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Reaction of Northern Ireland politicians to the banning
of the UDA

Dr Paisley

Well I was quite surprised because the attitude he had taken was that he did not think it was wise to do this and then suddenly he makes this decision and I would have thought that it's of course his decision, it's an executive decision, he must have certain facts before him and he must base his decision on those facts and those facts of course are unknown to the general public and myself. But I had thought that the fact that the former Chief Constable had described Sinn Fein as the murder executive of the IRA would have given him the opportunity at this time of proscribing Sinn Fein.

Interviewer

So you see this as a one sided decision.

Dr Paisley

I do. I do indeed, definitely, and I have information that the Southern Government are very keen to get Sinn Fein into talks with the British Government and in fact I have also very reliable information that Sinn Fein has suggested that the former Prime Minister Edward Heath would be a suitable man to chair such talks. Is Her Majesty's Government keeping Sinn Fein in the position where they can negotiate with them because they are not a proscribed organisation.

Interviewer

Well whatever the position of Sinn Fein, do you welcome the decision to ban the UDA?

Dr Paisley

Well I can't make a decision on that, Barry, simply because I haven't got the facts before me. There was a time when there was a whole series of murders taking place and these were

taking place at the hands of so-called and wrongly called Protestant paramilitaries and yet at that time the Secretary of State did not proscribe the organisation. Now whether the UDA was responsible in any way for those I cannot say, only he can say that. I don't think at any time the UDA ever claimed any of these particular murders. I think it was under other names that they were claimed.

Interviewer

With me now in the studio is the Ulster Unionist Security Spokesman Ken Maginnis and Brian Feeney of the SDLP. You have been calling for a ban on the UDA for a very long time and you satisfied now Brian Feeney?

Brian Feeney

Yes I have to welcome the decision, its long overdue and it will certainly be welcomed in the Nationalist community which perceives itself to be under threat, particularly in the Belfast area, from the UDA who have carried out hundreds of murders in the last 20 years.

Interviewer

Will they be under less now, do you believe?

Mr Feeney

Well I think the point about banning them, there are several points, one of them is that it is no longer possible to perceive that Loyalist violence is somehow less reprehensible than Republican violence. The UDA was the most numerous and largest terrorist organisation in Europe and to have them remaining legal was a scandal especially when they were carrying out sectarian murders on quite a savage scale in the course of the last 12 months and I think thats the important point.

Interviewer

Ken Maginnis the Rev Ian Paisley in a statement described this as a very one-sided and slanted in favour of one side of the community only and he said that at the same time Sinn Fein should have been banned. Do you share that view?

Ken Maginnis

Well can I say first of all that Ulster Unionists have no reservations whatsoever about the proscription of any organisation which is involved in sectarian killings as the UDA very clearly has been. Yes, I am surprised that Sinn Fein, which itself is involved and I am not talking about the IRA because I see no difference and I can prove that in terms of, if you look at Martin McCaughey in my own District Council who was deeply involved in killings.

Interviewer

Well let's not go into that area because he is not here to defend himself.

Mr Maginnis

Well he's not.

Interviewer

Your broad reaction though to the decision today.

Mr Maginnis

Yes he's not here to defend himself quite simply because he was killed himself when he was out trying to kill other people. But this is the very point I'm making that it's wrong to select one organisation. There should be an across the board proscription of organisations connected with violence. Quite honestly we would have preferred to see a very very very selective form of internment which would have allowed the

security forces immediately to take out the command and control structure of organisations like the UDA, like the IRA. That would have saved lives. I'm not terribly sure that, certainly not in the short term will we see any great benefit from this particular gesture and I come to the conclusion that perhaps it is just a gesture, not one that makes you unhappy but one that I think will not actually save a great number of lives.

Interviewer

Do you, as Ian Paisley does, see the hand of Dublin in this?

Mr Maginnis

Well I don't think it matters to a large extent whose hand is in what if you're talking about trying to get to grips with sectarian killers on both sides of the community. What I feel is that we haven't seen evidence of getting to grips with sectarian killers. We've seen it confined to a gesture, no objection to what has happened so far but I am afraid its not enough.

Interviewer

Is it a gesture Brian Feeney and should the Secretary of State have broadened the gesture to proscribe Sinn Fein?

Mr Feeney

It's more than a gesture. First of all it will make it impossible or much more difficult for the UDA to present itself as the acceptable face of loyalism if you like. In the greater Belfast area the UDA control large areas of working class Protestant estates where they are able to recruit, collect money, corrupt young people into the organisation. All that will be stopped because its a criminal offence to do that. So its more than a gesture. It means that its easier to get at the people who are organising the rackets, who are

dominating ordinary working class Protestant areas and making the lives of people in those areas a misery.

Interviewer

And what about the issue of Sinn Fein? Should they have proscribed Sinn Fein?

Mr Feeney

I go along with what the Secretary of State has said on this issue and that is that Sinn Fein have a considerable electoral support with large numbers of Councillors elected throughout the North of Ireland.

