

NATIONAL ARCHIVES**IRELAND**

Reference Code:	2005/7/633
Title:	Confidential report written by John McColgan of the Department of Foreign Affairs detailing various views on the political and social situation in Northern Ireland expressed to him in recent meetings by Harry Murray, chairman of the UWC [Ulster Workers' Council], John Laird of the UUUC [United Ulster Unionist Council], Erskine Holmes of the NILP [Northern Ireland Labour Party], and Gerry Quigley, Northern Chairman of the ICTU [Irish Congress of Trade Unions]. Sensitive information has been redacted.
Creation Date(s):	4 September, 1974
Level of description:	Item
Extent and medium:	12 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open

Copyright:

National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Visit to Northern Ireland - 2nd-3rd September 1974

I visited Northern Ireland on 2nd and 3rd September and had discussions with Mr. Harry Murray, Chairman of the UWC, Mr. John Laird of the UUUC, Mr. Erskine Holmes of the NILP and Mr. Gerry Quigley, Northern Chairman of the ICTU.

I met Mr. Murray in his house in Bangor and spent about two hours with him and his wife. He admitted to being very tired and exhausted from all the extra activity arising out of his UWC commitments and, as he said himself, from trying to catch up and absorb political ideas and developments which were entirely new to him. He has received a lot of abuse and even physical threats as a result of his participation in the Oxford Conference and his wife has also been receiving threatening phone calls. I got the impression that this had now died down but that it was quite intense and unpleasant for a considerable period.

Murray has no great confidence that the UWC has any useful function for the future. He described the stoppage as "a once-off job" and was doubtful if they could mount a similar operation again. Apart from that he no longer believes that it is the proper vehicle for doing what he personally considers necessary at the present time. He is about to mount a personal campaign across the sectarian divide for a full-scale peace movement. He has an intense personal commitment to this idea and will spare no effort to see it succeed. He admits that he will have problems about money and organisation and obviously hopes that his own sincerity and personal integrity will be sufficient to carry it through. It was clear to me at Oxford that he is somebody who totally abhors violence and that impression was, if anything, strengthened during my conversation with him.

He is to hold a meeting later this week with a group from

Ballymurphy and has been working in very close connection over the past few weeks with a Fr. Murphy from that area - I presume this is Canon Murphy. His own right-hand man at the moment is a man called Bob Pagles who is listed by Hibernia as a member of the UWC Council and who, from what he said to me, is either a baker or a flour-miller. He said that Pagles was the sort of man who a year ago would not even talk to a Catholic, but that he had now come round to Murray's own point of view that Catholics and Protestants at a working class level had more in common than those who were exploiting them. He instanced as an example of Pagles' change of heart the fact that he was coming to meet some people from Monaghan in Harry Murray's house at the end of this week. Murray mentioned the Monaghan people's visit several times during the conversation and apart from the fact that they were obviously from the other side of the political divide to him, he did not give me more information on it and I did not think it appropriate to press him.

