

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

IRELAND



Reference Code:	2006/131/1432
Creation Date(s):	3 March 1976
Extent and medium:	6 pages
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Access Conditions:	Open
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Activities of Loyalist Sympathisers in England

1. In the last three years, both the UDA and the UVF have established units in a number of English cities. As in Scotland, the former would appear to be by far the larger and more active of the two organisations.

2. While units are known to exist in Luton, London, Southampton and elsewhere, the English UDA is strongest in Northern cities such as Leeds and Manchester, and in particular in Lancashire: the Liverpool/Merseyside region, Preston, Accrington and Blackburn. It is well entrenched in Liverpool, especially in the Netherfield district. In a BBC radio interview in September 1973, a man who claimed to be a major in the English UDA estimated that the strength of his organisation was over 5,000, with 1,000 in Liverpool alone. While this figure was probably exaggerated at the time, it may well be closer to the mark in 1976. (However, "membership" of the UDA need signify nothing more than passive sympathy for its objectives.) The major said that UDA units had sprung up in Britain because Loyalists there believed that Ulster was in danger of being sold out to the Republic. He threatened that, in the event of an Army withdrawal, the UDA in Britain would be prepared to "go to Ulster on the side of the British Loyalists against the South".

From the little we know of the English UDA, it appears that its activities closely resemble those of its Ulster (or Scottish) colleagues. It organises bingo sessions, raffles, dances and social evenings in Protestant drinking clubs in order to raise funds. From the evidence of certain court cases, most of the funds collected appear to be used in the purchase of weapons, though UDA representatives protest sanctimoniously that their only concern is to support the families of UDA internees. Members of UDA units, it also appears, receive training in the use of weapons and in the techniques of bomb-making. The "Daily Telegraph" of 29.4.74 reported that members occasionally visit Belfast for attachment to UDA units "in the field". Discipline within each unit appears to be very strict, as a number of members have reportedly been severely beaten in UDA "romper rooms" for offences such as talking to pressmen. This emerged publicly at a court case in April 1974. The solicitor representing a man sentenced at Liverpool Crown Court for illegal possession of explosives maintained that his client had been forced to look after a parcel of explosives in order to protect his son, who was 'in trouble' with the UDA's Liverpool unit, from being 'court-martialled' and 'rompered' by the UDA. Liverpool youths who have asked to opt out have reportedly been threatened with death by their senior 'officers'. It is not surprising, therefore, that, despite the presence of Belfast-type Loyalist slogans on the walls, few people in Loyalist areas of Liverpool and other cities are prepared to admit even the existence of the UDA in their neighbourhood.

However, while the police are often well aware of the existence and strength of UDA groups in various English cities, they can only take action when the groups openly break the law, as the UDA is not an illegal organisation.

2.1. The first strong evidence of UDA criminality came in January 1974, when the organisation's paramilitary role was given sensational publicity in a "Daily Mail" article (of 14.1.74). This reported that

a unit called the "First Lancashire Volunteers of the UDA, England" regularly carried out training manoeuvres on Darwen Moor, a stretch of hillside between Bolton and Blackburn. A reporter and a photographer had accompanied the unit on one of its weekend exercises, and photographs of masked and uniformed men carrying sub-machineguns and rifles were attached to the article. A spokesman for the unit was quoted as saying that the UDA had men "all over England and Scotland, armed and in training for the day when they are needed to defend Ulster against IRA terrorism". He claimed that all English units were ready to go to Ulster at 24 hours' notice. Most UDA members in England, he said, were Englishmen who believed in the Loyalist cause "and were prepared to die for it". The spokesman further claimed that English UDA members took it in turns to go on "spells of duty" in Ulster; and that serving British Army instructors in England had given them training sessions.

On 15.1.74 Mrs. Barbara Castle, Labour MP for Blackburn, asked the Ministry of Defence to comment on these claims. The Home Office ordered an immediate police investigation, and Lancashire police set up a detachment specifically to seek out UDA members.

