

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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SECRET

Oifig an Aire Gnóthaí Eachtracha

14 January 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR THE GOVERNMENT

Northern Ireland

1. The Minister for Foreign Affairs submits this Memorandum as an aid to discussion. The policy of the Government hitherto has been
 - (a) to seek to ensure that Britain exercises its responsibilities in Northern Ireland, protecting the minority against any loyalist assault, and not conceding a declaration of intent or withdrawal, and
 - (b) to encourage developments towards agreement on a devolved power-sharing government in Northern Ireland.

Political Situation in Northern Ireland

2. The Convention formally ended in November 1976. There is now no local forum for political activity and members of the former Convention have no status. Political activity is confined to the 12 Westminster M.Ps. - 10 loyalists, Fitt and Maguire - and to the very limited activity of the 26 district councils. District Council elections are scheduled for May 1977.

3. The future of the SDLP is more uncertain than it has ever been. The recent annual conference endorsed the partnership approach but the traditional policy and leadership is under serious threat. Eleven out of the 17 SDLP members of the former Convention have declared themselves in favour of British withdrawal and it is difficult to see how the party can avoid a split and a major decline in its influence within the next year. An analysis of the present SDLP position is contained in Appendix 1.

4. In the minority community generally, there are few signs of serious dissatisfaction with direct rule and the widespread support for the Peace Movement - always more evident in the minority than in the majority section of the community - in its initial months is a recent example of popular rejection of violence by the overwhelming majority of the minority. But the Provisional IRA campaign has not in

recent years relied on or taken much account of popular support. Its support and membership has been and remains statistically small but there are no signs that it is any weaker than it was, say in 1972, and there are many obvious signs that its grip on some minority areas, notably West Belfast which comprises almost 20% of the minority population in Northern Ireland, is tighter than it has ever been. There is an increasing sense of despair that, after seven years of political initiatives and developments, Northern Ireland is probably as far away from a settlement as ever and this has inevitably led to a significant element of disillusion with the democratic political process. The frustration which is leading many within the SDLP to press for the party to change its policy and call for a declaration of intent could lead others in the minority community to an increasing degree of tolerance of the Provisional IRA campaign. There are not many who seem prepared to put the primary responsibility for the deteriorating political situation on the IRA. They have always seen loyalist intransigence as the primary obstacle and point to recent evidence, particularly the wrecking of the Sunningdale Agreement by loyalists and the failure of the Convention because the loyalists were not prepared to accept the British terms for devolved government. They also point to the continuing difficulties at local government level where, even though minority councillors share power where they are in control, not only has there been no reciprocal response from loyalists where they have a majority but they have used that majority to continue to discriminate. In this situation, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is a potentially favourable climate in the minority community for a continuation of the Provisional IRA campaign.

5. An analysis of the political position on the majority side is contained in Appendix 2. In summary, the present indications are that there is no significant movement within the majority community in favour of power-sharing. Leaving aside the Paisleyites, the most vociferous opponents of direct rule on the majority side are those most opposed to power-sharing. The reasonable "unionist in the street" can come to terms relatively easily with direct rule. The main motivation which might lead this "silent" element to champion devolved government, namely the security crisis, does not obtain since because of its position on the security forces the SDLP is cast in the role of part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

6. Informal inter-party talks have continued over the last few months between the Unionist Party, the UPNI and the Alliance Party.

The latter now feel that there is some prospect for success in re-opened talks between the SDLP and the Unionist Party and a recent speech by Mr. Molyneaux, M.P., in the House of Commons, is seen generally as the most likely basis for talks. In the course of a speech on the devolution debate, Molyneaux said:

"The devolution which matters and has always mattered in Ulster is not legislative but administrative devolution. This is why we nearly always talk about devolved government for Ulster. It is the lack of control over the application and execution of the law which is intolerable to us and which places our citizens at a crying disadvantage compared with all the rest of the United Kingdom.

