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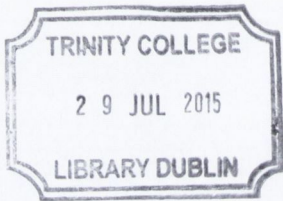
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RORY MILHENCH

Ulster Loyalism, Ulster
Unionism and the Irish
State, 1970-85



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Loyalism, unionism and parties of the 'right', 1974-82

Mainstream politics in the north was rarely oriented on the common trajectory of the right to left spectrum. The near monopoly of the constitutional question on public debate stifled consideration of social issues like housing, education and employment, which more routinely troubled working-class communities. Not only did this mean that elections would be contested on the border issue alone, but that political parties themselves, especially unionist ones, would evolve dysfunctionally, with policy on these distresses either underdeveloped or invisible.

It is because of this impairment that it is useful to analyse unionism and loyalism on their interactions with bodies who were keenly associated with one end of this spectrum. One is interested to inquire if there was a told assumption within unionism, inured by the legacy of majority rule, that its constituents would be satisfied with a discussion of the border only. Further, to uncover what leftist and conservative tendencies existed within the ideologies of unionism and loyalism, and with whom they enjoyed close fraternal relations. Perhaps unionists were more natural allies with elements of the right and mutual class membership made loyalists

closer to working-class dominated organisations, like republican paramilitaries and the trade unions.

Native relations: England, Scotland and the Orange Order

Loyalists did not adjust skilfully to the rivalry for publicity in Ulster, as they struggled to depict themselves as victims of the conflict. Loyalism's links to British unionism reiterated the contemptible narrative of empire, while the provenance of Ulster bound it to the noxious legacy of Stormont. This meant that loyalists struggled to attract overseas donors and ideological comrades. Despite its incapacity to challenge the supremacy of Irish-American fundraising, loyalists did develop benevolent channels and connive with some sympathetic groups. The Irish government became aware of these contacts and a D.F.A. report in March 1976 titled *the Activities of Loyalist Sympathisers in England* observed that

While units are known to exist in Luton, London, Southampton and elsewhere the English UDA is strongest in Northern cities such as Leeds and Manchester, and in particular in Lancashire: the Liverpool/Merseyside region, Preston, Accrington and Blackburn. It is well entrenched in Liverpool, especially in the Netherfield district.¹

Most of the funds raised in these areas were used to buy weapons and munitions. Members of U.D.A. units in England received training in the use of weapons and the techniques of bomb-making. The cases of Tommy Thompson, Supreme Commander of the U.D.A. in Britain, and his deputy John Gadd

Confirmed the existence of an arms-smuggling route which had been suspected by British police for some time. Loyalists were buying arms in Canada, probably in Toronto, & shipping them either directly from there or via New York to Southampton, from where they went by road to Liverpool and were later shipped across to Larne.²

Donoghue's report went on to claim some interdependence between the Orange Order in England and loyalist criminality in Ulster, observing that the Order had formulated plans to evacuate Ulster protestants to various British cities pending an eruption of civil war. In January 1976 John Williams, Secretary of the Grand

¹ Report dated 3 Mar. 1976 by David Donoghue, D.F.A. 2007/111/1833.

² Ibid.

Lodge of England, announced the Order's intention to take fleeing refugees by car and bus to Orange lodges in Leeds, Birmingham, Plymouth and other cities, from where they would be transferred to the homes of sympathisers. The report also noted that the U.D.A. and U.V.F. had been using several cover names in England, such as the *British Loyalist Council* and *Manchester Loyalist Association*, to deflect unwanted publicity. A paper written in March 1978 by Hugh Swift, about the conviction of a man in Preston for ferrying explosives to the U.V.F., indicated the D.F.A. remained concerned at the expansion of loyalist support, despite a change in government.³

A report in 1974 queried the links between the Orange Order and the Orange Volunteers, an Ulster paramilitary group established in 1972: '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'.⁴ Concerns over links between seemingly lawful institutions and criminal paramilitaries were raised by the State Department in Washington in a cable to the American Consulate in Belfast. It stated that it 'would also be of interest if Posts could assess importance of ties between illegal

³ Report dated 14 Mar. 1978, D.F.A. 2009/120/2062.

⁴ Report dated 17 June 1974, D.F.A. 2009/120/2036.

organisations such as those mentioned above [these were U.V.F., U.F.F., R.H.C.] and legal symbols of Protestant militancy like Orange Order and Vanguard.⁵

The Order as a body, despite comprising individual sympathisers, was never overtly favourable to the mission of militant loyalism. Its conservative ethical foundation eschewed the extra-legal measures loyalists were inclined towards. Arms caches were occasionally found in Orange Halls, but these were reserves for an emergency situation on which loyalists might have to rely for survival, rather than tools for pre-emptive, sectarian murder.⁶ It is interesting that it was a direct concern of Washington, which expressed misgiving at the compromised nature of seemingly legitimate agencies. This helps explain the embargo on arms sales to the R.U.C. which the United States government applied during President Carter's term of office.

The Irish government equated the unionist hierarchy with the Orange Order at the outbreak of the conflict in Northern Ireland. This interpretation was based not only on the phenomenon of dual membership, but the supposition that the U.U.P. acted as a guardian of the Order's interests. This included protecting its right to march, whilst proscribing nationalist congregations. It was of particular concern to Taoiseach Jack Lynch, who feared the Order had been elevated above a lobby group

⁵ Electronic telegram dated 31 Jan. 1974 from Secretary State Washington to American Consulate Belfast, 1974STATE020881, accessed via www.nara.gov on 21 May 2013.

⁶ Paddy Devlin, *The Fall of the N.I. Executive* (Belfast, 1975), p.81.

to a governing cartel. He complained in July 1971 that 'the fact is that the British Army is supporting the Unionists who are under the control of the Orange Lodge'.⁷

Lynch was similarly worried about 'the refusal of the Unionist Party to break their continuing association with the Orange Order'.⁸ Beyond association, it spoke of a certain interpretation of power which saw the Order as a ruling class and working-class protestants as a league of radical Presbyterianism. Patrick Hillery, Irish Minister for External Affairs, believed sovereignty in Ulster was reserved with the organisation: 'where does Faulkner go for his orders? Half his cabinet goes to the Orange Order'.⁹ Hillery feared his own cabinet were being usurped in favour of the Order, which was now being treated by the Conservative Party as if it were a de facto government. Undoubtedly a component of this anxiety was the tolerance shown to the Apprentice Boys' marches in Derry and the failure to ban their parades.

Oliver Wright, United Kingdom Representative in Northern Ireland between 1969-70, made a similar observation. He saw the police and local government as being under the control of 'Protestant-Orange (but not necessarily of Unionist) power'.¹⁰ One can detect a more heightened dread amongst Hillery and Lynch, that not only had they to contend with an abrasive unionist government, but that it was

⁷ Letter from Jack Lynch to Edward Heath dated 23 July 1971, Patrick Hillery Papers, P205/37, U.C.D. Archives.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Notes of Hillery's meeting with British Home Secretary Reginald Maudling, 11 Aug. 1971, Patrick Hillery Papers, P205/37, U.C.D. Archives,

¹⁰ Report by Oliver Wright dated 6 Mar. 1970, T.N.A. DEFE/13/1397.

answerable to the more intangible Orange Order, over which the Irish government could not hope to exert any influence. One might note that after the imposition of direct rule on Northern Ireland, which terminated the vista of an unfettered Orange Order, this parallel disappeared from Irish official records.

Scotland remained the best known and most lucrative source of sponsorship for Ulster loyalists, with the January 13th 1974 edition of the U.D.A. magazine *Ulster Loyalist* remarking that 're-cruiting is very encouraging which goes to show that our friends in Scotland are not just full of wind. In Glasgow, Motherwell and Kilwinney our strength is increasing'.¹¹ This source of support was an alarm to Merlyn Rees, who wrote that in 1979 'nine Scottish members of the UVF were awarded long sentences of imprisonment for involvement in violence. Some of these men had been involved in actual killings; overall they were part of an arms supply organisation to Northern Ireland.'¹² Groups, however, tended to be small, peripheral and based in those communities in which the Orange Order had once been or were then significant. Support in Glasgow was effectively limited to 'providing safe houses for men on the run, organising solidarity demonstrations, and offering humanitarian aid'.¹³ Those who assisted were wary of the conflict spreading to Scotland, so

¹¹ *Ulster Loyalist*, issue dated Jan. 13 1974, N.L.I., IR 330 U2.

¹² Draft security chapter, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/3/10, p.26.

¹³ Tom Gallagher, *Glasgow: The Uneasy Peace- Religious tension in modern Scotland* (Manchester, 1987), p.293.

fundraising assistance and the provision of sanctuary were often tempered by a willingness to co-operate with police investigations.

Protestant communities in Scotland were not under threat from their catholic neighbours in the way those in Ulster supposed they were. As a result they were not inclined to commit communal violence. Gun smuggling was of low incidence and marked by incompetence, with most activists apprehended by police, and there was little currency in making Ulster an issue for election candidates. Instead, the supply of gelignite was Scotland's most industrious contribution to Ulster loyalists, with all other activity limited to burgeoning relief funds in case of civil war and participation in the annual ethnic ritual of the Orange parade for West Scotland's protestant population. Even the capacity for the violence to be viewed as 'papist aggression' failed to provoke protestant Scotland into greater action. Instead, it was interpreted as the inevitable outcome from the fusion of national politics and religion, and united protestant and catholic scots in their desperation to abstain from the conflict.¹⁴

Scotland occasionally informed the British government's conduct on Northern Ireland, as it believed the similar sectarian conditions there could respond to a deterioration of the conflict in Ulster. In considering a scheme of complete withdrawal, which was considered likely to lead to civil war in Northern Ireland, it was assumed 'the trouble could easily spread to the large Irish communities in some major cities in Great Britain...Even the suggestion of a withdrawal could lead to

¹⁴ Steve Bruce, *No Pope of Rome: Anti-Catholicism in Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1985), p.168.

serious unrest in Western Scotland'. Thus Scotland was thought to be even more sensitive to developments in Ulster, with the proposition of withdrawal incendiary enough to concoct violence there.

Discussions on the potential for devolution in Northern Ireland also tended to reference Scotland, as it was feared Ulster devolution might set a menacing precedent for the rest of United Kingdom and reignite the 'West Lothian' question.¹⁵ Therefore, while western Scotland was considered in terms of the comparable genesis of sectarian division, its actual support to militant loyalists was often tenuous and halting. It is also to be noted that the contacts enumerated were almost entirely with the extended apparatus of organisations, like the Scottish U.D.A., which Ulster loyalists themselves created. There was no significant external group with whom association was abundant. An N.I.O. report recorded that Scotland, along with England, was the locale where most of the bestselling loyalist magazine *Combat* were bought outside of Ulster. Per month 'they send between 700 and 900 to Scotland and England, 100 to Canada and 50 to France'.¹⁶ This is a useful analogy for the relationship; sympathisers kept themselves informed but at a healthy distance from direct involvement in the conflict.

¹⁵ See Conclusions of a British Cabinet Meeting on 1 Apr. 1982, CC (82) 13th Conclusions, accessed via www.nationalarchives.gov.uk on 6 Nov. 2013.

¹⁶ N.I.O report titled 'Para-military Press' (no date), Loyalism- Box 1, N.I.P.C., Linen Hall Library, Belfast.

The distant labyrinth of Canada

More productive was the support network emanating from Toronto, Canada, which functioned as the global pivot of pro-loyalist fanaticism. An important court case, that of Billy Taylor, related that the supply line was still prolific as late as 1986, until the R.C.M.P. shattered an arms ring in a Christmas Day raid. In this instance the U.V.F. were beneficiaries, not the U.D.A. The Provincial Court of Ontario Criminal Division relayed the charge at his rendition hearing on 2nd May 1990

That he on divers days between the 1st October 1986 and the 27th December 1986 conspired with Albert Watt and Trevor Cubbon and others to have in the possession of the said Trevor Cubbon in England firearms and ammunitions with intent to enable another person by means thereof to endanger life contrary to Section 1 of the Criminal Law Act 1977 [sic].¹⁷

The English reference was specifically to Liverpool, where the arms were sent from Toronto, to be relayed to Belfast where John Bingham, 1st Battalion leader of D Company U.V.F., was to receive them. Further evidence at the hearing provided insight into the mechanics of the operation. The shipments were sent by sea to a fake trucking company in England in hollowed-out diesel engines. The packages were

¹⁷ Rendition hearing of William Charles Taylor, U.V.F. Box 1, N.I.P.C., Linen Hall Library Belfast.

consigned to deceased persons to evade detection. Part of the documentary evidence for the hearing were letters seized from the Christmas raid between Taylor and his U.V.F. contact, signed only as 'John'. These were almost certainly from John Bingham. One of them, undated, read that

We would be particularly happy with ARS S&W MOD 59. We here [sic] that the U.S. Army now issue a Berretta 9mm. It may possibly be a F92. You can see from the first two suggestions this calibre suits us. Small M. pistols or S.M. C5 Berretta UZI in seam are also highly suitable for the same reason due to transport problems, small assault rifles possibly with folding or telescope butts would be suitable.¹⁸

Tellingly, the donor in this instance was not a wealthy financier, ideological reciprocate or fellow paramilitary group, but a gun enthusiast who wanted to consort his pathological revulsion of communism with a cause, as he saw it, worthy of his talent for engineering violence. Further, his seizure by the R.C.M.P. and not the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (C.S.I.S.), and his subsequent prosecution under Canada's *Criminal Law Act* (1977), suggests the Canadian authorities evaluated his offences as being of a criminal rather than terrorist nature.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Correspondence between the D.F.A. and the Embassy of Ireland, Ottawa, persisted on the theme of subversive agents in Canada with sympathies for paramilitary groups in Ulster during the 1970s. The subject was first broached by the Irish Ambassador to Canada, Patrick Power, in 1974. In a letter to Paul Keating, Secretary of the D.F.A., Power wrote that

It has been established that, in the case of both extremes, support, including arms, has been obtained from Canada. The Orange Order may not be the force it once was in Canada, and its interest in things Irish may be much less nowadays. But the Orange Order still exists here.¹⁹

The inference here was that the Orange Order had been acting as a conduit for some form of succour, though Power did not mention what specifically it had been responsible for. The matter recurred the following year, after a meeting James Flavin, Secretary of the Irish Embassy, Ottawa, had with Mr. Middleton, Director of the Intelligence and Security Liaison Division of the Canadian Department of External Affairs. Flavin wrote to D.F.A. that 'as regards fund raising activities by loyalist supporters he [Middleton] said that they believed that some such activities were being carried on but not on an organised basis and no particular organisation or "front" has come to attention'.²⁰

¹⁹ Letter dated 20 Aug. 1974, D.F.A. 2007/111/1965.

²⁰ Letter dated 12 Mar. 1975, D.F.A. 2001/30/107.

A report by the Canadian Department of External Affairs admitted that little could be done about financial support to paramilitary groups in Ulster, but that convictions could be obtained for gun-running offences. It relayed the example of two men from Toronto who were sentenced in January 1975 to two years under the Canadian Import and Export Permits Act for attempting to ship guns to the U.D.A.²¹ Of greater significance were the associations between the Irish and Canadian security forces which were developed to stymie these exchanges. After a visit to Canada by a delegation from the Irish security forces, 'various subjects were renewed, including the threat of specific organizations, links between Irish subversive groups and their supporters in Canada, arms seizure cases in Canada involving IRA or UDA connections, and RCMP counter-measures in use in Canada'.²²

Two years later this intelligence portrait had progressed, with the Irish distress over the activities of the Northern Aid Committee (NORCID) inciting the need for a more comprehensive and forensic analysis of the fundraising landscape in Canada. Hugh Swift of D.F.A. wrote to Flavin in March 1977, expressing that 'we would find it useful to know how the Canadian authorities who monitor the

²¹ Report dated 25 Sep. 1975, National Archives of Canada, 20-IRE-9, Vol. 9192, File No. 2, Series RG 25.

²² Ibid.

activities of Noraid and of Protestant para-military representatives assess the position in Canada as regards the organisation of these groups.'²³

The administration in Dublin was concerned at how equipped or prepared their Canadian counterparts were to dissect fundraising for Ulster groups, whilst also seeking a path through which the Irish government could avail of Canadian intelligence. Flavin dismissed the opinion that the function of Irish organisations in Canada was to either fundraise or lobby and suggested that subversive activity was limited to individuals and small groups only. He also advised Swift to pursue subsequent inquiry on these matters through policing channels, as An Garda Síochána and the R.C.M.P. had already established direct links and wished to operate independently of the Embassy.

Swift replied on behalf of the D.F.A. that they should be kept aware of the depth of support in Canada for the U.D.A. and that diplomatic, rather than police, contacts should be the channel used to relay information to the Irish authorities. This was to 'assess the position of the PIRA, the UDA, etc., in Canada and to evaluate the efforts of the Canadian authorities in dealing with these bodies'.²⁴ The Ottawa Embassy responded to these requests, as they advanced to D.F.A. details of a Canadian loyalist group:

²³ Letter dated 1 Mar. 1977, D.F.A. 2007/111/1965.

²⁴ Letter dated 3 May 1977, D.F.A. 2007/63/46.

The present status of an organization called "Canada Loyalist Ulster Organization", about which we had previously heard from contacts in the R.C.M.P. It would appear that this organization, which originally had a membership of 350 people, now numbers less than 40. The decline in the organization's member-ship is understood to be directly related to the militant attitude adopted in recent times by its leadership.²⁵

This group was actually called the Canadian Ulster Loyalist Association (CULA), and was the most significant loyalist organisation in Canada. Relations between it and domestic Ulster loyalism were disclosed in the December 6th 1973 issue of the *Ulster Loyalist*, the U.D.A. organ, as its author announced he was 'pleased to report that the Canadian Ulster Loyalist Association has sent a cheque to the L.P.A. [Loyalist Prisoners' Association] committee for 500 dollars this week. This money has been spent on buying winter clothing for all our Loyalist prisoners'. Extended information was registered in the 27th January 1975 edition of the *Ulster Loyalist*, with a financial declaration of the *Niagra Committee*, a North American Loyalist fundraising body. In the period from 22nd August 1974 to January 2nd 1975 it raised \$4000.²⁶ Most contributions came from individual donors but three overseas groups gave offerings. They were the *Northern Ireland Association*, California (\$150), the *Ulster American Association*, California (\$235) and the *Social Evening* (\$255.50).

²⁵ Undated letter from Irish Embassy, Ottawa to D.F.A., D.F.A. 2007/63/46.

²⁶ Since most of the groups were American, but individual sponsors were Canadian, it is unclear if the figures cited are in Canadian or U.S. Dollars.

Further information on the groups or what the funds were spent on was not divulged. While the sums were insubstantial, they at least help locate some patterns of financial support. This may be surprising, as America's west coast is not traditionally an area suffused with Ulster-American sympathies. The vast majority of individual sponsors were from Toronto, Ontario. The U.D.A.'s decision to publish financial statements suggests the money was not used to subvert unlawful activity, but rather defray some form of welfare provision.

Another financial statement covering the earlier period of May 10th-August 25th 1974 revealed that the Niagra Committee oversaw a total of \$4180.45 in monies raised. Most of these donations fell in the month of July and individual donors were all from Toronto bar one from Alliston, Ontario. In this period, though, many more groups were active in fundraising with collections from the *Ulster Benevolent Group*, Toronto (\$185), the *Independent Loyalist Group*, Toronto (\$500), *Ulster Committee*, Hamilton (\$1065), *Women's Auxiliary*, a branch of CULA (\$270) and again the *Northern Ireland Association*, California (\$150).²⁷

The lowest contribution in the aforementioned statement was from a collection at one of the CULA dances (\$115), which might give some indication that it was a social club for those of Ulster-Scots heritage and not a hard-line loyalist

²⁷ In a 1974 edition of the *Canadian Ulsterman*, the official publication of CULA, an address was supplied for the group's dances, held on the first Saturday of the month, with its general meetings on every other Sunday. The location used is no longer as it was, West Point Hall, Sixth Street, Lake Shore Boulevard, West Toronto.

organisation. The surnames of donors indicate that it was composed of those with Ulster-Scots ancestry e.g. Armstrong, Finlay, Watson, Murdoch and Thompson. An issue of the *Canadian Ulsterman*, CULA's publication, contained a report on a speech made by Reverend Martin Smyth, an extract from a book on guerrilla warfare whose inclusion was seemingly to justify internment against the P.I.R.A. and the above financial statement. Its production was quite slick though it still included mistakes like 'Summingdale'.²⁸

Police operations, both in Britain and Canada, provide more information as to the extent of illegal arms shipments between the two countries. Michael McKinley has written of 'official estimates that "one or two" successful attempts have been undertaken to supply arms out of Canada'.²⁹ He went on to add that 'these loyalist ventures were of a small scale and included World War II-vintage arms...they were also frustrated by international police co-operation- involving the Hampshire police at the Southhampton [sic.] docks and the RCMP in Toronto'.³⁰ The arms recovered in the Toronto raid were 9 M1 rifles, 13 sten-gun housings, sten-gun ammunition clips [unspecified amount] and 2,000 rounds of rifle ammunition. The Canadian government even admitted at one stage that these supplies were finding their way across their border.

²⁸ See *Canadian Ulsterman* vol.1, no.6 (1974), N.I.P.C., Microfiche no. 326, Linen Hall Library Belfast.

²⁹ Michael McKinley, *The Ulster Question in international politics 1968-1978* (Unpublished thesis, Australian National University, Canberra, 1981), p.502.

³⁰ McKinley, 'The Ulster Question', p.503.

While on a diplomatic sojourn to Dublin in 1977, Donald Jamieson, Canada's Minister for External Affairs, was interviewed in relation to arms from Canada and was paraphrased in the *Irish Times* as stating that 'Canada has the longest undefended border in the world, with the USA, "and sometimes these things do happen"'.³¹ Merlyn Rees commented on the loyalist arms supply from Canada, but without great detail: 'Loyalists get their money from Canada and there's a great flow of arms into the place'.³² Other commentators concurred with his assessment, with loyalists' launching their appeals abroad to an often unsympathetic international audience.³³

The Irish Embassy in Ottawa monitored the reception of Ian Paisley in Canada, writing in January 1982 that Toronto's *Globe and Mail* was hostile toward him and that during a recent visit there was 'a barely suppressed disapproval of Paisley's message and manner'.³⁴ Paisley told the British High Commission in London that on his previous visit in September 1981, 'there had been pickets, mostly black youths'. He suggested that these people must have been paid to attend because they seemed to have no idea who he was, though he 'appreciated that unfriendly elements could make their way there'.³⁵ Ontario Attorney General Roy McMurray

³¹ *Irish Times*, 7 Sep. 1977.

³² Merlyn Rees Transcripts sides 7-8, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/1/4, p.3.

³³ See Barry White, 'From Conflict to Violence: the Re-emergence of the IRA and the Loyalist Response' in John Darby (ed) *Northern Ireland: the Background to the Conflict* (Belfast, 1983), p.188.

³⁴ Letter from M. Baylor of the Irish Embassy Ottawa to Martin Burke of D.F.A. dated 22 Jan. 1982, D.F.A. 2013/27/1495.

³⁵ Telex from British High Commission London to Department of External Affairs Ottawa dated 15 Jan. 1982, 20-IRLND-9, Vol. 8701, File No. 4, Series RG 25.

urged the Canadian Federal government to refuse Paisley entry to Canada, but he was granted admission. The Irish Embassy informed the Irish D.F.A. that prior to the aforementioned trip Paisley would be briefed by a political officer of the Canadian High Commission in London that he was to make no political speeches while there. He was then 'cautioned that he should behave in a manner befitting a visitor to Canada and will be asked to ensure that his behaviour is not provokative [sic].'³⁶ Paisley addressed the Orange Lodge of Canada and met other church groups during the visit.

Thus loyalist links with Toronto and Glasgow were established, but often only on the basis of a common ancestral heritage, not a shared determination to repel or restrain the activity of the Provisional I.R.A. The main marketing problem which ailed loyalism was its inability to present itself as a creed of thought, not a cult of violence. This was not because loyalism was in itself anti-intellectual, but because it was not galvanised by the pursuit of change, which made international petitions unconvincing. Furthermore, its adherents were themselves inarticulate and often caught between which choice was more effective for the destruction of republicanism in Ulster: constitutional innovation or punishing violence.

³⁶ Letter from P. Murray of the Irish Embassy in Ottawa, D.F.A. 2013/27/1495.

United States of America

In the chronicle of Ulster paramilitaries and America, Irish republicanism, the four horsemen and NORAID are considered the prominent actors. Still, one might reasonably expect loyalism to have received some observation and reportage within such a hierarchy. A general absence of loyalists or a marked ambivalence towards them in the American press could be explicable by the contented narrative that American audiences had been weaned on: the binary clash between British forces and the I.R.A.³⁷ The task is now to uncover whether space was made for the unionist position within this diagram, even if only to be cast as revolting.

At singular moments, loyalists reeled into conflict with American authorities, such as the acute tumult over the decision by the US Department of State in Washington to deny Ian Paisley a visitor's visa in December 1981. The Irish Consulate in Boston monitored the affair and the successful efforts of Tip O'Neill and Ted Kennedy in their lobbying to secure the refusal of entry. Those two icons of Irish-America wrote a joint letter to the editor of the *Boston Globe* to explain their actions and to disagree with a previous editorial which had expressed regret at the decision:

³⁷ Jack Holland, *The American Connection- US Guns, Money and Influence in Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 1989), p.58.

Mr. Paisley is notorious for his incitement of violence and religious bigotry in Northern Ireland and his resistance to any and all progress toward a peaceful settlement of the conflict /.../ Your editorial itself states that Paisley would be "speaking and raising funds for what he calls 'The Protestant cause'". This could prove to be one of his most lethal activities- in effect soliciting American dollars for his cause of intransigence and violence and contributing to the deaths of innocent Irish catholic men, women and children.³⁸

Boston Globe's previous editorial, to which O'Neill and Kennedy were responding, had queried the potency of whatever anti-catholicism Paisley might be accused of endorsing.³⁹ For the newspaper the issue was simple: was Paisley simply a bigoted anachronism, or was there something more intricate to his philosophy, and might it not be worth investigating? The State Department in Washington explained that their refusal to permit Paisley entry was based on his "'near advocacy" of violence, on the contents of his various public statements and on the establishment of the third force'.⁴⁰

The matter had been under consideration there for three weeks before it was decided that Paisley's visit would also be a compromise of both President Reagan's pledge to combat terrorism and his general policy on Northern Ireland. What does not seem to have been countenanced was the subsequent propaganda victory this

³⁸ Editorial of the *Boston Globe* reproduced in a telex from the Boston Consulate to the Irish Embassy, Washington, 30 Dec. 1981, D.F.A. 2011/42/6.

³⁹ Editorial of the *Boston Globe* reproduced in a telex on 23 Dec. 1981, D.F.A. 2011/42/6.

⁴⁰ Telex from Irish Embassy in Washington to Department of Taoiseach dated 21 Dec. 1981, TAOIS 2011/127/1079.

would grant to Ian Paisley, given his latitude to claim protestants were being omitted from the diplomatic arena whilst people like Bernadette McAliskey were granted entry without impediment. This specific point was raised at a meeting between Garret FitzGerald and Martin Smyth, Grand Master of the Orange Lodge in Ireland:

The Taoiseach commented that it would be counter-productive in terms of Irish/American opinion for Paisley and Robinson to appear in the U.S. Reverend Smyth felt that while such trips could be useful in reaching the broad spectrum of U.S. opinion, they needed to be well organised and planned in advance.⁴¹

FitzGerald suggested that so improbable was it that any trip would conjure a positive reception from respected organisations that its wretched failure would give a sturdy propaganda victory to the illicit Irish-American lobby, which the Irish government was so keen to limit.

The official position of the Irish government was to leave decisions on the provision of visas to American authorities, but they still insisted that if Paisley was admitted in to the United States he be diplomatically maligned: 'Not to deny entry would be one thinkg [sic] but to receive at a high level a man who is organising an

⁴¹ Notes of a meeting dated 1 Oct. 1981, TAOIS 2011/127/1101.

illegal third force etc. would be another matter entirely'.⁴² The Irish administration also became disconcerted by the 'unfavourable effect which our public opposition to Paisley's admission would have upon Unionists generally particularly since he would be one of a wider group'.⁴³ To specifically target Paisley might impair subsequent relations with the man, whilst also potentially generating friction with the American authorities.

There was a more arcane reason for the Irish government ultimately supporting Paisley's entry into America, which was initially approved by American authorities, but subsequently rescinded after the petitioning by Kennedy and others. Kennedy's view, as relayed by Washington, was that 'there was a risk that Paisley would get some access in the United States, for example being received by right-wing Congress people who could be sympathetic to the anti-terrorist aspect of his message'.⁴⁴ The Irish government countered that 'since we are working towards an agreed Ireland in which each tradition consents to play its part, we cannot in logic seek to silence in America the spokesman of a significant if extreme segment of the opposite tradition'.⁴⁵

Irish-America could afford to luxuriate in cavalier indignation and puritanical opposition, because it would not have to deal with the costs incurred from excluding

⁴² Letter from Assistant Secretary of D.F.A. David Neligan to Mr. Sharkey at State Department Washington on 8 Dec. 1981, D.F.A. 2013/27/1571.

⁴³ Note by Neligan dated 9 Dec. 1981, D.F.A. 2013/27/1571.

⁴⁴ Letter from Sharkey to Neligan on 11 Dec. 1981, D.F.A. 2013/27/1571.

⁴⁵ Letter from Neligan to Sharkey dated 14 Dec. 1981, D.F.A. 2013/27/1571.

a key Ulster voice. The Irish government could ill afford to adopt such a strategy, because that would impede the ascent of unity by consent. In addition, they did not see Paisley as having the same kind of relationship with terrorists as had other men who had been denied U.S. visas, like Owen Carron. His denial would also provide the Irish National Congress and NORAIID with a generous propaganda victory.

American popular analysis of the Northern Ireland situation was certainly naive, reduced of complexity and intent on explanations which tended to stress polarity, like Briton against Irishman, coloniser versus colonised. This left little room for Ulster protestants in American conceptions of the Irish situation, a problem made clear in a meeting between Lord Gowrie, Minister of State for Northern Ireland, and the Friends of Ireland (F.O.I.), an Irish-American lobby consisting of interested congressmen. It was established in 1981 to counteract the pro-I.R.A. tendencies of the Irish National Caucus and the Ad Hoc Congressional Committee on Irish Affairs. The Four Horsemen constituted its front line leadership, whereas the deputation which visited Ireland consisted of the House Majority Whip, Thomas Foley (D., Washington), Charles Dougherty (R., Pennsylvania) and James Shannon (D., Massachusetts).⁴⁶

Dougherty expressed concern that the British government was not exerting enough pressure on unionists to accept Irish unity. The group was most afraid of the

⁴⁶ The Four Horsemen was a collective term for Ted Kennedy, Tip O'Neill, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York and Governor Hugh Carey of New York.

unionist rationale becoming more prolific in American publications. Gowrie referred to Paisley's image in the United States 'as being useful to the British Government not only because he illustrated some of the difficulties we faced but also because he was identifiably a non-British element in Northern Ireland's problem'.⁴⁷ Paisley's visibility thus acted as an effective obstacle to simplified narratives, which themselves counteracted initiatives for resolution. It was, as Gowrie emphasised, an elision also prominent in the Republic of Ireland, as Charles Haughey seemed only willing to recognise Ulster protestants as part of the problem, not the solution, because they ruined the alluring vista of a simple transfer of territory from one sovereign power to another. Irish-American opponents of unionism preferred its voice to be inaudible in America, worried about how a resounding recital would corrupt the popular folklore of Brit versus Mick.

The British government was keen to have an affable, credible and articulate spokesman for unionism in America to 'educate Irish Americans who were more usually exposed to the Republican viewpoint than to Protestant convictions and anxieties'.⁴⁸ Peter Jay, British Ambassador to the U.S.A., felt hostility to unionists also derived from the way that some Americans 'tended to think of the Ulster situation in "colonial terms"'.⁴⁹ This inclination convicted unionists of an association of empire: unionists were a colonised people who in turn had enslaved Ulster's catholics. The

⁴⁷ Minutes dated 29 May 1982, PRONI CENT/1/11/34A.

⁴⁸ N.I.O. report dated 8 Dec. 1977, T.N.A. CJ4/2610.

⁴⁹ Meeting between Peter Jay and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Roy Mason on 11 July 1977, T.N.A. CJ4/2610.

