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REACTIONS TO THE REPORT OF THE GARDINER COMMITTEE

As expected, the Report of the Gardiner Committee published on 30 January 1975 received a mixed reception in Northern Ireland. The UUUC and UPNI generally welcomed the Report whilst the SDLP and more extreme groups (the para-militaries, Sinn Fein and the VPP) were disappointed with it. This disappointment stemmed mainly from the Committee's failure to recommend the ending of detention but there was also a fear that the Government might put the Committee's recommendation to abolish Special Category status into effect.

Reaction to the Report has generally been brief and muted, probably because the Report contained little that was unexpected and HMG has adopted a low-profile on its recommendations. Its publication was also overshadowed by speculation about a ceasefire and the publication on 5 February of Discussion Paper No 3.

UUUC

The Report received a general welcome. The Official Unionists noted that the necessity to retain special provisions to defeat terrorism had been recognised and said they would pay particular attention to the Government's reaction to the Report; this may be seen in the light of Loyalist concern over possible "concessions" by the Government to the IRA in return for a ceasefire. The DUP, which is the only UUUC member party that has called for the ending of detention, were at least happy that their recommendation on a release advisory panel was accepted by the Gardiner Committee. (This recommendation was in fact also made by the other UUUC parties.) It is interesting to note the UUUC's almost complete silence on the question of whether special category status should be ended; this was probably in order not to offend their less political supporters.

UPNI

The UPNI also welcomed the Report and Mr Faulkner said he was pleased the Committee had recognised that detention in the form used by the old Northern Ireland Government was preferable to "the diversions that successive Secretaries of State had introduced to try to make it (detention) look like a judicial process. It was not a judicial process." The Party put the view strongly that the introduction of the special category status had been a grave mistake. Mr Faulkner also thought that the Report was sensible in recognising that the right kind of government for Northern Ireland, if it was to have firm support, was one in which the responsibility was shared.

ALLIANCE

The Alliance Party's statements on the Report showed some lack of co-ordination. Mr Cooper praised the Government's decision to defer any action on the Report, which required careful and detailed study rather than quick reaction, whereas Mr Napier called upon the Government to implement quickly the recommended independent complaints procedure for the RUC (and to reconstitute and upgrade the Police Authority - this was not among the Committee's recommendations but was "promised over a year ago") in order to strengthen public support for the RUC. Mr Cooper was probably speaking to the Party's Catholic supporters when he said

that much of the Committee's work would become unnecessary if the Provisional IRA called a ceasefire. There was a welcome for the Report's recognition of the social and economic dimensions of the problem and for its recommendation of a Bill of Rights and fair employment legislation.

SDLP

The SDLP adopted a low profile attitude towards the Report. They were predictably disappointed that the Report contained no firm recommendation to end detention but welcomed the committee's recognition of its political implications. The SDLP placed the blame for the continuation of detention on the IRA; this may be an attempt to gain back some of the ground lost to the IRA/Sinn Fein in recent weeks. On the brighter side, the party welcomed the recommendation for a Bill of Rights and were happy that the Committee worked on the political assumption that a future government would have to be based on power-sharing. They made no statement about the ending of special category status.

PARA-MILITARY ORGANISATIONS

Loyalist and Republican para-military organisations found common ground in their opposition to the recommended ending of the "special category" status and in their disappointment at the continuation of detention. (With so few of their members detained Loyalist organisations were not as concerned with the latter as the IRA.) The UVF/VPP were "very disappointed" in the whole report which "offered no hope whatsoever to detainees or sentenced prisoners". The UDA have made no comment yet but may hold the same views. The Provisionals regarded the Report as disappointing but unsurprising. Mr Jimmy Drumm did not think it would influence the Provisionals on a ceasefire or otherwise, but he threatened mass hunger strikes (and worse) if the Government tried to implement the recommendation on special category status. Republican Clubs described the Report as a whitewash of a whole system of coercion but welcomed its mention of a Bill of Rights.

OTHERS

ICRA described the proposed ending of special category status as "spiteful" and said it was disappointed in the Report. The NCCL, which was, apart from Mr Paisley, the only body to comment on the continuation of no-jury trials, (deprecated by both) said it was seriously concerned at several of the findings. The Orange Order welcomed the Report.

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