Once this is understood, the old difficulties about power-sharing and widespread acceptance present themselves in a different and more amenable light, for it is essentially legislative and not administrative devolution which raised the dilemma between the irreconcilable ultimate objectives in Ulster and rendered insistence upon majority rule as essential to one side as it was unacceptable to the other. This made devolution either a Loyalist talisman or a Republican backdoor, instead of being what it should have been - an essential guarantee of good government for the whole population.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was right to ask "Is Northern Ireland to be left behind? Are we going to fail and leave progress to our successors?" We, the present generation of Ulster's political representatives, have a duty to answer those questions. We shall discharge that duty. Ulster needs a regional government now. It needs a regional government in which - as in the present government of metropolitan regions in England - all political parties would automatically participate in proportion to their elected representation. We believe that what we ask is in line with the Government's own thinking, as set out in Part V of their consultative document on England.

If we are made to wait for the implementation of a formula designed to grant legislative powers, on conditions to which our electorate would never permit us to assent, we shall be denied the satisfaction of our basic rights and present needs indefinitely."

The British Prime Minister has privately encouraged the SDLP to have a close look at this proposal and Hume and Fitt see it as providing a suitable basis for inter-party talks, not least because they see it as representing the abandonment of the Convention Report by the senior elected Unionist M.P. at Westminster. The Alliance Party sees the proposal as a tentative effort by the Unionist Party to break away from their coalition partners, Paisley and Baird. Though some prominent members of the Unionist Party, including Harry West, initially reacted unfavourably to the proposal, the Rev. Martin Smyth has recently endorsed it and said that he believed it would be viewed sympathetically within the party. It is therefore likely that a round of inter-party talks will begin in the next few weeks but given the analysis of the present Northern

Ireland political situation as outlined above, it would be unwise to be too optimistic about the prospects of the talks leading to agreement.

The British Attitude

7. With the failure of the Convention, both the British Government and the Conservatives seemed to become unwilling to commit themselves clearly to a policy based on a devolved power-sharing government for Northern Ireland. Neave, in particular, seemed to modify or water-down in some way the commitment to power-sharing and taken with his efforts at the Conservative Conference to re-forge the traditional links with the Ulster Unionists, it seemed that the Conservatives might be contemplating a shift of policy. At a meeting in London on 14 October with Mrs. Thatcher and other senior Conservatives, the Minister for Foreign Affairs drew attention to this trend and to the danger that it would encourage the Unionists in their hope that there would be a change in the Conservative Party's position, and suggested that, if the British Government were to clarify their commitment to the principle of no devolution without power-sharing, it would be vitally important that the Conservative Party should immediately endorse this statement.

8. The drift away from power-sharing by the British Government was not so marked as in the case of the Opposition but none-the-less, when faced with a question on Government policy on Northern Ireland on 28 October, Mason's proposed reply was weak and it was only after considerable pressure from Dublin, including intervention by the Taoiseach with Mr. Callaghan, that this reference was expanded to include the sentence "This means a system which will command widespread support throughout the community and in which both the majority and the minority will participate". Mr. Neave welcomed this reply in general terms, saying that it was very much in line with what the Conservatives had previously said. However, in a letter sent to West after the Minister's meeting with the Conservative leader, Neave reaffirmed his party's stand in favour of power-sharing.

9. Our primary concern in approaching both the British Government and Opposition was to elicit statements which would help check the drift in the SDLP towards the declaration of intent policy. While the responses were generally satisfactory, they did not in fact have the desired impact on the SDLP. They did, however, have the effect of forcing the Unionist Party to reassess its position and in particular to consider the implications of remaining committed to a Convention Report which has now been rejected on a number of occasions by both British Government and Opposition.

