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Present State of Unionist Opinion

1. The Department of Foreign Affairs has had contacts with an extensive range of people in the majority community in Northern Ireland in the past months: politicians in the OUP and DUP as well as churchmen, businessmen, trade unionists and journalists. It is clear that many middle to upper class people are fearful of what the future holds and would wish to see greater flexibility and compromise being displayed by their politicians. This "movement" is reflected also, although to a lesser extent, among working-class people. The following factors can be identified in producing this situation (a) continuing economic decline with many Protestants losing their jobs; (b) the rise of Sinn Fein which even one year ago was not seen by many Unionists to be as threatening as it is now; (c) the Forum Report and the reasonable posture which has been adopted by the Irish Government in pursuing it and (d) a growing distrust of the British Government and other British political parties. There is a feeling that the British Government cannot allow the situation to drift indefinitely and unless Unionists adopt a more reasonable position, the British will try and impose a radical solution. This desire for a more flexible approach would not be shared by the majority of working class Protestants who are greatly influenced by Paisley's leadership and the policies of the DUP.

2. Position of the Unionist Parties

The Official Unionist Party (OUP)

There have been signs of change in the OUP attitude in recent months. A discussion document entitled "The Way Forward" was published on 26 April 1984 in advance of the Forum Report. The tone of the document was unprecedentedly conciliatory. It recognised in one degree or another most of the elements defined by the Forum as comprising the Realities of the situation in Northern Ireland. It did not, however, address the security problem one way or another. New proposals contained in the discussion paper related to a Bill of Rights and support for Irish culture and identity. The document also

spelt out for the first time the OUP's view on administrative devolution. The Assembly would in effect become a regional local authority for all of Northern Ireland dealing with all the "non-contentious" aspects of government. It would operate on a majority rule basis taking into account the views and advice of committees of the Assembly dealing with different aspects of the Assembly's work. The committees and the chairmanships would be apportioned in relation to party strength in the Assembly. The document also left considerable room for negotiation. The signatories attached to the discussion paper represented a good cross-section of party opinion (W Martin Smyth, Jack Allen, Roy Beggs, William Bleakes, Jeremy Burchill, Dorothy Dunlop, Robert McCartney and Frank Millar). The document was adopted as party policy at a meeting of the OUP executive on 29 June. In private contact with officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs senior members of the OUP have stressed that this is a genuine attempt to create room for manoeuvre for the SDLP and to try to get both communities working together while setting the central constitutional issue to one side for the present. While it is clear that the actual proposals do not amount to a great deal and would be inadequate, as presently envisaged, for the SDLP to sell to their supporters, it is encouraging that the OUP in its conciliatory tone and in its analysis of the situation has made what for them is a substantial move forward.

3. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)

The DUP has maintained a somewhat more hostile stance as outlined in a document published in early May called "the Unionist Case - the Forum Report Answered". In a section called "the Way Ahead" the DUP calls for the maintenance of the Union, tougher security measures leading to "the military defeat" of the IRA and the restoration of majority rule devolved government "with the rights of the minority fully respected". On the role of the minority the DUP speaks of full representation within a devolved legislature and in protection "through enshrined statutory provision". The DUP reject any "institutionalised relationship or constitutional

arrangement with the Irish Republic and call instead for 'a removal of Articles 2 and 3 and a normalisation of relations between North and South'. The DUP approach has been successful with its primarily working class support in pandering to their fears particularly in times of crisis. It is interesting however that in recent times Paisley has adopted a lower and less aggressive profile and continues to support the Assembly which the OUP remain lukewarm about. DUP sources have indicated to the Department of Foreign Affairs that privately Paisley has mellowed and that he is conscious of the alienation of the minority and the need to provide a role for the SDLP within a devolved government framework. DUP thinking on this has not as yet gone beyond the possibility of a share for the minority in the chairmanship of committees of the Assembly which the DUP see as a form of power-sharing.

4. Apart from the Euro-election result which does not reflect normal voting patterns in N.I., it is interesting that the DUP has been losing support to the somewhat more moderate OUP. The percentage voting figures are as follows:

	E.P. 1979	L.G. 1981	Assembly 1982	General Election 1983	E.P. 1984
OUP	21.9	26.5	29.7	34	21.5
DUP	29.8	26.6	23.0	20	33.6

It is possible that the pressure on Unionist opinion as outlined at paragraph one above has made them move towards a slightly more moderate position (as exemplified by the OUP) and that this process can be encouraged and developed. A lot more "thinking" Protestants are conscious that the situation cannot and will not (on the part of the British) be allowed to continue to drift. It is clear that the British Government, if it wishes, is in a position to produce a major change of attitude on the part of Unionists towards a political settlement which would accommodate the Nationalist community.

5. On the question of loyalist para-militaries it is difficult to obtain precise information but it is generally accepted that the UDA is no longer the force it once was and that membership has dropped considerably. The UVF as evidenced by recent rioting on the Shankhill is still active and there is no doubt that in a situation of major political change both organisations would become revitalised although perhaps not achieving the levels of support reached in the mid-seventies.

Department of Foreign Affairs
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