Progressive Unionist Party (P.U.P.), the political wing of the U.V.F., had attempted to arrest such a depiction in November 1979. Presenting to a staff member on the House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee, they had urged that 'Congressmen and public officials speak out on behalf of the inalienable right of the people of Northern Ireland to determine their own destiny as United Kingdom citizens apart from the Republic of Ireland'.⁵⁰

Harold McCusker was the British government's candidate of choice for such an assignment. The N.I.O. observed, after a visit he made alone to America in March 1982, of the 'value of arranging visits to the USA by moderate Unionist politicians. The posts were obviously very happy with McCusker's performance and keen to see him return'.⁵¹ The visit was sponsored and organised by Her Majesty's government, such was their desperation to restrain the NORAIID lobby and have the unionist position articulated with the force and authenticity they were unable to give it. McCusker had made useful contacts during the trip, including Matthew Nimetz, a State Department official under President Carter. He also met with Congressman Clement Zablocki, Chairman of the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee and Walter Stoessel of the U.S. State Department. The N.I.O. also relayed that McCusker was content with the shifts in public opinion in America, which were wandering away from support for the Provisionals, suggesting 'there was now a

⁵⁰ N.I.O. report dated 30 Nov. 1979, T.N.A. 3279.

⁵¹ N.I.O. report dated 24 Mar. 1982, T.N.A. CJ4/3833.

much greater realisation there of the complexity of the situation in Northern Ireland and of the need for some form of political movement'.⁵²

Harold McCusker also enjoyed a productive relationship with F.O.I., and it was through meetings with him that, the N.I.O. noticed, they too demonstrated 'an increased awareness of the complexity of the political situation in Northern Ireland and the inadequacy of simplistic solutions'.⁵³ This impelled them to emphasise the necessity of unionist assent to any model of Irish unity, which the Office compared to Haughey's diffidence towards the consent caveat. The report also noted that between January 1981 and May 1982, McCusker had met the group three times and was keen 'to offer them hospitality in Unionist homes during their visit'. It seems McCusker was among the most audible unionist voices in America partly because he was the most welcome there.

American writers, however, often struggled to depict an optimistic image of Ulster protestants. A D.F.A. report into the American media's coverage of Northern Ireland observed that

Editorial writers are most conscious of the need to accommodate the wishes and fears of Northern Ireland Protestants. But this has not prevented some newspapers from shifting towards an unsympathetic view of the Protestants. They have been described as "diehards"

⁵² N.I.O. report dated 5 Apr. 1982, T.N.A. CJ4/3833.

⁵³ Report dated 26 May 1982, PRONI CENT/1/11/30.

[New York Times] prepared to use force to maintain a status quo, which to Americans, seems unworkable and bafflingly unappealing.⁵⁴

Paisley planned a visit as part of a joint unionist expedition termed 'Operation USA', at which he, along with his deputy Peter Robinson and John Taylor and Norah Bradford of the O.U.P., were due to visit 20 U.S. cities and fulfil speaking engagements on television.⁵⁵ The tour did proceed in January 1982, though with Jim Allister in Paisley's absence and with a greatly truncated schedule after Paisley was refused entrance. One might note the combined nature of the expedition, with members of the D.U.P. and O.U.P. in a single delegation: unionism unites in desperation. Furthermore, unionists had neither the resources nor the inclination to fund separate party political trips; this would further complicate the reception of unionism by suggesting there were ruptures within it.

The Consulate General of Ireland, San Francisco, reported on Robinson's address to the Irish Forum Chapters there and in Sacramento. At the latter he addressed only sixty people and was remarked as being 'unrelievedly serious', whilst his speech to two hundred in San Francisco was received with cold

⁵⁴ Paper entitled 'An analysis of the American media's coverage of Northern Ireland and the Maze Hunger Strike in 1981', D.F.A. 2011/53/5.

⁵⁵ John Taylor was U.U.P. M.P. for Strangford between June 1983 and June 2001. In February 1972 he survived an assassination attempt by the Official Irish Republican Army and remains part owner of the Alpha Newspaper Group, which owns local newspapers throughout Ireland.

politeness.⁵⁶ A contact of the Consulate General disclosed to Peter Robinson and Jim Allister the rationale servicing such disfavour, before insisting that the excursion might not have been a total failure. They were told that

this [Paisley's links to the segregationist Bob Jones] did damage to their efforts to communicate their political message /.../ He [Robinson] will have made few converts to the Unionist cause but he may have served a useful purpose in educating some of the more emotional Irish-Americans to the fact that the Unionist viewpoint is also strongly held and that it cannot be ignored.⁵⁷

The appeal of the loyalist message was blighted by associations with men like the famed segregationist Bob Jones and the eccentric logic through which it was occasionally issued. For instance, the N.I.O. reported of Norah Bradford's determination during the trip 'to put across the message to the American people that the present troubles in Northern Ireland are a struggle between Communism and Christianity'.⁵⁸

During the expedition its participants managed to secure meetings with some prominent men and media agencies. The delegation met the British Ambassador,

⁵⁶ Report dated 17 Feb. 1982 from Consul General to Margaret Hennessy, Anglo-Irish section, D.F.A., D.F.A. 2012/59/1613.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ N.I.O. report dated 26 Jan. 1982, PRONI CENT/1/11/1A.

addressed the National Press Club in Washington and had meetings with the editorial boards of leading American newspapers. The deputation were also received by United States Deputy Secretary of State, Walter John Stoessel, and Congressman Trent Lott, a Republican from Mississippi, while Robinson was interviewed by the *LA Times* and John Taylor by the *Christian Science Monitor*. They also met Peter Reams, Irish Desk Officer at the U.S. State Department.

So pronounced though was the unionist desperation to have their message understood that not enough thought was devoted to having it well liked. In a meeting with Margaret Thatcher before the expedition, Peter Robinson had complained 'that the propaganda battle was still being lost in the United States'.⁵⁹ Unpleasant avenues for the dissemination of the unionist ideology were pursued, even with their adverse implications, because unionists did not have the luxury of being selective, so hushed was their voice in America. Thus its broadcast was unlikely to be endearing or masterful. Dan Moynihan and Ted Kennedy refused to meet the delegation, but the Democratic Whip Tom Foley and Tip O'Neill's Counsel, Kirk O'Donnell, went in their stead. The D.F.A. remarked that the U.S. side viewed this meeting 'as not being very useful and a waste of time. It was their impression that the overall visit to the U.S. had not been very productive for the Unionists'.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Meeting dated 25 June 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/45A.

⁶⁰ D.F.A. report dated March 1982, D.F.A. 2013/27/1571.

Ian Paisley did make trips to America and his most generous source of donation came from his relationship with Bob Jones University in Greenville, South Carolina, where he became a frequent speaker and eventually joined its board of trustees. Paisley established contacts with influential southern politicians, such as senators Strom Thurmond and Jesse Helms.⁶¹ Paisley boasted of his friendship with Thurmond to Thatcher in a June 1981 meeting.⁶² In 1977 the first U.S. congregation of Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church was formed in Greenville and by the mid-1980s he had chapters in Florida, New Hampshire, Georgia, Arizona, California, Philadelphia, Calgary and Vancouver. Bob Jones was himself a fundamentalist preacher of some repute and was important in finessing Paisley's delivery technique. It was also through this association that Paisley gave the opening prayer in the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1981.

The American Consulate in Belfast reported on Paisley's trips to north America, where he attended the official openings of Free Presbyterian Churches. It commented on the potential for his brand of loyalist ideology to populate and occupy religious attitude, making Paisley a formidable figure, if his audience expanded suitably. 'There [are] obvious advantages in dual political/spiritual role in Ulster. Fundamentalist religious doctrine neatly meshes with fundamentalist

⁶¹ Andrew J. Wilson, 'Maintaining the Cause in the Land of the Free: Ulster Unionists and US Involvement in the Northern Ireland Conflict, 1968-72' in *Eire-Ireland*, Volume 40, Issue 3&4 (Fall/Winter 2005), p.224.

⁶² Meeting dated 25 June 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/45A.

political orthodoxy /.../ There seems to be broad and growing support for Paisley and Company, rendered for God and Caesar alike'.⁶³

Paisley's visits to America could be abundantly profitable, one venture netting an estimated \$20,000, but they were not successful in establishing a network of sympathetic loyalist supporters. Niall Ó Dochartaigh wrote that loyalists' arguments would not resonate with their intended audience because 'that audience is inaccurately imagined and because loyalists place undue weight on the role of mass communication in mobilization'.⁶⁴ When he spoke of an inaccurate conception Ó Dochartaigh meant that loyalists assumed that there existed within America a loyalist equivalent of the Irish-American catholic descendant collective which NORAIID courted so assiduously. Further, that lying unexploited was a suggestible reservoir of ethnic solidarity, waiting to be converted to the loyalist version of history.

Ó Dochartaigh suggested this vista was illusory for several reasons. Firstly, whilst there were organisations in America which concerned themselves with the genealogy of Protestant Ulster, such as the *Scotch-Irish Society* and the *Ulster-Irish Society*, they did not share loyalists' fondness for the British monarchy, versed as they were in the patois of the American War of Independence and the

⁶³ Electronic telegram from American Consul Belfast to American Embassy Dublin, dated 9 Apr. 1976, 1976BELFAS00144, accessed via www.nara.gov on 19 Nov. 2012.

⁶⁴ Niall Ó Dochartaigh, 'Reframing Online: Ulster loyalists imagine an American Audience' in *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 16:1 (2009), p.107.

Scotch-Irish role in the creation of a liberated America. Whilst these groups did participate in political activism, they tended to function more extensively as heritage and historical associations. Even the Orange Order is a small and constituent part of this, with only 31 American lodges in the early 1990s and around 600 members. This did not offer an extravagant platform for unionist lobbying.

There were loyalist clubs: Reverend Charles Reynolds of New York was their most prominent organiser. In October 1971 he founded the *Northern Ireland Service Council*, principally to 'support and encourage more unionist publicity trips to the US, to coordinate activities between "societies in the US with Ulster/Scottish-Irish ethnic origin", to raise and disburse funds, and to serve as a relief agency "for emergency situations in Northern Ireland"'.⁶⁵ At its peak the *Northern Ireland Service Council* had 100 members. Similar groups which sprang up in Los Angeles, San Francisco [both chapters of the *Ulster American Loyalists*] and Philadelphia [*Ulster Protestant Association*] had even fewer activists. A paper by Ronan Murphy of the D.F.A. on regionalised loyalist fund raising observed that it did occur, but in a limited fashion:

When I was serving in Chicago, I was told by contacts in the Irish American Community that Loyalist fund raising does take place in the midwest, though not on a large scale, as far as they knew. In 1979 [I think] Rev. Ian Paisley came on a tour of the Ohio/Illinois area speaking

⁶⁵ Wilson, 'Maintaining the cause', p.228.

at churches of the Fundamentalist/Evangelical kind /.../ One of the places he visited was Akron Ohio, which is verging on the Bible belt.⁶⁶

It is also important to acknowledge that loyalists tended to misinterpret why nationalists had been successful in America, and attributed too much emphasis on the efficacy of homeland propaganda. Irish-Americans made often spontaneous donations to republican causes at social events or street gatherings: there was no sophisticated network of ideological fraternity. Ó Dochartaigh suggests loyalists failed to grasp why NORAID worked and why their efforts at replication were thus doomed to failure. He claimed new research has shown that distant ancestry was not central to fundraising prowess, but rather the prevalence of 'pre-existing personal and political networks' which were often engineered by recent emigrants from Ireland.⁶⁷ What loyalism really lacked at the onset of the Troubles were these pre-existing organisational structures and personal networks of patronage. Instead, it tried to articulate its political philosophy to a nation which was either disinterested or had already accepted the nationalist narrative.⁶⁸

Andrew Wilson suggests that part of the failure came from Ulster unionists in Northern Ireland themselves, who saw greater value in lobbying 'the British Embassy in Washington and the British Information Service in New York to use their

⁶⁶ Report dated 12 Nov. 1981, D.F.A. 2012/59/1613.

⁶⁷ Ó Dochartaigh, 'Reframing Online', p.119.

⁶⁸ This was partly due to emigration trends, with more Ulster protestants emigrating to Canada than America.

considerable resources to counteract the political influence of Irish America'.⁶⁹

Limited financial resources was another reason why Paisley was the only unionist, along with Martin Smyth, to make repeated forays on American soil, with the former aided by his church network and the latter by the Orange Order in America. Indeed, in 1976 Smyth relayed to the Executive Meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council 'that when in America on his recent visit he found considerably more willingness to discuss and co-operate with Ulster Unionists, compared with the attitude he had previously experienced there'.⁷⁰ Smyth may have felt the reception was warming, but most of the trips made were undertaken on a purely pastoral or theological basis; they were not exercises in the ideological proselytising many loyalists craved. Lecture tours on the observance of reformist protestantism were more likely to secure visas, but they limited the scope for the diffusion of the unionist political outlook. Even so, Paisley's American Free Presbyterian congregations rarely attracted more than 40 people.

An interesting correspondence developed between D.F.A. and the Irish Embassy in Washington following a loyalist deputation to America. The inquiry concerned Mr. Harold R. Alexander, whose clients were the United Ulster Unionist Movement, the U.L.C.C.C. and John McKeague of the R.H.C. Alexander was registered with the American Justice Department under the Foreign Agents

⁶⁹ Wilson, 'Maintaining the cause', p.235.

⁷⁰ Minutes dated 4 Sep. 1976, Churchill Archives Centre, POLL 9/1/8.

Registration Act. Officials in Dublin were apprehensive after details of his visit to Washington became widely known in the press, and requested the Embassy explain the matter. The Irish Embassy in Washington reported Alexander had claimed that an independent Ulster 'would create dangers of a takeover by the left: the US would obviously not favour and might wish to provide support- financial and/or political- for a non-communist regime in Northern Ireland'.⁷¹

Alexander headed his own private consultancy practice in Pennsylvania and was basically proposing, on behalf of a number of leading loyalists, United States fiscal assistance to help engineer an independent Ulster. He was refused. Officers at the Embassy were suspicious of his own material motivations for such an enterprise and repeated the official state department policy of only recognising the current authorities in Ireland and the United Kingdom as legitimate governments. Michael Lillis, then a counsellor at the Irish Embassy in Washington, wrote to Séan Donlon of the D.F.A. suggesting an uncompromising approach to such delegations: 'I stated that it would not encourage loyalist politicians to make political compromises if they were being given the impression, however falsely, that the State Department was taking their representative seriously'.⁷² Lillis added that staff at the Embassy were disturbed these men had been granted a consultation, especially since members of NORAIID were prohibited from meetings.

⁷¹ Report from Irish Embassy in Washington, 17 Dec. 1976, D.F.A. 2005/145/2402.

⁷² Letter from Lillis to Donlon, 21 Dec. 1976, D.F.A. 2005/145/2402.

Loyalists thus became aware of the need to pursue their cause through legitimate, legally recognised channels and international bodies. A report by the American Consulate in Belfast in May 1975 noted:

Fragmentary reports reaching Belfast of activities two Northern Ireland groups visiting EC Capitals. One report originating Luxembourg has group of Northern Ireland local government councillors being told by EEC Officials that independence in itself would not RPT not be bar to Northern Ireland membership in community so long as no other member such as U.K. or Ireland opposed membership.⁷³

The American Consulate in Belfast enjoyed an interesting relationship with loyalists. In 1978 the Irish National Caucus sponsored two US Congressmen, Hamilton Fish and Joshua Eilberg, to investigate the U.S. visa policy for Sinn Féin. In the course of their investigations conducted in England and Ireland, they discovered that members of the U.V.F. and U.D.A. had been granted entry into the U.S. while members of Sinn Féin had not. They interviewed Charles Stout, then head of the American Consulate in Belfast, who said the decision was with the U.S. Department of State but that membership of the U.D.A. did not in itself constitute grounds for visa denial. Stout stated this was because the U.D.A. did not target the police or try

⁷³ Telegram from American Consulate Belfast to State Department Washington 7 May 1975, 1975BELFAS00162, accessed via www.nara.gov on 26 Sep. 2011.

to overthrow government, and was paraphrased saying that 'Although he had instructions that in any case of suspected IRA membership the person's visa application was to be sent for review to the State Department, he had no such instruction regarding the Protestant paramilitary groups'.⁷⁴

The U.D.A. might not have *existed* to target police and overthrow governments, but these were not actions proscribed by the group's leadership. This still does not explain the admittance of U.V.F. members to America while the group remained proscribed. In their report of the trip, titled *Justice Report: Politics and Visa denials*, Eilberg and Fish wrote that 'the delegation failed to understand the rationale of labelling only the individuals in the Provisional IRA as terrorists and exonerating individuals in Loyalist paramilitary organisations'.⁷⁵ Hamilton Fish, a Republican Congressman for New York 25th District, remained disconcerted by the security latitude afforded to loyalist paramilitaries. In May 1982 he urged U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig that

Only by outlawing the Ulster Defence Association and the Third Force will the British Government be able to convince the American public that British security forces are truly sincere in their attempts to achieve a workable and peaceful solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Jack Holland, 'The American Connection', p.138.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Letter dated 20 May 1982, D.F.A. 2013/27/1532.

By American public he specifically meant its Irish community, of which a belief in the partisanship of the Northern Ireland security forces remained a robust component of their historical memory. This was an instance in which loyalism's apparent lack of mission worked in its favour, with sympathetic visa decisions reflecting a judgement from state officials that loyalists were not a de-stabilising force in the way republicans were. This is perhaps because of the narrowing audience in America which loyalists had to incite or seduce, and of the determination of administrations to fight only on one front.

The British right and the lure of extremism

The *Ulster Worker*, a National Front and loyalist supporting periodical, promoted Ian Smith's regime in Rhodesia and featured ads in the magazine from the *Friends of Rhodesia Association* in Pretoria, South Africa. Not only was William Craig 'openly sympathetic to Smith's Rhodesia', but unionists tended to scrutinise the country for the conduct of the British government, and what this might mean for Ulster.⁷⁷ The conclusions derived from Rhodesia were that Ulster would be sold out to the United Nations, and then to an Irish republic, and that the British government would seek to repeal or weaken the British character of Northern Ireland through such a

⁷⁷ Donal Lowry, 'Ulster resistance and loyalist rebellion in the Empire' in Keith Jeffery (ed), *An Irish Empire: Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (Manchester, 1996), p.205.

surrender. When alluding to Rhodesia, unionists emphasised the extent of British perfidy and these parallels influenced Craig when he composed his warning of U.D.I. shortly after the imposition of Direct Rule in March 1972. Ian Paisley's newspaper the *Protestant Telegraph* saw white Rhodesia as a victim of the same sort of malevolent forces which had such a frantic grip over Ulster: 'papist' and ecumenical conspiracy and the sadistic rites of communism. Unionists wondered if the minority community of Northern Ireland would be accommodated as it had been in Rhodesia.

Other nefarious contacts were itemised in *Loyalist News*, a publication not linked to any one paramilitary group but which had John McKeague as a chief contributor. In its issue on the 31st January 1976 a spokesman for the Carrickfergus-based Loyalist Prisoners Committee stated that

Contact has been made with groups in Germany and South Africa who have indicated that they will be attempting to bring pressure on their own governments to intervene and ask Westminster to re-examine the case of Gusty Spence and the conditions of a number of other prisoners.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ *Loyalist News*, 2nd ed., vol.7, 31 Jan. 1976, N.L.I., IR 05 p46.

Official links between loyalists and the violent British right were however tentative and transient. The U.D.A. formally prohibited the National Front in September 1974 and Andy Tyrie issued a confidential memorandum declaring it as a neo-Nazi movement and forbade U.D.A. members from associating with its followers.⁷⁹ The American Consulate in Belfast were aware of Tyrie's stance and reported that the U.D.A. 'had called for its members to sever links with British National Front and to stay away from Front Pro-loyalist/anti-IRA rally scheduled for London Sept. 7. UDA spokesman quoted as saying organisation disagreed with much of front's policy'.⁸⁰

Another reason for the coldness between them was the National Front's declaration of Aryan racial supremacy, which viciously trespassed on the traditional loyalist motif of sacrifice at the Somme. The U.D.A. and U.V.F. were also at this time attempting to emulate credible political movements with cross-community and non-sectarian solutions, emphasising the idea of state restoration and reparation. An association with an expressly anti-Semitic and racist organisation would have made this contention risible. Finally, loyalists already had a political machine at Westminster, both with the Ulster loyalist politicians at Parliament, and in the form of the Conservative Monday Club, a group of right-wing Tory politicians who were zealously unionist on the constitution and the security situation. The group even had

⁷⁹ Martin Walker, *The National Front* (Glasgow, 1977), p.160.

⁸⁰ Telegram from American Consulate Belfast to American Embassy London, dated 3 Sep. 1974, 1974BELFAS00115, accessed on the Central Foreign Policy Files on www.nara.gov on 27 Sep. 2011.

an Ulster wing devoted to the cause of the Union and attacking the I.R.A. John de Vere Walker, chairman of the Monday Club's Ulster Group, wrote to Party Chairman Lord Carrington.⁸¹ He 'denounced the Government for appeasing terrorists and betraying loyalists, and warned Carrington that Heath's actions threatened 'an irrevocable split within the Conservative and Unionist Party''.⁸² Thus there was limited contact between loyalists and those of the British extreme right because there was no need for it to exist.

The British nationalism of Enoch Powell

Perhaps the most prominent and famed right-wing supporter of Ulster was Enoch Powell, maligned within the Conservative Party for his anti-consensual attitudes. Powell served as M.P. for South Down from 1974 to 1987, but despite also being a Monday Club member, he enjoyed a fractious relationship with loyalists. This was because they redefined unionist loyalty to Britain as conditional, something that Powell as a devoted British nationalist could not accept. He feared that the escalating separatism of Ulster Vanguard might blossom and tried to fetter the idea of a distinct Ulster identity which might be able to develop a self-possessing national

⁸¹ Carrington served as British Foreign Secretary from May 1979-Apr. 1982.

⁸² Mark Pitchford, *The Conservative party and the Extreme Right 1945-75* (Manchester, 2011), p.199.

consciousness. In a speech to the Belfast East Unionist Association on June 2nd 1972

Powell said:

The nationality which Ulster asserts is not an Irish nationality, nor an Ulster nationality, nor any separate nationality whatsoever. Of all these Unionism is a denial and a repudiation. It is the assertion, simply and solely, of British nationality, the claim to be part of a whole-integrally and therefore indivisibly apart- of that whole, the British nation.⁸³

Powell gave this speech three months after the imposition of Direct Rule in March 1972, which brought the Stormont regime to an end after its unionist government refused to surrender legal authority for the security forces in Ulster to the British government. Powell's words were in part a reaction to the burgeoning movement of Ulster independence, which timidly advocated secession from the Union. Independence of any kind was first proposed by the Vanguard movement at a series of rallies in the six weeks prior to the dissolution of Stormont in March 1972. It enunciated a nationalism of despair, dwelling not on the capacity for Ulster to evolve into a nation, but on the British government defaulting on the Government of Ireland Act, 1920. This highlighted the early struggles of loyalists to suffuse their

⁸³ Speech quoted in Richard Ritchie (ed.) *Enoch Powell- A nation or no nation? Six years in British Politics* (London, 1978), p.59.

nationalism with a mythic dimension or the kind of elegy we might find within the sombre verses of Irish nationalism.

A Vanguard pamphlet published in 1972, *Ulster- A Nation*, reiterated that 'Ulster's loyalty is primarily to her queen, and not to ministers or governments that fail in their duty to give loyal subjects the blessing of the Queen's peace'.⁸⁴ It went on to state that 'the British are the Ulster problem' and that the biggest threat to the loyalist cause was not the I.R.A., but Conservative antipathy towards Irish politics, from which they wished to extricate themselves by way of a united Ireland. The ethno-nationalism of Vanguard had embedded in it an ardent and paranoiac anti-Englishness, which indicted direct rule as a device for Englishmen to get elite employment. This document was a defence of Stormont and led the call for her restoration. After the publication of the Green Paper in October 1972, Craig's rhetoric became more specific towards Ulster entitlement:

Northern Ireland has the right to self determination [sic.] and if she is driven out of the U.K. in her independence she will make her own participation in wider associations and communities with a better chance of external investment and trade than remaining with the U.K. in a weak unstable position.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ulster Vanguard, *Ulster-a nation* (Belfast, April 1972).

⁸⁵ Ulster Vanguard, *The Future of Northern Ireland* (1972). Accessed via <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/>.

This was really only a mirage of resilience which recognised Ulster's reliance on the United Kingdom for the definition of its future. It did not suggest seizing or imposing independence at that time, but rather hinted that it could be a practical alternative if Britain decided to relinquish Ulster. One cannot detect any confidence in their ability to force Britain's hand; in fact, they explicitly recognised they were legally subordinate to them. Even Professor Kennedy Lindsay's proposals of Ulster as an independent state with dominion status within the Commonwealth recognised and insisted upon the maintenance of the British connection.⁸⁶ This was also seen as an effective prevention of reunification. Independence in its early form was thus not considered as a desirable option or one which would aim to unite both communities, but as a means to resuscitate the old Stormont regime.⁸⁷

Thus Powell supported the imposition of Direct Rule, coming to advocate further administrative and departmental integration for Northern Ireland into the apparatus of Whitehall, and thought those loyalists who protested against British authority were heretical. It became clear, therefore, that despite being one of the few British politicians with a genuine interest in loyalist affairs, he was not their most suitable patron. He failed to understand or sympathise with the embryonic loyalist antagonism towards London, the furious response to British attempts at constitutional restitution. Thus loyalists were not a natural constituency of Powell,

⁸⁶ See Kennedy Lindsay, *Dominion of Ulster?* (Belfast, 1972). Accessed on 22 Sep. 2014 via <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/organ/docs/lindsay72.pdf>

⁸⁷ James McAuley, *Bury me under the Red Hand: Loyalist paramilitary group politics in contemporary Belfast* (Occasional Paper, Number 8, Sept. 1988), p.9.

which explains his success in the more affluent, liberal unionist area of south County Down. Merlyn Rees noted the ill ease between Powell and Northern loyalists:

There[']s been a clash between Enoch Powell and the other loyalist leaders where Enoch has made it abundantly clear that he doesn't think much of the sort of Orange Order type loyalism and all that goes with it /.../ I know how much he dislikes the Protestant Paramilitaries.⁸⁸

It was Powell's habit to endow his idea of Britishness with a specific and exclusivist 'English' dimension, which of course ran contrarily to loyalist self-determination. Maurice Irvine explained that Powell's perception of Northern Ireland derived largely from his view of the United Kingdom as a unitary nation-state, a fount from which all ethical, political and religious values were born and adhered to.⁸⁹ Thus an intentional deviation from this by loyalists was for Powell a condemnation of the Union entire.

Irvine continued that Powell 'fails to discern the basic and agonizing if largely unconscious dichotomy in the psyche of the Ulster Unionist community of which he has made himself the champion'.⁹⁰ This paradox was the desperate will of a people to be affixed to a union which sought to expel it. This is what denied the unionist

⁸⁸ Merlyn Rees transcripts, sides 16-17, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/1/8, p.4.

⁸⁹ Maurice Irvine, *Northern Ireland: Faith and Faction* (London, 1991), pp.165-6.

⁹⁰ Irvine, 'Faith and Faction', p.169.

mind tranquillity. Powell in essence disregarded the unionist and loyalist need for a local attachment through which to arrive at the wider Britannic allegiance. Ulster loyalism was not a metropolitan Britishness, but a regional, localised and thus incongruous one. This explains why he was a perennial champion of greater parliamentary integration for Northern Ireland, hoping to vaccinate Ulster against conflict by reducing the distance between it and Britain's political standards. It was Powell's preference to achieve this by inculcating an atavistic reverence for the Union, reviving the covenanting patriotism of Carson and the early home rulers:

For Ulster and its people there is one sane and rational hope, and one only. It lies where it has always lain. It lies with the Union. In all doubt and danger, amidst all equivocation, trickery and treachery, the one golden rule of safety abides. The Union, the whole Union and nothing, but the Union. Ask no more. Accept nothing else. Stand firm.⁹¹

Powell's unionism was occasionally viewed as boorish, antiquated and obstructive; fundamentalist at a time when some loyalists were beginning to see the necessity of revising their traditional views on the Republic of Ireland and the Union. In a private note, he dispelled the logic of re-unification as fallacious,

⁹¹ Speech by Enoch Powell to the Annual General Meeting of the Coleraine Divisional Unionist Association, 5 Dec. 1981, TAOIS 2011/127/1017.

contending that Ireland had never been united and that the Irish republic had no defensible claim over Northern Ireland.

There is not, and never has been in any political sense, an "Ireland" that was "united" except within the United Kingdom. The word "re-unification" is a misnomer for the claim to annex territory and population belonging to a political entity from which the Republic seceded over sixty years ago.⁹²

Merlyn Rees again acknowledged Powell's increasingly isolated position in an N.I.P.R.: 'Mr Enoch Powell continues to plough on lonely furrow. He is unrepentant about his definition of "loyalty" which so offended his political associates'.⁹³

Rees was also scathing about the two other most prominent Conservative M.P.s on Northern Ireland, Airey Neave, Shadow Secretary of State and John Biggs-Davison, Opposition Shadow Cabinet Spokesman for Northern Ireland.⁹⁴ In another entry Rees claimed that 'A. Neave made another ridiculous speech, it really is quite incredible that he and John Biggs-Davidson [sic.] lead for them and they keep

⁹² Note on Reunification, undated, POLL 9/2/1.

⁹³ N.I.P.R. for period ending 27 July 1975, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/5/5.

⁹⁴ Airey Neave was a close friend of Margaret Thatcher's; his assassination in 1979 by the I.N.L.A. was a personal attempt to wound her as well. Biggs-Davison was peculiarly, for a Tory, an English catholic and wrote a book about the history of twentieth-century Ireland. See John Biggs-Davison, *The Hand is Red* (London, 1973).

talking about me talking to the paramilitaries [sic].'⁹⁵ Rees regarded Neave as imprudent and ill-informed generally on the Northern situation:

Anyway, the A Neave business, I am afraid he is not going to be very good, for one thing he is not very bright, he is not in anybody's league, and he and his sparring partner, John-Biggs Davidson [sic.] whom I rather like, they don't really understand what is going on.⁹⁶

Other Tory voices

One is able to chart the receding of good relations between Ulster unionists and the Conservative Party. The Heath/Whitelaw disposition for power-sharing with the catholic minority and the establishment of Westminster rule antagonised Ulster unionists, who began to doubt the unionist creed of the Tory party.⁹⁷ This was accompanied by a swelling exasperation within British opinion about Northern Ireland, which began to assess the Ulster situation as intractable. Dermot Nally of

⁹⁵ Merlyn Rees transcripts, sides 20-21, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/1/10, p.39.

⁹⁶ Merlyn Rees transcripts, sides 14-15, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/1/7, p.2.

⁹⁷ William Whitelaw was the first ever Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the office being created in March 1972 after the imposition of direct rule.

the Department of the Taoiseach was thus able to comment, in a review of the 1975 Conservative Party Conference, that

The mood of the Tory party towards Northern Ireland has changed considerably in the past five years and is now largely one of doubt, of uncertainty and of distaste for the violence there rather than, as previously, a position of unquestioning support for the "Ulster Unionists".⁹⁸

The Cosgrave government were heartened that relations between Britain and the Irish republic were improving, as the valence of an Irish dimension was now widely recognised, but remained concerned at what instability a disaffected unionism might herald. In a 1975 brief for a meeting with Margaret Thatcher, recently appointed Leader of the Opposition, several key requests with regard to unionists were made:

(i) Unionists must have no doubt on the union and (ii) there must be no doubt that the only form of devolved Government is power-sharing.

b. point out that developments in Northern Ireland were going in the right direction but slowly until mid-August when Unionists, perhaps wrongly, formed the view that there was hope of a deal with the Conservatives.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Report dated Oct. 1975, D.F.A. 2007/111/1963.

⁹⁹ D.F.A. 1975 brief, D.F.A. 2007/111/1963.

Thus the Irish government were keen that unionists receive reassurance on the persistence of the Union, though themselves remained insistent on the traction of power-sharing, which unionists must be made to accept. The inference made was that unionists had been recklessly misled by the Conservative party, thinking that an association could be bound between the two. Conservatives had yet to admit that their emotion for unionists was dying. The absence of the Tory whip on Ulster unionists M.P.s meant that unionists were not obliged or encouraged to vote in accordance with Conservative party preferences. To apply the whip would have initiated a tactical, but importantly, formal alliance between the two parties which would have thwarted Thatcher's freedom when it came to her Ulster policy in government.

In meetings and correspondence between the conservatives and Ulster unionists, it became apparent that the two parties had divergent ideas for the future of Northern Ireland. In a meeting between unionist politicians, including Craig, Harry West and Faulkner and a Conservative party delegation of Neave, Biggs-Davison and Geoffrey Howe, West stressed 'There could be no power sharing with "those who want to destroy the country"'.¹⁰⁰ Biggs-Davison noted that 'the

¹⁰⁰ Harry West was a fierce critic of the Sunningdale Agreement and was U.U.P. leader from Jan. 1974-Sep. 1979. His reputation though was that of a man who was mostly interested in agricultural affairs. Reference from minutes dated 14 Nov. 1975, Papers of Margaret Thatcher, Churchill Archives Centre, University of Cambridge, THCR 2/1/1/18.

politicians seem agreed that /.../ there should be a devolved parliament and executive /.../ The fundamental question is Catholic participation in government '.¹⁰¹

Airey Neave wrote to West a year later that 'we wanted a system of government which would commend widespread support throughout the community including the minority'.¹⁰² The unstated implication in this letter was that West's plans for devolution did not accept minority assent as important. To the conservatives, this suggested the anticipated return to Stormont governance, with the nationalist community in an emphatically subordinated position.

