

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2006/133/677
Creation Date(s):	March 1976
Extent and medium:	8 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.

Assessment of the present Loyalist position

1. The UUUC in the official report to Westminster following the second round of the Convention have once again made it quite clear that the only form of devolved government for Northern Ireland that they are prepared to accept is one based on the old Stormont system of majority rule. They made it clear in the recent inter-party talks that participation in government by any party as of right or putting persons into government "by contrived means and contrary to the declared wishes of the electorate as expressed through the normal democratic process" was totally unacceptable to them. They also stated that participation in cabinet by the UUUC with the SDLP or any other Republican party was out. This basically sums up the attitude of the UUUC and reflects the fact that their whole behaviour during the second round of the Convention was an exercise in tactics rather than a serious attempt at compromise.

2. They have adopted the doctrinaire position that they are not opposed to partnership in government as such and suggest that those who believe in partnership should get together and form themselves into a coalition, as the UUUC have done, and let the people decide between two groupings at an election. In the event of a coalition of the SDLP, NILP, Alliance, UPNI and Vanguard winning enough seats at such an election to form a government, they state they are prepared to act as a loyal opposition. The UUUC have also made it clear that in the event of the Convention Report not being accepted by the British and the system of direct rule from Westminster being continued, they would not be prepared to serve on an elected or appointed advisory body to the Northern Ireland Secretary of State. They have indicated that as a protest against the rejection of the Convention Report they may boycott the local district councils. They have also rejected the proposal for a referendum on a voluntary power-sharing coalition. They will probably

campaign strongly in the next few months for an election (which they would certainly win handsomely) but failing that will accept reluctantly continued direct rule from Westminster as being the best way of "preserving the Union".

3.. The single most important development on the Unionist side in the past six months has been the gradual and by now almost total dominance by Ian Paisley of the Coalition. Following the expulsion of Craig from the UUUC in October, Paisley has considerably solidified his position and has emerged clearly as the single authoritative spokesman on the Unionist side. He has in fact been most skilful in undermining support for William Craig's voluntary coalition idea and in particular in winning over organisations such as the UDA and the Ulster Special Constabulary Association, both of which initially supported Craig. It is quite significant that both Glen Barr and George Greene, two of Craig's strongest supporters in the Convention, have now both either been expelled or withdrawn from these organisations of which they were the main spokesmen five or six months ago. Paisley has also effectively split the Ulster Workers' Council and the vast majority of it would now support him rather than Craig, this again being a reversal of the position when Craig first floated his voluntary coalition idea in September. Paisley has been extremely skilful in his handling of the situation and has been careful at all times to maintain an impeccably constitutional position. At a recent stormy meeting of the UUUC when Baird suggested that the Protestant people should take strong action as a protest against continued direct rule by the British, Paisley was careful to adopt the attitude that any protest on the Protestant side should be exclusively political and constitutional. He immediately issued a challenge to Baird to spell out the consequences of the type of protest which he had in mind. Paisley has now achieved what many people have always regarded as his primary ambition which is firstly to

become the dominant figure on the Unionist side and secondly to have Northern Ireland integrated as closely as possible with the United Kingdom. He would see continued direct rule from Westminster as effectively achieving this and leaving him as the sole prominent representative of the Unionist community.

4. The position of the Official Unionist Party within the UUUC has now become rather pathetic. They have been totally overshadowed by Paisley's performance and Harry West as leader has proved to be both ineffectual and uninspiring. The recent Marplan poll showed that his personal support amongst Unionist voters was as low as 16%. While a number of Official Unionists find themselves uncomfortable as second-class Paisleyites, the evidence is that while the liberals within the party, such as John Taylor, John Laird and Martin Smyth, might be prepared to move towards a voluntary coalition agreement with the SDLP following substantial support for the idea in a referendum, the hard core of the party remains solidly attached to Paisley's line and people like William Douglas, Sheila Conn, Jean Coulter, Michael Armstrong, Edmund and William Thompson and Colonel Brush of South Down are all firm supporters of the Paisley line, not out of circumstances but out of conviction. The belief therefore that a significant number of the Official Unionist representatives might welcome a referendum to enable them to discharge their election manifestos and obtain a new mandate is probably not well-founded. Those who are most inclined to move like Laird, Taylor and Smyth have probably decided to give up politics because they see no immediate prospects that they are likely to have any support either inside the party or amongst the grass-roots for a movement towards compromise with the SDLP.

5. The support for Craig and his voluntary coalition idea seems to be waning rather than increasing. At present the only Convention members

supporting him publicly are Glen Barr, Trimble and George Greene. It now seems unlikely that anyone else would be prepared to move towards him. Craig's own assessment that at least seven or eight Official Unionists and almost all of the Baird nine would return to him in the event of a successful referendum on the voluntary power-sharing coalition seems to be over-optimistic. Unless there was a result in the referendum which showed support of about 75% for the voluntary coalition idea it is unlikely that any significant number of the Official Unionist Party would move to Craig's side. Developments over the past few weeks have probably totally extinguished the possibility of any substantial support building up for Craig. The final loss of support by the UDA in particular has left him almost totally isolated. In a telephone conversation last week he expressed himself as being extremely pessimistic.