10. Both the British Government and Opposition have been dismissive of the current independence debate. Mason described the debate as "unrealistic" in an interview in the Irish Press on 9 December, and said that the idea had not so far been "hardened up" by the political parties. Neave, in a speech at Cardiff on 20 November said that British withdrawal would be followed by civil war. Though there is much press speculation about British withdrawal, the current indications are that the present British intentions are to stay. Mason seems to see little hope in getting agreement between the Northern Ireland parties and he is avoiding taking any political initiative and concentrating his interest on security and economic affairs. (The implications of British withdrawal have been analysed in detail in previous memoranda. The main problems would arise in the areas of security and guarantees for future political and economic stability and would obviously not be confined to Northern Ireland. Any discussion of British withdrawal must recognise that our ability to influence developments, particularly in relation to the security situation in east Ulster, is limited.)

11. The debate in Britain, both inside and outside Parliament, on devolution for Scotland and Wales has generally, in the past, been kept separate from the problem of the future government of Northern Ireland, in spite of the obvious precedent which Stormont affords. In recent weeks, however, Northern Ireland is being brought in on the margins of the debate. Roy Mason referred to the strong tide flowing for devolution in the discussions over Scotland and Wales and said it would be a pity if Northern Ireland should lag behind. The question of devolution for Scotland and Wales poses problems for the UUUC Westminster M.Ps. because of the dichotomy between their demand for the implementation of the Convention Report on the one hand, and, on the other hand, their commitment to the union and their desire to improve their relations with the Conservative Party. The UUUC M.Ps. opposed the Government in the second reading debate on the Scotland and Wales Bill at Westminster. They have co-sponsored (with Mr. David Steel and others) a motion for the Committee Stage of the Bill which would extend the mandate of the Committee "to make provision for alteration to the structure and functions of Government in any or all parts of the United Kingdom". While for the UUUC the main element in the extension would be a possible increase in Northern Ireland representation at Westminster, the important point as far as the Liberals are concerned is to examine the question of restructuring the United Kingdom along federalist lines.

Northern Ireland Security Situation

12. Tables (Appendix 3) are attached giving (a) an analysis of deaths since the troubles started and (b) other statistics relating to the

troubles. The following points might be noted:

- of the 295 deaths in 1976, only 14 were members of the British Army. (By contrast, 103 soldiers were killed in 1972 out of a total of 467.) In addition, 23 members of the RUC and 15 of the UDR were killed. Of all the deaths in 1976, about 144 were caused by Republicans and 125 by loyalists. 135 of the civilians who died were Catholic and 108 Protestant;
- despite the intensification of security measures and the experience gained over seven years, the figures for finds of firearms - 637 in the first eleven months of 1976 - suggest that firearms continue to reach Northern Ireland in generous quantities. No official figures are available to indicate the source, but it is unofficially estimated by the NIO that over half of the weapons originate in the United States;
- 83% of a total of 1,281 lbs. of commercial explosives found in Northern Ireland in the period January-November 1976 are claimed by the British to have been manufactured in Enfield for use in the Republic. The corresponding figure for 1975 was 62%;
- in the first eleven months of 1976, there were 721 explosions and 431 malicious fires. Official compensation figures for the cost of this damage will not be available for about a year but in the year ending 30 March 1976 compensation of £46 million was paid for property damaged, mainly in the previous year when bombings and malicious fires were at a low rate. An unofficial NIO estimate is that property damage in 1976 will cost £75 million, just under £1½ million per week;
- of all the violent incidents (shootings, explosions, bombs neutralised, malicious fires, armed robberies) in Northern Ireland in the first eleven months of 1976, a maximum of 2.49% are alleged by the British to have any border element or connection with the Republic. On our reckoning, the figure is about 2%;
- as an indication of the numbers involved in the campaign of violence in Northern Ireland since 1971, almost 2,000 persons, 90% from the minority side, were interned or detained between August 1971 and the ending of internment in December 1975. There are currently about 1,200 special category prisoners in Northern Ireland jails of whom about 700 are republican and 500 loyalist. In 1976, about 700 members of the Provisional IRA have been charged before Northern Ireland courts with various offences - this compares with 320 in 1975. About 450 members of other para-military groups, a majority of them loyalists, have also been charged before the courts in 1976.

