

THE ULSTER DEFENCE ASSOCIATION: PARAMILITARIES AND POLITICS

by

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Introduction

Throughout 1981 political life in Northern Ireland has been dominated by events at the Maze prison. To date ten Republican prisoners [members of the Provisional Irish Republican Army and Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)] have died on hunger strike and five more have been given medical treatment and nourishment after relatives intervened at crucial stages in their fast.

Outside the prison the two communities have further polarised as evidenced by recent polling. The May local government elections witnessed a further decimation of the already thinly-populated middle ground as the "political status" debate raged on. The trend was best illustrated in the highly charged atmosphere of the two by-elections to the Westminster parliament in Fermanagh and South Tyrone, a constituency legendary for its rigidly religious voting patterns and where in a ritualised game it is assumed that many individuals will try to vote more than once.

In May, in a straight contest between R. Sands, the Anti-H-Block candidate, and H. West, Official Unionist, Sands won by a majority of 1,446 votes. After Sands had died, the August by-election involved six candidates, but the only two *who mattered* were O. Carron, Prisoners Candidate, and K. Magennis, Official Unionist. Again, it was the nationalist who won, this time by 2,230 votes.

The election of Bobby Sands was a considerable boost to the IRA. The reasons for his victory were complex and varied. They included the determination of nationalist voters not to lose a seat where on a head count basis they constituted a majority; hard line unionist disenchantment with a candidate who was seen as one of yesterday's men; the decision by the Social Democratic and Labour Party not to contest the election and thus avoid splitting the anti-Unionist vote in an area where they had since their formation failed to become the voice of the nationalist population; and finally the belief that somehow the election of Sands would be an *open sesame* resolving the impasse at the Maze and save his life. This argument rested on the fundamental premise (although scarcely believed now) that the British government would be forced by domestic and international opinion into granting the five demands of the prisoners which in total amounted to a call for the restoration of special category status for prisoners whose crimes were deemed to be politically motivated. This is a privilege still enjoyed by some 300 prisoners both Republican and Loyalist under legislation introduced by then Home Secretary William Whitelaw in 1972 and terminated by his Labour counterpart Merlyn Rees in 1976.

The second by-election resulted from Sands' death. The government introduced legislation barring any prisoner from standing for election but the anti-H

Block grouping successfully circumvented this by nominating Owen Carron as a proxy prisoners candidate. His manifesto was the five demands of the prisoners. (1) The right to wear their own clothing rather than prison issued uniform. (2) Freedom of association which includes a measure of autonomy within each prison wing and a desire for segregation from other prisoners with conflicting political ideologies. (3) The right to do alternative work in the prison and to opt out of what they see as traditional demeaning work. (4) The restoration of lost remission for prisoners who had refused to recognise the prison rules by going on the "blanket" and "no wash" protests. (5) Flexibility in relation to visits, parcels, recreation. Carron was duly elected but in line with Republican strategy did not take his seat at Westminster as this would lend credibility to the claim that it is the sovereign parliament with jurisdiction over Northern Ireland.

For the IRA the hunger strike has been the major card they have played during the present troubles. What they clearly did not expect was the absolute determination of the British government to engage in a battle of wills where no concessions would be made irrespective of whether prisoners died or not. This problem is clearly illustrated by the decision of the INLA that no more of its members would be joining the protest since if the current attrition rate continued they would all be dead within six months. Also of note is the increased role played by the relatives of the prisoners as the protest more and more appeared as a "conveyor belt" of death with confusion reigning over who was really controlling the machine. The world's press have long since departed, the period of feverish shuttle diplomacy has ended and the objectives of the protest seem farther away than ever.

The stalemate was reached because both the prisoners and government realised that underneath the rhetoric lay the kernel of the issue — the challenge to the right of the British to legislate in the province. Bobby Sands summed it up well:

"The issue at stake is not humanitarian nor about better or improved living conditions — it is purely political and only a political solution will solve it."

The reply of the government, even after all the events of the last nine months is the same as when the first hunger strike was reaching a crescendo in December 1980:

"Political status is what the protesters and hunger strikers are demanding. This the government cannot and will not give."

What then of the Protestant population? During the present crisis they have looked on suspicious of any "behind closed door" deals and with cold detachment as the hunger strikers died. The elections of Sands and Carron were viewed as destroying once and for all the myth of a moderate majority within the Roman Catholic population. A constant theme has been that the 30,000 + voters were laughing over the graves of the large number of Protestants who have been murdered in the area, ostensibly because of their membership of the security forces.

