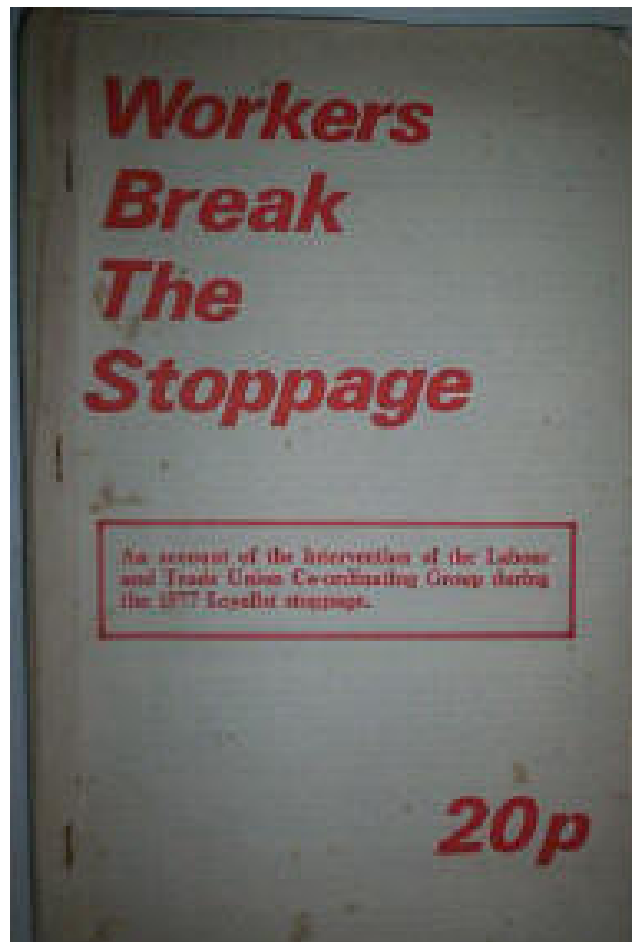


# Workers Break the Stoppage

An account of the intervention of the  
Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group during  
the 1977 Loyalist stoppage

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## **Introduction from 1977 edition**

The United Unionist Action Council (UUAC) stoppage has resulted in a humiliating defeat for its organisers. After eleven days, despite the use of every possible means to whip up support, the result was abysmal failure.

The working class broke the stoppage. It was their determination which left the combined weight of Paisley, Baird, the Ulster Defence Association and the other loyalist paramilitaries utterly powerless.

The cause of working class unity has won a major victory. Sectarianism has suffered a defeat and a major setback. Yet, as this pamphlet explains, the full extent of the victory which was possible has not been achieved.

Throughout the course of the stoppage the trade union movement had opportunity, after opportunity, after opportunity to decimate the evil of sectarianism. All were missed by the union leaders. A General who ordered his troops to stop firing just as they were beginning to get the upper hand in a battle, and thereby saved the enemy from rout, would probably face court martial.

Three years ago it was the trade union movement which was put to 'rout' at the hands of the Ulster Workers Council. Since then the unions have swung the tide somewhat in their favour, particularly with the Better Life for All Campaign. The UUAC stoppage placed sectarianism, for the first time in years, under the heel of the workers' movement. But instead of issuing the order to use all their force to stamp on it, the union tops decreed that they should do nothing, but leave it to the police and the army. As a result the bigots have been allowed to crawl away wounded, but not totally crushed.

Had the rank and file of the trade union movement adopted the attitude of the leadership the result would have been disastrous. Fortunately, they did not. Fortunately, they leaned instinctively upon their own power to hit back at the UUAC. In a thousand different ways, some of which are documented in this pamphlet, the workers took action themselves. It was this action, not the heavy hand of the state, not the condemnations of middle class politicians, and not the prayers of the Churches, which won the day.

Because mass action was not co-ordinated by the union leaders, because so many opportunities were allowed to slide by, the blows which the workers have dealt reaction have been painful but not fatal.

A few days after the stoppage was ended the Local Government Elections were held. The sectarian and right wing politicians on both sides managed to hold their ground. As previously, voting took place almost exclusively along religious grounds. On the Protestant side, Paisley's democratic Unionist Party actually increased its representation in many councils – generally reflecting its spread from a locally based party to the province wide expression of right wing Loyalism. Its chief competitor was the Official Unionist Party – no friend of any workers –, which remained as the single largest party in the Province.

On the Catholic side the sectarian based Social Democratic and Labour Party actually increased their grip in these elections. The other major party, the Alliance Party, increased its cotes in a number of areas. But it remains a thoroughly middle class organisation, hostile to the aspirations of working people.

It is a seeming paradox that one week the working class unite to defeat reaction and the next they re-elect the same brood of reactionaries that have misrepresented them in the past. This paradox can be explained in two words – NO ALTERNATIVE!

Had the unions taken the initiative against the UUAC they would have mobilised tens of thousands of workers. All eyes would have been upon them. They would have emerged as the strongest force in society. The stage would have been set for a class campaign to turn the defeat of the stoppage into a mass movement against slum hosing, low wages, unemployment, inadequate services, etc. With this the workers would have taken an enormous stride away from the problems and the divisions of the recent past.

In this situation direct intervention by the trade union movement would have transformed these elections. Why should trade unionists struggle to rebuff Paisley and his equally vicious counterparts on the Catholic side, only to leave the field open to these people during elections? Paisley's DUP won control of Ballymena Council. It did so because four of its eleven councillors were returned unopposed.

In reality this is what happened everywhere. Sectarianism and reaction were returned unopposed to every District Council. True, there were two parties who call themselves 'socialist'. One, the Republican Clubs, is bound by its name and traditions to a sectarian appeal. The other, the Northern Ireland Labour Party, has degenerated politically beyond measure in recent years. For example, its intervention in the UUAC stoppage was around the demand for a conference of all political parties who favour the link with Britain to be held. As a result of its political degeneration it has been virtually eclipsed as an organisation. Only one NILP candidate managed to win a council seat. Almost half of its candidates came bottom of their respective polls.

If ever there was a need for a political party to represent the working class it is now. Had the trade unions intervened in the Local Government Elections, with candidates for a union based Labour Party, and if this party fought on socialist policies, the growing revulsion of working people at sectarianism and the growing anger at lowering living standards would have been tapped. Even candidates sponsored by local Trades Councils would probably have captured seats. A focus of opposition would have been created in some District Councils and, in this way the nucleus of a future Labour Party would have been formed.

No more opportunities must be missed. The situation is still extremely favourable for the organised workers' movement. The crisis in the capitalist economy and the resulting attacks on living standards are opening up a whole period of class upheaval – both here and internationally. But inaction breeds danger. Paisley and like reactionaries will also be attempting to make use of the rising tide of anger among workers to further their won ends. Only if the labour movement failed to give a lead can his ideas gain ground.

Gains have been made by the working class as a result of the UUAC action. In order to consolidate these there is a need for the unions to launch a major campaign on class issues such as wages and unemployment. This campaign would bind workers together in struggle. It would be directed also against sectarianism in all its manifestations. Through it the workers' movement could lay the basis for an ending of the violence and also for the eradication of poverty.

Such a campaign, by its very nature, would be political. Obviously, it would be pointless taking its demands to Paisley, to Harry West, to John Hume or to Oliver Napier. These

gentlemen want nothing to do with socialist ideas. The need for the unions to create their own political organisations would be posed.

A rank and file conference of the trade union movement, which would also include the various independent Labour Parties, the remnants of the NILP, and the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group, should be called. From such a conference a political party of Labour could be formed.

A similar conference of rank and file delegates from trade unions, Trades Councils and shop stewards committees should be called to launch a major campaign against poverty and against sectarianism. This conference should be preceded by the fullest possible preparations throughout the trade union movement, including shop floor meetings to discuss these objectives. In this way the most democratic and representative decisions would be arrived at.

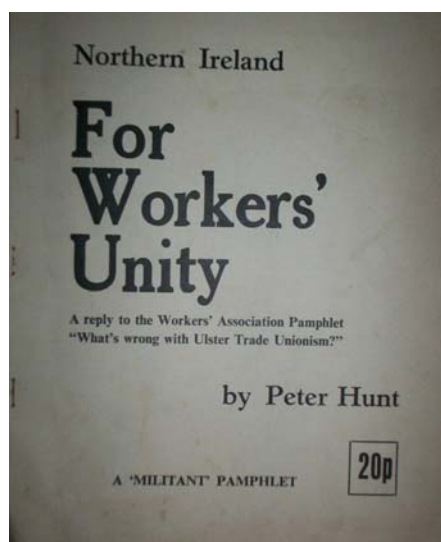
It is the purpose of this pamphlet to record the intervention of the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group during the 1977 stoppage, and also to plot the way forward for the trade union movement in Northern Ireland. The pamphlet contains a series of statements and leaflets issued by the L&TUCG in connection with the UUAC action. Each statement or leaflet is preceded by an explanatory introduction.

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group was formed shortly after the Ulster Workers Council stoppage in 1974. It is a group of trade unionists and socialists whose primary aim is to campaign within the trade union movement for the creation of a broadly based party of Labour.

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#### **Socialist reprints:**

The 1977 UUAC stoppage was linked to the 1974 one. The members of Militant in Northern Ireland brought together this pamphlet in response to articles by supporters of that stoppage who were intent on dividing the unions along sectarian lines.



This pamphlet has been reprinted and printed copies are available from the SP offices, 13 Lombard Street, Belfast BT1 1RB. £3. It can also be obtained at:

<http://www.geocities.com/socialistparty/FWUIntro.htm>

## **April 25<sup>th</sup> The Stoppage is announced**

On Monday April 25<sup>th</sup> the United Unionist Action Council announced that on midnight the following Monday a General Strike call was to be issued. They were demanding the stepping up of army activity against the Provisionals and a commitment from the British government to implement the terms of the Convention report.<sup>1</sup>

The UUAC were quite specific in this ultimatum, as to the effect they believed this would have: -

- "Electricity services will be run down – but at an increased pace to that of 1974. There will be two hours daily current for domestic purposes and emergency services will be catered for.
- "Petrol supplies will be exhausted within a week to 10 days – even if rationing is introduced.
- "We know that Roy Mason won't give in. There will be some wrangling and bargaining. But at the end of the day a worthwhile security programme will be devised.
- "The Action Council has devised arrangements for supplies to be made available direct from the farmers to the Ulster housewife. This policy will be formulated as in 1974.
- "This will be a long drawn out battle. But we will hang in until the end."

In many quarters this statement was greeted with scepticism. Many people, understanding that the mood for a repeat of the Ulster Workers Council stoppage of three years earlier was simply not there, believed that the UUAC would back down.

However, as a counter balance to the obvious absence of real support was the desperation of Paisley, Baird, the UDA and other loyalist sectarian groups. After the 1974 stoppage all these sectarians found themselves in positions of prestige and power. Since then their support and influence had steadily declined. In 1975 and 1976 the revulsion of ordinary people at all the ugly manifestations of sectarianism sprang to the surface in the form of the trade union Better Life for All Campaign and the Peace Movement. Paramilitaries and politicians like Paisley were pushed to the background.

For months these people had planned to call for a repeat of the 1974 stoppage, hoping it would bear the same fruits for them. At this stage it is speculation to say what events dictated that 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1977 should be the decisive date. But two factors probably helped them to this decision. Firstly, the Local Government Elections were due to be held on May 18<sup>th</sup>. For Paisley and the so-called 'political wing of the Action Council, the need to act before then was crucial. Secondly, the issue of the arresting and trial of members of the Ulster Service Corps for setting up illegal roadblocks had provided the opportunity for limited form of public protest a few weeks earlier. On the day of the trial of some of these men, Paisley organised a demonstration in Portadown. Workers in Kilroot and also at the

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<sup>1</sup> The collapse of the 1974 power-sharing Executive was followed by another attempted solution a year later in the Constitutional Convention. This was an attempt by the British to pressure the political parties into reaching agreement among themselves. It failed - the majority Unionists, the United Ulster Unionist Council, stubbornly recommended a return to Stormont majority rule, a proposal rejected by the British and the SDLP.

