

# **British Strategy in Northern Ireland**

***From the White Paper to  
the fall of Sunningdale***



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## INTRODUCTION

In the final part of this pamphlet, the author writes:

"While it is obvious that the Catholic masses will not abandon their historic aspirations without a fight, a question mark still hangs over the role of the Irish revolutionary movement. As a whole it has shown a decided inability to understand the dynamic of the struggle or to give real leadership to the broad layers who have from time to time placed confidence in them."

In all that has been written about the period from the British White Paper to the Ulster Workers Council strike, the articles reproduced here, which originally appeared in **the Plough**, stand out. In order to understand the dynamic of the struggle and the tasks of revolutionaries it is essential to have a clear and precise analysis of the development of British strategy. And that is exactly what these articles offer.

Presented together in this pamphlet they not only give a detailed picture of the political moves of British imperialism in the North. They also present a vivid demonstration of the Marxist method at work.

In a country whose Marxist tradition may be said to have died with Connolly in 1916, the Revolutionary Marxist Group has made a unique contribution to the Irish revolutionary movement, in analysing British strategy and the tasks of revolutionaries. This it has done both through **the Plough** and through the **Marxist Review**, its theoretical journal.

And in a situation where the Irish revolutionary movement has been isolated from world revolutionary currents, the RMG, through its membership of the Fourth International, has been able to draw on the valuable experience of its comrades in struggles in Argentina, Chile, America, Japan, Germany, Spain, France, Belgium, Italy, and many other countries.

The importance of the analysis offered in this pamphlet has already been recognised. The "White Paper" article was reprinted in at least seven publications internationally, and others have appeared in **Intercontinental Press** and **Inprecor**.

The articles are reproduced here unchanged apart from a few grammatical alterations and corrections.



# 1 The White Paper — Why It Failed

Disraeli once said that every time Britain finds an answer to the Irish question, the Irish change the question.

This is just a clever way of saying that British diplomacy in Ireland has always covered its nakedness by avoiding the issues and discussing irrelevancies. The Whitelaw White Paper is just the latest example of the grand old tradition. The key feature of Britain's latest plans for Ireland is their failure to grapple with the needs of the Irish people (which was to be expected) but also their failure to satisfy the needs of British imperialism itself.

It is now commonplace knowledge among socialists, republicans and political commentators in general that Britain and its native clients desire a 'federal solution' to the Irish problem. There is no need to elaborate on this, merely to mention that the general forms of this solution were outlined last October in the Westminster Green Paper, *The Future of Northern Ireland*.

The Green Paper constituted a basic reappraisal of British imperialism's strategy in Ireland. The central revision concerned what is known as the 'constitutional position' of the Six Counties. The Six Counties were considered to be an integral part of the United Kingdom, and its status was held to be inviolable except by the will of the Protestant majority, i.e. the Unionist bourgeoisie.

This tenet of British policy was deleted by the Green Paper which stated that the constitutional position of the North "must not preclude the necessary taking account of. . . the Irish dimension". In other words the future of the Orange statelet was no longer to be considered purely in terms of the Protestant majority but in terms of the whole people of Ireland. Moreover Britain's confidence at this point was high-lighted by its desire to give its change of policy as wide a currency as possible as is evidenced by the statement (contrary to the wishes of Conor Collaborator O'Brien) that a refusal to speak *now* of Irish unity would be "a prescription for confusion".

The Green Paper not only insisted on placing the question of partition in the context of Irish unity, but it also spelt out in a general way what this would mean for the basic structures of the Six County statelet.

For the first time it was openly admitted that the conflict rending the North apart over the past fifty years, arose not merely from the existence of two "political viewpoints", but from the existence of "two whole communities".

The reformulation of the problem in this manner, pointed the finger logically at other features of the Orange statelet. It was admitted, albeit in an indirect way (using such euphemistic terms as "permanent majority" and "permanent minority") that this situation had resulted in institutionalised sectarianism against the Catholic minority.

By so framing the problems the need to radically alter the structures of power in the North was deliberately posed. Thus the need "to seek a much wider consensus than has hitherto existed" was insisted upon. It was openly acknowledged that "minority groups should be assured of an effective voice and a real influence". And it was stressed that this would have to be done by "giving minority interests a share in the exercise of executive power".

The Green Paper undoubtedly marked a major shift in the historic orientation of British imperialism in the sense that it posed the need for some formal unity between North and South and the need for a definite sharing of executive power between the Catholic and Protestant communities in the North.

Arising from the new orientation two important practical proposals were made. Firstly, that a *Council of Ireland* should be set up which would take account of the Irish dimension by giving the Southern bourgeoisie a significant say in the affairs of the Six Counties. Put simply, it was intended to end the sovereignty of the Unionists. Secondly, that a *community government* be set up in which representatives of the Catholic minority (i.e. the Catholic middle class) would wield ministerial power.

Although British imperialism wishes to introduce these reforms and alterations, it is caught in the web of its past policies. Now that it has altered its course, the material results of its past interventions have produced autonomous tendencies which are cutting across her path at this point.



In the South these tendencies assert themselves in two important ways.

Firstly, in the economic sphere: one of the fundamental reasons behind the federal proposals, has been the significant increase of control gained by British capital over the Southern economy during the sixties. But this is not only the reason for federalism; it is supposed to be a means to achieving it. The influx of capital, the expansion of industry, the creation of jobs, was supposed to show in a practical way the desirability of integration with Britain. In the short run this may in fact have had some effect.

But the way in which British capital created and organised industry was guaranteed to defeat such a purpose. British capital, to use a Marxist expression tended to increase the organic composition of capital invested in industry, i.e., it increased the ratio between capital invested in plant and machinery, and capital invested in labour power. Since surplus value and profit are created on the capital invested in labour, a decline was produced in the rate of profit. To offset this decline the rate of exploitation of labour had to be increased. (This increased rate of exploitation, has already received a practical manifestation in the huge strike wave which marked the sixties.)

In addition to this central feature, there is a whole galaxy of secondary problems – intensified inflation, worsening balance of payments, run down of external reserves, etc., which eat away any surplus social product that might have been used to provide decent social services or create a welfare state.

In the long term, the intervention of British imperialism was bound to propel the Irish working class into struggle against its designs, rather than integrating the class into its overall system.

Secondly, in the cultural sphere the hopes of British imperialism have proved equally vain.

During the 30's, 40's, 50's, for reasons we will not discuss here, Fianna Fail seized on the Republican traditions of the working class and small farmers and used them in a demagogic way to consolidate its position of power. Now the process of integration with Britain demands that these traditions be liquidated. But the fruits of the years hard work cannot be obliterated over night. The "ideological reformation" had to begin gradually. The first changes naturally began within the intelligensia and were slowly transmitted to the general public. But the unexpected explosion of the struggle in the North reactivated the traditional instincts. It came as a timely shot in the arm to the Republican ethos which was about to expire helplessly.

The interaction of these economic and cultural factors have prevented the ripening of conditions and the preparation of public opinion quickly enough to permit any attempt at laying the prerequisite foundations for the implementation of the proposals of the Green Paper.

Of course the more important and profound stumbling blocks to

any meaningful implementation of the line elaborated in the Green Paper, came primarily from the North. These obstacles to the policy of the British are traceable largely to the heterogeneity of Unionism and the peculiar position occupied by the Protestant working class in the production process.

The heterogeneity of Unionism stems from the deformed nature of the Irish market and the consequently deformed nature of the Northern market. Because the Northern market is a fragmented piece of the entire Irish market, it succeeded in producing only an unstable and unbalanced economy. In particular it created two distinct layers within the Unionist ruling class, who's interests do not immediately coincide.

The smallness of this market, resulting in high risk and low profitability on capital, causes an outflow of capital to Britain and keeps the size of industrial enterprises limited. Hence the widespread existence of the Victorian type family firm, which of course is bigger than a petty bourgeois concern but not quite the norm of 20th century capitalism. This type of firm continues to play a vital and vigorous role in the North of Ireland economy.

By contrast to the effusion of capital there is a continuous influx of capital from Britain which arises from the lower rate of profit due to greater technical advancement and a higher organic composition of capital in Britain. This influx of capital has created an alternative and distinct layer within Unionism, which is much more closely identified with the interests of British imperialism.

While both these wings of Unionism are heavily dependent on British imperialism, they are so, in different and even contradictory ways.

The second wing of Unionism, the "moderates" in the present struggle, while it may have some degree of independence has no real or substantial interests apart from those of British imperialism.

The first wing, the "extremists", is much different however. The family firm, in the course of such a long and prosperous existence has become not only an economic unit, but a social and political unit as well. As such, it is much more deeply rooted and interested in the Protestant community.