13. British security policy is based on two main elements, viz.
 (i) the development of the RUC as the primary instrument for the detention, arrest and charge of those who break the law, (ii) the Army

will remain as the essential buttress of this policy as long as it is needed. There are at present about 14,000 British soldiers in Northern Ireland. The current RUC strength is about 5,250 and there are 7,700 in the UDR, of whom about 1,600 are full-time. There are some signs of change in attitude on the part of the minority towards the RUC, a third of whom have been recruited since 1970, but it is estimated that the number of Catholics in the force is only about 5%. The minority attitude towards the UDR is still generally hostile, not only because about one-fifth of the regiment consists of ex-B-Specials but because it is suspected that a significant minority of the UDR in rural areas also have an allegiance to loyalist para-military organisations. At least 72 members of the UDR have been convicted of terrorist-type offences committed mainly since 1972.

Security Co-operation

14. The Minister for Justice will report orally on this. As far as inter-governmental aspects are concerned, there has in the past year been relatively little private or public recrimination from London on north-south co-operation and following his meeting with the Taoiseach in March 1976, the then British Prime Minister expressed "satisfaction at the excellent results that had been achieved". This tone has been generally maintained throughout the year at political and official level meetings and though there have been some recent public references, e.g. in the Queen's speech, to "looking to the further development of co-operation" and seeking co-operation between the two armies (Mason in an Irish Press interview), there is no outstanding new British suggestion for further co-operation in the security field.

Economic Matters

15. A summary analysis of the Northern Ireland economy is contained in Appendix 4.

16. As far as cross-border economic co-operation is concerned, studies are at present in progress, financed jointly by the EEC Regional Fund and the Irish and British Governments, of communications in the Derry-Donegal area and on certain aspects of fish conservation in the Irish Sea. Discussions are taking place with the British authorities on a possible study of cross-border co-operation in the Dundalk-Newry area. In addition requests from the local authorities involved, both

North and South of the border, for studies of the agricultural and tourist potential of the Erne and of the Foyle Catchment Areas are being examined. The SDLP has made elaborate proposals for the development of north-south economic co-operation and these are currently being examined but in general it would appear that the best prospect for increasing co-operation lies in

- (i) promoting specific cross-border projects either with the British authorities alone or jointly with the British authorities under EEC auspices;
- (ii) the initiation of contacts between Ministers and the British Ministers who head the Northern Ireland Departments; and
- (iii) the intensification of contacts that already exist at official level between Departments in Belfast and Dublin.

The forthcoming visit of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will provide an initial opportunity for a general review of north-south economic co-operation by Mr. Mason and relevant Ministers here. An analysis of the SDLP proposals has been recently circulated by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to the Ministers for Industry and Commerce, Agriculture, Transport and Power and Local Government.

The Future Political Situation

17. Events in Northern Ireland during the period ahead could develop along several different lines:

- (i) Firstly, there is the possibility - but it should not be rated as more than a possibility - that talks which seem likely to take place in the early part of this year could lead to agreement between the Ulster Unionists and the SDLP on a form of administrative devolution, (without legislative functions for the time being at least) along the lines suggested by Molyneaux. If agreement were reached along these lines it seems probable that the SDLP negotiators could secure acceptance for the agreement despite the division in the party on policy that emerged at the recent party conference;
- (ii) Secondly, and perhaps more probably, the talks could break down without agreement on power-sharing. This would be likely to be followed by an intensification of divisions in the SDLP, leading probably to a widening of the divisions within the party and to a large section moving towards support for a declaration of intent, or, less probably, negotiated independence. This would create obvious problems for the Government even if, as seems likely, the British Government ignored, for several years at least, the "declaration of intent" demand and maintained its commitment to direct rule;

- (iii) Thirdly, there is the possibility, (which, however, according to present information seems unlikely) that faced with a further political breakdown of this kind the British Government could modify its policy towards accepting the idea of a declaration of intent and of ultimate withdrawal. This, while unlikely in the next year or two, cannot be ignored as a possible eventual development;
- (iv) Fourthly, there is a possibility, although again it appears very unlikely, that the British Government would move towards total integration of Northern Ireland with the United Kingdom. Given the devolution proposals for Scotland and for Wales and the distaste of British politicians for closer involvement with Northern Ireland, it seems improbable that this would happen, although 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. Less unlikely, perhaps, could be some minor variant of integration, involving an increase of representation for Northern Ireland at Westminster and possibly the inclusion of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom legislative framework as distinct from the present situation where there is a separate legislative process for Northern Ireland.