Two weeks later, eight men were arrested in raids on a number of houses in Lancashire and one in West Yorkshire. Four sten guns, along with rifles and a shotgun, weapon parts, 28,000 rounds of ammunition, paramilitary uniforms and UDA documents were also seized, mainly at a house in Accrington. In Belfast, Tommy Lyttle confirmed that the men arrested were members of the 1st Lancashire Battalion of the UDA. He added, however, that they had virtually their own command structure and were not answerable to the Belfast leadership but merely maintained "continuing liaison" with it. If, on the other hand, Belfast instructed them to come over to fight, they would be "on the next boat". Lyttle disclosed that the eight did not include any of the crucial UDA leaders in England. He concluded by saying that the arms haul, though quite substantial, was "not a crippling blow", and that the UDA would get over it. Sammy Smyth described the arrested men as Englishmen who belonged to "the old crowd who were proud to be British, a vanishing breed these days", and who felt an affinity with Loyalists.

On 6.2.74 seven men appeared at Preston Magistrate's Court, charged with possessing sten guns without authority. They were: James Haley, Joseph Alexander Johnston, Alexander McClements and James Richard Webb of Preston; Colin Edward Kennion of Accrington, Samuel James McLean of Blackburn and James Kerr McDowell of Earby (near Colne in Yorkshire). Later in the month, a further two, William Addis of Chorley and Edward Solomons of Blackburn, were charged in connection with the same incident. In court on 27.3.74 the nine men were further charged with conspiring to drill or train themselves in the use of arms and to practise illegal military exercises, at Darwen Moor on 12.1.74.

At their trial in Preston Crown Court on 2.7.74, the nine pleaded guilty to a total of eighteen charges relating to illegal possession of firearms and conspiracy. Mis Rose Heilbron, prosecuting, informed the court that the defendant James McDowell, spokesman for the Preston UDA unit, had told the "Daily Mail" reporter on 12.1.74 that members of the unit had been "on active service for the past 18 months using England as a training place for Ulster"; and that, along with other units, they had already been allocated areas of Ulster where they would operate in the event of civil war. McDowell had also stated that there were 6,000 UDA members in England. The prosecution further

alleged that the Preston unit (which had been formed in early 1973) had invited the newspapermen to the demonstration on the moors in the hope of being paid £150 which could be forwarded to the UDA in Belfast.

On 3.7.74 the nine men were each sentenced to two years' imprisonment.

Inquiries into the origins of the uncovered arms and ammunition continued. There was much speculation at the time that the weapons had been obtained from a small IRA armoury in a house near Manchester after a simple code phrase for their collection had been "broken" by the UDA men.

2.2. The obtaining of arms and ammunition either for themselves or for their Belfast colleagues has been, perhaps, the most significant activity of the English UDA in recent times.

On 27.3.74 Southampton docks police, acting on a tip-off, discovered a consignment of a dozen rifles (including two Armalites), pistols, 1,000 rounds of ammunition and explosives which had been unloaded from the "Dart America", a container ship plying between North America and Southampton, some ten days previously. It was addressed to a Mr. B. Griffiths in Leeds from a Mr. E. Griffiths in Ontario, Canada. On 8.4.74 two men, Roy Ralph Rogers-Forbes, a former Leeds councillor, and John William Griffiths, also of Leeds, were arrested and charged with conspiring to contravene the Firearms and Explosive Substances Act by illegal importation of arms. Later a third man, John William Gadd of Liverpool, was also arrested and charged. On 24.7.74 the three were committed for trial to Winchester Crown Court. The prosecution alleged that the men had imported the arms from Canada to Britain, and that they were destined either for the UDA in Belfast or for the training of UDA members on the Yorkshire moors. It was further alleged that Rogers-Forbes was a lieutenant in the Leeds UDA unit, Griffiths commanded the unit and Gadd was a 'high-ranking officer' in the Liverpool UDA unit.

