

ULSTER DEFENSE ASSOCIATION

FORWARD

This document was drawn up recently by Senior U.D.A. Officers at a 3-day conference in Holland.

You will notice the significant progress during the 3 days and the improved difference between Day 1 and Day 3.

It is not an historical document by any means, but it shows that the Ulster Defence Ass. is making a serious attempt to be progressive and remove sectarian politics from N. Ireland.

You may find sections of it outdated, particularly these portions relating to the Convention. But it is also worth noting that even greater progress has been made in certain other aspects of it.

It was compiled by independent observers, who were in attendance at the conference.

RECORD OF DISCUSSION:

- (1) It generally appeared to everyone that the ultimate aim of the Catholic community, and the I.R.A. in particular, is to destroy Northern Ireland. In this regard it was asserted there is a clear-cut Northern Ireland identity which is based upon a British way of life and British traditions.
- (2) In contrast to the definite goal of the I.R.A., the U.D.A. had no clear-cut objective but the need for such an objective was strongly felt.
- (3) To the extent that this is true there is probably no solution to the problem of Northern Ireland other than a military one (i.e. a decisive victory over the I.R.A. which would prevent guerilla activity).
- (4) Even though it was felt that the likelihood of complete success was low, the U.D.A. nonetheless had no option but to pursue its opposition regardless of cost.
- (5) It was accepted that if, despite these considerations, the military battle was attempted and won there was still the question of what followed next in political terms.
- (6) The view was expressed that many groups in the Catholic community (including the Officials) were prepared to accept a common approach to the development of Ulster on the basis of the existing nation state. But this was regarded as a short term expediency on their part which would not distract them from their ultimate goal.
- (7) It follows therefore that the need for taking immediate action is imperative if the debt which was felt by members of the group to succeeding generations was to be discharged and their futures guaranteed.
- (8) Experience of the strike in May, 1974, led to the belief that it was important for the U.D.A. to take an initiative because manifestly they could not depend either upon their own politicians or upon Westminster.
- (9) It was agreed that the failure to take initiative after the strike was due to hesitancy on the part of the U.D.A. and lack of experience which allowed them to be conned by the politicians.
- (10) The Strike provided a rallying point and focus for the expression of a feeling widely shared in the Protestant community. Another kind of initiative to serve the same purpose is now required again.
- (11) One such initiative might be a clear statement of policy on human rights and constitutional issues designed to test the extent to which the Catholic community was prepared to co-operate in building a new Ulster.
- (12) Such an initiative would in addition clarify the extent to which the present politicians represent the views of the members of the U.D.A. on whom they had depended. The reaction by the community, especially the Protestant community would also give an indication of the support which existed for the policy of the U.D.A.
- (13) There was a strong feeling that the U.D.A. would have great difficulty in taking such an initiative because:-
 - (a) they lacked credibility (except as a defence organisation when the Protestant community was under threat).
 - (b) they lacked resources.
 - (c) they lacked experience and skill in this kind of action.
 - (d) they lacked the support of the mass media.
- (14) On the other hand the view was expressed that the taking of such an initiative might in fact create credibility for the U.D.A. (as indeed had the Strike) and might have the effect of attracting different kinds of resources.

RECORD OF DISCUSSION:

- (1) The objective of the U.D.A. from the beginning has been to maintain the status quo in the face of the threat to destroy Ulster by the I.R.A. However, it was now recognized that the U.D.A. did not seek to bring back all the trappings of the old Unionist government with the disadvantages for working-class people which had characterized the last fifty years.
- (2) The political reality is that if the U.D.A. were to take any initiative it would invite reaction from existing political structures, possibly split the vote, and certainly incur the risk of failure as a result of the tide of reaction against that initiative.
- (3) Yet equally the political reality is that traditional politics and elected representatives had failed to represent the basic interests of the electorate. Evidence of this can be seen in such matters as the selection of candidates and in the arrangement of meetings.
- (4) Despite the fact that the working-class people have not been well represented by the Unionist Party they still largely support it because of the threat of the border and because of traditional habits of modesty and deference to leaders drawn from the establishment.
- (5) For these reasons, it was felt that a new initiative of some kind was needed. For example:
 - (a) a political initiative by the U.D.A. (i.e. the presentation of an agreed statement to act as a focus for pressure);
 - (b) a new political party;
 - (c) the development of an existing organisation such as U.C.A.G.
- (6) In discussing these options fear was expressed concerning the danger to the U.D.A. of involvement in political activity.
- (7) It was strongly felt that unless the border issue could be taken out of politics it was not possible to see how normal politics could develop because of the danger this represented for Protestant solidarity.
- (8) Two ways were suggested out of this dilemma:
 - (a) the pursuit of alternative political action through local government elections and the long-term build-up of strength in opposition to the established political parties.
 - (b) the presentation of a policy document which tied proposals for social development and basic rights to a definition of the status of the border.
- (9) In the final analysis it was recognized that only the firm commitment of the Catholic community in Ulster to the future of Ulster could take the border out of politics. The view was also expressed that the best economic and social interests of the Catholic community lay in the development of Ulster.
- (10) Any statement of policy or any political initiative taken would have to give hard consideration to the British link.

In this as in other matters it would be essential that clear statements would in the end emerge.
- (11) There was a strong feeling that nothing could be done without resources. In this regard the need for money was obvious but there was also a need for a clear policy, good organisation and support in the community.

RECORD OF DISCUSSION:

- (1) While the objective of the U.D.A. is to promote a Northern Ireland identity based on British traditions, it was nevertheless agreed that it might prove necessary to give some consideration to the possibility of some form of independence for Ulster. It was agreed that any modification of the formal link with Britain would depend upon the avoidance of British opposition such as would be offered to any proposal likely to threaten the peace and security of the Catholic population, or to threaten the external security of Britain itself.
- (2) Should such negotiation lead to British acceptance of such a proposal, it was agreed that its implementation (particularly within the wider context of the EEC) would not necessarily mean great risks for the Ulster economy.
- (3) With regard to the Convention, it was agreed that the U.D.A., along with other para-military organizations, would not be directly represented. Consideration was therefore given to alternative possibilities which would allow the voice of the U.D.A. to be heard, viz.
 - (a) a reduction of constituency size with a corresponding increase in Convention membership;
 - (b) persuading the UUUC to include a number of U.D.A. representatives in their line-up of candidates for the election;
 - (c) the formation of a second-tier convention of community and other representatives;
 - (d) the introduction of a list system;
 - (e) consultative status at the Convention for community organizations, with participation on committees.
- (4) It was agreed that these proposals might be taken up with the appropriate authorities, i.e. the UUUC and the Secretary of State. In this connection it was suggested that the Secretary of State should be persuaded to extend the concept of power-sharing to include all significant groups in the community.
- (5) Any initiative of this sort would depend upon the U.D.A. producing some statement of policy, which would have to avoid the following dangers:
 - (a) it must not divide the U.D.A.;
 - (b) it must not concede anything that would damage the credibility of the U.D.A. in the loyalist community;
 - (c) it would equally be damaging if it did not really say anything.
- (6) Some reference to a bill of rights would be included in such a policy statement along with firm proposals on social policy and proposals for constitutional measures necessary to implement these ideas. Obviously such a general statement of policy could not be developed in the space of a few weeks. It was thought, however, that a statement indicating that active steps had been taken to develop policy, and giving some outline of that policy, might be sufficient for the purpose of negotiating a role.
- (7) These policy guidelines should not appear as an innovation, since from its inception the U.D.A. had discharged many other responsibilities over and above its para-military one and had given support both to industrial peace-keeping and to community development.