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UDA: recent developments

I had a meeting in Belfast yesterday with the journalist with whom I have periodic contact. Part I of my report of this meeting has already been circulated. The present part covers our discussion of the UDA's "Common Sense" document and other recent developments.

UDA document

My contact has been in touch with his usual UDA sources since this document was published.

They have told him that John McMichael is "over the moon" about the positive responses evoked by the document. In addition to the welcome from Hume and Cushnahan, and the obvious discomfiture of Molyneaux and Paisley, he is pleased with the reaction from the NIO - which, the UDA noted, omitted to make any reference to the Agreement. (From a NIO source, my contact has heard that the text initially transmitted from London was more restrained but that, due to an error in transmission, a cautionary sentence was omitted and a slightly more positive impression was conveyed than had been intended).

McMichael is basking in the aura of respectability suddenly acquired by the UDA and is trying to think of ways in which he can follow up on this success. In this connection it is reported that he has suggested to the Inner Council that the UDA should henceforth refrain from claiming responsibility for acts of violence. It should not even resort to the code-name (UFF) which was invented precisely for this purpose. The acts of violence would, of course, continue but the UDA should not associate itself even indirectly with them. (It was not lost on members of the Inner Council that McMichael was the primary instigator of most of last year's UDA violence and indeed

argued on one occasion that the UDA, using the UFF label, should identify itself more frequently with paramilitary activities).

The origins of the document lie in the UDA's uncertain reaction to the Anglo-Irish Agreement at the end of 1985. At the time Tyrrie was all in favour of a violent response. Others, however, argued for the production of a political alternative. It was left to McMichael and the UDA's "Ulster Political Research Group" (which had produced papers on a number of topics already) to draft something. Although a paper on equal citizenship appeared in May 1986, McMichael focussed on "other things" during the marching season and did not tackle the larger job until relatively recently.

The ideas which the "Common Sense" document contains, my contact observed, have all been around for some time. A number of them (e.g., the Bill of Rights, a written constitution and a Supreme Court) featured in the UDA's 1979 paper on negotiated independence, written essentially by Glen Barr (but with help from McMichael) and based to some extent on discussions which the UDA had in the United States at that time with a number of people including Paul O'Dwyer. The proposal for a devolved government elected on a P.R. basis first came from the Alliance Party. A number of the ideas were already aired in the UDA's paper of May 1986.

In the course of drafting the document, McMichael (or his colleagues) consulted John Hume twice about it. Hume was reportedly even more positive about it in private than he was in his public statement on the matter. In addition, Bernard Crick, a professor of sociology at Birkbeck College in London (who has ^{an} interest in Anglo-Irish affairs), was consulted about it.

Tyrrie had no involvement in the document. He is very pleased with its reception, however. Despite the reputation he has of being politically astute and far-sighted, Tyrrie is in fact

quite limited when it comes to political matters and has been inclined to leave these more and more to his deputy, whom he "hero-worships".

My contact regards the UDA document as an essentially opportunistic exercise intended to upstage the Unionist politicians and to win some favourable publicity for the UDA. McMichael, in his view, "does not mean any of it sincerely". His intention is simply to score some points off the Unionist politicians. Inside the UDA, people have been reflecting wryly on the contrast between McMichael's ostensible concern to "bring Catholics to the Cabinet table" and his well-known belief (indistinguishable from racism) that exclusively Protestant preserves must be created in Northern Ireland in order to safeguard the Loyalist heritage. .

It is difficult "even for UDA people" to reconcile the McMichael of this week's document with the McMichael who was "driving Catholics out of their homes in Lisburn" for most of last year. McMichael himself clearly feels safe from any accusations of hypocrisy: when someone in the Inner Council wondered (prior to publication of the document) whether the media might draw unfavourable comparisons with UDA activities last year, McMichael replied that "it's not widely known that I was involved in any of that" and that accordingly there should be no problems.

Internal feud

My contact's UDA acquaintances were also struck by the sight of Tommy Lyttle sharing the platform with McMichael at the press conference to launch the UDA document. Lyttle, as a member of the drafting group, had to be there, as did Eddie Sayers (a UDA member whom Ken Maginnis has accused of complicity in various crimes). The row about the threat to Lyttle's life with the alleged complicity of McMichael and Davy Payne is, however, simmering on. Word of it has spread, furthermore.

The INLA man whom my contact saw last Tuesday was able to tell him that "there's big trouble on the other side - Craig and McMichael tried to set up Lyttle to be killed". The man was adamant, however, that the INLA had no involvement in this plot.

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5 February 1987.

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