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Organised Loyalism - other than political parties "as at 17/6/74"

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21/15/74

This note summarises the various organisations and groups - with the exception of the political parties - through which Northern Ireland Loyalism finds expression and which the Catholic community would consider to a greater or lesser extent inimical to its interests. These are the para-military organisations, the Northern Ireland security forces and the recently emerged Workers' Councils. The note considers also the evidence which exists, over the last few years, of the strength and modus operandi of these groups even though this evidence in no way provides an adequate blueprint for future activities as it is fair to say that only the UWC has shown its hand, the Loyalist para-military organisations contenting themselves with occasional massive demonstrations of strength, sectarian assassinations, games of brinkmanship with the British Army and attacks on Catholic owned property.

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I. Para-military Organisations

Most of these organisations, whose strength can only be guessed at in many cases, gathered under the umbrella of the Ulster Army Council in mid-December 1973. The most significant of these, in numbers and influence are the Ulster Defence Association and the Ulster Volunteer Force. After these come the Ulster Special Constabulary Association (USCA), the Red Hand Commandos, Down Orange Welfare, the Orange Volunteers, the Ulster Protestant Volunteers and the Vanguard Service Corps. Whether such groups as Tara, "The Militants", the Ulster Freedom Fighters and the Ulster Citizens Army have a sufficiently separate existence from the above organisations or indeed any existence at all to count as additional components of the Council is open to conjecture.

(i) U.D.A.

Formed originally in the immediate wake of internment, August 1971,

this consists of a central council of the various local defence associations which either previously existed or came into being at that time. In May 1972 the UDA reformed itself on military lines, with a Major General, Brigadier and eleven Colonels or Lieutenant-Colonels who between them formed the 13-man Inner Council. In January 1973 this was increased to 17 members, but later following a "coup" type operation by dissatisfied young militants the number dropped to five, to be called henceforth the General Staff.

The UDA has never been declared an illegal organisation despite its many flauntings of the authority of the RUC and British Army. It has been shaken and its membership drastically reduced by internal suspicions and feuds especially in 1973 when the strain between young militants and the ^{other} other conservatives who were against taking on the British Army was most apparent. The deaths of "Duke" Ernie Elliott and Tommy Heron, allegedly for attempting to steer the organisation in a too-socialist direction reflected another source of tension. The UDA is still however undoubtedly the largest para-military organisation in the North. The most up to date assessment of its strength is approximately 25,000 and while the main concentrations are in Belfast they have claimed to have battalions in most of the major towns. The organisation has units also in Britain, chiefly in the Lancashire area. The present chairman is Andy Tyrrie.

In an interview published in May 1972 in the Sunday Independent the UDA outlined their political objectives as follows: that Loyalist politicians should unite to form a common political front, that the minority community should do the same and that both sides should then negotiate; on the return of Stormont "with increased powers" a form of community government should be established" ... Catholics cannot annihilate Protestants and Protestants cannot

annihilate Catholics. Obviously we have to live together and the sooner a formula is found for both of us to do that the better we will like it"; improved relations with the South would be welcomed but a united Ireland was absolutely ruled out. If Stormont was not restored, and if UDI were proclaimed trading relations with the South would be developed to a greater extent. In this and subsequent interviews in 1972 chiefly given by Tommy Heron the then Vice-Chairman, the UDA was quick to distinguish between Catholics as a whole and the IRA. The tone of these interviews shows evidence of socialistic tendencies and a willingness to talk to representatives of the minority community. In August 1972 the UDA hoped to see the emergence of working class socialist political party, broad based enough to attract Catholic support.

During the Sunningdale talks the UDA called for complete integration with Britain or an independent Ulster and rejected any form of a United Ireland. It betrayed mounting exasperation with the inability of the Loyalist politicians to unite in order to effectively cope with the situation (a theme running through UDA announcements for several years).