This situation has created, along with a variety of other factors, a strong paternalism which has reinforced and further spawned a web of favouritism, discrimination, graft, power and privilege.

Accordingly the extreme wing is hostile to any attempt to infringe on its sovereignty and more particularly to sharing state power with the Catholic minority. So, while this wing depends on Britain for profitable outlets for its surplus capital, it has a firm base of its own which can create friction with the interests of British capital.

As Britain proceeded with the plans of reform, it did not consider seriously the significance of the growing schism within the Unionist camp. The *material* basis of the split was not understood and a naive belief persisted that it would heal itself once the gravity of the situation became



apparent. As it turned out, no assumption could have been more ill-founded. It is in fact the resistance of the extreme wing of Unionism which today constitutes one of the most dangerous elements in the grave situation which exists.

The second obstacle we mentioned, the position of the Protestant working class, is of course an extension of the problem of heterogeneity in the Unionist camp, but it is best dealt with as a separate category.

The Protestant working class cannot be understood solely in terms of the labour-capital conflict which characterises any segment of capitalist society. It must be analysed in the context of the evolution of the entire Protestant community. Only in this way can the importance of its role be put in proper perspective.

Two aspects of this evolution must be taken into consideration. To begin with, the elementary historical fact that the Protestant community was planted in Ireland as a bridgehead of nascent British capitalism meant that the lower ranks had to be granted special concessions in order to encourage loyalty and bind them to the aristocracy. The principle concession was security of tenure, which allowed an improvement and expansion of holdings and the emergence of line weaving and spinning as a "cottage industry". By contrast, the native Catholic population was forbidden any security of holdings and consequently was not in a position to develop any skills or techniques.

By the time of the industrialisation of the North during the middle of the last century, it was only the Protestant peasantry which was in a position to fill up the leading skilled ranks in industry.

In addition, their new advantage by comparison to the Catholic population was reinforced by the factors which as we have seen also created a fissure in the Unionist bourgeois monolith – the nature of the Six County market.

While a significant layer of industry with skilled opportunities did spring up, the smallness of its market base prevented widespread diversification and created intense competition for these positions. Since the Protestant workers were installed first, they have been able to use their advantage to monopolise the various trades in the major industries. The Catholic workers on the other hand have been forced to occupy the unskilled positions and as there is too little scope in this field of employment, they have been subjected to an abnormally high rate of unemployment and emigration.

The Protestant working class has therefore, as Connolly pointed out, come to occupy a position quite similar to the old British labour aristocracy. But there is the additional feature, that a reactionary peasant ideology, Orangism, lay ready to hand, at the time of the formation of the Protestant working class which they used to solidify their ranks and defend their privileged position.

The Protestant working class is naturally hostile to the moves towards a federal solution and the economic tendencies of diversification

which underpin it. Consequently they have mobilised as a separate identifiable force and have thrown their weight in behind the extreme wing of the Unionist bourgeoisie. This has accentuated the rift in the Unionist camp and reinforced the obstacles to Britain's strategy. The Protestant working class has in fact played a decisive role in the extreme Unionist mobilisation against the threat to its privileged position.

It is unnecessary to recall here how all the factors we have outlined have intervened in the last few months. In the South, the massive trade union upsurge after Bloody Sunday and the repeated mobilisations after Mac Stiofan's arrest and during the passing of the Offences Against the State Amendment Act are clear enough in their meaning.

On the opposite side, since the abolition of Stormont we have seen the consolidation of the extreme wing of Unionism, the Vanguard Movement led by Craig, and the rise of the Protestant working class through the Orange Order, the Loyalist Association of Workers and the Ulster Defence Association.

It was obvious, even when the Green Paper was first published, that the proposals logically flowing from it could not possibly be implemented against such odds. But British imperialism still had a few cards left to play. In the South an all out effort to crush republicanism both physically and politically was projected. The main weapons in this drive were the Anti-IRA bill (O.S.A.A.) followed by the general elections. In the North the border poll was to be used as a lever to enhance the position of the moderate wing and put it in a position where it could compete with the extremists for hegemony over the Protestant workers.



Both of these offensives failed. The Anti-IRA Bill met with tremendous opposition from the Southern people. It was only with the help of a few bombs from British Intelligence that the legislation was forced through, and the government recognised its defeat by not widely using its new powers. In the general elections which followed, this defeat was confirmed. (The purpose of the elections was clearly to stabilise the situation for the White Paper, but none of the major pro-imperialist parties were able to raise the pertinent issues such as security, repression, collaboration etc. Instead the manoeuvre was reduced to a squabble over rates and prices etc.)

In the North the border poll stunt produced equally ineffectual and dubious results. Although the extreme wing had raised the cry of a Unilateral Declaration of Independence, a separate nine county Ulster with independently negotiated relations with both the South and Britain etc., this was largely demagogic hot air. When the crunch came the moderate wing found it had very little room to outflank the extremists. In fact the only interests which suffered were those of Britain who had her "Irish dimensions" kicked out the door.

Unable to deal effectively with all these obstacles and suffering repeated defeats every time it tried to grapple with them, British imperialism has been forced to retreat. The magnitude of this retreat can be judged by a comparison of the proposals in the White Paper and those projected in the Green Paper.

The most glaring retreat in the light of such a comparison has been on the question of the "Irish Dimension" since this is central to the federal solution. (Whereas the question of power sharing is only a means to an end.)

Until quite recently, it was thought that the recognition of the "Irish dimension" in the form of a Council of Ireland which would give the Free State a veto over some affairs in the North would be a central feature of the White Paper. Although it was admitted as the deadline for the White Paper that nothing too bold would be ventured in this field, it certainly came as a surprise to all seasoned commentators that no direct proposals on the Council of Ireland were contained in it.

A careful examination of the White Paper commentary on this shows that the whole line of approach to the Council of Ireland has been changed. The Free State will first have to recognise the status of "Northern Ireland" and crush the Republican Movement before any kind of united council can be considered. In addition, the areas of work for such a council are limited in advance to "tourism, regional development, electricity and transport". This means pushing the Irish dimension right out of the picture again. The prospects of the Free State authorities being able to mobilise popular support for a constitutional change which would recognise the right of British imperialism in Ireland and O.K. the extirpation of republicanism in return for a mess of pottage such as "co-operation" in tourism, electricity, transport etc, is to say the least

# NORTHERN IRELAND CONSTITUTIONAL PROPOSALS



unlikely. The "regrets" expressed by Cosgrave are a hint to British imperialism and the Unionists about the awkward position their Southern collaborators are in.

The move towards Community Government was also halted, though not in such clear and decisive terms. Firstly the restored Stormont Assembly will not have even the limited power which the old regime had. Prior to this Stormont had no control over foreign policy, treaties or trade pacts, no control over currency, weights, measures, radio, air or sea navigation, taxation post office; no power to declare war or raise an army; in addition, any decision taken by the legislature could be annulled by the Queen's Government.

Now the security and constitutional matters have been removed from the sphere of its competence. The new Stormont Assembly will in fact be nothing more than a glorified County Council.

Thus the question of power sharing is avoided altogether by depriving the Assembly of any effective power. In other words, the new Assembly will just be a more naked form of *direct rule*.

In this form, the Assembly cannot act as a stabiliser. While it strips the Unionists of power it does not give the Catholic middle class (led by the SDLP) any additional power. The SDLP, while it may be prepared to accept this temporarily in the hope of better things to come, will not embrace it as a definitive solution. That is why they have shown such little interest in the proposed structures for power sharing.

Of course, apart from any question of the Assembly having real power, the proposed methods of power sharing are transparently ineffectual for the simple reason that the Six Counties by its very nature is a sectarian apartheid state and can only be genuinely reformed in an all-Ireland context. No matter whether the seats are increased from 52 to 80 or 800, no matter whether the straight vote or proportional representation is in operation, the Unionist and Protestant population will still have a substantial permanent majority.

Accordingly, it doesn't matter whether the Cabinet is chosen by the Secretary of State (who will undoubtedly always appoint a couple of Castle Catholics), the ministers, whether they be Protestant or Catholic will have to submit to a Unionist majority. Moreover these Ministers, if they operate in accordance with the procedures recommended in the White Paper will have to bring their legislation through departmental committees which will be elected on a PR basis which will guarantee that they are unionist dominated. So even at this preliminary stage any Catholic or non-Unionist minister would have his hands tied by a Unionist majority.

No wonder Mr. Faulkner could boast that the "epoch making" proposals of the White Paper were only a souped up version of the proposals made by the Unionist Party as early as....1970!