GEC plant at Larne were said to have come out on a half-day strike in support of the USC. This may have left the Action Council with the belief that the time was opportune for another 'General Strike.'

In any case, the memory of 1974 meant that the UUAC would not have considered mass support an essential prerequisite for success. On the first day the UWC 'strike' over 90% of the workforce ignored it and attended work. For two or three days there was a marked absence of support. But, as the power supplies ran down and as the paramilitaries resorted to a campaign of intimidation, the stoppage began to take effect. Then as the economy ground to a halt and as the power-sharing Executive visibly began to crack under the strain, and as the Government responded with a heavy hand, actual support for the UWC began to develop. By the end of the 'strike' these previously unknown figures were 'toasted' leaders in most Protestant working class areas. For a brief period 'power' had been in their grasp. Within in their areas they had replaced the services of the state with their own form of services, they had dictated who should pass and who should not pass, they had determined what supplies were 'essential' and what not.

It was obvious that, if the UUAC went ahead with their threat, they would repeat the tactics of 1974, hoping to achieve similar ends. From the start it was also clear that some sections of the Action Council would have liked to go one step further than in 1974 – to actually take power fully in their own hands.

To get the stoppage off the ground they clearly intended to shut off the power, and at the same time to use the 'persuasion' of the paramilitaries to ensure that workers stayed at home. Finally some, at least, of the Action Council were anticipating that military repression would give their action and added boost. On the day following their initial announcement the Belfast Newsletter quoted a UUAC source as saying: "We hope that troops will play a hand in a bid to break the strike – for that will tend to give it impetus."

Seeing that the strike threat represented a desperate bid by right wing loyalist politicians and the loyalist paramilitaries, notably the UDA, to recoup lost ground, the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group did not dismiss it as mere verbal sabre rattling.

Not only the likes of Paisley, but the trade union movement, had enormous lessons to learn from May 1974. Had the trade unions intervened at the very beginning if that 'strike', when workers were demonstrating how little they supported it, that could have prevented its development. However, the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU dithered for a full week before attempting to organise a march back to work. This effect was quite simply 'too little, too late'. It was an isolated gesture organised at 8.00 in the morning, when workers were unable to get to the assembly points. But most importantly, by the time it took place, real support for the UWC had already become entrenched in many areas. On day one or two of the 'strike' the unions could have presented a picture of enormous strength. By the Tuesday morning of the second week they were capable of demonstrating only their weakness, with tiny parades of the most active and most determined of their members.

With this in mind, and with an understanding of the lengths to which the UUAC might be prepared to go, the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group reacted to the announcement of the Action Committee plan. On 26<sup>th</sup> April a statement was issued both condemning the stoppage and spelling out a programme of activity by which the trade union movement could intervene.

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Poster used by the UUAC to mobilise support for their plans.

The key point here is to lay the blame for the deaths from the Troubles onto the Northern Ireland Office, in other words, if the UUAC's proposals for increased security and devolution had gone through, things would be better here.

This 1986 poster makes use of the old army recruiting imagery, similar to World War 1 posters.





## Statement Number 1

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group condemns the stoppage being called for by Loyalist groups and politicians. The effect of such an action would only be to greatly increase sectarianism and, in particular, to sow the seeds of potential division onto the shop floor.

The working class of Northern Ireland would gain nothing from any such stoppage. In no way did the workers benefit from the action of the Ulster Workers Council three years ago. Now one section of the working class is benignly asked to down tools so that a group of reactionary, anti-working class politicians can regain the political power they feel they have lost. For 50 years Northern Ireland was ruled by people little different from those asking for this stoppage. Protestant and Catholic workers 'benefited' from this only in terms of mass unemployment, squalid housing and poverty. Why should any worker put himself or herself out in order to institute another period of misrule?

In 1974 the UWC stoppage initially got off the ground on the basis of massive intimidation. All the signs now indicate that Paisley and Co. intend to use similar methods to gain 'support' on this occasion.

This can be avoided – if the working people are mobilised now to show their outright opposition to a stoppage, and their determination to resist intimidation. The only force capable of mobilising workers in this manner is the trade union movement. The bigots have exposed their hand. The unions have the opportunity to demonstrate how worthless this is.

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group call upon the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU, the individual unions and the Trades Councils to immediately campaign against threatened action. Meetings should be convened of shop stewards on an area basis – from these, shop floor meetings could be organised right across the province.

If this pressure is not sufficient to show Paisley and his colleagues how little support they have, then a rank and file delegate meeting of shop stewards and other trade unionists should be convened in Belfast between now and the start of the proposed stoppage. This meeting should discuss plans for a programme of mass demonstrations of workers in all areas. It should also discuss the ways and means by which the trade union movement can use its support and resources to prevent intimidation.

We call upon the trade union leaders to urgently take these and any other necessary steps so that this catastrophe can be stopped before it starts. Such a programme of action can be the launching pad for a mass trade union campaign to unite the working people against not only this sectarian venture but sectarianism in general, and around a class programme for Jobs, for Houses, for an end to the Social Contract<sup>2</sup> and instead for a minimum wage tied to the cost of living, and for the necessary socialist policies from the Government to bring these about.

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<sup>2</sup> This Contract was seen as an agreement whereby unions would limit demands which may lead to higher inflation in return for actions from Government which would apparently help the working class.

## April 29<sup>th</sup> Shipyard men show the way

The urgency of the trade union intervention spelt out in the 26<sup>th</sup> April statement, was clearly not felt by the trade union leaders. The Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU met on the evening of April 28<sup>th</sup> and issued a statement opposing the 'strike'. They called on all workers 'to unite in opposing those people engaged in violence and also those who seek to create division by advocating a course of action which clearly cannot lead to any constructive achievement in Northern Ireland.'

How the workers were to 'unite' was not mentioned. The question of shop floor meetings, shop stewards meetings, discussion among activists on how intimidation could be defeated, were all notably absent. Only two concrete steps were decided upon by the NIC at this meeting. Their statement concluded: 'The Northern Ireland Committee has already contacted the British TUC and a delegation of the Committee will meet the Secretary of State, Mr Mason, on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April.'

While this leisurely approach was being adopted by the union leaders the UUAC were engaged in frantic efforts to galvanise support. Leaflets were circulated in many factories spelling out the aims of the stoppage. Paisley and Baird were busy issuing statements and making radio and TV appearances, all the time pouring forth their sectarian venom. Meanwhile the Ulster Defence Association were making sinister noises and issuing veiled threats in the background.

As every day passed it became clearer that the UUAC had no intention of backing down. Shop stewards and trade union activists were more and more being thrust into the front line. No directives were being issued from the trade union leaders but there was a clear desire on the part of the workers that their opposition to the 'strike' be given open expression.

Fortunately sections of the rank and file of the trade union movement took it upon themselves to intervene. On Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> a number of shop floor meetings were held and outright opposition to the UUAC action was expressed. The workers at Ballylumford had indicated their opposition. On the afternoon of the following day at least 7,000 shipyard men met and voted overwhelmingly not to participate in the 'strike'. Only a few hundred hands were raised against this decision. Other factories followed suit. Shop stewards at the major Shorts Brothers factory also voted not to take part.

That night the *Belfast Telegraph* lead with a report of the shipyard meeting and with reports of other factories where the workers had similarly decided against the stoppage. On the buses coming home from the factories this was the main topic of conversation. Workers took heart in the decision of the Harland and Wolff men. The determination of tens of thousands of workers not to be pushed around, as in 1974, was reinforced.

Paisley, on a teatime news programme, declared that only 1,500 had attended the shipyard meeting and that speakers on the platform had been heckled by large numbers of Action Council supporters. His claims rang particularly hollow when, on the front page of the following day's *News Letter*, a photograph of the meeting showed clearly its true size.

All the trade union leaders had to do at this moment was to issue a call for workers to follow the example of the shipyard men. The initiative of the rank and file, who had taken one of the steps outlined in the Co-ordinating Group's earlier statement, had presented them with the easiest of opportunities to intervene. Later that Friday evening the Steering

Committee of the Co-ordinating Group met to discuss the situation. Their meeting decided to issue the statement published below. It also decided that this statement should be issued to delegates attending the special meeting of Trades Councils, which had been arranged by the ICTU to take place in Dungannon on the following Sunday. Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group members would be pressing at this meeting for the trade union leaders, and the Trades Councils, or if necessary, the Trades Councils on their own, to take action as outlined in the statement.

The L&TUCG Steering Committee also discussed the possibility of direct intervention by the Group. It was felt that, if the trade union leaders or the Trades Councils, had not initiated a course of action against the stoppage by Sunday or, at the latest, Monday, the Co-ordinating Group should organise a public meeting on the Tuesday evening to spell out the demands they were making.

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## **Statement Number 2**

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group wholeheartedly supports the actions of shop stewards and workers in Harland and Wolff, Ballylumford and other factories in demonstrating their opposition to the stoppage being threatened by Paisley and his UUAC colleagues.

Through these actions it has been made clear that the workers of Northern Ireland are opposed to this action and that only through the threat of intimidation can it even get off the ground. Intimidation can be defeated if the rest of the trade union movement is mobilised. The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group call upon shop stewards throughout the province to follow the lead which has been given and, on Monday, to organise shop floor meetings to demonstrate the opposition of workers to the stoppage.

In this way it can be shown that no section of the working class stands alone in resisting any threats which may be made. The L&TUCG also call upon the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU and the Trades Councils to organise meetings of shop stewards on an area basis to discuss in detail the ways in which the trade unions can ensure the protection of all workers.

We believe that by action of this nature the working class can stop this so-called 'strike' before it starts. Should this pressure not be sufficient the shop stewards meetings should work out plans for a programme of mass demonstrations of workers to hammer home the message that Paisley and his friends do not represent the aspirations of the working people of Northern Ireland.

## **April 30<sup>th</sup> Solidarity Call**

On Friday 29<sup>th</sup> April the Ulster Defence Association announced that large numbers of their members from Scotland and England were being brought to Northern Ireland and would be 'assisting them' during then course of the 'strike'.

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group reacted to their announcement with an appeal to the workers' organisations in Britain. The following telegram the following morning to Glasgow Trades Council, Liverpool Trades Council, to the National Union of Seamen in Liverpool and Glasgow and to the General Secretary of the TUC: -

“The Northern Ireland Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group request that your organisation take whatever action you deem necessary in order to prevent people from your area coming to Northern Ireland to assist in the organisation of the proposed loyalist stoppage.”

Two days later Liverpool Trades Council in conjunction with Liverpool Borough Labour Party, the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Workers Union and UCATT held a May Day march and meeting at the Pier Head in Liverpool. A speaker from the L&TUCG was invited to address the meeting on the enforced stoppage. The following statement was read from the platform by the President of the Trades Council:

“The Merseyside, North West trade unionists and socialists have previously supported, and will continue to do so in the future, all activities which seek to unite the forces of the working class, particularly the trade union movement, against sectarianism and intimidation in Northern Ireland. The Irish question is a class one – only the working class united under the banner of socialist policies can offer a way forward.”

Also on that day the L&TUCG received a telegram from Knowsley Trades Council (near Liverpool): -

“All support to your struggle against sectarianism and for united working class action towards a socialist solution in Ireland.”

**April 30<sup>th</sup> – May 1<sup>st</sup>**

## **The Workers must break it**

The United Unionist Action Council used the three days before the stoppage to attempt to restore some of the credibility lost through the massive demonstrations of the shipyard and other workers. Paisley stated bluntly that the shipyard workers would be ‘reconsidering’ their decision over the weekend. Translated from parliamentary language this simply meant that the paramilitaries would be applying their particular type of pressure on these and other workers.

Paisley himself, in a speech to supporters in North Antrim, resorted to a different tactic. He ‘raised’ the stakes in the pending confrontation by declaring: ‘I am only remaining in public life to see the thing through, and if it fails, then my voice will no longer be heard.’

