



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/46/173

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Accession Conditions: Open

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

POLITICAL POSITIONS
OF THE
ULSTER DEFENCE ASSOCIATION
AND THE
ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE

1. GENERAL

Despite many attempts to do so, the UDA and the UVF have not been successful in building a political party or a network of community groups to solidify the base of support for paramilitary action. Both parties seem to have come to the conclusion that paramilitary organisations cannot provide an alternative to mainstream unionist parties.

2. THE U. D. A.

The UDA (a legal organisation) was established in 1971 as a co-ordinating body for the various vigilante groups, or "defence associations", founded to protect loyalist areas of Belfast and its environs. It assumed a largely working class identity and refused to admit to membership M.P.s or clergymen. Its paramilitary wing, the Ulster Freedom Fighters (which is illegal and has been responsible for 101 deaths in Northern Ireland since 1972), is a group which the UDA has always said is autonomous, although it "understands" the reasons for its actions.

Membership of the UDA peaked in the early 'seventies at 40,000 men, but in recent times has never exceeded a few thousand. There have been frequent and regular calls for its proscription since its foundation.

Its political involvement began with its participation in the Ulster Workers Council, which orchestrated the 14 day strike which brought Northern Ireland to a standstill and forced the British Government to abandon the power sharing administration and Council of Ireland established by the Sunningdale Agreement. In Spring of 1977 it attempted to repeat the 1974 success of the UWC by forming the United Unionist Action Council (with politicians such as Ian Paisley) and called a strike in May of that year to protest at British security policy and direct rule. However, the strike only received half hearted support and was a relative failure compared to the 1974 episode.

Following this, the UDA established the New Ulster Political Research Group in 1978, which, in 1979, advocated negotiated independence for Northern Ireland. It published a report, "Beyond the Religious Divide", which was largely ignored.

In the protest actions against the Agreement the UDA voiced its opposition but seemed content that mainstream

Unionist political leaders took the lead. In particular it ruled out any repetition of the 1974 stoppage (no doubt mindful of the 1977 experience) but favoured civil disobedience, and its members were active in protests against the Agreement and in the March 1986 "Day of Action".

In 1981 the Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party was launched to replace the NUPRG, with John McMichael becoming its first chairman. In 1987 McMichael published "Common Sense", the document which the UDA maintains still outlines its political position. In this he calls for an assembly and executive, elected by proportional representation, with Northern Ireland being governed by an all-party coalition. There would also be a Bill of Rights and a written Constitution, which could only be amended by referendum. The minimum requirement for the establishment of this system of government was a setting aside, at least temporarily, of the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The UDA has been characterised in recent times by the taint of racketeering and the ensuing murders of several members of the inner council. Shortly after the publication of "Common Sense", John McMichael was murdered by the IRA in December 1987. There were allegations at the time that he had been set up by fellow inner council member, Jim Craig, whose involvement in racketeering McMichael had been investigating. Three months later supreme commander, Andy Tyrrie, was ousted from the leadership and replaced by the inner council. In November 1988 the UFF assassinated Jim Craig, claiming that he had been a "traitor to Ulster". The new leadership is younger and seen as more militant and less corrupt.

In a recent interview with Chris Thornton, published in the Irish News, the inner council laid out its objectives and policies, which are based on the refusal to be used and abused by Unionist politicians, which it claims the UDA has been in the past. The inner council repeats its commitment to the ideas set out in "Common Sense", and states that blocking the involvement of the Irish Government in the government of Northern Ireland is its main motivation. It lays the responsibility for a political settlement with the constitutional parties in the North, claiming that it has no right to interfere.

3. The U. V. F.

The UVF, which takes its name from the force created by Edward Carson in 1912 to fight Irish Home Rule, first came to light in 1966 when it murdered two Catholic men in Belfast, whereupon it was proscribed by P. M. Terence O' Neill. The organisation is characterised by its random and often brutal murders of Catholics (although it has claimed in the past to only target those involved in

republican paramilitary organisations). It is organised upon purely military lines and has been responsible for 86 murders since 1972.

Although membership has never approached the figures membership of the UDA has reached, the top strata of that membership was considerably depleted during the period from the mid 1970's to the mid 1980's, due primarily to internal feuding and supergrass trials.

The political activity of the organisation has been extremely limited. During the period April 1974 and October 1975 the proscription of the organisation was briefly lifted and it founded its own political wing, the Volunteer Political Party, which fielded one candidate in the 1974 Westminster elections, in which it did very poorly indeed. Its policy was support of the link with Britain on the grounds that a United Ireland or a unilateral declaration of independence would lead to increased unemployment and lower social welfare payments.

Its most recent political (quasi-political) act was its membership of the Combined Loyalist Military Command, which in April 1991 announced a cease-fire for the duration of the Brooke Talks, which lasted until the collapse of those talks (almost ten weeks later). Lifting the ceasefire the organisation announced that "we have shown that we have no vested interest in the continuation of violence." (It is interesting to note that the ceasefire was organised by Peter Robinson, M. P., to avert blame being placed on the Unionists in the event of the talks collapsing : a continual accusation of Terence O'Neill's was that Ian Paisley was a supporter, if not a member, of the UVF.)

In recent newspaper interviews, leaders of the UVF have stated that they will lay down their arms only when, or if, the Republicans do so.

Declan Smyth
Anglo-Irish Section
30 June, 1992.