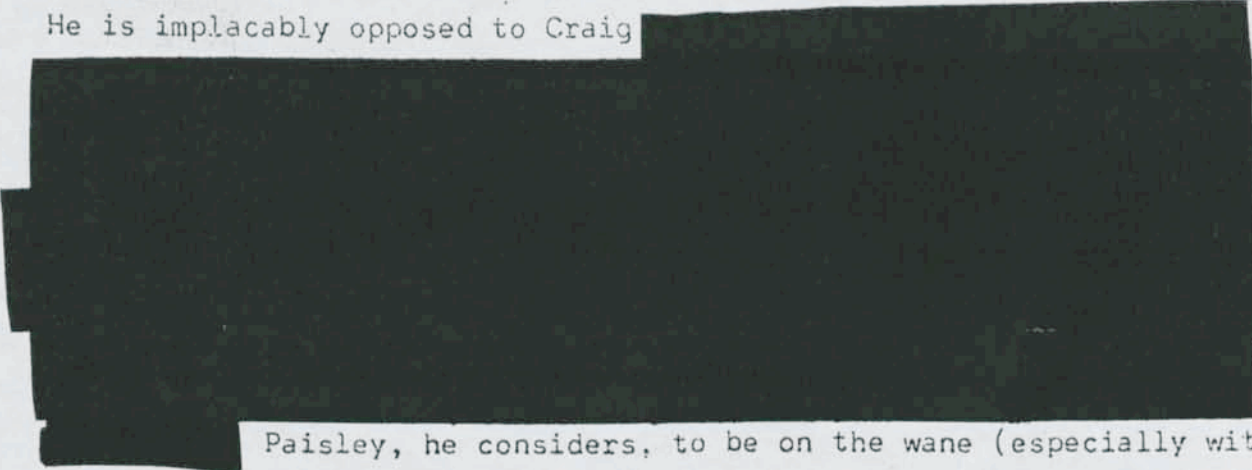
Murray was very clear that the UWC was not going to "go political" and the people in it were not the sort of people who could survive in the political arena.

[REDACTED] It is obvious that there is great rivalry between [REDACTED] and that in fact their views are pretty well diametrically opposed. He added that the UWC stoppage was never quite the sophisticated operation that the press made it out to be and that even the famous Group of 21 never really existed as such. The conclusion I would draw from our conversation is that the inevitable cracks have now appeared in the organisation and that its fragmentation and eventual break-up, if it has not already taken place, is not very far away.

Murray hopes to start his peace campaign within the next fortnight and he will be aiming at obtaining over 100,000 signatures. He then hopes to have a monster rally in the Ulster Hall (sic). Then he will

present the signatures to the Secretary of State as being the authentic voice of the ordinary people of Northern Ireland. He intends to rely substantially on a very wide base of support from the women folk of Northern Ireland and expressed unqualified admiration for some of the women in Derry and in the Falls area of Belfast. He, himself, had been instrumental in suggesting to John O'Donoghue of RTE the idea of using women from both sides for his "Crossings" programme on internment and from what he had heard, it had probably been the best programme in the series. With his 100,000 signatures he hopes then to be in a position to talk to anybody who might be in a position to influence the situation and in this he would obviously include the Provos. in particular. He also hopes to mobilise church leaders and he mentioned in this connection that he had established very good relations with Bishop Cathal Daly.

He is implacably opposed to Craig



Paisley, he considers, to be on the wane (especially with Powell's arrival on the scene) and while he does not like Harry West, since he is a capitalist, he thinks him a sincere man and the best hope on the hardline loyalist side.

On the policing question, he said that Gerry Fitt's and by implication, the SDLP's reaction to Rees' proposals had been quite right and that he would not expect anyone in the Falls Road in the present circumstances to join the RUC Reserve or to become part of a local community police force. He was disappointed that the talks between the UDA and the SDLP had broken down but agreed that the

handling of the initial stages and the silly publicity that went with it made this almost inevitable. He did not exclude the fact that talks might begin again and said that the UDA had had talks, probably some months ago, with Official Sinn Féin. The violent reaction of the UDA after the talks with the SDLP had been due to pressure from the UVF who had put the finger on the UDA. There is considerable rivalry between the two organisations and several recent bombings in loyalist pubs have been due to this. The UVF is a much smaller, tighter and better organised body than the UDA though the latter is probably 20 times more numerous.

On the Convention, he felt that the loyalists would probably have an absolute majority and if this happened he saw no alternative for the SDLP but to withdraw. He thought the loyalists would not unite into one party but that the three parties would continue in existence. He has told Merlyn Rees quite clearly that if he holds the Convention election before people have had time to talk, he will reap a bloodbath. He himself would like to see it put off for a full year but is hoping that it may not take place until at least Easter next. He is very disturbed at the disintegration in society in Northern Ireland, particularly amongst, what he called decent, God-fearing, respectable Protestants. This is now beginning to manifest itself in the schools where the children from 12 years upwards are now practically uncontrollable. His son is teaching in a local school in Bangor and is thinking of giving up the job because of the frustrations.