A brief of the Security Committee of the Ulster Unionist Council demonstrated the party's incapacity for innovative thinking in times of political duress. Thoughts of reconciliation were braked by the reminiscence of full security control. It was more about survival than solution: 'The long term objective is the restoration of a devolved parliamentary with both the will and power to preserve public order by having legislative and administrative responsibility for law enforcement through the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Criminal Courts'.¹⁰³ They demanded from the British government the access to greater security provisions if they became needed; such a request was actually a cipher for the return of security autonomy, delivered through the contract of the Union.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Letter dated 23 Nov. 1976, POLL 9/1/8, File 1 of 2.

¹⁰³ Brief dated 28 Apr. 1976, POLL 9/1/8, File 1 of 2.

Perhaps one should not underestimate the damage that the imposition of direct rule in March 1972 did to the cordiality of conservative/unionist interaction. The residual bitterness lasted because unionists saw it as a savage termination of unionist rule and not as a way of rescuing Ulster from a pilgrimage to civil war. Colonel John Cunningham of the Ulster Unionist Council told John Biggs-Davison that 'it would take time to heal the wounds of Heath's betrayal of the Ulster Unionist Party but that most would welcome the restoration of the link'.¹⁰⁴ Thus the U.U.P. were thinking of re-establishing links, but were unsure if conservative priorities complemented those of unionists.

This suggests that unionists believed conservatives had a duty to service them. Several months later, James Molyneaux said much the same when the question of an advancement in contacts arose: 'while there was no animosity they did not have good relations with the Conservative Party. Until such times as they came up with policies which were an improvement and which would undo the damage which they did'.¹⁰⁵ Incidentally, Molyneaux remarked that the ambivalence was mutual, with the hostility of the catholic Tory Bill van Straubenzee towards Ulster unionists especially marked.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Notes of a meeting dated 22 Mar. 1976, THCR 2/1/1/18.

¹⁰⁵ Minutes of the Ulster Unionist Council dated 16 June 1976, POLL 9/1/8.

¹⁰⁶ Van Straubenzee was Minister of State for Northern Ireland, 1972-74.

There remained a cabal of Conservative party backbenchers who wished for greater warmth between the two parties, for reasons of political tradition as well as strategy.

Mr. Julian Amery made the point that we should try to regain the sympathy of the Unionists because there was a strong likelihood that the forthcoming session of the Northern Ireland convention would fail to reach acceptable agreement. If this happens we may have to make a choice. This choice must be distinct from Labour's.¹⁰⁷

Amery's logic was that a realignment with unionism would make it appear that the conservatives were stronger and more robust on the issue of Northern Ireland than the Labour Party, who had fashioned the failed initiative of the Constitutional Convention just to be seen to be brokering something.¹⁰⁸ John Biggs-Davison proposed that there should be provision at the Conservative Central Office for joint discussions on future policy and 'to help with the planning of a small Conservative-minded group of Unionists to make arrangements and oil the wheels in Northern Ireland'.¹⁰⁹ Biggs-Davison wrote to Thatcher that 'we need to rebuild a Conservative base in Ulster and to add to our voting strength here. In various ways, including the

¹⁰⁷ Minutes of the Parliamentary Northern Ireland Committee of the Conservative Party, dated 15 Jan. 1976, AMEJ 1/10/3/, File 3 of 3.

¹⁰⁸ Amery was born on 27 Mar. 1919 and died on 3 Sep. 1996. He was a leading member of the Monday Club for three decades and was Minister of State at F.C.O. from Nov. 1972-Mar. 1974.

¹⁰⁹ Minutes dated 22 Mar. 1976, THCR 2/1/1/18.

admission of Molyneaux to some meetings of the Northern Ireland Committee, I have been helping to sweeten the atmosphere'.¹¹⁰

As with the later response to the A.I.A., appeals would be limited to the more respectable Official Unionists, with Biggs-Davison hoping that 'if Paisley's DUP and Craig could be separated from the rest of the UUUC, both Official and Faulkner's Unionists could get together again. This would be in the national, and our party's, common interest'.¹¹¹ This seems not only because of the traditional link, but because this type of unionist would be more pliable to the conservative vision of power-sharing. Another reason for this ceremonial detachment was that unionist unrest had been moderated by Roy Mason's Ulster policy, which sought not to urge them into constitutional measures of conciliation but to win the security war with the P.I.R.A. Mason was British Secretary of State for Defence between 1974-1976 and he brought these edicts with him. He believed efficient security was a greater aid to Northern Ireland than Whitehall initiatives.

A report by Dermot Gallagher, Press and Information Counsellor in the Irish Embassy, London, related the unionist lurch towards Labour after exchanges during the 1977 Conservative Party conference. John Taylor of the U.U.P. admitted unionists 'thought the present Government was in general pursuing the right policies at the moment and that there might not be all that much in it for the Unionists if there were

¹¹⁰ Letter dated 18 Feb. 1975, THCR 2/1/1/18.

¹¹¹ Letter from Biggs-Davison to Ted Heath dated 14 Jan. 1975, THCR 2/1/1/18.

to be a change of Government'.¹¹² The conservatives were reported to be declaring the same, as Airey Neave indicated that he was not 'very hopeful of re-establishing much of a rapprochement with the Unionists at Westminster. Powell was carrying on a personal vendetta against his old colleagues, McCusker and Carson felt themselves to be closer ideologically to Labour than to the Conservatives'.¹¹³

The disconnect was compounded by the fact that in Opposition, Northern Ireland was not a dominant subject of interest for the Shadow Cabinet, with any contributions it did receive coming from the same triumvirate of Neave, Biggs-Davison and John Houston, a Home Affairs Research Officer. Edward Heath was acknowledged as maintaining an interest in Ulster affairs while out of office, though others, like William Whitelaw, purposefully let theirs drift into abeyance.¹¹⁴ There also grew a feeling amongst backbenchers, after the Conservative party acceded to Office in May 1979, that unionists now formed part of the opposition and should thus be excepted from the Conservative party organisation. This extended to invitations to speak at their annual conference, at which unionists had occasionally addressed delegates. A 1979 report by the Irish Embassy, London, relayed the position as such:

¹¹² Report dated 19 Oct. 1977, D.F.A. 2009/120/2120.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ See Minutes dated 12 Nov. 1976, D.F.A. 2007/111/1993.

Privately many conservatives are asking why should a member of the OUP, who sits on the Opposition benches in Westminster, be a member of the Executive Committee of the Conservative Party. There is also a feeling that the OUP helped to maintain Labour in office during the last Parliament.¹¹⁵

Unionists, the Falkands and self-preservation

If the narrative of conservative and unionist interrelation has been one of steady disintegration, it is useful to contextualise the Falklands war as the illustration of British sovereignty and how the conflict was monitored by unionists to measure the unionist appetite of the conservative government. A fortnight after the conflict began, the N.I.O. noticed that 'Unionists rapidly drew parallels between the Falklands and Northern Ireland. They noted that both territories are claimed by foreign states, though a majority of the population of each wants to remain British.'¹¹⁶ Confirmation that Gibraltar had been the subject of similar meetings with Spain reinforced unionist hysteria that a pattern of de-colonisation was becoming detectable in British foreign policy. This also suggests that unionists continued to nurture a residual doubt that they were desired members of the United Kingdom.

¹¹⁵ Report by Daíthí Ó Ceallaigh, Press and Information Officer, Irish Embassy, London dated 18 Oct. 1979, D.F.A. 2010/19/1643. Ó Ceallaigh would later be appointed Irish Ambassador to Great Britain.

¹¹⁶ Report by David Blatherwick dated 16 Apr. 1982, PRONI CENT/1/11/24.

The Irish government were keen to decipher Thatcher's varied and occasionally abstract view of self-determination and what consequence this might have on her constitutional interpretation of Northern Ireland. Concern was also devoted to the damage Haughey's unsuccessful attempt to block British sanctions on Argentina through the U.N. Security Council would have on Anglo-Irish relations. A Department of an Taoiseach paper considered that 'throughout the crisis, the Prime Minister has insisted that her government's concern is not only to uphold the principle of self-determination for the Falklanders, but for all people'.¹¹⁷ Extended to Northern Ireland, this principle was thought to be most favourable to unionist interests, forming as it did a parallel with the caveat enshrined in Britain's Northern Ireland policy that there would be no change in its constitutional status without the consensus of a majority of its people. It was also assumed that the British government 'referring to a universal right to freedom from aggression by other states, can be interpreted by Unionists in very general terms as of relevance to Northern Ireland'.¹¹⁸

Thus in its analysis of the Falklands, the Irish government concluded that nothing intimated the British government would abandon the guarantee of unionist involvement, or 'a readiness to accept the idea that questions of sovereignty can be negotiated over the heads of the persons directly concerned, or that Governments

¹¹⁷ Report written by Simon Hare dated 28 June 1982, D.F.A. 2012/59/1688.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

might have a duty to do so in their interests.’¹¹⁹ It was this design of sovereignty as an arrangement, whose expression required the consultation of the majority community, that ignited unionist rage at the A.I.A. in November 1985. Ireland’s neutrality on the Falklands, as a former senior Irish diplomat told me, was intended by Haughey to be his reprisal on the British government for their handling of the Hunger Strikes in 1981.¹²⁰

A report by Michael Lillis tried to measure the extent the republican hunger strikes had degraded the British commitment to the mantle of Ireland. He relayed the casual disconnect between Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Jim Prior, and Thatcher, but more alarmingly, the absence of contact between civil servants at any level of the N.I.O. and Thatcher’s advisors. Lillis added this reinforced the impression that had been growing that civil servants in the F.C.O. and N.I.O. were ‘possibly because of nervousness induced by the Falklands episode and its implications for the British Civil Service, less forthcoming now than people like Armstrong and Goodall’.¹²¹

Thus the Irish government were worried about the starkly receding British interest in Northern Ireland, and what it meant for the pursuit of Irish objectives. Jim Prior claimed the injury inflicted to general Anglo-Irish relations had been close to

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Interview with Michael Lillis, Former Head of Anglo-Irish Division of D.F.A., on 24 Apr. 2013.

¹²¹ Report by Michael Lillis dated 29 Sep. 1983, D.F.A. 2013/27/1589. His reference was to Sir David Goodall and Sir Robert Armstrong of the Cabinet Office.

terminal: 'An improvement in Anglo-Irish relations /.../ could not be achieved while Mr Haughey was Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, and when Mr Haughey lost office it would take a considerable effort to repair the damage that had been done'.¹²² The Irish government still believed that whatever the range or variety of organisational estrangement, the British government was still collectively oriented by 'a residual unionism or imperialism; a lack of readiness to see the Irish as having a separate identity; a kith and kin attachment to unionists'.¹²³ Thus they still expected conservative Northern Ireland policy to prejudice nationalists in the north more seriously than unionists, while they remained fearful of 'a unionist reaction that would lead to greater instability, violence and bloodshed'.¹²⁴

Conclusion: the shrine of the Union?

Paul Dixon has urged that one must not disregard the schemes and tactics innate to loyalists' British allegiance, which was sustained mostly by their desire 'to achieve their strategic goal of securing the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain', not a shared ideological temperament.¹²⁵ Therefore the Union became, for the unionist or loyalist, an appliance or facility through which to protect his way of life. It is not an automatic endorsement of British political institutions. Thus if the

¹²² CC (82) 45th British Cabinet Conclusions, dated 28 Oct. 1982, accessed via www.nationalarchives.gov.uk on 6 Nov. 2013.

¹²³ Note dated 5 Dec. 1983, D.F.A. 2013/27/1618.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Paul Dixon, 'Contemporary Unionism and the tactics of resistance' in Bric and Coakley (eds), *From Political Violence to Negotiated Settlement- The Winding Path to Peace in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2004), p.133.

Union, which was subservient to the Ulster people, could no longer uphold this way of life, then loyalists would have to seek an arrangement outside of it, to preserve their living standards. This logic was explicitly articulated by William Craig in a meeting with Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Willie Whitelaw. Craig said that

The Union had always been regarded as a basis of stability, supporting the way of life in Northern Ireland. Many people now thought - in view of the present economic and political policies followed by the Government - that Northern Ireland would be better off as an independent state.¹²⁶

Thus one must acknowledge the mutual conditionality which has defined the British/unionist relationship. British governments have persevered with Northern Ireland's membership of the Union because it has been considered the most appropriate arrangement for security stability there. Unionists have entered into accords with British governments, like the Good Friday Agreement, because they were considered the most effective strategy to maintain Ulster's union with Britain, which itself guarantees a certain way of living.

According to Dixon, such pragmatism came from the realisation that if they could have done it responsibly and avoided civil war, the British government would have discharged Ulster from the Union. Dixon claimed that 'this was most starkly apparent during the period 1970-6 when there was evidence of sympathy among the British political elite for Irish unity, suggesting no overriding British interest, beyond

¹²⁶ Minutes dated 19 Dec. 1972, PRONI CAB/9/J/90/10.

stability, in preserving the union'.¹²⁷ This thinking was replayed around the signing of the A.I.A., when the Union was viewed in cold, clinical terms, with British esteem for Ulster flailing. Indeed, Jonathan Moore wrote that 'those that remained "Rock Firm for the Union" in Conservative ranks were normally referring to Scotland not Ulster. The Orange Card was long dead, only to be reborn in times of desperate parliamentary arithmetic'.¹²⁸ Colin Coulter observed that 'both the British public and the British political class have proved only too willing to consider a future for Northern Ireland outside the Union'.¹²⁹ This also suited the 'functionally appropriate amnesia' of those who were unwilling to admit Britain's fault in the conflict's origins.¹³⁰

Thus, despite all parties being advocates of the Union, there was a distant and at times estranged relationship between unionism, loyalism and the Conservative party during this period. The fact that one must cite singular figures to exhume this relationship suggests that a Conservative association with and interest in loyalist or unionist politics was the exception, not the custom. This detachment was compounded by the fact that Ulster was not a policy issue of importance in opposition, and by the time the conservatives did assume office in 1979, the idea that

¹²⁷ Dixon, 'Contemporary Unionism', p.152.

¹²⁸ Jonathan Moore, *Ulster Unionism and the British Conservative Party: A Study of a Failed Marriage* (Irish Studies Centre Occasional Papers Series Ten, University of North London, 1997), p.21.

¹²⁹ Colin Coulter, 'The Character of Unionism' in *Irish Political Studies*, 9 (1994), p.4.

¹³⁰ See Brendan O'Leary, 'Northern Ireland' in Hickson and Seldon (eds), *New Labour, Old Labour: The Wilson and Callaghan Governments, 1974-79* (London, 2004), p.245.

the Irish government ought to have a role in the resolution of Ulster had gained traction, further alienating unionist opinion.

The British government also disagreed with the unionist interpretation of the design of British citizenship. Unionists felt the Union had a duty to shelter them, since they had always fought and remained in greatest proximity to one of its deadliest enemies, Irish republicans. The British government saw the Union as a variety of peoples. When considering ways of reassuring unionists that the Anglo-Irish process was not a tortuous march towards unity, one was to state that 'the new arrangements were being pursued in the interests not just of the people of Northern Ireland, but the 55 million who live in Great Britain'.¹³¹ Thus the purpose of the Union was to represent and protect the will of all its members, not just the unionist minority who felt they alone retained the permanent and intractable right to be obeyed. The Union, which unionists constantly expressed a loyalty for, covered a range of peoples whose arithmetic deposited Ulster protestants as a firm minority. This led unionists to wonder if perhaps they might have a future, but Ulster unionism did not.

¹³¹ Note by David Blatherwick on 11 May 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/36A.

5

Loyalism, unionism and parties of the 'left', 1974-1982

Ulster unionism, the British Labour Party and unity by consent, 1974-1982

The British Labour Party had established its own unionist credentials ever since the party made the decision to send British troops into Derry in 1969. It supported the conservative government on the interdiction of Special Category Status during the republican hunger strikes and Roy Mason had viewed his duty mostly in the subtext of security advances, an interpretation which most favoured unionists, who were often keen to diminish the ideological persona of the conflict. This was more a consequence of bi-partisanship on Northern Ireland, that is, the accepted practice of Opposition endorsing government policy, than any vigorous enthusiasm for keeping Northern Ireland in the Union. Mason was keen to reassure Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Michael O'Kennedy, in 1979 that 'we have no deal with the

Unionists, and have shown our good faith in counter-punching them. They now realise they will not get a return to majority rule'.¹

The fire of this terse accusation had been stoked by the S.D.L.P., who claimed that the Labour government had arranged a voting pact with unionists as they had done with the Liberal Party in 1977.² The S.D.L.P.'s allegation that such a covenant had been replicated was easily refuted by the voting record of unionists, which was rarely to the government's advantage. Craig, Powell, Paisley, Molyneaux and McCusker had all voted against the government's budget resolutions in April 1977, and the House of Commons' Parliamentary Clerk could announce that there was 'not one example of even two Unionists voting with the Government'.³

Yet the suspicion did not die, and persisted despite its falsehoods. This was because of the many functions such an untruth was able to fulfil; it relieved the S.D.L.P. of their failure to secure power-sharing and it allowed unionists to claim that they had 'optimised their influence at Westminster'.⁴ It is also likely that it was intended to embarrass or catalyse unionists because of the vigour with which the British government would denounce the allegation: it would make them appear isolated and without support. In such an atmosphere perhaps the lethargy of direct

¹ Briefing note for the Secretary of State for meeting on 17 Jan. 1979, PRONI NIO/12/138.

² This they needed after a by-election defeat left Labour without a majority and facing a motion of no confidence. A deal was made that the Liberal Party would vote for the government in the event of such a motion in exchange for the Labour Party accepting a limited number of Liberal Party policy proposals.

³ Letter from Mr M. W. Hopkins, Parliamentary Clerk, to Mr Chesterton of the N.I.O. dated 27 Sep. 1977, T.N.A. CJ4/2611.

⁴ N.I.O. report dated 26 Oct. 1978, T.N.A. CJ4/2611.

rule could be banished and a new arrangement brokered, since unionists would realise they could no longer rely on a compliant British government.

The British government were concerned that such rumours were ultimately an impediment to progress and that unionists should be reminded that no protection would exist. Roy Mason urged Michael Foot to ensure that 'further rumours about deals do not arise and are promptly denied if they do. I hope, therefore, that you will keep this in mind in any contacts which, as Leader of the House, you may have with Unionists'.⁵ Nearly two years after its first appearance, the myth of a pact lingered still. The N.I.O. now realised that 'the only conclusive proof against a pact will be a Government defeat as a direct result of Unionist opposition on a resigning issue'.⁶ Thus the force which most keenly kept the conspiracy alive was the S.D.L.P., who sought to expose the sordid association that they believed existed between unionists and the British government.

Bi-partisanship was defied for the first time in 1981 when Labour stated that their policy for Northern Ireland was now contrary to that of the British government: Irish unification by consent. It was mostly a hollow promise. Since Labour was out of government and the conservatives had a sound majority it was not an imminent or plausible pursuit. However, it should be acknowledged that it was a dramatic rupture from the previous direction of its Ulster policy. The caveat of consensus

⁵ Letter from Roy Mason to Michael Foot dated 30 Sep. 1977, T.N.A. CJ4/2611.

⁶ N.I.O. report dated 7 Feb. 1979, T.N.A. CJ4/2611.

would necessitate a rigorous surveying of unionist opinion, since their discontent would pose the most formidable obstacle to its success. The Irish Ambassador to Great Britain, Eamon Kennedy, wrote of a meeting he had with Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Don Concannon M.P.:

He [Concannon] accepted that the new policy, if it was to be successful, must encourage the Unionists to engage in dialogue with the minority community in the North and with Dublin. He insisted that if the Labour Party were to adopt a policy on these lines it would need to be balanced by our [Dublin] Government which would have as their purpose the removal or reduction of loyalist fears of the Republic.⁷

One of the incentives of unity for Labour was a new, restorative view of unionists and their appetite for progress, compared with the apathy of the Conservative party. Daithí Ó Ceallagh, Press Officer of the Irish Embassy in London, noted an exchange he had with Brynmar John, then Opposition Spokesman for Northern Ireland, in October 1980 which suggested a reconsideration of the political complexion of unionists. 'The old grandees [Brookeborough and O'Neill] have been replaced by the small businessmen [Molyneaux] and by persons who in normal British circumstances would be natural members of the Labour Party [McCusker].

⁷ Letter addressed to David Neligan, Assistant Secretary of the Anglo-Irish section, D.F.A., and dated 26 May 1981, D.F.A. 2011/39/1816.

He sees this as a hopeful sign'.⁸ Members of the Official Unionists also believed the constitutional question had compromised the typical alignment of the political spectrum in Northern Ireland. The preoccupation with partition subdued expression on issues of class and the emergence of naturally left or right wing political parties. Frank Millar, Press Secretary of O.U.P., commented in May 1982 that what the 'province really needed was a left of centre Unionist Party, shorn of the Orange connection and led by someone like McCusker. This could concentrate on "real politics"'.⁹

Labour's National Executive Committee (N.E.C.) on Northern Ireland published a report in January 1981 titled *Northern Ireland: the Next Steps*, which advocated greater integration for Northern Ireland with the United Kingdom. Its author was Dick Barry, a pro-unionist desk officer at Labour's research department at Transport House. Elements of the party were offended by its obvious unionist pieties. Kevin McNamara, later Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, denounced it as 'a dangerous foolish paper, a Unionist paper, some might be a little unkind to call it an Orange Paper. It is a paper on which Enoch Powell and the Ulster Unionists must delight'.¹⁰ The ambiguities over the direction which the Labour party would go came from the challenge of both defining and pursuing the consent feature of unity, a recurring concern which distressed the Irish narrative on unification as

⁸ Report dated 6 Oct. 1980, D.F.A. 2010/19/1732.

⁹ Meeting between Millar and Stephen Leach, Political Affairs Division of N.I.O., 10 May 1982, PRONI CENT/1/11/29.

¹⁰ Speech by McNamara to the Formby and Altcar Labour Party on 18 July 1981, D.F.A. 2011/39/1816.

well. Peter Dorey commented that it left the British Labour Party facing three possibilities: 'seeking working class unity in the Province as the prerequisite of national unity; pursuing a 'dual strategy' of harmonization and reform; redefining the party's meaning of 'consent''.¹¹

The party doubted the viability of the first option, that of working-class solidarity, as they viewed the protestant working-class an immovable labour aristocracy. This, they presumed, would never cede to better relations with proletariat catholics, as it would threaten their industrial supremacy. Such a move would inevitably have required Labour to organise in Northern Ireland, offering candidates for competition at elections, something the party did not favour. The final option, that of defining unity by consent, which would have required concessions and reassurances to unionists about the realities of a newly united Irish state, was never fully entered into, as it risked enraging labour's nationalist support in England. It would also bind Labour to a definitive policy it might need to extricate itself from once in power, due to the changing exigencies of the situation.

Thus it pursued the second option, that of progressive reform, which would in effect amount to bi-partisanship. Dorey also argued that labour's thinking on the Ulster situation was problematic, emanating from a crude analysis of class capital which saw them interpret the conflict's origins in the terms of economic poverty and

¹¹ Peter Dorey, *The Labour Party and Constitutional Reform: A History of Constitutional Conservatism* (Basingstoke, 2008), p.334.

disparity. Labour thought that the scale and tone of sectarianism would abate with an improvement in the material conditions of Catholics. However, such an approach would in reality effect two things. It would invoke a response of jealousy from Ulster Protestants who suffered just as markedly from housing squalor and penury and it would mute or subdue nationalist support for unity, as material prosperity allayed nationalist unrest and acted as an effective argument for the maintenance of the Union.

That Labour ultimately promoted, or did not dispute, Conservative party policy on Northern Ireland, indicates both the lack of importance Ulster commanded in the formation of domestic policy for British political parties, and their shared impulse to withdraw from Ulster, or at least their reluctance to commit to a greater involvement in its future. Both major parties believed that Northern Ireland was distinctly 'an other' and thus required exceptional, meaning non-British, structures for its long-term stability.¹² This is why bi-partisanship flourished despite the potential for policy divergence. As William Rodgers, then Labour M.P. for Stockton and a man who turned down the offer of Labour Spokesman on Northern Ireland, put it:

¹² Michael Cunningham, *British Government Policy in Northern Ireland 1969-89: Its nature and Execution* (Manchester, 1991) pp.243-7.

Northern Ireland Spokesman /.../ has in his view little or no importance when a party is in opposition because of the bipartisan approach. This led to a situation in his view where there was little political mileage to be gained for the Opposition Northern Ireland Spokesman.¹³

Tony Benn provided insight into the composition of the Labour cabinet in 1974 during the U.W.C. Strike and the sympathies of its members.¹⁴ He wrote that it was riven between the 'pro-Catholics', of which he included himself, Harold Wilson, Bob Mellish and Shirley Williams and 'pro-Protestants', who he named as Fred Peart, Willie Ross, Peter Shore, Jim Callaghan and Merlyn Rees.¹⁵ It was, as Benn later confirmed at a meeting of Labour's Committee on Northern Ireland, an issue, as it was with the conservatives, which received scant attention from the British cabinet during his time in government:

In the Cabinet in which he served up until 1970 and from 1974 to 1979 Northern Ireland was only discussed twice- once in 1969 on sending in the troops and secondly during the 1974 loyalist strike. There were, of course, Cabinet Committees which discussed Northern Ireland

¹³ Letter dated 17 Dec. 1980 from Daithí Ó Ceallagh to Seán Whelan of D.F.A., D.F.A. 2010/19/1732.

¹⁴ Benn was Labour Secretary of State for Energy June 1975-May 1979. Benn was regarded as a radical, speaking publicly against the Iraq war, the power of industrialists and in favour of workers' rights. He died in March 2014.

¹⁵ Tony Benn, *Against the Tide: Diaries 1973-76* (London, 1989), entry dated 28 May 1974, p.162.

and Ministers were engaged in various discussions, but except on those two occasions the major domestic issue facing Britain was not discussed in Cabinet.¹⁶

Cabinet indifference to Northern Ireland makes even less sense when one realises that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was always present at cabinet meetings, from which Ulster was then omitted. This listlessness translated to House of Commons debates on Northern Ireland, which became routinely predictable. Frank Murray of the Department of an Taoiseach wrote of the repetitive and formulaic narrative: 'the Unionist Members with support from certain Tories pressing for more action on the ground by security forces with Gerry Fitt and some of the Labour Members stressing the human rights aspect of the problem'.¹⁷ That made the British parliament a barren vehicle for the revival of incisive, inventive thinking on Northern Ireland. Instead, it formed typecast roles for politicians to adopt, rehearsing for a play that was never staged.

It was also vital for the Labour Party to have unionist approval for the unity by consent scheme, which was thoroughly reserved. Don Concannon was forced to admit that for all the theatrical indulgence of the idea, the Labour Party had been unsuccessful in convincing unionists of its merit and 'that there was no doubt that

¹⁶ Report dated 6 Oct. 1980, D.F.A. 2010/19/1732. These sentiments were repeated by Benn in a book which petitioned for British withdrawal from Northern Ireland. See Tony Benn in Martin Collins (ed.), *Ireland After Britain* (London, 1985), p.131.

¹⁷ Letter to Wally Kirwan dated 26 Feb. 1980, TAOIS 2010/53/747.

Unionists in general were pleased that they were out of office'.¹⁸ Clive Soley suggested the way to manufacture unionist consensus was 'to create a network of joint or harmonized activities linking North and South in which Unionists would acquiesce out of self interest'.¹⁹

Such a strategy was not one Labour could readily pursue out of office and the disinterest of their constituents did not help galvanise the political will for such advancement. The direct challenge of unity by consent for the Labour Party was how to convince unionists of a constitutional arrangement which was antithetical to the central tenet of modern unionism, eternal tenancy of the United Kingdom. Unionists held the view that the 26 counties of the republic seceded from the Union, not that the 6 counties of Northern Ireland seceded from the 26. To unionists, this meant partition was inevitable and irreversible. Labour's inclination was to urge the removal of the constitutional guarantee to unionists, rather than understand why Irish unity so intimidated unionists or how to remedy this fear.

It should be emphasised that those who maintained an interest in Ulster and agitated on its behalf were most frequently backbenchers, and then only a minority of them. The British Labour Party had an even weaker connection than the Conservative Party did with loyalists and unionists. Their stated policy for Northern Ireland, unity by consent, did however require greater contact with unionists, as

¹⁸ Meeting between Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs Peter Barry, Clive Soley and Don Concannon, 27 July 1983, D.F.A. 2013/27/1518.

¹⁹ Ibid.

they were perceived to be the most formidable obstacle to its success. There is little evidence of attempts by the British Labour Party to engage directly with the representatives of Ulster unionism or loyalism during this period. The reasons for this abstinence were not only the improbability of the policy, but the antagonism within the Labour Party for entreating a people seen as the natural constituency of the Conservative Party and the expanding distance which was being put between British political parties and the issue of Northern Ireland.

Rather than design the precise architecture of unity which aimed to reorient unionist scepticism, the Labour Party preferred to speak of that pessimism as the real obstacle to unity. Thus they obscured their failure to articulate unity by consent as an attractive prospect to unionists. The Irish government reviewed this as a general tendency of the left in Great Britain, as it observed that *The Guardian* was the most sympathetic British newspaper to the Irish position and that it 'identified the UDA and other loyalists such as Paisley and Powell as obstacles to reconciliation in the province'.²⁰

²⁰ TAOIS 2011/127/1020.

Ulster loyalism and trade unionism

As part of its mission to form a coherent, credible alternative to political unionism, loyalism began to formulate distinctive policies. One in particular, which differentiated it from the unionist mainstream, was its view of organised British trade unionism, which its workers remained represented by. It was noted by David Donoghue of D.F.A. that 'It [U.V.F.] is hostile to the unions, and wants to establish a separate Ulster TUC "free from Marxists and Republicans"'.²¹ The U.V.F. elaborated on its views towards unions in their own paper *Combat* in August 1975, stressing the secessionist impulses of loyalism and the traitorous nationalism of the unions. It claimed loyalists should

Vote from office those officials such as Andy Barr, Betty Sinclair, Joe Cooper and others who have pronounced nationalist sympathies. The next step should be the disaffiliation of the major unions from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and the creation of an Ulster Trade Union Congress affiliated to the British Trade Union Congress.²²

The issue of significance for the U.V.F. was the dormant political imagination saturating the protestant working class, which saw it eclipsed in activism by a

²¹ Report dated Oct. 1975, D.F.A. 2005/145/2401.

²² August 1975 issue of *Combat* in D.F.A. 2008/79/3034.

mobilised nationalist proletariat. To compete, they wanted to domesticate their own trade union system, protecting the bloc of protestant labour, whilst maintaining the guardianship of the British link. Animosity between the protestant working class and trade unions in Ulster fomented during the U.W.C. strike, when the Chairman of the Northern Ireland Committee (N.I.C.) of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (I.C.T.U.), Len Murray, initiated a failed intervention to abort the strike. In their second strike bulletin, the Workers Association, a group associated with B.I.C.O., addressed the matter. 'Mr Murray must now realise that the official trade union leadership are not the tried and trusted leaders of the workers in anything but the narrowest trade union affairs'.²³

The observation of a union hierarchy estranged from its workers was also supported by the paramilitary body the Orange Volunteers in their first bulletin, shortly after the fall of the Executive:

The right to work is now shouted across the roof tops as a democratic slogan, by trade unions and equally by other organisations, who want to contribute their two pennies worth. What about the right to live, what about the widows and sorrowing Mothers who mourn their husbands and sons.²⁴

²³ B.I.C.O., Strike bulletin no.2, 21 May 1974, N.I.P.C., U.W.C. box, Linen Hall Library Belfast.

²⁴ Orange Volunteers Bulletin No.1, N.I.P.C., U.W.C. box, Linen Hall Library Belfast.

Merlyn Rees acknowledged the distrust between the unions and loyalists. Around February 1976 he noticed that 'to Loyalist politicians like Baird, and to Loyalist workers like Jim Smyth of the UWC, the ICTU is a Republican/ Nationalist/ Communist dominated organisation, and any ICTU initiative must be an attempt to "con" Loyalists'.²⁵ Three months later in May he noted that 'The Irish Congress of Trade Unions sets out to be non-sectarian and non-party political, but is not given the benefit of the doubt by many Loyalists'.²⁶

During the U.W.C. strike, the Northern Ireland Officer of the I.C.T.U., the intervening body, made a press statement, which clarified their views on its organisers. They saw the U.W.C. as a sectarian group who were stirred by the incentives of power, not proletariat liberation, seeking 'to cloak their involvement with an air of political respectability, but they are clearly seen by all thinking people as power-drunk, personally-ambitious individuals, who have contributed nothing of lasting value to the well-being of working people'.²⁷

An alternative explanation of the unions' intervention was that to them it was not a case of it being the 'wrong' strike, but that it was not 'their' strike, perhaps detecting a threat to its domination in the representation of the protestant working class. They did misapprehend the strike as a purely militant revolt, eliding its

²⁵ N.I.P.R. for period ending 2 Feb. 1976, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/5/7.