On the other hand, the position of the Government was made clear. Over the weekend 1,200 extra troops arrived, the first of some 3,000 brought in to deal with the stoppage. This inflow of troops was accompanied by a similar influx of military equipment. In fact, troops numbers were raised to higher levels than at any time since Operation Motorman dismantled the Catholic no-go areas in 1972.

It was made clear by Mason that, if the ‘strike’ escalated, the army would be used in full force to smash the loyalist paramilitaries. However the use of such force at the outset, particularly when the mass of the workers were openly opposing the stoppage, would be counter-productive to the Government and the ruling class’s objectives. The troops would maintain a relatively low profile in the first instance in the hope that the workers would break the ‘strike’. If this policy failed the low profile would be abandoned and the army would be used, and used in whatever force and with whatever methods the situation required. Roy Mason spelt this out in a press statement on the Sunday: -

“One of us wish to see the troops used, even in the maintenance of vital services other than as a last resort. It is a job for the workers and in doing it they will have all the support I can give them.”

The use of the army in this manner would have solved none of the problems of the working class. The loyalist paramilitaries might have been crushed – but at a cost! Instead of advancing the cause of class unity and socialism, it would have left a terrible scar on the community which could erupt in future, even worse, sectarian conflicts.

Such repression against one side of the community would have paved the way for similar methods, if necessary, against the other. The British ruling class would be prepared to go to these lengths now because it is in their interests to destroy the paramilitary organisations on both sides.

In the future, as the capitalist economy falls into even deeper crisis, the working class are certain to move into battle against attacks on their living standards. It will not then be the paramilitaries, but the trade union movement, which will present the chief danger to the ruling class.

Because they opposed this stoppage and because they saw no alternative form of protection against the paramilitaries, many workers looked to the army to stamp down on the UUAC.

This was and is a perilous position for any worker or any section of the workers’ movement to adopt. If a Thatcher Government or a National Coalition government came

to power in Britain the possibility that a general strike would be called by the trade union movement would be very real. Just as the media, army, police, etc. were being prepared for use against the UUAC so they would, without the slightest question, be used against such a general strike.

Not only the breaking of the UUAC was important. The way in which they were broken and by whom was also important. If they were crushed by state repression the ruling class would emerge strengthened, more ready to do battle against the working class movement. Equally the action council bigots would have been converted into martyrs and the memory of their defeat would have been food for future brands of sectarianism and reaction.

If on the other hand the organised labour movement were to break the stoppage the trade union movement would emerge triumphant. The basis for a struggle on such issues as wages and unemployment would be laid. The UUAC would be utterly humiliated and discredited. All the claims of the UDA, Paisley and Co. to speak for the Protestant working class would have been evaporated.

In the mind of every workers on the weekend before the stoppage was the issue of intimidation. If the trade unions were to defeat the UUAC they would have to stop intimidation.

### Statement Number 3

The shop floor meetings held at Harland and Wolff, Ballylumford and many other factories have shown that workers want nothing to do with Paisley and his UUAC stoppage. Since the threatened action has little or no support it is now clear that only fear and the threat of intimidation can get it off the ground.

The central issue, therefore, is how intimidation can be prevented. By their actions the Harland and Wolff and other workers have already provided the answer to this question. It is possible for one group of workers acting on their own to be cowed by fear. But no one can even attempt to intimidate the mass of the working class if they move into action as a body.

The stoppage has been opposed by the trade union leaders who have called upon workers to remain at work. This, in itself, is not enough. The unions must also prepare to organise the protection of all their members who obey their instructions.

How can this be done? The simplest way of averting the stoppage and stopping the UDA in their tracks would be for shop stewards in every factory to organise, today, or at the latest Tuesday, a meeting of their members to discuss the stoppage. These meetings would also discuss what would be done if any threats are made against any section of the workforce.

With workers in every area expressing their opposition to Paisley's call, which is undoubtedly what would happen, the mood of the workers would be one of determination to get to their work.

To consolidate this mood it would be possible for the shop stewards themselves, the Trades Councils or the trade union leaders to organise, at a moment's notice, meetings of shop stewards in every area.

At these meetings the workers could work out how one section of the movement, one factory could come to the assistance of any workers who are intimidated. Thus, if one or two factories in an area were closed by gangs of thugs the stewards in those factories could call upon other stewards for assistance. Marches from other factories would brush aside any intimidators. Two or three workers, or small groups of workers, might be turned away from a factory. But what force is going to turn away a march of thousand of workers?

If the trade union leaders had acted decisively a week ago there would be no stoppage. They preferred inactivity, presumably hoping that the UUAC threat would go away of its won accord. They wasted precious time.

It is still not too late. The rank and file have taken the lead. If their actions are continued and if pressure is put on the trade union leaders to co-ordinate their opposition, the stoppage, at best, will not take place; or at worst will be crushed within a matter of one or two days.

Not Roy Mason, not the British army, not Harry West or Bill Craig – but the working class of Northern Ireland, organised in action by the trade union movement to defeat Paisley and his cronies.

## May 1<sup>st</sup> – Trades Council Call

Also on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May a special delegate meeting of representatives from all the Trades Councils took place in Dungannon. This meeting, which was attended by about 50 delegates, had been organised by the ICTU in order to discuss such matters as the possibility of forming a federation of all Northern Ireland Trades Councils.

Copies of the Co-ordinating Groups statement (April 29<sup>th</sup>) in support of the Harland and Wolff men were distributed to those present.

In view of the situation the first part of the agenda for the meeting was suspended to allow time for an emergency discussion on the UUAC threat. ICTU officials presented a prepared statement which they suggested should be issued as a press release. As with the previous statement from the ICTU this offered condemnation of the stoppage but failed to spell out a programme of action by which the unions could intervene.

The meeting rejected the ICTU statement and discussion concentrated on specific action which could be taken. In the end a five-point action plan was drawn up. These points were:

1. Every worker should report as normal to work.
2. Every employer should spell out to their workforce that factories will be open for work.
3. Local union and Trades Council representatives should prepare contingency plans, if necessary, to ensure access to and from places of work and housing estates.
4. The Authorities should liase closely with local union officials to guarantee the right to work.
5. Congress House will be a co-ordinating centre and can be contacted if problems arise.

This statement represented an enormous step forward. With the paramilitaries sharpening their weapons in preparation for battle and with Mason importing thousands of troops this was a clear recognition on the part of these union activists that their movement had a responsibility to take a clear and independent stand.

Point 3 was a recognition that the mass force of the working class organised by the trade union movement could be used to challenge and defeat the paramilitaries. This point was amplified by the Northern Ireland Office of the ICTU who, in a radio interview broadcast from the Dungannon meeting promised that the trade unions would provide defence for workers against intimidation.



## **May 2<sup>nd</sup> – Union Leaders Backslide**

The call for a co-ordinated programme of shop floor meetings to follow up the lead of the shipyard workers was not made by the union leaders. Only the Co-ordinating Group issued such a call.

However, on Monday meetings were held in many factories and offices organised by shop stewards and local representatives largely on their own initiative. A mass meeting of workers organised by the unions in the Royal Victoria Hospital unanimously passed a resolution denouncing the stoppage.

The workers in the Department of Health and Social Services Office in Frederick Street, Belfast, met and passed a resolution supporting the five point action programme agreed to by the Trades Council seminar the previous day. These workers went on to call for shop floor meetings to be ‘organised against the stoppage and to arrange for the protection of workers.’

In this atmosphere of general anticipation workers waited for amplification of the trade unions five-point plan. They waited in vain! In a teatime television news programme Terry Carlin, the Northern Ireland Officer of the ICTU, stated that the security forces and the RUC must protect the workers. He had not a word to say about the role of the unions could play in themselves organising the defence of their own members. The five-point plan had clearly been quietly abandoned in the short space of 24 hours.

A meeting of the Co-ordinating Group Steering Committee, on the Monday evening, in view of the lack of action on the part of the union tops, decided to go ahead with preparations for a public meeting to be held the following day. Leaflets were produced for distribution to shop stewards and Co-ordinating Group members.

At this time the mood of many workers hung in the balance. Support for the stoppage there was little or none. But the threat of intimidation had not been broken. The union leaders had allowed the opportunity presented by the Harland and Wolff meeting for a follow up campaign to slip by. Much of the effect of that meeting had such dissolved, as Paisley continued to dominate the news, and as the UDA made headlines with the announcement that 15,000 of their members would be mobilised by midnight.

The key issues at the time were how workers could get into factories and how people could get out of the estates, if the 1974 tactics of barricades were to be repeated by the UUAC. Faced with the retreat of the unions from the courageous stance they had adopted the day before and with the burning need to ensure that the workers responded to pickets and barricades with mass action, the Co-ordinating Group issued the following statement.

## Statement Number 4

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group welcome the call which has been made by the Trades Councils and trade union leadership for workers to take action to defeat the sectarian stoppage.

The trade union leadership have stated that they will organise the defence of workers against intimidation. These words must be converted into action. In every case the best form of defence is mass defence. Where pickets block factory entrances the workers should assemble outside the factory until they have sufficient numbers to march past the pickets. This happened in a number of factories during the 1974 Ulster Workers Council stoppage.

Should intimidation occur within estates workers from nearby factories should organise and march into these estates, hold meetings, and, in this way, show that they have the power to organise protection.

These are the methods by which the grip of intimidation can be broken. They should have been prepared for and co-ordinated by the trade union leaders as soon as the stoppage was announced. Should the steps not have been taken by the ranks of the movement on Tuesday morning, and should workers find that they are barred from getting into the factories or are being threatened while at work, the trade union leaders and the Trades Councils must organise mass demonstrations in the centres of all the major towns, particularly in Belfast. Demonstrations of thousands and tens' of thousands of workers demanding the right to go to work would lay the basis for unstoppable mass marches back to work.

Any workers who find that they are unable to get into their work places, or who are otherwise intimidated, should immediately contact their Union officials and the leaders of the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU, and insist that they initiate action on the above lines.

Only by mobilisation of the organised trade union movement can the stoppage be broke. The workers must rely upon their own strength, not the forces of the State.

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Example of the Unionist position of the NILP, and why it was necessary for the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group to campaign to build a new Labour Party in Northern Ireland. The issued several statements in the course of the stoppage without referring to the working class or socialism.

Belfast Telegraph, May 2<sup>nd</sup> 1977

David Bleakley, Northern Ireland Labour Party, "said going to work tomorrow would be the best way for Ulster people to show the world that they intended to remain British. 'We shall be voting with our feet.'"

## May 3<sup>rd</sup> In the Balance

Intimidation brought the stoppage some success. Before the midnight deadline on Monday the night shift had left the shipyard. It was not long before the night shift in Shorts followed suit.

The following morning the mass of workers went to their work much as normal. About 40 pickets blocked the main entrance to Harland and Wolff, nevertheless about half the workforce went in. Approximately 50% of the Shorts workers did likewise. In other areas there was an overwhelming turnout. The Tomb Street sorting office [in Belfast] of the GPO, for example, reported on the first mornings of the stoppage a turnout of more than 90%, more than normal. Else where the picture was the same. Buses continued to run, milk deliveries were normal, [and] the power stations were open. By and large workers had made a determined effort to get in.

Again despite the lack of a call from the union leaders the workers instinctively responded to the threats with mass action. On the Shankill gangs of pickets were stretched across the road. Those going to work waited at street corners until in large enough groups to march past. It was reported that people in one working class estate in Newtownabbey responded to threats to a bus driver by placing an 'escort' of workers in the bus.

The correctness of the call for marches through the picket lines was illustrated again and again. At the GEC plant in Larne Paisley himself turned up to assist with the picketing. At one stage 300 workers were gathered outside, undecided as to whether they should pass or not. Fear and fear alone kept them out. If marches into work had been systematically organised elsewhere, even in a few of the largest concerns, this would have been decisive in reinforcing the determination of these workers to get to work. What a humiliating blow it would have been for Paisley if workers answered his personal picketing attempts by marching past him!

