

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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The Loyalist Paramilitaries: Political Assessment of  
Current Situation

1. The election last May of 59 Sinn Fein members, who openly support the so-called armed struggle, to 17 of the 26 district councils; the banning and rerouting of loyalist and Orange marches during July and August, coupled with anxiety about the possible emergence of an Anglo-Irish Agreement which some fear would destroy their Britishness, has placed the loyalist paramilitaries increasingly in the spotlight and has put pressure on them to be seen to respond to what they and some unionists see as the threat to their heritage.

2. Officers in the Department of Foreign Affairs have recently discussed the current situation in the loyalist paramilitary organisations with, among others, the Official Unionist Deputy Leader, Harold McCusker M.P., the OUP Spokesman on Security, Ken Maginnis M.P., the OUP General Secretary, Frank Millar, the Lord Mayor of Belfast, John Carson, members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, including a DUP member and the leader of the Alliance Party, John Cushnahan, the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh, Dr. Armstrong, and other clerics of the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Moderator, Mr. Bertie Dickinson and the Clerk of the Assembly, Dr. Simpson, and with a number of commentators including a journalist who as well as being an expert on the loyalist paramilitaries has spoken individually to a very large number of them, including all the leadership, within the last two weeks. What follows is based on the information obtained in contact with the above, and on our own assessment of what they had to say.

3. The two main loyalist paramilitary groupings are the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). The UDA which is by far the largest and most important loyalist paramilitary grouping is not outlawed. When it resorts to paramilitary violence it usually makes use of the pseudonym of Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF). The UVF is illegal. During the last year McMichael of the UDA established

the Ulster Defence Force (UDF), which consists of about 70 UDA men who have been trained in map reading and target shooting. The purpose of this is to produce a nucleus of well trained UDA cadres. They remain untested.

4. Andy Tyrie has led the UDA for the past twelve years. He is in a stronger position now than ever before. It had been the practice until recently for the local UDA Commander, who is styled brigadier, to be elected by the local membership. Tyrie has, however, in the recent past appointed the brigadier for South Belfast, John McMichael, and the brigadier for North Belfast, Davy Payne.

5. McMichael, who is generally regarded as not being very bright, is very close to Tyrie, who appointed him leader of the failed UDA political front, the New Ulster Political Research Group, and is the chief public spokesman for the UDA. Payne is perhaps more significant. He was interned in the early seventies. He is known as a sadist and a bully, is believed to have murdered the SDLP Senator Paddy Wilson and his girlfriend, (she had more than 40 stab wounds) and to have been responsible for many other atrocities. Though he has been arrested by the RUC on many occasions they have never charged him, one reason being that they have always had to treat him gently because of his heart condition. His appointment by Tyrie has led to tension among the UDA in the North Belfast area.

6. The UDA's strength lies throughout Belfast. It has little influence elsewhere in Northern Ireland. There are links between the UDA and many unionist politicians. Peter Robinson, the DUP deputy leader, was initially very close to the UDA and is believed by his colleagues to keep in contact with them. Others such as Alan Kane of the DUP and George Seawright, the independent unionist whose support is in the Shankill, would retain very close links with the UDA and possibly with the UVF. Moderate unionists such as Maginnis see McMichael from time to time, though Millar refuses to meet him or any other paramilitary.

7. The UVF, which is an illegal organisation, is much smaller than the UDA. Its base is the Shankill. The UVF leadership, including the overall chief of staff (Bunter Graham), was charged in the Budgie Allen supergrass trial, which collapsed in early July. With the exception of the chief of staff they had been replaced while they were in gaol and are now engaged in a struggle to reassert their leadership. Graham is very sore because he believes those outside failed adequately to support his family while he was in gaol. They also sold his caravan. The Red Hand Commandos have become absorbed into the UVF since the assassination by INLA of their leader John McKeague in 1982.

8. Both the UDA and the UVF are in the words of one of our contacts "riddled" by the RUC. Though Judge Higgins released the UVF men charged on the evidence of Budgie Allen, because of the unreliability of the witness, the RUC remain knowledgeable about the leadership and able to pick them up whenever they want. It is believed they told the police everything they know while in prison. Similarly the UDA leaders are well known to the RUC. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] UDA HQ is bugged by the RUC as was proved to the satisfaction of a journalist contact recently when visiting Tyrrie in his offices. McCusker and other prominent unionist politicians believe the UDA and the UVF to be incapable of mounting a campaign because of their infiltration by the police. Both the UDA and the UVF leaderships are aware of the knowledge of the police.

