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PROTESTANT ALIENATION

1. There has been much reporting over recent months of a growing alienation in Protestant communities. These reports have come from a number of sources: directly from politicians such as Dr Alderdice, indirectly from PAB, the press, community leaders, etc; and one could reasonably presuppose a linkage between a growth in alienation and increasing loyalist paramilitary violence.
2. In an attempt to clarify whether such reports are accurate and, if so, to diagnose alienation in the Protestant community, Central Secretariat brought together officials

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from a number of NI departments and NIO divisions. Our analysis and conclusions are contained in the attached paper. This is necessarily somewhat impressionistic, not least because no-one either in Unionist politics, Protestant communities or Government departments could or would claim an authoritative grasp of all the issues. Likewise the conclusions of the note and its recommendations are necessarily a little tentative. But the consensus view is that a problem does exist, primarily in the economic and social field though very definitely fuelled by constitutional uncertainty, and that we cannot be complacent in seeking to assuage Protestant anxieties.

3. The recommendations set out in paragraph 22 of the attached note need not be regarded as comprehensive or definitive. Ministers may wish to use the note as a basis for a wider discussion with officials at which the broader canvas and points for action could be discussed.

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PROTESTANT AREAS AND ALIENATION

Introduction

1. This note seeks to set out our current understanding of the accuracy of the recent spate of claims that "Protestant areas" are being increasingly alienated from the Government; and to suggest suitable steps we might take.

Background

2. There has been a large number of reports, particularly since last autumn (NB pre-Coleraine), of increasing Protestant alienation. They come from politicians (UUP, DUP and Alliance, as reported by PAB); community leaders (including occasionally those in nationalist areas observing developments in loyalist quarters); those in the community with whom BAT, MBW, etc, officials come in contact; and lastly there is a clear upsurge in loyalist paramilitary violence which prima facie may be linked to increasing disaffection. In sum, there is much smoke; but so far the fires have largely escaped identification. Interestingly, at least some of the community leaders who have warned in strong terms of growing alienation are themselves unclear as to whether it may have a political, security or economic causation. The main part of this note seeks to identify the source of fires, if any.
3. Interestingly such reports tend to be confined to the greater Belfast area, Londonderry and Tyrone (where security concerns probably underlie them). North Belfast is a particular source: the area, significantly, suffers from particularly acute economic, social and inter-communal problems. But other areas, eg, Portadown, Fermanagh, which have previously been important indicators

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of Unionist attitudes, have so far been the sources of few reports. So we should not (yet) conclude that we are facing universal Protestant disaffection.

General Considerations

4. Before focussing on Protestant alienation, we must recognise that this does not exist in isolation: our appreciation of it needs to be balanced by continuing recognition of Catholic deprivation, which on most indicators continues to bear disproportionately on them. So it remains right in both political and moral terms to continue to respond to that.
5. Some corollaries arise:
 - given the higher relative degree of minority deprivation, policies such as TSN aimed at the more disadvantaged are likely to benefit that community disproportionately. We need to be careful in presentation, but this is an inevitable fact of life we need to recognise;
 - any efforts to improve conditions amongst the more deprived sections of the minority community are likely to be resented for that very reason alone, even if appropriate action is also being taken towards majority deprivation;
 - conversely, any efforts to publicise what we are doing for disadvantaged sections of the majority community are likely to be bitterly criticised as sectarian; eg, continuing criticism in some parts of Catholic West Belfast that the Government's investment of £1.2bn in 1989 in privatising H&W and Shorts was massive discrimination in favour of the Protestant East Belfast economy.

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6. In general therefore there is no wholly safe way forward. We must continue to respond to the greatest need (which is disproportionately Catholic) but make it clear that this means that we are also greatly concerned by Protestant need.

Political

7. Is the reported malaise/ferment/alienation in Protestant areas politically motivated? Are we hearing claims of Protestant discrimination, greater propensity to paramilitary violence, etc, because of growing uncertainty about NI's constitutional future, related both to the current debate and to the outcome of the 1991 Census? Reports of growing alienation are very often accompanied by claims that, from the loyalist viewpoint, "everything is sliding away"; "the Irish support the SDLP, HMG is neutral and withholds support from Unionists"; "it's only a matter of time till the Brits withdraw, abandoning us to the Irish".
8. These arguments are usually deployed in an attempt to explain loyalist violence; but there is evidence that the sort of views they represent are increasingly common amongst the Protestant "chattering classes", who may in turn have some influence on political attitudes in the Protestant population as a whole. Although Protestant unease at fair employment measures may be diminishing it remains strong; there is a perception, largely misplaced, of a growing and disproportionate number of Catholic appointments to public bodies. Dr Alderdice's recent pronouncements and the views of Rev McCrea (Mr Maccabe's note of 18 February) illustrate the thrust and impact of such views.

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9. There is the risk that a bandwagon is beginning to roll and thus for political reasons many may see an interest in jumping aboard (especially in view of the local Government elections). We should not take comfort from this, but we should remain alert to the risk.
10. On balance, however, we conclude that there is evidence of a growing political and constitutional uncertainty, perhaps amounting to a crisis of self-confidence, in at least some parts of the Protestant community. The impact on attitudes amongst UUP and DUP leaders is harder to discern. Some, eg, Chris McGimpsey, use the growth in Protestant anxieties as justification for early progress in Talks to "stop the rot": to that extent the impact could be beneficial. But in the medium term the risk must be that growing Protestant anxieties will be reflected in a reversion to traditional rigid Unionist attitudes, and thus make Talks more difficult.