The implications of this failure are becoming more obvious every day. The only way out of the complex impasse in the North will be a major defeat for one of the sectors opposing the British solution. Having changed the balance of forces through a decisive military intervention, it may then be possible for Britain to implement some of its proposals.

There are two important opposition groups - the Catholic masses and the extreme unionists. The question is: which of these will the British opt to defeat?

It is unlikely that imperialism will make a major offensive against its former allies. Not for any sentimental reasons of course, but because of the dangerous consequences this could have.

Any attempt to crush the organisations like Vanguard, LAW, the UDA as has already been proved would generate a whole series of pogrom attacks against the Catholic ghettos. The security forces would then find themselves taking on both sectors at the same time since the resistance of the minority tends to grow over into offence against imperialism. Such a fight they are not capable of winning except at enormous expense to the already over-stretched resources of British imperialism.

Even if such a situation did not occur there are deeper political consequences which must be considered.

The taming of the "Loyalists" would indeed change the balance of forces but not specifically in the direction of British imperialism. The position of the Catholic masses would be strengthened as a result, and without the extremist wing of Unionism to act as a buffer their struggle could not be easily contained. In the long run, the strategy of defeating the Loyalists would not be the most profitable one for Britain.

On the other hand an offensive against the Catholic minority would have many side effects. The most important effect would be to put the moderate wing of Unionism in a position to compete with the extreme wing of Unionism for leadership of the Protestant working class. A heavy defeat for the Catholic masses would undoubtedly placate large sections of the Protestant workers and reconcile them to Britain's new plans. It is likely therefore that the failure of the White Paper will result in an escalation of the brutality against the Catholic community.



The tasks of revolutionaries and their supporters are two-fold. The first task is to expose any illusion that the White Paper might work. Such an illusion leads to collaboration with imperialism and disarms the people against the inevitable attack.

The second task is to link the struggle North and South. Only the mobilisation of the Southern workers can prevent the defeat of the Catholic ghettos in the North. In this respect the tendency among socialists and Republicans to think that the main line of offence against imperialism is along the economic front is very erroneous and dangerous.

The practical tasks of the socialist and republican movement necessary are:-

1. *To explain how and why the White Paper is a failure.*
2. *To expose the dangers of collaboration.*
3. *To prepare for mass mobilisations among the Catholic people.*
4. *To win support in the South for the minority in the North as the first stage in the mobilisation against imperialism in the South.*



# 2 Assembly Farce

Towards the end of October the Northern Assembly meet for the second time. Its purpose was to discuss standing orders i.e. procedure. Just as with the farce that occurred at the first Assembly meeting in July this event was acclaimed as an historical landmark.

The fact that the press and politicians have to invest every posture of the Assembly with such tremendous grandeur reflects how deeply in question the future of the Assembly really is. There is little confidence in the Assembly getting off the ground and shortly before its recent meeting it received several knocks on the head.

On October 5th, four years after the present troubles erupted, "Mr. Whitelaw admitted publicly, for the first time that he had certain reservations now about the chances of the Assembly succeeding" [Irish Times]

Then a few days later, on October 11th, the Official Unionist Assembly members met and declared that they would participate in the Assembly Executive only if they were given a clear majority over the SDLP and Alliance in addition to which they demanded collective responsibility and a full backing for the security forces from the SDLP.

Within a few days Paddy Devlin, chief whip of the SDLP retaliated by announcing that the SDLP would be expecting an overall majority on the Executive and that they would be seeking the position of Chief Executive.



Next came the 300 strong meeting of the Standing Committee of the Ulster Unionist Council which was to be a test of strength for the pro-power sharing faction of the Unionist Party. The Faulknerites, after taking a hard line on the formation of an executive expected to get a comfortable majority of 40-60 votes. In the end they scraped through with only 27 votes to spare. The general feeling afterwards was that things looked fairly gloomy for the Official Unionists.

As things stand now the general assessment of British imperialism following the Assembly elections has been ignominiously refuted.

The first general conclusion arrived at was that the Unionist monolith had been shattered, that the Loyalist hard liners would be reduced to impotence, that the militants of the UDA, LAW, had been crushed, while the more moderate and reasonable Official Unionists would be forced to recognise that in their weakened position power-sharing was their only hope.

In reality the emergence of the VUP-DUP alliance as a small force signified that they had grown sufficiently in strength and confidence to break from the omnipotent Unionist Party and assert themselves independently. This has since been confirmed.

The VUP-DUP Alliance has been able to attract the Unpledged Unionists into a coalition thus maintaining a powerful bridgehead in the Unionist Party. Originally the political pundits assessed that this would not happen and that Faulkner would be able to force the main body of the prodigals back into the official fold. But it is now clear that the Unpledged Unionists lead by West and Taylor are dictating the pace to Faulkner. Their strength within the Unionist Party as a whole has grown enormously. It is true that Faulkner got through at the Standing Committee of the Ulster Unionist Council, but this was by the skin of his teeth. Moreover although the numerical strength of the votes cast against him was slightly below what was needed to finish him off, the actual social weight of those votes was much more formidable. Behind the vote of Capt. Bill Henderson, for instance, stands the prestigious Belfast 'News Letter' of which he is owner. And behind the vote of the Rev. Martin Smyth stands the Orange Order of which he again is head. In fact "grass roots moves in the Orange Order to sever the organisations official links with the Unionist Party seem likely to come to a head in December" [Irish Times Oct. 22]. Already during October many District Lodges of the Order have refused to appoint delegates to the party council as a show of disenchantment.

Other weighty opponents of Faulkner and Official Unionism are Colonel James Cunningham and Sir George Clark, honorary secretary and chairman of the Standing Committee respectively. Within the 900 strong Ulster Unionist Council itself the weight of these Unpledged Unionist is likely to find a further expression which could confirm officially the split between the Official and Unpledged wings.

Not only was British imperialism mistaken in relation to the splits

within Unionism it was also mistaken in its view of the para-military groups. It is true that LAW the UVF and UDA represented fairly autonomous and independent mobilisations of the Protestant working class in a reactionary defence of its privileged position. Both the Official Unionists and the Loyalists who represent different wings of the Protestant capitalist class were competing with each other for the support of the Protestant workers. What the decline of LAW, UVF and UDA signifies therefore is not that the Protestant working class reaction has been demobilised but that it has been hegemonised by the Loyalist alliance of UVP-DUP. This explains the disappearance of the para-military groups. It is no accident that Craig who at one time was calling for the hanging of UDA men should also be repeating his threat of liquidation and bloody civil war against the catholic population

The cleavages in the Unionist camp follow well defined lines. Behind each of the major factions stand well defined class interests. The Official Unionists, the big bourgeoisie integrated as they are with British capital, are willing to implement British strategy. The Loyalists, the small business and property owners whose whole existence is very much tied to the fate of the six counties, want to retain their petty powers and privileges.

But there is one curious phenomenon which cuts across the neat pattern: the Unpledged Unionists. They have adopted the programme of



the VUP-DUP while remaining within the Unionist Party. The reason for this explains the probable evolution of Britain's strategy.

The anti-Faulknerites realise how weak the Official Unionists are. They are confident that Faulkner's support will collapse and with it Britain's present course. They expect that Britain will then be forced to return to a policy of extreme repression against the Catholics in order to *placate the Protestant Reaction*. However, this will have to be done within a limited manoeuvring space in order not to sweep the ground from under the Free State compradors and so as not to arouse the indignation of international public opinion.

This is precisely what would happen if they made a deal with Craig and Paisley. But if they can find some other element within the Unionist Party to carry forward its policy then British imperialism can keep its cover and do the necessary work at the same time. It is the knowledge of this which keeps West and Taylor within the old party waiting for THEIR turn.

This should be a warning to the minority. When Britain's present strategy fails completely the likes of West and Taylor will come into their own. What preparations are being made against such an eventuality? What protection does the SDLP offer? The simple answer is NONE. Again we repeat, as we have often repeated in the 'Plough': it is high time to rebuild the mass organisations, to re-establish the street committees to redouble the vigilante groups, to prepare for the inevitable showdown!

# After The Loyalist Election Victory

The Northern Westminster elections have thrown into relief once again the basic problems of British strategy in Ireland – the division in the Unionist ruling class, the aristocratic nature of the Protestant workers, the uneasiness of the Catholic community, the limited area of manoeuvre open to the Southern collaborators and the brooding resentment of the twenty-six county working class.