On this first morning the total lack of support for the UUAC was shown. Workers had answered Paisley with their feet – by streaming into their workplaces. And so the intimidation was stepped up. In yet another blood curdling statement released during the morning the UDA stated that at 3.00 pm the 'strike' would be made to bite.

In Belfast gangs of youths roamed the streets on the edge of Protestant areas leaving a trail of closed shops in their wake. In other towns the same thing happened. Ballymena had greeted the beginning of the stoppage by largely ignoring it. So too had Lurgan, Portadown, Coleraine and many other areas. But during the morning gangs appeared on the streets of these towns, in some cases no more than 30 strong. Despite their numbers they were successful in forcing shops to close.

In Larne, where the docks were shut, the stoppage had the most immediate effect. Pickets on the bus depot were successful in disrupting services. Shops were largely closed.

During the course of the afternoon the intimidation without question began to take effect. Threats made to *Belfast Telegraph* workers meant that although the paper was printed, it was not delivered. Elsewhere some of the smaller factories were closed as workers received phone calls 'reminding' them of their homes and their families, etc. In all 400 cases of intimidation were reported to the RUC during the day. By the late afternoon

things hung in the balance. On the basis of the inaction of the union leaders the 'strike' momentum was surging upwards.

As the need for decisive action grew and grew so the trade union leaders moved further and further away from such a position. They looked everywhere other than to the workers to provide the answer. A statement from the Northern Ireland Officer of the ICTU acknowledged that the situation was worsening. He appealed to Roy Mason that 'threats by the UDA to step up activity must be met by a firm response from the security forces.' Unless this was done, the statement warned, 'all hell will break loose.'

As the UUAC well knew 'all hell' would break loose if, at this stage, military activity against them had been increased. It was precisely such a response that the UDA was relying upon to boost their support.

A further statement from the union leaders appealed to the Orange Order, Vanguard, Unionist Party and Protestant Church leaders to 'unite to add their might to the individual approaches' to workers to ignore the strike call. In reality there had been more than enough such condemnations from more than enough such sources. What workers required was an answer to the problems of pickets on factory gates, threatening phone calls, and gangs of young thugs in the streets, etc. The 'weight' which needed to be added to the opposition to the UUAC was the 'weight' of the trade union movement drawn into mass activity.

Members of the LTUCG spent the first day of the stoppage visiting factories and distributing leaflets advertising the Group's Public Meeting which had been arranged for that evening. This meeting, given the urgency of the situation, decided to launch a petition among workers calling upon the trade union leaders to act.

A statement issued from the meeting outlined a number of the steps which the unions and the Trades Councils could take to defeat intimidation. It made a call for mass demonstrations to show the power of the organised working class and to restore to the workers their confidence and determination.

### **Statement Number 5**

A meeting of shop stewards and trade union activists organised by the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group tonight issued a call to the trade union leaders to take urgent action to mobilise workers against the stoppage.

The meeting welcomed the fact that the vast majority of workers have responded to the first day of the stoppage by marching through the picket lines and reporting for work. However, the pressure of intimidation and fear has affected some areas. If the fear of workers could be overcome the stoppage would crumble. The need for action on the part of the unions is therefore urgent and immediate.

From this meeting the LTUCG are launching a petition among workplaces calling upon the union tops to act. The shop stewards and workers present demanded that the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU and the Trades Councils take immediate steps to ensure:

- 1 That, where pickets stand outside factories, the workers be organised to gather outside until they have sufficient numbers to march past.

2. That threats made to those who go to work, about the safety of their homes and families, be answered by marches from the factories into the estates where the threats are directed. Meetings called within the estates could establish vigilante groups of workers who would ensure that the families and property of those at work is protected.
3. That mass demonstrations of workers be organised during the day within the next 24, or at the outside 48, hours in the centre of Belfast and all the major towns. Such demonstrations should be the focal point of opposition to the stoppage in every area.

A programme of action on these lines would undercut the effect of intimidation by the UUAC. If these steps were immediately taken the stoppage could be defeated. The victors in that situation would be the organised working class. But if the unions do not decisively intervene the danger exists of the stoppage gaining ground through intimidation. Should this happen those who will have lost will be the trade union movement and the working class.

UUAC Poster used to mobilise support for the stoppage.



## May 4<sup>th</sup> Support for Petition

On the second morning of the stoppage the initial turnout all over was higher than on the first. The pendulum of success was swung somewhat away from the UUAC.

The paramilitaries, for their part, had decided that the policy of intimidation was the policy which would bear the most fruit. Buses and busmen were their most immediate target. In the Kilcooley estate in Bangor shots were fired at the 8.10 school bus. In Belfast a systematic series of attacks on bus drivers was launched. Some drivers were threatened at gunpoint. Others were attacked physically. Stones and other objects were thrown at a number of drivers. John Freeman, Regional Secretary of the ATGWU, later stated that no fewer than 17 busmen had to be taken to hospital as a result of these attacks.

The City Bus drivers in Belfast reacted by withdrawing their services for a period. Three hundred strong they walked from the City Hall in Belfast to their union headquarters where, at a mass meeting, they unanimously decided not to give way to the thugs but to resume work. This action was one of the major turning points of the stoppage.

Busmen are required to take their buses out early in the morning and late at night through potentially dangerous areas. They do so without any form of protection. If these men could stand firm against threats and against physical attacks, what could workers in factories and throughout industry generally not do? As with the mass meeting in the shipyard a few days before, the mass action of the City Bus drivers gave confidence and heart to others.

Once again a section of the trade union rank and file had seized the initiative. Their action presented the union leaders with yet another golden opportunity to intervene.

The workers had proved that they were capable of getting to their workplaces despite intimidation. Furthermore, they were showing that they intended to stay there. What was required, above all, were mass demonstrations, which could bring all sections of the working class together in an open show of strength and solidarity. Such demonstrations, following on from the lead given by the busmen, would have had the effect of armour plating the determination of workers to ignore the UUAC and the paramilitaries.

As a follow up to mass demonstrations meetings could have been arranged on the shop floor, and delegate meetings of shop stewards could have been arranged. These could have worked out the means by which the mass force of the working class could be used to provide defence. It could have been left to the ingenuity of the workers themselves, at these meetings, to decide upon the best methods they could use in their areas to put a stop to the activities of the thugs.

A danger signal which further underlined the need for such activity came during the afternoon. Workers in the Ballylumford power station voted in favour of a motion calling for increased security measures against the IRA. This vote was followed by a vote of the majority of those present in favour of the stoppage itself.

Although engineers and many other Ballylumford employees wasted no time in disassociating themselves from this decision, it should have been a clear warning to the union leaders that things could still go the UUAC's way.

Sadly the ICTU chiefs chose to do nothing. Their foremost public utterance during the day took the form of a joint statement with the Confederation of British Industry and the Irish government Chamber of Commerce. This merely congratulated both employers and workers for their response so far.

Throughout the day the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group petition was circulated among workers in many industries. The emphasis of the petition, and of the Group's propaganda at this stage, was on the need for mass demonstrations. It read: -

“The present sectarian stoppage and the accompanying intimidation can only weaken and divide the organised trade union movement.. We, the undersigned, therefore call on the leadership of the trade union movement, namely the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU, to oppose the stoppage by immediately organising mass demonstrations in all the cities and towns of the North. Such demonstrations would clearly show that the majority of trade unionists wish to remain at work and would thus cut the ground from under those who would intimidate us.”

Milk workers, lorry drivers, Council employees, Hospital workers, Civil servants, Firemen, workers in a number of industries were among those who signed this call for action. Copies were given to the busmen who distributed it to their Belfast depots and pinned it on the wall of their canteen. One bus driver who signed this petition was Harry Bradshaw. A few days later he was shot dead at the wheel of his bus.

Those circulating the petition did meet with one 'failure'. They took it to the Communist Party headquarters and asked that it be distributed among their activists. This request was met with a blunt refusal on the grounds that 'demonstrations would only inflame the situation.'

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News reports:

Irish Times reported (4/5/77) on the 3<sup>rd</sup> that 17 busmen were ignored, 'several by pieces of concrete hurled through their windows' and that shots had been fired into a school bus in Bangor.

At midday on the 3<sup>rd</sup>, after rioting on the Newtownards Road, the Citybus drivers held a meeting and 'decided unanimously to continue to work but without any guarantees about how long they would do so.'

The busdrivers refused (Northern Ireland Office minister) Don Concannon's assurance of security force protection. A union spokesman said 'there would be no-one "riding shotgun" on public transport. "We don't want soldiers or policemen on the buses, just the opportunity to drive."'

## Statement Number 6

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group supports the determined action of the overwhelming majority of workers to go to work in spite of the massive intimidation being used by supporters of the UUAC. The Belfast busmen especially have shown the way. After being threatened and attacked and some of their number being injured, they held a mass meetings and voted unanimously to keep the buses going. These workers must not be left to bear the brunt of the intimidation alone. The rest of the trade union movement must follow their lead and hold mass meetings on every shop floor to demonstrate that they wish to remain at work. Similarly, pickets at the factory gates must be answered by the workers waiting outside the gates until they are all present and march in as a body into work.

Also in order to cut across any creeping effect the intimidation might be having, mass meetings and demonstrations in every city and town should be organised by the trade union leadership – the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU. Such a lead would be answered by support from the majority of workers. Even one demonstration in Belfast called by either the NIC or the Belfast Trades Council, resulting as it would in thousands and thousands of workers taking part, would crush the action of the UUAC. Even the workers in one industry or one large factory could give the lead and call for such a demonstration, appealing to all workers to come out in support.

The Belfast Trades Council meeting on Thursday night could take such a decision for Friday. And even the Saturday May Day demonstration, late though it may be, could be turned into a demonstration against the intimidation and sectarian stoppage.

If the trade union movement mobilises and defeats the UUAC action this would mark the beginning of an enormous campaign of the united working class movement against wage restraint, for a decent living wage, for decent housing and for an end to unemployment.



**May 5<sup>th</sup>**  
**Irish Congress of Trade Unions reacts to Petition**

The drift back to normal working continued throughout the third day. Harland and Wolff reported a 60% turn-out. Shorts workers stated that the situation in their factory was more or less back to normality. Gallaghers announced a full turnout. Belfast Co-op revealed that, out of their fleet of 194 milk floats, 180 were on the roads. In Portadown only two factories were shut. The massive Goodyear plant in that area was working normally.

To this situation the paramilitaries responded in the only manner they knew how – by stepping up, yet again, the bully boy tactics. In the Willowfield area of Belfast a parcel bomb was left on a milkman's float<sup>3</sup> but was successfully defused. 20 cars belonging to shipyard men were attacked and, according to one report, 15 of them burnt. By the end of the day the police were claiming that no less than 1,000 cases of intimidation had been reported to them during the stoppage so far.

As the paramilitaries more and more showed their face so the trade union leaders hid theirs. By now they were assigning no role whatsoever to the independent action of their members against intimidation. The 'role of the unions', in their eyes, was being reduced to that of a telephone exchange, doing nothing more than relaying messages to the police. A circular to all trade union officials, sent on the Thursday, gave the following advice, under the heading INTIMIDATION:

“If you or your colleagues have been intimidated, report the matter to the Police, IF VERY URGENT TELEPHONE 999.”

The circular continued by listing the telephone numbers of the RUC Central Stations. Not one word did it contain about any form of action union members could take themselves take.

In fact so far had the Northern Ireland Committee leaned away from the slightest notion of direct action, so remote had become the calls they themselves had made the previous Sunday, the Northern Ireland Officer exerted not a little effort contacting union officials and representatives asking them to stop their members circulating the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group petition. He even went so far as the issue a statement to the media saying that this was an 'unofficial' petition and calling upon workers not to sign it.

In reply the Co-ordinating Group issued the following statement.

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<sup>3</sup> These were electric delivery vans. They went very slowly, 'floating' along.

## Statement Number 7

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group in response to the statement from the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU that trade unionists should not sign their petition state that the petition contains nothing that is not in accord with trade union policy. It is as follows:

“We , the undersigned, therefore call on the leadership of the trade union movement, namely the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU, to oppose the stoppage by immediately organising mass demonstrations in all the cities and towns of the North. Such demonstrations would clearly show that the majority of trade unionists wish to remain at work and this cut the ground from under those who would intimidate us.”

