

[Mr. McLachlan] hurling strong and sometimes heady words at the rest of us, have contributed to this failure. To a great extent they must accept the responsibility for not engaging in the dialogue and making sure that the fears, aspirations and lack of confidence of the people whom they represent are brought into the political process. They may well find that they reap the whirlwind of what they have done. We are reaping that whirlwind too. If an opportunity arises in the near future I appeal to them to come into play and make a contribution. They have a major part to play in the future of Northern Ireland.

Once communication has broken down dialogue is extremely difficult. What we have to do now is to get rid of the heady words and the catch phrases. We have to find a means of speaking to the people who feel excluded. It may not be so much their leaders as the people themselves to whom we should talk. I hope that all of us will play our part in trying to open that dialogue.

4.17 p.m.

Mr. Hume (Department of Commerce): The Chief Minister will refer to the general situation when he is replying to the debate. It is my responsibility to outline the situation in relation to the matters for which I have departmental responsibility. The key to the grave situation which exists is the position of electricity services. Services are now so restricted that the electricity system has been divided into two parts, one serving the west based on Coolkeeragh power station and the other serving the eastern part based on Ballylumford. Output from both these stations, the only two in operation, is greatly restricted. The supply from the Coolkeeragh station is dependent on one generating set which has been giving mechanical trouble. There is now no guarantee of how long either part of the system can remain viable. Collapse of either part could take place at any moment. We all know what the consequences would be. They have been spelt out in detail over the past weekend.

However, many people have been working very hard night and day since the beginning of the crisis to ensure that the supplies which are available have been distributed equitably. No one has yet mentioned these people. I should like to take this opportunity of paying the highest possible tribute to the chairman, the senior management and the control engineers of the Northern Ireland Electricity Service who have managed to distribute the available supplies equitably since the beginning of the crisis. I am sure that all Members would share in that tribute. [Hon. Members: Hear, hear.] That is the electricity position. I believe that people are still not aware of the gravity of a breakdown in the system. As I said, there is no guarantee that that will not take place. It is only in such a situation that people will become aware of the gravity of the total breakdown of essential-services.

Another matter for which I have responsibility is gas production. This is continuing but the continuity of supply is now in question because of the attitude of the strike organisation to oil deliveries to gas stations. On the oil front itself we understand that all oil deliveries other than those to hospitals have ceased under a direction issued by the body calling itself the Ulster Workers' Council. What this means in effect is that there will be severe problems for essential workers such as doctors who must be mobile and who must have motor fuel.

The situation on the industrial front is worsening. There is an almost complete stoppage in the Belfast area and in provincial areas where the situation was reasonable yesterday it is worsening today. The main reason for this is lack of electricity. There is clear evidence that many workers are willing to go to work but are either unable to work because of the shortage of electricity or are being prevented from going to work because of intimidation. Our information is that intimidation is on the increase rather than on the decrease. All of this has serious effects on the economy. Industry is losing

orders. The damage to the future cannot be calculated. The prospects for new industry have been greatly damaged. Last week we had a successful seminar in Europe to attract new industry but its whole effect is in jeopardy because of the situation. We are talking about jobs for our people. Unless the damage is stopped the spectre of widespread unemployment stares the people in the face. Those are the facts of the situation and the basic effects of the strike.

The body which initiated this strike calls itself the Ulster Workers' Council. The effect of its strike may well be that we will not have any workers. It says it has called this strike in the name of a political cause. I have always believed that a political cause was supposed to benefit the people in some way. No one is benefiting from what is happening. As I said, the Chief Minister will be speaking in more detail. All I have to say is that no political cause can benefit from what is happening because what we are facing is not the pursuit of a political objective but anarchy. In those circumstances it behoves every single person with the slightest grain of responsibility to stand up against it.

4.24 p.m.

Mr. Ferguson (North Belfast): As I came into the House the Rev. Dr. Paisley and the Rev. Beattie both acclaimed me loudly to be the cause of this strike. I thank God from the bottom of my heart that I had nothing whatsoever to do with the strike. There will be a judgment on the heads of those who aid and abet it. It is a despicable act. What makes it more despicable is that the strike decision was not taken in a moment of anger, as many strike decisions are. This was a carefully planned operation of which the Loyalist Coalition was fully aware; indeed, it did all it could to bring about the strike.

I do not know very much about the Ulster Workers' Council. Very few people seem to know much about it. It would appear that words have been put into the mouths of its spokesmen. One

has only to listen to their statements to realise who is really speaking. As I say, this organisation's decision was not taken in a moment of anger. It was taken some weeks ago, apparently without any trouble. There would appear to be no doubt about this. It can be proved that some of these events took place three weeks ago. A week ago yesterday certain members of the Coalition took themselves to Larne and had consultations with the strike committee.

The Loyalists and Protestants who use para-military organisations in order to enhance their political images have little or no respect for God or man. I believe that the Good Book was written for every day in the week. I find it very useful. It states:

"If a man say I love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar".

The bitterness and hatred of those who organised the strike is not directed at Catholics as such but mainly at Protestant Members of the Assembly, especially the Right Hon. Brian Faulkner. These men have no morals. Having raised the political temperature and made the iron hot they want another election tomorrow. It matters not what hardships they cause or who suffers. All that matters to them is their own political gain and advancement. They have conned the people of Northern Ireland into believing that the Council of Ireland is a half-way house to a united Ireland.

I do not believe that; nothing could be further from the truth. The Council of Ireland is not nor was it meant to be a Parliament. It is an institution or a consultative body for the common good of all our people in the North and South. The first act of the Northern Ireland Parliament over 50 years ago was to ask for nominations for such a council. You were too young, Mr. Speaker, to remember the nominations of the all-time greats who were in that list. There was Billy Grant of Duncairn, a people's man and a shipyard man. He was elected a member of that council. There was Sir Dawson Bates, one of the stalwarts of the Unionist Party;