
STRIKE BULLETIN NO. 2

TO THE REPORTERS OF BRITISH PRESS AND BROADCASTING.

Your reporting of the strike so far has been a mere propagandist exercise, bearing as little resemblance to the facts of the case as "news reports" of the Republican News tend to do. Perhaps you thought this would help to end the strike. It has clearly not done so. In fact it has been a serious factor in aggravating the situation. It is time that you put an end to propagandist

misrepresentation. The fiasco of the "trade union return to work" should have jolted you out of your propagandist ruts.

Many of you, in the name of impartial reporting, have spent much time talking to Provisionals, and reporting their version of events. Robert Fisk of The Times, to cite one example, justified this approach on Northern Ireland radio recently. He justified impartial reporting of the "enemy" case because he regarded the Northern Ireland conflict as a civil disturbance within the state rather than as a conflict between the state and its enemies. But when it comes to the Ulster Workers' Council and an industrial strike, as against the Provos and a bombing campaign, Mr. Fisk's journalistic impartiality evaporates, and he reports the strike as if he were a paid propagandist of Merlyn Rees's Ministry.

Your reporting has acted as a provocation. You have attempted to bring the Ulster Workers' Council into disrepute and to represent the strikers as a rampaging mob. You are feeding British public opinion with false reporting which backs up the political bungling of Rees and Orme. You are bringing yourselves into contempt. In view of the provocative misrepresentation of their intentions and actions by the press, broadcasting and the Government the strikers have been behaving with remarkable moderation and good sense. Sooner or later you will have to reckon with the Ulster Workers' Council, and the viewpoint that it represents, as a social force that cannot be conjured away either by false propagandist news reporting or by the manipulation of power politics. And the sooner Muhammed starts moving towards the Mountain, the better for all concerned.

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THE 'TRADE UNION RETURN TO WORK' The fact that Messrs, Rees and Orme risked so much of their credibility on the success of the "trade union return to work" shows they are politically inept rather than malicious. If they had done less of the "colonial, administrator" act, and had done a bit more to find out something about the relation of the official trade union leadership to the political views of the trade union rank and file, they would not have expected the "return to work" to be anything less than a fiasco.

Len Murray appealed to the workers to heed the call of their tried and trusted leaders to return to work. Mr. Murray must now realise that the official trade union leadership are not the tried and trusted leaders of the workers in anything but the narrowest trade union affairs. In Britain there is at least a general identity of broad political sympathy between the TUC and

the mass of trade unionists. That is not so in Northern Ireland. Andrew Barr, Chairman of the Shipbuilding Confederation, and Jimmy Graham of the AEU, led the back-to-work campaign. They are anti-Partitionists. The mass of their members are Unionists. Barr and Graham are heeded by their rank and file in trade union affairs proper. But when they led the back-to-work campaign they were not acting as trade union leaders but as politicians. In political matters they are at loggerheads with their members, so the campaign failed. We hope that Mr. Murray will take the trouble to find out why he walked to the shipyards, along with the "*tried and trusted leaders*", and a mere 150 men. If he does he will find that what we have said is true.

There is a tacit understanding in the trade union movement that political and economic matters will be kept separate. In circumstances of sharp political division this is a necessary condition for keeping the trade union movement united in economic matters. Barr, Graham, etc. broke this convention by trying to use their leading position in the economic struggle for political ends. And it is this fact, (rather than "*intimidation on the housing estates*", as Graham argued on the radio), that caused this morning's fiasco.

The enormous political gulf between many of the trade union leaders and the general trade union rank and file is understood in Belfast as a pragmatic fact, it will now be understood by many in Britain as a pragmatic, but incomprehensible fact. Since the weird logic of Stanley Orme will try to find an explanation for this fact which harmonises with the widely-held Anti-Partitionist view that nearly all Protestant workers are incipient fascists, who can only be saved from fascism by anti-Partitionism, and since press reporters have not bothered to find out the facts of the case, a word of explanation is necessary here.

There are a number of particular reasons why political anti-Partitionists appear in the economic leadership of workers who are politically unionists. One is that the Communist Party of Northern Ireland gained a strong position in the trade union leadership during the 1939-45 war. During that war, and until about 1950, the CPNI was strongly Unionist in politics. It fought the 1945 election on a Unionist programme. During the 1950s it vacillated on the question of the Union. In the course of the 1960s it became increasingly anti-Partitionist, and united with the Irish Workers' Party (26 Counties) in 1970 to form the Communist Party of Ireland on a strongly Catholic-nationalist programme. Through this development it lost its mass following in the Protestant working class, but a number of individuals remained in the leadership of unions.

A second cause is the fact that local leaders of many British based unions are appointed by the Union executive in Britain or that elections are held on a United Kingdom basis. In such circumstances there is a bias in favour of anti-Partition. (The British Communist Party is anti-Partitionist, and so are many Labour Party elements, who have been induced to believe that anti-Partitionism and social progress are synonymous in Ireland.) That is how Andrew Barr, Jimmy Graham etc. come to lead Trade unionists with whom they have no political sympathy.

The main political damage. that they do is in giving trade union leaders in Britain a completely false picture of the situation here.

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WHAT DOES 'SUNNINGDALE' MEAN? Many, of the strikers' representatives will say they are against "Sunningdale". This enables it to be said that the strike is against power-sharing. But there are two elements in "Sunningdale": power-sharing and the Council of Ireland. It is the Council of Ireland that is at issue in the strike. If Rees and Orme could grasp that simple fact they might stop making fools of themselves.

Len Murray thinks he is defending "Sunningdale" when he walks with Andrew Barr in what the mass of the workers see as a blackleg attempt. And Andrew Barr, of course, doesn't tell him that the political party to which he (Barr) belongs - the Communist Party of Ireland - opposes Sunningdale because it isn't sufficiently anti-Partitionist. The CPI has been putting up posters calling for return to work as an anti-Sunningdale measure. The CPI was hoping for a major conflict in the Protestant community over return to work. That would certainly have upset Sunningdale.

Workers' Association

21st May 1974.