18. At this stage it seems clear that

- (i) our policy should be decisively directed towards encouraging a successful outcome to any talks which may take place between the Official Unionists and the SDLP in the early part of the year, even though one must be sceptical of this prospect;
- (ii) consideration could also be given to further action to persuade the British Government to react to the SDLP in a manner likely to weaken the pressures towards a change in policy, e.g. by our asking the British to consider some form of reply to the SDLP challenge - "govern or go" - of last September;
- (iii) given the doubts about success in these talks, however, it is necessary to begin to give consideration to what the Government's attitude would be if these talks failed and if the disintegration of the SDLP proceeded apace, creating a situation where the majority of the former elected representatives were committed to a "declaration of intent" policy. Preliminary discussion on what the Government's attitude might be to this would seem desirable even if no firm conclusions can be reached at this stage.

19. In the meantime it would seem particularly important that the contact with the SDLP should include contact with the "dissident" leaders such as Seamus Mallon and Paddy Duffy with a view to trying to minimise the danger of movement by a large group in the party towards formal acceptance of a declaration of intent policy.

The SDLP Position

1. The future of the SDLP is more uncertain than it has ever been. The recent annual party conference formally endorsed the partnership approach but the traditional policy and leadership was seriously challenged under three headings:

- relations between the SDLP and the Government;
- British withdrawal;
- independence for Northern Ireland.

There were three motions dealing with relations with the Republic, two of them critical of the Government's unwillingness to exert influence on the British Government (i) to clarify its intentions on the North and (ii) to implement her stated policy of power-sharing in Northern Ireland and the third calling for the development of a pluralist society in the Republic to help lessen tensions between North and South and within the North. These were debated for about half an hour at the beginning of the conference when very few delegates had arrived and the main feature of the debate was strong attacks on the Government's Northern Ireland policy by Seamus Mallon and Frank Feely. Mallon accused the Government of building a Berlin wall of indifference between the North and South and said that this was having a devastating effect on the morale of the Northern Ireland community, particularly that of the minority. Implicit in everything he said was that the Government should identify itself clearly and exclusively with the minority as represented by the SDLP and he seemed to threaten that if this did not happen, the minority, including at least some of their elected representatives, would take their guidance from "other parties in the North who were making the running" (i.e. the Provos.). Dublin could not, he said, oppose the views of the Northern Ireland minority who wanted Britain to leave Ireland. Hume responded by explaining that the SDLP's relations with the Government were, of their nature, conducted in private and that this method had served the party well over the last five years. There were, of course, differences of opinion from time to time but the passing of resolutions at conference was not the way to resolve these differences. The two motions critical of the Government's approach in its contact with the British Government were composited and put to a vote. They were defeated by 26 to 24 but only after a recount. (On one reckoning, the first vote resulted in the motion being carried

by two votes. In the interim, additional delegates had been allowed enter the hall.) The significant element in the vote is that a clear majority of both the former Convention members and the party Executive voted in favour of the motion.

2. The main debate at the conference was on a composite motion which

"calls on the British Government to declare its intention of withdrawing to give the divided people of Northern Ireland the opportunity to negotiate a final political solution and a lasting peace in Northern Ireland."

