and the servile press get Weirder every day. It is as if they were determined to drive the great majority of the Protestant community into the arms of the

die-hard opponents of power-sharing. when the strike began last week they embarked on a propagandist campaign of confusing the issue. They declared power-sharing to be the issue. In fact anybody with an ounce of wit should have been able to see that it was the Council of Ireland issue that was bringing widespread support to the Loyalist alliance. But the result of the Government's antics is to increase Protestant opposition to power-sharing.

A clear decision to reject the Council of Ireland until such time as the Southern Government called a referendum and deleted Articles 2 & 3, or until such time as a Council was sanctioned by a referendum in the North, would have cleared the air, and would have given the power-sharing Executive the opportunity to prove itself. Such a course of action would have minimised the popular support of the parties opposed to the Executive. But the course of action which was adopted has given the anti-Executive parties an undeniable majority in the country: and the behaviour of the Government during the past week tends to develop that majority from a simple opposition to the Council of Ireland into an opposition to power sharing.

People say: *"if all of this is necessary to defend Power-sharing, we'll have none of it"*. And this situation has been brought about by political bunglers who imagine that they are defending power-sharing, and who see themselves as God's gift to the human race!!

If the wise men of the press and the BBC want to find the "extremists" responsible for escalating the threat to power-sharing, they are to be found in Stormont and Downing St.

Orme, Rees and Wilson have announced that they will smash the Protestant workers into the ground rather than negotiate, or even negotiate about negotiations, with them. When Orme, a long-time fellow-traveller of the Republicans, declares this, it is understandable. (The Republicans have longed for the day when the British Army will smash the Protestant workers.) That he should ever have been made the Minister of State at Stormont was an act of gross irresponsibility. But have Rees and Wilson taken leave of their senses? If they persist in the course that they threatened yesterday, power-sharing is finished.

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WILLIAM BLEASE'S MAJORITY William Blease* is finding it hard to come to terms with the fact that he is not the political leader of his trade Unionists. It

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was he and his colleagues who forced the issue to a confrontation. He is now trying to explain away the fiasco. He still claims that the majority of workers support his policy, and that the Ulster Workers' Council represents only a handful. The reason only 200 of the 20,000 workers in the East Belfast industrial complex turned out is that the other 19,000 were intimidated. Even the BBC is finding that hard to swallow.

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WHY THE GOVERNMENT DOESN'T USE ITS "MAJORITY SUPPORT"

The BBC'S opinion poll of a few weeks' back has been cited in recent days to prove that the UWC does not have widespread popular support. That poll shows a great majority for moderate opinions, and it is argued that since the UWC is "extremist" it cannot be representative of majority opinion, and the effectiveness of the strike must be due to intimidation.

But if the Government policy has majority support, why is the prospect of an Assembly Election viewed with such panic? Doesn't everyone know that an election now would almost certainly return a minority of Executive members, virtually wipe out the Faulkner Unionists and generally increase Loyalist representation? Is it not precisely because the Government knows very well that its bungling has turned a majority of the electorate against it that it is panic-stricken?

If the UWC represented only a minority of bully-boys it would be very easily dealt with. But the UWC began this strike with a solid core of popular support, and the arrogant and hysterical behaviour of the Government has caused that support to increase. And no amount of tricky propaganda will now erode the influence of the UWC. No people with any spirit will put up with being blatantly insulted and trampled on. (Isn't it surprising that such a thing should have to be explained to people who call themselves socialists?)

The BBC poll showed that ample basis existed for consolidating and developing the power-sharing arrangement provided a modicum of political ability and diplomacy were brought to bear on the matter. It required no ordinary ineptitude to make such a thorough mess of things as Rees and Orme have done. (Whitelaw, having down his bit in Ulster, seems to have dismissed it from his thoughts. But it is certain that if he were still in Stormont things would not now be in the mess that they are. It is not pleasant for a workers' organisation to have to regret the absence

of a Tory and the presence of a 'socialist': but a fact is a fact.)

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A CREDIBILITY GAP

Last night's Westminster statement said that the Government will restore normal life in Ulster. What with? It says that is preserving essential services? It has been pretty well proven that essential services are maintained by the UWC rather than the Government. In fact the Government can think of nothing to do except threaten to use the Army in some way or other. It has lost all contact with the people.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION NOW?

The more that the Government persists in its attitude of colonial domineering, the more difficult a solution becomes. By its recent actions the government has turned the Assembly into a rump Parliament. And the longer the present policy is continued, the less chance there is that the Assembly will again be regarded as a representative institution until there are elections. But how are the parties which now declare the UWC to be an unrepresentative minority to survive the elections?

It is certain that they will not be able to maintain themselves in political power by use of the Army. They can only survive by going on the offensive politically: by negotiating with the UWC; by making a clear statement that there will be no Council while Dublin funks a referendum on its Constitution or while a majority in the North opposes it; and by announcing a date for new elections towards the end of the year, thus giving themselves a few months in which to gain credibility with the Council issue out of the way.

If they haven't the guts for that course of action, the only coherent alternative is to declare in favour of full integration with Britain.

Workers' Association

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