²⁶ N.I.P.R. for period ending 10 May 1976, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/5/7.

²⁷ Report of a special meeting held on 29 May 1974 to review U.W.C. strike, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES 10/9.

components of class rebellion. One might have expected the U.W.C. to have conjured up more kinship from workers' organisations, given that it was largely a workers strike. Kennedy Lindsay, who was affiliated to the Vanguard movement, alluded to the strike's social charter and the requirement to repair the living conditions of certain groups, the degradation of which was acting as a damning indictment of the protest. Kennedy advocated the establishment of local advice centres to

keep the Loyalist people up-to-date with the changing situation, advising them on matters of supplementary Social Service Benefits, welfare & Health, availability of food and drink, heating supplies etc. assist the military welfare organisations in the care of the young and old, sick and needy and in the event, the movement of women and children to safe areas etc.²⁸

An issue of *Ulster Loyalist* shortly after the strike testified that the strike was in fact a recital of protestant democracy, not an erosion of it. There was, apparently, 'scarcely a sign of Protestant triumphalism to be seen. The general state of mind brought about in the Protestant community by the strike offers greater opportunity for the working out of a democratic political settlement than has ever existed before'.²⁹ Paddy Devlin of the S.D.L.P. offered a different view of loyalism in his explanation as to why Len Murray's back to work effort was glaringly unsuccessful:

²⁸ Kennedy Lindsay memo dated May 1974, N.I.P.C., U.W.C. box, Linen Hall Library Belfast.

²⁹ *Ulster Loyalist* dated 6 June 1974, N.L.I., 1K 1355.

'the military allowed the loyalist paramilitary organisations to block off every housing estate during the night, thus closing the roads the workers would be using the next morning to get to the starting point of the march'.³⁰ Murray himself had claimed intimidation as the main reason for the meagre participation.

A telegram from the American Embassy in London on 21st May to Washington disputed such an interpretation: 'working level British government officials had admitted to us that they consider TUC intervention a very genuine error of judgment. In retrospect, this seems to be the case'.³¹ Such a view was confirmed by William Blease, later Lord Blease, who was a member of N.I.C. of the I.C.T.U. and formed part of a delegation, comprised of members of the Confederation of British Industry and the Ulster Farmers Union, which met with the Executive shortly before it fell. Blease thought that speakers 'generally had greatly underestimated the support for the workers' strike which had widened from extremists to more moderate Protestant opinion'.³²

It might also be added that support for Len Murray's back-to-work scheme during the U.W.C. strike from individual unions in Britain was tepid. The American Embassy in London commented on their shared reluctance to become implicated in Ulster in any way. They spoke to two key personnel. Firstly, Michael Walsh, deputy

³⁰ Paddy Devlin, *The Fall of the N.I. Executive* (Belfast, 1975), p.16.

³¹ Electronic telegram dated 21 May 1974, 1974LONDON06342, accessed via Central Foreign Policy Files on www.nara.gov on 26 Sep. 2011.

³² Minutes dated 24 May 1974, PRONI OE/1/16.

head of the Trade Unions Congress (T.U.C.) international department 'noted that most unions would prefer to stay out of the Northern Ireland situation'.³³ Such an assessment was shared by Sir Sidney Greene, T.U.C. General Council Member and head of the National Union of Railwaymen, who 'told us at that time that a number of TUC unions with mixed Protestant and Catholic membership in Northern Ireland were very hesitant to get into the middle of the bitter political dispute in that area'.

Members felt unable to intervene not only because the disturbances were in a contested area, but because they did not believe it was the duty of a trade union to do so. Thus to corroborate Andrew Boyd's thesis that Irish unions were apolitical and non-interventionist on the north to the point of redundancy, one can conclude that this inefficacy was sustained by an internal union organisation which eschewed agitation on matters on which its membership was divided or which had the potential to divide it along sectarian, tribal lines.³⁴

Emmet O'Connor has claimed that the strike did no lasting damage to the relationship between workers and their unions.³⁵ This was determinedly not the case amongst loyalist paramilitaries. They were afflicted by unrelenting concern about the unions' political alignment and a growing aspiration for a Trade Union Committee of its own. The Workers Association published a paper in June 1974,

³³ Electronic Telegram from American Embassy London to Secretary State Washington D.C., 31 May 1974, LONDON06841, accessed via www.nara.gov on 8 Jan. 2013.

³⁴ See Andrew Boyd, *Have the Trade Unions failed the North?* (Cork, 1984), p.66.

³⁵ Emmet O'Connor, 'Labour and left politics' in Arthur Aughey and Duncan Morrow (eds), *Northern Ireland Politics* (London, 1996), p.52.

attempting to condemn the unions for what they saw as an anti-partition posture. It sought the establishment of an Ulster Trades Union 'affiliated to the British TUC, the ICTU, and international Labour bodies'.³⁶ It rebutted the assertion that an Ulster T.U.C. would be a homogenous protestant T.U.C., claiming that 'the only way that the Ulster TUC would be protestant is if all the catholic trade unionists boycotted it. We can see no trade union reasons for such a boycott'.³⁷

This was an attempt by the Workers' Association to invent designs for a schismatic Ulster T.U.C. Another group issued a reply shortly after its issuance in November 1974. In the publication *Militant-Irish Monthly*, the author considered that such a move would split the unions along sectional lines and force workers to choose a sectarian loyalty which debarred consensus with the other competing one. 'This would play into the hands of those on both sides who wish to see the working class divided and weakened'.³⁸ It was also thought doubtful that there was any way, except through individual trade unions, an Ulster T.U.C. could be affiliated with the British organisation. This led some loyalists to believe that the best way to make the unions in the north stronger was the establishment of a paramilitary Trade Union Defence Force to enforce worker safety and welfare.

³⁶ Workers Association, *What's wrong with Ulster Trade Unionism?* (Belfast, June 1974), p.3.

³⁷ Workers Association, 'What's wrong', p.27.

³⁸ Peter Hunt, *Northern Ireland-For Workers' Unity: A reply to the Workers' Association Pamphlet "What's wrong with Ulster Trade Unionism?"* (Dublin, 1974), pp.13-14.

Thus the separatism in Ulster trade unionism was often equated to protestant domination over the entire movement. Some loyalists remained insistent on the importance of establishing their own Union, but unaffiliated to the British movement. The urge for autonomy came partly from the failed boycott of the N.I.C. to shut down the U.W.C. strike, as 'the existing trade union in Northern Ireland is regarded with grave suspicion by Protestants since the UWC strike'.³⁹ Andrew Boyd asserted that loyalist failure to attain union independence was threefold: those who petitioned for it were ignorant as to how unions should operate, the majority of union members were reluctant to alienate themselves from the protection of British unions, and finally, there was scarce probability, especially after the U.W.C. strike, of any British trade union wanting to disaffiliate from the I.C.T.U. and join a six-county T.U.C.⁴⁰

The Irish government were aware of these considerations. A report written by D.F.A.'s David Donoghue in October 1975 detailed the relationship between the U.W.C., William Craig and the trade unions, after a directive asked him to make reference to 'the connection between William Craig, Glenn Barr [sic.] & Andy Tyrie (UDA) & the way in which the U.W.C. has been controlled by Barr + Tyrie + used to support Craig's recent policies'.⁴¹ Donoghue wrote that

³⁹ Tom Lovett and Robin Percival, 'Conflict and Community in action in Northern Ireland' in Paul Curno (ed.), *Political Issues and Community Work* (London, 1978), p.192.

⁴⁰ Boyd, 'Have the Trade Unions failed', p.91.

⁴¹ Handwritten note dated 15 Oct. 1975, D.F.A. 2011/39/1818.

Right-wing UWC trade unionists detested the influence of the I.C.T.U. in Ulster, alleging it to be controlled by Communists: they wanted a separate Loyalist trade union body for Ulster. Smyth [Jim, the U.W.C. press officer] and other UWC leaders tried, therefore, to present the UWC in 1974-5 as a kind of unofficial Loyalist trade union pressure group.⁴²

In September 1974 the U.W.C. supported farmers' protests at Ulster's agricultural problems and in January 1975 intervened successfully in a milk process workers' dispute. It criticised the Northern Ireland Housing programme frequently and organised rallies in support of the "Save the Shankill Campaign". It also backed the U.U.U.C.'s opposition to E.E.C. membership and its call for a "boycott" of the Republic's currency.

Andrew Boyd has contended that through their policy of toleration and non-intervention, the I.C.T.U. actually adopted a discriminatory facility against its catholic members.⁴³ Boyd's corollary was that the I.C.T.U. had failed to interrupt sectarianism within their unions, adding that the influence 'of the unionist parties and the Orange Order among the majority Protestant working class must go a long way towards explaining why the Northern Ireland committee of the ICTU has not been notably effective as a political pressure group'.⁴⁴ Their reluctance to confront sectarian discord derived from an insisted political objectivity, which was recognised

⁴² Report titled 'The Ulster Workers' Council', D.F.A. 2011/39/1818.

⁴³ Boyd, 'Have the Unions failed', p.66.

⁴⁴ Boyd, 'Have the Unions failed', p.73.

by Una O'Brien, research assistant to Don Doncannon M.P., Labour Party spokesman for Northern Ireland, in 1981. She accepted that many trade unionists in Northern Ireland wished either a T.U.C. of their own, or a more replete integration with the British unions, but that the N.I.C. and Len Murray in particular felt 'that it would be dangerous for it to identify itself with political views on either side'.⁴⁵

The reluctance of the trade unions to become politically involved, as well as nationality being a stronger force than class identity in the north, were cited as decisive arguments against the British Labour Party organising in Northern Ireland. Labour M.P. Clive Soley wrote that if the unions were pulled into the 'political argument about the border it could have disastrous consequences for the unions. At best they would have to fudge the issue (as they do now), at worst they would split along Catholic/Republic and Protestant/Unionist lines'.⁴⁶

The force of the point inferred here was that the N.I.C. of the I.C.T.U. was there to protect the labour interests of northern workers, but was so neutral as to be blindly apolitical when it came to intervening in the tensions of the conflict. It ignored the exceptionalism and distinctiveness of this friction to Ulster and focussed on the seasoned stock of union matters; wage disputes, working conditions and general welfare. Indeed, there is no explicitly stated or implicitly inferred reference

⁴⁵ Meeting with Dáithí O' Ceallaigh, Press and Information Officer, Irish Embassy, London on 14 Aug. 1981, TAOIS 2011/127/1023.

⁴⁶ Paper by Clive Soley (no date, most likely 1987), Papers of Neil Kinnock, Churchill Archives Centre, University of Cambridge, KNNK 12/1/3/, File 2 of 2.

to a defined political function of the N.I.C. in the I.C.T.U. Constitution and Standing Orders. No guidance is provided on dealing with issues of sectarian dispute, discrimination, harassment and the restriction of religious freedoms.⁴⁷

This seems to suggest that the N.I.C. did not see an intervention in these troubles as a duty of theirs, as well as considering the shop floor immune to the blight of sectarian prejudice. A visiting group of Labour M.P.s to Dublin complained in 1983 that 'their efforts to elicit a commitment on the part of congress to persuade the British TUC and trade unionists of the correctness of the British Labour Party's unity by consent policy did not seem to bear any fruit'.⁴⁸ In a meeting with the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party in June 1987 'the NIC/ICTU emphasised that its rules prevented it from discussing issues of a constitutional nature'.⁴⁹

Analysis of other policy papers of the N.I.C. on peace and prosperity also lean heavily on this interpretation. They tend not to emphasise the sectarian nature of conflict in Ulster, which might lead to assumptions of insolubility, or accentuate the necessity of intervention, but the exploitation of the working classes by the demagogues of both communities. The N.I.C. claimed that it was their aspirations for power that drove the communities into combat: 'The Committee believes implicitly that the interests of working-class people, Protestant, Catholic and

⁴⁷ I.C.T.U., *Constitution and Standing Orders* (Killarney, 1991), p.13.

⁴⁸ Report of a visit from 27-28 Apr. 1983, D.F.A. 2013/27/1518.

⁴⁹ Minutes dated 11 June 1987, KNNK 12/1/3, File 2 of 2.

dissenter are indivisible, and that there can be no lasting solution to our community problems except one that unites them in a brotherhood of justice and equality'.⁵⁰

Thus, to the I.C.T.U., power and the hunger for it were the currencies which funded the conflict in Ulster, not sectarianism or the pull of diverging national aspirations. This approach fashioned the conflict to accommodate the agenda of trade unionism; it ignored the pollution of sectarianism in order to propagate the idea that the working classes of both community could be united by the trade union movement. An emphasis on sectarianism would only serve to make this notion incredible. It has thus been common practice for the unions to present themselves as arenas inoculated against sectarianism, as Bill Rolston wrote. 'The image of the trade unions as a haven of normality is one that the official trade union movement in Northern Ireland has long had of itself'.⁵¹

But even if the N.I.C. thought of itself as politically neutral, others did not. The Peace People rejected an offer by the Committee to include their banners during one of their early rallies. The N.I.O. observed that because of its existence as an I.C.T.U. derivation, and the automatic Irish dimension this enshrined, it was always 'vulnerable to the exploitation against it of "loyalist" emotions. It was probably weakest following its somewhat abortive demonstration against the loyalist strike in

⁵⁰ N.I.C., *Trade Union Policies for Peace and Prosperity in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1975), Catalogue number P662, Linen Hall Library Belfast.

⁵¹ Bill Rolston, 'The Limits of Trade Unionism' in Liam O'Dowd, Bill Rolston and Mike Tomlinson (eds), *Northern Ireland- Between Civil Rights and Civil War* (London, 1980), p.68.

1974.⁵² Yet the unions' reluctance to intervene in sectarian affairs also cloaked it in a mist the N.I.O. found hard to penetrate. Because its political aims were unclear, its interior was obscured. The Permanent Secretary wondered if it was 'the case that some unions are wholly Protestant while others are mixed or predominantly Catholic? /... / Are those who lead the NIC/ICTU mostly Catholic? How do some socialists and "non-loyalists" come to have important union roles in a predominantly Loyalist work-force?'⁵³

Individual members of the N.I.C. did show willingness to hold to account offices of state which seemed to have contravened accepted human rights conventions. The N.I.C. would have irregular consultations with the Police Authority on the investigation of complaints made against the body. At one meeting in June 1976, N.I.C. member Mr Coulthard asked Merlyn Rees to confirm if torture was still a method of police interrogations at Castlereagh. Coulthard stated that 'there was a fervent belief between working-class Protestants and Roman Catholics that torture was still a regular occurrence at Castlereagh and the police would not be widely accepted until this belief could be disproved.'⁵⁴

This was not, however, an impulse which they sought to make public. In a publication on human rights three years after this meeting, no mention was made of

⁵² Report by D.J. Perham of the Department of Manpower Services dated 24 Nov. 1977, T.N.A. CJ4/1501.

⁵³ Report by Permanent Secretary of N.I.O. Andrew Purkis dated 3 Oct. 1977, T.N.A. CJ4/1501.

⁵⁴ Meeting between N.I.C. and Police Authority on 5 June 1976, PRONI NIO/25/2/27A.

alleged torture at Castlereagh or, during discussions of emergency legislation, that internment had been applied almost exclusively against one community in Northern Ireland.⁵⁵ Edmund Aunger acknowledged that a particularly striking characteristic of conflict in Northern Ireland 'is the relative absence of effective class organisations containing both Protestants and Catholics. Compared with other parts of the United Kingdom, the trade unions have been considerably weaker in social influence'.⁵⁶

It should be noted though that despite organisational infirmity, the N.I.C. of the I.C.T.U. was key in spoiling the failed May 1977 U.U.A.C. stoppage. It was organised by Ian Paisley and was a protest against the inadequacy of Roy Mason's security measures against the I.R.A. A report by the N.I.C. of the I.C.T.U. into that abandoned strike contended that in addition to ensuring essential supplies reached only legitimate retail outlets and essential services functioned routinely

Very close liaison was maintained between the Northern Ireland Officer and Police Control and the Police responded readily to requests for reinforcements, extra protection, clearance of blockage of roads, etc. Information obtained from trade union sources about plans for further disruption were conveyed to the police and acted on.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See N.I.C., *Memo on the protection of Human Rights in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1979), Catalogue number P2677, Linen Hall Library Belfast.

⁵⁶ Edmund A. Aunger, 'Religion and Occupational Class in Northern Ireland' in *Economic and Social Review*, Vol. 7, No.1 (Oct. 1975), p.2.

⁵⁷ I.C.T.U., *Memorandum on the recent U.U.A.C. stoppage*, N.I.P.C., U.W.C. box, Linen Hall Library Belfast.

Another body key to the demise of 1977's stoppage was the Labour and Trade Union Co-ordinating Group (L.T.U.C.G.). Formed shortly after the U.W.C. strike, it was composed of trade unionists and socialists seeking to promote an alternative to sectarian politics and the creation of a broadly based party of labour within the trade union movement. It recognised that the U.W.C. had been manipulated by middle class unionists lacking in class sympathy, who then abandoned the movement, disinterested in their evolution.

Now one section of the working class is being asked to down tools so that a group of reactionary, anti-working class politicians can regain the political power they feel they have lost [...] why should any worker put himself or herself out in order to institute another period of misrule?⁵⁸

By misrule it meant the suffering inflicted upon the loyalist people by mass unemployment, squalid housing and general penury.

The L.T.U.C.G. joined a special delegation of members from every Northern Ireland Trade Council in May 1977 to discuss their potential federation. The convening groups also devised a 5 point action plan to stall the loyalist strike and to determine a programme of working-class resistance:

⁵⁸ Queen's Branch of L.T.U.C.G. report, *Workers break the stoppage: An account of the intervention of the Labour and Trade Union Co-Ordinating Group during the 1977 Loyalist Stoppage*, N.L.I, 5B 755, p.2.

- (1) Every worker should report as normal to work.
- (2) Every employer should spell out to their workforce that factories will be open for work.
- (3) Local union and Trades Council representative should prepare contingency plans, if necessary [sic.], to ensure access to and from places of worker and housing estates.
- (4) The Authorities should liase closely with local union officials to guarantee the right to work.
- (5) Congress House will be a co-ordinating Centre and can be contacted if problems arise.⁵⁹

Terry Carlin, Northern Ireland Officer of the I.C.T.U., stated that the security forces alone must protect the workers, but failed to speculate on any way in which the unions could play a role in organising the defence of its own members. It seems that because the U.W.C. had failed to develop into a viable, labour-based and non-sectarian alternative to Paisley and Craig, working-class protestants did not support the U.U.A.C. action. Equally significant was the absence of a constitutional crisis to quell or resolve, no national disaster to avert. The U.D.A. also had little appetite for physical confrontation with the police or organising a revolt themselves and only hoped in desperation that 'the picture of British soldiers in violent collision with Ulster's youth will provoke a revulsion amongst the Protestant community'.⁶⁰

This view was expressed at a meeting of Permanent Secretaries at Stormont Castle shortly after the strike collapsed, at which a robust government response and

⁵⁹ L.T.U.C.G, 'Workers break the stoppage', p.8.

⁶⁰ Letter from Roy Mason to James Callaghan dated 7 May 1977, T.N.A. DEFE 24/1702.

the worsening economic situation, which made workers fearful of losing their jobs, were cited as additional explanations for the failure of the strike.⁶¹ In a meeting between FitzGerald and Roy Mason, the former raised his concern over the conduct of the U.D.R. Mason replied that

They had in general behaved well during the strike. Their call-up had allowed three Army battalions to be released to back the RUC. Only a handful of UDR members had showed "qualms" about their call-up. They had all turned out and performed their duties satisfactorily.⁶²

The principal consideration with loyalists and trade unions is whether the appeals to establish an independent trade union movement in Ulster were exercises in sovereign class conceptualisation or an attempt to re-assert a singular dominance which excluded catholics from positions of influence. Some right-wing unionist groups thought that rather than create a new trade union system for Ulster, loyalists should instead learn to use the existing trade union system better. The Conservative Friends of Northern Ireland, a group which sought to co-ordinate pro-unionist agitation in London and western Scotland, urged that 'We have seen an increasing

⁶¹ Minutes dated 13 May 1977, PRONI CENT/1/6/7.

⁶² Notes dated 26 May 1977, TAOIS 2007/116/760.

use by the republican sympathisers of the unions to undermine the Union. As can be seen in the article there is no reason why the right can't use them as well.'⁶³

A later article discussing the U.W.C. strike stated a similar case, that it was wholly political, with 'no wage demand, no conflict with management, it proved that industrial power can be used by the right as well by the left /.../ To loyalists everywhere it shows the need for a strong voice in the trade unions, just in case'.⁶⁴ There were elements within the paramilitary organisations which saw latitude for greater class autonomy and encouraged activism which functioned without British or unionist association. However, these were overwhelmed by those who understood unions as a potential weapon against Irish republicanism. Unionist hysteria and indignation played their part too: loyalists saw the lack of an explicit commitment to the Union by the N.I.C. as demonstrative of rampant nationalist sympathies, which needed to be extinguished.

⁶³ *Unionist*, Issue 2, dated July 1984, accessed in Trinity College Dublin library.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Minor leftist contacts

Shortly after the fall of the Executive in 1974, the U.D.A. sent a delegation of three men, one of whom was Glen Barr, to Libya. It travelled after an invitation by a new non-political organisation from the republic, a business initiative known as the Development of Irish Resources Institute. Amongst the topics of discussion with Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi, and reported by the American Consulate in Belfast, were 'financing and technical assistance for eventual exploitation offshore oil resources', as well as Libyan support for a potential U.D.I.⁶⁵

Gadhafi believed that after the success of the U.W.C. strike groups like the U.D.A. might in the near future be in a position of keen influence or even executive office, and would negotiate favourably on the topic of natural energy resources. It has also been suggested that the Libyan leader wanted an explanation of the Northern conflict and, impelled by his own anglophobia, that, 'by extension, he was seeking, through discussions with the UDA, to manipulate the province's tensions, if not to his advantage, then certainly to Britain's embarrassment'.⁶⁶ Merlyn Rees speculated on the range of possible motives for the trip, recording them as an attempt 'to buy arms, or to negotiate with the IRA, or to conclude a deal to develop

⁶⁵ Telegram from American Consulate Belfast to State Department Washington dated 15 Nov. 1974, 1974BELFAS00186, accessed via www.nara.gov on 26 Sep. 2011.

⁶⁶ Michael McKinley, 'The Ulster Question', p. 575.

Ireland's resources North and South or to persuade Colonel Gaddafi of the Protestant cause'.⁶⁷

Ideological reciprocity was not a motive for this fleeting tryst; economic opportunism drove the exchanges. This is the key criterion for evaluating loyalists' international connections. Rarely were they nourished by philosophical solidarity. The traction of political embarrassment or the material virtue of acquiring a trading partner in Western Europe were more frequent motives for contact. The British Embassy in Dublin recounted wild possibilities which had been surfacing, ranging from the U.D.A. installing Ulster as an offshore Cuba to force the British government into accepting loyalist demands, to right-wing loyalist leaders like Martin Smyth and Ian Paisley 'seeking aid from an anti-imperialist like the Libyan dictator'.⁶⁸ This would be attractive because the intervention of Libyan Communists, inclined to despise the imperial monolith of Britain, would limit the co-operation which had been transpiring between the U.D.A. and the I.R.A. on the latter's *Eire Nua* proposals, which advocated a federated form of Irish unity.

A cable from the American Embassy in London also probed such matters. It concerned the intriguing prospect of Soviet involvement in Northern Irish affairs:

⁶⁷ N.I.P.R. for period ended 17 Nov. 1974, L.S.E. MERLYN-REES/5/4.

⁶⁸ Report by B.A. Major of the British Embassy to Brian Donnelly, Republic of Ireland Department of the F.C.O., dated 14 Nov. 1974, T.N.A. FCO 87/362.

Consul General Belfast reports that he was approached by “a leading unionist politician” who stated that an unnamed official from the Soviet Embassy, Dublin, had recently been in Belfast and called representatives of following paramilitary organisations: Ulster Defence Association [UDA] and both the Provisional and Official Wings of the IRA. Congen’s source said that he had received this information from UDA leader Andy Tyrie and that he had advised Tyrie to “string him (the soviet) along”. Source went on to say that Tyrie felt the visitor was “looking around for something to support”, and that he had advised HMG of Tyrie’s report, but that “no action” had been taken.⁶⁹

William Craig told John McColgan of the D.F.A. that William McGrath of the loyalist paramilitary group TARA had made several visits to Russia. Accusations would later be made against McGrath that he was an MI5 operative who was used to disseminate propaganda behind the Iron Curtain.⁷⁰ Craig had also been told by a friend of ‘a high official in the Finnish Government who had contacts with the Russians and who would be prepared in certain circumstances to make arms available to the Loyalists’.⁷¹ Craig insisted the offer made was credible.

In December 1981 Reverend Martin Smyth revealed that the aforementioned contact had loitered in loyalists’ minds. The *Irish Independent* reported that so robust was loyalist determination to resist a suspected U.S. plan to bring a united Ireland

⁶⁹ Electronic telegram from the American Embassy in London to State Department Washington dated 14 Oct. 1976, 1976LONDON16422, accessed via www.nara.gov on 26 Sep. 2011.

⁷⁰ See Chris Moore, *The Kincora Scandal: Political cover-up and intrigue in Northern Ireland* (Dublin, 1996).

⁷¹ Report of a meeting dated 12 Feb. 1976, D.F.A. 2013/27/1474.

into NATO that 'they were prepared to "look East instead of West" and seek sympathy from the soviets'.⁷² Smyth's revelations imply he was the unionist contact mentioned by the American Consulate in 1976. This though is mostly inconsequential, since the connections professed were notably tenuous, with certain unionist players, often solitary individuals, merely alluding to the prospect of Soviet assistance and not confirming that any contact other than the excitedly speculative had been broached. It also seems probable that unionists understood the returns of playing the red card, hoping it would paralyse any Anglo-Irish initiatives which sought to proceed by excluding unionism.

Loyalists, starved of authentic ideological allies, took to developing associations which were often impermanent and disreputable. The Irish government became aware of one such route, when reports emerged in May 1970 of 'four shiploads of Czech arms, consigned through an East German port' which had been landed on the Donegal coast for the U.V.F.⁷³ One of the boats had been deterred off Tory Island by a British minesweeper, but the rest were able to land and have the arms delivered through Northern Ireland. The port through which the arms were transported was later revealed as Hamburg and the Irish government established contacts there to ensure the supply was soon cut off. Merlyn Rees later sought to reassure Garret FitzGerald that this mechanism was still being monitored by British

⁷² *Irish Independent*, 15 Dec. 1981.

⁷³ Report by Kevin Rush dated 5 May 1970, Patrick Hillery Papers, P25/36, U.C.D. Archives.

authorities: 'We also receive information about the movement of arms for Protestant para-military organisations. These usually come in through the ports and the stringent controls which we can maintain at ports of entry into Northern Ireland have led to seizure of shipments'.⁷⁴

Loyalism and republicanism

The republican movement was also alarmed at the intimation of weapon exchanges, especially between loyalists and the security forces. In minutes of the Provisional's Army Council dated 28th February 1975, reflecting secret discussions with British intelligence officers, it was noted of the U.D.A. that 'the Brits have come under v. heavy pressure from this source with their "vigilantes out" etc. Brits state (a) This is a joint problem and [sic.] (b) they want help of R.M. (Republican Movement)'.⁷⁵ At another meeting of the Council in June the matter was expanded:

The leadership is alarmed at the visible growth in loyalist forces, e.g. the doubling in membership of the R.U.C. Reserve to more than 4,000 since September last coupled with the

⁷⁴ Letter from Rees dated 4 Feb. 1975, TAOIS 2005/151/704.

⁷⁵ Brendan Duddy Collection, POL 35/64, National University of Ireland Galway Archives (N.U.I.G.A.).

increase in the U.D.R. to 7, 600 in the same period. This represents, Mr. Rees's placating of Loyalist demands for a "third force" made last summer.

Great concern is also felt at the raid on the U.D.R. armoury at Magherafelt. The Republican representatives have continually warned of collusion between the U.D.R. and Loyalist para-military forces. The logical result of such collusion is seen in the continual flow of modern weapons from the U.D.R. to sectarian killers.⁷⁶

At the Magherafelt raid, 151 self-loading rifles, 35 sterling sub-machine-guns and 35 pistols were stolen from the armoury. The S.D.L.P.'s Ivan Cooper expressed concern at the time that access to the inventory was gained without any sign of resistance and that the raiders seemed to have known its exact location.⁷⁷ The republican movement were also worried about the proliferation of arms in loyalist possession, and countered with proposals as part of a bi-lateral truce package with British security forces which would enhance republicans' means of defence.

In the private papers of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, President of Sinn Féin from 1970 to 1983 and a member of the Provisional I.R.A. Army Council, measuring the range of loyalist war materials recurs as a constant concern. After detailing an incident at which Davey Payne, a prominent U.D.A. member, produced his gun licence to an R.U.C. officer in the presence of a journalist, giving Ó Brádaigh the impression that

⁷⁶ Minutes dated 19 June 1975, Brendan Duddy Collection, POL 35/64., N.U.I.G.A.

⁷⁷ D.F.A. report into the U.D.R., undated, D.F.A. 2008/79/3257.

loyalists were arming themselves with impunity, he suggested a new system could be established. This involved the appointment of republican liaison officers, who would issue clearance cards to holders who had been approved of carrying specified firearms on their persons, averting their arrest if they were stopped by security force personnel.

The idea came to form a central tenet of their 12 terms for a bi-lateral truce, sent to British officials in January 1975. The sixth term read that 'Members of the Republican Movement reserve the right to carry concealed short arms solely for the purpose of self-defence'.⁷⁸ The Army Council seemed aware that such a proposal would not be warmly approved by the British, annotating: 'difficult. Brits recognise problem but not solution'.⁷⁹ This stipulation seemed closely wedded to the eighth term, which called for 'No reintroduction of R.U.C. and U.D.R. into designated areas'.⁸⁰ The Army Council appeared to be flexible on these terms, and noted that this point was 'very difficult- huge loyalist element: open to discussion', but that by loyalists there would be 'No invasions. Cannot operate if not welcome'.⁸¹

These requests did garner consensus and a truce was established, resulting in a cessation of military operations from 10th February 1975 until their resumption on 23rd January 1976, though the ceasefire was not formally ended until March that year.

⁷⁸ 12 Terms for bi-lateral truce dated 20 Jan. 1975, Papers of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, POL28/29, N.U.I.G.A.

⁷⁹ Notes on a truce dated 23 Jan. 1975, Papers of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, POL28/30, N.U.I.G.A.

⁸⁰ 12 Terms for bi-lateral truce dated 20 Jan. 1975, Papers of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, POL28/29, N.U.I.G.A.

⁸¹ Notes on a truce dated 23 Jan. 1975, Papers of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, POL28/30, N.U.I.G.A. Notes on a truce dated 3 Feb. 1975, Papers of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, POL28/35, N.U.I.G.A.

The truce was achieved because the Provisional I.R.A. had been persuaded that Britain was planning a military and political disengagement from Northern Ireland and only required more time to develop their strategy to fulfil this. This assumption urged more contact between republican and loyalist paramilitary groups, because they were the factions who would have to prevent what some feared would follow a British withdrawal: the instant decline into savage civil war. Ó Brádaigh met with an intermediary, known only as S., and stated that 'contacts with Loyalist para [sic.] were becoming positive or appeared so, cornerstone of R.M. policy that after agreement had been reached with Brits that doors would be open for negot [sic.] with Loyalists'.⁸²

Increased cordiality with loyalists was also thought to assuage the fears of those who feared a British desertion. Ó Brádaigh wrote of two advantages closer relations with loyalists would have in August 1975: 'danger of increased sectarian violence now. May cool situ. [situation] & help to prevent B. govt. acting in a hasty manner. B. disengagement being noticed; may help to calm fears'.⁸³ The incremental increase in loyalist and republican contact was also something that British representatives began to encourage, to ensure a moderation in military hostilities.

This is reflected in British advice to P.I.R.A. in May 1975, during the truce, that loyalists should be availed of for consultation. One British official stated that the

⁸² Notes of a meeting 30 Sep. 1975, Papers of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, POL28/59, N.U.I.G.A.

⁸³ Note dated 25 Aug. 1975, Papers of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, POL28/55, N.U.I.G.A.

republican movement in general was not 'paying enough attention to what the actual aims of the Loyalists might be. The Brits would like to go over this ground with R.M. representatives. A great deal of Loyalist action depends on their gauging of Republican action and reaction'.⁸⁴ A minute from Meryln Rees to Harold Wilson divulged the details of such meetings, indicating that in fact they had been occurring since shortly after the U.W.C. strike:

Since then [12th July 1974] moves to promote contacts between loyalist and republican paramilitary groups have continued. They were instigated by Andy Tyrie, Chairman of the UDA [without the knowledge of many of his supporters] [sic] and now involved a part at least of the leadership of the Official and the Provisional IRA /.../ The Officials are probably the most enthusiastic, the Provisionals less so, and the UDA merely willing to experiment.⁸⁵

Rees added however that the U.V.F. were the one major paramilitary group who did not involve themselves in such discourse.

