



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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15/8/86

TO HQ FROM BELFAST

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CODED MESSAGE	
IMMEDIATE URGENT	
CONFIDENTIAL	
DATE	15/8/86
INITIALS	QR 1330

REACTION
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FOR ASST. SEC. O TUATHAIL FROM P. COLLINS

1. YOU WILL PROBABLY HAVE SEEN THE EXTENSIVE MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE AFTERMATH OF YESTERDAYS' COURT APPEARANCE BY DUP DEPUTY LEADER, PETER ROBINSON, IN DUNDALK. IT MAY BE USEFUL, HOWEVER, IF I ATTEMPT TO SET OUT THE SALIENT POINTS IN RELATION TO PERCEPTIONS HERE.

2. THERE IS A GENERAL FEELING IN THE MEDIA THAT ROBINSON AND COMPANY HAVE WON A SIGNIFICANT PROPAGANDA VICTORY. IN TERMS OF PERCEPTION, THE TELEVISION DID SHOW CLEARLY THAT THE GARDA ATTACKED THE 'NATIONALIST' GROUP AND TRIED TO KEEP BOTH GROUPS APART. NEVERTHELESS, THIS WAS MORE THAN OFF-SET BY THE FOLLOWING EPISODES:

(I) PETROL BOMBS. THESE LOOKED EXTREMELY DANGEROUS ON T.V. AND PAISLEY AND ROBINSON HAVE BEEN ABLE TO MAKE A GOOD DEAL OF RUNNING WITH THIS AFFECT. SEVERAL REPORTS STRESSED THAT THE PETROL BOMBS WERE THROWN FROM A DERELICT BUILDING, SOMETHING WHICH, FAIRLY OR UNFAIRLY, IS SEEN HERE AS REFLECTING ON THE ADEQUACY OF THE GENERAL SECURITY COVER. REPORTS THIS MORNING THAT CHARGES ARE PENDING IN RELATION TO THIS EPISODE MAY GO SOME WAY TOWARDS COUNTERACTING THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS.

(II) THE DAMAGE TO PAISLEY'S AND ROBINSON'S CAR.

WHILE IT IS FAIR TO SAY THAT DAMAGE FROM STONE THROWING ETC. TO THE CARS OF LOYALIST SUPPORTERS LOOKS BAD, IT IS PROBABLY VAGUELY UNDERSTOOD. THE DAMAGE (WHICH, ADMITTEDLY, WAS SLIGHT) TO THE DUP LEADERS' CAR IS OF A DIFFERENT ORDER AND IS SEEN AS SOMETHING THAT

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SHOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED. THE DRIVER OF THE CAR WAS SLIGHTLY INJURED AND PAISLEY HAS BEEN ABLE TO GET MILEAGE OUT OF THAT.

3. IN OVERALL TERMS, THE ESSENCE OF THE REACTION IN N.I. IS PROBABLY WELL ILLUSTRATED BY THE HEADLINES IN TODAY'S ENGLISH PAPERS (AS DISTINCT FROM THE RABID AND EXAGGERATED REACTION CONVEYED BY THE N.I. PAPERS), E.G., "SECTARIAN STRIFE ERUPTS ON THE STREETS OF DUNDALK - LOYALISTS MET WITH PETROL BOMBS" (THE TIMES): "LOYALISTS FACE FIRE BOMBS AS M.P. IS REMANDED" (DAILY TELEGRAPH): "ROBINSON'S LOYALISTS STONED OUT OF DUNDALK" (THE GUARDIAN). THE "FINANCIAL TIMES" LED WITH A MORE FAVOURABLE HEADING ("IRISH POLICE PROTECT LOYALISTS ATTACKED BY REPUBLICANS IN DUNDALK"), BUT NOTED THAT "POLICE DID NOT PREVENT THE TWO SIDES MINGLING OUTSIDE THE COURT."

4. IN A LONGER TERM PERSPECTIVE, THE CHANNEL 4 NEWS AND BBC'S NEWSNIGHT WERE THE MOST INTERESTING. CHANNEL 4 INTERVIEWED DOWNTOWN RADIO'S POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT, EAMON MALLIE. HE TOOK THE VIEW THAT THE LOYALIST BOYCOTT CAMPAIGN HAD FAILED TO MOVE THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND MILITANT LOYALISTS WERE NOW DETERMINED TO MOUNT A CAMPAIGN IN THE SOUTH. HE SAW ROBINSON'S CLONTIBRET STRUTTING AND YESTERDAY'S EVENTS AS THE BEGINNINGS OF SUCH A CAMPAIGN. BBC'S NEWSNIGHT TOOK A VARIATION OF THIS VIEW, VIZ., THAT PROPAGANDA COUPS HAD ELUDED THE LOYALISTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND, BUT YESTERDAY'S EVENTS WERE CERTAINLY AN IMPORTANT PROPAGANDA VICTORY.

5. WHAT IS NOT IN DISPUTE, I THINK, IS THAT PETER ROBINSON HAS HAD A MAJOR VICTORY IN TERMS OF HIS OWN POLITICAL CAREER WITH THE DUP AND, GIVEN THE AURA OF "MARTYRDOM" WHICH IS SLOWLY ATACHING TO HIM, HE HAS PROBABLY ACQUIRED, IF I MAY COIN A PHRASE, A "SNEAKING REGARD" IN NON-DUP UNIONIST CIRCLES.

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