Since the White Paper, the politicians and the media commentators have studiously avoided dealing with these problems. Previously they attempted to exclude from their minds the contradiction between appearance and reality by totally identifying appearance with reality. They accepted the overwhelming support received by the SDLP as a sign of reconciliation in the Catholic ghettos; the early narrow victories of Faulkner as proof that he was bringing the Protestants behind him; the apathy of the Southern workers as an indication that Cosgrave and Lynch could do what they liked.

But now all this has changed. The resounding electoral victory of the Loyalists, the visible shift away from the SDLP, and the inability of the National Coalition to make a simple declaration that would really allay the “fears” of the Protestant community, show that appearance was at variance with reality all along. So now that appearance has shifted more into line with the basic reality of the situation the pundits continue to

avoid facing up to the issues simply by saying. . . appearance and reality are at variance!

There is still no understanding of what the reality of the situation is or of how the situation is evolving. We cannot here repeat our previous analysis of the key material and superstructural obstacles to Britain's strategy. On the basis of the election results we can however show how the trend of development we predicted when the White Paper was published has been confirmed.

The division between the Faulknerites and the Loyalists is not a temporary division created by a sharp turn of events. It was created by the fact that one section of the Unionist capitalist class has become highly integrated with British capital and acts almost directly in accordance with Britain's interests while the other section still has its own fairly distinct interests and is determined to protect them by preserving the status quo.

In between these two contending forces stands the Protestant working class which commands the better paid, more secure and socially advantageous areas of employment. They feel threatened by Britain's economic policy of diversification in the North which would inevitably put the Catholic working class on a par with themselves and generalise the competition for the best positions in employment.

Both the Faulknerites and Loyalists have been competing for the support of the Protestant workers because with the backing of such a major social force they could almost be guaranteed to establish their position as the dominant one. The homogeneity of the Protestant working class, having already been weakened by the limited industrial diversification since the war, and under tremendous pressure from the revolutionary self-confidence of the Catholic workers, tended to divide and oscillate between both camps. But in the immediate situation its short term interests were still general enough and strong enough, to unite them by and large, behind the Loyalists whose interests were also opposed to diversification.

The first major test of this analysis came at the Assembly elections. The result was clear but not decisive. The deep going schism in the Unionist camp was openly revealed. But the Faulknerites still had major support among the Protestant workers. They got 30.7% of the total poll and just 50% of the identifiable Protestant vote. Not understanding that the Loyalists and their working class supporters were not simply a historical anachronism left over from an older period Faulkner hoped that by bold and decisive action he could completely discredit them. He followed up his election success with the implementation of "power-sharing" and the negotiation of the Sunningdale Agreements. With these tangible achievements he hoped to completely outflank his opponents on the Protestant side.

But it was only at that point, when exactly what was happening was made crystal clear to the Protestant workers that the ground began to shift from under Faulkner. The turning point in his already low fortunes

came with his defeat at the Ulster Unionist Council when West and Taylor seized control of the Unionist party machine. The trend away from Faulkner was decidedly confirmed by the latest elections. Of the Protestant vote Faulkner got only 20% and only 10% of the entire poll. The complete significance of this vote is emphasised by the defeats of Pounder and Bradford.

The protagonists of Britains policy are trying to minimise the significance of these results. They say that the Assembly has not yet had time to prove itself. This might have been a valid argument had the Westminster elections revealed no change in the balance of forces between the Faulknerites and the Loyalists. But this is not the case. The real trend of development is left unexplained. If only a few months back 50% of the Protestant communities was prepared to accept Faulkner and his policy, why today does 80% reject it? The answer is that the Protestants, especially the workers, have seen enough to know that in the present context Faulkner is not giving them what they want.

It is hopeless to think that in the future the Assembly (and all it implies) can prove itself and change the attitude of the Loyalist rank and file. It is not the failure of the Assembly to put its policies into practice that has lost it support but the very nature of these politics. Power-sharing and the Council of Ireland interferes with the interests of the Loyalist bourgeoisie and the Protestant working class too – THAT is why they have rejected Britains strategy.

After four years of long struggle during which thousands were interned, imprisoned and tortured, in which thousands more were harassed





and driven from their homes and in which hundreds were killed, the Catholic community grasped eagerly at the breathing-space offered by the Assembly. There was a wild and naive hope that reconciliations with the Protestant community, on the basis of equality, was at long last in sight. The SDLP as the principle supporter on the Catholic side of Britain's strategy received overwhelming support from the Catholic population. Never before had any party achieved the hegemony which the SDLP won in the Assembly election. They won 22% of the total poll and 83% of the identifiable Catholic vote.

But only a short time later that overpowering domination has been breached. The failure of the SDLP to bring about the slightest improvement in the immediate suffering of the Catholic ghettos; the failure to end army and police harassment, to halt the assassination campaign, to release the internees etc. has started a drift away from them. The significance of this drift is evident in the election results.

It is true as the SDLP claims that not only have they maintained their overall share of the poll but they have also increased it from 22% to 23.2%. But they carefully avoid any detailed analysis of this vote. A look at the composition of their support explains why.

In five constituencies there was no significant change in the SDLP vote — in three of these (North Antrim, South Antrim and South Belfast), they increased their vote by 1%–2% while in the other two they lost 1%–2%. In three more constituencies they lost heavily. Armagh down 5%; Fermanagh-South Tyrone down 14.6% and in Mid-Ulster down 6.2%.

So it was in the remaining constituencies that the SDLP almost exclusively increased its vote. A close examination of where the increased support came from reveals how integrated into the Unionist statelet the SDLP has become.



\* In the North Belfast the SDLP vote rose by 3.2%. It is obvious that this was the small middle class vote attracted by Alliance in the Assembly election. This time Alliance ran no candidate and approximately half of its original vote 6.6% went to the SDLP.

\* West Belfast produced an 8.4% increase for the SDLP. Here again the benefactor was Alliance who ran no candidate this time round and transferred the bulk of its original 8.5% to Fitt.

\* In South Down the SDLP vote rose by a startling 15.2%. Here the transfer from the Protestant middle class supporters is most obvious. This is the constituency contested by Loyalist leader Capt. Orr. In the Assembly election the Faulknerite candidate received 27.8% of the poll. This time round there was no Faulkner candidate and Faulkner personally called on his supporter not to vote for Orr. It is clear that in fact a significant number of his rump support voted SDLP instead.

\* Although the Derry constituency did not produce dramatic results for the SDLP - an increase of 2.9% - it must be analysed in this grouping. In the Assembly elections the Republican Clubs had no



candidate. On this occasion he made great inroads of the SDLP Catholic vote with a very successful campaign by the Republican Club candidate Mick Montgomery. Nonetheless the SDLP not only maintained but even increased its vote. Again it is obvious that the redeeming support came from Alliance who bowed out of the elections and transferred the bulk of its 8.3% to the SDLP.

What this picture shows is that the SDLP's vote is not as homogeneous as it previously was. It could maintain its position only by drawing on a large reservoir of Protestant middle class support which was put at its disposal courtesy of Alliance and Faulkner.

In addition it is essential to look at the inroads on the SDLP support made by the revolutionary anti-Sunningdale forces on the Catholic side. In the Assembly election they got only 8% of the Catholic vote while this time they got 25%. It should not be forgotten that on this occasion they contested less seats than before. Taking into consideration that half the constituencies were not contested by them their share of the Catholic vote can reasonably be estimated at 30% of the Catholic vote.

Of course the SDLP argues that this large increase was due mainly to a personality vote for McAliskey and McManus. Naturally they ignore the same "arguments" when considering the compactness of their own vote. But the real refutation of this facile reasoning is the definite trend of voting expressed in the success of the Republican club candidates. Contesting only four constituencies (instead of seven the last time) they nonetheless increased their proportion of the Catholic poll from 13,064 votes to 15,152 votes.

The overall results of the Westminster elections in the North when analysed thoroughly shows that the uneasiness of the Catholic working class about the Assembly is being steadily transformed into active opposition. It is almost certain that if the anti-Sunningdale force have 25%—30% support at the polls then their actual support and influence is much greater.

In the South the influx of British capital has increased the rate of exploitation of the working class and thereby created a rational basis for opposition to British imperialism amongst the workers. This opposition has tied the hands of the Free State Collaborators who wish to make concessions that would help Britain and the Faulknerites.

The result of the elections has intensified their dilemma. It has been demonstrated clearly that no stable change has occurred in the North. Workers are apprehensive lest that recognition of the "constitutional" position of Northern Ireland would in effect be recognition of the right of West, Craig and Paisley to continue to oppress the Catholic minority. Without the certain support of the workers, Cosgrave and Lynch and Co. are unable to give those guarantees which might weaken the mass base of Loyalism. Nor will they find it easy to step up the repression of Republican and Socialist forces in the South which Britain and the Faulknerites have been demanding as a prerequisite to Sunningdale.



