

SECRET



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THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE
IN NORTHERN IRELAND

In basic terms the security problem in Northern Ireland is simple. It springs from the antagonism of two communities with long memories and relatively short tempers. Their differences, originally religious and cultural, largely coincide with political divisions and, with the passage of time since the formal constitution of the Northern Ireland state, have been aggravated by social and economic grievances. Thus, the Roman Catholic and Nationalist minority almost instinctively attributes its problems to what it believes to be the inherent and deliberate bad faith of the Protestant and Unionist majority, while the latter, conscious of the minority's Southern orientation, with almost equal instinct believes that the demand for the remedying of grievances is a preliminary to the dissolution of the State itself. In this atmosphere attempts to improve relations, however genuine and well-founded, only too often are greeted with suspicion by both groups. Typical of this reaction is the growth of the Paisleyite Movement on the Protestant side.

2. Threats of violence come from three main groups, namely the I.R.A. and its political wing Sinn Fein, the Paisleyites, and more recently the Civil Rights Movement. There is also a small Communist Party and several Trotskyist and Anarchist groups, none of which constitute a serious threat in itself but nevertheless exercise some influence on the three main protagonists.

THE IRISH REPUBLICAN ARMY

3. Since the campaign of 1956/61 there has been no direct military activity on a wide scale by the I.R.A., and those incidents which have occurred have been against opportunity targets
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SECRET

SECRET



- 2 -

designed to maintain "Army" morale. It seemed likely that the lull might be broken in 1966 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising, and units of the I.R.A. were poised for action on both sides of the border. The last-minute and unexpected closing of the border seems to have nipped this project in the bud. At the present time the I.R.A. Army Council is believed to have approved in principle action against military targets at Omagh and possibly also against a U.S. establishment at Londonderry. I.R.A. commandos are believed to be in position for these operations, have carried out a reconnaissance and are waiting for a suitable opportunity.

THE CHANGING CHARACTER OF I.R.A.

4. While there has been no significant change in the military organisation of the I.R.A. there is nevertheless evidence of a change in its strategy in recent years. It continues to be a reasonably well-disciplined guerilla army in which the basic unit is a commando of five men equipped with small arms and backed by a staff responsible through the Chief of Staff to the Army Council. The present Chief of Staff is Cathal GOULDING and there is automatic provision for his succession should he become incapacitated. GOULDING's military plan, drawn up in 1966, provides for action in five stages, namely:

- (i) an anti-agent campaign aimed at the destruction of the R.U.C. intelligence network and the general demoralization of the security authorities;
- (ii) operations against opportunity targets;
- (iii) escalation, that is an increase in the scale and frequency of stages (i) and (ii);
- (iv) agricultural and industrial sabotage;

/(v)

SECRET

SECRET



- 3 -

- (v) the kidnapping of prominent members of the British Government.

5. There is in addition a political plan drawn up by Dr. Roy JOHNSTON who became the I.R.A.'s Director of Education in about 1965. JOHNSTON, who is an executive of Aer Lingus, was a foundation member of the Irish Workers' League (later Irish Workers' Party) which is the equivalent of the Communist Party in Eire. He was also a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (C.P.G.B.) when in London between 1960 and 1963 and it is hard to say how far his current sympathies have remained communist since he joined I.R.A. The more traditional members of I.R.A. certainly regard him as a Communist and believe that he has gathered about him a small group of leaders of like mind, including GOULDING, on the Army Council. His Communist training is apparent in his plans for changing the political/military strategy of the I.R.A., notably in his insistence that I.R.A. needs a wider economic and social base.

6. Under JOHNSTON's influence the I.R.A. has therefore embarked on a policy of political education and, with the exception of isolated attacks designed to maintain Army morale, co-ordinated military activity has been deferred. In accordance with this strategy, I.R.A. has taken over much of the political spadework hitherto entrusted to Sinn Fein and has endeavoured to build up a groundwork of Cumanns (or branches) under cover of tenants' associations, youth, co-operative or factory groups. This is very much on orthodox Communist lines and the pattern includes the Republican clubs now banned in Northern Ireland.

7. The change of emphasis has raised problems both in the I.R.A. itself and also for the security authorities in Northern Ireland. Within the organisation the move has not passed unchallenged, more particularly by the traditionalists who prefer the gun to the political tract. One effect has been to accelerate the growth of splinter movements which not only represent a reaction against the

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SECRET

SECRET



- 4 -

leftward trend of the Army under JOHNSTON but also no doubt reflect the declining morale which almost inevitably sets in when a guerilla army ceases to be active. The largest of the splinter groups is that in Cork, which is constantly critical of the Communist influence on the Army Council.