The purpose of this petition which is now being circulated and being signed in factories and workplaces such as amongst the busmen, the workers in the milk industry, the hospital workers and transport workers and firemen, is to emphasise to the trade union leaders the need to take action against intimidation and against the sectarian stoppage. The correctness of the Co-ordinating Groups position, that such pressure on the Northern Ireland Committee is necessary has been borne out by the discussion now taking place on the Northern Ireland Committee about possibly calling off the May Day rally and parade. The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group calls on all trade unionists to get in touch with the NIC office immediately and make sure the march and rally goes ahead.

And not only that, but the trade union leaders must use the resources that are available to them to turn it into a mass rally against the intimidation and stoppage. The Co-ordinating Group also calls on the Belfast Trades Council, if the NIC backs down, to go ahead with the march and rally on their own – whether permission for it from the authorities is available or not.

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**May 5<sup>th</sup>**

## **Belfast Trades Council Meets**

By Thursday the main emphasis of the LTUCG's propaganda was directed to the May Day Parade due to be held two days later. The demand for demonstrations during the week, particularly during the first two crucial days of the stoppage, was not heeded.

Despite the obvious waning of the UUAC's support, the need still existed for action from the trade union movement to deal a final death blow to their increasingly discredited 'strike'. The May Day parade offered an excellent ready-made weapon with which to deal such a lethal blow.

However, it was known that some members of the Northern Ireland Committee did not want to proceed with the May Day parade at all. Hence the call in the Co-ordinating Group's statement (above) for the Belfast Trades Council to be prepared to take over the parade if this proved necessary.

Thursday evening was the traditional Trades Council May Day meeting. Co-ordinating Group members distributed the following special leaflet at the meeting:

### **Leaflet to Trades Council**

As the third day of the UUAC stoppage comes to a close it seems that the attempt to intimidate workers into staying away from work is meeting with less and less success. Over 1,000 complaints of intimidation have been reported. These are only the tip of the iceberg. Whether a worker is asked politely or physically threatened or even attacked this still amounts to intimidation as behind the polite 'request' just as much as with the threat stands the record of the paramilitaries and the image of their victims of the past.

To these tactics the workers have given their answer. Last week, led by the shipyard workers, the trade union movement clearly opposed the UUAC action. On Tuesday morning the majority of workers went to work. On Wednesday the number increased even further. ASO also, the intimidation increased. The Belfast City busmen bore the brunt. Many of their members were threatened and some beaten and injured. They responded by calling a mass meeting and voted unanimously to keep the buses going. This was one of the most crucial developments so far. Not only that the men's decision kept the transport, but also it gave heart and a lead, a real inspiration to other workers. The busmen showed the way. Today, even more workers have turned up to work and while the situation at Ballylumford has not been completely clarified it would seem that the intimidators of the UUAC are failing and that their stoppage is running out of steam.

The credit for this goes 100% to the workers who defied the threats and gone to work. The courage of the busmen has been repeated, if perhaps not so graphically, up and down the province. It has been the actions of the workers, not any actions of the police or the army, which has been decisive. This courageous refusal of the workers to be intimidated is even more praiseworthy when the lack of lead of the trade union leadership is considered.

Joint statements with the employers and referring intimidated workers to the police is not a lead. The Trades Councils meeting last Sunday came out for a lead to be given by the Unions and for the Unions to organize to defend the right of workers to go to work. These decisions were ignored by the leaders of the Northern Ireland Committee. If the Northern Ireland Committee had issued a call for mass meetings to be held on every shop floor at

the end of last week or on Monday, following the lead given by the shipyard workers, the UUAC action would have been crushed before it even got started. Even during the course of this week if this had been done it would have mobilized and drawn the workers together and the mass meetings would have given confidence against the intimidations. During Tuesday and Wednesday, and even to some extent yet, the situation hung in the balance. Decisive action from the trade union leadership was called for to tip the scales. One demonstration on Tuesday or Wednesday in Belfast would have brought out tens of thousands and would have crushed the intimidation and the UUAC action. Such a lead did not come, but fortunately for the whole working class movement the rank and file stood firm and began to turn the tide on Wednesday.

However, the danger is by no means over yet. Decisive action is still needed. The May Day meeting on Saturday should be turned into a mass demonstration against the stoppage. Even if it is ended by then this should still go ahead. By using all the resources available to both the Trades Council and the Northern Ireland Committee, tens of thousands would answer the call on Saturday. Such a demonstration would put an end to any intimidation. It would break the morale of the UUAC.

Also such a demonstration should be made the launching pad for a campaign for workers unity against sectarianism and for a struggle against wage restraint and against the cuts in public spending and the rising unemployment.

The dangers of the UUAC action and also of the actions of the various paramilitaries and sectarian politicians in general to the trade union movement cannot be exaggerated. Success for the UUAC could lead to the splitting of the unions and to the intimidators deciding on who went to work and when and who would make the decisions in the working class areas.

By making Saturday's march the start of a campaign for a decent wage, for decent housing and for full employment and posing working class solutions to these evils the working class movement would be cemented together in a struggle against the employers and to put an end to the present system of exploitation, poverty and sectarianism and to replace it with a society controlled by the working class people and based on need not profit.

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## Friday May 6<sup>th</sup> - May Day Cancelled

The Special May Day meeting of Belfast Trades Council had taken a decision to send a delegation to see the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU on the following morning. A resolution passed at the meeting bluntly called upon the Trades Council to go ahead and organize their own parade if the ICTU leaders backed down.

The delegation met the Northern Ireland Officer of Congress on Friday morning. They took away from this meeting a clear impression that the parade would go ahead. After receiving the delegation the Northern Ireland Committee itself met and discussed the situation. At lunchtime they issued a statement to the effect that the march was still on. This decision was communicated to trade union offices and a number of unions made efforts to have advertisements placed in the following mornings newspapers calling on their members to turn out.

At about 3.30 pm union offices received a different message. An announcement from the Northern Ireland Committee stated that, following an approach made to them by the security forces, they had decided to cancel the march. Their message further stated that the Peace People, who had called a Rally in Belfast for Saturday afternoon, had also been approached by the police and asked to call this event off.

The Officers of Belfast Trades Council, arguing that it was too late for them to organize an alternative parade, and also that such a parade would be illegal, decided not to proceed.

For the ICTU decision there could be no justification whatsoever. All week they had asked workers to ignore the threats of the bullyboys. Now, after the police had whispered warnings in their ears about possible trouble, they abandoned their traditional demonstration of workers' solidarity. The folly of their decision was underlined when the Peace People announced that their rally would go ahead. The Peace Movement lacks any concrete objectives. Its leaders have no conception of the economic problems which lie at the root of the violence. Their dwindling support is concentrated among the middle class. Nonetheless they do, at least have the courage to follow through a course of action which they have begun.

The need for a show of strength from the unions was again emphasized by the events of the day. In terms of the numbers going to work on Friday the 'strike' continued on the road to total demise. Factories like Courtaulds reported full production. Grundig claimed a normal turnout. For the first time since Tuesday, when street gangs had forced the closing of the shutters, the shops in Coleraine opened. On the second and third days petrol had only been delivered to essential services. On Friday full deliveries were restored.

With normal working reported almost everywhere all eyes focused on the power stations. If Ballylumford, the largest station, capable of generating almost all Northern Ireland's electricity needs, were to hold firm the stoppage would surely crumble.

From the outset relations between the power workers and the Action Council were more than a little strained. The UUAC had assumed that 1977 would repeat the tale of 1974. Ulster Workers Council leader Billy Kelly had then effectively organized the shut down of power supplies. Once again he promised that he could deliver the goods. But this time he neglected to ask the people concerned, the power workers. When Kelly, shortly before the stoppage, had informed the Ballylumford workers of the Action Council's plan, he found himself almost physically ejected from the plant.

On Thursday evening a delegation of shop stewards from Ballylumford visited firstly Roy Mason and then the Action Council. Mason made promise of increased security measures, revealing plans which had been in the pipeline for better equipment for the police, etc. he convinced himself that he had said enough to satisfy the delegation. Paisley and his colleagues were likewise convinced, following their discussion with these workers, that Ballylumford would at last, come round to their side.

On Friday morning the press was full of ‘concessions’ offered by Mason. ‘Paisley let off the hook’, ran one headline. And indeed, had the UUAC seized upon this announcement, declared victory and called off the ‘strike’, Mason’s statement would have been turned into a costly blunder. Accused of yet another ‘sell out to loyalism’ he would have reaped the fruits of this mistake in the form of an intensification of the Provo’s campaign and increased support for it among the Catholic population.

But, undoubtedly overconfident after their discussions with Ballylumford workers, the UUAC let this opportunity slip. They were soon to rue this overconfidence. On Friday afternoon a ballot was conducted among the workforce of the power station. By 286 votes to 171 they decided to stay at work.

Paisley reacted by declaring that ‘the strike was a success’ because ‘the working class people are backing the strike. Big business and the likes of Mr. Mason will not deter us from going ahead to drive home the impetus we have already started.’

In a similar vein political figures of the ilk of Hitler and Mussolini also denounced ‘big business’ only so that they could whip up support among backward sections of the workers and among the middle classes – support which would be used not against the capitalists but against the workers. Paisley went on to argue that the Ballylumford vote was not ‘democratic’, that it was swayed by ‘engineers and office staff’ and to appeal to those who supported his ‘strike’ to come out regardless. So much for his adherence to majority rule.

Having thrown up an opportunity to retreat without total loss of face the UUAC were clearly not going to accept defeat until they had exhausted every weapon at their disposal. The one weapon which had not been totally exhausted was that of intimidation.

By the Friday evening the RUC had totaled no less than 1,429 cases of intimidation. At midnight a crowd 200 strong had gathered outside the gates of Ballylumford. This was how Paisley intended to back his call for the workers to come out irrespective of the vote.

A wild animal is at its most dangerous when it is cornered and wounded. This is the worst time for its hunters to rollover on their backs and fall asleep. What was required at the close of the fourth day of the ‘strike’ was one show of mass strength on the part of the trade union movement to put the UUAC out of its misery. In this is explained the crying need for the May Day parade to proceed.

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group issued the following statement on the matter: -

### **Statement Number 8**

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group condemn the decision of the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU to cancel the May Day parade. If ever there was a time

when it was necessary for a demonstration of a united trade union movement to take place that time is now.

The sectarian stoppage called for by Paisley and the UUAC has not been able to take hold because of the determined action of the rank and file of the trade union movement. Above all the Citybus workers have made a defiant and heroic stand against intimidation.

In marked contrast to the determined action of the rank and file has been the inaction of the trade union leadership. No attempt has been made to co-ordinate the actions of the rank and file. Mass demonstrations earlier in the week would have undermined the UUAC.

Instead of cancelling the May Day parade the Northern Ireland Committee should have pulled out all the stops to transform it into an enormous demonstration of workers against the stoppage. That act alone could have been decisive in forcing the UUAC to call an end to their action.



This image shows the leading members of the Northern Ireland Labour Party going up Ann Street towards Corn Market, Belfast, 7<sup>th</sup> May, for 'their rally'.

Left to Right:

George Chambers, Alan Carr (Vice Chair), Sandy Scott (Chair), Brian Garrett and Jack Barkley.

## **May 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Ballylumford bears the Brunt**

On Saturday Paisley and Baird both visited Ballylumford. There they were given a sharp ultimatum. They were told by the workers that, unless the intimidation was stopped, the power would go off. It would not be run down but would be shut off completely, so that not even essential services could be maintained.

Paisley backed down. After this he probably realized the 'strike' was defeated, the end was a matter of time. But he intended to use that time to his personal best advantage. Hence, from that moment until the end of the stoppage, Paisley concentrated his efforts on presenting a show of strength among the farmers – traditionally the backbone of right wing Loyalism, particularly those farmers in his own North Antrim constituency.