Politically the Democratic Unionist Party under the charismatic leadership of the Reverend Ian Paisley has forged ahead on the simple philosophy of no surrender to the enemies of Ulster. On the same day as Sands' funeral they organised a memorial service in Belfast for the victims of IRA violence under the banner "the murderers have a choice the victims had none". Paisley successfully raised the spectre of British duplicity during his "Carson Trail" rallies, aimed at sinking the Anglo-Irish rapprochement initiated by Premiers Haughey and Thatcher at the Dublin summit. Shudders have been set through the entire unionist family by the prospect of a Labour government under the leadership of Tony Benn and committed to the eventual unification of Ireland being returned to power. On a more sinister note the series of nocturnal manoeuvres on hilltops throughout the province with Paisley's supporters waving firearms certificates showed the often overlooked military arm of aggressive Protestantism. Particularly trenchant was his statement of 2 July in the border village of Sixmilecross announcing the formation of a new Protestant defence force to counter what was perceived as the genocide being waged on their co-religionists in the peripheral areas of Northern Ireland:

"We have a choice to make. Shall we allow ourselves to be murdered by the IRA or shall we go out and kill the killers?"

A second noticeable feature within the Protestant campaign has been the establishment of a new political party from within the ranks of the Ulster Defence Association, not the first time that a paramilitary organisation has taken the political path, but on this occasion the UDA seems determined that it should be more than an overnight phenomenon. The key question is how far the military activities of the organisation limit the possibilities of a transition to a bonafide political organisation and to what extent a defensive organisation can hope to seize a positive political initiative. The main section of this article focuses on the evolving response of both the military arm and the political voice of the UDA.

The Loyalist Paramilitaries

If a major achievement of the Unionist leadership after the partition of Ireland in 1921 was to coopt and thereby control popular Protestant violence in the service of the nascent state (through the B and C Special Constabularies), what has been characteristic of the present Ulster troubles has been a loss of that control along with a loss of the Stormont system. The fall of Stormont created a whole new dimension of militant Protestant activity. Stormont — a convenient shorthand for Protestant majoritarian rule — had been *theirs*, a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people. But it had been progressively undermined since 1969 and the reversion to Direct Rule from Westminster in 1972 radically altered the nature of militant Protestantism. The deep sense of betrayal, of an imminent "sell-out" to the Catholic enemy within (IRA) and without (Irish Republic), informed a chorus of protest and demonstration. However the system was no longer just an expression of Protestant supremacy, nor was it so readily influenced.

In these new conditions Protestant militancy had become independent of established political control. Its voice had developed into a distinct and separate refrain and paramilitary muscle was being flexed autonomously in sectarian assassination. What distinguished militant Protestant activity was its negative and reactive character. In “military” terms tit-for-tat killings followed the level of IRA violence; politically “boycotts” such as the 1974 UWC strike blocked political initiatives by the British Government. It could prevent “solutions” being imposed upon them without their full-hearted consent. But it showed that they could not enforce their own solutions. The failure of the 1977 strike showed also that boycott, without effective alternatives, is subject to an embarrassing diminishment of returns. Its overemployment could undermine militant morale and, indeed, fragment that loyalist unity it is designed to foster.

UDA — A Military Role

“The only way we will get peace here is to terrorise the terrorists” — Andy Tyrie, Supreme Commander Ulster Defence Association speaking on BBC programme *The World This Weekend*, February 1, 1981.

The UDA emerged in September 1971 as an umbrella organisation encompassing a number of street vigilante groups which had formed in Protestant areas of Northern Ireland in response to the violence that had ensued after the introduction of internment by then Prime Minister, Brian Faulkner.¹ It is the largest paramilitary organisation in the province and the only one not proscribed by Schedule 2 of the Emergency Provisions Act (1978). This has enabled it to parade openly and has facilitated the development of a political wing the NUPRG which will be discussed more fully later.