In the meantime the crisis of Irish capitalism is deepening and on the economic front a new wave of resistance is rising. The rejection of the first edition of the Third National Wage Agreement is indicative of a new general awakening. The stirring from passivity on the economic front will create a much more volatile situation politically. If the Free State regime attempts to introduce more universal repressive measures it is clear that working class reaction will be much stronger than in the past. So the Coalition government must continue to balance on an even narrower tight rope than its predecessor.

The elections show that the major obstacles to a proper implementation of Sunningdale have not been cleared away. Even the chances of agreement actually being signed have receded somewhat. Certainly the signing of the agreements is still possible but it is now being increasingly recognised that Sunningdale will not be the great epoch making occasion it was originally expected to be. Whether or not the accords are ratified the struggle will inevitable resume. The only question now is: how soon?

In answering this question a number of features of the struggle have to be considered carefully. Firstly, there is the fatigue and war weariness of the Catholic population. This is not an ephemeral phenomenon that can easily be cast off. The root of this psychological disorientation



is material. The effects of the campaign of intimidation and assassination should not be underestimated. Whole areas have been uprooted and resettled thus breaking up the social cohesion of the Catholic community. The continued harassment of the British Army and the assassinations have led to the imprisonment and death of hundreds of leading cadres in the most important areas.

Secondly there is the crisis of leadership. The Catholic population put its fervent faith overwhelmingly in the SDLP during its 'left' turn. Now they have been led like lambs to the slaughter by this same party. It will take time for them to restore their faith in the possibility of real political leadership.

The state of fragmentation in the revolutionary camp will not help this process. The election results show that the republican and socialist forces have recently gained a solid base of support. But unless they are able to understand what the objective needs of the immediate situation demands and unless they are able to unite in a common struggle round these demands they will be unable to consolidate or extend their influence.

The signs are not very encouraging in this respect. The old animosity between Officials and Provos still remains as sharp as ever. In addition a new rift has opened between the Provos and its socialist allies — the P.D. and RMG. Behind these antagonisms stand real political differences. But on the pressing needs of the moment — the ending of internment, the withdrawal of the British army, an end to the sectarian assassination campaign and the rejection of Sunningdale — all are united. There is no excuse therefore for not having a united movement on these demands. All that stands in the way are petty squabbles, jealousies, personality conflicts and political dogmatism. If the revolutionary movement cannot overcome these then it does not deserve and will not get, the support of the people.

Thirdly, there is the position of the Protestant working class. For the last couple of months the situation has been ripe for an offensive against power-sharing and the Assembly. Yet there has been no major response. The Loyalists election victory will undoubtedly invigorate their resistance but it is obvious that there is a lack of confidence and cohesion. This clearly stems not from any tendency towards reconciliation but from disintegration of the Orange/Unionist monolith as well as the traumatic effects of the Tories "betrayal" of them.

Until a new Loyalist cohesion (as is being forged under the impact of the election victory) it is certain that this apathy will remain. In turn the Catholic community, tired and worn already, will not feel the full urgency of the inherent contradictions between the aims and aspirations of the two communities.

Taking these factors into consideration it is possible to see a continued down turn in the situation and continued ray of hope for Britains strategy in the immediate future. But whether Sunningdale breaks down before it is ratified or afterwards the recent elections show that the powerful economic political and social contradictions which made Sunningdale necessary in the first place have not been mitigated or resolved.

# Ulster Workers Council Strike

The recent loyalist strike in the North has been loosely categorised with terms as diverse as "fascist" or "anarchist" by members of the British Government and the establishment. But the variety of labels and interpretations given to it by the republican and socialist movement indicates that it is even more confused than the ruling class, on the lessons to be learned.

Official Republicans spokesmen such as Jim Sullivan in Belfast, saw the strike as one where loyalist workers were duped and used by "fascist" politicians. The Communist Party of Ireland glorified the abortive actions of the trade union movement as forcing mythical breaks in sectarianism, and Provisional Sinn Fein delighted in the downfall of the Executive, stating that a step had been taken towards loyalists and republicans together deciding the destiny of Ireland. Some stated that the strike resulted purely from intimidation and that it had no mass support.

Each of these positions shows basic misconceptions on the nature of the strike and such imprecision can only contribute to a failure to grasp the realities of the current period.

In fact, the strike clarified a number of issues. Firstly, the determination of the Protestant working class to retain its privileged position in the northern statelet.

The strike was the product of frustration among broad layers of

the protestant working class. The euphoria following the electoral success of the 11 UUUC members to Westminster had worn off quickly with their inability to alter British policy. Loyalists saw a slip towards reform in the North and the dismantling of the Protestant ascendancy inexorably continuing.

The Ulster Workers' Council was formed by workers in key industries, which remain almost exclusively composed of Protestant workers such as shipbuilding, oil and power. For some time the U.W.C. threatened and prepared for a general strike but it postponed action at the request of Craig, Paisley and West who backed action in parliament. With this policy discredited preparations for the strike were made in clandestinity and May 14, when the Assembly vote would almost certainly back Sunningdale, was selected as an opportune date for action. When the vote did support the British strategy, the strike call was made that evening.

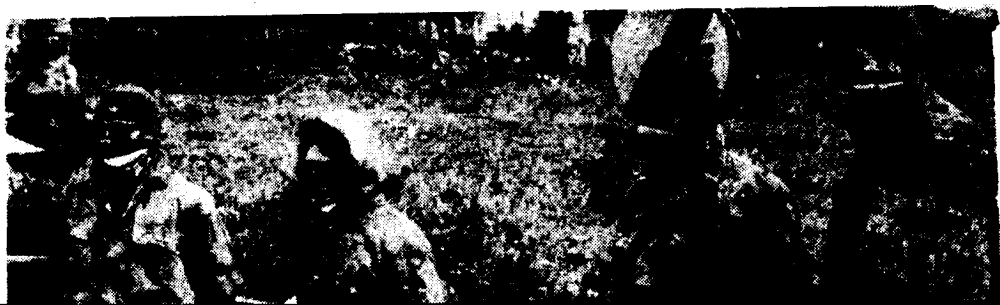
Unlike its predecessor L.A.W. as a loyalist group in industry, the U.W.C. was not a mass organisation, although by the end of the strike it was claiming 80,000 members. Thus the U.W.C. could not initially directly pull workers out of the factories en masse.

On the morning after the strike call, the majority of workers reported at work. In such loyalist strongholds as the Sirocco Works, Mackie's and Harland and Wolff figures of around 90 per cent attendance, a good average, were recorded. During the day mass meetings were held in many of the key plants in the Belfast area and many workers returned home during the afternoon. Workers left ICI and Carrickfergus, Gallahers in Belfast, while Carreras were left with a skeleton staff and only a tiny portion of workers continued to report to the shipyards. Workers at Courtaulds voted at a mass meeting to run the works down gradually despite warnings of jeopardised jobs by the management. It was the first time the continuous production process had been shut down during any dispute.

Outside these bases of loyalist workers, intimidation, often a warning telephone call from one of the loyalist military organisations, the UDA or UVF, and power cuts closed down many other works. By the next morning, according to figures of the Engineering Employers' Association 36,000 (90 per cent) of engineering workers did not turn out for work.

Larne was barricaded off and services taken over by the UDA and UVF, hi-jacking brought the Belfast public transport system to a halt and road-blocks prevented many from getting to work. A list of essential services to be maintained was published by the UWC.

But while intimidation and hi-jackings were early weapons of the





strikers to hit areas of industry and commerce where UWC members were not strongly implanted this was not to say that the workers were forced en masse from work against their will by intimidation or power cuts.

The demands of the strikers against Sunningdale found a ready response from the protestant working class and once it had shown itself to be successful, the strike found mass support also.

Intimidation or power cuts did not halt work at Protestant areas such as Newtownards or Ballymena at the out-set of the strike and despite claims that lack of power was responsible for the complete halting of most industry the Goodyear plant at Craigavon, whose 2,000 workforce is largely Catholic, continued to work on reduced power, and at Armagh and the Maydown industrial estate at Derry work went on.

The continuing production at Maydown became such a psychological thorn in the side of the UWC that on Sunday they threatened to entirely close down the Collekerragh power station if work did not cease. The authorities complied with their demand.

From early intimidation the strike gained momentum as it gained the mass support of the protestant working class. The elements involved found industrial power on a level previously outside its experience. A solidarity was formed which put irresistible pressure on the assembly unionist party and which forced the British Government to come to terms with them.