Finally, however, in January of this year, the UDA announced that the organisation was seeking a more responsible image and intended itself to take the political initiative. They proposed putting four alternative solutions to the Loyalists in a series of meetings to be held all over Northern Ireland. These were:

- a federal Ireland
- a Protestant Ulster for a Protestant people
- an independent Ulster with Protestants and Catholics working together
- the Sunningdale proposals.

- The preliminary results of this consensus-seeking were later said to favour power-sharing on the Swiss or Israeli model, next integration, next restoration of Stormont or lastly an independent Stormont.

Round about the same time (February 1974) the UVF outlined its "Peace Plan" calling for a Council of Ulster (see section on UVF below). The UDA rejected their proposals, though they covered some of the alternatives outlined above, as "likely to demoralise the Protestant people". It is not hard to detect a note of pique that the UVF should have stolen its thunder. Some weeks later, on March 8th, in a statement of intent the UDA said, inter alia, that it would favour the formation of an Assembly and Executive which reflected all the views of the people.

The most interesting statement in recent times from the UDA came, however, on April 3rd, when it warned that the Northern Ireland situation would have to be resolved within the year as otherwise the aims of the British and Irish Governments and of the IRA would be achieved, leading to civil war. To prevent this a series of proposals and counter proposals were suggested. The proposals included the taking of aggressive action against those areas where the Provisional IRA receive succour, support and a base for their continuing operations and an interesting counter proposal suggesting negotiation between the IRA and UDA provided the IRA rejected their aspiration for a united Ireland in the near future and the Loyalist people accept the withdrawal of British troops and a reorganisation of the RUC acceptable to both parties. The statement points out that the UDA must either dissolve and be absorbed into its social organisation, (the Action Community Team,) or take the initiative and resolve the situation once and for all.

The UDA has several times since the publication of these proposals warned that it may go on the offensive. However the UWC strike

provided an outlet for some of this war fever, the UDA being principally responsible for the manning of barricades and roadblocks during the 15 day stoppage. Since the termination of the strike the UDA is no doubt, in common with all other political or quasi-political groups in the island, looking into the crystal ball. An indication of its thinking may lie in a remark of its chairman, Andy Tyrrie, to the Press Counsellor in London, after a recent radio programme to the effect that "the only hope for the Province's future lay in the Loyalists and the SDLP coming together and agreeing to share power, with no interference from either Dublin or London". While its numbers are not as great as in the heyday of the no-go areas, and while its discipline may not be as tight as that of e.g. the UVF or the Orange Volunteers, it remains a large and powerful threat to the minority community, especially in Belfast.

(ii) The Ulster Volunteer Force

The UVF, founded sometime in the early 1960s, and proclaimed an illegal organisation in 1966 after the Malvern St. murders, is reputedly the most tightly organised and disciplined of the para-military organisations with units throughout the North grouped in three main battalions in Armagh, East Antrim and Belfast and with units in Liverpool, Glasgow and Manchester. Though it claimed responsibility in November 1973 for 97% of the recent Loyalist activity, its numbers are much fewer than those of the UDA with whom however it has co-operated on many occasions and in different organisations over the past few years, the latest such being the Ulster Army Council. The UVF appeared in 1972 to be the social conscience of the Loyalist movement and co-operated with the UDA in an attempt to clean up the racketeering and gangster elements in East Belfast. Like the UDA it has proclaimed on a number of occasions its impatience with the inability of the Loyalist politicians to unite and press for a single coherent solution to

the problems of Northern Ireland. This, coupled with the realisation that the IRA through Sinn Féin was winning the propaganda war in the U.K. led to the formation in November 1973 of the United Loyalist Front, ~~arising out of the feeling that the relationship of Sinn Féin and the IRA, both wings, should be installed as the political mouthpiece of the UVF,~~ represented in the Assembly by Hugh Smith, member of West Belfast. At that time the new organisation was to be made up of ten separate fronts throughout the North. These may or may not have been based on the existing UVF structure. The ULF would work within the law for "17 political and social objectives ranging from worker partnership schemes in plants and factories to the release of all Loyalist prisoners", and demanding a withdrawal by Britain from the EEC and the UN.