9. Both the UDA and the UVF are widely involved in racketeering, be it in the form of control over certain building sites or building trades (UDA), in the form of the black taxis (UVF) and of drinking clubs (UDA), or more simply in the form of extortion. The UDA have also become money lenders, charging 25%. Some of the UDA protection rackets do provide a "service" and they frequently claim that their services can, and do, prevent petty thieving from, for example,

building sites. Many of our contacts in Northern Ireland, including McCusker, believe that the UDA and the UVF have become "too soft" to be capable of handling a long paramilitary struggle, because of their interest in the rackets. Others such as John Carson, who has very good contacts on the Shankill, believe they will never again attract the following they have had in the past because they are distrusted by the local population who envy them their rich life style, with big houses and big cars, while their colleagues languish in the Maze. The conclusion is that the UDA, and particularly Tyrrie, are more interested in making money and devote most of their time to that end.

10. The rerouting of some of the Orange parades and the consequent clashes between the police and loyalists, especially in Portadown, followed by the expulsion of policemen and their families from loyalist estates in Cookstown and Portadown, have raised the spectre of loyalist violence again.

11. The initiative to oppose the decision to reroute the parades by the creation of a broad front came not from loyalist paramilitaries but from local Portadown Orange Order leaders, in particular Alan Wright who organised the loyalist meeting of 3rd July. That meeting was attended by Paisley and Molyneaux and Wright was encouraged to take the lead by them, according to both OUP and DUP contacts. Another local leader is Black, who was prominent in Vanguard during the seventies and his son. The elder Black is also a member of Craigavon Borough Council, and is described by Millar as a fringe lunatic whose influence is temporary.

12. Both the UVF and the UDA were present in Portadown during the disturbances. In particular McMichael and Tyrrie were seen on the 12th and 13th as well as on the 3rd. Those who travelled went by bus from Belfast to Portadown and the UDA had great difficulty in filling a small number of buses with their supporters. This underlines the Belfast/city nature of both UDA and UVF. Their concerns are with Belfast and it would be

very difficult for them to become involved anywhere else on a regular basis. It also underlines the relative lack of serious interest. The buses were frequently stopped by the RUC and had the UDA or UVF really intended to be serious about the situation in Portadown they would have travelled by other less noticeable means.

13. Wright established the United Ulster Loyalist Front (UULF) in early August in Portadown. Only one unionist MP attended that meeting, Peter Robinson, the DUP deputy leader. Almost all other unionist MPs as well as Frank Millar, the General Secretary of the Official Unionist Party, had been approached by Wright and had refused. The position of the Official Unionists was that members were not permitted to attend in an official capacity, though some attended in a personal capacity. A 13-member committee was set up by the UULF on which the UDA is represented by McMichael. Two other members of the Committee are the extreme DUP Councillors George Graham (Newry and Mourne) and Ethel Smyth (Down). Three resolutions were passed, calling for the resignation of Sir John Hermon, welcoming the OUP/DUP pact and their joint work to devise a strategy to resist an Anglo-Irish agreement, and thirdly calling for the establishment of a UULF committee in every locality.

14. The UULF arose in response to a specific situation - the rerouting of Orange parades. The impetus came from the local Orange Order and was encouraged by the unionist politicians. The OUP have since distanced themselves from the agitation. Paisley has also been, for him, reasonably careful, though he has permitted elements of the DUP to take their seats on the Committee. Maginnis believes this agitation is past its zenith. A well informed commentator, probably correctly, says it was a one issue affair and is now almost closed.

15. Underlying the development of the UULF, according to the OUP General Secretary, is a belief that the efforts of constitutional unionist politicians are failing to preserve the

unionist position and that it is now necessary to supplement the efforts of constitutional unionist politicians.

