

After this, is one going to go back to a menial, boring task? Is one going to go back on to the "buroo"? It would take quite a lot of strength of personality to opt for that. I would suggest. This is a big problem. Once people lose their respect for law and order, once they realise that as long as they ignore the law of the land they can get away with it, the effect on society is most detrimental. I would join with the previous two speakers in saying to the Executive to get hold of Mr. Rees and tell him what he has to do. The Executive should tell him that we cannot wait, because this has been going on for far too long already.

3.28 p.m.

Mr. Hume: I am sorry to intervene before other hon. Members have spoken but I have urgent business to attend to. I welcome the opportunity that you have given to me, Mr. Speaker, to intervene in the debate. All speakers to date have underlined the immediate threat posed not only to the livelihood but to the very life of the Northern Ireland community by the stoppage of fuel supplies which has been enforced by those who have provoked the present crisis.

Members are already well aware of the consequences of the near paralysis of the electricity system. Factories have been deprived of the means of production, the agricultural industry is distressed and severe personal inconvenience and hardship has been brought to every home in Northern Ireland. Those responsible for the situation have now brought us to a position in which within a very few days we may have no electricity supply at all. This is a situation fraught with implications which no advanced community has ever been called upon to meet. I doubt whether those involved really know the consequences of what they are at.

Mr. Mallon: Hear. hear.

Mr. Hume: Now we are confronted by the results of interference with the

supply of oil products. The life of this community depends upon unimpeded supplies of oil. Here I am thinking not only of all public and private transport, of agricultural and industrial production, but of the vital services which are required to preserve life. Hospitals, food manufacture and distribution, the water and sewerage systems all depend upon oil supplies. Those who are behind this action are not merely destroying our present and future economic prospects, they are in a real sense gravely imperilling the life and welfare of every person in this country.

Mr. Mallon has said that we in the Executive should look ahead to the time when this situation is settled with a view to providing compensation for all the damage caused and to all the people who have suffered. As I said here yesterday, those engaged in this action feel, or seem to feel, that there is a safety net underneath all this which can protect them and protect this community from the consequences of their action. I want to say very clearly that I know of no way nor of any plan to provide compensation for what is happening at the minute. It is simply an impossibility, and that should be clearly spelt out. If they think that a safety net is being provided they are completely and absolutely wrong.

Yesterday I gave warning of the impact which this crisis is having upon industry and on our prospects of economic growth. Today, arising from the interference with oil supplies, we are confronted by an even more immediate and indiscriminate threat to the welfare of every person in our society.

Mr. Mallon: Hear. hear.

Mr. Hume: I cannot accept that those responsible have thought through the consequences of their actions.

All Members who have spoken have given advice to the Executive and therefore to myself as the person who carries the statutory responsibility for the maintenance of these services. That advice has been about what we should

[Mr. Hume]

say to the Secretary of State. I want to make one thing very clear: that I am very well aware of my statutory responsibility for these services. I am also aware of the steps which are necessary to enable me to see that they are provided, and I have informed the Secretary of State of the steps which he must take if I am to do so. [*Hon. Members: Hear, hear.*]

3.36 p.m.

Mr. Duffy (Mid Ulster): I want to join Mr. McConnell, Mr. Mallon and the Minister in expressing concern about and dissatisfaction with the situation. One wonders where we are going. It was disappointing to hear the Minister of Education say that we were living in uncertain times. The Executive and the Assembly must steel themselves to carry out their duties despite the bullying which is going on throughout the Province. It would be very wrong to show any lack of determination. These people must not be allowed to achieve anything.

We must express our absolute abhorrence of what is going on. The manning of filling stations in Belfast by members of the U.D.A. and other para-military organisations is quite intolerable. The area east of the Bann is affected far more seriously than the rest of the Province. West of the Bann one rarely sees any evidence of the strike. That ought to be appreciated. In fact, people there are suffering only because they are deprived of oil and other essentials. It is incumbent upon the Executive to see that supplies get to areas where the strikers have no support. It is with amazement that one witnesses what is happening in the city of Belfast.

The effect of the power strike is to deprive people throughout the Province of essential commodities. By controlling power stations one can control the destiny of an entire community. How is anyone able to gain such control? I urge the members of the Executive, especially the Minister concerned, to find out who gave instructions that the whole community should be deprived

of this absolutely essential service. Like Lord Dunleath, I am amazed by the open violation of law throughout the Province. On my way to this House yesterday—only 200 yards from the gate—I was stopped and asked to produce a pass. About 20 yards away there were tender-loads of policemen, but they simply looked on.

When I was travelling home yesterday evening I was stopped again, despite the fact that within a short distance members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary were watching. I accept that that force is unable to deal with such a situation, but one must ask what the 16,500 members of the British Army are doing. Why are they not coming out and facing up to these people? There is only a sprinkling of soldiers on the streets. One can only conclude that they are not prepared to confront the people who are roaming the streets and inflicting such hardship. Like other Assemblymen, I call on the members of the Executive to go down to the Castle and make known their complete dissatisfaction and that of the Assembly—indeed, that of the community at large—with the stagnant way in which the Secretary of State is acting. The lack of activity is amazing.

I should like to draw attention to the fact that some barricades are being manned by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment. Members of that regiment are taking part in the strike and encouraging intimidation. I want to register my dissatisfaction. If electricity supplies were restored the Province would return quickly to normality. Every sinew should be strained in our efforts to get the technicians and other workers back to work. We have been told that they are available. The rows of empty Executive Benches seem to indicate that Ministers do not appreciate the urgency of the situation. If they did, some of them would be here to reply to our criticism and advice.

3.41 p.m.

Mrs. Dickson: I support most of the sentiments expressed by other hon. Members. It is deplorable that there is