

NORTHERN IRELAND

Betty Sinclair*

THE Border Poll of March 8 revealed little change in the balance of forces, Unionist and anti-Unionist, over the past four and a half years. If anything, the anti-Unionist element who voted for joining the Irish Republic and those who abstained was well over the usual third of the electorate. The result of the poll was as follows:

To remain as part of the UK	591,820
To join with the Irish Republic	6,463
Spoiled votes	5,973
Total electorate	1,031,633
Abstention vote	427,377

Of those who were eligible to vote, the percentage for the Union was 57.5. But no one had any illusions about the conduct of the poll. The anti-Unionists boycotted the poll. There were few persons other than Unionists inside the polling stations. Allegations were rife about 'stuffing the boxes'. William Deedes, British Tory MP, admitted in his article in the *Sunday Telegraph* (March 11) that the returning officers, poll clerks and observers (Unionists) had an 'astonishingly close acquaintance with the voters'. He went on to say that 'observers' were 'unusually' allowed inside the polling stations and 'often worked alongside the poll clerks.' What Deedes did not make clear to the readers was that the 'observers' were persons working in the Unionist interest. They were breaking the electoral law, and the poll officials, responsible for the conduct of the poll, condoned these breaches. It will be clear that the Border Poll was a sop to the ultra-Unionists and a further exercise in sectarian politics. Anything the Unionist regime could do in this wise, the Whitelaw one could do better—with the aid of 33,000 armed forces!

The poll has revealed nothing that was not known except that the anti-Unionist front, which has suffered much from harassment from the British Army and the sectarian murders of workers, still rejects any return of a Stormont Unionist administration whatever might be the wishes of the Heath Government and those in Northern Ireland who would cry 'quits' at any price.

In the camp of the Unionists, who welcomed the poll results, there are serious doubts about the intentions of the British Government and fears that they may have delivered themselves over to accepting

* This article was written before the publication of the White Paper.

solutions not in accord with their demands. Since the inception of direct rule in March 1972, Whitelaw has been seeking a 'moderate centre' from the Unionist and anti-Unionist camps. So far he has been unsuccessful. William Craig MP, leader of the Ulster Loyalist Council, who has taken part in talks with MPs of the Social Democrat and Labour Party, stated after the poll that 'loyalists would not accept a solution that did not bring cabinet government,' and 'they were not prepared to accept a situation which did not restore to a Stormont parliament control of security.' Faulkner, more cautious, stands wondering when, and where, to jump. If the anti-Unionists have rejected Stormont rule by the Unionists, it can be assumed that the Unionists do not relish rule by Westminster.

The latest effort to capture the leadership of the Unionist forces, and a few days before the expected publication of the White Paper, has come from the Rev Ian Paisley MP, leader of the Democratic (*sic*) Unionist Party and Capt L. P. S. Orr, leader of the Unionist MPs at Westminster, who called a meeting of all the organisations of the 'loyalists', and have put forward the following demands: defeat of the IRA, no Council of Ireland unless the Republic recognises the Constitution of Northern Ireland (i.e. the Government of Ireland Act, 1920), restoration of the Northern Ireland parliament or full integration with Britain, and local control of the police. Faulkner, still leader of the Unionist Party and at variance with Orr for some time, who was subject to very strong opposition from Paisley when he was Prime Minister—'Faulkner must go'—was 'invited' to attend the meeting.

The Green Paper, issued after the Darlington Talks of last September, contained the guide-lines for the White Paper. In Paragraph 74 the terms were clearly laid down of accepting the link with Britain. It was stated:

So long as Northern Ireland remains part of the United Kingdom, the United Kingdom parliament must be the sovereign authority over all persons, matters and things in Northern Ireland, and the ultimate acceptance of that authority must be a necessary condition of the financial economic and military assistance from which Northern Ireland benefits as part of the United Kingdom.

The United Kingdom Government was said to have major concerns in Northern Ireland (para 74):

First, it [Northern Ireland] should be internally at peace—a divided and strife-ridden province is bound to disturb and weaken the whole Kingdom. Secondly, that it should prosper, so as to contribute to and not detract from

the prosperity of the whole. Thirdly, that Northern Ireland should not offer a base for any external threat to the security of the United Kingdom. In pursuing these objectives, the Government will wish to consider at all times the views and interests in Northern Ireland and take them *as fully as possible* into account [emphasis added].