On the fifth day of the strike a State of Emergency was declared by Merlyn Rees. The strains of growing loyalist extra-parliamentary strength began to tell on the unionist parliamentarians. Then Pro-Assembly Unionist Roy Bradford announced on May 20. "The Sunningdale Agreement was never at any time unconditional. . . . there is wide sympathy for these (anti-Sunningdale) views among pro-Assembly Unionists". He broke the official line of the Faulknerite Unionists by calling for talks by the British Government with the strikers.

The previous day the UUUC had thrown its support behind the strike. The loyalist parliamentarians had initially been outflanked by the UWC and subsequently over-taken by protestant working class action. Unsure of the support the strike might acquire they were initially unfavourable. William Craig said on the first day of the strike he was not in favour of such action at that time; Official Unionist, William Thompson, MP for Mid-Ulster, said it was incorrect. A meeting between Craig, West, Paisley's second in command William Beattie and Glenn Barr, with Merlyn Rees brought no agreement so on Sunday the UUUC pledged "full support" for the strike "in an all out effort by bringing a change in British policy" Far from having led the strike, the loyalist parliamentarians found themselves forced to join in support of it.

Pressures were also on the Pro-Assembly Unionists. On May 20 a statement announced, "There can not be any Council of Ireland as envisaged at Sunningdale". There must be no dilution the SDLP replied. Rumours of a revolt within the Pro-Assembly Unionist Party against

Faulkner were refuted as backbenchers issued a statement back-tracking on previous support for Sunningdale. "By voting for the amendment we in the Assembly Party did not vote in favour of signing an agreement based on the Sunningdale proposals for a Council of Ireland without qualifications . . . these qualifications have not been fulfilled . . . we cannot agree to the Council of Ireland as suggested at Sunningdale. Aware of this, our party has been negotiating for several weeks along these lines, but our efforts have been unnoticed because of false propaganda".

This was despite denials of a report in the Financial Times some weeks earlier that such negotiations were taking place, denials made by Faulkner. The strength of the strike was altering the scales of the Faulknerites' balancing between the strategy of British Imperialism and the demands of the Protestant working class. The tensions within the Assembly Unionists grew parallel with growing petit-bourgeois support for the strike.

Two days later, after the failure of the trade union "back to work" marches the Sunningdale Agreement was, in effect, shelved. By 11-8 votes the Executive agreed that the Council of Ireland should be postponed for at least four years. A council of ministers was to be formed without executive powers or secretariat. All that remained of the agreement was a forum for the discussion of tourism, sport, geological surveys and electricity.

The loyalists had won their first major concessions and added impetus was given to their already considerable confidence. The UWC said the strike would go on until their demands, escalating with the success of the strike, were met. They called for elections for a new assembly.

Three days later Harold Wilson with his ham-fisted broadcast condemning the loyalists as "spongers" on Britain, yet again increased the loyalists' solidarity. The sponge became a symbol of the strike and pieces were attached to supporters' lapels.

On May 28 Faulkner, faced with the most convincing mass protest, resigned. He said the degree of consent required to sustain the executive did not exist.

By the general will of the loyalist population, the strike then ended. It was felt that a victory had been won, the threat to the ascendancy blocked. The UWC recognised the reality of a mass decision to return to work and called for a phased restarting of industry and services.

Massive demonstrations, some 10,000 strong were held during the strike and at its end to celebrate the victory, taking place at Omagh, Portadown, Lurgan, Armagh, Lisburn and Belfast.

The strike was started by a movement of the protestant working class to defend its privilege as a labour aristocracy. As its momentum gained the support of the petit-bourgeoisie, the farmers were won and the loyalist politicians were forced to get into line. Politicians such as Craig and Paisley found their receptions in East Belfast and the Shankill Road at mass meetings not always the friendliest.



The UVF described the role of UUUC politicians as "disgusting" during the course of the loyalist strike, and that they had "opposed the strike and then, after it had gained popular support, used it for party propaganda". A clear rift was evident between the working class loyalists and the parliamentarians out of touch with the popular mood.

The strike must be characterised as reactionary, but not as "facist" as some Official Republicans, Billy Bleas of the ICTU and British Labour politicians suggested.

The strike was not led by the petit-bourgeoisie, the primary social layer motor force of facist movements, nor was it aimed at the smashing and atomization of the working class, the destruction of all working class organisations, or the ending of all political liberties as the last resort of capitalism, as is facism.

It was a reactionary strike and tendencies within it could be

utilised by a fascist movement. The attacks of the ICTU as "communist and republican" and the threat to withdraw protestant workers from it could, if carried out, be a potentially dangerous annexation of the organised trade union movement from loyalism.

An East Antrim Workers' Council has been formed of 100 workers from about 20 factories, including ICI, British Enkalon and Courtaulds, along with farmers, small traders and representatives of the UDA and UVF. It has called for the formation of a "trade union movement which truly represents the feelings and views of the loyalist working class." The threat has not yet been carried out, and the loyalist's attitude to British based unions has not been specified. The fascist movement to take advantage of such a situation is not in existence, although the influence of Britain's largest fascist group, the National Front has been increasing.

The struggle against such developments will not, however, be aided by cries of "fascism" at every appearance of repression. Just as the cry of "wolf" as false alarms led to the success of the animal when it finally did appear, so those who shout "fascism" with such frequency today confuse and obscure the true nature of fascism. This ultimately aids fascism to spread its own mystifications, to grow, and it will have disarmed the working class by the time the real phenomenon appears.

But to glorify the protestant working class and entirely ignore developments on the right is even more dangerous. Thus the Official Republican paper "The Irish People" has been quoted with satisfaction by the UVF in their paper "Combat" when columnist Ann Devlin suggested the strike was on an "anti-business men like Hume and nincompoops like Cooper" basis. Thus the strike is not even reactionary. Ann Devlin went on, "When the southern capitalist press screams for the forcible suppression of working class Protestant people by the British Army, this is fascism". Such ignorance of both the nature of the protestant working class and of fascism can only bring delight to those fascists within the loyalist camp.

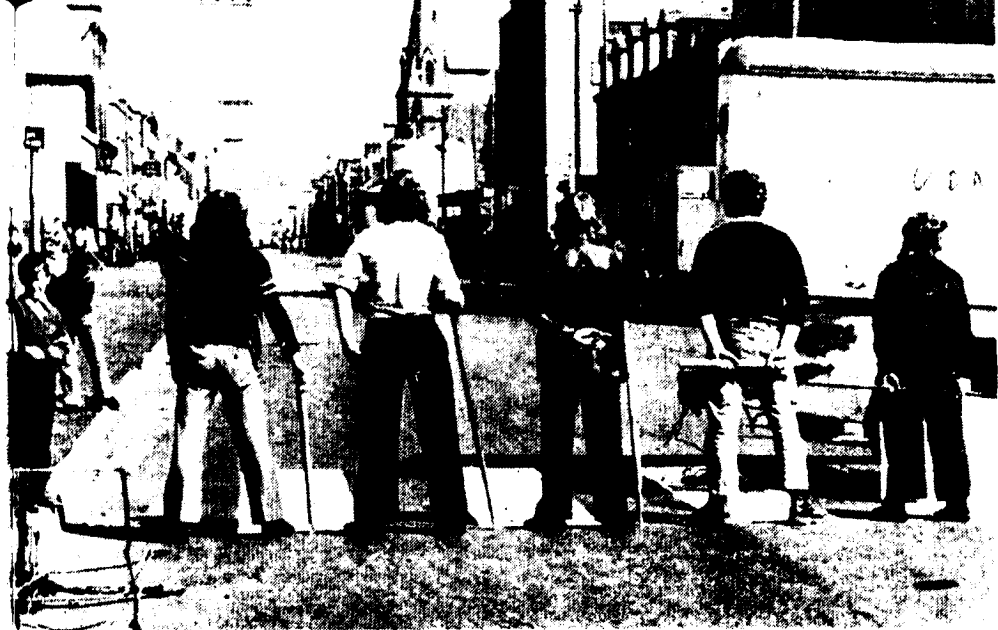
The only effective way to combat the growth of fascism in the North is by a strong mass movement against repression which can split and demoralise the loyalist solidarity.

# Britain's New Turn

The collapse of Sunningdale marks a new turning point for Britain's strategy in Ireland. Although Britain has charted a flexible course in the past and revised its policy on numerous occasions, it has nonetheless remained within a strategic framework created during the early sixties. As the crisis of British imperialism deepens and the contradictions inherent in the northern situation itself ripen, this framework is rapidly becoming a straitjacket. Increasingly, Britain is compelled to adopt a qualitatively different type of perspective.

