

TALKING TO THE SDLP

(This article was written on Thursday, 26th July. At time of going to press it is unclear when the UDA-SDLP talks will in fact take place.)

THE DECISION OF THE UDA TO HOLD TALKS WITH CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS IN GENERAL AND WITH THE SDLP IN PARTICULAR, shows a new spirit of confidence in the Loyalist ranks. Up till now, the 'grass roots' Loyalists have been unable to deal with the situation politically. They have relied on their own strength and determination to carry them through and have left all the talking and politicking to the professionals. But the professionals have quite clearly not produced the goods. The Assembly Unionists and Alliance Party are out in the cold, because they were unable to face up to the SDLP. But whereas Faulkner at least tried to cope with the SDLP and get them to behave in a responsible fashion, the UUUC just sit back and abuse them. However much they may deserve such abuse, the fact remains that they are the elected representatives of about a quarter of the population, and they're not as bad as the two IRAs. Granted that Catholics are not likely to be voting for out and out unionists in the near future, the Loyalists have to at least attempt to get through to the SDLP, if only to make it clear to all concerned (including the Catholics) that it is only their inability to get rid of their aspirations that is standing in the way of a peaceful settlement.

Nonetheless, there are serious difficulties that shouldn't be underestimated. The UDA was not set up as a political organization. They have very little experience in dealing with anti-partitionist politicking. Already there are signs that the whole disgusting machinery of Catholic Nationalist manoeuvring has been set in operation. A news bulletin on Wednesday announced that it was hoped that the discussions would produce a joint statement condemning internment. That is undoubtedly what the SDLP will try to get. Another article in this Bulletin ("Internment is NOT the Central Issue"), explains why we hope they will not succeed. The other thing they will undoubtedly try to do, will be to scare the UDA with the idea of a British withdrawal. Why that prospect should scare the Loyalists, though, is something of a mystery. If the British withdraw, the Loyalists will take over. It's very difficult to understand why the SDLP should have devoted so much time and effort to trying to bring about this - from their point of view - most undesirable state of affairs.

On the UDA side, the problem will be a very strong temptation to give up on the first try. It's important to realise that nothing substantial can emerge from one meeting. The SDLP are not going to give up their aspirations overnight. But if it is obvious that the 'extreme' Loyalists are prepared to talk, and are prepared to consider ways in which the political and social isolation of the Catholic community can be ended, then there will be pressure on the SDLP to take a more sensible line. Grass roots Catholics want a peaceful settlement, and they couldn't care less about the Council of Ireland (and they're not nearly as worked up about Internment as their politicians like to think they are). When it becomes obvious that it is their representatives that are the main obstacle to ending the conflict, they are likely to start thinking fast. The UDA must make it clear that, while they are not going to be fooled by any political trickery on the part of the SDLP, they are prepared to face up to and endure the ordeal of the long series of discussions that will be necessary before the aspirations of the SDLP begin to crack.

...AND A NOTE ON LOYALIST UNITY

THE UDA HAVE ONLY BEEN ABLE to take these initiatives since they left the Co-ordinating Committee of the Paramilitary groups. At first sight, this looks like a threat to the unity of Loyalist ranks. But if the Loyalist organizations are not to be allowed to behave differently, what is the point in having different organizations? Unity is important when it's a matter of taking militant action against a common enemy - as was the case with the strike and with the big paramilitary demonstrations after direct rule was imposed. It is also important in elections held under the direct vote system where a split vote could let in an anti-partitionist. Under Proportional Representation, unionists (or republicans) can vote for a number of unionist (or republican) candidates in order of preference, without the danger of splitting the vote. So people who are agreed on their position as regards the border, can disagree on matters of general policy. As long as it is possible to get united action when united action is important, it is a good thing that there should be a wide variety of political approaches being tried out by different organizations on the Loyalist side. Ultimately the people will decide which methods they like and which they don't, so that while going out on a limb as the UDA have done is a risk, it is a risk only to the popularity of the UDA, not in any way to the continued existence of the N. Ireland state !

INTERMENT IS NOT THE CENTRAL ISSUE

BECAUSE REPUBLICANS HAVEN'T A HOPE OF GETTING A UNITED IRELAND, they like to concentrate on issues that are irrelevant to the central one - the Border. The Civil Rights agitation itself was an attempt to divert attention away from the need for the Catholic community to drop its anti-partitionism and integrate fully into society in Northern Ireland. Instead of facing up to the fact that their isolation from society was due to their leaders continually campaigning for the destruction of the state, they insisted on blaming 'the other side' and attributing their (largely self-imposed) isolation solely to 'Unionist bigotry'.

Since Internment was introduced, it has become the main diversionary issue for the Republicans. The Official IRA, the Communist Party of Ireland, the SDLP and all the various 'front' groups that have grown up to confuse things (the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, the Association for Legal Justice, the Catholic Anti-Discrimination Association, the Central Citizens' Defence Committee, the Catholic Ex-Servicemen's Association, the Anti-Internment League, the Irish Civil Rights Association), have all been kept in business over this single issue.

It is tempting to try and put them out of business by ending internment - but ending internment means releasing a large number of Provisional IRA men. The people who call for the ending of internment never say what's going to be done about Provos who can't be 'convicted' in the normal way (the idea that in a war situation the army should have to act solely on the basis of 'citizen arrest' is ludicrous). The Provos - and getting rid of them - are the main political problem facing the Catholic community, since it's in the Catholic community that they're operating: it is this problem that Catholic organizations should attend to - not opposition to the necessarily clumsy means that have to be used by people outside that community.

