



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Gang
PA Loyalist Strike
N¹⁰/3

Current Issues

Loyalist Day of Action Background Note

1. Regional Impact of Strike

Predictably the impact of the strike on a regional basis was conditioned by religion and political allegiance. Predominantly Loyalist towns such as Portadown and Ballymena were cut off throughout the day, as much of County Armagh and South Derry. In predominantly Nationalist towns such as Newry however, the impact of the strike was greatly reduced. This dictatory was most marked in Derry where, in stark contrast to nationalist areas, business in the Waterside district ground to halt. Public transport in Belfast was reduced but a service continued all day. The main shops in Belfast were also open. On the other hand, small shops were closed in Belfast and in Loyalist areas throughout Northern Ireland. Although the airport was open for business, roads leading to it were sealed and flights came to a halt as the day went on. With an exception in early morning ferries did not operate. Due to the action of the workers in Ballylumford in particular, there were significant power cuts averaging 4 to 5 hours. The strike undoubtedly caused widespread disruption of all services. The workforce stayed away from most major plants in large numbers. However, even Harland and Wolff and Shorts had some staff turning up for work (10 - 15%). The turnout among the Northern Ireland civil service was surprisingly high at about 90% of non industrial staff.

In general, the strike was most effective in rural areas where protestors managed to seal off roads in a virtually permanent fashion.

2. Intimidation

There were complaints from all parts of Northern Ireland about non intervention by the RUC in situations of intimidation of workers and motorised traffic. The intimidation was played up heavily in the British media, greatly diluting the effectiveness of the strike to British public opinion. The following examples are designed to illustrate the various forms of intimidation experienced during the days. In many areas, covert intimidation gave way during the afternoon to open violence.

- Workers driving through roadblocks are reported to have been photographed by protestors. In some cases, registration numbers were noted.

- There are reports of shops being intimidated into closing into Belfast, Ballymena, Lurgan, Derry, Kilkeel, Omagh and elsewhere. Intimidation took the form of telephone calls, paramilitary presence, and window-smashing.
- In Omagh a local DUP Councillor was reported to be taking the names of people going to work in the Hospital Road area.

In a statement after the strike, Sir John Herman said the police had received 237 reports of intimidation.

3. Role of RUC

A separate has been prepared on this issue.

4. Role of the British Army

The British Army appear to have been directed to remain in barracks. One report received by the Department indicates that an army barracks in Omagh was blockaded by protestors all day and no attempts was made by the army to enter or leave the complex. The army were called upon on a number of occasions to defuse bombs and clear roads. Nationalist sources in touch with us felt that the army had kept too low a profile.

5. Political Reaction

The SDLP, as represented especially by Mallon has been extremely critical of the RUC for non intervention. Hume and Currie have been previously critical, however, of Mallon's public statements. On the Unionist side, the Newsletter saw "little cause for jubilation" and Molyneux at least appears to have recognised that control of the strike had been lost to violent extremists with counterproductive effects on the British Government. He announced that he would not participate in further strike action. Reaction in the British media has been hostile to the strike. There is little doubt that the loyalists have lost both sympathy and political support as a result of the day of action with many political commentators posing the question: Loyal to whom? Mr. King has reaffirmed in the House of Commons the Government's determination to implement the Agreement. He has also emphasised the effect of the strike on the Northern Ireland economy and the right of people to go about their business.

Results of the Strike

The most immediate result of the strike has been a diminution in support for the loyalist cause, both in the British media and in sections of the Conservative Party. More important, and more difficult to ascertain, are the effects of the strike on Loyalism itself. In the immediate aftermath of the strike there were signs that the unified front put up by the OUP and the DUP was beginning to slip. Molyneaux precluded participation in any future strike action whereas Paisley was more reticent his response. It remains to be seen whether the loose alliance between the parties can be maintained in the weeks ahead.

On the security side there were no fatal injuries and violent sectarian clashes were generally avoided. Nonetheless, the failure of the police to implement the assurance that roads would be kept open has done damage to relations between the security forces and the minority community.

Anglo-Irish Section.

10 March, 1986.