16. In order to deal with this and to protect their flank a working group of six, Robinson, Wilson and Foster of the DUP and Millar, Smyth and Ross of the OUP, has been established to co-ordinate tactics and to deal with the perceived threat to their position. It is that group which drafted the Unionist document presented to Mrs. Thatcher on 30th August by Molyneaux and Paisley. It is the belief of the OUP that the existence of that group, which is a concrete expression of the OUP/DUP pact, has prevented Paisley throwing in his lot completely with the paramilitary forces evident in Portadown. Paisley is described by many sources, including some in the DUP, to be erratic and capable of throwing his weight behind the paramilitaries.

17. The leaders in Portadown attracted support principally from the Orange Order, from the DUP and from independent unionists. The fact that Paisley was present at Portadown for half an hour to give encouragement, as well as being present at other Orange parades over the summer such as Castlewellan, Randalstown and Keady, has been remarked upon unfavourably by persons such as the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh and the OUP spokesman on security, Ken Maginnis.

18. As of now the UULF is inactive due to the nature of its foundation, to the fact that the OUP have succeeded in providing an alternative focus - the pact and the document presented to Thatcher - and to the adverse reaction within large sections of the unionist community to the expulsion of RUC families from their homes on loyalist estates in Portadown and Cookstown. This latter factor is a very important one.

19. A central pointer to the ability of the loyalist paramilitaries to mount a serious campaign will be the extent to which they receive support from the Orange Order and from unionist politicians. We have a report which indicates that

the UVF and the Orange leadership (including Martin Smyth, OUP MP for South Belfast) met early in August to work out a joint strategy following the events in Portadown. [This report came to us from the UVF through a journalist who is not entirely reliable and may represent UVF kite flying.] Speaking "as a traditional unionist", which presumably means an Orangeman, Martin Smyth, taking the weekly OUP press conference on 2nd September, said that if the British constitution were to be "set aside" Northern Ireland unionists would ultimately resort to force of arms. "If a decision was made to put Northern Ireland outside the Union into a United Ireland we would defend our right as citizens to defend our territory." Archbishop Armstrong, who is friendly with Smyth, was astonished by Smyth's words and believed that it was the Orange Order which had put him up to it.

20. The Order numbers about 80,000 and there are an unknown number (perhaps up to 20,000) in the Paisley controlled Independent Orange Order. Both, but particularly the main Orange Order, are believed to be weak and lack vigour. They are of little consequence except during the marching season of July and August and then only in those areas where they are still face to face with Catholics. There has been very little, if any, trouble in Belfast and in Derry with Orange marches which are now kept out of Catholic areas.

21. There is no evidence that the paramilitaries on their own can mount a violent campaign of a general nature. Unlike 1974 they lack the support of a broad section of trade unionists, though there is some evidence that they retain strong links with workers manning the power stations.

22. The UDA and the UVF can always carry out a sectarian murder particularly in fringe areas late at night after they have taken drink. There is also, according to unionist politicians, always a possibility that a maverick or a small group will try to mount a campaign. However, sectarian murder and the random killing of Catholics do not find ready

support within the unionist community. The leadership of the paramilitary groups do come under pressure from within their organisation from time to time to show that they can still deal with the Catholics. The recent killing by the UDA of a Sinn Fein election member while painting a house in a loyalist housing estate in Lurgan is thought to reflect such pressure. McMichael, who gave the order for that killing, told a journalist contact that he now believed that Catholics should be kept out of Protestant housing estates. He also told him that they were watching three particular Sinn Fein members in Belfast. Our contact believed it likely attempts could be made on their lives. He also believed that the petrol bomb attack on a CIE bus on 5 September probably represents a once off attack by the UDA, and that the additional declaration that Southern registered cars are legitimate targets should not be seen as heralding a major campaign.

#### Conclusion

23. The conclusion of all our contacts is that as of now the loyalist paramilitaries lack the wherewithal, be it commitment, weapons, manpower or money, to mount a sustained campaign. It seems very significant that the whole pattern of recent events, notably the Sinn Fein successes, the leaks about an Irish Government role in the administration of Northern Ireland and the disturbances following the rerouting of the Orange parades, have not resulted in any perceptible additional support for these paramilitary organisations. Nor have they any significant political or trade union support. As of this moment the key remains with the unionist politicians not with the loyalist paramilitaries.

*Doc*

D. O Ceallaigh

10 September 1985