

BACK TO SQUARE ONE?

Betty Sinclair

WHEN the Northern Ireland Parliament was opened by King George V on June 22, 1921, there were in attendance 40 Unionist members. The 12 Opposition Members (six Nationalists and six Sinn Feiners, including de Valera who had been elected for Down) refused to attend. They did not enter Stormont until 1925.

When the Northern Ireland Parliament opened its new session on October 5, 1971, with all doors locked and no member of the public allowed to be present, there were 39 Unionist MPs of various shades and hues, including four who had become members of the new Democratic Unionist Party led by Paisley and Boal. There was one Opposition MP from the Northern Ireland Labour Party. The 12 other Opposition Members, six from the Nationalist Party and six from the Social Democratic Labour Party, had refused to attend following their announcement in the month of July that they were withdrawing from Stormont.

Robbie Burns was a great poet, philosopher and, above all, a realist. It was he who wrote the famous phrase: 'Facts are chieftains that winna ding.' And the great problem for the supporters of Unionism is that they will not accept the true nature of the Northern Ireland state, and all that it has meant and what it stands for today. Prime Minister Brian Faulkner's speech to the farcical assembly at Stormont on October 5, when the Nationalist and SDLP Members continued their boycott of Parliament, despite all the bluster and blood-thirstiness, did try to present the facts. He pointed out that Northern Ireland (i.e. the Unionist Party) '... cannot win this struggle alone.' He went on to say:

It is now more than ever important that the UK [Tory] and Northern Ireland [Tory] Governments should form a *common view* of the situation and work together by *agreed means* to the vital end of restoring [Tory] peace and stability (My emphasis).

The *Belfast Telegraph*, in *Viewpoint*, October 5 (three years after October 5, 1968, in Derry, when Unionist rule was thrust into the melting pot by the original act of repression against the civil rights movement) stated:

The real power over Ulster, economically and militarily, lies in Westminster, but this is a fact which Mr Craig and those prepared to consider UDI are

unwilling and incapable of facing. These are the forces which threaten to drag Mr Faulkner down, just as they dragged down Captain O'Neill and Major Chichester-Clark . . . [whose] only crime was to recognise what they themselves failed to recognise—that *the old false concept of Northern Ireland as a sovereign state is dead* (My emphasis).

Lord Brookeborough, when he was deposed as Prime Minister in 1963, warned that he had 'not been master in his own house.' He had to get the green light from the British Treasury for every penny he spent. Capt O'Neill, when he was facing his tormentors within his own party, also made known Stormont's subservient position *vis-à-vis* Westminster. Chichester-Clark told the Stormont House of Commons a few days before he was forced out of office: 'Whoever comes to this despatch box will find the same problems, and face the same situations as I have done.' He was referring to his Government's lack of power and its true role as a very subordinate instrument of the Westminster Government and Parliament.

So Faulkner is fourth in line to use his Government's subordinate position in his own defence, and, in turn, use the pressure of his friends and opponents to extract from Heath and his unholy Conservative crew consent to use additional repressive measures, i.e. a 'third force', which would give the appearance of being 'master' to the dissidents within the Unionist camp. (The tragedy was that the Wilson Labour Government, 1966-70, did not put a stop to the Unionists' unfailing capacity for introducing reactionary legislation to 'deal with the situation'.) All that Faulkner has asked for has come apparently willingly from Heath and Maudling, and especially so in the deployment of the British Army against the anti-Unionist forces.

This continued encouragement of black reaction in Northern Ireland enabled internment to be brought in with all its tragic consequences for the Catholic and Protestant working class. The new demand, for a 'third force' of Unionist supporters, rejected recently by Defence Minister Lord Carrington, in the Protestant ghettos, *is already a practical reality* and only awaits the sanction of Heath and the British Parliament. Faulkner, even more than his predecessors, is a prisoner of the ultras, and Heath plays with lives if he also, in turn and in his desire to maintain Faulkner, allows such a force to be formalised and legalised. John McQuade, MP for Woodvale (Democratic Unionist), threatened in Parliament that 'his people were almost past keeping law and order and he did not know how long they could be held.' He had no answer to give them when they were doing 'vigilante duties' every night; they would have to continue until there was a UDR unit in their area, 'which would put an end to any

trouble.' The Ulster Defence Regiment, legislated for by the Wilson Government as a force under his Government, is now, if the ultras are given Heath's ear, to be transformed into 'localised units' which the ultras will fully support and which will take the place of the disbanded 'B' Specials.