At the opening of their trial in Winchester on 13.11.74, the defendants pleaded not guilty. The prosecution gave evidence that Forbes and Griffiths had joined the UDA when they met Gadd in Liverpool in 1973. Griffiths, who had previously served in the Army, became commander of the small Leeds unit, and meetings were held at his home. Forbes, a member of the Army's officer training unit at Leeds University, conducted UDA training exercises on the local moors. In a raid on his home following the arms discovery, uniforms, maps (including a street map of Belfast) and books on infantry training and rifle shooting were found. UDA literature was found at Griffiths' and Gadd's homes. In a statement to the police, Forbes had said the Leeds UDA had been approached by a man from Belfast who asked them to take part in a plan to obtain arms for Ulster to defend the border if the British troops pulled out.

On 14.11.74 a detective-inspector informed the court that Griffiths told him that Gadd and a man called Tommy Thompson were much more deeply involved in the affair than he was.

On 20.11.74 Mrs. Louise Davey, a former woman captain in the UDA, appeared in court. She said she had left the UDA three months previously, because she had given information to British troops in Ulster and feared reprisals from the UDA on that account. She gave evidence that on 22.2.74, Tommy Thompson and John Gadd - whom she described respectively as the supreme commander of the UDA in Britain

and his deputy - came to her Plymouth home, where they told her that guns and explosives might soon be coming from Canada. They asked her if she could obtain guns and bomb-making equipment, and suggested that she send the guns to Gadd's home in Liverpool. Mrs. Davey also revealed that explosives smuggled by English Loyalists to Belfast were frequently concealed inside children's dolls.

On 4.12.74 the defendants were found guilty of conspiring to smuggle arms. Gadd was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, Forbes to seven years and Griffiths to five years. In January 1975 two men named Hall and Whiteside were also sentenced in Toronto for their part in the plot.

2.3. The case confirmed the existence of an arms-smuggling route which had been suspected by British police for some time. Loyalists were buying arms in Canada, probably in Toronto, and shipping them either directly from there or via New York to Southampton, from where they went by road to Liverpool and were later shipped across to Larne. On 24.8.74 the "Southern Evening Echo" in Southampton carried an article which publicised this gun-running route. It also reported that the UDA unit in Hampshire was actively training in isolated parts of the county. In Belfast Tommy Lyttle dismissed the article as a wild attempt on the part of two dissident women members of the Hampshire unit (almost certainly Mrs. Davey and her daughter) to discredit the organisation.

However, the evidence which Mrs. Davey gave at the Winchester trial on 20.11.74 dealt a much more serious blow to the English UDA. Tommy Thompson, an unemployed painter and former Army lance-corporal of Langrove St., Liverpool - whom she had alleged to be the UDA's supreme commander in Britain - was arrested on the same day and charged (a) with managing a quasi-military organisation, in Liverpool and elsewhere, from 1972-4; (b) with conspiring with John Gadd and others in 1973-4 to contravene the Firearms and Explosive Substances Act; and (c) with conspiring between 1.12.73 and 14.1.74 to contravene the same Act. When his trial opened at Winchester on 4.6.75, he denied all charges. Dealing with the first charge, the prosecution recalled that James Haley, one of the Preston nine sentenced in July 1974, had said that he regarded Thompson as being "in charge" in the event of the UDA being called on to go over and fight in Ulster. On the conspiracy charges, Thompson was alleged to have been involved firstly in the Southampton affair and secondly in the illegal activities of the Preston unit. On 12.6.75 the defendant claimed he had left the UDA in May 1974 after 18 months' membership, and denied ever having taken part in paramilitary activities. However, evidence was entered against him by Mrs. Davey and other witnesses, who alleged that Thompson ran the English UDA from his Liverpool home in an area known as the "Orange Free State" (because of its high proportion of Loyalist residents): that he had sworn in new UDA members in a Liverpool café; and that he had been responsible for providing the arms for the Preston unit's demonstration in January 1974.

On 14.6.75 Thompson was found guilty on all charges and jailed for 10 years.

3. The UVF has a much smaller representation in England. It is thought to have most of its strength in the north-west, especially in the Liverpool area. Other units exist in Manchester and London. Some units are said to be highly trained in military tactics and to be equipped with British Army rifles and other infantry weapons.