In July 1975, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh received a report from his British contact, known only as S. He wrote that the British government were looking beyond the Constitutional Convention, which suggested either scepticism or disinterest in its potential for producing cross party consensus: 'this includes the development of the

⁸⁴ Meeting with British representatives on 24 May 1975, Papers of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, POL28/67, N.U.I.G.A.

⁸⁵ Minute entitled 'Extremist Groups', 26 Sept. 1974, T.N.A. PREM16/151.

Republican position with the Loyalists, that is getting the Loyalists to come to terms. The Brits would devise methods with R.M. which would encourage dialogue with Loyalists [sic]. A new era, a new generosity'.⁸⁶ This approach was endorsed at another meeting with British agents, who stressed that there was a growing capacity to find common ground but that if it was not captured the British might obviate itself from the north.

The Brits feel that both Republicans and Loyalists want a way out of the situation; the Loyalists are not rigid regarding the British connection and there is an opportunity here for R.M.

(c) The Brits stated that if the convention does not show that all the people are ready to cooperate in their own government then a widening of the gap between Britain and 6 counties will take place.⁸⁷

In fact it was divulged to the Provisional Army Council by British representative James Allen that the Constitutional Convention was intended as a stalling exercise, at which British indifference could be masked and time for a detachment policy devised, whilst also maintaining the illusion of British peace brokering. There was

⁸⁶ Report dated 3 July 1975, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh papers, POL28/69, N.U.I.G.A.

⁸⁷ Notes of a formal meeting with British representatives dated 7 May 1975, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh papers, POL28/69, N.U.I.G.A.

little faith in its capacity for success; the convention was a pantomime which protected the British government from the recrimination of inaction. Described in notes of a meeting under the alias A., Allen stated that:

The Brits were uninterested in the outcome of the Convention. They had not the slightest intention of getting drawn back into the Northern Ireland situation. "This is part of a deliberate policy of disengagement and R.M. should appreciate that it was at the very heart of decision making". "Of course we are going and all the Republican ideals will be realised if they can have the patience to let this policy mature".⁸⁸

Loyalists themselves implicated Britain in a scheme of withdrawal. In a meeting with Noel Gallagher, a republican activist, Glen Barr stated that ordinary protestants would not object to a British departure so long as it did not appear to have been a result of the Provisionals' tactical success. Barr claimed the British had now cultivated an unrepentant indifference to Ulster protestants and did not care what became of them. The meeting also suggested a diminishing of the ideological breach between loyalists and republicans and a more dramatic move towards reconciliation. Barr stressed that he 'didn't totally reject a nine-county regional parliament. In his opinion this could only be done politically by example through

⁸⁸ Meeting with British representatives on 1 July 1975, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh papers, POL28/69, N.U.I.G.A.

first of all establishing an independent six county state /.../ a return to the old time ascendancy one-party Government is no longer tenable'.⁸⁹

Analysis of the convention should vacillate between conclusions of it as an expected failure and as an initiative in which British officials lodged little faith. Harold Wilson secretly flirted with the idea of withdrawal in 1975 and Merlyn Rees seemed equally unsure as to the north's future: 'We are not going to be able to run Northern Ireland /.../ But I am absolutely convinced that this power-sharing thing cannot work'.⁹⁰ William Craig said of Frank Cooper, Permanent Secretary of the N.I.O., that he 'clearly does not believe that the convention can produce a solution or that any mechanism designed to push the Convention forward has any hope of success'.⁹¹

It could be argued that the British reiteration of their imminent withdrawal was deceptive and was instead an attempt to moderate the operations of both paramilitary communities. Merlyn Rees insisted that whatever the Convention produced, the British government could not abdicate its responsibilities for Northern Ireland. He refused to tolerate talk of a withdrawal: 'whatever the long term may bring, we must remain responsible for governing Northern Ireland, as we remain responsible for governing any other part of the United Kingdom'.⁹² This was not the

⁸⁹ Notes of a meeting dated 7 Jan. 1976, Brendan Duddy Papers, POL35/66, N.U.I.G.A.

⁹⁰ L.S.E., Merlyn Rees Papers, Transcripts 1974, DSC00186, p.12.

⁹¹ Report of a meeting between William Craig and Irish Ambassador to Great Britain Donal O'Sullivan dated 12 Feb. 1976, D.F.A. 2013/27/1474.

⁹² Paper by Merlyn Rees dated Sep. 1975, T.N.A. CJ4/979.

same as denying that British exasperation for the north was glaring, but rather refusing to let it debase the central contract of the Union. The British government were unwilling to intervene in the Convention, deliberately designing it as forum of Ulster representatives. This was part of a trajectory the N.I.O. advocated known as 'distancing', a more localised model of direct rule, whereby local politicians would uphold its application. Since direct rule could not be a permanent solution, the British government was interested in how to modify its machinery to execute policy at a local level. The Constitutional Convention was this project's centrepiece.

The nine-county solution to which Barr referred was Sinn Féin's *Éire Nua* programme, which sought to federate Ireland into four provinces, each with their own legislature and a central Parliament in Athlone. The commune of ideas eventually culminated in a joint statement issued by the Provisional I.R.A. and the U.L.C.C.C., an amalgam body of loyalist paramilitary and political organisations, in April 1977, after mediation by former M.P. for Shankill Desmond Boal and Senior Counsel Seán MacBride.⁹³ Meetings between these two bodies on political frameworks predated the announcement by almost two years, with an illuminating exchange taking place on 24th September 1975. The essential item was that republicans remained determined to stay informed about loyalists.

The republican movement revealed that these exchanges had resulted in a set of demands from loyalist paramilitaries. These included a general acceptance, which

⁹³ Boal was a founding member of the D.U.P. in 1971.

received mutual agreement, that no public figures should be permitted to use the protestant people to further their personal ambitions. In addition, loyalists pledged themselves to 'plumb the depths of Provisional sincerity to try and discover if in fact there could be equality and peaceful co-existence if agreement could be reached on acceptable political structures'.⁹⁴ The U.D.A. proceeded to issue a detailed set of demands:

- (a) That the existing agreements and links that have been forged through contact between the U.D.A. and Provos be extended if possible to all other areas, and that these agreements be signed if possible on paper.
- (b) That the U.L.C.C. [sic.] AGAIN request that two member [sic.] of the H/C (High Command) meet two of their people.
- (c) That the U.D.A. have established a hot line, that will be manned 24 hours per day, to deal with the Provos /.../
- (d) That all of this be seen to be what it in fact is, - an attempt to try and find common ground in what could nearly be described as a late attempt to try and prevent us all from careering into a deadly Civil War from which none of us can emerge as victor.⁹⁵

The prospect of mutual annihilation haunted loyalist thoughts at this time, and this sincere entreaty parallels the political reckonings in documents like 1979's *Beyond the*

⁹⁴ Ruairí Ó Brádaigh Papers, POL28/77, N.U.I.G.A.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Religious Divide by the U.D.A.'s political wing the U.P.R.G. It countered a solution for Northern Ireland based on the premise of six-county independence, with an emphasis on cultural commonality. It identified the British government as the perilous enemy for both communities.

It was hoped that the deputation could orchestrate a termination of violence, find a compromise between the *Éire Nua* and independence proposals and that a joint report could be submitted to the British government. Their joint statement assured that the parties to this delegation 'will use their utmost endeavour to ensure a complete cessation of all acts of violence in Northern Ireland, the Republic, and Great Britain for such period as may be necessary to enable meaningful discussion to take place'.⁹⁶ It added its hope that the earnestness of spirit inherent to this amity would be reflected in the attitude of all those in authority, north and south, including the respective security forces.

Despite its mention, the Irish government was not directly involved in negotiations with republicans, a result of their acute animosity towards the Provisionals. This is not to suggest that Cosgrave's government was unaware of the thawing in relations between loyalists and republicans. John McColgan, a counsellor in the D.F.A., met with Jim Fitzpatrick, a Belfast solicitor who was to become a vital and active intermediary for D.F.A. in their attempts to establish paramilitary contacts in the north and decipher the intrigues of its underworld. He informed

⁹⁶ Statement dated 15 Apr. 1977, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh Papers, POL28/89, N.U.I.G.A.

McColgan of the success of the Community Conference Council at Portsalon, County Donegal. Jacky Taggart, a U.D.A. leader in north Belfast, and Seamus Loughran of Provisional Sinn Féin developed an especially profound rapport. Fitzpatrick added that a keen relationship between the two groups 'at community level is being gradually built up but he was unable to assess what the eventual results of this contact might be, though he is clearly convinced that its general effect will be a good one'.⁹⁷ He added that Gerry Fitt of the S.D.L.P. was having secret talks with Tommy Lyttle of the U.D.A.

A similar report was sent by the Consulate General of Ireland in Boston to Séan Donlon, then Assistant Secretary of D.F.A., on 12th September 1975 about the Irish Forum held at Amherst, Massachusetts. In attendance were the journalist Kevin Myers, Paddy Harte and some Canadian loyalist groups. The author detailed a private conversation she enjoyed with Tyrrie, in which he had specified loyalists' maturing association with republicans:

The accord between UDA and IRSP on mutual prevention of sectarian assassinations was a high point in this sense [humanizing effect] /.../ It was also noted that this was the first occasion on which formal presentations had been made by such a variety of groups in the presence of others.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Report dated 25 Sep. 1974 by John McColgan of his trip to Belfast on 18-20 Sep., TAOIS 2005/7/634.

⁹⁸ D.F.A. 2007/111/1833.

An assumption which prompted much of loyalists' behaviour towards southern governments and their representatives was that they were responsible for the conduct of the I.R.A. To loyalists, the arms trial of 1970 had confirmed the parasitic growth of the P.I.R.A. through the prescription of the Irish state.⁹⁹ The Irish government's failure to extradite would compound this hypothesis. Thus to restrain the efficiency of the republican movement, loyalists would occasionally petition the Irish government. In anticipation of an attack by the Provisionals during the Queen's Jubilee visit to Northern Ireland in 1977, the mid-Ulster U.D.A. sent out a circular to selected journalists and politicians in the republic with warnings of their own.

It was decided that in the event of any demonstration whatsoever, retaliatory action will be taken. Since the South takes such an "interest" it is right that you should be informed, as you can expect to bear the brunt of [sic.] such action /.../ In the event of any harm befalling her Majesty or an attempt at such, all public figures in the Free State will be considered legitimate targets for attack.¹⁰⁰

Sent to Séan Donlon amongst others, its most interesting feature was its specific mention of Neil Blaney and Charlie Haughey as enemies of Ulster and direct targets. Clearly the distrust from the arms crisis had not dissipated. The Young Militants, a

⁹⁹ Blaney, along with Haughey, was sacked from Jack Lynch's cabinet amid allegations they used funds to import arms for use by the I.R.A. Both defendants were cleared of the charges on 23 Oct. 1970.

¹⁰⁰ Letter dated 23 July 1977, D.F.A. 2007/111/1832.

faction of the U.D.A., even wrote to Conor Cruise O'Brien having been authorised by its inner council to 'challenge the government of Eire to act within 3 months to defeat the IRA or else Eire will spill with blood'.¹⁰¹

The same impulse could translate to positive interaction though, as reductions in P.I.R.A. activity would be attributed, however incorrectly, to the efforts of the Irish government.¹⁰² Andy Tyrie, in a reverential and confessional letter, wrote to Charles Haughey in December 1980:

Please permit me to thank you for your earnest endeavour in saving the lives of countless Ulstermen and women. I am sure you realise that by seeking out and preventing the incessant flow of weapons and explosives into Ulster, you are effectively ensuring that Loyalist organisations will not seek vengeance in the Republic.¹⁰³

Thus loyalists identified the republic as the source of I.R.A. growth and assumed its reduction was contingent on the actions of the Irish government.

Conclusion

¹⁰¹ Letter from the Young Militants to O'Brien (No Date), TAOIS 2005/7/623.

¹⁰² This is not to suggest that the Irish government played no part in the effort against the I.R.A., but that to loyalists, it was assumed they alone had control of the organisation.

¹⁰³ Letter dated 2 Dec. 1980, TAOIS 2010/53/857.

The British government were keen, especially after the failure of Sunningdale, that Northern Ireland be remedied with a lasting, internal solution. This ethos spawned the Constitutional Convention of 1975, which was in part to allay unionist fears over external, foreign interference, to ensure the pursued solution had the consent of a majority of political parties and to diminish the level of British involvement in the protracted conflict. One should hesitate to appraise the Convention as the British prelude to their intended withdrawal. The intimations they made regarding withdrawal were a contrived attempt to moderate paramilitary violence or fevered exasperations of singular British officials and not official policy of the administration.

It does seem improbable that the British government under Wilson, who personally favoured reunification, would be able to justify to themselves a strategy of withdrawal. His chastening experience of the U.W.C. strike, which affirmed his doubts over security force neutrality, and which he interpreted as an attempt to reassert protestant domination in Ulster, compounded the unlikelihood. The assumption that the British were to withdraw brokered closer relations between loyalist and republican paramilitaries, and this was likely the purpose of British threats to depart all along. What is especially striking about these contacts is the depth of co-operation that did exist, albeit between the two leaderships, mobilised by a desperate desire to avert the catastrophe of civil war.

As regards unionism and Labour, it is notable that both parties acknowledged the natural leftist tendencies of the O.U.P., which had been stunted by a preoccupation with the border and had never been encouraged to flourish. Unionists felt those feelings had to be suppressed because there was then a limited market in Ulster for their expression, especially amongst the middle classes, from where most of their electoral support was derived. Their reluctance to orient policy on left-wing parameters speaks of their reluctance to alienate this demographic and initiate a closer association with Ulster loyalists, with whom these issues found greater favour.

Loyalists, trade unions and republicans are an interesting triumvirate to analyse because they permit the scholar to consider his subjects in terms other than nationality. Class is under-studied as a determinant in sectional membership in Northern Ireland, and this is why so little work has been undertaken in loyalists' internal and external associations. Loyalism might not have always liked to see itself as retaining elements of class identity, but its discussions with the various groups discussed in this chapter reveal how loyalists did issue their pronouncements on class issues. Until loyalists are understood in terms, at least partially, of their class composition, scholars will not think it reasonable to undertake such research.

6

Loyalism, unionism and the ecology of violence

Against the force of nationalist memory, unionists maintain that their injuries have been forgotten about. After the publication of the Saville Report on Bloody Sunday, it was common to hear counter-pleas by unionist politicians that the icons of protestant casualty, like the Kingsmill massacre and the La Mon and Enniskillen bombings, become the subject of state inquiries.¹ The relevant implications of this rivalry are historical. One must investigate how the perceived imbalance in the public recognition of victimhood affected the way unionists remember their violence and if it called for embellishment or elision. It is also important that one identifies the different types of violence committed by unionists and the differences in the way they operated.

¹ On 5 Jan. 1976 eleven protestant workers were shot dead by the P.I.R.A. near the village of Kingsmill, County Armagh. Twelve people were killed when an incendiary device planted by the P.I.R.A. exploded in the La Mon hotel, County Down on 17 Feb. 1978. Eleven people died after a P.I.R.A. bomb attack on the cenotaph in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh, on Remembrance Sunday, 8 Nov. 1987.

Loyalism and the protestant border persona

The first terminal of analysis is in the rural hinterlands of Ulster and the geographical psychology of protestant border deaths. There grew an assumption among unionists that border deaths had a purer or more discrete truth in them, because they showed what happened to Ulster's protestants when they got too close to the threshold of the republic. Most analyses of loyalism tend to be Belfast-centric and ignore its growth in mid-Ulster. Here loyalist paramilitaries flourished against the backdrop of segregated communities, a strong Orange Order and a belligerent enemy to repel: the Provisionals operating in what became known as the 'murder triangle'.

During a trip to Northern Ireland, Merlyn Rees commented on his excursion to Armagh with John Taylor M.P., noting the peculiarity of the protestantism there. He remarked that 'going around with the Protestant MP from Armagh, around the Craigavon area and the Mayor of the town, one tapped a feeling about the Protestant community which is difficult to explain'.² Duncan Morrow has claimed that rural violence occurred in areas which had a history of long-standing land disputes between protestants and catholics.³ Steve Bruce has argued that the primacy of territory and space lead to the transfer of property in more seismic ways in border or

² Merlyn Rees transcripts, sides 12-13, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/1/6. p.32.

³ Institute for Irish-British Studies colloquium on loyalism, 5 Oct. 2011, Ulster Museum, Belfast.

rural areas. If a young protestant farmer was murdered in south Armagh, this tended to displace the entire family from the property, which subsequently passed into nationalist ownership.⁴ Thus rural deaths were an aggressive removing force.

This dramatic depopulation derived from an assumption that property in Ulster was a unionist commodity. A transfer in ownership was not a neutral but violently charged transaction, as it formed a severe allegory about the invasion of catholicism and the weakening of protestantism. It also radicalised the vigilance of rural protestants, increasing their suspicion of all parties, even their urban co-religionists. Bruce observed that urban loyalists would notice 'that Protestants from the Border areas are prone to disingenuously militant rhetoric.'⁵ Intrinsic to this was the tendency of loyalist paramilitary mid-Ulster battalions to disobey directives from the Belfast based Inner Council and act of their own volition, such as Billy Wright's Loyalist Volunteer Force faction in Portadown. This contrary disposition could be articulated in expressions of eccentric logic, such as declarations made by the U.V.F. that British soldiers were now considered legitimate targets. The American Consulate in Belfast reported that

Mid-Ulster battalion issued statement Oct. 23 threatening attacks to begin Oct. 30 on army for "harassment" loyalists in Lurgan. Statement excluded Ulster Defence Regiment and Royal

⁴ Steve Bruce, 'Unionists and the Border' in Malcolm Anderson and Eberhard Bort (eds), *The Irish Border-History, Politics, Culture* (Liverpool, 1999), p.130.

⁵ Bruce, 'Unionists and the Border', p.131.

Ulster Constabulary as targets but said as property innocent Protestants was bombed because Provisional IRA retaliating for harrassment [sic.], innocent Catholics would then be legitimate objects execution for harassment loyalists by Army. Also targets are pubs that serve soldiers and girls who associate with them. Belfast UVF headquarters disassociated organization from statement but small North Down Battalion issued statement supporting mid-Ulster and rejecting new leadership.⁶

Religious observance is also related and one must acknowledge that rural Ulster is where evangelicalism and the Orange Order are at their most embedded and fanatical. Significantly, anti-catholicism is rationalised here on grounds of theological dispute and the lingering threat of the Church of Rome. Wallis, Bruce and Taylor contest this to be a reason why rural Ulster would be more fervently committed to repel 'any erosion of Protestant dominance in Northern Ireland', as these are a people 'for whom the traditional Ulster evangelical identity is still a living reality'.⁷

In rural Ulster, protestants have enjoyed an agrarian and economic supremacy over catholics and have also been able to detach themselves from urban conflict and live largely in separation from them. Rosemary Harris agrees with Bruce in relation to sectarianism amongst border protestants. She stated that the working-

⁶ Electronic Telegram from American Consulate Belfast to Secretary of State, Washington D.C., dated 24 Oct. 1975, 1975BELFAS00343, accessed via www.nara.gov on 29 Jan. 2013.

⁷ Bruce, Taylor and Wallis, *"No Surrender!" Paisleyism and the Politics of ethnic identity in N.I.* (Belfast, 1986), p.27.

class protestants in border areas, like upland (hill) farmers saw catholics as economic competition in a way that the wealthy (lowland/valley) protestants did not.⁸ This resulted in a cruder anti-catholicism amongst the poor which resisted catholicism on sectional and sectarian grounds. Wealthier border protestants opposed catholicism for its religious doctrine, emphasising the threat this posed to the supremacy of protestantism.⁹

In reality, the latitude for economic competition between the poor of either side was partial and the sometimes obsessive resentment was raised from the malign psychology and allegory of land transfer. Harris explained that 'such competition as there was over land was more often directed to its symbolic worth than its monetary value. Ownership of a farm meant the symbolic occupation of an area'.¹⁰ Another key reason for the acute anxieties of poor protestants was their greater proximity to catholics than the more socially remote infield protestant, who was able to live in greater isolation. This meant the ideas of 'treachery' or 'the enemy within' were recurring fears for a certain type of protestant, precipitating a greater emphasis on the need for self-defence and vigilance.

Graham Dawson commented on how border protestants' 'sense of isolation and disconnectedness from wider social networks, of being peripheral and

⁸ Rosemary Harris, *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster* (Manchester, 1972), p.xi.

⁹ Harris, 'Prejudice and Tolerance', p.167.

¹⁰ Harris, 'Prejudice and Tolerance', p.168.

marginalized, has stemmed from the geography of their location'.¹¹ But like Harris, he is apt to stress the psychological elements of border contact and the neurosis it has created. Dawson continued to write on the habit in the 1990s, following developments in the Balkans conflict, of unionist politicians and their sympathisers to borrow its nomenclature and term the P.I.R.A. campaign against protestants in border areas as either 'genocide' or 'ethnic cleansing'. Dawson urged that regardless of the acuity of this vocabulary in the context of Ulster's border, 'the Protestant and Unionist narrative of ethnic cleansing ought nevertheless to be taken seriously as a cultural memory of the conflict'.¹²

But a cultural memory from where? It may have been a calculated tactic by unionists to circulate their experience of violence, making it more renowned by using the mesmerising language of genocide? It is though challenging to measure the extent to which this was a result of how profoundly other atrocities, like those in Guatemala and Cambodia, had taken possession of the unionist consciousness. Its use is indicative of not only protestant awareness of productive propaganda techniques, but the intensive psychological pressure exerted by the I.R.A. campaign which forced such a rendition of violence. The use of such hyperbole by border protestants expresses the dislocation between urban and rural protestants and acts as a means for the latter to articulate their competing narrative of suffering. This was

¹¹ Graham Dawson, *Making Peace with the past? Memory, trauma and the Irish Troubles* (Manchester, 2007), p.217.

¹² Dawson, 'Making Peace', pp.220-221.

in fact a rural challenge to the centrality of Belfast loyalist grievance, with border protestants invoking the distinctiveness and singularity of their own experience of conflict, pronounced in the astonishing language of atrocity. Genocide was only identified by unionists in rural areas.

Kirk Simpson stressed the grip of a whispered or silenced characteristic to border history and how this group have remained shrouded in neglect. The impulse to correct this deficit involved disputing unionist historical orthodoxies, ones which refuse to permit witness for protestant disempowerment.¹³ A stress on victimhood urged an explanation of vulnerability or security failure. After March 1972 though, the unionist community could lay the blame for the latter with the British government, who removed the control of the security forces from the unionist government.

Thus the rhetoric of 'ethnic cleansing' was for rural protestants a mechanism for opposing dominant narratives which excluded their experiences, but which could also revive repeating tropes of protestant invective in Ireland: the oppressive instincts and predilections of catholics, their continued assault against the protestant people and the need for protestants to resist and stay vigilant against such subjugation. Stories of genocide could act both as an appeal for assistance to isolated protestants and as a means of restraining nationalist emancipation in Northern

¹³ Kirk Simpson, 'Silence and Violence among Northern Ireland Protestants' in *Ethnos*, 72(1) 2007, pp.9-14.

Ireland, by suggesting that these actions were representative of the endemic nature of tyrannical catholicism.¹⁴ And perhaps it should be emphasised that the fears were not conjured from only fantasy. Fintan O'Toole recognised that 'it is not accidental that in these rural areas, a disproportionate number of the IRA's victims were the only sons of Protestant farmers'.¹⁵

It should also be acknowledged that the accent of genocide was heard in the advertisement of protestant border deaths before the Balkans crisis. In March 1982, Harold McCusker, Ulster Unionist M.P. for Upper Bann, petitioned the Economic and Social Council of the U.N. Division of Human Rights, accusing the Irish and British governments of human rights violations in Northern Ireland. The case against Ireland was based on their non-practice of extradition, which was indicted as having made Ireland a safe haven for republican terrorists, of denying the right to self-determination of the people of Northern Ireland because of the claims enshrined in Articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Constitution and of failing to act in a manner compatible with various international instruments, including the Genocide Convention.

McCusker was petitioning on behalf of his constituents and collected protestant victims of violence on the southern frontier, being counties Armagh, Tyrone and Fermanagh, whom he claimed 'are the victims of a sustained and calculated campaign of genocide against them and their community on account of

¹⁴ Kirk Simpson and Hastings Donnan, 'Changing Relationships in the Irish Borderlands' in *Anthropology in Action*, Vol. 13, Issues 1-2, p.75.

¹⁵ Fintan O'Toole, 'The End of the Troubles' in *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 45, No.3, 19 Feb. 1998.

their political opinion and/or religious belief'.¹⁶ A selection of the rights he claimed were violated included freedom from discrimination, the right to life, the right not to be tortured and freedom of religion.

The Irish government questioned the admissibility of the petition on the grounds that it had manifestly political motivations, which is disallowed under U.N. charter, and that its claims were wildly overstated. McCusker's logic was that since 49 out of the 64 border deaths during the years 1978-1981 were protestant, this amounted to genocide as defined by the U.N. Genocide Convention, which included criterion like the killing of members of a national, ethnical, racial or religious group and deliberately inflicting on that group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part.

The Irish government sought to refute the sectarian purpose McCusker was seeking. Such victims may have been protestant, but that this was not the reason they were killed. Rather it was down to their membership of security forces; that the majority of total victims were protestant was not a coincidence. Rather, it said more about the identification of the security forces with only one community in Northern Ireland, which explained overwhelming protestant recruitment to those forces. A brief dissection of fatality statistics further discredits McCusker's accusation. Border deaths amounted to a small proportion of total deaths in Northern Ireland: 2, 175 people were killed during the period 1969-1981, but only 275 of these were from

¹⁶ Copy of McCusker vs. Ireland and the U.K., D.F.A. 2012/59/1673.

border areas, a share of just under 13%. For the period McCusker cited, 1978-1981, border deaths accounted for only 24% of total deaths in Northern Ireland.¹⁷ Further, under the Irish 1973 Genocide Act, no act of genocide could be regarded as a political offence or an offence connected with one. Therefore, if Irish courts had already judged that certain acts were political, and this was being promoted as the reason behind non-extradition of fugitive offenders, these acts could not then be construed as genocidal.¹⁸

The petition was not successful, rejected at the first stage by the Communications Working Group of the Sub-Commission for the Protection of Minorities and Prevention of Discrimination. The British government disregarded it as a casual nuisance, but the Irish government were worried about the advances unionists might make from the recognisable accusations at its centre. The terms of reference through which unionists began to frame protestant suffering are of the most significance. It was not an attempt to resolve the conflict, or hold governments to account, but to give the unionist cause greater visibility at the cost of those governments' disgrace.

It was also an isolated incident, not yet part of a repeating pattern, and it is difficult to detect the point of origin for such thinking and the extent to which ethnic outrages elsewhere informed it. The use of language most commonly associated

¹⁷ Report dated 9 July 1982, D.F.A. 2012/59/1737.

¹⁸ Ibid.

with the Holocaust, mass graves and war crimes undoubtedly spoke of unionist attempts to internationalise their plight and their fear that loyalist injury would not abate without intervention. It also says something about the competition for the dead in Ulster, with a hyperbole of unionist death tolls used to suggest a homicidal conspiracy against the oppressed protestant. This itself derives from the rehearsed motifs of protestant polemic; their perilous social station as a minority community and constant vigilance against a murderous catholic majority. One might be tempted to denounce them as paranoid or cynical, but the repeating pattern suggests protestants retained the pulsating fear of some form of isolation, whether from British neglect or Irish unity.

The issue of the urban/rural dichotomy was a concern to authorities during this period, keen to monitor protestant opinion in order to anticipate what was occasionally referred to as the 'protestant backlash'. The American Consulate in Belfast wrote to the State Department in Washington in September 1975, observing that:

North Down is relatively prosperous relatively tranquil partially rural area. Grass roots sentiments there are not necessarily the same as among east Belfast urban proletariat and among Belfast and Londonderry paramilitaries [Drawing from the same socio-economic

groups] who support Craig. Much further exploration is needed /.../ whether there is underlying fundamental shift and polarization by class and on geographic lines.¹⁹

The American Consulate demonstrated an acute awareness of how stability in Ulster was often predicated on the decisions of the unionist and loyalist communities, directly responsive to the choices they might make.²⁰ The sensitivities in the association between agrarian and city loyalists was thus of particular relevance. In an analysis of loyalist appeals for a rural militia in 1974, the office noted that

Loyalist leader John Taylor spelled out militia proposal to Consul General August 14. Taylor said that in his constituency only centers large towns safe. He said that Countryside and villages unprotected and vulnerable and that IRA bombers could move in and out with impunity. Army and RUC could not respond to telephoned appeals for help in time to prevent bombing or apprehend terrorists. He spoke of "twenty businessmen" with arms in each village who could respond quickly to emergencies.²¹

Taylor wanted the establishment of a Third Force or Home Guard to supplement the security details of the U.D.R. and R.U.C., whom he claimed were

¹⁹ Electronic telegram dated 26 Sep. 1975, 1975BELFAS00304, accessed via www.nara.gov on 26 Sep. 2011.

²⁰ Geoffrey Bell, *The Protestants of Ulster* (London, 1976), p.121.

²¹ Electronic telegram dated 16 Aug. 1974, 1974DUBLIN01106, accessed via www.nara.gov on 22 Nov. 2012.

overextended by the demands of combatting the I.R.A. This was a recurring component of unionist thinking during the period, with Paisley and the U.U.A.C. staging a strike in May 1977 on the issue. After a visit to Derry in August 1974, the Defence Committee of the Conservative Party also recommended the establishment of 'a para-military force, possibly a two-tier RUC. Without this a transfer of the preservation of law and order to the police appears impossible'.²² Taylor was unique though in applying this logic exclusively to remote, rural areas. His pleas for a state funded, armed petit-bourgeoisie were not accepted by the American Consulate, who saw them as a tactic to reassert authority in the loyalist power struggle:

Taylor's description of rustic militia on minuteman model does not RPT not square with fact recruiting efforts confied [sic.] so far to cities such as Belfast and Bangor or fact that IRA terrorists relatively less active in villages and countryside than in towns and cities. CONGEN hesitates draw broad conclusions but it appears some Ulster loyalists seeking regain political initiative forfeited to Ulster Workers Council [UWC] through tactic of establishing third force.²³

It could have been an attempt by Taylor to reclaim personal power, but it was fashioned through the logic of rural vigilance because of how accepted and

²² Report of the Conservative Party Defence Committee after a visit to Derry, 6-7 Aug. 1974, POLL 9/2/1.

²³ Ibid.

recognisable its central assumptions were to his constituents; the precarious station of protestants in the shadow of the I.R.A.

The Irish government and loyalist border violence

Harold Wilson recognised the assertive symbolism of violence near the border and how protestants saw it as the fatal advance of militant republicanism. Wilson believed that even if an improvement in border security had a negligible effect in reducing overall violence in the north 'the individual on the Shankill Road would feel better'.²⁴ Thus gains in border security were less essential to their immediate locality than for their role in easing unionist anxiety in general. Border protestants, and those who identified less with Belfast than with a rural character, strove to have their narrative of suffering as renowned, if not believed, as the more dominant one of urban loyalists. It seems that in making this concerted effort, it was as much an appeal to other protestants to understand the trials of their lives as it was for any other group.

The McCusker petition in 1982 demonstrated that unionists were now willing to reference these grievances in the starkest of terms. Did unionists really believe they were the victims of genocide? This seems doubtful, with it more likely

²⁴ Wilson in a meeting with Liam Cosgrave, 5 Apr. 1974, D.F.A. 2013/27/1620.

reflecting their desperation and jealousy for attention: McCusker would have known that using the language of genocide was the best way to attract astonished, if not frenzied, media and government treatment. It would be remiss though to denounce it entirely as a publicity stunt. It may have originated from inclinations of sensationalism, but it was an account that border and rural protestants came to accept as truthful. This acceptance was expedited by fear: fear that the world did not know about the deaths of rural protestants and that their ignorance was matched only by their apathy.

But while border identity should be discerned as a palpable and distinct entity, it remained a marginalised component of the unionist consciousness. It had to rely on individual lobbyists, such was the provincial nature of Ulster loyalism; warring paramilitary factions meant a combined loyalist military strategy was rarely applied. Most efforts were directed towards coordinating unionist and loyalist activities in Belfast. After Harold McCusker died of cancer in 1990, the public expression of protestant border angst became less visible and the symbolism of their existence faded with the choices of loyalist paramilitaries. Rarely did loyalist paramilitaries launch attacks close to or beyond the frontiers of the Northern Irish state. This is not an admonishment but an historical query: why did mid-Ulster battalions of the U.V.F. and U.D.A., those close to the border, not target the Irish republic militarily more often than they did? Why was more violence not perpetrated by loyalists at border locales or even inside the Irish republic? After all,

the U.V.F.'s car bombing operation in Dublin and Monaghan in May 1974 had been gruesomely effective.