Now, however, these organizations are being given a big morale booster by Loyalist spokesmen who are also opposing internment and calling for a Bill of Rights. As Tomas Mac Giolla, President of Official Sinn Fein, puts it: 'I am more and more convinced that if the NICRA were now to reactivate their campaign for a Bill of Rights and an end to internment they could get much broader support than was possible a couple of years ago'.

Doubtless the NICRA, (which is an Official Sinn Fein front), will do just that, and doubtless in their forthcoming talks with the UDA, they are going to try to get a common front against internment. (Contd. p. 4)

WHAT DOES "ANTI-IMPERIALISM" MEAN ?

THE OFFICIAL IRA held a conference of 'anti-imperialists' recently.

What are 'anti-imperialists' ?

Basically anti-imperialists are people who are opposed to foreign domination of their national economy.

Sometimes this domination takes the form of conquest, so the 'anti-imperialists' have to expel a foreign occupying force.

More often, nowadays, it takes the form of foreign businesses setting up branches in the local economy which, being more efficiently run on a larger scale than the local firms, are able to beat them in open competition and, often, to force them to close.

Sometimes, especially in the case of foreign 'conquest', this 'imperialism' can hold back the development of the local economy, and prevent people from getting jobs and raising their standard of living. In such cases, the 'anti-imperialists' are right to be opposed to it.

But the presence of 'foreign' firms can help to stimulate the economy, create jobs and introduce new techniques that local businessmen would not have had the knowledge or the capital to apply. In such cases, the slogan of 'anti-imperialism' becomes the slogan of the jealous local businessmen who are unable to compete.

The Official IRA and the Communist Party of Ireland claim that they are 'anti-imperialists' opposing British Imperialism in Ireland. They claim that the 'British presence' is the main obstacle to 'the people of Ireland' taking control of the natural resources of Ireland and using them to their own benefit.

Unfortunately, no countries nowadays are totally self-sufficient, unless people are prepared to go back to living on three acres and a cow. They did seriously ! - try that in the South under de Valera in the thirties and the forties, with the result that there was massive unemployment and emigration. But if you want to live in a nice modern country, with televisions, cars, aeroplanes and such things you need to get machinery, knowledge and money from outside. At the moment it comes mostly from Britain. Where's it going to come from if you expel the British ? From Russia ? Would 'the people of Ireland' really prefer Russian imperialism (such as they have in Eastern European countries) to British imperialism ?

In the North, we don't regard the 'British presence' as foreign. The majority of people 'feel' British, and have no problems of national identity, or of feeling 'put upon' by foreigners.

In the South, however, there is a clash of identities. On the one hand there are 'Irish' things - Guinness, the Irish language, the Catholic church, laws against divorce and contraception, shamrocks, folk music, Gaelic football, etc. On the other hand there are 'British' things - BBC, soccer, large scale industry, trade unions, 'the permissive society', pop music etc. The Official IRA would like to wipe out all the British things and leave us with the Irish things, or rather, with the Irish things minus the only substantial one - the Catholic church and its social teaching. And they are upset because the British Protestants in Ulster are not enthusiastic about the idea.

What it amounts to is fear of large scale enterprises, especially if they are run by foreigners (though they are fond of occasionally attacking large scale native businesses just to show how broadminded they are). It is a sentiment that is more appropriate to the owners of small businesses than to workers, who have no chance of owning any businesses, large or small, and who are - quite rightly - mainly concerned with their wage packets and working conditions. (Contd. page 4)

INTERMENT (contd)

The reason why the Protestant organizations oppose internment is obviously that they want their own men released. Tommy Lyttle of the UDA admitted in a recent TV interview that they could offer no alternative, but that anything that was done would have to be done 'within the law' - which is, effectively to pretend that there isn't a war situation, and that the Provos are just normal criminals. The UVF in their paper Combat criticized the Young Unionist, Frank Miller, Jun., for spelling out that his support for internment meant that he supported internment of Loyalists. But the UVF do not spell out the fact that their opposition to internment means supporting the release of the Provos. According to Combat:

'Mr. Miller attacked Mr. Ken Gibson (in his absence) of the Ulster Volunteer Force because of the latter's efforts to bring about an end to the repressive Emergency Provisions Act, which permits the Security Forces to imprison Loyalists without trial'.

The Emergency Provisions Act also permits the Security Forces to imprison Provos without trial, and since the only way to deal with the Provos is to repress them, we can't really complain about it being 'repressive'.

Our view on the internees is that they should be treated as prisoners of war - treated well, given good visiting facilities and released when the organizations to which they are affiliated declare and successfully maintain a ceasefire, on the clear understanding that they're reliable to be picked up again if the ceasefires are broken.

We also feel that Republican organizations should not be allowed to make internment a central issue, and that Protestants should not join with them in what would effectively be a common front against the British (that is what the Official IRA and Communist Party of Ireland dream about when they go to bed at night). The only possible platform on which Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland can unite is to build a peaceful and democratic state in Ulster. The political representatives of the Catholic community must not be allowed any diversion from the need to face up to that.

"ANTI-IMPERIALISM" (contd)

As socialists, we have always imagined that everyone would be better off under socialism, which would be even more efficiently organized on an even larger scale than capitalism. If however socialism means confinement in a tight little turf-powered economy with everybody speaking a language that is of merely antiquarian interest to the rest of Europe, then we'll be quite happy to settle for capitalism (and, for that matter, 'imperialism'), until something better comes along.

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