In August 1973 the East Antrim battalion of the UVF had stood down from active service and, condemning the sectarian murders, announced its intention of becoming a "socio-political ginger group at local government level". In November a 43-day Christmas cease-fire was announced during which time politicians were urged to implement policies guaranteeing Northern Ireland's position within the U.K. A measure of the influence of the UVF on all the para-military organisations is the fact that their "request" that these other organisations follow their example in calling a cease-fire until January 1974 was almost 100% successful. This cease-fire was later extended indefinitely by the UVF only, because of the unity now being shown by Loyalist politicians and "the coming together of all para-military organisations" (in the Ulster Army Council) though the UVF stress its opposition to power-sharing and a Council of Ireland. Rumours of UVF backing for a six county Ulster within a federally united Ireland began to emerge in January of this year, provided the idea got popular support, though ostensibly the alternatives of a return of Stormont, or an independent Ulster were being pursued.

At the end of January the UVF responded to a Provisional IRA request, that in return for the Provo declaration that off-duty UDR men were no longer legitimate targets, the Loyalists would cease sectarian assassinations, by issuing a statement condemning sectarian executions and calling on all para-military organisations "to ensure that such activities cease forthwith". Further evidence of the UVF's turning away from violence and towards politics came in a long and interesting article in the Sunday News of February 3rd. In this the UVF admitted carrying out many acts of violence through fear brought about by "50 years of sectarian indoctrination by Unionist politicians". Having studied the question exhaustively the UVF were now disillusioned with all politicians (with the possible exception of D. Boal) and called for the creation of a "new society based upon the unity and sovereignty of the ordinary rank and file Ulster people - Protestant and Catholic alike". The statement opposed the Council of Ireland and called for a conference representative of all shades of opinion to hammer out a new constitution after which "Britain and Eire must be told in no uncertain terms that the people of Ulster will plot their own destiny and govern their internal affairs". Undeterred by the UDA's dismissal of this article and by growing dissatisfaction among the militant members of the organisation, the UVF has reportedly made contact with the Official and Provisional IRA and pursued its interest in a political solution though warning that its military structure remains intact and differentiating between offensive and defensive actions. In April the UVF was removed from the list of proscribed organisations.

Just before the UWC strike the UVF, as a member of the Ulster Army Council called for a period of direct rule during which new elections should take place in constituencies "reduced in size so that independents can have a chance". The statement also called for the dismissal of the Council of Ireland "even as a topic for discussion" and (still striving for a united Loyalist voice) for

a Congress of all Loyalist politicians, groupings and para-military organisations.

The UVF therefore appears to have within itself a strong military structure, whose striking ability is not in question but whose stance will be defensive as far as possible together with a genuine commitment to seeking a political solution. Their support of the UWC strike is not in conflict with that commitment. As lately as June 11th they have again called on the Provisional IRA to end its bombing campaign and seek election to future Northern Ireland Administration. In this it differs from the UDA who have to some extent thought through a political stance but who have not abandoned the idea that a military solution may be more effective.

(iii) Orange Volunteers

Little is known of this organisation, which is a member of the UAC and whose name invariably crops up in any list of para-military organisations. It was apparently founded in June 1972 by William Craig and consisted then of 500 ex-servicemen organised under the direct control of Vanguard. It, with a 200 strong Vanguard Service Corps formed to steward Craig's rallies and some 12,000 members of the Ulster Special Constabulary Association made up the "Ulster Guard".

Discipline is said to be tight in the Orange Volunteers, as befits an organisation of ex-servicemen. Many of its members are reputed to be in the Orange Order, though there are no formal links between the two organisations. However, the recent discoveries of arms caches in Orange Halls may have dented that assertion slightly. Its political philosophy is summed up in its avowed task of defending the Protestant heritage in a "doomsday" situation.