In June 1974 the Manchester office of the Press Association received a statement purporting to come from "UVF Brigade HQ, England", which ordered the English UVF units to take retaliatory action against "targets already designated" if the IRA resorted to terrorist activity in England. However, Ken Gibson in Belfast immediately rejected the statement as entirely false and said that the person responsible for it would be named to the police. Five months later a man purporting to represent the English UDA telephoned journalists in Belfast with a warning that, for every bomb set up by the IRA in Britain, three would be planted in Ireland, North and South.

In November 1975 five UVF men were arrested after police searched a lorry parked near the Heysham-Belfast ferry terminal. The lorry was found to contain ingredients for bomb-making: 62 sticks of gelignite, 25 detonators, 92 lbs. of fertiliser and over 1,000 lbs. of sodium chlorate. In a subsequent raid on the Everton home of one of the men, UVF newspapers and other literature were found. On 19.11.75 the five men appeared at Preston Crown Court, charged with conspiring to cause an explosion in Northern Ireland: Harry Lloyd of Everton (alleged to be the local UVF leader), Francis Wylie and Norman Alexander Kinner of Belfast, Harold Sydney James of Liverpool and Alan Arnold Tyrell of Huyton. Kinner made a statement in court claiming that the materials were only for use in the event of British withdrawal from Northern Ireland. On 4.12.75 four of the five men were found guilty. Lloyd, James and Kinner were sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, and Tyrell was sentenced to five years; Wylie was acquitted.

4. One of the less publicised aspects of English loyalism is its close relationship with the extreme right-wing movement, the National Front. One of this movement's characteristics is a fierce hatred of the IRA. On a number of occasions in the past, Loyalists from both Ulster and the mainland have joined in National Front demonstrations in London and elsewhere and National Front supporters have participated in Loyalist marches. One of Craig's Vanguard rallies at Hyde Park in 1972 attracted substantial National Front support. In 1973, the National Front considerably stepped up its interest in Ulster and established branches in many Loyalist areas of the province. John Tyndall, the movement's national organiser, paid several visits to Belfast to talks to Loyalist politicians and paramilitary leaders, in particular to Vanguard and UDA leaders. National Front members in Ulster and Britain also formed close links with the UVF, in particular with Billy Mitchell.

While as yet the National Front has not been implicated in illegal Loyalist activities in Britain, it remains a factor to be reckoned with in the future as the Loyalist cause offers it an attractive outlet for its extreme right-wing philosophy. In December 1975 an Irish pub in London, Biddy Mulligan's, was bombed and five people were injured; though responsibility for the blast was later claimed by the "Young Militants" (a UDA breakaway group), there was initial speculation that National Front members may have been involved.

5. As in Scotland, the Orange Order provides a respectable front for many of the English Loyalists' activities. All of the Loyalists convicted in recent court cases have been members of the Orange Order, which is well established in the North of England. James Pettigrew, a witness at the Winchester gun-running trial, described himself as a sergeant in the Leeds UDA unit, and then mentioned in passing that he was the secretary of the Leeds Orange Lodge. The Order, it would appear, turns a blind eye nowadays to the presence of paramilitants in its ranks.

In January 1976 John Williams, secretary of the Grand Orange Lodge of England, announced that his organisation had drawn up a plan to evacuate Ulster Protestants in the event of civil war. Members envisaged taking refugees by car and bus to Orange Lodges in Leeds, Birmingham, Plymouth, Portsmouth and other cities, from where they would transfer them to the homes of sympathisers.

6. Finally, one or two 'cover names' have been used on occasion by both the UDA and the UVF in England in order to deflect unwelcome publicity. The British Loyalist Council, based in Manchester, and chaired by Bill Jenkins, is merely a coordinating body for UDA and UVF activities. And in a recent case at Manchester Magistrate's Court, the prosecution held that the Manchester Loyalist Association, to which, it alleged, the three defendants belonged, was simply a front organisation for either the UDA or the UVF. The men - David Roderick Anderton, Robert McFarlane Watson and Malcolm Alexander Rough - had been in possession of a pistol and ammunition when stopped by police at Middleton, Lancs., on 23.12.75. At the most recent hearing they were remanded in custody until 5.3.76.

David Donoghue

3 March 1976