It was a lively, comprehensive debate complete with procedural wrangles and, on both sides, a range of speeches which appealed to reason and to emotion. Immediately before the debate on the motion, Fitt had delivered his annual address to conference and for all practical purposes this was a defence of the British presence and a bitter attack on "the latent Rory O'Bradys" in the party whose objectives were identical to those of the Provos. Fitt made a thinly disguised threat that he would leave the party rather than lead it on the basis of a policy of British withdrawal. Paddy Duffy introduced the motion with a poorly delivered intervention listing the reasons why the British presence was the real problem in Ireland. Seamus Mallon made a well-presented, clear intervention backing Duffy, pledging his loyalty to the SDLP constitution and bitterly denying that he was a latent O'Brady. The British presence had failed to resolve the economic, security and political problems of Northern Ireland. At heart, everyone in Ireland wanted to see Britain out and there was no advantage to be gained by suppressing this desire and fudging the real political issue. Hume made a strong defence of traditional policy saying that he wanted to see Britain go but he also wanted to see a solution. He had no doubt that others shared his political frustration but frustration was no basis for a new policy. He said that the Northern Ireland problem was primarily one of the conflict between two sections of the community and that Britain alone was not the problem. He questioned the assumptions in the motion being debated and gave a grim warning addressed to the loyalists but written for the conference delegates: "if you want to continue being intransigent, then you are destroying politics, yourselves and Northern Ireland. It can only lead to confrontation in which no politician will have any influence". The motion was defeated by 153 votes to 111 with 12 abstentions but the platform party split

14 for withdrawal, 15 against and, most significantly, of the 16 ex-Convention members present, 10 voted in favour of British withdrawal. These were Mallon, Duffy, Devlin, Cooper, McGrady, O'Donoghue, Feely, Tom Daly, Joe Hendron and John Turnly. The seventeenth ex-Convention member, Vincent McCloskey, was not present and has virtually opted out of politics. But he too is known to favour British withdrawal. Fitt and Hume now find themselves leading a party, a majority of whose public representatives are not prepared to accept official party policy.

3. The third round in the contest between the leadership and the rest of the platform party came on a discussion of a motion (109)

"instructing the Executive to undertake an immediate study of negotiated independence and to involve all levels of party machinery in it".

The Cookstown branch (Paddy Duffy) had submitted a discussion paper on Negotiated Independence as a Way Forward and at one stage in the conference it appeared that a motion calling for the acceptance of this document as party policy might have a reasonable chance of being passed. The Duffy/Mallon group saw, however, that they were assured of victory on motion 109 and, as Mallon put it afterwards, they decided to go for a certain point rather than a possible goal. He felt it important from a psychological viewpoint to register at least one victory over the traditional leadership and from a practical viewpoint he wanted to have a definite mandate on which to keep up his campaign in the coming months in the privacy of the party's internal policy-making bodies. Thus it was that the debate on independence as an option was conducted on the basis of the harmless sounding motion to undertake a study of independence as a possible option. The main speakers in favour of the motion were Cooper and Mallon and despite strong speeches against it by Currie, Hugh Logue and Bríd Rogers (Lurgan) - Hume and Fitt had by now become fed up with the whole conference and were not even in the hall for most of the discussion or the vote on this item - it was carried by 147 to 51. Many of the 147 votes came, however, from people who are opposed to independence as an option but who do feel that the present political situation calls for a thorough reassessment of the party's traditional policy and approach. The Duffy/Mallon group will not, however, wait for the reassessment and they now regard themselves as having a mandate for an unspecified course of action other than that based on the traditional SDLP line.

4. It should be noted that SDLP policy is threatened, not by those seeking more a moderate policy but by those whose objectives are the same as the IRA. The influence of the Provisional IRA on SDLP thinking is now a major one. Not only do many SDLP representatives see their local positions of leadership threatened but there may be one or two who are in contact with and directly influenced by the Provisional IRA. In other cases, the influence is indirect but none-the-less effective. There is every likelihood that the party will be held together for the next few months and that it will participate in another informal series of talks with other parties to try to reach agreement on devolved government for Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. If these talks do not bring agreement it is difficult to see how the party can avoid a split and a major decline in its influence within the next year.