On the Sunday night Paisley addressed a meeting in Ballymena and gave a clear indication that he had accepted defeat as inevitable: "If in the coming days the action which has been initiated had to be halted, that does not mean that the struggle has been in vain."

During the weekend cavalcades of tractors appeared in towns like Newtownards, Lisburn and Ballymena. These stage-managed antics on the part of the farmers were designed to give an appearance of support and success to Paisley rather than to advance the actual course of the stoppage.

While Paisley retreated to the country to try to repair his flagging credibility the paramilitaries prepared to make the fullest use of intimidation. A statement from them at the weekend gave a grim warning to workers not to dare to go to work on Monday. 'We strongly advise the working population of Northern Ireland to keep off the streets, as we no longer can be responsible for their safety.'

Their tactic was to concentrate their pressure on key groups of workers in key industries. On Sunday three attacks took place on busmen, and one driver was seriously injured.

Outside Belfast the central focus of their attention was on Ballylumford. The statement issued on Saturday afternoon by the workers in that plant, saying that, unless the intimidation was stopped, they would walk out, should have been the signal for the unions to act.

No longer was it simply a case of a demonstration to force the UUAC to call a halt to the stoppage. Because such action had not been organised, and because May Day had been 'postponed', workers in Ballylumford and other large industries had been left to bear the brunt of the intimidation alone. The need now was for a show of strength from the organised working class to let the Ballylumford men know that they did not stand-alone. Such a demonstration of mass solidarity and strength could have been followed up by measures to provide defence for all those who had been unwillingly placed in the front line.

On Sunday May 8<sup>th</sup> the Co-ordinating Group made the call for solidarity action to be urgently organised.

## **Statement Number 9**



The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group applaud the stand taken by the workers of Ballylumford Power Station in continuing to work despite the threats, direct and indirect, being made against them, by supporters of the UUAC stoppage. The Ballylumford men have been placed in the front line. Paisley and his paramilitary allies have decided to concentrate all their efforts on breaking these men.

The statement issued on Saturday from workers in the stations that they would down tools unless the intimidation was stopped shows the pressures to which they have been subjected. This statement should be taken as a call to trade unionists everywhere and to the trade union leaders in particular, to take action to show the Ballylumford men that they do not stand-alone.

On Saturday the annual May Day parade could have provided an excellent opportunity for the workers to mobilise their support and show the Ballylumford workers and all the other workers who are still bearing the brunt of intimidation that the might of the trade union movement stands behind them. The parade would have been a tremendous success as the several hundred trade unionists who turned up at Transport House on Saturday morning despite the cancellation, clearly proved. However, for no good reason May Day was not celebrated. This damage must be repaired. If the supporters of the stoppage can direct their attentions to breaking the resolve of the Ballylumford men, the trade unions can concentrate on showing these men that the entire trade union movement, the tens of thousands who ignored the pickets, the threats, the abuse all week, are prepared to take action in their support. A mass demonstration in support of the stand of the Ballylumford workers would not only have the effect of stiffening their resolve to resist intimidation, it would also be a crushing blow to the UUAC.

Rank and file trade unionists have all but broken this stoppage by continuing with their work. The trade union leaders must now take action to bring these workers onto the streets in one mass demonstration in Belfast, with supporting demonstrations in other towns, in order both to show the power which backs the Ballylumford workers and to prevent Paisley and the paramilitaries from prolonging their discredited stoppage through the use of intimidation and fear.

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Example of the Unionist position of the NILP, and why it was necessary for the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group to campaign to build a new Labour Party in Northern Ireland. The issued several statements in the course of the stoppage without referring to the working class or socialism.

Irish News, May 9<sup>th</sup> 1977

Alan Carr, vice-chairman of the Northern Ireland Labour Party has called for a conference of all pro-Union parties opposed to the strike where, he said, it could be made clear to the world that the demise of the strike was not due to any weakening of the pro-Union sentiments of the vast majority of the Northern Ireland people.

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News reports

Irish Times, 9<sup>th</sup> May, a busdriver was shot at on the Sunday (8<sup>th</sup>) at the Queensland Street – Crumlin Road junction – where Bradshaw was to be shot.

**May 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>**

**Murder!**

At the beginning of the second week the steady stream of workers back to work continued, despite all the threats and all the menacing statements of the paramilitaries. Even in Larne cracks began to appear in the enforced 'solidarity'. A meeting of trades on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> voted by 111 votes to 22 to open their shops as usual instead of during the hours decreed by the Action Council. At the GEC factory a 50% turn out was reported, 540 of the workforce having gone to work.

Against this background the sheer futility of all the efforts of the 'tractor armies' which had been brought onto the streets, was shown. On Monday and Tuesday the 'military' manoeuvres of the farmers reached their climax. A number of main roads were sealed by tractors on Monday morning. Even the Newtownards Road in Belfast was closed for a period as a section of the rural population descended upon the city.

Upon Ballymena the main effects of this 'tractor driving army' were concentrated. All day Monday the town, much to the annoyance of most of the residents, was sealed off. Paisley that evening announced: "Tonight is going to be the crunch and the battle is going to be won in Ballymena." Ballymena remained closed off all that night.

Elsewhere on the following morning the tractors appeared in force again. The battle, however, did not take place in Ballymena. It occurred a few miles away at Toome. Furthermore it was not 'won'. It was decisively lost. For a short period the bridge leading to Toome was blocked by tractors and machinery. Then a crowd of Toome residents gathered behind the farmers and began to pelt them with stones. Soon another crowd of angry motorists and workers from minibuses, etc, which had found their way blocked, gathered in front of the farmers.

Attacked from both sides the farmers ran off across the fields. Behind them they left their equipment, some of which was burnt by the crowds. The rest was thrown, to a background of noisy cheers, into the river.

What happened in Ballymena that morning was far short of a battle. Paisley and a few of his disciples, including Baird, stood waiting for the police to arrive. Having instructed his supporters not to resist in any way Paisley soon found himself arrested. As soon as this happened the farmers climbed into their tractors and drove away, much to the relief of the people of the town, who quickly got back to normality with shops, etc. reopening. Paisley was released after a few hours. From his point of view the exercise had been successful. It had given a token show of strength right in the heart of his power base. With this and his arrest under his belt he could claim success in his own area and thus justify his remaining in political activity.

In Belfast paramilitaries thugs were engaged in more serious attempts to close industry. On Monday a no-warning bomb exploded outside Gallaghers factory. The following day another no-warning bomb exploded at the Mountainview [petrol] filling station, killing one person and injuring a number of others. To the dismay of the UUAC it was later revealed that the dead man was a son of the representative of the Independent Orange Order on their own Action Council.

Side by side with the power stations and the petrol stations as a key service must be placed the bus service. On Tuesday afternoon Harry Bradshaw was driving his bus along the

Crumlin Road in Belfast. A gunman stepped onto the bus at a stop, pulled out a gun and shot him.

Harry Bradshaw was killed because he was doing what his union had told him to do. He was continuing to drive his bus. This foul deed was a direct attack on the trade union movement as a whole. It enraged the entire working population, in whom a tremendous respect for the courage of the busmen had been built up.

This murder cried out for a response from the union leaders. Had they made the call it would have resulted in one of the largest demonstrations of the working class ever to have taken place in Belfast- such was the fierce outrage it provoked. On television that evening the regional secretary of the Busmen's union had the opportunity to announce such a demonstration. The only action mentioned was a delegation which the union was organising to see Roy Mason and to discuss the security situation.

The murder was answered by the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group with the following statement and appeal to the union leaders.

### **People killed in violence related to the 1977 stoppage**

Date	Name	Details
May 8 <sup>th</sup>	Robert E Crawford	A Protestant civilian he was shot by UDA in the mistaken belief that this Fermanagh man was from Southern Ireland.
May 10 <sup>th</sup>	Harry Bradshaw	A bus driver who was shot at the Crumlin Road-Queensland Street corner as he worked despite the stoppage. A UDA member as later jailed.
May 10 <sup>th</sup>	John Geddis	This UDR member was killed in a loyalist bombing of Mountainview petrol station, Crumlin Road. Ironically his father was on the main committee organising the stoppage!
May 10 <sup>th</sup>	William Hobbs	A UDA member he died in a premature explosion in Newtownabbey. A second UDA man, James B McClurg, from Antrim, died on June 7 <sup>th</sup> as a result of this explosion.

There were several other deaths in this period as a result of the continued IRA campaign. They were Edward Coleman, Douglas Deering and Robert Nairac, an undercover soldier.

## Statement Number 10

The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group condemn the murder of a Belfast bus driver. This act shows the methods to which the supporters of the UUAC are prepared to go in order to stop workers going about their work. The working class of Northern Ireland who have overwhelmingly rejected the calls of Paisley and his colleagues must make sure this despicable action is not repeated.

Throughout the present stoppage the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group have made repeated calls upon the trade union leadership to take decisive action to mobilise their members against intimidation and against the stoppage. These calls have been ignored as the union tops have preferred to adopt a low profile.

But enough is enough. With this latest murder and with the tightening of the screws of intimidation on other areas the disastrous policy of the union tops must end. More than any other group of workers the Belfast busmen have shown courage and determination to resist intimidation. They deserve more than verbal applause from the rest of the trade union movement. So too do the workers of Ballylumford.

At the moment the only major success which the UUAC can claim are where the workers have downed tools because of, and often in protest, intimidation. And while the thugs have been given a free hand the union leaders have shunned calls for the independent mobilisation of their members. In view of the latest killing the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group strongly repeats its call for the union leaders to act.

The answer which must immediately be given to this murder is the organisation of mass demonstrations in Belfast, and support demonstrations in other towns, so that the working class coming onto the streets in their thousands can show the UUAC and the paramilitaries who back it where the real power in society lies.

Such a demonstration would force Paisley into retreat. It could be followed by shop floor meetings, and shop stewards meetings in every area, to discuss the ways in which the unions can utilise the enormous resources at their disposal to organise the protection of their members against the murderers and intimidators.

The policy with the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions have adopted, of relying on the state forces instead of mobilising their own members, and of joining hands with the Confederation of British Industry and the Chamber of Commerce, must be ended.

For the independent mobilisation of the trade union movement to defeat the stoppage!  
Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> May – Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> May



On Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> a major part of the union response was to send a delegation to see Roy Mason to discuss security. The man on the front right is Eugene O'Callaghan, a senior ATGWU official.

### **11<sup>th</sup> Busmen Respond**

Sensing the anger stirring against them the UUAC were quick to condemn the murder of the busman and the explosion at the filling station. Against speculation that the 'strike' could not continue Paisley defied the evidence of everybody's eyes and declared: "The strike goes on. It's growing in strength."

Facts showed otherwise. By Wednesday most of the pickets had disappeared in Belfast. Even the shipyard was not picketed. The Ballylumford station kept open despite a reduction in the workforce. Larne Harbour opened for the first time to let in a few ships.

The intimidation was not working. Against it was the courage of the ranks of the trade union movement which prevented the more vicious attacks seen at the beginning of the stoppage from achieving their aim. Above all it was the busmen who made the power of mass action felt.

A mass meeting attended by about 600 busmen on Wednesday morning voted to suspend all bus services until after the funeral of their murdered colleague. The busmen were on strike, not in support of the UUAC but in defiant opposition to them. One week earlier a decision by these workers to suspend services would have been disastrous. At this early stage of the 'strike' the sight of the buses being intimidated off the streets would have had a demoralising effect. On Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup>, day seven of the stoppage, it had precisely the opposite effect. It was seen by all, not as a sign of any weakening of the men's resolve, but as an expression of their anger. It was a mass protest by the workers against Paisley and his colleagues.

For the second time the busmen showed the way. Mass action was necessary in order to prevent other murders. As the busmen's meeting was taking place the annual conference of the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU was being held at a hotel outside Belfast. At the start of this conference the outgoing Chairman of the Committee, Harold Binks, roundly condemned the 'fascist minded people' behind the stoppage. However, his speech failed to point the way to independent action on the part of the working class. Throughout the Province, he said, there exists "a widespread demand for better security and better protection for lives and property. This demand was not confined to any one section of the community – it was shared by all. All sections had a valuable part to play in the fight against terrorism. They should formulate specific suggestions for improvements and should pass these on to government through legitimate channels."

