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NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICAL REVIEW: 23 NOVEMBER - 6 DECEMBER 1981

A: INTRODUCTION

Ian Paisley's "Day of Action" took place on 23 November as planned, and concluded with an evening rally at Newtownards where some 4,000 members of the "Third Force" paraded.

B: NORTHERN IRELAND

(i) Third Force

2. Ian Paisley's "Day of Action" took place on 23 November, and it was well supported among industrial workers, although public services were generally maintained. Some 5,000 people were reported to have attended Paisley's rally outside Belfast City Hall at lunchtime, as opposed to 1,500 at the UUP Service of Remembrance an hour earlier. At the earlier event Jim Molyneaux (UUP leader) read a Proclamation to the Queen begging her to instruct her Ministers to direct "unremitting effort to secure the frontier of your Kingdom and the defeat of subversive forces within the community", and to abandon any dialogue with Dublin. After Paisley's demonstration at the City Hall he led a crowd of 1,000 plus on a motorcade to the entrance of the Stormont Estate, where they were addressed by Paisley and Peter Robinson (DUP deputy leader) and then dispersed.

3. The evening rally at Newtownards concluded the Day of Action. Paisley, with his DUP colleagues Peter Robinson and John McQuade, marched at the head of his "Third Force", which he claimed to be 20,000 strong but which was estimated at various strengths down to 4,000.

4. The following day Paisley claimed that the Day of Action had been "more than an unqualified success" and that he had written to the Prime Minister to make it clear that "Ulster had spoken". He claimed that the establishment of the Third Force was part of an ongoing strategy, the next stage of which "will have to be done

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in such a way that the Government will really be shaking. There is not going to be any notice of it. It will be extreme action." The letter also offered Mrs Thatcher the services of the Third Force: "I wish to offer you a vast body of disciplined and dedicated volunteers who could be enlisted in an official third force to complement the efforts of the RUC and UDR." Mr Paisley concluded by saying that "a gradual process of all-Ireland integration" was afoot and that "the people of Ulster are going to resist this to the death".

5. The Secretary of State made clear in a statement on 24 November that the Government would not allow private armies to take over the work of the Police and Army, and that co-operation with the Republic of Ireland, particularly on security, would continue. Paisley replied angrily: "When Prior refuses to provide security, as he has, then we are morally and legally justified in taking whatever steps are necessary to defend ourselves, and this we will now proceed to do." However, he had said the previous day that he would not accept any personal responsibility if anyone died at the hand of the Third Force: neither did he accept that the Force was motivated by him. He later enlarged on this, saying that the decisions of the "Third Force" were made by its own Commanders, and he himself was not a member of the Force. On 26 November the RUC Chief Constable, John Hermon, in strongly-worded TV and Radio statements reiterated what the Secretary of State had previously said: "No Republican or Loyalist paramilitary organisation or any private force acting outside the law will be permitted to usurp the authority of the Police and the Army."

6. Later that day in a meeting with the Secretary of State John Hume (SDLP leader) expressed his anxiety about the Third Force and the possible use of legal weapons for illegal purposes. He added that in his opinion Paisley had exploited the anger about events over the last number of weeks for party political purposes.

7. Speaking at a Loyalist rally in Glasgow on 28 November Paisley warned that if IRA terrorists "come to murder Protestants they had better watch out, because we are there to murder or kill them before they murder the Protestants". He also enlarged on

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his "making Ulster ungovernable" statement. What he really meant was (he said) that Ministers of the Crown would have to stay in Stormont because they would not be welcome anywhere in Northern Ireland.

8. On 3 December at Northern Ireland Question Time Gerry Fitt (Independent) asked the Secretary of State if he was aware that it had been said that members of the Third Force were members of the UDR and RUC. Mr Prior replied that such allegations were being investigated by the GOC and the Chief Constable.

(ii) Political

9. Harold McCusker MP(UUP) said on 24 November that he believed from recent talks with the Secretary of State that the Government was stepping up efforts to give Northern Ireland more control over its own affairs, and added that Unionists "have always recognised that any future administration must protect the minority rights". He stressed that a future Stormont government would need to have "considerable power" over security. However, on 1 December Eldon Griffiths MP (Parliamentary Adviser to the Police Federation in England and Wales) told the Secretary of State that the NI Federation would resist any suggestion that the RUC should be handed over to the control of Ulster politicians in any new Stormont assembly. The seven main Loyalist groups met in Londonderry on 28 November and agreed to develop a joint strategy for the return of devolved government to Northern Ireland.

10. On 2 December in an interview with "The Guardian" the Secretary of State confirmed that he would be putting more emphasis on the economy and had invited political leaders for talks to Stormont to discuss economic development. He also reiterated the point that what he perceived was a "political vacuum" and what he would like to see was a partnership which would involve "the political parties of Northern Ireland together with the British Government as an interim step".

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11. Earlier, on 25 November, several Unionist politicians had indicated that they would attend the economic talks provided they did not involve an Irish dimension. Harold McCusker MP said the proposed forum must not be linked to the Anglo-Irish Council, nor should it be seen as a substitute for a devolved assembly in Northern Ireland, while Peter Robinson MP warned against attempting to use the talks as a means of sucking Unionists into a power-sharing arrangement. The Government confirmed that there would be no question of the economic talks involving the proposed Anglo-Irish Council.

12. On 3 December the Secretary of State rejected a call from the backbench MP, Nicholas Winterton (Cons) for the re-introduction of selective internment for suspected or known IRA terrorists in view of the recent upsurge in violence, saying "I believe that the best way to deal with suspected terrorists is to bring them before the courts". He added that he hoped talks being held between the British and Irish Attorneys-General would result in more action against criminals taking refuge in the Republic.

13. Enoch Powell MP (UUP) on 5 December alleged a conspiracy between Britain, USA and the Republic of Ireland to bring about Irish unity. The Anglo-Irish summit talks were (he said) merely part of a plan to abolish the Northern state and have the unified country made part of NATO to block "the gravest of all gaps in the American strategy for Europe and the Atlantic".

C: INTERNATIONAL

14. Following the criticisms of the Taoiseach by Charles Haughey (FF leader), on 29 November Sile de Valera (FF) repeated her own strongly-worded criticisms of his "weak-kneed, foolish and bungling attempts" to change the Constitution, and added that a lasting solution could only be found in the context of a United Ireland. She suggested that the political process he had embarked upon in relation to Northern Ireland could encourage young people to join the IRA.

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15. Dr FitzGerald, speaking on a UTV programme on 3 December, launched a strong attack against PIRA which he said was driving a wedge between the Unionists and the people of the South, and increasing the fears of Unionists and the hostility of people in Britain towards Unionist politicians. He also reiterated his previous idea of a joint-courts system to deal with terrorist-type offences North and South of the border which, in his opinion, would prove more effective than extradition.

16. The previous week, on 26 November, while in London for a meeting of the EEC heads of government, he had a brief discussion about Northern Ireland with the Prime Minister; and also had a brief meeting with Michael Foot MP.

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