Interviewer

But the Chief Constable of the RUC is on record as describing Sinn Feinn as the murder executive of the IRA.

Mr Feeney

Its extremely difficult to make a personal link between members of Sinn Fein and the IRA. The fact is if they are engaged in terrorist activity they have been and are arrested and prosecuted. They are a political party which has a considerable following and in terms of world propaganda, if you were to ban a political party which gets more than 10% of the vote it makes it extremely difficult for the British Government to explain why its banning a political party that gets more than 10% of the vote.

Ken Maginnis

Well really its up to SDLP to make sure that Sinn Fein don't, in Nationalist areas, get more than 10% of the vote. Actually listening to Brian, it would seem that he's concerned mainly with the threat the UDA present in Protestant communities to young people and he gives that as a reason why they should be banned. They are collecting funds there, they are corrupting

young people but Sinn Fein are doing exactly the same job for the IRA therefore in Catholic areas they are recruiting young people, they are collecting funds for the IRA and so I think we should have had more even handedness. Nobody is complaining about effective action. Let me make that very clear. Nobody is crying on behalf of the UDA let me say but it would be much more meaningful if I could go back to my constituents this evening and say the Government has taken a courageous step which will take some of the killers at least, some of the command and control structure off the street. Rather I believe we'll find that some young lad who goes out and shouts 'up the UDA' or paints 'up the UDA' on a gable wall is hauled into Courts. I hope the Courts are sensible if such things occur, I hope the police are sensible if such things occur.

Interviewer

A very brief final word Brian Feeney. You wanted to rebut I think what Ken Maginnis was saying.

Brian Feeney

Yes, obviously my first reason for saying the UDA should be banned is that they are a large terrorist organisation who have killed hundreds of people in the last twenty years and terrorised the Catholic community. That's why they should be banned but a secondary element is the corrupt control they have in working class areas.

Ken Maginnis

So have Sinn Fein.

Interviewer

We must leave it at that point, thank you both very much indeed.

The Alliance Party said it welcomed the Secretary of State's announcement. Councillor Seamus Close gave his reaction to the ban to our reporter.

Mr Close

Well it's something the Alliance Party has been calling for over a number of years. I am naturally very very pleased that the Secretary of State has now taken this action. The situation was clearly unacceptable where you had those of a paramilitary and murderous intent who were walking our streets and I'm very very pleased to see that they will now be made amenable to our Courts.

Interviewer

As you say, you've been calling for the ban for many years. What reasons were you given in the past for the ban not being implemented sooner?

Mr Close

Well rather than harp back to past I would rather look to the future and look to a situation of where such organisations as the UDA are clearly illegal and will no longer be able to walk the streets.

Interviewer

Why do you think it happened at this particular point?

Mr Close

I think that in any society there reaches a stage where the force of the law and those who are in charge of the direction of law decide that it is right that various measures should be implemented. I, as I say, through the Alliance Party, we have been calling for this over a protracted period of time, my only comment on that would be, its better late than never. I

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wish it had happened some time back when perhaps lives could have been saved.

Interviewer

Do you think that there could be any particular reason, any particular incident that has led to it happening now for example, the bookmaker shooting earlier in the year?

Seamus Close

Again I would stress that over the years there have been a number of incidents which have led many people to call for the proscription of the UDA. The latest atrocities are but those in a long catalogue of crimes carried out by this organisation.

Interviewer

The leader of the Ulster Democratic Party is Derry City Councillor Ken Kerr. He has said in the past that some members of his party are also members of the UDA. A short time ago Paul McCauley asked Councillor Kerr what he felt today's announcement would mean for members of the UDA on the ground.

Councillor Kerr

This is a question I think that everybody has been asking me this morning. The first question they are asking is why now? Why ban the UDA now? In recent weeks there has been no significant upsurge in violence or anything like that so I mean people want to know why has the Secretary of State banned the UDA now because I mean like its not going to do nothing, I mean they are not going to go away. I mean you can't just wish between 8,000 and 9,500 away like that. The other question is what does this mean. Are they going to start lifting people? Are they going to start arresting people for the simple fact they think you might be in an illegal organisation. There are a whole lot of question I think that

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people want answered and I mean like why announce in advance as well. I mean like apparently its supposed to be from midnight tonight but I mean why announce it now. Why didn't they wait till midnight tonight and announce it and do whatever they were going to do.

Interviewer

The Secretary of State says he is satisfied there are direct links between the UDA and the UFF. Do you accept that?

Councillor Kerr

Well nobody in political terms really knows. Everybody is guessing. Nobody can really point and say that there is a definite connection there. There it is. There we can point to it. So I mean like, I think this is another attempt by the Secretary of State to placate nationalist opinion. The Dr Brian Feeneys of this world who have shouting for years, this is just another sweetener for them. Maybe its designed to keep everybody in the talks happy as well.