Another point he mentioned with considerable emphasis and on several occasions during our talk was that people making statements in Dublin cannot be too careful of what their effect will be in Northern Ireland. He said that we must, for God's sake, stop and think before we say anything and he is saddened at the fact that the South is perpetually talking about "our people" in Northern Ireland, meaning the Catholics, but never has a good word to say for the

Protestant people. He pleaded that the political leaders down South might on some occasions throw a few words of praise to Protestants and he was convinced that this would have an astounding effect on the man in the street in Northern Ireland.

Finally, the question of meeting other people from the South came up and he indicated that he would be only too glad to talk to anybody who might be able, as he said, to help him. He expressed a strong personal wish to meet the Taoiseach and though I did not raise that aspect of the matter with him, I am fairly certain that he would want to do it on a private basis and without publicity. He will probably be in Dublin on the 25th October to speak to the Philosophical Society of Trinity College and that might be a possible occasion for the meeting if the Taoiseach wished to follow it up. He also indicated clearly that he will be happy to meet the Minister on any occasion.

I also had a meeting with Mr. John Laird at Unionist Headquarters in Glengall Street. The meeting was originally scheduled for 11,00 a.m. but when I got there Mr. Laird's secretary apologised for the fact that he had had to go up to Stormont to meet a prospective Liberal candidate in the forthcoming British general election. In the event he came back around midday and the meeting took place in the presence of Mr. Tony Burton, the prospective Liberal candidate for Aldershot - currently a Tory seat - who, I gather, was in Northern Ireland because Aldershot is one of the few constituencies in Britain, which, because of its military connections, gives rise to questions on Northern Ireland. Mr. Laird was profusely apologetic for having kept me waiting so long and was in fact quite friendly. I should add, however, that the interview was probably not as frank as it might have been because of Mr. Burton's presence and also in the initial stages was rather like a formal television interview with Mr. Laird giving stock party answers to most of my questions. Apart from this, Mr. Laird was very confident and self-assured and

generally radiated the feeling that the right-thinking Protestants had now clearly won out and that the triumvirate of Craig, Paisley and West would be the controlling factor in the Convention. He was very happy with Mr. Enoch Powell's arrival in South Down, though he remarked that his candidacy would probably attract a fair collection of eccentric candidates to the constituency such as Flat Earthers and Maplin Airport supporters. In reply to my question, he said that it was not envisaged that Powell would stand for election to the Northern Ireland Convention though he said some wag had suggested that he should go forward for a currently vacant seat on Banbridge District Council. He expressed a slight worry that Brian Faulkner might also stand in South Down but dismissed it as unlikely since it would bring political death to him if he was the cause of splitting the vote and allowing the SDLP in against what the Unionist Powell supporters would obviously see as the Godfather figure of the new unionism. When I said I did not see how Powell could be beaten even if Faulkner stood against him, he agreed fully but added that it would be very much resented by Unionists if Faulkner even dared to attempt it, and would do Faulkner absolutely no good in the long run.

When I asked him if he was apprehensive about working class political leaders or candidates emerging from the UWC movement to oppose traditional hardline Unionists such as himself, he said clearly that if such people were about, he hoped they would stand for election and good luck to them if they won. He clearly implied that he did not think they had the slightest chance of winning but I got the impression he would like to see such candidates come forward as it would give his party a chance of showing to everybody on the Protestant side where the sound heart of unionism lay.