5. In the minority community generally, there are few signs of serious dissatisfaction with direct rule and the widespread support for the Peace Movement - always more evident in the minority than in the majority section of the community - in its initial months is a recent example of popular rejection of violence by the overwhelming majority of the minority. But the Provisional IRA campaign has not in recent years relied on or taken much account of popular support. Its support and membership has been and remains statistically small but there are no signs that it is any weaker than it was, say in 1972, and there are many obvious signs that its grip on some minority areas, notably West Belfast which comprises almost 20% of the minority population in Northern Ireland, is tighter than it has ever been. There is an increasing sense of despair that, after seven years of political initiatives and developments, Northern Ireland is probably as far away from a settlement as ever and this has inevitably led to a significant element of disillusion with the democratic political process. The frustration which is leading many within the SDLP to press for the party to change its policy and call for a declaration of intent is leading others in the minority community to an increasing degree of tolerance of the Provisional IRA campaign. There are not many who seem prepared to put the primary responsibility for the deteriorating political situation on the IRA. They have always seen loyalist intransigence as the primary obstacle and point to recent evidence, particularly the wrecking of the Sunningdale Agreement by loyalists and the failure of the Convention because the loyalists were not prepared to accept the British terms for devolved government. They

also point to the continuing difficulties at local government level where, even though minority councillors share power where they are in control, not only has there been no reciprocal response from loyalists where they have a majority but they have used that majority to continue to discriminate. In this situation, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that there is a favourable climate in the minority community for a continuation of the Provisional IRA campaign.

Department of Foreign Affairs

January 1977

The Loyalist Position

1. The majority community in Northern Ireland shows little sign of recovering its political equilibrium, disrupted by the suspension of Stormont and the events which followed. Tactical or personal rivalries among their politicians should not distract attention from the widespread agreement on the part of the majority to reject the concept of partnership or power-sharing and to demand the restoration of a Stormont-type system. The Convention elections, (May 1975) which remain the most recent electoral test of opinion in Northern Ireland, resulted in the anti-partnership parties obtaining almost 55% of all first preference votes and just over 60% of seats in the Convention. There is little evidence that opinion has significantly changed since May 1975 and the increasing hostility towards the SDLP, particularly since the party's recent conference, suggests that the anti-power-sharing mood is stronger than ever.

2. The official UUUC response to the rejection of the Convention Report has been to reaffirm their commitment to the Report as the democratic expression of the will of the majority in Northern Ireland coupled until recently with apparently genuine hopes, particularly in the Ulster Unionist Party, that it might yet be accepted by a British Government, for example through a change of heart on the part of the Conservatives when in power. These hopes, fostered by a certain ambiguity on the part of Mr. Airey Neave, have now been largely dispelled, in particular by Mr. Neave's letter to Mr. Harry West (November 1976) which reaffirms in clear terms the commitment of the Conservative Party to partnership as a precondition to devolved government. The growing awareness that the implementation of the Convention Report is unattainable has highlighted the division in the UUUC between those for whom a devolved or majority government is the primary objective and those prepared to accommodate themselves to direct rule, either as a first choice or because it eliminates the prospect of minority involvement in government. Ambitious political figures such as Mr. John Taylor or Mr. Ernest Baird, who now find themselves without a political forum are prominent in the former category. Their policy at its extreme would consist in fomenting opposition to direct rule, if necessary in co-operation with the para-militaries and by means of extra-constitutional action. The

UUUC members at Westminster, less frustrated politically and dominated by the Rev. Ian Paisley and Mr. Enoch Powell, both considered to be partisans of integration, are representative of the second school, content in the last analysis to work the present system.

3. The Official Unionist leadership, confused by these contradictory impulses, has been unable to go beyond the ritual declarations of support for the Convention Report as the basis for their policy. Some individuals - notably Capt. Austin Ardill and Mr. James Molyneaux - convinced that power-sharing has no chance of being accepted in present circumstances, have suggested that the lack of local participation in direct rule might be mitigated by the formation of committees with chairmen drawn from both communities to advise the Northern Ireland Office Ministers or by the formation of a regional administration without legislative powers. Neither proposal has so far been developed in detail or attracted much public support but there is a possibility that one or other will form the basis for a new round of inter-party talks early this year. For the present at any rate, support for the Convention Report remains the only agreed focus of policy and the chief safeguard, although a tenuous one, against the formal disintegration of the UUUC coalition, the strain on which will be increased by the rivalries attendant on the selection of candidates for the next Westminster election.