8. To the extent to which I.R.A. becomes absorbed in the complexities of social and economic problems in Ireland as a whole the prospect that it may lose its enthusiasm for simple but violent military solutions grows and in this sense the JOHNSTON influence is not wholly unwelcome. Nevertheless there is at present no reliable evidence that I.R.A. has abandoned or contemplates abandoning its conspiratorial and military character and in the medium term the JOHNSTON policy is likely to present the Northern Ireland security authorities with some new and awkward problems. It is to be expected that I.R.A. will try to penetrate organisations not obviously political in character and will endeavour to exploit movements which seem to command mass support. It is involved in the Civil Rights campaign; when I.R.A. members with records of violence are seen to be participating in large and ostensibly peaceful demonstrations the degree of violence to be anticipated and the precise balance of force to be applied in return is not easily calculated.

THE PAISLEYITE MOVEMENT

9. The moving spirit of this Movement is the Reverend Ian PAISLEY who first came to prominence in 1951 when he formed the breakaway Free Presbyterian Church. He is bitterly anti-Roman Catholic, wholly opposed to the current trend towards Christian unity and since 1965 has made considerable political capital out of the Northern Ireland Government's attempts to improve its relations with Eire. The Movement comprises several organisations under a variety of titles of which potentially the most dangerous was the Ulster Volunteer Force. This was organised in six divisions throughout Northern Ireland and by

/1966

SECRET



- 5 -

1966 it is known to have succeeded in making recruits among the armed members of the Ulster Special Constabulary. The Force was banned in the same year but the latest available information (February 1968) indicates that it still exists in secret and retains the sympathy of some members of the Special Constabulary.

10. The overt support which the Paisleyite Movement can mobilize tends to be in direct proportion to the religious and political temperature. Almost certainly the Movement has more support than respectable Protestant citizens are prepared to admit and, although PAISLEY and his lieutenants are often condemned, his meetings are well attended and widely reported. Those attending fall into three categories, namely: Protestants who are prepared to follow him in demonstrations but stop short of any quasi-military activity; a small number who would go all the way; and finally a rabble who go to meetings and demonstrations in the hope of a fight and the prospect of a little looting. The principal danger represented by PAISLEY and his followers, like the I.R.A., is that each, by creating incidents, could easily provoke a chain reaction by the other. In this context potentially the most explosive area of activity is that of the Civil Rights Movement.

THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

11. The organising body of the Civil Rights Movement is the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association which was formed in Belfast in January 1967. The Association claimed that Nationalists, Republicans, the Northern Ireland Labour Party, National Democrats and the Northern Ireland Communist Party were represented on its organising committee to which a solitary Unionist was subsequently co-opted. The declared aims were freedom of speech, assembly and of the Press, electoral reform, and an end to discrimination in employment and housing. Unionists, including the Paisleyites, were said to be welcome if they accepted these aims.

/12

SECRET

SECRET



- 6 -

12. The original Chairman was Noel HARRIS, a member of the Northern Ireland Communist Party until 1964, and, after his replacement, Betty SINCLAIR, a prominent and long-standing Communist in Northern Ireland. She is a close contact of the C.P.G.B. and in consequence the Association received considerable publicity for its demonstrations in Communist papers both in London and Northern Ireland. There is also a sprinkling of Trotskyists in the Association who also have contacts with like-minded groups in London, but unlike the pattern of recent demonstrations in London, it is doubtful whether Trotskyists played more than a marginal role in the disorder at Londonderry in October and subsequent demonstrations. A few London Anarchists are also known to have participated.

13. The extent to which the I.R.A. is involved in this Movement is more difficult to assess. There are indications, derived exclusively from Northern Ireland sources, that individual members of the I.R.A. were present at the initial disturbances in Londonderry. The aims and composition of the Association certainly lay it open to I.R.A. penetration and a member of the Wolfe Tone Society was present at the Association's inaugural meeting. This society, which is based in Dublin, is the brainchild of JOHNSTON and GOULDING and its branches are intended to take the place in Northern Ireland of the banned Republican clubs.

14. There is a noticeable similarity between the demonstrations of the Civil Rights Movement and those of the anti-Vietnam campaign. Like the latter, the Civil Rights Movement, in pursuit of aims unobjectionable in themselves but emotionally charged, has attracted considerable support from young people, some of whom are not averse to violence. Experience of the anti-Vietnam demonstrations in the rest of the U.K. has already shown that violence is most likely to be avoided when the Police are present in adequate number and understand the nature of their opponents, not least their intention to provoke.

/CONCLUSION ...

SECRET

SECRET



- 7 -

CONCLUSION

15. Until recently the main, but not the only, threat of violence in Northern Ireland has been from commando-type raids over the border by the I.R.A. There may be a few such raids in the next few months but there is no reason to expect a series of large scale raids. The support the Reverend Ian PAISLEY is attracting and the development of the Civil Rights Movement have, however, introduced a new and more serious risk of violence - more serious, that is, than the clashes which have occurred traditionally between Orangemen and Roman Catholics. The I.R.A. may well see in the Civil Rights Movement the broader base necessary for the achievement of its political aims. To the extent to which it succeeds, and is seen to succeed, the threat of violent reaction from the Paisleyite movement will grow.

SECURITY SERVICE

9th December 1968

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