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Progressive Unionist Party and Ulster Democratic Party
Background Note

Background

1. The Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) was founded in the Shankill Road area in 1978. It has close links to the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). Its best-known member for many years was Hugh Smyth, who remains its sole elected representative and was Lord Mayor of Belfast in the 1994/5 session.
2. The Ulster Democratic Party (UDP), which is close to the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), was formed in 1989 as a successor to the Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party¹.
3. While the two parties are at pains formally to draw a distinction between themselves and the loyalist paramilitary organisations, it is clear that the connection is close and that in the absence of a substantial electoral mandate their chief significance derives from this fact.

Electoral Support

3. Neither the UDP nor the PUP have been able to generate significant popular support, either before or since the ceasefires. In the 1993 District Council Elections, the two parties put up a total of seven candidates. One from each was returned: Hugh Smyth (PUP - Belfast) and Gary McMichael (UDP - Lisburn). Their combined share of the overall vote was 4,074, or 0.64%. In November 1994, two DUP councillors from Newtownabbey defected to the UDP.

¹ Gary McMichael's father, John McMichael, who was reputedly a leading member of the UDA and was killed by the IRA in 1988, was chairman of the Ulster Political Research Group which in 1987 published "Common Sense", which set out ideas for an agreed internal settlement in Northern Ireland. This document was reissued by the UDP last year.

However, in a Newtownabbey Council by-election held in February 1995, the UDP candidate finished a mediocre fourth in a field of five, well behind both the UUP and the DUP, despite the fact that the electoral area included the loyalist heartland of Rathcoole. No candidate from either ran in the Coleraine council by-election earlier this month.

Early Contacts with Irish Government

5. The previous Taoiseach, Mr Reynolds, has indicated on a number of occasions that during the negotiation of the Joint Declaration contact was made with loyalist interests through intermediaries including the Rev. Roy Magee, and that the wording of that part of paragraph 5 relating to guaranteed civil rights and religious liberties reflected loyalist concerns.
6. In June 1994, Mr Reynolds replied at some length to a letter from Gary McMichael putting six questions regarding the interpretation of the Joint Declaration. David Ervine, PUP spokesman, has recently claimed both in public and in private that, when Taoiseach, Mr Reynolds told him that a gesture on decommissioning by the IRA and the loyalist paramilitaries would be a pre-condition for the entry of Sinn Féin and the loyalist parties into all-party talks.

Loyalist Ceasefire

7. The Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) ceasefire took effect on 13 October 1994. A statement announced that the CLMC "having received confirmation and guarantees in relation to Northern Ireland's constitutional position within the United Kingdom, as well as other assurances, and in the belief that the democratically expressed wishes of the greater number of people in Northern Ireland will be respected and upheld

.... will universally cease all operational hostilities..", and indicated that "The permanence of our ceasefire will be completely dependent upon the continued cessation of all Nationalist/Republican violence, the sole responsibility for a return to war lies with them."

8. In the immediate aftermath of the loyalist ceasefire, representatives of the two parties began to attract substantial media and other attention. A first visit to the United States was organised for late October 1994. Further visits took place around St. Patrick's Day and to attend the Washington Investment Conference in May.

Forum Participation

9. While neither party has felt able to accept an invitation to participate in the work of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, following informal contacts between the Secretariat and members of the PUP, Mr Colin Crawford, a lecturer in social work with a special interest in prisoners' issues, was appointed in March as an observer "to articulate the perspective of loyalist paramilitary prisoners". He has made a number of statements which we understand to have been cleared by PUP leaders.

Exploratory Dialogue with British Government

10. On 15 December 1994, a combined delegation from the two parties met British officials for the first time. To date, there have been fifteen meetings in the series, the most recent - and the first with the Secretary of State - having been held on Tuesday 12 September. Discussions have ranged over a number of areas, including the political situation, policing, prisoners (an issue of particular concern to both parties), decommissioning and socio-economic issues. The British have characterised the meetings as "positive and constructive" and presented

the meeting with the Secretary of State as a token of encouragement.

Loyalist Position on Decommissioning

11. In a statement issued on 25 August, the CLMC indicated that it would not be prepared to initiate decommissioning "with an operational, heavily armed republican war machine intact and refusing to relinquish their arsenals". It expressed concern at "the orchestration of repeated attacks upon the Protestant tradition and heritage." However, it said that "provided the rights [of the "Ulster people"] are upheld, the CMLC will not initiate a return to war. There shall be no first strike."
12. In interviews given since 25 August, and at the meeting with the Secretary of State on 12 September, elements of this statement have been amplified by spokesmen for the PUP and UDP. They have emphasised
- loyalist suspicion of the motives and intentions of the IRA and Sinn Féin, which they say has been accentuated by the summer's arson attacks on Orange Halls, by continuing IRA targeting activity, and more generally by republican inflexibility on decommissioning;
 - the willingness of loyalists to meet the first two "Washington criteria" (a willingness in principle to decommission, and to reach agreement on the modalities of decommissioning);
 - a refusal to initiate the process of decommissioning without symmetrical action by the IRA;
 - a belief that the IRA could advance the situation by responding to the CLMC's "no first use pledge"

- support for a twin-track approach to decommissioning and political talks, and for the International Commission in particular (despite reservations that it could be seen as justifying the internationalisation of the NI problem generally).

13. However, a more threatening note was struck by David Ervine of the PUP in a Radio Ulster interview on 6 September, when he attacked the Irish Government for postponing the scheduled Anglo-Irish Summit, which he called "the single most damaging thing since the two ceasefires"; he emphasised that the CLMC's "no first use" pledge held good only for as long as "democratic rights" were upheld.