Harold Binks was correct when he said there exists a widespread desire among workers to end the killings. The lack of support from among Protestant workers for Paisley and his paramilitaries colleagues, whose arms are steeped to the elbow in the blood of workers, clearly showed this. A yearning exists on all side for an end to the sectarianism. There also exists a yearning, particularly among Catholic workers who have suffered the most, for an end to repression and for no more of the atrocities which the so-called 'security forces' have perpetrated.

The trade union movement can and must give vent to all this frustration. This movement alone has the potential to root out sectarianism. This could be done, firstly, by the mass mobilisation of the working class and, secondly, by taking whatever steps prove necessary to remove the guns from the hands of the bigots and the thugs and defend workers.

It was therefore unfortunate that the only action which the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Committee could foresee for workers was an extension of the 'suggestion box' idea from industrial matters to the issue of security. What better to contrast the role of the trade union leadership with that of the rank and file than the fact that, while 600 busmen were meeting in Transport House to discuss what action they could take after the death of a colleague, the Chairman of the NIC was spelling out the message: "Do nothing, leave it to the security forces."

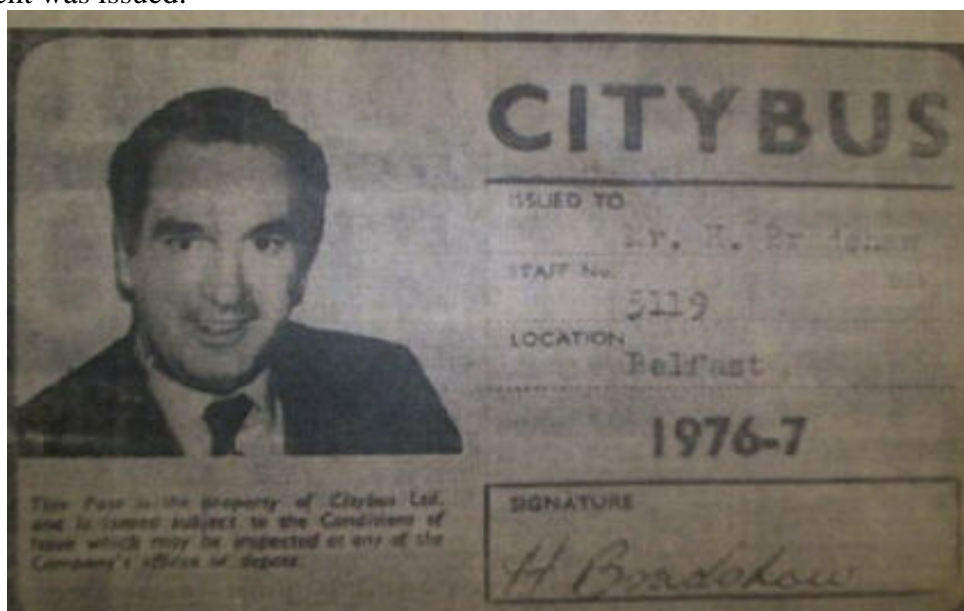
Members of the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group, armed with the group's propaganda, went to Transport House for the busmen's mass meeting.

Meanwhile the attacks continued that morning. A car bomb exploded 40 yards from the Ulsterbus depot in Bangor's Abbey Street. The following day the driver of a petrol tanker was shot while driving along the Protestant Donegal Road in Belfast. Later that evening a senior shop steward in Belfast West power station had a fortunate escape when shots were fired into his house in Newtownabbey narrowly missing his wife. These incidents indicated that the thugs had not relented in their attempt to close down the key sectors of the economy.

The danger existed of other workers meeting the same fate as Harry Bradshaw. From this the need for action from the unions remained urgent despite the virtual collapse of the stoppage in every other sense.

On Wednesday evening a meeting of the Steering Committee of the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group decided to organise a further Public Meeting to be held the following evening. The murder of the busman and the obvious danger of attacks on other

workers prompted this decision. The next day leaflets advertising this meeting were distributed to shop stewards and Co-ordinating Group member. At the meeting the actions which the trade union movement could take were discussed. From it the following statement was issued:



Works pass of Harry Bradshaw, from the Belfast Telegraph, 11<sup>th</sup> May.

### **Statement Number 11**

At a public meeting held by the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group in Belfast last night the murderous intimidation being carried out by supporters of the UUAC was condemned. The killings of the Belfast bus driver and the attack on the tanker driver shows that these elements are now stepping up their campaign to try and force workers to support them. This shows the depths of their desperation as their stoppage appears to be staggering towards complete failure.

If has been the courage and the determination of the workers which has been decisive. The busmen and the Ballylumford workers especially have borne the brunt. These workers must no longer be expected to stand-alone. The rest of the trade union movement must be mobilised in support. Already many opportunities have been missed. The mass meeting of the busmen on Wednesday could easily have been the signal for the Northern Ireland Committee to organise mass demonstrations in the cities and towns of the North, with special emphasis on a massive one in Belfast. This would clearly show the overwhelming support of the workers for the busmen and their opposition to UUAC intimidation. No more time should be lost. Such demonstrations should be organised immediately.

These should be followed up by meetings of shop stewards and trade union activists in the working class housing estates, to organise a safe mans of getting to and from work and to defeat intimidation in the estates. This is the way to end the present intimidation and suffering being endured by working class people.

Such action by the trade union movement should be the launching pad for a campaign against sectarianism and against falling living standards, unemployment and bad housing. The fight for decent living standards generally would weld together the working people, and finally bring to an end the spiral of violence, sectarianism and repression of the past years.

## Friday 13<sup>th</sup>

## The End?

The morning papers on Friday 13<sup>th</sup> were full of speculation that the 'strike' was to be called off. It was rumoured that a meeting of the Action Council the previous evening had taken a decision to that effect.

Indeed, but for the lack of buses in the morning, there was by now little evidence anywhere that a 'strike' was taking pace. Almost the only people on 'strike' were those who were 'out' in opposition to the UUAC.

The funeral of Harry Bradshaw that morning was huge. Special buses were run to it by busmen from all the depots. Afterwards these workers held a further mass meeting in Transport House. The meeting decided by a majority to resume services. This decision, which was pushed through by the platform was not popular with any of the men. In particular those from the Ardoyne depot who had been the victims of attack after attack in recent years, were totally opposed to a return to work.

At the meeting Co-ordinating Group members handed out a special leaflet. It was taken by every busman. The leaflet, printed below, repeated the call for mass action from the unions. By now, with normal working almost everywhere, many workers were beginning to doubt the need for such action. But such moods of complacency, even at this late stage, were dangerous. It was possible that further, even more serious attacks, would have been organised by the paramilitaries. In order to convince workers of the need for such action the leaflet called upon the union leaders to take this simple message to meetings on the factory floor in order to prepare the mood of their members.



14 buses brought workers to the funeral of Harry Bradshaw, a protestant member of the ATGWU, murdered for working and carrying out his unions instructions.



## **Leaflet to the Busmen**

The murder of Harry Bradshaw and the attempts on the lives of other workers by the UUAC shows that these elements are trying to tighten the screw of intimidation. In spite of this, however, the overwhelming majority of working people are ignoring their demand for a stoppage and are remaining at work. It has been this courageous and determined stand taken by the majority of workers which has been decisive in turning the UUAC action in the direction of defeat. The busmen and the Ballylumford workers have borne the brunt of the pressure so far. They must no longer be expected to stand-alone. It is up to the trade union leaders and especially the Northern Ireland Committee to give a lead.

Already many opportunities have been missed. Wednesday's mass meeting of busmen was the signal for action. The vast majority of working people were and are sympathetic to the busmen. A call from the Northern Ireland Committee on Wednesday for mass demonstrations in the cities and towns of the Province, with special emphasis on Belfast, would have been answered by tens of thousands of workers. In Belfast a massive rally would have resulted with workers marching from all areas to the city centre. From such demonstrations the call would have gone out for meetings of shop stewards and trade union activists in every working class area in order to organise ways and means to tackle intimidation and to defend workers.

The situation still class for such action. The Northern Ireland Committee leaders should put out the call at once and follow it up by tours of the largest workplaces in Belfast to get support.

A one or town hour demonstration in Belfast accompanied by similar action in the rest of the Province would begin the process of bringing to an end the intimidation and the attacks on workers.

If the Northern Ireland Committee were to take these steps the response would be the biggest demonstration of solidarity and unity of the working class movement ever to have taken place in this country. It would also mean the transformation of the trade union movement with branches, shop stewards committees and Trades Councils being revitalised. This could prepare the basis for a further campaign to be launched against sectarianism and linking this to a struggle for a decent living wage, an end to wage restraint, for full employment and an end to slum housing. Such a campaign would weld together working people in a united labour movement and would push to the sidelines all those sectarian groupings who seek to turn worker against worker. The way to defeat the intimidation and sectarianism is to mobilise the trade union movement.

- For Mass Demonstrations against intimidation
- For meetings of trade union activists in working class areas to draw up measures to defeat the intimidation.
- For a united and mobilised trade union movement fighting for decent living standards.
- For workers unity
- For an end to sectarianism

## May 13<sup>th</sup> Lessons

At midnight on 13<sup>th</sup> May the stoppage was officially ended. The workers had beaten it. Decisive action on the part of the trade union rank and file had won the day.

Sectarianism had suffered a set back. Yet, because the union leaders missed opportunity after opportunity, it had and has not been eradicated. Paisley was quick to point to the siege of Ballymena and claim that his constituents at least supported him and therefore there could be no reason for him to withdraw from political activity.

Some of the lessons of the 11 day stoppage were drawn out by the secretary of the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group in the following letter sent to the *Irish Times* and published on May 24<sup>th</sup>. This was in reply to a letter from Paddy Devlin of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (published May 9<sup>th</sup>) which was basically a defence of the stand taken by the trade union leaders during the first days of the stoppage.

### Letter to the Irish Times, published 24/5/77

Sir,

Now that the UUAC stoppage is over the statement by Paddy Devlin (May 9<sup>th</sup>) that the trade union leaders, during its course, gave a real lead to their members for the first time in years can be evaluated.

It is true that the leaders of the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU made plain their opposition to the stoppage. It is also true that these same leaders together with the officials of all the major unions burned not a little energy in attempting to keep their members at work.

But the fact remains that all this effort was not co-ordinated in an attempt to mobilise the full power and support of the unions into direct action to break the stoppage. Demands made by the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group and from other trade unionists, that such action be taken were resisted and ignored.

In contrast to the efforts of the trade union tops to maintain a low profile stands the reaction of the rank and file. In particular the mass meeting organised in Harland and Wolff, the determined stand of the power workers and, above all, the

courageous refusal of the Belfast busmen to bow to intimidation, stand out as examples of how the ranks of the trade union movement responded with mass action and mass solidarity, even if their leaders were not prepared to initiate such activity. By these methods the workers of Northern Ireland and nobody but the workers left Paisley and his accomplices paralysed.

Seven days before the event the Action Council declared their intentions. Had a programme of shop floor meetings been organised during this period, and had these meetings discussed not only the attitude of workers to the stoppage, but what preparations could be made to ensure access to and from the factories and estates, far from the bigots of the UUAC being in a position to challenge the workers' right to go to work, the workers would have been challenging the UUAC to dare lift one finger to stop them [going to work]. Unfortunately the union leaders deemed such preparations unnecessary. Fortunately the Harland and Wolff, and many other workers, decided otherwise.

On the eve of the stoppage, having wasted seven previous days, the union leaders could still have intervened

decisively. A call could have been issued to workers to march en masse past pickets or through barricades, and the necessary preparation could have been undertaken to ensure that shop stewards organised such action. Again despite the lack of central direction, that is precisely what the workers did in many areas and in many factories. Throughout the course of the stoppage it would have been simplicity itself for the ICTU chiefs to organise mass demonstrations in Belfast and other major towns. Such a show of the enormous combined power of the working people would have forced the UUAC to retreat. Demonstrations could have been coupled with shop floor meetings, meetings in estates, meetings of shop stewards, to discuss how the workers organisations could put a stop to intimidation. The murder of bus driver, Harry Bradshaw, could easily have been answered by a demonstration of tens of thousands of workers in Belfast. All that the union leaders had to do was name the time and the place.