The Orange Order's 'new Ulster Covenant' is said to have been signed by 500,000 persons at Orange Halls throughout Northern Ireland. The Order have made known their demands on Faulkner in no uncertain terms, and this action, in stirring up old and reactionary passions, bodes ill for any peaceful political settlement. Defections of a serious nature have taken place from top to bottom of the Unionist Party. MPs Paisley, Boal, Beattie and McQuade have launched a new party, the Democratic Unionist Party—a contradiction in terms—and have occupied the opposition benches at Stormont to continue the campaign to bring down Faulkner and restore the old Protestant Unionist ascendancy, at whatever cost. Mr Wm. Craig has come out with his credo of UDI and has told his supporters that 'Ulster could go it alone.' He also maintained that Westminster could probably be persuaded to accept the fall of Faulkner and the reincarnation of the progenitors of the Northern Ireland state, Carson and Craig, within new physical frames looking like Craig or Paisley. The history and practices of previous British administrations towards colonial subjects and territories would make one hesitate to deny such an assumption, or draw a similar conclusion.

If such an assumption is not wrong, then the troubles of Northern Ireland since 1920 and to date will look like a harmless variation of a Donnybrook Fair. The results would be too grim to contemplate. Already working class areas in Belfast have been forced into tight Catholic and Protestant ghettos by the removal of over 2,000 families (over 10,000 men, women and children) from 'mixed areas' by intimidation, arson and other means, whilst the police and British Army units looked on. There are few 'middle areas' left in the city, and in those that still remain they live in fear that they too will be evicted by the bullyboys in the ranks of Unionist reaction. The Unionist administration, at local and central government level, are fully aware of what has taken place and have refused to interfere. Whilst declaiming against 'terrorists' and 'no-go-areas', i.e. anti-Unionist areas, they have accepted 'bush law' when it is administered by 'loyalists'. The Heath Government still have 'their man' at Stormont, ostensibly to guide the Government here into the ways and practices of democracy. By common consensus, his role is now

interpreted as knowing and condoning all the horrors that go to make up Northern Ireland's social, economic and political life.

The '... chieftains that winna ding'. These, in Northern Ireland's case, are represented by the area's real position within the 'United Kingdom'. The great political difficulty for Faulkner, and those who went before him, is to get his supporters, and others, to accept that reality. Northern Ireland has been represented as an 'integral part' of the UK, and it was, and is, no such thing. It has been called part of the 'mainland' of Britain and even geographers could not agree with that. So part of the whole problem is to have these false terms and the reality accepted, and at the same time prevent the mass of Protestant Unionist supporters turning completely against Unionism and Westminster. And all the latter's 'plans' for Ireland. With the realisation of the awful truth there will probably come a terrible retribution and the gain will not be one for British imperialism. It could, despite the darkness that hovers immediately, be a gain for the progressive forces in the whole of Ireland.

The problem of 'security' and 'law and order' thus becomes one of retaining Northern Ireland within the framework of British political and economic control with the aid of British armed forces; also to ensure the control of British monopoly capitalist interests over 80 per cent of industrial, commercial and farming interests here. The day is fast approaching for the facing up to the real facts of life in Northern Ireland. The resentments that such a facing up will bring will tax the strength of giants. The Faulkners and Heaths will attempt to do this in their own way but, in the end, they will not count.

When the British Parliament resumes and debates the situation in Northern Ireland, it will have to come up with much better results than were evidenced during the recall debate on September 22-23. The British Labour Party will have to discard the so-called bipartisan policy on Northern Ireland. If they do not, then they will have decided deliberately to deliver the people here up to greater reaction and terror legalised by a British Parliament. This must not be allowed to put back for generations the possibility, through a correct political solution, of working class Catholic and Protestant men and women coming together in defence of their true class and national interests.

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