There has been a positive correlation between the level of membership in the UDA, the amount of support it is accorded in the community and periods when the constitutional status quo and safety of the Protestant population have been perceived as under threat.² A good instance of this was the boom recruiting period after the prorogation of the Stormont parliament in March 1972. Geographically its main strength has been in the urban areas of Belfast and Londonderry. Although much of the violence in the province has been concentrated in the border regions of Fermanagh and Armagh the UDA is weak here with many of the Protestant farming community opting to serve in the official forces of the state: the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR).

The use of terror has always been a key element in UDA strategy be it either to impress upon Westminster the holocaust which would follow British withdrawal or as a retaliatory weapon against the IRA. On occasions throughout the province the UDA has become embroiled in internecine warfare with the Ulster Volunteer Force which had lain dormant since the halcyon days of 1912 until it re-emerged in a clandestine form in 1966, opposing the liberal measures being introduced by Terence O’Neill as Prime Minister. In the main these battles have been concerned with territory and racketeering rather than ideology. Both organisations have relied to a large extent for funding on robberies, collections in public houses, extortion and contributions from external sympathisers —

mainly Scotland and Canada.³

The UDA military strategy has evolved through a series of distinct phases. In 1972/73 it was responsible for a number of bombings and tit-for-tat sectarian assassinations. This involved a “clearing of the decks”, the removal of the remaining minority residents from an area;⁴ and “holding the line”, the use of force to stop physical encroachment by the Catholic population into areas which were viewed by Protestants as their own domain.⁵ In the Ulster Workers Council Strike of May 1974 the UDA played a prominent role.⁶ Members were prominent at street barricades and acting as enforcers of the strike call. An umbrella grouping, the Ulster Army Council, co-ordinated the activities of the “alphabet soup” of paramilitary organisations. The group warned on the eve of the strike:

“If Westminster is not prepared to restore democracy, i.e., the will of the people made clear in an election, then the only way it can be restored is by a coup d’etat”.⁷

This was the first instance in recent times where independence was aired as an alternative to the British connection, a “shadow cabinet” having been established by the Ulster Workers Council. However there had been no consideration of the future development of the economy or of the role of the minority. Rather it was an impulsive reaction to the crisis. It would have been a declaration of independence Rhodesia-style. One thing was crystal clear however — when the chips were down the paramilitaries assumed the mantle of arbiters of Ulster’s destiny. The actions of the UDA in 1974 were conclusive evidence for the assertion of D. W. Miller:

“They learned public order derived in reality not from the sovereign authority but from their own exertions on the ground”.⁸

From 1974/79 the UDA appeared only intermittently in a military capacity. The Organisation became more and more an everyday part of the Protestant community in some areas. Effort was focussed on collecting revenue for the families of the loyalist prisoners. When Andy Tyrrie became an institutionalised leader, so a concerted effort could be made to establish a cohesive political programme. Loyalist violence has essentially been reactive. As the British Government shied away from any political initiatives and Ulster seemed safe as the IRA campaign lulled, the UDA and others found it hard to justify an overt military role or the protection rackets which were being operated. The security forces were increasingly penetrating the ranks of the loyalist paramilitaries which were organised on a traditional pyramid structure and this, allied to an increased use of the confidential telephone by civilians, resulted in the severe weakening of many active service units. A further factor contributing to the comparatively dormant role of the UDA was the desire amongst a vast majority of the population for a cessation to hostilities partly due to war weariness and partly due to the activities of the Peace People.

The most recent phase of loyalist paramilitary activity began in late 1979 after the assassination of Earl Mountbatten and the death of 18 soldiers in

August of that year. The launching of a new political initiative by the British Government partly in response to international pressure,⁹ culminated in a White Paper published on November 22, and an escalation in IRA demands for a British withdrawal and resolution of the H-Block impasse. In an atmosphere of political uncertainty the loyalist paramilitaries thrived and the assassinations resumed. The new ingredient was their selectivity and sophistication. Very few of the National H-Blocks Committee have escaped unscathed. The role of the UDA in this period is a controversial one. Commentators such as David McKitterick in the *Irish Times* and Vincent Browne in the magazine *Magill* have argued that it is a carefully orchestrated campaign directed and controlled by the UDA godfathers.¹⁰ However attention to court proceedings indicates that those charged with involvement in the recent wave of killings have mainly been members of the outlawed Ulster Volunteer Force and Red Hand Commandos.

