

SG (CAPO) (79) 7

STEERING GROUP ON THE CIVIL ACTIVITIES OF PARAMILITARY ORGANISATIONS

GAEILIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

Following a suggestion by the Army it has been agreed that the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) should be discussed at the next meeting of SG (CAPO). A background paper on the GAA is attached.

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GAEILIC ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION (GAA)

The purpose of this paper is to review the position of the GAA in relation to the activities of the paramilitary organisations.

History

2. The GAA was founded in 1884 to preserve the national identity through the promotion and development of Gaelic games and pastimes and in co-operation with the Gaelic League founded in 1893 the fostering of the Irish culture and language. There are now about 3000 affiliated clubs and about half a million members in Ireland with associated overseas associations in those countries with active Irish communities.

Finance

3. (i) Formerly individual clubs were self financing relying largely on voluntary contributions for the provision of club facilities. However, for a number of years now, the Club Development Scheme has been operating whereby voluntary contributions made by members are lodged in a central fund from which money is lent to clubs to improve facilities. Recently a new £1 m scheme was launched to help clubs purchase and develop their grounds.

(ii) In addition to these "self-help" schemes GAA clubs have benefited to a considerable extent from grants paid by the Northern Ireland Department of Education. Capital grants are available towards developing facilities for voluntary sports clubs with a rateable value of less than £2000. The normal rate of grant is 50% for clubs with open membership, and 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % for clubs which restrict their membership. Because of the controversial rule 15 which excludes members of the Crown Forces from membership of the Association, clubs affiliated to the GAA are grant aided at the 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % rate.

(iii) The total amount of capital grant aid paid by DENI during the period from June 1962 (when the first grant payment was made) to 31 March 79 was £218,760, most of this having been paid out in latter years, for example the amount paid in the last financial year was £93,000.

(iv) In addition to these amounts the Sports Council for Northern Ireland has paid out £21,000 in equipment grant aid to the GAA since 1974.

Political Affiliations

4. (i) The GAA has in the past claimed to be a non-political, non-sectarian organisation representing a cross-section of nationally minded people. However, the organisation's official guide makes frequent references to the GAA's commitment to a free, united and Gaelic Ireland.

(ii) In 1974 at the GAA's National Congress in Dundalk there was a clear manifestation of the GAA's anti-British stance when motions were adopted condemning British occupation of GAA grounds and the British Forces' treatment of Irish people.

(iii) Again in March 79 at the Annual Congress in Dublin, a resolution was adopted which modified the rule which describes the organisation as non-political. This rule now describes the Association as "non-party political". The Congress also adopted a motion calling for the Association to "unequivocally support the struggle for national liberation and the right to self determination of the Irish people in the 32 counties without interference from foreign powers".

(iv) The Londonderry GAA, in May 78, spoke strongly in favour of concessions on special category and has contributed to the Republican Prisoners' welfare fund and in Aug 78 as a gesture of solidarity with the H Block protestors cancelled all fixtures to enable its members to participate in the Coalisland - Dungannon protest march.

(v) In March 79 the then President of the GAA, Mr Con Murphy, was quoted in the press as condemning the indecent and inhuman treatment of prisoners in the H Blocks and adding that this was a cause for concern to the GAA.

(vi) In recent months the GAA have been particularly vocal at local and national level in protesting about security force occupation of part of the Rangers Club ground at Crossmaglen. The subject was raised by the Republic's Foreign Minister, Mr O'Kennedy, when he recently met the Secretary of State and attempts have been made to make the issue a national one with a well orchestrated campaign involving GAA clubs throughout Ireland, members of the Dail Eireann and the House of Commons.

Finds on GAA property

5. (i) On 12 March an IED was found and neutralised in the changing rooms of Carrickmore GAA, Co Tyrone. The device consisted of 3 milk churns each containing 100 lbs of HME. It is believed that the GAA hut was being used as a transit point in a PIRA supply route.
- (ii) On 14 April a UDR patrol found 29 live rounds and 3 spent rounds at the entrance to GAA field at Cladymore, Markethill, Co Armagh.

Conclusions

6. (i) The GAA is avowedly a 32 County Gaelic organisation with intensely strong Republican links and aspirations for a united Ireland, but it is a respectable national organisation with wide representations at all levels of society. The organisation boasts that over 90% of the Dail Eireann are members or ex-members; the late Cardinal Conway was one of its patrons and the Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, is a former County GAA player.
- (ii) Ministers are aware that GAA membership rules discriminate against members of the Security Forces and that elements in the Association are unco-operative to the point of being anti-security forces. Ministers, nevertheless, concluded that on balance it would be a mistake to impose a complete embargo on the payment of Government grants to the Association, working instead to apply pressure, eg through periodic contacts through DENI and the Republic's Department of Education, to have the controversial rule 15 revoked.
- (iii) It is almost inevitable that in an Association with such a wide Republican membership there will be those who are sympathetic, openly in some cases, to the terrorists' cause, and even some who may themselves be active terrorists. However, while the find of the IED at Carrickmore GAA almost certainly points to involvement of individual members, from that particular club, there is no evidence to suggest a general involvement at any level by the GAA in terrorism or other paramilitary activity.