Explaining the behaviour of the U.D.A. is easier. The organisation sought a more replete political role for itself, especially during its promotion of independence for Northern Ireland.²⁵ Leader Andy Tyrie knew he needed the cooperation of the southern government if independence was to have any political traction, thus operations were rarely sanctioned against it or the state it governed. Former Fine Gael T.D. Paddy Harte relayed one instance when Tyrie actually intervened to prevent his own members from committing violence against the republic. In 1978 the U.D.A. planted incendiary devices in a large number of business premises in Dublin to act as a warning that they could take lethal action if they wanted to. As Harte recalled, 'some of its (U.D.A.) members wanted to go for the real bombs but Andy Tyrie /.../ would not allow it'.²⁶

An explanation for the U.V.F. is harder to conjure, other than the relatively unsatisfactory one that it identified Ulster republicans and catholic civilians as its primary targets and that southern operations were logistically more complex. The aggregate of this behaviour was that the Irish government periodically drew up contingency plans for potential combat with loyalists, but were not consistently fearful of attack from militarised loyalists. This compounded the transient flight of

²⁵ See Chapter Three on the Irish Constitution for the gratitude expressed by Tyrie and other loyalists at being received by representatives of the Irish government.

²⁶ Paddy Harte, *Young tigers and mongrel foxes* (Dublin, 2005), p.187.

loyalists in the mind of the Irish government; they would appear sporadically, not systematically. Few resources of An Garda Síochána or the Irish army were committed to subversive loyalist activity because loyalists themselves rarely launched attacks. Their security priority was to prevent the republic being used as a base for terrorist attacks on Northern Ireland. Irish army intelligence concluded in November 1975 that 'above all their (loyalists) capability for attacks into the Republic is minimal'.²⁷ Garret FitzGerald remarked in May 1977 of the R.U.C.-Garda co-operation in border areas, but only in how it curbed republican activity.

He (FitzGerald) hoped that the RUC presence could be strengthened in border areas including South Armagh. Recent evidence from many sources indicated that the efforts on our side of the border had been extremely effective and were probably the major contributing factor in the improved situation in, for example, South Armagh.²⁸

Material on precise security operations out carried against loyalists may well be buried in redacted files, but the intelligence analysis of loyalists that is present in Irish records are general reviews of paramilitary behaviour. A report from August 1975 observed that

²⁷ Extract of a report contained in a letter from Séan Donlon to Garret FitzGerald dated 21 Nov. 1975, D.F.A. 2008/79/3106.

²⁸ Notes of meeting FitzGerald had with Roy Mason in London, 26 May 1977, TAOIS 2007/116/760.

The past five years have seen a radical deterioration in the balance of armed force within the island of Ireland. During this period the strength of the Protestant para-military has multiplied- perhaps four fold since 1970- as has the availability to them of arms and explosives. New legal armed forces have been created whose numbers equal those of the Irish Army.²⁹

Absent is a systematic security mechanism to consider how loyalists might attack the south.³⁰ Instances of loyalist threats would be detailed periodically, such as the instance of 16 March 1974 in the Fermanagh/Tyrone area, when 'two teams (of loyalists) were deterred from making their attacks on villages over the border and three men have been arrested and charged with possession of fire arms and arson'.³¹ One is led to conclude that this is partially because loyalists themselves did not see injury to the Irish state as a key military objective. It also complements the argument that Irish governments only considered loyalists and unionists periodically, at instances when such reflection was unavoidable. This impacted upon how Ulster loyalism was received by the Irish government: it was seen as a localised phenomenon incapable of truly harming the Irish republic.³²

²⁹ Report dated 12 Aug. 1975, TAOIS 2005/151/698.

³⁰ See Chapter Two for the contingency plans drawn up by the Irish government on how to restrain Ulster loyalists in the event of civil war.

³¹ Top secret Irish security brief dated 21 Mar. 1974, Garret FitzGerald Papers, U.C.D. Archives, P215/80.

³² This despite loyalists being responsible for over forty cross-border murders between 1968 and 1998.

The Irish government were also aware that most of the violence generated by the northern conflict occurred in the north. This meant that not only could its own security forces not operate in that territory, but that the threat of violence to the Irish state was marginal. Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave remarked to Harold Wilson in April 1974 that 'of the 108 deaths in the North which have occurred as a result of politically motivated violence during the past six months, only 18 took place in Border areas'.³³ There was thus not the same communal complexion in the south for the conflict in the north to be reproduced there.

Loyalists, collusion and the Irish government

The Irish state's role in the subject of security in Ulster was related to loyalists in two ways. Firstly, the fair procedures of policing, challenged by allegations of collusion between paramilitaries and security forces, were of major concern to Irish politicians. Irish interest also involved responding to the reform of the R.U.C., part of the 'ulsterisation' policy adopted by Merlyn Rees to reduce the British military commitment in Northern Ireland. The second element were the operational

³³ Notes of a meeting dated Apr. 1974, TAOIS 2005/7/658.

directives of their security forces, the Irish Army and Gardaí, for Northern intervention, and specifically, for their contact with northern loyalists.

The basic parameters for Garda/R.U.C. co-operation were established by Meryln Rees in September 1974 at a meeting in Baldonnel, County Dublin with Patrick Cooney, then Irish Minister for Justice. With the Garda Commissioner and R.U.C. Chief Constable also present, it was agreed that the two forces would share intelligence on several areas including communications, ballistics and explosives. The Irish government became concerned that this minor liaison might formalise their total deference to the British government and expressed the more general anxiety over the integrity of the forces they were to be working with. Specifically, the issue of collusion arose

There is nothing in the British record to suggest that they would ever move against loyalist para-military bodies with the vigour with which they have pursued republicans in the past /.../ We have had recent disturbing reports of overlapping membership of loyalist para-military bodies and security forces. There are thus grounds for concern as to the impartiality of the security forces operating in Northern Ireland.³⁴

³⁴ Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave in a meeting with British Prime Minister Harold Wilson, dated 5 Apr. 1974, D.F.A. 2013/27/1620.

The Irish government barred collaboration between the Irish and British armies. This was due to the number of complaints over British army behaviour, their catalogue of outrages which had been construed as massacres (Bloody Sunday, Ballymurphy) and the persistent Irish interpretation of them as an occupying force. Between June 1971 and May 1975, 7,325 complaints were made about the British Army in Northern Ireland.³⁵ It also derived from their belief that an army should have no role in policing the civilian population.

Discomfort over loyalist infiltration into security force personnel and the impartiality of these bodies remained constant. In November 1977 R.T.É. screened a documentary on the U.D.R. in which U.D.A. Supreme Commander Andy Tyrrie expressed his satisfaction that his members could join the Regiment and receive military training. The U.D.A. as an organisation were not proscribed until 1992, yet individual members were still being convicted of terrorist offences. The programme also highlighted the recent loss of funds and stores from certain battalions within the Regiment and the antagonistic handling of the minority community by U.D.R. companies.³⁶

On 24 February 1978 a meeting was held at the British Army Headquarters of Northern Ireland (H.Q.N.I.), at Thiepval Barracks, Lisburn. Its purpose was to discuss a defensive press brief on the investigations into 10 U.D.R., a battalion which

³⁵ Letter from Roland Moyle of N.I.O. to Phillip Whitehead M.P., dated 14 May 1975, L.S.E. MERLYN-REES/12/1.

³⁶ Report on U.D.R., D.F.A. 2009/120/2032.

had allegedly solicited army funds to the U.V.F. The investigation had begun to look at irregularity into general weapon security breaches, but after the activities of 10 U.D.R. became apparent, the remit of the inquiry was confined to unveil 'the extent of the personal involvement of some U.D.R. members in paramilitary organisations. There were also indications that members of paramilitary organisations had been invited into clubs on U.D.R. premises'.³⁷ A summary of a previous meeting divulged the investigation findings in more explicit detail, confining suspicions to 179 Pro Company. It found that it was the U.V.F. who were the main beneficiaries of the assistance and that these donations had been unnervingly free of obstruction:

There is a very good inclination that a large percentage of the funds have been going to the U.V.F. At present the fraud appears to be confined to D Coy personnel. In respect of the theft of stores and equipment, irregularities in stores accounting and the control of keys have revealed the ease with which these items have been passed to paramilitary organisations.³⁸

The greatest asset to the practice of dual membership of the U.D.A. and the U.D.R. was the legal peculiarity that they were both recognised by the British government as lawful organisations, thus preventing their mutual partnership being made unlawful. Men would be discharged from the U.D.R. but not be prosecuted. A

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Summary of a meeting held on 1 Feb 1978 at H.Q.N.I. to consider crime and security in U.D.R., T.N.A. DEFE70/599.

paper by the Ministry of Defence (M.O.D.) in 1973 explained that the policy on discharge from the U.D.R. of men involved in collusion had been extant since late 1972. It catalogued that from

November 1972 to 25 July 1973, 73 men have been discharged for this reason, the cases of 35 men have been placed on the 'link' procedure [a system of regular review after a possible subversive trace was suspected] and a further 20 men have resigned. The majority of these cases have occurred in 9 U.D.R. [Co. Antrim], which includes Carrickfergus, Larne and Ballymena, and 10 U.D.R. [Belfast].³⁹

The paper estimated that in some areas a significant proportion, as high as 15%, of U.D.R. soldiers would also be a member of a loyalist paramilitary group. It is obvious the U.D.R.'s command hierarchy were much more comfortable in admitting infiltration by paramilitaries through the phenomena of dual membership than the collusion of their Officers who had no actual membership of the groups. Access to stores and armouries was only possible with the complicity of Officers, who had possession of the keys. This was a more baleful illustration of corruption than the discovery of a paramilitary member who had been told to join the U.D.R. to obtain firearms training.

³⁹ M.O.D. draft paper entitled 'Subversion in the UDR', T.N.A. DEFE24/835.

If the estimate is correct, only a small fraction of those men who were linked to both groups were ever discharged, and this seems to have occurred only if they were well known loyalists or if they admitted their dual membership. Added to the legal protection of dual membership were the difficulties in obtaining proof of connivance with loyalist paramilitaries, given such an exercise's reliance on witness testimony. The same paper admitted that it was deficits in intelligence, or 'large gaps in our coverage', that made the discovery of compromised soldiers more problematic.⁴⁰ This meant intelligence on stolen arms was mostly retroactive and scarcely preventative; instead it was limited to attributing blame after the event. The M.O.D. also admitted that it was often difficult to convince the Commanding Officer that one of his men was compromised. One might like to consider this an archetype of 'wilful blindness'; the system used to detect collusion was deficient, but, because this conspiracy spoke such uncomfortable truths, it was intentionally so.

The British government were made aware of the Irish concerns around the susceptibility of their security forces to negative infiltration but were not always patient or sympathetic to these anxieties. In a cold exchange between Richard O'Brien, first secretary to the Irish Embassy in London and Michael Hodge, a member of the Republic of Ireland Department of the F.C.O., O'Brien stated that the Irish government's concern 'about the UDR was not difficult to understand given the evidence indicating the over-lap in membership between the UDA and the UDR, the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

number of charges which have been brought against individual members of the UDR...including the Miami Showband tragedy'.⁴¹

Hodge replied by referring to the Irish injunction on direct army to army collaboration or even permitting British army to Garda contacts to flourish. But what flagrant collusion gave the Irish government was the ideal pretext to resist army to army co-operation. If undue pressure were exerted on the frailties of Irish security assistance, they could reply that 'it is difficult to ensure reasonable co-operation with a force where the criminal element is apparently so much in evidence'.⁴² Thus so entrenched or predictable was collusion that the Irish government began to use it as a device to protect their own security policy.

Policing reform in Northern Ireland

The first phase of internment, imprisonment upon suspicion of guilt only, ended in 1975, with the last detainee released in December. The subsequent shift was towards a modified prosecution system, whereby suspects would be arrested and detained 'by a system based upon the collection by the police of sufficient evidence against

⁴¹ Notes of a meeting dated 19 May 1977, D.F.A. 2008/79/3251.

⁴² Brief dated 3 Mar. 1976, D.F.A. 2013/27/1483.

individuals to merit putting them on trial for specific criminal offences'.⁴³ This meant a waning of the British army as the primary agency for identifying and remanding terrorist suspects, and from 1975 onwards, an increase in R.U.C. patrols in all areas, excluding west Belfast and parts of Derry. Total British army numbers in the north fell from 21,000 in 1973 to 12,000 in 1980.

Before the decision to reform the machinery of the R.U.C. was made, other contingencies were considered. These included the establishment of a separate force or branch of the R.U.C. to deal exclusively with terrorist offences and a 'federal force like the FBI in the USA', which would be responsible to a north/south Police Authority, with federal courts also being created.⁴⁴ The problem with the former was that it would be predominantly protestant, seen by too many as a revived B-Specials, which itself could increase minority support for terrorism. The latter suggestion, to federate police in Ireland, could only transpire in the shadow of a Council of Ireland, for which the U.W.C. strike had depleted the political will. As the N.I.O. observed, the testing enigma of the R.U.C. was that it was 'a police force to the Protestants and that it is seen as an Army by the Catholics'.⁴⁵ Moves to mollify nationalists, like changing the name of the R.U.C., would serve to aggravate unionists.

⁴³ Kevin Boyle, Tom Hadden and Paddy Hillyard, *Ten Years on in Northern Ireland: the legal control of political violence* (Nottingham, 1980), p.24.

⁴⁴ N.I.O. Paper on Policing Reform dated 12 Sep. 1974, T.N.A. CJ4/992.

⁴⁵ N.I.O. report dated 18 Mar. 1975, T.N.A. CJ4/992.

Douglas Janes of N.I.O. had complained to Séan Donlon of D.F.A. in December 1974 that 'the force was getting very few Catholic recruits in any event. The increased recruitment was coming about exclusively from Protestants and though the RUC was not a sectarian police force, it needed Catholic recruits'.⁴⁶ Donlon replied that nothing had been successful in making the R.U.C. acceptable to those in nationalist areas. The agreed solution was an expanded police force to compensate for reduced army numbers. It was Merlyn Rees' inclination to 'Ulsterise' the replacements. That is, to have local people with specialised knowledge police their own communities. The recruitment drive included full-time female officers for the first time, a doubling of the overall part-time reserve from 2,000 to 4,000 and a near trebling of the full-time reserve from 350 to 1,000. Rees saw it as a way to re-establish the primacy of the police over the army, being of the opinion that the latter's policing role should be kept to a minimum. His view was that soldiers tended to make ill-disciplined policemen, collecting too much irrelevant information, which diverted them from the appropriate direction of an investigation.⁴⁷

The move invited controversy soon after its inception. Michael Farrell believed it was an attempt by the British government to teach loyalists how to build 'a semi-fascist Orange Statelet in the North'.⁴⁸ For the Irish Embassy in London, and particularly the Ambassador Donal O'Sullivan, it was a source of acute concern. It is

⁴⁶ Meeting on 12 Dec. 1974, TAOIS 2005/151/687.

⁴⁷ Merlyn Rees draft chapter, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/3/10, p.26.

⁴⁸ Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: the Orange State* (London, 1976), p.335.

interesting to note the parallels with this issue and the disbanding of the B-Specials in 1969. In both cases, the Irish Embassy in London was worried about a fortified protestant army with the facility to administer a military dictatorship or catholic genocide. The planned restructuring of the R.U.C. accompanied a period of loyalist unrest, following the U.W.C. strike, when they sought to consolidate their position with the establishment of a Home Guard squadron which would augment the service performed by the R.U.C., as a sort of legislated militia. U.U.U.C. politicians had also urged their supporters to join the U.D.R. and the R.U.C. Reserve in the summer of 1974.

The Ulster Special Constabulary Association (U.S.C.A.), mostly comprised of ex-B-Specials, would later stage a failed series of night patrols with vigilante squads around certain areas. There was much hysteria generated by Paisley and the organisation's leader, George Greene, but the tiny pageantry of the small number of men who turned out to direct the residential check points belied the sensational promotion. A telex from O'Sullivan to D.F.A. relayed the surprise of the Dublin government that 'it is possible for unauthorised persons to proceed publicly with the recruitment and organisation of such forces which differ little from para-military organisations and can be turned into cadres for violence without great difficulty'.⁴⁹

Rees had previously met with the U.S.C.A., who expressed their desire for a new force, and Rees relayed this to O'Sullivan. Kevin Dwyer of D.F.A. suspected

⁴⁹ Telegram from O'Sullivan to Martin Burke of D.F.A. on 14 Aug. 1974, D.F.A. 2005/4/834.

that this third force would be a resurrection of the B-Specials and would 'be very difficult to control even though it was the intention of the authorities to put them firmly under RUC control and even if they were not to be armed'.⁵⁰ Rees actually intended policing reform to silence entreaties for extra-legal brigades of vigilantes or country police forces, encouraging loyalists to become more subservient and dutiful to the rule of law.

Other, more pacifying nuances were planned, like link centres to extend policing to areas which were remote from main police centres. The Irish government thought these would be playgrounds for harassment. To reach recruitment targets there was to be a lowering of qualifications for membership of the R.U.C. Reserve. A D.F.A. paper drawn up to respond to the new plan also suggested a general lowering of standards:

If it is accepted that the additional recruits are likely to be Loyalists, the danger is that many of them may also be outwardly respectable extremists if not outright thugs /.../ On balance it appears that the plan is designed to take the steam out of Loyalist demand for a Home Guard rather than a serious attempt to improve policing.⁵¹

The U.D.A. believed the initiatives were inadequate, with an armed border force the answer. This may have also been, as Sir Frank Cooper, Secretary of N.I.O., observed,

⁵⁰ Note of a meeting with the British Charge-d'Affaires Mr. Thom on 16 Aug. 1974, D.F.A. 2005/4/755.

⁵¹ Paper on creation of a third force, D.F.A. 2005/4/755.

because 'loyalists were disappointed about the way in which recruitment to the RUC and UDR had gone. It has been a plank of their policy some time ago that these organisations should be flooded with their followers but, in fact, this had not happened'.⁵²

It should also be noted that the Irish government's discomfort was merited. The reforms did not even aim to overcome the leading defect of policing in Northern Ireland, which was the inability of the minority to identify with the existing police service. This seems especially misguided since the decision to shift to a more empirically grounded policing could have benefited from the acquiescence of all the communities they operated in. As Hillyard et al stated: 'In those cases in which details were recorded, almost all Loyalist suspects were arrested by independent police action, while more than half the Republican suspects were arrested by Army patrols or joint Army/police patrols'.⁵³ The R.U.C. would be advanced in to patrol 'green areas', but since there was no change to the acceptability of that force the gains would be minimal. This domestication of civil authority did, though, undermine the mission of the P.I.R.A., which was stated in the logic of an imperial, anti-colonial struggle. The death of a British soldier could be celebrated by the republican movement as the incremental removal of an occupying force, but if more

⁵² Cooper meeting with D.F.A. officials on 5 June 1975, TAOIS 2005/151/705.

⁵³ Boyle, Hadden and Hillyard, 'Ten Years on in Northern Ireland', p.29.

of the security forces were from Ulster, this became a more challenging argument to make.

The most telling aspect of the issue for the Irish government was not their fear for the imperilled northern catholic minority, but their estrangement during the deliberation of what this new policing expansion would entail. Kevin Dwyer wrote wistfully of the Irish exclusion from a position of influence: 'before a statement was made on policing we would hope to be allowed the opportunity of making our comments. Obviously the way it was being done now made this impossible'.⁵⁴ As an end riposte it was noted that 'perhaps it would be inappropriate for us to comment publicly on the plan. Privately we might express regret that the consultations which had been promised did not take place'.⁵⁵ The Irish government had been overlooked in discussions of what was ostensibly an issue for the N.I.O. Their diplomatic vulnerability, or dependency on British volition, was exposed. The issue accentuated their position as a foreign government who could comment, debate and investigate issues corresponding to the north, but who would be forced to accept the decisions of the British government, regardless of their folly.

But the Irish government came to expect the right to be consulted on Northern Ireland and this led them to sometimes asking unsuitable questions. After Séan Donlon had complained about the continued existence of 'hardliners' in the

⁵⁴ Dwyer meeting with British Charge d'Affaires on 30 Aug. 1974, D.F.A. 2005/4/755.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

R.U.C. and inquired about their removal, the N.I.O. became aggrieved that representatives of the Irish government were commenting on the policing of what was in principal a foreign territory.

I am sure that the Irish Government would not accept any suggestions from us about the retirement and re-assignment of officers in the Gardai, and I think we could make it clear to them, if they pressed the point, that matters of personal management of this kind are not suitable for detailed discussion.⁵⁶

The R.U.C.: a protestant's ally?

On 3rd March 1986, in protest to the signing of the A.I.A. in November 1985, loyalists staged a day of action. This included the closure of most of the factories and shops in Northern Ireland, as well as the interruption of public transport services and the

⁵⁶ Letter from J.B. Bourn of N.I.O. to Douglas Janes dated 20 Jan. 1975, T.N.A. CJ4/992.

erection of street barricades. In their report of the event the Northern Ireland Justice and Peace Commission claimed:

There is widespread evidence of the R.U.C. simply standing back and allowing the law to be broken /.../ on a few occasions policemen and members of the U.D.R. helped to erect the barricades and man them /.../ the R.U.C. also stood by while paramilitaries paraded in uniforms and masks /.../ there are also reports of off duty members of the U.D.R. parading in paramilitary uniforms and masks.⁵⁷

The journal *Lobster* alleged that in addition to the R.U.C., the British army should be cast as more than mere passive sympathisers when it came to loyalists. It argued that when the British army encountered U.W.C. and paramilitary members on the streets and at the barricades 'they were meeting people who were both political and, as Fred Holroyd has shown, military allies. Army co-operation with Protestant paramilitaries ran from blind eye turning to outright military co-operation'.⁵⁸ The general outstanding query is of security force policy towards loyalists and whether it was dutiful or protective.

At a meeting held on 17th March 1987, former British army intelligence officers Fred Holroyd and Colin Wallace suggested that leniency towards loyalists was not a

⁵⁷ Report by the N.I. Justice and Peace Commission into the Loyalist day of Protest on 3 Mar. 1986, N.L.I., 5B 2870.

⁵⁸ Anon, 'Covert operation in British Politics 1974-78' in *Lobster*, Issue 11 (April 1986), p.23.

result of vulgar sympathy, but operational deficiencies which determined the selection of the P.I.R.A. as the primary target for security forces. Holroyd recounted his experience as a military intelligence officer working with J Division of the R.U.C. in 1973 in the Portadown/Craigavon area:

At this time 90% of their activities were against Republicans. This was justified by the fact that the security forces "could not fight on two fronts"; that Republican terrorism was seen as the main enemy; and by the fact that any activity concentrating on Protestants was controlled by just one Officer, who effectively vetoed it.⁵⁹

Even in the area of Portadown, a town rampant with loyalist subversion, loyalists were overlooked and only one officer was made responsible for the assessment of their behaviour. This policy direction also suggests the security forces saw themselves as sharing similar purposes as loyalists, with the differences enshrined in their mandate of legal authority. The British government viewed loyalists as a body of men which would bolster the security force efforts against the I.R.A. and were unprepared for a scenario in which they would act in opposition to British security force members. Merlyn Rees discussed this after a street disturbance between loyalists and the British army on the Shankill Road, which prompted him to query the "possibility" that if the Protestants are going to turn against us of this affecting

⁵⁹ Minutes of a meeting, L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/18/4.

policy'.⁶⁰ What Rees meant was that if loyalists were no longer to be considered a quiet ally, but a potentially abrasive enemy, a new policy for their handling would need to be devised.

This again assumed a permanence or finality to the unionist and loyalist observance of British policy. The idea of northern security forces making a determined effort to pursue only republican paramilitaries was also acknowledged by the Irish government. They believed the attitude of the British security forces to extremist loyalist violence was trained by two considerations: 'a military consideration that the army cannot afford to find itself operating on two fronts at once and a political fear of facing directly the full implications of Loyalist rebellion'.⁶¹ After Garret FitzGerald complained that 'there was no evidence that Loyalist violence was either being tackled or seen to be effectively tackled', Secretary of State for Northern Ireland William Whitelaw countered that he was most concerned about that variety of unrest, given how intimidation of juries and witnesses was worse on the protestant side.⁶² The distinction was that 'there had to be a different style of approach to that used in the Catholic areas'. FitzGerald drew attention to the problem of perception. Regardless of how effective covert operations were against loyalists, public confrontation was almost invisible, serving the vista of security force clemency.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Brief by Séan Donlon dated Sep. 1973, D.F.A. 2013/27/1482.

⁶² Meeting dated 8 Nov. 1973, D.F.A. 2013/27/1621.

Because of 'no-go' areas, deemed too combustible or uncooperative for the R.U.C. to patrol, the type of crime loyalists and republicans were convicted of was also different, which convinced some loyalists that they were being victimised by legal process. Ian Paisley claimed that most minority suspects were released 'because the RUC cannot enter areas to gather proper evidence against them' but that 'loyalist criminals are tried and sentenced'.⁶³ This meant the R.U.C. would ignore minor offences in nationalist areas like speeding or out-of-date driving licenses, but would pursue them in loyalist ones because convictions could be attained. A U.U.P. delegation emphasised to Merlyn Rees that it appeared to the majority community 'that the police were applying tougher standards in Protestant areas whilst the Green areas remained unpoliced. This seemed grossly unfair'.⁶⁴

The U.D.A. announced on 26 February 1975 that the R.U.C. would be unwelcome in loyalist areas and that the U.D.A. would mount patrols to assume the maintenance of law and order. The American Consulate in Belfast surmised that the U.D.A. was resentful over the fact that the R.U.C. operated freely in loyalist areas and were 'able to obtain evidence leading to successful prosecution and long sentences', 'while many Republicans apprehended by Army have only been interned and can look forward to early releases'.⁶⁵

⁶³ N.I.O. Report on Political Parties' views dated 15 Mar. 1975, T.N.A. CJ4/992.

⁶⁴ Meeting between Merlyn Rees, Harry West and John Taylor on 28 Feb. 1975, T.N.A. CJ4/992.

⁶⁵ Telex from American Consulate Belfast to State Department Washington on 27 Feb. 1975, accessed via www.nara.gov on 23 Sep. 2011.

It might be useful to be aware that ambiguity, or hesitance over how to police protestant gangs and paramilitary groups, was inherited from the very beginning of the conflict, as the Northern Ireland cabinet discussed in July 1970 'suggestions that there was still widespread uncertainty in the police as to their role in riot conditions- and uncertainty which had perhaps been responsible for their failure to intervene in the Ballymacarrett riots on the weekend 27-28 June.'⁶⁶ The intimation made here was that security forces were unsure how to police 'their own', men driven by the same ideology as them or who shared a common ideological purpose. At other times, authorities felt it preferable to work within the bounds of protestant vigilantism, seeking to counsel or harmonise the groups, not dismantle them:

It was generally agreed that the Security Forces should look at what the vigilante groups are doing and try to guide and advise rather than control them /.../ while the vigilante groups are usurping some of the functions of law and order they were doing some good work.⁶⁷

It is important to add that the U.D.A. remained a legal organisation until 1992 and that the general British government policy was, where possible, to keep paramilitary bodies legal in the hope that this might allow their hunger for violence to moderate. The rationale was that if terrorism or violence was about the pursuit of power by

⁶⁶ Note of a cabinet meeting dated 7 July 1970, PRONI CAB4/1532.

⁶⁷ Emergency Committee Minutes, 29 Oct. 1971, PRONI HA/32/5/8.

those without it, the way to make these men less dangerous was to empower them. One either made them into politicians or removed the reason for their violence to exist.

This logic would also be applied to some republican groups as demonstrated by a paper on British army engagement with the U.D.A. and the Catholic Ex-Serviceman's Association (CESA), which was deemed sufficiently sensitive by the Army to not be passed below Battalion HQ level.⁶⁸ 'The Army's operations against the UDA/CESA should be directed against their criminal, extremist elements whilst making every endeavour to maintain good relations with the moderate law-abiding citizens in both organisations.'⁶⁹ This was the British policy throughout the Troubles, and an N.I.O. brief from as late as November 1988 persisted in this logic:

The U.D.A. is not proscribed. It is not, unlike the others, an avowedly terrorist organisation. Individual U.D.A. members have been convicted of acts of terrorism, but the fact that members of an organisation commit criminal offences does not necessarily mean that the organisation as a whole is criminal.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ CESA was a paramilitary but unarmed group, founded primarily for patrolling and protecting Catholic areas from excursions of the British army. It is estimated that their membership was as high as 8,000 in 1972.

⁶⁹ Policy document about British army/R.U.C. interaction with U.D.A./C.E.S.A., dated 6 Nov. 1972, T.N.A. CJ4/838.

⁷⁰ N.I.O. brief on proscribed organisations, Nov. 1988, Box 1- U.D.A./U.F.F., N.I.P.C., Linen Hall Library Belfast.

Such a rationale protected the British government from having to face awkward confessions about their own attitude towards loyalists, and if they were bound by the shared mission of Ulster's enduring attachment to the Union.⁷¹ Firmer legal action against loyalists would have given them latitude to claim that the British government was a neutral, ambivalent arbiter in the conflict and not resolutely unionist. It was thus in their interests, in order to pacify loyalists, to think and reference them in softer terms than those created for republicans. This dichotomy was reinforced by the fact that unlike Irish republicans, Ulster loyalists did not launch attacks against the British mainland, so were not regarded a significant security problem by the British government. This ambiguity found expression in an 'attitude inadvertently revealed by Northern Ireland Secretary Humphrey Atkins in 1980 when he accused loyalist assassins of playing into the hand of 'the terrorists''.⁷²

The Irish government's alarm at this stated logic should also be noted, which they saw as a horrid ethical mess. They informed the F.C.O. in February 1973 that they considered security progress improbable 'while the U.D.A. are allowed to continue to operate without apparent hindrance. Their illegal activities should enjoy no more immunity than similar activities from any other quarter. The due process of the law should be applied'.⁷³ Privately, the British government agreed, accepting that

⁷¹ Philip Elliott, 'Reporting Northern Ireland: A study of news in Great Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in UNESCO, *Ethnicity and the media: An analysis of media reporting in the United Kingdom, Canada and Ireland* (Paris, 1977), p.366.

⁷² Liz Curtis, *Ireland and the Propaganda War- The British media and the 'battle for hearts and minds'* (London, 1984), pp.104-5.

⁷³ Copy of a telegram from Dublin to F.C.O. on 1 Feb. 1973, T.N.A. FCO87/227.

while they did not want a confrontation with loyalists, they had to have one, in order to plausibly demonstrate their devotion to law and order. The question was if they would maintain an illusion of dealing with loyalists impartially, or whether, as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Francis Pym pondered, 'it would also be desirable to take powers to revoke firearm licences and to require conditions for their issue'.⁷⁴ Would they take decisive action against loyalists or aim only to be seen to? Conclusions must orientate towards the latter.

And it should be stressed that compassionate treatment of loyalists cannot solely be attributed to a lack of resources or prioritising the defeat of the I.R.A. There was undoubtedly an ideological dispensation which made the police and British army regiments sympathetic to the loyalist cause, compounded by the acceptance that they had a shared enemy. There matured an intelligence culture in which the mutual exchange of illicit information flourished. Loyalist paramilitaries sometimes carried out assassinations after access to Special Branch sources which disclosed the identity and location of I.R.A. members. Intrinsic to this was an assumption that loyalist violence was different to republican violence: it was either pro-state violence or counter-terrorism which would not exist without the activity of the P.I.R.A. and other republican groups. The American Consulate in Belfast detected the variety of

⁷⁴ Conclusions of a British Cabinet Meeting on 8 Feb. 1973, CM (73) 5th Conclusions, accessed via www.nationalarchives.gov.uk on 6 Nov. 2013.

this collusion, with intelligence also shared about the internal developments of the republican movement:

There is a long history of Paisley being recipient privileged information. He apparently informed through sources in police last summer that Provisional IRA leader Seamus Twomey had been removed from "Wanted" list. He has also claimed knowledge of secret meetings held between Provisionals and Civil Servants.⁷⁵

For loyalists, collusion with security personnel was another way of protecting Ulster from the hazards of militarised republicanism. Loyalists saw themselves as an ancillary or auxiliary of the state, not a force in opposition to it, so long as it preserved loyalist interests. If the British government ceased to enthral or obey loyalist public will, like with the Sunningdale agreement, then this contract had to be revised.⁷⁶

This 'contractarian' belief goes far in explaining the betrayal many loyalists felt at the hands of the British state for internment, criminal conviction and the stripping of special category status for prisoners, and the lack of repentance loyalists had for the staging of nationwide strikes. Loyalists believed they were fulfilling the

⁷⁵ Electronic Telegram from American Consulate Belfast to Secretary State Washington D.C., dated 23 Jan. 1976, 1976BELFAS00038, accessed via www.nara.gov on 22 Nov. 2012. See also the *Report of the Stevens Inquiry*, April 2003, for more on collusion between Loyalists and the R.U.C.

