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WHAT IS THE WORKERS COUNCIL

The Northern Ireland Executive was toppled on the 28th May, 1974, by the Ulster Workers Council in a bold and bloodless coup after the British Security Forces had wretched repeatedly on supporting the Executive writ.

The move made by the loyalist workers to overthrow the Executive was as unexpected as it was effective in its deadly execution. It was quite unexpected in that it was initiated and sustained by the U.W.C. - an organisation that sprang to life from the debris left behind by the discredited and defunct Loyalist Workers Association.

This was a mass movement of Loyalist workers, led by William Hull, which in 1971 and immediately afterwards, organised thousands of card-carrying members into a series of one-day strikes in favour of internment Catholics and in opposition to the fall of Stormont.

The movement was located in the heavy Engineering shops and factories of the Lagan Valley. Its organisation and its membership corresponded to that of the Trade Union Movement in its operations on the shop floor. It embraced all the firms in the Industrial Estates of Belfast. "It was instantly successful with its organisational know-how and had the muscle to close factories down at will. Many of the reports at the time indicated that the muscle was really provided for in the shadowy form of masked gunmen who saw to it that the L.A.W. directives to Catholics to clear off the job were backed up.

At this time, leaders of L.A.W. were to be found on the same platform of Mr. William Craig. They were present on at least two occasions at public meetings when he said that loyalists should use their economic power to discriminate against Catholics



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in the North and again, when he urged Loyalist workers to compile lists of Catholics for liquidation.

Throughout the entire period that this organisation was active, Catholics working in the Engineering Industry were the victims of a vicious campaign of persecution. Many of them left these workshops never to go back again: when they were slow to leave the threat or the use of violence was employed against them. An unlimited amount of power in the hands of certain leaders of L.A.W. soon created its own brand of problems. Personality differences erupted which were quickly followed by disastrous results for them in the Assembly Elections in June, 1973. Funds were mishandled or not accounted for and a full-time organiser was assumed to have absconded for this reason. Senior members were seen to resign on a scale that was to have considerable effect on membership lists. L.A.W. was on the rocks and in danger of foundering.

Last Autumn, some of the remaining leaders who still believed in the idea of harnessing the industrial strength of workers to the loyalist cause embarked upon a rescue operation.

Two leading Trade Unionists from the Belfast area, one from the Aircraft Factory and the other from the Shipyard, recognised the potential capacity of the loyalist workers to stop everything in a general stoppage.

They immediately set about forming the Ulster Workers Council on a similar basis to that of L.A.W. A wider range of workers were introduced into the Council. Backing was sought from paramilitary groups, farmers and the Orange Order.

A general stoppage was planned for 14th May after four other dates had been turned down. The stoppage was to coincide with



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predictable assembly vote at Stormont being recorded in favour of accepting the terms of the Sunningdale package.

The Vanguard Movement were among the early backers for the stoppage. Their leader, Mr. William Craig, knew of the plans from the beginning. Their Headquarters in Hawthornden Road were handed over and became the main base of operations. Mr. Craig was the first spokesman for the strikers at a time when Mr. Paisley had left in haste to bury an Aunt in Canada which he didn't have and when Mr. West was still waiting on the bookies to pay out the winnings before he put his money on the U.W.C.

The most bizarre backer was the Down Orange Welfare. Its leader is an ancient warrior called Colonel Peter Brush who is a deputy lieutenant for Co. Down and a member of the infamous Kildare Street Club. The past membership of the Club included military predecessors <sup>like the former Major Sir</sup> who would have approved warmly of the old phoney's present antics. He leads a substantial group of farmers who operate a loose form of association for the promotion of self-help ideals. Under Brush's supervision they spilled over into the paramilitary business because of the use to which they put their tractors and licenced shotguns in the course of the stoppage.

The Orange Order through their volunteers gave the stoppage full backing. It was ironic for them that in the aftermath of the stoppage ~~that~~ large arms dumps were found in a number of Orange Halls while the Order still posed as a corner stone of Law and Order. Documents found with the arms indicated that the Central Committee of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland had issued a directive to Lodges to organise a trained and disciplined



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para-military force. It is unassailably accepted that Orange Volunteers have engaged in violent activities against Catholic targets in the North.

Perhaps, the most perplexing participant on the Co-ordinating Committee was the representative of the former Ulster Special Constabulary. This organisation for all practical purposes no longer exists. It was disbanded four years ago after repeated and strong criticism of its anti-Catholic behaviour had been made in the Courts, in Parliament and by the Cameron and Scarman Tribunals. It is now assumed that it was the Ulster Defence Regiment which was being represented. This Regiment is made up entirely of U.S.C. personnel. It is under their control and motivated by their values. The U.D.R. like the rest of the regiments in the British Army, is equipped with a wide range of modern weapons, some of which from time to time are siphoned off to the U.V.F. Training facilities for loyalist para-military organisations are always available through U.D.R. channels.

The most important factor in the success of the stoppage was the underwriting of it by the paramilitary forces - the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Ulster Defence Association. Both organisations are Belfast based and have large memberships. They were put to use on the morning following the start of the stoppage when they were formed into armed units to visit the various industrial estates to close down factories. While the stoppage lasted, they were required to keep a presence on these estates to prevent workers returning to their jobs and to man a network of road blocks that prevented movement unless with the blessing of the Co-ordination Committee. Responsibility for public order was, by default, shifted on to their shoulders.



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There can be no doubt, however, that one of these two groups was to blame for the terrible bombings in Dublin which cost twenty seven lives. Cars in which the explosives were carried to Dublin were hijacked and the owners held in houses in North Belfast until after the bombs had exploded.

The hijackings were carried out in public in areas which had been sealed off by the U.D.A. and the U.V.F. It was impossible for them to happen or the cars to travel in or out of the sealed off areas without the acquiescence of the local paramilitary pickets.

What happened in Dublin and Monaghan was part of a supportive campaign that was put into reverse only when the total carnage created by the explosions was beamed back to Belfast on to the T.V. screens.

By the stoppage succeeding so completely the U.W.C. have produced a crushing veto to any political initiative of which they do not approve. Thus, nothing moves unless it is favourable to their views on what type of North they want.

It is in this area that they can be pushed off the rails, for the unity that existed between them and their leading politicians during the stoppage was merely skin deep.

It is abundantly clear to them, as to everyone else, that the Loyalist leaders are hell bent on acquiring personal power. They hoped to see it delivered to them by forcing through a U.D.I. solution similar to that secured some years ago by Ian Smith in Rhodesia.

The U.W.C., on the other hand, were motivated in this action as much by a crude class hatred of the landed gentry and

local business tycoons who for years dominated Unionist Party politics as by their fears of a United Ireland via Sunningdale.

Predictably there are stormy days ahead for the loyalist United Front when they get down to the business of evolving policies for the future.

The politicians who acted as spokesmen during the stoppage are little if any way removed from the lines pursued by the Faulkner Unionists who were jettisoned by them on the overthrow of the Executive. Indeed it is a fact that William Craig, Harry West and Ian Paisley displayed no interest in the social and economic issues that passed through the Northern legislative processes over the years. They cannot be trusted to represent the interest of working class people that make up the bulk of U.W.C. membership. The U.W.C. recognise this fact. At present they are engaged in trying to hold off elections for the N.I. Assembly, against the wishes of the politicians, until their own leaders are better prepared. It is only by following this course that they can cash the cheque they wrote by their own efforts.