(iv) Down Orange Welfare

Reports of this organisation, reputedly 5,000 strong and under the command of Lt.-Col. Edward Brush, ready to take up arms in the event of a civil war, were first published in November of last year and were dismissed by the authorities at that time as a cheap publicity stunt.

Nothing further was heard of the organisation until the recent UWC strike, when Down Orange Welfare was listed as one of the para-military constituent organisations of the Ulster Army Council. After the strike Col. Brush appeared at a victory rally with other worker and para-military leaders and politicians. A report of June 4th in the Daily Mail stated that the Colonel is head of "what military intelligence believes to be the most efficient of the para-military groups in Ulster", and that he was adviser on "security" during the strike. Col. Brush who is a J.P. was quoted as being in favour of forming a Home Guard responsible for internal Northern Ireland security and of bringing back the B-Specials.

(v) Ulster Volunteer Service Corps

Originally known as the Vanguard Service Corps, this group, 200 strong, was founded in 1972 by William Craig to steward his Vanguard rallies, together with the Orange Volunteers, at a time when a rift occurred between Vanguard and the UDA. Together with the USCA, these three groups formed the Ulster Guard, Vanguard's own Commando organisation independent of the UDA. The Vanguard Service Corps was disbanded by Craig in November 1973 and regrouped itself under its present name, still retaining its sympathy for the Vanguard movement.

It adhered to the original UVF cease-fire of November/December 1973 but warned in January 1974 that unless the Loyalist politicians crushed the Executive a final military offensive would be launched

by the para-military organisations. "Once a military campaign is started it will continue until Loyalist politicians who were barred from Sunningdale are brought to the talks and positive steps are made to restore democracy to government in Northern Ireland ... We will not be taking arms against the army or police but if they take up arms against us then a confrontation cannot be avoided ... if Westminster refuses to recognise the (Loyalist) one third of the population ... then there would be no alternative but to seek an independent Ulster". (Sunday News 27/1/74) The UVSC Commander also said in the interview quoted above that the Boal plan might be accepted as an alternative to an independent Ulster.

(vi) Ulster Special Constabulary Association

This group consists of members of the former B-Specials who were disbanded in April 1970. It has had close associations with William Craig's Vanguard movement and formed part of the Ulster Guard previously referred to. At that time its membership reportedly stood at 12,000. The USCA leadership is not named or quoted in any reference material available here, but it can probably be taken that it would fall in on the ultra-right and most belligerent wing of the UAC and that with its local knowledge, wide dispersion and access to arms (after disbandment many B-Specials formed rifle clubs until the formation of these in turn was halted. Many of them also joined the UDR, established at that time.) it would constitute one of the most dangerous of the para-military groups in a civil war situation.

Future policy of the UAC

The Congress of Loyalist groups referred to in the section on the UVF (drafted earlier) has now (17/6/74) been announced. It will consist of a three day meeting of the UAC and UWC but will exclude Loyalist politicians who appear to be in the process of being

totally swept aside by the working class organisations as leaders. The mounting disillusionment with these politicians noted above and obvious in all public pronouncements of the UDA, UVF, et al, came to a head with their belated and initially cautious endorsement of the UWC strike.

This congress will consider a call from the West Belfast brigade of the UDA for a three month cease-fire period to be enforced on their more militant members by the UAC and by both branches of the IRA during which time negotiations (from which politicians would be excluded) regarding the future of Northern Ireland, power-sharing in some form is regarded as essential, but a Council of Ireland totally ruled out, would take place. That such a congress should even meet to consider such proposals must be seen as a victory for the saner elements within the para-military organisations, though their politics would not in their present form be acceptable to the IRA of either persuasion, to the Catholic population or to the Southern Government. The strength of the working class movement, in both its military and worker aspects, must now be urgently considered.