⁷⁶ See David Miller, 'Queen's rebels', p.6 for an elaboration on this 'contractarian' ideal.

archaic obligations the state had reneged on. Recurring motifs in loyalist polemic, poetry and policy were sacrifice, pride, innocence, heroic defence and loyalty. It was loyalist duty to hold the British state to account once this contract had been defaulted. A U.V.F. policy document made clear to them that

There is no essential difference between official Government action and unofficial loyalist action in the struggle against terrorism and subversion, so long as that action is morally justified /.../ when such authorities fail, due to weakness or as a result of political expediency, it becomes the duty of Loyalists to assume the role of the authorities.⁷⁷

Such an imperative was given more theatrical expression in December 1980 when six loyalist prisoners at the Maze Prison, county Down, went on hunger strike. It was also a calculated attempt to revive sectarian tensions by mimicking the techniques of republicans and to indict loyalist politicians, who had incited the acts they were imprisoned for, but who had since allowed them to become forgotten men. It operated as an instrument of assurance, for loyalists to convince themselves and others that their crimes had been worth it, or in the aid of something tangible. They did this by making the return of Special Category Status their key demand: 'We wish to remind those same politicians and the general public that we too have been held under the SPECIAL Powers Act, and sentence by SPECIAL courts, so we

⁷⁷ U.V.F. Policy Document (Belfast, Nov. 1974), N.L.I., 5A 875.

firmly believe that we are entitled to SPECIAL category status'.⁷⁸ Their demands, which included segregation from republican prisoners, the right to wear their own clothing and to refrain from prison work, were regarded as unacceptable by the N.I.O. on the foundation that these persons had been convicted of crimes such as murder, and not on the content of their political views.

The matter was settled after some concessions were granted to loyalist prisoners, such as the provision of extra visits and parcels. The extension of full prisoner of war status to loyalists would have initiated a legal amnesty and an encouragement to offend under the logic of 'political offence'. The episode was thus demonstrative of the cynical opportunism within loyalism, especially of it being a reactive ideology. But it also remarked on the delicate nervous system of loyalists; overshadowed by the mission of republicanism and persistently denied the recognition, both by the British government and unionist politicians, that their contributions were known, celebrated and considered valuable to the endurance of Ulster.

Unionists also sought to expose the apparent failings of British security policy to preserve their own position. If the British government and its rule of law were understood as giving effective protection to the unionist community, this threatened to make the two main unionist parties redundant, since their central preoccupation

⁷⁸ Press Statement from the Public Relations Officer of the Loyalist Prisoners on the Clean Protest, 3 Dec. 1980, PRONI NIO/12/191.

was with security and the constitutional question, and not the social issues which more commonly troubled their constituents. Unionist complaints were also an attempt to recoup autonomous control for the administration of the security forces back to the unionist ruling classes, who had been deprived of this authority since the imposition of direct rule in March 1972.

In a meeting with Margaret Thatcher in June 1981, Ian Paisley warned the Prime Minister that if the security situation deteriorated further, a loyalist paramilitary backlash would be inescapable. The intimation was that it was the British government's negligence which had allowed this to happen, especially if there were any concessions granted to the republican hunger strikers. Paisley suggested that 'it should be made clear that the UDR was authorised to operate anywhere in Northern Ireland'.⁷⁹ This was a reference to the restrictions installed by the British Army G.O.C. during the republican hunger strikes, when in certain locales like the Short Strand in east Belfast and Carrickmore in County Tyrone, the regular army were preferred over the U.D.R., whose presence would more probably aggravate the escalating factional tensions. Paisley claimed that 'it was widely assumed that this policy was the result of an agreement between the "security chiefs" and the leaders of the Catholic Church that certain areas would be 'no go' areas'. Unionists would thus manipulate security to maintain they were being failed

⁷⁹ Minutes dated 25 June 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/45A.

or conspired against by a traitorous or inept British government, the insinuation being that security control should consequently be returned to them.

It also had another useful advantage for unionists in that it allowed them to interpret the crisis as a security one, or the struggle to defeat anti-state violence, and not that the conflict was about nationality. Diminishing the ideological persona of the conflict enabled unionists to disarm the narrative of Irish nationalism, which was heavily predicated on a colonial or imperial interpretation. Thus through security measures, unionists hoped to remove or defame the validity of the aspiration which existed so vividly within the nationalist psyche.⁸⁰ The N.I.O. recognised this, observing that 'ending violence meant to many unionists not simply enforcing the law but ensuring the minority community no longer held the aspirations which terrorists sought to express'.⁸¹ This also forms a comment on the lack of sophistication within the leadership of unionism, which 'placed an almost total reliance on a security response'.⁸²

This meant that unionists could excuse their own inactivity under the hypothesis that only security solutions could remedy the inertia, affording them an assured logic for dismissing or criticising constitutional initiatives, which also had the Irish dimension enshrined in them. During a meeting with Humphrey Atkins,

⁸¹ Note by S.W. Boys Smith dated 3 Dec. 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/91.

⁸² Paul Arthur, *Special Relationships: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland problem* (Belfast, 2000), p.107.

Peter Robinson remarked that the D.U.P. 'did not believe that political action would have any helpful effect on the level of violence' and that 'The Secretary of State's belief that the Security forces were doing all they could was typical of the attitude which led to the majority being sold out to the PIRA'.⁸³ Reinforcing the caricature of a British government weak on republican terrorism allowed the D.U.P. to marshal unionist activism, whether through the vigilantism of Ulster Resistance or the mass protest of the Third Force, gestures which endorsed the fallacy that they alone were the protectors of the protestant people.⁸⁴ Such an agenda also prompted the D.U.P. to propose and pass a vote of no confidence against the R.U.C. Chief Constable John Hermon at their annual conference in 1981.

This had a considerable effect on loyalists, because it became an overt confession that the mainstream unionist parties had no interest in the urgent social concerns which were the fixations of the protestant community like housing, education and healthcare. An N.I.O. report noted that 'ordinary working class Protestants are increasingly convinced that the two main Unionist parties ignore the real issues, such as unemployment and housing. Many paramilitary groups have long wanted to do away with the sectarian divide and come to terms with the Republic'.⁸⁵ The suggestion here was that unionist politicians sought to uphold this divide in order to profit from the singular preoccupation with the border it allowed.

⁸³ Minutes dated 4 Nov. 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/93A.

⁸⁴ Ulster Resistance was an Ulster paramilitary movement established by unionists on 10 Nov. 1986 in opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

⁸⁵ Note on Developments in the Unionist Community dated 16 Oct. 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/86A.

An N.I.O. review of the D.U.P.'s 1979 Election Manifesto acknowledged the unionist tendency to ignore socio-economic issues, or that the policy designed to service them was often chronically underdeveloped.⁸⁶

It was these same unionists, equipped with a conviction that the security war was being lost, who could become the most studied security concern for the British government. Ian Paisley's Third Force, established in 1981 to remonstrate against British failures to restrain the P.I.R.A., elicited similar concerns that the U.W.C. strike of May 1974 had. 'Allegations of sympathy if not complicity between the Third Force and the RUC and UDR are causing especial indignation- again not only among Catholics'.⁸⁷ The official action taken was to permit the assembly to march through Newtownards, County Down, but to arrest those wearing paramilitary uniforms or who caused a breach of the peace. 'This gradation of response strikes the best balance between provoking the Catholics by doing nothing and provoking the Protestants by picking a fight'.⁸⁸

In a meeting with N.I.O. Officials, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Humphrey Atkins admitted that he was partly culpable for the agitation, as he 'had not given enough public attention to security questions in the immediate aftermath of Mr Bradford's murder and that this has probably tended to push some unionist

⁸⁶ See PRONI CENT/1/8/17.

⁸⁷ Report by David Blatherick of N.I.O., 7 Dec. 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/91.

⁸⁸ Reponse by D.J. Wyatt, 7 Dec. 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/91.

opinion in the direction of Dr Paisley'.⁸⁹ Atkins did qualify by adding that the Third Force had been underwhelming in its influence, as Paisley had miscalculated its popularity. One might note the desperation of British officials to ensure Paisley was subdued and moderate unionism revitalised. The N.I.O. recognised that Paisley and his D.U.P. colleagues 'have a major political interest in raising an outcry'.⁹⁰ The main implication was how other, more moderate unionists would react to his invocations and if they would be radicalised or be repelled by them. The N.I.O. thought the answer could be 'a campaign to show how meaningless and irrelevant are the fears Paisley stirs up'.⁹¹ This was also the strategy of the Irish government, who believed that power-sharing would be impossible without a scenario in which 'Paisley and his supporters are isolated from what will hopefully be the more moderate unionist mainstream'.⁹²

Speculation persisted within the N.I.O. as to whether Paisley desired the authority of executive office and would obtain it through constructive statesmanship, or if he was happier being the perennial detractor, seeking to consolidate his reputation as sole defender of the loyalist people. This he would achieve by relentlessly attacking British government security policy.⁹³ Perhaps thought it would also be useful to consider Paisley's behaviour as the normal

⁸⁹ Meeting dated 30 Nov. 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/91. Reverend Robert Bradford was the Ulster Unionist M.P. for Belfast South until he was assassinated by the P.I.R.A. on 14 Nov. 1981.

⁹⁰ From a note by David Blatherwick dated 11 May 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/36A.

⁹¹ From a note by David Blatherwick dated 7 Apr. 1981, PRONI CENT/1/10/25.

⁹² Brief dated 3 Mar. 1976, D.F.A. 2013/27/1483.

⁹³ See Report dated 2 July 1979, PRONI CENT/1/8/8.

conduct of government opposition. Common traits of opposition parties include being evasive or dishonest on the alternatives available to government and failing to admit that they would be subject to similar compromise if they assumed office, rather than castigate every government policy without having to depend on its triumph for survival.

Thus Paisley's strategies would be more comprehensible if they were seen, not as obsessive defeatism, but as a way of protecting his own position, which was most under threat, not from the U.U.P., which the D.U.P. had soundly overtaken, but the British government. The success of their security policy would act as the most effective argument for the maintenance of direct rule, which counteracted the D.U.P.'s preference for devolution and which would most resemble the old Stormont arrangement. Humphrey Atkins was violently harassed at the funeral of Robert Bradford, with mourners furious at the British government's failure to halt what they deemed gratuitous republican violence. The incident prompted the British Cabinet to assess the weakness of unionist alternatives. They were either faltering or hysterical. 'Protestant leaders had no very clear ideas on what extra measures should be taken against terrorism although there were suggestions that suspects should be interned en masse and that the security forces should shoot on sight'.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Conclusions of a British Cabinet Meeting on 19 Nov. 1981, CC (81) 37th Conclusions, accessed via www.nationalarchives.gov.uk on 5 Nov. 2013.

Conclusion

In attempts to impugn the reputation of security forces in Ulster and exhibit damning corruption, the party that is most often omitted from the study of collusion is the loyalists themselves. For them, collusion with security personnel was another way of protecting Ulster from the threat of militarised republicanism. They saw themselves as an ancillary of the state, an expansive logic which justified murder, industrial stoppages and the provision of intelligence information to the R.U.C. This assumption was mutual, with the security forces both unprepared for and incapable of dealing with incidents in which loyalists operated against them.

This was neatly accommodated by an already present ideological empathy for loyalists within security forces, though their practical incapacity to make an enemy out of both factions of paramilitary groups must also be recognised. A war against both loyalists and republicans was an operational impossibility, though security force determination to employ loyalists as an intelligence reservoir ensured they were rarely subjected to the attentions of law enforcement as republicans were.

The Irish state, finally, remained concerned over the subject of policing in Northern Ireland not only because of these suspected sympathies, but, as the diplomacy over policing reform revealed, because they could easily be omitted from this process, limiting their contributions to inaudible pleas. But nor should it be

accepted that British authorities were completely disinterested in restraining the infringements of Ulster loyalism. Colin Wallace, a military intelligence officer in the British Army, was a forerunner in what became known as psychological operations, or 'psy-ops'. Wallace's job included planting bogus stories in the daily press which would disrupt the proficiency of paramilitary groups.⁹⁵ In an example of the efficacy of his 'black propaganda', Wallace at one time successfully claimed that a socialist paramilitary group he had invented, the Ulster Citizens Army, had infiltrated the U.D.A. and was responsible for recent deaths in the organisation, leading to several departures from the Association and some disquiet.⁹⁶

His intention was to generate dissension on ideological grounds in the ranks of loyalist paramilitaries. Reports were leaked that the U.D.A. had held talks with the Official I.R.A., that the Ulster Citizens Army had pledged war against the British Army and that the U.F.F. was now to be regarded as a Marxist organisation.⁹⁷ Not only does this demonstrate an awareness that accusations of communism would be especially incendiary amongst loyalists, linked as it was to republicanism, but that British intelligence operatives were keen to limit the efficacy of loyalist paramilitaries, despite, or perhaps because of, their continued legality.

The unionist predilection for framing their injuries as genocidal should not be construed just as a manic form of self-indulgence, but as the desperate fear that they

⁹⁵ Statement to Civil Service Appeals Board (no date), L.S.E., MERLYN-REES/18/4.

⁹⁶ Jim Cusack and Henry McDonald, *UDA: Inside the heart of loyalist terror* (Dublin, 2005), p.132.

⁹⁷ D.F.A. report from June 1976, D.F.A. 2008/79/3124.

could be erased from the earth and no one would know or pay for it. Unionists, inured by the comfort of single party rule, became terrified of their degenerating station in Northern Ireland. This was often expressed in complaints about their ability to defend themselves and resulted in somatic formations like the Third Force, Ulster Resistance, the U.W.C. or in the incessant demands for greater security autonomy. These concerns were sharpened by the belief that the British government was disengaging, at least mentally, from Northern Ireland, and that unionists would be forced to decide how to integrate nationalists into the fabric of the state, rather than just resist the might of their physical force.

Ulster unionism and the Anglo-Irish Agreement

The rigour of unionist hysteria over the institutionalised involvement of the Irish state in the administration of Northern Ireland was strengthened by the joint studies process. It was an installation of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council, formed in 1981 to refine Anglo-Irish relations through mutual disclosure on various topics such as security co-operation and education. The joint studies process had revived the two most petrifying phantoms of the Sunningdale agreement for unionists: their serial omission from the diplomatic process and the supposed departure of sovereignty to the Irish government.

Margaret Thatcher sought to reassure Ian Paisley that such conversations were innocuous and that 'Northern Ireland Unionists have nothing to fear from the further development of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Republic or from the programme of joint studies on which the two Governments are to embark'.¹ James Molyneaux, leader of the O.U.P., held the unionist position that

¹ Letter from Thatcher to Paisley dated 10 Dec. 1980, T.N.A. PREM 19/507 f 115.

the republic had no intrinsic or historically endowed right to claim ownership of Northern Ireland.

To unionists, the relationship was only unique, as it was referred to in the Haughey/Thatcher joint communiqué of 1980, because the republic insisted on asserting possession of an alien territory over which they had no legal authority. Molyneaux insisted that 'so long as that claim is maintained, it is quite intolerable that the proposed study groups should purport to be finding ways to make relations between the United Kingdom and the Republic closer'.² Unionists knew that discussions between the Irish and British governments always included the subject of Northern Ireland and not just the state of diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Ireland. Concerns were shared with some backbench members of the Conservative Party. At a meeting of the party's Northern Ireland Committee, M.P. for Northampton Town, Anthony Marlow, 'drew attention to the government's failure to show positive commitment to the union. Mr. Molyneaux said he felt that the Conservative position had become rather neutral: and he would like a more positive statement'.³

Unionist anxiety was compounded by the paradox that while Britain lived profoundly in the unionist consciousness as a nexus of national identity, it reciprocated little authentic affection to unionists. To disrupt this asymmetry,

² Letter from Molyneaux to Thatcher dated 13 Jan. 1981, T.N.A. PREM 19/507 f 63.

³ Minutes dated 4 Feb. 1982, AMEJ 1/10/11.

unionists had to force their way, often through protest, into the British line of sight. Mass unionist congregations often operated as desperate pleas just to be noticed. Less prevalent was the recognition that the unionism of each party was not the same; British unionism was different from Ulster unionism. According to unionists, the choice was not whether one could make a case for recognising the validity of an Irish nationalist ambition if a majority of citizens within Northern Ireland desired it, but that no British government, and especially a Conservative one, should ever consider such a scheme. A parent never sells their children, no matter how lucrative the offer.

The New Ireland Forum was established by Garret FitzGerald in 1983, at which Irish nationalist parties met to discuss political solutions to the protracted Northern Irish conflict. Thatcher rejected the Forum's final suggestions of confederation, a unitary state and joint authority in November 1984 with the devastating cry of 'out, out, out' at a British-Irish summit press conference. Afterwards Robert Armstrong, British Cabinet Secretary, framed the challenge as such. The problem was now 'to find some set of measures which the unionists would not regard as threatening but which would represent to the nationalists a real assurance that they could have confidence in the institutions and process of government in Northern Ireland'.⁴ The challenge of this task for the Irish government was how to secure an arrangement which they could advertise as giving

⁴ Minutes by Robert Armstrong of a meeting between Irish and British senior civil servants dated 18 Dec. 1984, T.N.A. PREM 19/1289.

them appreciable involvement in the governance of Northern Ireland, while also accepting the sovereignty of British authority, to which the state was ultimately subject.

One might like to consider why unionists were not encouraged greater participation in the Anglo-Irish process, but were instead kept stranded on the margins of diplomacy, given that it was loyalist opposition which had previously ransacked attempts at solution. A joint statement issued by Molyneaux and Paisley two months after the A.I.A. was signed showed not only that unionism united when under threat, but that their exclusion from diplomacy remained a severe indignity for unionists, and a reason why their M.P.s departed the House of Commons in protest: 'As the agreement thus changed the status of Northern Ireland and the government refused to consult the people of Ulster about these drastic changes in Ulster's constitutional position, all the Unionist members of Parliament resigned their seats'.⁵

Feargal Cochrane observed that 'the lack of consultation with the unionist leaders was requested by the British government, against the better judgement of Dublin who wanted to bring them in on the process'.⁶ The Irish government was unaware unionists had been exiled so thoroughly, but nor did they see it as their duty to correct this, considering unionists a more natural constituency of the British

⁵ Joint statement released 28 Jan. 1986, POLL/9/2/38.

⁶ Feargal Cochrane, *Unionist Politics and the Politics of Unionism since the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (2nd ed. Cork, 2001), p.29.

government. This element was a significant tenor of the agreement, which did not require the collaboration or assent of internal players within Northern Ireland. Now Thatcher could structure and redeem the A.I.A. as an expression of English nationalism, not Ulster unionism.

It could exist to protect English interests, which were to relieve England and her Parliament of the grim calamity of Ulster. The A.I.A. could be heroically resisted by unionists, who would attempt to have it cast as an artefact of British treachery, but it could not be razed by them. The pressing concerns are to judge how prominent unionists were in discussions about the A.I.A. and how resonating their antagonism towards it to was British political parties. One might consider if unionists were not made inherent to the formation of the agreement, if this was an admission by the British government that it could survive without them or that it would not have been possible with them.

The Labour Party, unionists and the Anglo-Irish agreement

The agreement, signed on 15th November 1985, established the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference, a consultative body comprised of officials of the Irish and British governments. A permanent secretariat based at Maryfield outside Belfast formed from this, at which these officials convened. This allowed the Irish

government to express its views on devolution and major legislative and policy proposals within Northern Ireland in relation to the interests of the minority community there. Other provisions related to security and the administration of justice, cross border co-operation and economic development. This meant that the Irish government had been granted a more than symbolic intervention in the affairs of the north, but a manifestly physical one, whilst the body itself could not draft legislation.

In preparation for Labour leader Neil Kinnock's meeting with Margaret Thatcher in February 1986, it was observed that the main dangers were either that the stated A.I.A. process would halt because of unionist resistance or that it would proceed and 'appear to take no account whatsoever of Unionist views, thus building – ironically – a sense of Unionist alienation in which only the sectarians will flourish'.⁷ Labour were also concerned at the possibility of 'increased Unionist paramilitary violence' and of the need to 'make continued public offers to the Unionist politicians of a place in the decision- taking process', so neutered had they been by the passage of the A.I.A.⁸ Kinnock suggested a propaganda effort to explain with precision what the agreement changed. According to Kinnock, such an effort would 'be evidence of confidence in the process on the part of the Government and

⁷ Briefing notes dated Feb. 1986, KNNK 12/1/3, File 2 of 2.

⁸ Ibid.

would put the Unionist leaders on the defensive. It might also succeed in winning a crucial few percent more supporters for the Agreement among moderate Unionists'.⁹

Asked by Kinnock whether unionists would be allowed a consultative mechanism to express their views to the Intergovernmental conference, Thatcher 'indicated that this was likely but would not in itself be enough to satisfy the Unionists'. Indeed, Thatcher seemed aware of the need for some sort of appeal to unionist politicians. When Kinnock queried if perhaps a committee of the House of Commons might be set up to consider establishing an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary tier, she replied that 'too rapid progress on this would alarm the Unionists. They would need to be assured that such a body would be a UK/Republic structure not an All Ireland one'.¹⁰

The Labour Party supported the A.I.A., which permitted the Irish government an advisory role in the governance of Northern Ireland, as they perceived it initiating an advance towards their professed arrangement for Northern Ireland; Irish unity by consent. At a meeting of Labour's Parliamentary Party in 1987, Kevin McNamara, Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, declared that the Labour Party should commit itself to 'making agreements between Belfast and Dublin more important to the Irish than anything that is decided in this House or in Whitehall, in fact making London irrelevant.'¹¹ This though was precisely the

⁹ Minutes of a meeting dated 24 Feb. 1986, KNNK 12/1/3, File 2 of 2.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Minutes of a meeting dated 2 Dec. 1987, KNNK 12/1/1, File 2 of 2.

synthesis of unionist anguish. The wildest consequence of the A.I.A. for unionists, as it had been for Sunningdale, was the imagined adjustment in power centre for Northern Ireland from London to Dublin. Labour pursued the very philosophy which disconcerted and endangered unionism the most.

McNamara continued that it was the role of the Labour Party to look for men and women of vision 'who can lead the Unionist community towards the more productive fields of political, social and economic co-operation. That is why consent is so important and why there is no question of watering it down or seeking to circumvent it'.¹² He urged that the party remember the unionist people and remove grievances from both communities, failing to grasp that it was the apparatus which the agreement had created for that task which so excruciated unionists. Indeed, Labour's support for the agreement led them into friction with the political representatives of unionism. In January 1987 the party's N.E.C. met with a delegation of the O.U.P., comprised of James Molyneaux, Martin Smyth and Frank Millar. They relayed to the N.E.C. that Labour would be penalised for supporting the agreement and that devolution would bear the aggregated cost: 'All forces that have been mobilised against the AIA would equally be brought into play against a Labour Government committed to the AIA /.../ The OUP could not discuss it (devolution) with a government still implementing the AIA.'¹³

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Minutes of a meeting dated 16 Jan. 1987, KNNK 12/1/3, File 2 of 2.

Such a stance from unionism, with the D.U.P. also instructing the N.E.C. that 'any talks within the framework of the AIA now would be "with a gun at our heads"' and that they would 'look at any "excuse" for suspending the AIA', prompted an abrasive riposte from the Labour Party.¹⁴ Responding to speculation that the government was considering changing the legislative practice of unamendable orders in an attempt to lure unionists back to the House, McNamara advised Kinnock that their party should resist placating unionists because:

The more the Unionists are frustrated by our intransigence on this matter, the more they will have to consider the devolution option.

Why give a victory to the Unionists when they have obviously lost the battle, as shown by the general election results in the Six Counties?¹⁵

Such a confrontational tone elicited a severe reply from Molyneaux, who described the first point as 'blatant blackmail' and the second as 'simply contemptible'.¹⁶

The Labour Party regarded unionist participation as important, given that a design of the A.I.A. was to catalyse consensus towards a power-sharing, devolved form of government for Northern Ireland. However, it was a prescriptive participation, given that it forced unionists, who had been kept in silence, to agree to

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Circular by Kevin McNamara dated 23 July 1987, KNNK 12/1/1, File 1 of 2.

¹⁶ Letter from James Molyneaux to Neil Kinnock dated 10 Nov. 1987, KNNK 12/1/1, File 1 of 2.

the Republic of Ireland contributing to the mechanics of this governance. To unionists, the agreement was a maxim from the British government that politicians from the south had a greater right to design the constitutional fabric of Northern Ireland than they did. The A.I.A. humiliated unionists, publicly exposing the absurdity of their fraught devotion to a Union which sought to expel it. Other commentators believed the Labour Party's strategy of obliging unionist involvement in the Anglo-Irish process was perilous, as it might urge unionism into militant revolt.

John Alderdice, leader of the Alliance party, met with Jim Marshall, Deputy Shadow Spokesman on Northern Ireland, and said the Labour Party failed to realise that any step beyond the A.I.A. would mean that 'the British Government was up against 11,000 members of the security forces as well as hard-line Loyalists /.../ if a Labour Government pursued Irish unity it would end all Loyalist co-operation and feed the IRA campaign'.¹⁷ In opposition, Labour thinking towards Northern Ireland actually increased in its zeal for Irish unity, which acknowledged the inevitable alienation of unionism that would attend such an ambition. This came to be seen as an endurable price to pay for Irish unity. In 1991, a Labour paper titled *Options for a Labour Government in Northern Ireland* proposed that Northern Ireland be officially recognised as a joint territory of Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland by an international treaty.

¹⁷ Minutes of a meeting dated 30 Aug. 1988, KNNK 12/1/3, File 1 of 2.

To this end, the paper also recommended modifying Article 2 of the Irish Constitution to make reference to the fact that 'Northern Ireland is presently the national territory of both the British and Irish nations'.¹⁸ It acknowledged that 'Unionists are unlikely to be happy with our proposals. It is therefore necessary to reassure unionists that shared responsibility is not an immediate staging-post to Irish unity'.¹⁹ Even if Labour wished to pursue a gradual procession towards unity, they thought it important to avoid adding, if possible, to the undulling pessimism of unionism.

But this was not as vital as ensuring the maintenance of the Irish dimension, which not only made their ultimate vision of unity more probable, but acted as an appeal to the minority community in the north and the catholic, Irish emigrant population of Great Britain, from which Labour drew electoral support. Labour's interpretation that the agreement could help prepare and devise all-Ireland unity was precisely the unionist objection to it, and why unionists were rarely compelled by the British government's argument that the agreement was an arrangement to improve mutual security conditions.

¹⁸ Paper written in Nov. 1991, KNNK 12/1/7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

The Conservative Party and hostility to the A.I.A.

Nicholas Scott, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the N.I.O., sought to reassure conservative backbench M.P. Marion Roe that the purpose of the A.I.A. was not to expedite the Irish government annexing Northern Ireland. Scott believed it was largely a security arrangement, which would limit the efficacy of I.R.A. militancy and enable the minority community to identify more closely with the security forces in Northern Ireland. He said that 'the Agreement is not the first step on some slippery slope to unification. The only way unification can come about is if a majority of the population of Northern Ireland consent to it, which at present they clearly do not'.²⁰ For a conservative M.P. with a traditional affinity for the Union and its family of nations, the A.I.A. did pose a formidable dilemma: how far should you resist an accord which your own government pursued, and which it considers a major innovation in Anglo-Irish relations, but seems to hold little regard for the injury it commits to the Union or the unionists, its fanatic disciples?

One unambiguous element of the agreement was the revelation that the British government did not maintain Ulster because of a blossoming affection for it, but because it had yet to concoct the formula of its careful withdrawal. Ulster was the stain of Britain's imperial past which remained bound to Britain through placed

²⁰ Letter dated 25 Mar. 1986, POLL 9/1/2, File 3 of 3.

obligation, not thoughtful kinship. The implication of this question for conservatives was simple. Did they agitate on the Union's behalf because of a resounding and permanent affinity for it, or because a failure to would fracture the Union and award a major victory to Irish republicans? In the months before the agreement was signed, the Conservative Party's pressure group the Monday Club were distinctly unequivocal on this matter; Northern Irishmen were British subjects. The stark truth, a policy paper remarked 'is that unity by consent is talked about only by those who fail to grasp the reality of the Northern Ireland situation. One million Britons living in the province cannot be persuaded to become part of the Irish Republic'.²¹

There existed in Westminster a small cabal of conservative M.P.s who were concerned at the swelling estrangement of the O.U.P. from the Conservative Party, which seemed to be an alarming descendant of the agreement. Two of the most prominent of these men, Julian Amery and Ian Gow (who was assassinated by the P.I.R.A. in 1990) entered into correspondence on this subject. Amery wrote that one of the gravest 'casualties of the Hillsborough Agreement is the widening of the gap between the Conservative Party and the North of Ireland Unionists. This has been steadily eroded since the suspension of Stormont. It is now close to becoming an antagonistic relationship'.²²

²¹ Monday Club Policy Paper titled "*Out!, Out!, Out!*", dated Aug. 1985, POLL 9/2/1.

²² Much like that of Airey Neave, the assassination of Gow was a personal attempt by republicans to hurt Thatcher by killing a close confidant of hers. Their relationship had soured though since Gow resigned his position as Minister of State for the Treasury days after the signing of the A.I.A. in protest. The reference is from a letter to Gow from Amery dated 1 Apr. 1986, AMEJ 1/10/12.

In Amery's correspondence with Molyneaux it was made clear that even though the entire body of unionism was imagined to be under critical and astonishing threat from the agreement, and despite the fact that Molyneaux and Paisley had themselves joined together to resist its impact, appeals would be limited to the Official Unionists only. This was because this was the source of the antiquated, traditional association, not the more reactionary and volatile D.U.P. Amery even suggested to James Molyneaux that 'hitherto, it could be argued that the Ulster Unionists were a branch of the Conservative and Unionist party'.²³ This explains the desperation of some conservatives to ensure this association survived the angst of the agreement. It would honour and renew the revered bond which at one point had such an urgent political purpose, but which had now degenerated to fading nostalgia.

The Conservative Party's Watching Committee committed themselves to the surveillance of the dying affection between the O.U.P. and the Conservative Party. In a meeting in February 1986 it 'was agreed that the Watching Committee should seek a meeting with Messrs. Molyneux [sic.] and Powell at the earliest opportunity with a view to persuading Unionist members to play a full part in the proceedings in the House of Commons'.²⁴ The concern was that a disengagement from the political process would follow unionist disaffection and fatigue, and that the duty of the

²³ Letter from Amery to Molyneaux dated 29 Apr. 1986, AMEJ 1/10/12.

²⁴ Minutes dated 3 Feb. 1986, AMEJ 1/10/3.

Conservative Party was to ensure they retained a visible presence at Westminster. With that union intact, the two parties would be in a healthier position to resist the A.I.A. and prevent the collapse of unionism as an ideology into a redundant system of thought, the relic of colonial Britain.

At another Watching Committee Meeting Lord Cranborne suggested that efforts be exerted in the direction of Scotland in order to secure the collapse of the agreement. It was noted that 'Conservatives were vulnerable in Scotland, and therefore Government might be susceptible to pressure from Orange interests there'.²⁵ Thus for some conservatives, loyalty to the Union ran deeper, at least cosmetically, than loyalty to their own government's Anglo-Irish policy. Their preoccupation with assisting the Official Unionists also implies they believed they were not capable of orchestrating cohesive resistance on their own.

The two themes of closer unionist/conservative collaboration and the moderation of the A.I.A.'s efficacy dominated relations between the two parties in the first collisions of the agreement. In meeting between Prime Minister Thatcher and conservative backbenchers, who had organised into the pro-Union lobby called Friends of the Union, the motif of unionist exclusion recurred. 'The credibility of Unionist political leaders has been undermined, in that their advice before the signing of the agreement was disregarded and they have made no impression on the

²⁵ Minutes dated 26 Nov. 1986, AMEJ 1/10/3.

Government since 15th November 1985'.²⁶ The group was concerned that the government was underestimating the extent to which restrained and moderate unionists would remove their support for the government on account of the A.I.A. and the force this imparted on the 'continuing withdrawal of consent by Unionists'.

The response from unionists at such agitation on their behalf was not thankful. In May 1987 Julian Amery M.P. suggested that in the event of a hung Parliament 'the Watching Committee should offer its good offices as a conduit between Ulster Unionists and the Government /.../ particularly in view of the mistakes the Conservatives had made after the first 1974 election'.²⁷ Unionists, Molyneaux countered, would resist such a move if the conservatives persisted with the agreement and had committed to it in their manifesto. The conservatives did lose 21 seats at the general election on June 11th 1987, but retained a healthy majority. Thus unionists were willing to contribute to their own political segregation and malfunction in order to uphold their puritanical opposition to the A.I.A. This is explicable only by appreciating the depth of treachery unionists believed the agreement plumbed. James Molyneaux was perhaps the most wounded by the scarring ordeal of what appeared to be British desertion, as he 'was old enough to have fought for the United Kingdom during World War Two'.²⁸

²⁶ Aide-Memoire dated 14 Jan. 1987, AMEJ 1/10/3.

²⁷ Minutes dated 13 May 1987, AMEJ 1/10/3 File 3 of 3.

²⁸ James Loughlin, *Ulster Unionism and British National Identity since 1885* (London, 1995), p.212.