He admitted frankly that he considers the Westminster election a "damned nuisance and an irrelevancy" and that the real election as

far as he and his colleagues are concerned is the election to the Convention. Nevertheless, he is fairly sure that they will probably keep their eleven seats and also thinks that Gerry Fitt will hold his seat in West Belfast. He thought it quite possible that the UUUC would have an absolute majority in the Convention but he was quite emphatic that it would not be their intention to wreck it. In fact their main objective will be to not let it be said at the end of the day that the Convention failed because of them. He would hope to see the elections as soon as possible but fears that they will probably not take place until next February at the earliest. He sees this as a bad thing but appeared resigned to it. He said that he would be prepared to share power with the SDLP after a fashion, but that it would have to be in the context that they only represented 25% of the electorate and their voice in power-sharing should be proportionate to that. I was not able to get him to elaborate further on this point. An essential concomitant of the SDLP's policy will have to be to stop the practice of running to Dublin and London every time there is a ripple on the waters in Northern Ireland. (I should mention that Harry Murray made exactly the same point to me.) Laird said that this perpetual travelling circus of the SDLP was greatly resented in Unionist party circles and was quite intolerable. He said that his party, when the going got rough, had nowhere to run to as London obviously was no solace to them at present and they had had to learn to stand on their own feet. The SDLP should do the same. He said quite clearly that any Council of Ireland was anathema as was any formal expression of the Irish dimension. Nevertheless, it was quite clear to him that co-operation would be essential between whatever new administration emerged in the North, and the South. This could be done at Ministerial level by the individual Ministers as the necessity for it became apparent but talk of a formal Ministerial Council or a Parliamentary Assembly were just not on.

I asked, if in the context of a Labour victory in the British election, he thought Merlyn Rees would continue as Secretary of State.

He obviously would like to see this and considered Rees had done a fair job. I mentioned the rumours that Roy Hattersley might be appointed and he thought that would be disastrous [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He also described Hattersley as the darling of RTE. He is opposed to the ending of internment and does not believe that it will wean people away from supporting the Provos. but will only put another 600 Provos. in the field. He sees the role of the South at present as keeping its mouth shut about Northern Ireland though he obviously did not resent the idea of my coming to talk to him.

One interesting point he mentioned in passing was that the UDA had been involved in the recent murder of the woman whose body was found off the M.1 at the end of July. This had horrified a lot of Protestants and the support for the UDA as a result had dropped to an all time low. This is interesting in the light of a radio report this morning that the UDA have put their forces on alert ostensibly because they fear Rees' policing proposals may lead to an upsurge in violence. In the light of what Laird said, the UDA action might perhaps be an attempt to recover ground in the hardline Protestant community by resorting to violence again.

Our conversation was interrupted several times by phone calls and I had some brief discussions with Mr. Burton. He feels that this election is a do-or-die effort for the Liberal Party and people like himself, who are interested in politics will look elsewhere if the Liberals don't show a considerable increase at Westminster. He sees the balance of power in the next Westminster Parliament being held by the ten Scottish Nationalists, the possibly twelve Ulster Unionists and four to five Welsh Nationalists. In these circumstances the Liberals will campaign on a platform that as the only decent respectable British minority party that should be the controlling factor in the next Parliament and people should vote for them for that reason. The Liberals, if they do get support, will

obviously take votes from Tories rather than Labour and in the long term a Labour-Liberal alliance is more credible than a Tory-Liberal alliance. If this were to come about the Labour party would obviously have to drop its nationalisation plans. The Aldershot seat is at present Tory-held and the possibility of his being successful there will be related to what percentage of Tory voters will move to the Liberal side.

I also had a meeting with Mr. Erskine Holmes of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. He has just recently been appointed Northern Ireland Secretary of the European Movement and in fact a lot of our conversation revolved around this subject. I was able to give him a certain amount of useful information and suggest possible contacts for him in the Commission and he seemed very grateful for this and became very friendly. The result was that I did not get a great deal of information from him on the Northern Ireland situation but the contact was a useful one and will, I think, bear considerable fruit in the future.