Security

11. There has been a clear upsurge in loyalist paramilitary violence. There are several specific reasons - change in leadership, loss of Nelson etc. The outlook is assessed as very serious.
12. It is hard to tell whether it is the greater efficiency of the UFF which is drawing greater numbers of recruits and thus spilling over into extended disaffection in Protestant communities; or disaffection making the UFF seem more attractive. But in any case there are reports of UFF having no difficulty in raising recruits.
13. One interesting change in the social conditions in some Protestant areas has been reported: the weakening of social, family-based disciplines and controls which have in the past acted as a brake on the growth of Protestant

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paramilitaries. So, whereas in the past a major loyalist atrocity has created enough revulsion for that brake to be applied effectively, perhaps it will no longer be effective. (This social phenomenon is also apparent in parts of GB, eg, Blackbird Leys estate in Oxford as reported in similar terms by the Sunday Times on 21 February.)

14. A further new feature is the widespread nature of damage in Protestant residential and business areas wrought by bombings at Belvoir, Glengormley, Bangor and Coleraine. These, it is argued, have affected more Protestants in places which have not previously been impacted; they have brought more Protestants to doubt from first-hand experience the ability of the security forces to overcome terrorism; and so there is a more widespread sympathy for direct loyalist action, or at least toleration for it which did not previously exist on anything like the present scale. This underlines the importance of seeking to increase confidence in the effectiveness of the security forces, in tandem with promoting confidence in terms of reducing friction between the security forces in the community (a concern primarily but not solely associated with the nationalist community).
15. The risk of intensification of loyalist violence exists, and both the political and social background are unlikely to restrain it. Moreover, if the IRA were to be thought to be attacking the loyalist community qua loyalist community, then the tendency to turn to the UFF and UVF rather than the RUC or Army for protection may be greater than in recent years. Mrs Seawright's reaction to the recent murder of a R Irish soldier in West Belfast may not be an isolated example. And the traditionally strong social restraints seem to have weakened.

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Economic and Social

16. Much of the reporting of alienation has focussed on economic and social problems: greater unemployment (largely unknown pre-80s on anything other than a low scale in Protestant areas), TSN, MBW and IFI seen as "Catholic support programmes". There may well be both an ignorance and an envy factor at play here: ignorance that disadvantage still does bear more severely on Catholic communities and also of what the Government is doing for Protestant communities through, eg, MBW; and resentful envy at the greater relative success of Catholic communities in accessing Government and IFI funding (the widely-attested reason for which includes relatively less developed structures in Protestant areas. These largely stem from the individualist nature of Protestantism and that community's past reliance on more conventional social and economic structures).
17. But there is major Protestant deprivation. A few indicators of male unemployment in mainly Protestant wards in Belfast illustrate this:

Crumlin	40%
Duncairn	34%
Shankill	31%
Tullycarnett	31%

Other indices would paint a similar picture. So, even if Catholic deprivation is more widespread and often more intense (eg, male unemployment in Ardoyne at 53%, Falls 57%, New Lodge 56%, Whiterock 58%), severe Protestant deprivation does exist and must be tackled.

18. There is also a case for Ministers and departments to be careful to avoid creating or promoting impressions that

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programmes such as TSN, MBW, etc, are solely for the benefit of the Catholic disadvantaged: they are aimed at disadvantage itself, and reflect the disproportionate disadvantage of the Catholic population - but comprehend Protestant disadvantage as a similar policy objective.

19. We should also continue to target effort on seeking to develop structures in Protestant areas for accessing Government and IFI funds, eg, by encouraging the formation of constructive groups to act as points of community leadership and as means of relating to Government, IFI, etc.
20. The impression that it is those Protestant areas suffering most disadvantage (Belfast, Londonderry) which report growth in alienation and those better-off from which fewer such reports emanate (see paragraph 3) may suggest that the growth in Protestant alienation has primarily an economic rather than a political or security causation.

Conclusions

21. Conclusions are necessarily tentative:

- (1) we should continue to monitor carefully reports on this theme;
- (2) we should remain alert to the possibility that we are witnessing a bandwagon and to the risk of encouraging it; but equally we should move quickly to assuage concerns which we believe to be genuine;
- (3) there is evidence of growing political and constitutional uncertainty amongst unionists which on balance is likely to make Talks more difficult;

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- (4) the threat of intensified loyalist violence is growing;
- (5) there is evidence that a relative deterioration in economic and social conditions in Protestant areas is a significant factor behind growing alienation, though intensified by constitutional uncertainty;
- (6) Protestant communities are less well equipped to tap Government help and in any case increasingly see public programmes as tilted against them.

Recommendations

22. Recommendations are as follows:-

- (1) Ministers should seek to allay Protestant fears, eg, through the planned series of speeches by the Secretary of State on both political development and security, though both the objective and content will need to be judged with great care. We should carefully consider whether these could also seek to engender a realistic understanding of the implications of demographic trends;
- (2) Ministers and departments should be careful to ensure that programmes such as TSN and MBW are not presented or seen as geared to the minority community. Projects supported under such programmes in Protestant areas should be identified with Ministers and be the subject of well-planned publicity;
- (3) where opportunities arise, efforts should be made to encourage the formation and growth of constructive, well-led community groups in Protestant areas; and

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- (4) we should consider an early study of social and economic conditions in Protestant areas (preparatory work is already under way).

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