6. Ernest Baird on the other hand now seems in a particularly strong position and has been stomping Northern Ireland in recent weeks addressing poorly-attended loyalist rallies and out-doing Paisley in the tone and content of his extremist speeches. He has in recent meetings with Deputy Harte tried to present an image of reasonableness and friendship towards the South but all the other evidence available is that his real intentions are in fact much more sinister than this. He is known to be very close to the UVF in particular and to have desires to get closer to them. In addition, he has recently called for strong action if the British reject the revised Convention Report. In the view of one observer, he is a man who sees war coming and is prepared to do more than his share of the fighting if and when the time comes. He is a complete bigot and will never accept that Catholics in Northern Ireland should be allowed near any administration. The war which Baird sees coming is one between the British and the loyalists and not one between the two communities in Northern Ireland. In the

view of both William Craig and John Laird, former close colleagues of his, he is a man of extremely volatile character and is both unreliable and untrustworthy. He is extremely ambitious and his present attempts to oust Paisley and take over the leadership of the Unionist community, while carefully planned, are unlikely to succeed. If they did there should be no doubt whatsoever that he would adopt an even more intransigent and hardline approach than Paisley himself.

7. Any assessment of the present thinking on the Protestant side would be incomplete without a look at the Protestant para-militaries. The best information available is that there is no particularly sophisticated plan amongst the Protestant para-militaries at present in the event of continued direct rule. They have always tended to be a defensive rather than a reactive force and while the recent demonstrations about the ending of special category status have been particularly disturbing there is no substantial evidence that they wish to wage an all-out campaign either against the Catholic community or against the British Government. All the evidence is that Andy Tyrrie, the present leader of the UDA, is not anxious for a full-scale war and he will do what he can to control his people on the ground. However, those that know him also accept that his actual control over the UDA as an organisation is somewhat limited. Tyrrie, who was very close to Glen Barr, was originally a supporter of the William Craig initiative on voluntary coalition but has openly come out against it in the last few days and has split both personally and on policy matters with Barr. Feeling between them is said to be very bitter at present. The most significant aspect of the UDA move away from Craig is that it reflects Tyrrie's judgement that the grass-roots support for Craig has disappeared. With the departure of Barr and the emergence again of Sammy Smyth as the spokesman for the UDA, any moderate or political influence inside the UDA which may have been operating for the last 18 months may well now

disappear. It is not therefore to be excluded that the UDA may become more active within the next few months and may in particular direct their attention towards the South of Ireland. While the possibility of a UDI attempt by the Protestant para-militaries in the immediate future seems remote, journalists close to them have indicated that they are being particularly secretive about their activities at present, a position which also obtained in the eight weeks prior to the UWC strike in 1974.

8. The other main Protestant para-military group, the UVF, which was behaving in a particularly vicious and savage manner in the late Summer and early Autumn, suffered a change of leadership in November and now seems to have settled down to work in closer co-operation with the other Protestant para-military organisations. It has once again been absorbed into the Ulster Army Council, the parent body of all para-military organisations, and has in fact generally indicated that it would support a referendum on the voluntary coalition idea. It is also particularly active in the recent attempts to resist the British attempt to end special category status and was, through the UFF, involved in the kidnapping of the brother of the Governor of Crumlin Road Jail at the weekend. While the patching up of relations with the UDA may mean that a more moderate group is now in charge of the organisation there is no evidence to suggest that it will stop its campaign of sectarian assassinations which may be expected to increase further with the ending of the Convention.

9. Another effect of the Craig proposals was the splitting of the UWC as a grouping. The split seems gradually to be healing and the UWC, now that the UDA has withdrawn support from Craig, will largely be supporting Paisley. It seems unlikely that they would find an issue or be in a position to immediately organise another industrial stoppage

similar to the strike of May 1974 but it is not to be excluded in the post-Convention situation that now that the rifts in the organisation have been patched up and a tentative unity has begun to re-emerge, that pressure of events may unite them again in such a cause.

10. The general attitude among the Protestant population to the South of Ireland has changed significantly in the last 18 months. There is a considerable degree of acknowledgement that the South is trying to deal fairly and squarely with the IRA and the handling of the Herrema kidnap case and the Stagg funeral by the Government has won a grudging if guarded respect from even the most hard-line Unionist. In addition there was a reasonably wide response to the Taoiseach's recent speech in Dalkey. Two particular issues, however, continue to arise in any contacts with the Unionist community. The first is that there is complete puzzlement that we have been unable to do anything about Provos using the border as an escape route particularly from the South Armagh area. The second issue which is most constantly mentioned by all Unionist spokesmen is in relation to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. There is considerable appreciation of what the South is doing in the field of security and a feeling that the IRA are being pursued more vigorously south of the border than they are north of it. Nevertheless, there remains a genuine sense of grievance amongst most Protestants about Articles 2 and 3. A change of the Constitution in this area is probably the one subject that is raised most frequently by Unionist contacts. The Taoiseach's and other Ministers' statements about unity by consent are all accepted as valid but while Articles 2 and 3 remain there will always be a residue of distrust about Dublin's ultimate intentions. This is particularly so when the possibility of a change of government down here within the present party structure remains. Most Unionists would accept the sincerity of the National Coalition Government but the possibility of a return to power of a

Fianna Fáil Government with these two Articles still in force makes them feel quite vulnerable and that feeling will remain until the Articles in their present form are changed or removed.