4. The principal political forces on the majority side show no signs therefore of modifying their resolutely anti-power-sharing stance. This is due in part to the role played by the Rev. Paisley who has been able to exploit the say which the UUUC structures gives to him in the affairs of the other coalition parties to isolate Mr. Craig and to sabotage by premature disclosure the exploratory talks between the Official Unionists and the SDLP in June 1976. The present situation, congenial to his integrationist thinking, also affords him the greatest influence which he has exercised in the majority community to date and he is likely to work for its continuation as far as electoral considerations will allow. The Official Unionists console themselves that because of its implicit religious and class limitations Paisleyism is unlikely to threaten their electoral support and meanwhile carefully avoid anything which might involve them in a contest of loyalism with the Rev. Paisley. In the absence of an initiative from the mainstream Unionist grouping

the smaller parties on the flanks (Vanguard, UPNI, NILP, Alliance) already suffering a loss of public interest are unlikely to be significant instruments of change.

5. . . Although under Paisley's tutelage loyalist politicians have interpreted their mandates rigidly rather than otherwise there is little indication that their reading of popular sentiment has been wrong, or that any popular loyalist force for change, either positive or negative, is now poised for impact. Some of the loyalist para-militaries, whose support is said to be at a low ebb, have taken a lead in sponsoring a document in favour of negotiated independence. Although the idea has attracted support from different quarters it has done so for various and sometimes contradictory reasons, including loyalist ambitions for a free hand on security as well as liberal aspirations to peace. The support of the para-militaries (which in any case excludes the most powerful group, the UDA) is no guarantee of popular acceptance as is shown by the election records of para-military candidates and in view of the dramatic financial cutback it would imply it is likely that in the absence of an impetus from Britain - for which there is at present no sign - the independence idea will not attract serious support in the majority community. Threats by the para-militaries to use extra-constitutional action to bring about a restored majority rule Stormont are also unlikely to be very real at present, though a quick change in attitude cannot be ruled out, e.g. in a situation where the security situation deteriorated rapidly and the British authorities showed themselves unable or unwilling to bring it under control.

6. Support for the Peace People, although forthcoming from the majority community, is nevertheless fairly qualified. The Peace Movement is seen primarily as a laudable attempt by the minority community to root out the IRA. Its objectives are not considered to have the same relevance to the majority, whose para-militaries are seen in a defensive role. The effect of the Peace Movement on the majority is limited also by the failure to involve credible representatives of the majority in the inner leadership and by misgivings about the political intentions of some of those prominently identified with it.

FATAL CASUALTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

1969 - 31st December 1976

	1969	1970	1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	TOTAL
<u>Total Number of Civilians Killed</u>	12	23	114	323	170	167	211	245	1,265
<u>*of which Sectarian Assassinations</u>									
<u>Roman Catholic victims</u>	-	-	-	90	51	78	92	98	409
<u>Protestant victims</u>	-	-	-	39	32	40	57	91	259
<u>Total Number of assassination victims</u>	-	-	-	129	83	118	149	189	668
<u>Security Forces casualties:</u>									
<u>Prison Officers</u>								1**	1
<u>Army</u>	-	-	43	103	58	29	14	13	260
<u>UDR</u>	-	-	5	24	9	5	7	16	66
<u>RUC</u>	1	2	11	17	13	16	11	24	95
<u>Total Number of Security Forces casualties</u>	1	2	59	144	80	50	32	54	422
TOTAL CASUALTIES	13	25	173	467	250	217	243	299	1,687

* No records for 1969-1971.

** Figure from October 1976.