Other para-military organisations

Groups other than those in the UAC are frequently mentioned. Very little hard factual information is available in their regard and their claims regarding manpower, firing power, etc. must be taken with some scepticism as indeed must such claims from all para-military groups. Many have no political philosophy beyond a simple desire to defeat the IRA and maintain the Union. In the coming months there will possibly, depending on the outcome of the congress referred to above, be an increased effort by the larger para-military groupings to at least restrain their militancy and if possible add some sophistication to their political thought processes.

● Red Hand Commandos

No reliable information is available regarding the number of people in this organisation formed in 1972. by John McKeague following a split with the UDA though one newspaper report at the time the organisation was proscribed (November 1973) put it as low as 30. The group has apparently some connection with the UVF, though it is likely that the UVF would at present condemn its sectarian policies, and is centred on the Shankill Road and Sandy Row districts of East Belfast. The Red Hand is reputed to have carried out assassinations and armed robberies. It is working class in orientation and its political philosophy appears to centre simply on opposition to the IRA and retention of the British connection. Since its proscription little has been heard of the activities of the group though the name occurs regularly in lists of para-military organisations.

Tara

Even less is known of this group, whose name occurs from time to time in lists of para-military groups. Its chairman apparently criticised the peace proposals of the UVF published in April 1974 and thereby drew upon the organisation a scathing attack from one of the UVF Brigadiers who, whoever took the criticisms seriously enough to publish a long and detailed refutation. From this latter article (Sunday News 14/4/74) one deduces that Tara is an organisation of "evangelical Protestants" whose Colonel is an enthusiast of ancient Irish culture. All new recruits are given a lecture on the significance of the name and members of the group are referred to as "kingsmen". One also gathers from this article that Tara opposes any dialogue between Loyalists and IRA supporters of either branch, that it disapproved of the UVF cease-fire, that it condemned the UVF condemnation of sectarian assassinations, that it considers religion a factor of paramount importance in the current struggle and that the UVF call for a "new society based

upon the unity and sovereignty of the people" was an act of treachery. There is a connection with the Orange Order as the Colonel of the Tara Brigade was "instrumental in having the banner of Ireland's Heritage Orange Lodge inscribed with Gaelic lettering". (This featured in one of our Bulletins a few years ago)

Ulster Freedom Fighters

More than any other group this organisation has been identified with sectarian murders and with attacks on Catholic owned property especially in the summer and autumn of 1973. Its origin is obscure and contested. It announced itself in June 1973 as a group of men dissatisfied with the "soft line" being taken by the UDA. There are still strong grounds, however, for believing it to be a grouping possibly numbering no more than 20, within the main UDA organisation which will claim responsibility for outrages thought too extreme for the parent organisation to be associated with. In the two months between May 13th and September 7th, 1973, they claimed responsibility for 13 assassinations, 17 attempted killings and 18 bombings. Although ten UFF members were reported to be in Long Kesh very shortly after commencing their operations, the structure of the organisation remained a mystery. In November the UFF was proscribed.

The UFF has also been rumoured to have connections with the UVF and certainly followed that organisation's lead in maintaining a 43-day cease fire (November 18th - December 31st, 1973). However, unlike the UFF it resumed its campaign against Catholics in January 1974 and has continued up to the present time, its latest bombings occurring at a greyhound training track and a Catholic primary school. The UFF have been condemned by the UVF and the invitation of Ken Gibson, leader of the UVF, to the UFF to explain their position and objectives has been rejected.

Finally it is worth noting that Thomas MacGiolla and Professor Kennedy Lindsay (VUPP) have claimed that the UFF is a unit of British Army SAS engaging in counter insurgency the latter stating that the organisation has been forced to "tone down" its operations since the coming to power of the Labour Government as that Administration would not tolerate its activities to the same extent as the previous Tory Government. It is certainly true that between March 21st and June 8th the UFF did not claim responsibility for any explosions.

Whatever its origin and allegiance, the UFF appear to have no coherent political philosophy or blueprint for the future of Northern Ireland beyond a commitment to defeating the IRA and maintaining the union with Great Britain. It is not a member of the Ulster Army Council and played no overt part, at least, in the UWC strike.