Action on these lines was not taken. So far did the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU recoil from direct action that even the traditional May Day parade in Belfast was cancelled. Again it is fortunate that the busmen and other groups of workers did not display such timidity and indecision but made a defiant and public stand.

As a substitute for the independent mobilisation of their movement the union leaders resorted to joint statements of condemnation with the Confederation of British Industry, total reliance on the army and the police to stop intimidation and complete backing for the policies of Roy Mason. A poor substitute such policies will be proven to have been! Certainly the CBI were totally opposed to the stoppage. But not for the same reason as the members of the trade union movement. The CBI wished for a return to normal working so that they could get on, undisturbed, with the job of

exploiting the working people. Trade Unionists resisted the calls of the Action Council because, among other reasons, a sectarian stoppage would weaken the ability of the trade union movement to continue the fight against exploitation. Their very arguments of the employers which the union leaders echoed, opposing the stoppage because it was political, because of the damage to the economy, etc., are precisely those which these 'allies' in the CBI will use to attempt to discredit the future struggles of the working class, struggles which the ICTU leaders will be asked to head.

So also with the reliance on the army and the police and the policies of the government. In the first place the state forces have, for years, proven themselves incapable of defending workers. During the stoppage the action of one group of workers such as the busmen proved a thousand times more effective in breaking intimidation than the combined activities of the state forces. Policemen may stand at workers' doors for a few days. But what remains in the minds of workers is what will happen when the police go away. Only the drawing into action of the workers themselves can guarantee lasting protection.

In the second place the repressive methods of the security forces, so called, can be supported by the labour movement at its peril. Repressive laws, repressive methods on the streets, no matter on who they are practised today, will be used against the working class movement in the future. Those who applaud the threats of Roy Mason to use his military power to break this reactionary stoppage should consider what was the role of the army during the 1926 General Strike in Britain, when workers took action to defend their lowering living standards, and what would be the role of the army if the return of a Thatcher government in the future were to provoke another General Strike in Britain.

The trade union leaders here now have the opportunity to make up for the indecisiveness they have recently displayed. They should now launch a campaign on the issues of jobs, houses, wages and against sectarianism. Were they to begin a struggle against wage restraint, for a national minimum wage tied to the cost of living, against unemployment, for a cut in the working week, for work sharing without loss of pay, for a crash housing programme, and for socialist measures from the Labour government to bring these about, they would arouse the mass of the working

people into action. With the present demise of the UUAC sectarianism has been put on the run. But, like a discarded cigarette, it continues to smoulder and threaten future fires. A campaign concentrating on the fundamental class issues would stamp it out once and for all.

Peter Hadden,  
Secretary,  
Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating  
Group  
Belfast

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### **Letters to the *Irish Times*, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1977**

#### Loyalist Strike

Sirs,

Probably one of the most serious political events in the history of the Northern conflict has been timetabled for today. The possibility of 'a general and indefinite strike' as reported in the *Irish Times* is, to one who was living in Belfast during the 1974 'constitutional stoppage', a concern which must be urgently tackled by the trade union and labour movement of the Republic.

The belated response of Mr Murray and the ICTU initiative of a 'Return to Work' – six days after the strike was declared on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1974 – proved less than adequate when confronted with the intimidation and general build up of the previous strike. It is necessary for the ICTU to mobilise and defend their members from the major threat, posed by this 'strike' to working class living standards, the right to work and freedom from sectarianism. For this strike represents, clearly and definitely, a direct assault by right-wing political forces in the North on the working people of the province. Support will come from many Protestants, but it is important to stress the fact that such support is a response to the bankrupt policies of Westminster and disgust and disillusionment at the failure of politicians to present any real alternatives. It is precisely this feeling which the Bairds, Paisleys and their hatchet men are preparing to callously exploit.

So far the only response of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (its Northern Committee) was to issue a joint statement with the Confederation of British Industry and the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce. The statement was concerned about the 'ability of industry to deliver the goods' and about 'firms, both large and small' with their 'severe cash flow problems'. Perhaps the most candid confession contained in the concluding paragraph of the reported statement illustrates the impotency of the ICTU (NI) and its strange bedfellows: "There are surely better ways of finding solutions to the problems inherent in the Northern Ireland situation". Indeed there are, but one way of 'finding solutions' is 'surely' not to be found in issuing such useless statements as this one. Instead the ICTU should be making a positive challenge to the sectarian bigots by boldly standing against their threats.

If, for instance, Senator Mullen and Dr Thornley can involve themselves publicly in the cause of a humanitarian resolution of the hunger strike, surely they must make every effort, through their respective organisations, to defend the lives and living standards of many

thousands of Northern workers. The occasion now presents itself for the organised Labour and trade union movements in the North and in the South to demonstrate its commitment to a socialist solution of the troubles by asserting the only real alternative to the Right-wing guardians of social injustice and sectarian violence.

Yours etc.,

Gerard Dawe  
University College Galway

[The author had been a member of the NILP and a supporter of Militant while living in Northern Ireland.]

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9<sup>th</sup> May 1977

Sir,

There is nothing more reprehensive to those of us striving to hold off a Fascist coup d'etat in the North than to read of the sneers contained in the screed from Mr Dawe (May 3<sup>rd</sup>) – your distant drummer from Galway University.

It is completely untrue and quite unfair for your correspondent to suggest that the only response the ICTU made to the attempted 'take over' was to issue a useless statement in conjunction with the Confederation of British Industry and the Northern Ireland Chamber of Trade. It was by no means useless; on the contrary, it was extremely useful to establish an identity with all interests to maximise resistance to the Paisleyite before they got their campaign off the ground.

Of course this was but a small and shrewd part of one of the many moves made by the unions in trying to pre-empt the coup. For the first time in years real leadership has been shown by some officials, particularly by John Freeman of the Amalgamated Transport and General Workers Union and Terry Carlin of the ICTU, both of whom have exposed themselves to great personal risk in their encouragement of workers to ignore the bully-boys at the factory gates.

Senator Mullen's instincts as a humanitarian do not need to be awakened on this matter by snide references from Mr Dawe.

Officials of the Irish Transport and GWU are in direct and almost hourly contact with him as general secretary on problems which need his intervention. As usual, he has been most solicitous in his concern for his own members, unlike Mr Dawe and full of praise for the courage of Northern workers in standing up to the massive intimidation of the Paisleyites.

His observations about Dr David Thornley are equally unworthy.

Yours etc.,

Paddy Devlin  
Belfast

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News reports

The RUC reported later that in stoppage related violence 3 people had died [a fourth was killed in a sectarian attack while a 2<sup>nd</sup> UDA man died later], 41 RUC officers injured, and 115 people charged with offences committed during the strike.

## **Workers Unity Cripples Paisley Militant Irish Monthly June 1977**

The so-called General Strike organised by the Ulster Unionist Action Council (UUAC) was finally called off after ten days. This decision represented a crushing and humiliating defeat for Ian Paisley and all the reactionaries in the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and para-military groups who gave backbone to the stoppage.

The workers of Northern Ireland broke the stoppage as easily as cracking a rotten twig. Despite intimidation, attacks and open murder, they continued to go to work. Three years ago the Ulster Workers Council closed industry by a campaign of intimidation. This time workers refused to be cowed.

On the first day workers overwhelmingly swept past the pickets organised by the UUAC. In strong 'loyalist' areas some barricades were erected by cordons of UDA members who formed human barriers across streets. In the Shankill Road workers defied this action, waiting until they had large enough groups before marching past the wall of pickets.

As the threat of intimidation was clearly insufficient, the second morning the thugs began to systematically stop and threaten bus drivers. One was injured. A mass meeting of busmen was held at their union headquarters and voted overwhelmingly to continue driving.

By the end of the first week the stoppage had been shown to lack support. Even in 'loyal' Ballymena shops and factories remained open. Only in Marne, though a massive intimidation, were the docks closed and life ground to a halt. Over the weekend the UUAC tried to tighten the screws of intimidation. They directed more and more of their attention to the main Ballylumford power station which provides 75% of Northern Ireland's electricity. But all their efforts failed to crack the resolve of the Ballylumford men to stay at work.

By the beginning of the second week a section at least of the UUAC decided intimidation was not enough. They resorted to murder itself. A car bomb blew up in the forecourt of a petrol station. This was the signal to 'encourage' other stations that it would be 'healthier' too close. But to their horror they found that the person killed in the explosion was none other than a son of a member of the Action Council!

On Tuesday afternoon a Belfast bus driver was shot in the cabin of his bus. Busmen held a mass meeting and decided to strike, not in support of the UUAC but in protest at the intimidation. Two days later a petrol tanker driver was shot and on that evening an attempt was made to kill a power station shop steward. The tactic was to use the bullet and bomb to close down essential services. But the heroic stand of the busmen and the courage of the working people of Northern Ireland were victorious.

If the stoppage had succeeded the vice of sectarianism would have tightened. It would have been a grave setback for the trade union movement. Paisley's original demand for a return of a Protestant dominated Stormont and for a further repression against the Catholic population would have been no help whatsoever to the working class.

But the Labour Movement emerged with only a fraction of the strength to could have gained if the trade union leaders had used to power of the working class. The Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group called for shop floor and area meetings of shop stewards to discuss how the defence of workers could be organised. Mass demonstrations could have welded the body of the working class together. But such calls were shunned by the leaders of the Labour Movement. They even cancelled the May Day parade on the Saturday 7th May when it could have been an opportunity to intervene decisively in the struggle. Just one example of the several opportunities wasted on the eighth day when Harry Bradshaw, the bus driver, died while obeying union instructions to stay at work. He died not as a Protestant or Catholic but as a trade unionist. A call from the union leadership would have brought thousands out in a mass demonstration of union solidarity. Instead the union leaders sent only a delegation to see Roy Mason! At the annual

conference of the Northern Ireland section of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the leadership even refused an emergency motion to discuss the stoppage the day after the murder.

The leadership opposed independent action by the trade union movement leaning instead towards Roy Mason, the police and the army. But the experience of the last seven years has shown that the troops are incapable of defending workers from injury or death. On the contrary, they have been used as an instrument of brutal repression of working people. No wonder the busmen of Belfast refused the offer of armed soldiers on their buses for protection. The army can be no substitute for the mobilisation of the working class in its own defence.

The determined mood of the busmen and other workers showed how the momentum of the 'strike' was stopped in its tracks. If it had picked up steam the preparations of the army showed how they would act. Troops and heavy vehicles were brought in. Helicopters with machine guns were specially mounted. A terrible confrontation was in store. In the event it did not happen. Troops were used to disperse UDA pickets here and there but the full force of army repression was not used.

However, they are now preparing for further action against Catholic areas and even protestant where necessary. The methods used today against the IRA or UDA will be used against workers in Britain and Ireland in the future.

Sectarianism has been put on the run but the union leaders have not seized the opportunity for mass action. Paisley declared that he would retire if the strike was not supported. When he saw defeat was inevitable he turned to his power base - the farmers in Antrim. He even provoked his token arrest at a roadblock so that he could use the face saving tactic that his constituents in north Antrim supported him so he need not retire. He and his friends will now await a new opportunity to fan the flames of sectarianism.

The Labour Movement must stop any new chance for him. A campaign organised by the Labour Movement on the class issues of jobs, housing and wages and against sectarianism - building on the broad unity in the workplaces forged by the last ten days which could sweep the Paisleyites and sectarians aside permanently.

A trade union based Labour Party could be built. If a rank and file delegate trade union conference was called now to debate such a mass campaign by the trade unions and to create a political party based on the working class, it could cut across the sectarians, Tories and paramilitaries who dominate the political battleground at the moment.

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