A more plausible explanation is that we are witnessing independent actions by maverick elements who feel that the military role should be given greater emphasis. This is nothing new. The UDA has a long history of internal feuding usually resolved by violence rather than the subtlety of debate. There have been disagreements over whether their political programme should have a socialist element,¹¹ links with political parties, on the desirability of collecting protection money from shop-keepers, on talks with the IRA and on the issue of political status for prisoners. Confusion reigned in the Protestant community when UDA members started on a hunger strike demanding the same concessions as the 7 IRA men who had initiated the hunger strike. Street support was minimal for the UDA, the inner council seemed divided, and the leadership did not seem to accurately reflect rank and file opinion.¹²

The spate of media articles alleging a major role for the UDA in recent assassinations has, however, fuelled the cacophony of voices calling for the proscription of the organisation. Secretary of State, Humphrey Atkins, makes frequent statements on the government attitude in the face of a concerted attempt by the Alliance Party and others to provoke him into banning the groups' activities. He recently replied to those critics who have argued it is the sheer scale of UDA and pressure of space at the prisons that enables it to operate as the only legal paramilitary organisation:

“The size of an organisation has nothing to do with whether it is proscribed or not. The test of proscription is whether an organisation is actively supporting, encouraging or engaged in terrorist activities”.¹³

Central to the debate has been the alleged connection between the UDA and the Ulster Freedom Fighters, a group organised on a cellular structure which appeared in June 1973. The UFF is proscribed under the Emergency Provisions Act (1978) yet no-one has been charged in the courts with membership of the organisation. Some recent murder trials relate to crimes committed in 1973 and claimed then by the UFF, yet the men standing trial are acknowledged members of the UDA.¹⁴ The title UFF has thus been viewed as a “nom de guerre” or flag of convenience for the UDA. The most accurate assessment is that the UFF emerged as a militant faction growing within the ranks of the UDA with its

origins in the opposition to the rampant pocket-lining and extortion which was allegedly taking place in the East Belfast UDA circa 1973.

“By taking on the form and title of a new and distinct group it was hoped that the UDA would not be blamed for the assassinations”.¹⁵

It is ironic that the calls for the proscription of the UDA should come at a time when the NUPRG was ready to field candidates in the local council elections in May 1981. Humphrey Atkins is in the difficult position of knowing the UDA have committed acts of terrorism but also desperately wanting to keep open the political door to the UDA. Proscription would be the end of the road for the political initiative and possibly provoke an internal revolt against the Tyrie/Barr faction. It has been because of Tyrie’s position as unquestioned leader since 1974 that the independence option has been able to develop into a philosophy identified with the UDA and agreed as a political policy by the 8-man inner council. Would the UDA honour its original motto, *Cedenta Arma Togae* — law before violence?

NUPRG — Paramilitary in Politics

The central problem besetting Protestant paramilitaries is to transform military muscle into a responsible political voice, to make the difficult transition from being avowed defenders of the Protestant community to being articulate advocates of a constructive set of public policies. Certainly past experience has provided little hope that the step will be a sure one. As the Supreme Commander of the UDA, Andy Tyrie, confessed in a recent interview:

“People do not trust paramilitaries, that’s for sure”.¹⁶

Yet there has been a definite attempt to capture that trust, or at least, to reduce the mistrust of paramilitary intentions. The expression of a concern for political change, for a new constitutional politics, represents an attempt to shift the influence of Protestant militancy from the streets to the conference room. This political strategy has been developed by the New Ulster Political Research Group (NUPRG) the most prominent member of which Glenn Barr.¹⁷ Referring to the activities of the NUPRG, Tyrie was of the opinion that these could help to overcome public distrust of the paramilitaries and indeed this was the very reason that it “has been promoting *community* politics” (our emphasis). As Tyrie continued,

“It should be possible for a paramilitary organisation to cross over and become a political one”,

and he rather dubiously cited the Democratic Unionist Party as an example of this.¹⁸ The assumption of Tyrie and of the NUPRG was that a distinctive political approach can “legitimize” militant Protestant voices within the Loyalist community while at the same time providing an appeal that would allay the fears of Catholics. This is plainly quite a task. What then are the elements of the NUPRG’s distinctive strategy?