Both the Irish and Northern Ireland 'dimensions' will be required to be completely subordinate to the United Kingdom 'dimension', and supplement the role of Britain inside the Common Market. For the Irish capitalist class this may be a matter of easy agreement as more and more British and other foreign countries establish their ascendancy in industry and commerce, North and South, through their multi-national corporations, banks, hire purchase and insurance companies, building societies, the United Stock Exchange (since last June embracing all stock exchanges in Britain and Ireland), and the united working which has been established between the Confederation of Irish Industry and the Northern Ireland branch of the Confederation of British Industry. David Howell, Minister of State for Northern Ireland, was reported as saying that the 'border will mean little in the economic sense in the context of Europe.' And so big business, with Britain as the dominant partner, will accept a White Paper which lays down the framework to carry this 'partnership' forward into the future.

There will be no attempt, or wish, to end the political divisions deliberately created over many years between the common people in the North, or between such people North and South: economic unity in favour of the multi-national corporations, and disunity between the manual and professional workers so that the latter will never be strong enough to fight their class enemies at home or challenge the role of British imperialism in Ireland.

Direct rule, now extended for another year, was welcomed by the 'political infants' who thought that there would be ushered in an era of 'British justice'. These hopes were shortlived and remain only in the breasts of the Northern Ireland Labour and Alliance Parties who are actuated by a despair that the people of Northern Ireland will ever be able to come together to work out solutions in their interests. The Whitelaw administration proceeded to govern with the aid of all the repressive legislation instituted by the Unionists. The weapon of internment was retained and reinforced by the Detention of Terrorists Order—*passed by the Westminster parliament*; 'Operation Motorman', to open up the no-go areas of the anti-Unionists, was carried out last July and no action was taken against the para-military forces that were growing up on the Unionist right.

The British armed forces gave little or no protection to Catholic families and business people who lost their homes and livelihoods. (A spokesman of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive estimated that 20,000 families have moved in the past three and a half years—mostly Catholic families.)

The progressive forces have called for a Bill of Rights to protect all citizens, and this has been supported by the British and Irish Trades Union Congresses. Over 750 persons have been killed since August 1969, and most of those deaths have occurred in the first year of direct rule. It was also in that year that sectarian assassinations of workers took place, which now total more than 120.

Whilst money has been poured in to maintain the security forces and assist big business (mostly British) no steps have been taken to introduce any democratic reforms. What disheartens progressive forces in Ireland is the almost total acceptance by the Labour Opposition at Westminster of British Tory policy in Ireland, and especially in the North. How can the Labour Opposition accept such undemocratic rule for any section of the United Kingdom? If they accept such for 1½ million people in Northern Ireland, it will be an easy step towards accepting the same conditions for 55 million people in Britain—especially when the call for (Tory) 'law and order' becomes more rampant. British military wallahs who deal with the theory and practice of military rule and the new ideas of 'urban guerrilla warfare', look upon Northern Ireland as a training ground for possible future eventualities if and when the people of Britain begin to roll the bosses off their backs. The dangers are very great.

The workers are fighting back. Through the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), the local District Committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, the Belfast Trades Union Council and the excellent lead given by the 250-strong conference of representatives of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers' Union, serious efforts are being made to win all workers away from sectarian activities and ideologies and to establish a strong working class leadership. Movements of tenants' associations are building up to cut the sectarian divide. Social problems, the legacy of half a century of Unionist neglect, are being tackled in a more determined way and were much in evidence at the historic conference of 400 representatives from 60 organisations which was called by the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trades Unions on March 3.

The will is growing for working class unity. This will can grow if the correct setting is provided. The White Paper, unless it contains

the pattern for democratic rights for all—from Unionists to Republicans—will only hold back the struggle. The people of Northern Ireland must be provided with the framework that will enable them to make good the destruction that has been caused, the total cost of which could reach over £100 million; to end the unemployment and slums which have been a root cause of all the dissension; to end a political set-up that can only be maintained by a perpetuation of sectarianism; and, in the words of the ICTU resolution, which 'accepts the right of persons peacefully to advocate political change, including changes in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland.'

In these grim days that lie before us, we look to the British trade union and labour movement for assistance. We are both ranged against the same Tory Government. We are both fighting for democratic rights for our movements and peoples against a Government determined to rob the British people of the rights they have won through the centuries and to prevent the extension of democracy to the people of Northern Ireland. That struggle we must win if we are to write our working class paper that will usher in an era of peace and amity in Northern Ireland and between the workers of Britain and the whole of Ireland.

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