14. Given the negligible extent of popular support for the PUP and UDP, and the hostility to them of the larger Unionist parties, they may have doubts about their likely eligibility for participation in all-party talks. However, we understand that positive, if imprecise, signals were sent to them by Michale Ancram at his meeting with them on 31 August.

Political/Constitutional Issues

15. While the UDP's views on political and constitutional issues have been set out in more expanded form than those of the PUP, the proposals of both parties are along broadly similar lines:

- they emphasise the right to self-determination of the people of Northern Ireland, and derive from that an obligation on the British Government to win the consent of a majority for political arrangements as well as for constitutional change;

- both recommend devolved government for Northern Ireland, based on "responsibility-sharing" between the two communities and underpinned by a written constitution including a Bill of Rights
- relations between North and South should be on a pragmatic "good neighbour" basis.

16. The UDP's response to the Framework Documents attacked them as "asymmetrical and flawed", highlighting the lack of a real East-West dimension to counterbalance the North-South one, and arguing that the Documents sought to thwart "genuine self-determination .. by the Northern Ireland electorate" and to pressurise Northern Ireland into North-South integration without consent. The UDP proposes a "Council of the British Isles" to replace the "British/Irish Intergovernmental Conference."
17. In a letter to the Taoiseach on 11 August, Gary McMichael, arguing that the unionist community needed its confidence boosted regarding the integrity of the peace process, said that it could be best achieved by a removal of Articles 2 and 3 from the Constitution. In his reply, the Taoiseach quoted from A Government of Renewal's commitment "to balanced constitutional change in the context of an overall settlement."
18. The PUP appears to place somewhat greater emphasis on social and economic issues and is seeking to tap into Protestants from a working-class background who might have supported the NILP before the Troubles.

Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

18 September 1995

PUP and UDP : Security Issues

Background Note

1. Prison Issues:

As far as the PUP and the UDP are concerned, the importance of the prisoners issue is paramount as prisoners played a fundamental role in brokering the Loyalist ceasefire. On prisons issues, the Loyalist parties have called for movement in several areas. The proposed legislation returning the rate of remission to 50% has been welcomed by both parties as a start of a process. They have also called for consideration of the Life Sentence Review mechanisms with a view to earlier review of sentences and also review of the operation of compassionate parole. A Prisons Sub-Committee has been established by the Loyalist parties comprising six members drawn from both parties. The sub-committee has been involved in exploratory talks with the British Government since December 1994. In June, the UDP prisons spokesman, John White, called for consideration of a general amnesty in 3 to 5 years. This conflicts, however, with the acceptance by the UDP at the opening of talks with the NIO last December that a general amnesty would not be possible. In that instance, they called for a programme of phased releases after a period of "prolonged and permanent peace".

2. Policing:

On the issue of policing, the Loyalist parties have called for a more sensitive, less militaristic approach. During exploratory talks with the British Government, McMichael (UDP), while not wanting the disbandment of the RUC, called for genuine changes of substance and for the force to be made more accountable to the community it serves. Billy Hutchinson (PUP) also stated that there was a need for a fundamental change in the RUC's role in peacetime.

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A statement was released by the Derry branch of the UDP in July in the wake of clashes between the RUC and Loyalists in the City. The statement referred to the 'heavy-handed' tactics of the police and called for a 'shake-up' of the RUC.

3. Decommissioning:

While acknowledging the importance of the decommissioning issue, the Loyalist parties have also stated the necessity for progress on other issues. Gary McMichael (UDP) has said that it is wrong to have progress conditional on the arms issue. The Combined Loyalist Military Command was reported on 25 August 1995 as claiming that its weapons would only be used for defensive purposes and that it would decommission if and when the IRA handed in its own guns. The Combined Loyalist Military Command, in its ceasefire announcement of 13 October 1994, had asserted that the permanence of its ceasefire was entirely dependent on that of the IRA ceasefire.

Following the parties' first formal meeting with the Secretary of State on 12 September, Billy Hutchinson (PUP) stated that the Loyalist parties were committed to the first two requirements of the Washington criteria, but that an undertaking on the third would have to take place bi-laterally with the IRA. In recent weeks the Loyalist parties have criticised the lack of movement on this issue on the part of Sinn Féin and the IRA.

4. As evidence of possible continuing arms procurement by the Loyalist paramilitaries, Lindsay Robb, a prominent member of the UVF mid-Ulster brigade and PUP member (representative at the party's exploratory talks with Minister Ancram), is on remand in Scotland with five others on charges relating to UVF arms buying operation.

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5. Punishment Beatings:

Of the approximately 190 'punishment' beatings carried out since the IRA ceasefire, around one-third may be attributed to Loyalist paramilitaries.

6. Loyalist paramilitaries, using the cover name of 'Protestant Action Force' in June issued threats against local drug dealers in Larne, Co. Antrim. The group is thought to be a cover name for the UVF. The threat was subsequently lifted. However, media reports in recent weeks have indicated that UVF threats have been made against drug-dealers in Cookstown, Co. Tyrone.
7. The Loyalist parties have stated that they neither support or condone such attacks. David Ervine of the PUP has called for an end to the beatings. However, Billy Hutchinson of the PUP admitted in June that senior Loyalist paramilitaries were involved in punishment beatings.

Security Section,
Anglo-Irish Division
September 1995

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