In December 1988 the Watching Committee drafted an alternative to A.I.A., with little difference except that it would be a temporary arrangement, lasting until November 1993. Paisley and Molyneaux considered a joint appeal to 'Messrs. Andrews and Bloomfield of the Northern Ireland Office to see whether there was anything to be done which might modify the Hillsborough Agreement'.²⁹ Ultimately, whilst there existed a reserve of ideological reciprocity, conservatives felt unionists were mostly on their own. Ian Gow recognised, for all their lobbying and political activism, that there was robust international support for the agreement, namely in Europe and America, and that Thatcher's administration had neither affection for nor faith in Ulster unionists. 'The Government also felt that the Unionists were fragmented, and might not be reliable supporters of a coalition in the House of Commons since at the very least they could not always be relied upon to turn up.'³⁰

Even when it was suggested that Molyneaux approach the Foreign Office with a view to talking on Privy Council terms, Julian Amery emphasised that 'it was up to the Unionist parties to make the running in any initiative rather than friends in the Conservatives'.³¹ The A.I.A. was, after all, a Thatcher policy. When it was agreed in 1989 that the conservatives organise in Northern Ireland, Ian Gow confessed to Laurence Kennedy of the Northern Ireland Conservative Associations that the Westminster system would be hostile to such a development. 'I cannot conceal from

²⁹ Minutes of the Watching Committee dated 15 July 1987, AMEJ 1/10/3, File 3 of 3.

³⁰ Minutes of Watching Committee dated 13 May 1987, AMEJ 1/10/3, File 3 of 3.

³¹ Minutes of the Watching Committee dated 15 July 1987, AMEJ 1/10/3, File 3 of 3.

you the truth that a Conservative Secretary of State supporting the Conservative Party in Northern Ireland will be unwelcome to the Northern Ireland Office.’³² Gow knew that the A.I.A. was an intentional disposal and circumvention of unionism. It made limited sense to recall unionism to greater prominence now that it was in operation.

This translated to fragile gestures of solidarity expressed by backbenchers in the Conservative Party to the O.U.P., like the possibility of establishing a House of Commons Select Committee on Northern Ireland. They seem like an attempt to prevent or defuse accusations of treason by unionists by preserving the unionist credentials of certain Tory politicians. Gow himself resigned as Minister of State for the Treasury over the agreement. Principle remained, though there appeared little confidence that these measures could repel the agreement, or make unionists more agreeable to the conservative government. This suggests unionists were not considered an integral element of the British nation and that the Union could survive their expulsion.

Yet disaffection with the agreement persisted, and it seemed important for a faction of conservatives to remain informed and think contrarily about Northern Ireland. The intended return of the agreement for the British government included the parliamentary isolation of Sinn Féin and the improvement of security co-operation between the British and Irish security forces. Gow argued that ‘In the first

³² Letter dated 9 Jan. 1990, AMEJ 1/10/3, File 3 of 3.

three years of the Agreement there has been no sign of peace, stability and reconciliation /.../ the Agreement was to reconcile the minority without alienating the majority- in fact the opposite has happened'.³³ If the agreement yielded abject dividends, a recurring alternative, to complement closer unionist/conservative association, was full integration of Northern Ireland into the British political system. This meant there would be no devolved parliament in Northern Ireland, but would most likely entail increasing the number of seats Northern Ireland would hold in the House of Commons. Integration was not a new suggestion, but its resurgence as a viable constitutional option for Northern Ireland followed the A.I.A.

Integration and the shadow of the Irish state

Integration first became a policy of enthusiasm for Ulster unionists when James Molyneaux became leader of the Official Unionists in the House of Commons in 1974. He advocated closer association with the conservatives and it was observed by Jonathan Biggs-Davison that 'there are signs of a desire among the Official Unionist Members to renew parliamentary links with us'.³⁴ A tuning of conservative-unionist relations suggested not only a desire for the piety of tradition and political decency,

³³ Minutes of a meeting of the Watching Committee, 16 Mar. 1988, AMEJ 1/10/3, File 3 of 3.

³⁴ Letter to Margaret Thatcher dated 18 Feb. 1975, Papers of Margaret Thatcher, THCR 2/1/1/18.

but a pragmatism of survival and recovery, as Sunningdale had so tainted the reputation of unionism.

Another reason for a movement towards the conservatives was that its shadow bench had redeemed its unionist credentials after Heath's betrayal, an inference which was to ebb, but which was prominent during the mid-1970s. 'MOLYNEAUX said that Mrs. Thatcher was a Unionist. SMYTH [Martin] also spoke favourably of the Leader and asked for more intimate contact with the Conservative Party and joint preparation of policy'.³⁵ Personnel like Biggs-Davison, Thatcher and Neave had convinced some unionists that this batch of conservatives would be more obedient to their vision of majority devolution. At a meeting of the Conservative Northern Ireland Committee, 'Mr Neave said the Unionists were anxious to find out exactly what policies a Conservative Government would pursue in relation to Northern Ireland'.³⁶

There was some response from the Labour government to the rising integrationist lobby when they staged a Conference on Electoral Law in 1978, which considered increasing Northern Ireland's share of parliamentary seats at Westminster. Labour had already conceded extra parliamentary representation to Northern Ireland in 1977, a move which was perceived as being integrationist and in

³⁵ Notes of a meeting between John Biggs-Davison and the Ulster Unionist Council on 19 Mar. 1976, THCR 2/1/1/18.

³⁶ Minutes dated 30 Mar. 1976, AMEJ 1/10/3, File 3 of 3.

line with Enoch Powell's strategy.³⁷ Notable members included Enoch Powell, Molyneux and Gerry Fitt, who expressed concern that integration would be even more regressive for Ulster than dominant one party rule:

If there is an increase in the number of seats, and power is handed back to the local authorities, there will be a substantial body of Unionists who will say, "This is integration; we do not have to search any further for political institutions in Northern Ireland".³⁸

This was what integration would become, a way to reproduce or contain Northern Ireland within the Union if devolution was not created. It would be an option that Molyneux would favour occasionally for it would restrain nationalist ascent, given that integration would remove the border from Northern Ireland politics. Partition and its residue would cease to command political attention if devolution, a constitutional arrangement which made Ulster seem distinct, was debarred.³⁹ Northern Ireland would be further assimilated into the British political system and the need for it to be treated differently from the rest of the Union would vanish. This would at least prevent unification and perhaps provide unionists with a greater parliamentary veto at Westminster. Indeed, Garret FitzGerald remarked on one

³⁷ Paul Arthur, 'Special Relationships', p.160. See also Simon Heffer, *Like the Roman: The life of Enoch Powell* (London, 1998), p.718.

³⁸ Minutes dated 11 Jan. 1978, POLL 9/2/6/, File 2 of 3.

³⁹ See Michael Cunningham, 'Conservative dissidents and the Irish question: the "pro-integrationist" lobby 1979-94' in *Irish Political Studies*, 10, 1995.

advantage of such a development: 'at civil service level the tensions between the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Departments might make a solution of this kind, which would get rid of the latter, seem tempting'.⁴⁰

Molyneaux was singular in his hunger for integration, with Paisley, Craig and David Trimble all professed devolutionists. More than any other unionist, Paisley was a regional M.P. who derived his support from a specific demographic and who would have the most to lose through integration. Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Jim Prior, acknowledged that there was little support for integration and that unionists must be fastened to devolution.⁴¹ A Workers' Association publication noted that

The devolutionists on the Unionist side have begun to look upon Britain as an alien force. All their arguments as to why devolution is preferable to integration boil down to this: that Britain is not to be trusted /.../ and therefore Ulster must be kept at arm's length from Britain.⁴²

Integration had the carriage of revenge to some after A.I.A, a way of overturning the emphatic subordination of Northern Ireland and its unionist classes. It would consequently aggrieve the political opponents of unionism, and the agreement itself,

⁴⁰ Memo for the government on 14 Jan. 1977, TAOIS 2007/116/749.

⁴¹ Minutes of the Conservative Party Northern Ireland Committee, 28 Jan. 1982, AMEJ 1/10/11.

⁴² Workers' Weekly Paper titled *Unionism or Devolutionism?*, May 1981, AMEJ 1/10/11.

which some unionists relished. Arthur Aughey wrote that the essence of the integrationist case was that only when Northern Ireland was governed in the same way as 'the rest of the United Kingdom will the conditions for peace and reconciliation exist. What makes this idea even more attractive as a basis for opposition is that the Hillsborough accord is designed to prevent precisely that parity of status'.⁴³

What such an interpretation masked was that rather than being a heroic response, integration was a desperate, traumatised over-attachment to the object lost, the Union, to which now no unionist could be ambivalent. This followed the tortuous, agonising scream that unionists were no longer valued and that their departure from the Union would be neither mourned nor prevented. If the A.I.A. was the loudest chorus of British indifference to the will of unionism, it may be surprising that unionists could contemplate reunion with them. This though revealed their lack of imagination and their reliance on the Union for concepts of political definition. The response from the British public to the agreement was relief, appraising it as a cure for the weariness the conflict had inured rather than alarm at the way it so disturbed unionists, which suggests there was no mutual affinity between the people of Ulster and Great Britain. Unionists would then struggle to claim a right to membership of the British unit of nations if their eviction incited only modest disapproval.

⁴³ Arthur Aughey, *Under Siege: Ulster Unionism and the Anglo-Irish Agreement* (London, 1989), p.134.

But even this is a particularly unionist way of examining the agreement. It was not a manual for British disengagement from Northern Ireland, only one to arrange the permission for it, if this was ultimately desired by a majority of people within Northern Ireland. The fatalism of unionism was of such depth that even this was equated to utmost treachery. The agreement was designed to engineer power-sharing, not a certain surrender to a united Ireland. The contours of the distressed unionist response suggest unionist confidence in their welcomed membership of the Union had been wavering before the agreement.

Indeed, Molyneaux had intimated that some unionists would pre-empt their disposal with a departure on their own terms: 'The Anglo-Irish talks and the murder of Robert Bradford during a severe security crisis had 'brought unionists almost to the point of renouncing and repudiating the union''.⁴⁴ Captivating as this was for some unionists, it was advocated either by separatist loyalists who favoured independence, or those unionists, like Paisley, whose own position was threatened most by the efficiency of the British government's security policy. Consequently, it was highly unlikely to be an option of solvency for Molyneaux and the Official Unionists. Rather, it reflected the psychological duress exerted on the unionist consciousness by the suspicion that the British government was joyfully choreographing Irish unity.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the Conservative Party Northern Ireland Committee, 4 Feb. 1982, AMEJ 1/10/11.

When Harold McCusker made similar allusions in November 1981 to Jim Prior, it suggested unionists had come to realise that whilst they felt ethnically British, they were also British by contract, which could be annulled. Prior had noticed that 'every fibre of McCusker's fibre was British, but he wondered how long he and his colleagues could afford to remain so if the price to be paid was so high'.⁴⁵ Thus remaining British was a choice and the union an instrument to guarantee a certain way of life. This was a philosophy more commonly espoused by Ulster loyalists.⁴⁶ It was also evidence that unionists believed the British thought in 'fractions of Britishness', that some peoples were more British than others. Robert McCartney made the same point the following week to Prior. McCartney claimed that because of the way the British government were allowing Irish unity to emerge 'Unionists did not feel they were being treated as if they were fully British'.⁴⁷

The A.I.A., at least for the British government, was the recognition of both national traditions within Ireland as legitimate and discernible.⁴⁸ There was enough latitude within the agreement for both governments to claim triumphs, if not absolute victories. The Irish government were given more than a consultative role in Northern Ireland, privileges secured without requiring the consent of unionists. This

⁴⁵ Meeting between Harold McCusker Secretary of State for Northern Ireland James Prior on 13 Nov. 1981, T.N.A. CJ4/3334.

⁴⁶ One wonders the extent to which it was a plea for the British government to think about what it would lose, a part of the British nation, if it was to continue on its project of unification, which was the unionist suspicion.

⁴⁷ Minutes of a meeting on 18 Nov. 1981 between Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Jim Prior and U.U.P. representatives, T.N.A. CJ4/3334.

⁴⁸ Eamonn O'Kane, *Britain, Ireland and Northern Ireland since 1980: the totality of relationships* (Oxford, 2007), p.65.

was the first stride of a process which could eventually evolve into unification and the subordination of Sinn Féin, whose militancy would be vanquished by the government's constitutionalism. The British government could anticipate improved security co-operation with Irish security forces in an effort to restrain the P.I.R.A.

The psychological propensity of unionists to interpret each constitutional initiative as the menacing predecessor of unity suggests unionists had a chronic and affecting fear of the idea of a thirty-two county republic. If they construed the British promotion of Irish unity to be the most promiscuous deceit, it must have been because its imagined consequences would be the most ruinous for them. Unionists were synchronised by the belief that they were British citizens whose natural residence was within the boundaries of the Union. If this link was severed, they could not rely on protestantism for ideological reassurance or convalescence, because the key appliance of their worldview had always been the resolute pride in an imperial heritage. Even liberal unionists like Harold McCusker insisted their unionism was more important to them than their protestantism and their tendency was to interpret the conflict in Ulster as the struggle to keep it British, not protestant.⁴⁹ Thus membership of the United Kingdom remained an inalienable right for many Ulster unionists because, for a successful evasion of Irish unity, it had to be.

⁴⁹ This inclination also undermines the argument of scholars such as Steve Bruce who have attempted to reconcile Northern Ireland as being a religious conflict. See Steve Bruce, David Taylor and Roy Wallis, *"No Surrender!" Paisleyism and the Politics of ethnic identity in Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1986).

It also meant Irish nationalists and Ulster unionists shared the debilitating dread of being committed to a constitutional arrangement in which they were decisively a minority. To resist this, unionists would use Britishness as a tactical convenience, condemning initiatives which had an Irish dimension preserved in them. This was because they allegedly compromised Ulster's permanent membership of the United Kingdom, a concept which unionists depended on for self-perception. This was why they were not educated on the agreement's contents prior to its signing. The A.I.A. however, because of a fierce creed of neglect and desertion, made the unionist claim to a British identity derisory and meaningless.⁵⁰ The A.I.A. acted not only as a direct threat to unionists' professed British identity but its public supremacy as well, as it also seemed to welcome the absence of a continual, official endorsement of unionists' British personality, making a unionist claim to its endurance highly questionable.

If Irish unity did materialise, unionists would be British subjects without a host. This would be a terminal humiliation. They could not easily return to parading a British identity, or speak in the diction and vocabulary of British ancestry, after the British people and government had so calmly disowned them. This was central to the peril and malice of the A.I.A. for unionists and why it so humbled them. If it

⁵⁰ Unionists periodically demanded the return of an Ulster Parliament, but this was less to satiate keenly felt nationalist inclinations and more to ensure the return of full security control and to make a complete British desertion more difficult to execute.

decisively undermined their assertion to be British, and this is what they had always relied on to orient themselves, it begged the question of who were they. Perhaps it exposed them as pitiful, deluded British nationalists, or another cult of Irishman who had been living in denial.

Unionists were struck by the terror that they would have to watch themselves become extinct while the world shrugged its shoulders. If the Union was abolished, or at least Northern Ireland's participation of it, and Irish unity forged, unionists would either have to be consoled into becoming liberal nationalists with the distinction of being Protestant or Ulster Irish, or disperse, and vanish into the cosmos of dead ideologies alongside Chartists and Flat-Earthers, ageing without a cause. This paradox explains the perpetual fatalism of unionism and why unity was the summit of unionist fear: unionism would asphyxiate without the oxygen of the Union.⁵¹

But there were some analysts who believed that progress for Northern Ireland depended on this tortuous climate. The Foreign Intelligence Bureau of the Canadian Department of External Affairs thought that protestant intransigence would actually make unity more probable: 'the longer Protestant stubbornness persists, the less unthinkable eventual union between Ulster and Irish Republic will become and the

⁵¹ It was for this reason that many unionists were opposed to Ulster independence as a constitutional solution, as it would require the dissolution of the Union as unionists understood it.

more likely the British public will be to endorse it'.⁵² Their logic was that unionists would renounce or negotiate their own unionism if it came to be permanently associated with obstinacy and threatened to cast Northern Ireland into darker ruins. Moderate unionists would emerge once they realised British patience was dwindling and that the only practicable option for Northern Ireland lay on the road to devolution.

But rather than unionist estrangement being a mere product of the A.I.A., some came to believe it was its punishing intention. Arthur Aughey wrote that not only was the purpose, rather than the effect, of the agreement to 'fatally weaken the Union', but that it was an exercise in containment and 'an attempt to cow unionists /.../ Unionism would become so discredited by the actions of the reactionary few that the many would be happy to accept the new dispensation provided for them by the Agreement - forced "consent" to help facilitate Irish unity'.⁵³ Perhaps one can denounce this scepticism as paranoiac, but it does illustrate the extent to which the agreement was thought to herald the extinction of unionism, whilst also accounting for Aughey's own preference for integration, which was a guarantee of equal British citizenship for Northern Ireland's inhabitants.

What the agreement did with precision and certitude was to alter the power dynamic within unionism: they could not repeal the agreement with force as they

⁵² Report dated 16 June 1986, National Archives of Canada, 20-IRLND N, Vol. 15996, File No. 14, Series RG 25.

⁵³ Aughey, 'Under Siege', pp.58-60.

had with Sunningdale, or, more importantly, rely on the endless British guarantee of unionist political will. Michael Lillis, the chief Irish architect of the A.I.A., suggested Thatcher knew the unionists had become necessary collateral. To sign the agreement would divorce them, perhaps permanently, from the Conservative Party.⁵⁴ However, Lillis contends, she became convinced that it was time unionists were told that the assurance of everlasting concession had lapsed.

This feature was seen by the British government as a significant implication of their Anglo-Irish policy as early as December 1980. A review of the phases in the relationship noted the British government's enduring insistence 'to demonstrate to the Unionists that they did not have a veto over Anglo-Irish relations.'⁵⁵ Ken Stowe, former Permanent Secretary at N.I.O., told Irish Ambassador to Great Britain Eamon Kennedy of their intention to 'teach them (unionists) a lesson about where intransigence is leading them. We are going to talk to Dublin instead'.⁵⁶ The spectacular delivery of this imperative was what wounded relations between unionists and the British government so fantastically. The entire British political system, unionists averred, now conspired against them. As Marianne Elliott remarked, the A.I.A. was so vigorous a shock because unionists had been hitherto sustained by 'an illusion that London needs the Ulster protestants to maintain the

⁵⁴ Interview with Michael Lillis, Former Head of Anglo-Irish Division of D.F.A., on 24 Apr. 2013.

⁵⁵ Review dated 26 May 1982, PRONI CENT/1/11/30.

⁵⁶ Note by Kennedy on 18 Aug. 1981, D.F.A. 2011/46/1. Stowe was Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister from 1975-79 and Permanent Under-Secretary of State at N.I.O. 1979-81.

British connection'.⁵⁷ Now the A.I.A. would be seen as the opus of the Westminster retreat from Northern Ireland.

In fact, relations between the two factions had receded greatly and were now marked by a steady and ceremonial detachment, with Ulster unionists no longer invited to speak at Conservative Party conferences and only backbench M.P.s agitating on behalf of unionist interests. The Conservative Party rejected demands to organise in Northern Ireland until 1989. Those conservatives who did retain an emotional preoccupation with or fetish for the Union were few. Thatcher was a unionist by instinct but had been convinced of the security virtues of rebuking those instincts. The British government was unprepared for the depth of unionist despair the agreement conjured, which was why Thatcher came to regret its creation.

The British government believed that legally recognising the validity of the Irish dimension would be a benefit not only to trade links with Ireland, but the general Anglo-American relationship. A brief by David Goodall, then of the Cabinet Office, acknowledged that to pacify the American administration, his government needed to be visibly working towards reconciliation, which would allow the British to 'withstand pressure from the Irish lobby to intervene directly. Good relations with the Irish government are an important factor in achieving this result'.⁵⁸ But the consequences of a truculent and rebellious unionism find no consideration within

⁵⁷ Marianne Elliott, *Watchmen in Sion: the Protestant idea of liberty* (Derry, 1985), p.5.

⁵⁸ Brief dated 26 May 1983, T.N.A. CAB 196/124.

the British government's pages, even though their omission came to be considered the agreement's greatest failing by members of that government.⁵⁹

In a self-fulfilling prophecy, this would refine the ethos of unionist obduracy it had become renowned for and make it even more extravagant. Colin Coulter wrote that 'the political fatalism and pessimism characteristic of many northern Protestants have typically sponsored a sullen, mindless intransigence that has deprived unionism of both purpose and influence'.⁶⁰ However, it was the tormented and operatic response to the A.I.A. which helps elucidate why such intransigence had been so routinely cultivated: nervous exhaustion over the perishing Union and the unwillingness of a British government to save it, coercive unity with the south and an inescapable disclosure of unionist impotence.

The signing of the A.I.A. suggested that the British government believed political progress in Northern Ireland was now predicated on the abandonment of unionists. Without an analysis of these factors, of which the A.I.A. was a succinct and powerful anagram, unionism and loyalism in this period will remain indecipherable, wildly illogical and intellectually subordinated.

⁵⁹ Sir David Goodall believed this was the agreement's central flaw in a talk given at Trinity College Dublin, 19 Nov. 2013.

⁶⁰ Colin Coulter, 'The Character of Unionism' in *Irish Political Studies*, 9 (1994), p.14.

Conclusion

There is perhaps a criticism of foresight one can level at unionists, that they failed to predict the A.I.A. The New Ireland Forum may have publicised Thatcher's hostility to the Irish government's designs for change, but it also made unionists aware that they would not be content with a purely consultative role in the affairs of Northern Ireland. Unionists were certain that the residual and occasionally fanatical unionism of Thatcher and Gow would ensure eternal sanctuary and that any atrocious *diktat* that was hatched could be made ungovernable by the dazzling forces of unionism as it had in May 1974.⁶¹ The point might also be made that Molyneaux and Powell misjudged the influence of Gow and others on the Prime Minister. They assumed that they operated as a direct route to Thatcher, through which she could be influenced.⁶² This underestimated the determination of the woman herself. The U.U.P.'s loss of two parliamentary seats at the general election in June 1987 suggested that the stunning pyrotechnics of their protest had not given them more force as an opposition party.

Even in 1984 it was obvious to the Irish government that 'the fear of Irish unity which inhibits Unionists from contemplating participation in a power-sharing arrangement /.../ is at heart grounded in a lack of certainty about British rather than

⁶¹ 'Diktat' was the term that former U.U.P. M.P. Roy Bradford used to describe the agreement.

⁶² Paul Arthur, 'Special Relationships', p.212.

Irish intentions'.⁶³ The most plausible explanation was that for all the unionist reproach of Thatcher's government, and fear of its future behaviour, they still expected their British guarantee to impede the ascension of nationalist ambition. So sinister a performance of British exasperation, especially after the hunger strikes and the Falklands, was not.

The way the agreement is seen will undoubtedly change if Ireland is one day unified into a unitary state. If that does occur, historians can rightly point to the agreement as the first time the consent principle of unity was breached, given that there was no public vote on it and unionists were made subsidiary to the objectives of Irish nationalism.⁶⁴ Because it was not felled by unionist protest, it also acted as a lasting monument to the British government's willingness to support Irish unity, if it could be suitably arranged.⁶⁵

As it stands, it is most commonly appraised as a failure in that it did not yield the security improvements that were intended, but that its guarantee of both dominant national traditions in Ireland sired the atmosphere which made 1998's Belfast agreement possible and necessary. Upon the creation of Irish unity, and the wild catastrophe that would be for unionism, it will be to the A.I.A. that commentators will turn to analyse what made this development permissible. While

⁶³ Irish Speaking Note dated 13 Nov. 1984, T.N.A. PREM 19/1289. Emphasis from original text.

⁶⁴ Thomas Hennessey, 'Unionism and Consent: problems with a principle?' in Aughey and Gormley-Heenan (eds), *The Anglo-Irish Agreement: Re-thinking its legacy* (Manchester, 2011), p.73.

⁶⁵ Paul Bew, 'The Irish Government and the Agreement: a dynamic vehicle for change?' in Aughey and Gormley-Heenan (eds), *The Anglo-Irish Agreement: Re-thinking its legacy* (Manchester, 2011), p.41.

not penning the obituary of Ulster unionism, the A.I.A. at least invented the alphabet from which it could be written.

Conclusion

This thesis is the first concerted study into the relationship between Ulster unionists, Ulster loyalists and successive Irish governments during the Northern Irish conflict. Hitherto, only elements, like the interaction between the Irish and British governments, have attracted attention. Too often unionists and loyalists have been the victims of an assumption of passive voice. This study has shown that not only was there a detectable, changing and complex relationship between northern protestants and the Irish state, but that there are many more avenues for research that could be pursued. This often has offered some up for consideration, including Irish trade unions, British political parties, the governments of North America, Irish republicans and the domestic police forces.

In considering the behaviours of Ulster unionism and its different types of interaction, physical and abstract, with the Irish state, the intention has been to revise the assumption of constant hostility. One is struck by the level of contact that did occur between representatives of the D.F.A. and leaders of loyalist and unionist opinion. Personal rapport was forged and mutual understanding grew, perhaps to compensate for decades of estrangement when no communication existed. Irish governments were aware that unionist consent was vital to stability in the north, but they were rarely bold enough to petition the Irish public on this point and express a more sympathetic view of unionism.

Violent loyalism was also occasionally misinterpreted by the Irish government, cast as unruly barbarism instead of fear over British abandonment and Irish conquest. When it did stage effective political action, loyalism managed to catch the attention of Irish officials. But this was transient. The infrequency of cross-border incursions by loyalists and the decision to focus on unionist opinion limited the visibility of Ulster loyalism within the outlook of Irish governments. Its violent tendencies were evaluated periodically, but the level of contact with loyalists that was pursued by Irish officials around the time of the U.W.C. strike faded, as a British withdrawal looked less likely and loyalist organisations drifted from positions of mass influence in Ulster. This neglect has been transferred into Irish academia as well, where the absence of Ulster loyalism remains especially marked.

The paths of future research

Whilst it has been productive over the course of this thesis to orient the ideological posture of loyalism and unionism on a broader spectrum and chart their interrelationship with Irish nationalism, there is much substantive work that remains to be done. Most important amongst this is an analysis of how northern protestants operated within the republican consciousness. This study has focussed on the Irish government but the interpretation of unionism from within Irish republicanism has

received little attention. Analysis of unionism in the 1990s was often framed through contemporary hopes, such as the desperate will for peace; that unionism could be cured and reformed.¹ This tendency actually cultivated amnesia over the many historical perspectives of unionism and unionist experience over the conflict's duration, since scholarship was galvanised towards deciphering strategies for progress. The slack can now be pulled.

Fervent attempts have been made to analyse unionism in alien contexts, concentrating on their encounters with the Irish state and the British government. Transnational studies of unionism though have rarely been undertaken. The extent to which unionism was influenced by external ideologies and foreign concepts of settler violence is thus under appreciated. One wonders if comparative analogies could be made with other minority ideologies which exist in the same geographical unit as dominant ones: Swedes in Finland, Germans in Bohemia etc. What about the unionist ecology of violence, and the ways in which unionists were influenced by their reception of other conflicts, like Guatemala in the 1980s or the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s. Might this explain their inclination to borrow the lexicon of 'genocide' and 'ethnic cleansing' and form the caricature of uninterrupted victimhood to understand and have the world understand their suffering of I.R.A. violence. One is curious as to the role this imperative might have in the public arena of Northern

¹ For example Norman Porter, *Rethinking unionism: an alternative vision for Northern Ireland* (Belfast, 1996).

Ireland and the reconciliation of torturous memory, over which one community claims total ownership.

The agreed definition used in this study is of northern Irish unionism, but a study of southern Irish unionism during the 1970s and 1980s would also be productive. The label of 'colonist' was only ever fleetingly applied to unionists, either by nationalists in an attempt to defame Ulster unionism or by unionists themselves to complain about the gross inadequacy of direct rule.² Allusions are occasionally made between Northern Ireland and Palestine, French Algeria and South Africa, but this is mostly to explain the settler origins of the conflict, not its contemporary endurance.

This eschewed comparison of Northern Ireland with former British colonies which nurtured a residual colonial identity, like Kenya, or nations of the Commonwealth like Australia and New Zealand.³ In addition to measuring the accuracy of the 'colonial' label in its application to unionism, it is essential to analyse if the historical subjects implicated by it used a colonial model to understand unionists and the territory they inhabited. It would be useful to establish if the British government made colonial parallels with Northern Ireland and its unionist

² The work of Stephen Howe is useful in this regard, but it stands almost alone. See *Ireland and Empire: Colonial legacies in Irish History and Culture* (Oxford, 2000).

³ Allusions are occasionally made between Northern Ireland and Palestine, French Algeria and South Africa, but this is mostly to explain the settler origins of the conflict, not its contemporary endurance.

population, especially after direct rule was imposed in March 1972 and during instances of constitutional volatility, like the Sunningdale agreement.⁴

Perhaps they compared the loyalist-driven independence movement to Rhodesia's U.D.I. in 1965? How did lessons gleaned from colonial stewardship, particularly for Harold Wilson, inform British government policy on Northern Ireland? Was a distinction made between Northern Ireland and other, distant colonies, because of the way Ireland had historically been integrated into the national territory of Britain? Did foreign governments with a recognised 'colonial' dimension to their national character make allusions to Ulster unionism as a minority, post-colonial population in their analysis of Northern Ireland conflict? Was there a solidarity or fraternity of colonial affection? Did the Union persist as a nexus of identity for Commonwealth countries and was Northern Ireland interpreted in terms of Empire? It is to such questions that future research should thus be oriented.

What would be particularly interesting is if there was evidence of ideological or genealogical association between Ulster unionists, loyalists and the Ulster diaspora of Commonwealth nations, like there is in Canada. Canada has largely gone unnoticed in scholarly work on Northern Ireland, as have most countries within the Commonwealth, favoured instead for the roles of Britain and America. Future studies could locate Northern Ireland within a grander international

⁴ Oliver Wright, The United Kingdom Representative of Northern Ireland, referred to Northern Ireland as a 'colonial, Protestant' government in the final report of his time in the post. The report was dated 6 Mar. 1970. But how widespread was his interpretation amongst other departments of the British Government? See T.N.A. DEFE/13/1397.

narrative, examining how it became a crisis in global terms and entered the foreign affairs briefs of other nations.

A preoccupation with the national question, and only the southern experience of it, has limited debate within Irish academia on the subjects of Ulster unionism, Ulster loyalism, the personality of 'pro-state' violence and terrorism, Northern Irish nationalism, British nationalism, colonialism and protestantism. The significance of this research is in how it can expand the context in which Northern Ireland and unionists are understood into an international one and contribute to the study of colonialism. Operating research through the terminus of these topics can also encourage more British academics to adopt unionism and Northern Ireland as viable subjects of study. This thesis is the first recognisable study which examines in detail what successive Irish governments thought of Ulster unionists, Ulster loyalists and how both operated within the Northern Irish policy of those governments. The model of this study should be replicated: Irish and British records should now be used to study parties other than the Irish and British governments. They exist as a deep reservoir of material which can elucidate the station of several key players in Ulster during this period.

The inflection of such research will be likely determined by the direction of the peace process itself. In periods of instability, it seems likely that areas of the conflict will be wilfully avoided; trespasses tolerated, if not forgiven, for the healthy endurance of the current political arrangement in the north. This is already an established trend: talk of legal immunity for pre-Good Friday terrorist offences

suggests the peace process will be exalted above a strict application of the rule of law. 'Damage to the peace process' is becoming an automatic defence for the failure to disclose details of certain incidents or what the involvement of some actors in terrorist activities was. Friction continues to grow between what victims want, which varies between retribution, commemoration and disclosure of the truth, and what the majority of Northern Ireland wants, which is to have the past contaminate contemporary life as rarely as possible.

This does make one wonder if historical analysis comes too late, after it was needed most, or if it can form a causeway to influence current policy. What one hopes more than anything is that unionism can gradually be incorporated into the teaching of Irish studies or Irish history within secondary and tertiary education. By viewing unionist experience as Irish, northern protestants will feel less alien than they do at present to most southerners and a more nuanced dialogue can develop over the intricacies of Irish unity and Irish nationality in general.

This assumption, that unionists are not Irish, seems to justify many in the republic's ignorance of or disinterest in unionists. But unless unionists come to be considered by Irish nationalists as a form of Irishman, the interpretation of Irish nationalism and Irish unity themselves will remain only superficially understood. Unionists cannot be asked the agonising question of their own place in the world unless a movement of intellectual generosity is made by the Irish nation first. But the most important and final point is that the scholar of unionism should not have to be

so tentative or apologetic: research into loyalism and unionism is necessary on its own terms, because of the complex history it represents, and not solely to become a minor addendum to the narrative of Irish nationalism.

This is why such emphasis has been placed on inspecting loyalists and unionists as their own historical subjects whose relationships with trade unions, national governments, paramilitary bodies and each other require closer historical scrutiny. This is particularly true on the question of the Irish public's relationship with Ulster's paramilitary groups. One hopes that this is the greatest achievement of this thesis; to not only have investigated new areas, but to have enshrined the acceptance that those areas and subjects are worth knowing better at all.

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Abbreviations: CCC: Churchill College Cambridge; UCDA: University College Dublin Archives; NUIGA: National University of Ireland Galway Archives.

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Brendan Duddy	NUIGA
Garret FitzGerald	UCDA
Patrick Hillery	UCDA
Neil Kinnock	CCC
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