Britain's historic interest in Ireland was to enforce an artificial division of labor and manipulate the terms of trade between both countries. Political strategy was governed by a desire to transform Ireland into a source of cheap food and labour for industrial Britain.

But the prolonged decline of British imperialism has slowly modified this. These changes were rooted in Britain's difficulties, particularly since the last world war. A low level of investment and growth coupled with increased competition on the international market and a shrinking share of world exports has caused repeated crises in Britain's balance of payments. Any attempt to find an immediate solution to this problem by restricting home demand met with the stiff resistance of a well organized and self-confident British working class. Moreover, in the long term, a restriction of home demand could only add to the stagnation of industry, making the balance of payments situation worse.



The only alternative open was to stimulate overseas investments as a source of profits. The mid-fifties – an important period for adjusting relations in Ireland – saw a significant change in this respect with a steady annual increase in the figure for long-term private investment abroad. An important part of this overseas investment found its way into Ireland, where it began to take over and dominate the new industrial base which had been developed under native control during the protectionist period. In the South of Ireland only 20 percent of industrial capital in the sixties was raised locally and of the remainder over 40 percent came from Britain. In the North too there was a significant influx of capital and even by the end of the fifties only about 30 percent of capital invested in heavy industry remained in local hands. Practically all the rest was owned by Britain.

This development demanded a more sophisticated political framework to deal with the changing relations between Britain and Ireland and between North and South. Instead of fostering artificial divisions it became necessary to maximize unity and integration.

It was recognized that such an abrupt change could not be introduced overnight. The profound social and political contradictions that had matured over centuries would take time to mellow. In the flush of growth and expansion this did not represent an insurmountable problem. A long-term strategy of rationalizing Ireland's political structures and drawing the whole country more tightly within Britain's orbit was projected.

The renewed crisis of British capitalism starting in 1969 has dealt this perspective a severe blow. When Britain's balance of payments showed a surplus in 1969 it seemed that Britain was beginning to cope with the problems clogging it since the war. But the nature of the surplus indicated

that this was not the case. It originated mainly in the fall of import prices and rise of export prices, as a result of devaluation. In other words, it did not reflect a strengthening of the economy but rather a weakening of it.

The change in Britain's prospects has had inevitable repercussions on its strategy in Ireland. As late as 1968, when the line it was pursuing became entangled by a genuine democratic upsurge among Catholic workers, Britain's response remained within the limits of the strategy of the earlier half of the decade. During the first phase of the struggle, from October 1968 to August 1971, the aim of the Labour party and the Tories was simply to restore the status quo so that the long march towards a gradual federal solution could be resumed.

But the contradictions in the North of Ireland sharpened so quickly that it was necessary to speed up the introduction of the federal solution in a gambling effort to forestall a premature confrontation. Thus, in the second phase of the struggle the Assembly and the power-sharing executive were hastily established and the Sunningdale Agreement was drawn up as a first step in the direction of the federal solution.

Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this short-term initiative was still viewed in the context of continued and expanding opportunities for British capitalism. Now that even this pre-condition can no longer be relied upon, the federal strategy has been made redundant. A whole new framework for getting the Irish situation under control once more is obviously needed. Britain has been reluctant to face this fact. Certainty about the depth of the economic and political problems facing it at home had first to be confirmed before bridges could be burned. But now that the bleak prospects for Britain are established without doubt the necessary adjustments are being made.

If the collapse of the Assembly and the power-sharing executive and the disappearance of Sunningdale indicates a change in Britain's attitude toward Ireland, then the July 4 White Paper indicates the direction of that change. It represents a decisive retreat from the federal strategy to a highly repressive solution in the present crisis.

In the new White Paper the so-called Irish Dimension is completely emasculated. From meaning that the Orange ruling class would have to subordinate its political autonomy to the dictates of the entire Irish ruling class in accordance with the requirements of British imperialism (as outlined in the Green Paper of October 1972 where the term "Irish Dimension" was first coined) it has been reduced to the plane of geography — to the fact that the Free State and the six counties have "a common land frontier"! The political significance of the "Irish Dimension" is thereby rendered meaningless. As the Irish Times (July 5) notes in its front page coverage of the White Paper: "The 'Irish Dimension' is reduced to a shadow. . . . Acceptability (of any British solution in the North) to Dublin, previously a feature of British policy, is excised from the new policy."

Power-sharing, the other main pillar of Britain's strategy, is also

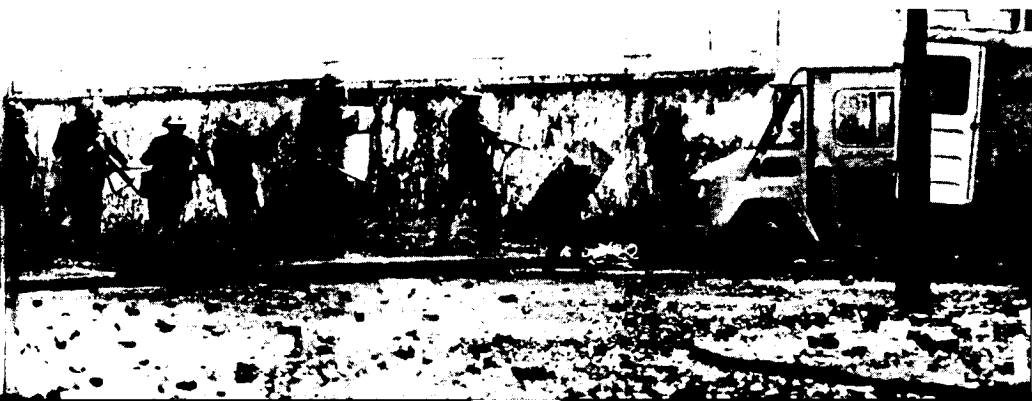




emptied of all content. Previously the Green Paper had admitted that the Catholic population had become a permanent minority in the North and that alone created a number of social and political anomalies. The first White Paper (March 1973) projected a definite system of power-sharing between the chosen political representatives of the minority and the representatives of Unionism as the only way of democratizing Northern political relations — a necessary pre-condition for the federal solution.

A measure of how much Britain's confidence has been shaken in the latest turn of events is illustrated by the second White Paper, where the rationale of power-sharing is seen simply as the need for political stability. Accordingly, the insistence that "there must be some form of power-sharing" is more a poignant cry of despair than a political conviction. There is in fact only one form of power-sharing that might have co-opted the anti-imperialist minority. That has been tried and overthrown by the Loyalists.

The only other possible form of power-sharing is that advocated by the Loyalists themselves — the inclusion of Castle Catholics and Token Taigs in an Orange-controlled cabinet. This appears to be the "some form" of power-sharing that the new White Paper has opted for. The British bourgeoisie is retreating to an acceptance of the old Stormont-type regime



with a few trimmings and trappings to save face.

Once the above has been understood it is easy to comprehend the provisions of the White Paper vis-a-vis the setting up of interim political machinery. This machinery is not a fly wheel operating a transmission belt to a further installment of the federal solution, rather it operates a transmission belt back to the pre-1968 situation.

To extricate itself from the terrible mess it is in, Britain needs a breathing space. The establishment of a Constitutional Convention to discuss possible solutions to the Northern problem is designed specially to provide this. Can anyone seriously imagine that almost five years of intense struggle can suddenly be followed by a whole period of mere chatter? That further discussion can produce some remedy that has not already been thought of and discarded? No, Britain is not so naive, nor is any solution expected. Britain is simply waiting for an opportune moment to implement the new strategy already outlined in the White Paper.

If Britain is to implement this strategy, then it must rely on a molecular process to which it supplies the energy but which it is not directly part of. In other words, Britain cannot afford a decisive blow against the minority at this moment. Such a move would unite the entire community, oust the SDLP and send tremors of revolt across the border into the South. Instead Britain is depending on the changing relationship of forces between the Catholic and Protestant communities. Within the framework of its previous approach Britain tried to keep the Loyalists in check while dealing with the minority itself. Now it is releasing the damper and permitting a balance of forces more favourable to the Loyalists to emerge.

Thus the Irish Times (July 5) observed correctly that: "Although a veto is retained for Westminster the White Paper leaves little doubt of the desire of the British Government to withdraw (in a political sense) from the scene leaving the Northern Ireland representatives to arrange matters to the best of their own ability." And when the White Paper says that "Some time is required for political groupings to emerge and develop, to engage in discussion with other parties and interests and to clarify but not foreclose their positions," what it really means is that the developing trends since the Westminster election must reach maturity before a new decisive change can be introduced.