He said quite frankly that the NILP are now openly courting the loyalist vote. He sees no value in the party such as NILP even trying to bridge the sectarian divide in Ulster at present. He also was convinced that there was no hope of the UWC going political or of a working class people's party emerging at the Convention. Certain individual UWC people may get elected to the Convention but it will be as representatives of different organisations, e.g.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] y, and would want to be their candidate if they were putting someone forward but Holmes was not entirely sure that [REDACTED] was one hundred percent secure and there are other individuals within the

organisation who have political ambitions too. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

He also told me a little about the internecine warfare between the UVF and the UDA. The rivalry between the two groups is liable to flare up at any time and a lot of the bombing in the loyalist pubs has been as a result of this. The UDA apparently constantly taunt the UVF that despite all their talk their capacity to be violent is not very striking. Both organisations are fairly well financed and operate largely through a network of pubs, the difference being that the UVF owns several of its own pubs whereas the UDA often just manage pubs, sometimes at the request of the brewing groups, who are afraid to put in their own managers. He mentioned that a Hastings pub on the Newtownards Road had been handed over to the UDA to manage and that it was now one of the most peaceful places in Belfast in which one could drink.

He is impressed by Tyrrie, the Chairman of the UDA, who has done a lot to make the organisation respectable and to take away its gangsterish image, particularly in relation to its own internal finances. He thinks the UDA are trying to get more respectable as they have found that Protestants, just like Catholics, are not prepared to vote for the men of violence. He said the problem was that the leaders of both organisations had a fairly bloody personal record. They all tended to be "nice guys" and the tragedy was that

in this type of organisation in Northern Ireland it was often the nice guys who had to do the killing.

The NILP have set up a group which has the improbable name of the Church Group for Political, Economic and Social Education in Northern Ireland. He himself, I gather, operates this organisation though he said that I should not be misled by the word "Church". He did not believe particularly in anything but the Church title was a handy front label. During August they organised in conjunction with some Scottish Quakers, an Educational Seminar in Scotland, which was attended by UVF people for the first week and UWC people the second week. The funds for his organisation come from the Rowntree Trust and one of the people he also mentioned as helping him was Pratap Chitnis, who is Secretary of the Joseph Rowntree Social Service Trust and was one of the participants at the Oxford Conference. One of the people who attended the ~~Swedish~~ Conference was a UDA man called [REDACTED] who has since been lifted for the murder of the woman whose body was dumped off the M.1. He was at some pains to stress that he co-operated with the UVF on his own terms and obviously saw his role as trying to give some sort of basic political awareness to a bunch of otherwise unsavoury thugs.

Holmes may be a useful contact because of his political awareness and his clearly very close relations with the UVF. We will obviously have to weigh very carefully what he says but he may eventually be able to give us a valuable political assessment of what the para-military organisations are about and what weight they carry within their own communities.

I also had a brief discussion with Mr. Gerry Quigley who confirmed to me that there is an almost grim sense of foreboding in the Catholic community at present. The feeling seems to be that the doomsday situation is much nearer than people thought. This may

to some extent be due to the fact that people are returning from holidays and that the full impact of the collapse of the Executive is only now setting in. I should stress that I found no such feeling on the Protestant side and in fact the general reaction there was that things are more normal now than they have been for some time and there is a hope that a fairly protracted breathing space has been gained. Quigley is very worried that he may be dragged into the Newry power dispute because of the schools situation there (he is Northern Ireland Secretary of the INTO) and he also told me that from information available to him there are not more than ten active Provos. in Newry but the hatred of the British Army is such that they have very strong support.

I also tried to contact Mr. James Allen of the Northern Ireland Office but he is away on leave until next week. His secretary wanted to put me through to his Deputy, Mr. Oakley, who obviously is a liaison man with the loyalist community. Both Harry Murray and Erskine Holmes mentioned Oakley's name to me. In addition I got the clear impression that Murray is in fairly regular contact with James Allen and that Erskine Holmes, through Oakley, sees Merlyn Rees quite frequently, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I also tried to contact the Rev. Brian Smeaton but he was away in Derry. I rang him on my return to Dublin and have arranged to see him next week.

John

John McColgan

4 September 1974