In this light the White Paper's ambiguity on security is ominous. The SDLP was bitterly disappointed by the absence of a gesture towards creating a security force acceptable to the minority. More important is the snowballing demand among loyalist politicians for a 20,000-30,000-strong Protestant Home Guard. Although the British government has been approached officially by the Loyalists on this matter, although the demand has been coupled with renewed threats of civil war from John Laird and Bill Craig, the British government remains silent.

This cannot be because the government considers the subject too trivial to deal with. The raising of the demand on the Orange 12th of July

commemorations by Taylor was not frivolous holiday speechifying. The demand percolated through from the grassroots of loyalism. It originated in the Ulster Special Constabulary Association, a paramilitary group formed by ex-B-specials which has several thousand members and is represented on the Ulster Workers Council. This organization in itself could easily constitute the backbone of either an official or unofficial loyalist militia. It has been reported that the USCA in fact intends to emerge at the end of August as an unnamed force to recruit on a wide scale before arming.

Added to this is the growing dissatisfaction with the role of the Ulster Defense Regiment and the Royal Ulster Constabulary both among loyalists in general and members of the security forces themselves. Numerous reports of para-military loyalist groups taking over units of the UDR and carrying out sectarian operations have appeared in the press. Dissatisfaction with the RUC is also increasing. Proportionately the RUC has borne the brunt of the war against "terrorism." Figures released last month by the RUC show that since 1968 more than half the force has been injured in riots and street battles. By contrast its success against the Provos has been minimal — last year over a thousand bombs were planted



despite the unprecedented security precaution. Even the success of the security forces shows how hopeless their task is. The capturing of 282 rocket launchers and mortars, 1,598 firearms, 187,399 rounds of ammunition, and 3,400 pounds of explosives reveals only the massive size of the iceberg that lies submerged and out of the grasp of the security forces. In face of this meager performance and the cost to the morale and prestige of the UDR and RUC, the Loyalists' demand for a more aggressive force is bound to meet with a wide response in the Protestant community.

Britain's apparent oblivion to the tendency towards loyalist militarism is not without explanation. This tendency is exactly what Britain wants to see enhanced, without for the time being soiling its own hands. It will have at once outflanked the Ulster Defence Association and found an alternative and more reliable battering ram against the Catholic minority.

To date no important section of the revolutionary movement has been able to understand the dynamic and direction of the national struggle. After the establishment of the Assembly, the Officials predicted a return to normality. The far left groups with the exception of the RMG (Revolutionary Marxist Group, Irish section of the Fourth International) and the PD (People's Democracy) simply condemned the Assembly and power-sharing as an empty gesture but ignored their implication for the future course of the struggle. The Provos forecast that the Assembly would fall, but as a direct result of their own campaign.

Following the fall of the Assembly and the overthrow of Sunningdale all these organizations and groups are once more indulging themselves in facile predictions based on assumed dogma. Some see the development of an autonomous working class movement among the Protestants which will inevitably embrace socialism. Others see the withdrawal of Britain and a deal between the Republicans and Loyalists being reached. And, of course, for the far left groups, blinded by their own dogma and self-importance, nothing has changed — "the struggle goes on."

All of these assessments miss the mark by a wide margin.

Will there be an autonomous Protestant working class movement and will it embrace socialism? Those who answer this question in the affirmative are relying on the current divisions within the Loyalist camp to produce something. But they have thoroughly misunderstood the nature of these divisions. It is true that there is friction between the plebian elements of the UWC and the middle class representatives on the United Ulster Unionist Council. But this friction has not been created by any move on the part of the UWC towards socialism or even populism. What has happened is that the UWC strike brought the bourgeois leaders of Loyalism to the pinnacle of power after five years of fragmentation and frustration. Now that they are on top, the Wests, Craigs, and Paisleys are seizing the opportunity to sweep away all the intermediary forces of plebian (working class and petty bourgeois) origin in an effort to bring the movement firmly under their own control.

Those — among them certain sections of the Provo leadership — who imagine that Britain will withdraw from the North leaving it up to the Republicans and Loyalists to work out some federal compromise display an equal lack of understanding. Can these people seriously imagine that after such a long campaign to maintain its presence Britain is simply going to abandon the enormous assets it has accumulated in the North? Has British imperialism been increasing its direct share of Northern industrial and commercial capital in the last decade just to hand it over to some federal state that will be dominated by the Provos or any other group of Republicans? Not likely! Will the Loyalist bourgeoisie (or even their working class followers) who have excluded the Catholic population even from employment suddenly agree to share their spoils? What a hope!

Finally, does the “struggle” simply “go on” without any significant change? Only the myopic economic left which can’t see past petty reformist issues could believe that it does. While these fossilized caricatures of social democracy ask themselves questions that have been answered clearly by the course of events (such “profound” questions as “will the Protestant workers unite with their Catholic brothers to fight imperialism”) new and decisive questions are being posed.

The most important question in the next period is whether or not the Catholic working class will be able to wage a struggle against the emerging alliance between British imperialism and Loyalism and the return to the days of the old Stormont regime. If the answer to this question is a pessimistic one, then the recent White Paper is an epilogue to a series of imperialist manoeuvres; if the answer is optimistic then it is only an introduction to a new chapter of struggle.

Although the Catholic minority appears demoralized and submissive, there is a process of recomposition at work in the community. In the last issue of *The Plough* we tried to evaluate this process. We noted that while the SDLP still maintains political hegemony over the Catholics, the revolutionary anti-imperialist forces were slowly growing. That growth could be estimated only in terms of the electoral support received in the Assembly and Westminster elections and the re-emergence on a touch-and-go basis of street politics. Neither of these could act as sure barometers of the process of revolutionary recomposition that is going on. But that this process does exist and is exerting a real pressure is lately confirmed by the splits that have periodically opened in the ranks of the SDLP since the Loyalist triumph. Moreover, the Devlin wing has apparently got the upper hand inside the party during these controversies. The SDLP as a whole is bending to the pressure of the militancy within the ghettos, and this portends a new and more favourable atmosphere for a revolutionary upsurge among the Catholics. If the mood in the Catholic community was one of despair, the SDLP would have softened its attitude towards power-sharing and the “Irish Dimension.” Instead it was forced under pain of further weakening its already loosening electoral base to project an intransigent and militant image.

It is possible to predict that as Britain's new plans become more obvious that there will be mounting opposition from the Catholic minority. Given the critical nature of Britain's economic and political situation and the flowering confidence of Loyalism, no serious attempts to co-opt this resistance will be attempted. **The only possible outcome will be a major confrontation taking on the dimensions of civil war.**

While it is obvious that the Catholic masses will not abandon their historic aspirations without a fight, a question mark still hangs over the role of the Irish revolutionary movement. As a whole it has shown a decided inability to understand the dynamic of the struggle or to give real leadership to the broad layers who have from time to time placed confidence in them.

The coming confrontation is the last chance for a long time. Only by uniting our forces and forging real links with the masses can we hope to meet the challenge.



## DATES

- October 30th 1972 British Government's Green Paper on the future of Northern Ireland published.
- March 20th 1973 British Government's White Paper, 'Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals', published.
- June 30th Northern Ireland Assembly election results announced: Faulkner Unionists, 23; SDLP, 19; Unofficial Unionists, 10; DUP, 9; Alliance, 8; Vanguard, 6; West Belfast Loyalists, 2; NILP, 1.
- November 21st Agreement reached between Faulkner Unionists, SDLP, Alliance and Whitelaw on form of Northern Ireland Executive.
- November 28th Loyalist members stage disruptions in Assembly.
- December 6th Sunningdale talks start.
- December 9th Sunningdale conference agrees on terms for Council of Ireland.
- March 1st 1974 Anti-Sunningdale Loyalists win 11 of the 12 seats in the British General Election.
- May 14th Loyalist Ulster Workers Council declares general strike against Sunningdale agreement.
- May 28th Faulkner Unionists resign from Northern Ireland Assembly, — fall of Sunningdale.
- May 29th Ulster Workers Council strike ends. British Government prorogues Northern Ireland Assembly.
- July 4th British Government's White Paper, 'The Northern Ireland Constitution' published.



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The articles in this pamphlet, reprinted from *the Plough*, an Irish revolutionary socialist paper, trace British strategy in the Six Counties of Northern Ireland from early 1973 to late 1974.

Its publication comes at a critical time for the revolutionary movement, evidenced by organisational realignments and a crisis of perspective in the Catholic ghettos. To understand the dynamic of the struggle and the tasks of revolutionaries it is essential to have a clear and precise analysis of the development of British strategy. These articles not only describe events, but also point the way forward; for that reason they will be of vital interest to all who seek the overthrow of British imperialism in Ireland.

A REVOLUTIONARY MARXIST GROUP PAMPHLET

25p