The NUPRG posed a middle way between irreconcilable opposites, between the union with Great Britain and a united 32 county Republic of Ireland. The

political goal is an independent Ulster and it has been sincerely canvassed as the *only* solution to the existing constitutional conflict which, so the analysis goes, finds expression in perpetual sectarian conflict. Within an independent Ulster Protestant identity could be maintained without the creation of a sectarian state apparatus. It puts forward an Ulster state the common allegiance to which transcends Protestant “Britishness” and Catholic “Irishness”; it claims a common experience through common adversity, a fellow-feeling forged (however paradoxically) through years of communal strife. Its basic assumption is that commonly acceptable institutions can be created on an Ulster-basis alone. So there would be a classical constitutional trade off. Protestants would sever the *United Kingdom link while Catholics would forgo their allegiance to a United Ireland*. Both would lose something, certainly — but this would be merely the outworn symbolism of religious and political myopia. In the new independent Ulster difference would now contribute to political stability and social harmony, not destroy them.

These ideas were presented in an attractive version in March 1979 in a “discussion paper” by the NUPRG entitled “Beyond the Religious Divide”. Flirtation with the idea of independence was nothing new in Protestant politics. What was different about “Beyond the Religious Divide” was that it tried to make it a priority not a last resort. What was proposed was a draft constitution and political structures for a post-independence state plus a Bill of Rights to guarantee and to secure the liberties of every citizen regardless of religion. In this paper we do not intend to consider in detail the technicalities of these proposals nor the economic arguments for or against but to appreciate the thrust of these ideas and their limitations. Let us follow through the reasoning of the document.

The basic premise is that “proper politics” cannot be achieved “as long as there is a question of constitutional allegiances”.¹⁹ It is important to note at this point the working class, quasi-socialist nature of the NUPRG’s concept of “proper politics”. It is a politics based on the distribution of economic resources and on social welfare which, so the authors contend, have been neglected while “sectarian politicians continue to fan the flames of religious bigotry for self-gain and preservation”. However, what is lacking is any analysis of class relations or any radical critique of the politico-economic structure of the 6 counties. What is presented is the familiar anti-establishment, anti-politician populism which has been a feature of Ulster Protestantism just as much as Unionism has been. Tyrre has called this leaning towards socialism, whatever that may mean in practice. Significantly as well the traditional Protestant rallying cry of “We are the people!” (in effect the Catholics are *not* part of the state) has been supplanted by the phrase “our people”; in effect a full embrace of the Catholic community in a “United Northern Ireland”. So the old zero-sum game of constitutional politics has given way to a solution which:

“does not have a victor and a loser. It will encourage the development of a common identity between the two communities, regardless of religion. It offers first class Ulster citizenship to all our people, because like it or not, the Protestant of Northern Ireland is looked upon as a second class British

citizen in Britain and the Roman Catholic of Northern Ireland as a second class Irish citizen in Southern Ireland".²⁰

For the NUPRG the struggle to remain British, to preserve the Union, has been consistently spurned by Westminster. The purpose of loyalty must be re-examined and loyalty must now be focussed *solely* on Northern Ireland. Catholics are enjoined to consider their alienness from the Republic which, so it is argued, wants Northern Catholics just as little as Great Britain wants Northern Irish Protestants. Hence the attempts, ingeniously, to rediscover and trace an "Ulster" identity extant before the plantations of the 17th Century, in other words to assert a belonging that is not British as traditionally understood by Loyalists, but separate. It seeks two things. First, it seeks to establish a Protestant, Scots-Irish right to the province of Ulster. Second, it seeks to express a common heritage that transcends the history of Planter and Gael and to emphasise past untainted by religious bigotry. The most notable effort to date is the book *The Cruthin* by Ian Adamson.²¹ It also explains why Protestant paramilitary leaders (or some at least) have taken an interest in that formerly most taboo subject, Celtic Mythology.

However attractive this initiative may be for UDA commanders, serious loyalist objections may be cited. First, independence asserts above all the "Irishness" of the present troubles (even if it is a provincial Irishness) and denounces Protestant "Britishness". Yet this sacrifice is immeasurably greater on the part of the Protestant community than is the withdrawal of *claims* of sovereignty on the part of the Irish Republic to the territory of Ulster. It is a self-sacrifice, and if Britain goes, it goes for good. But the Irish border remains and thus the Irish dimension remains too, providing still a powerful magnetic attraction for nationalist aspiration within Ulster. Indeed, Irish nationalists have for long made it clear that the only factor preventing the achievement of Irish unity has been the presence of the third party — Great Britain. Second, there can be no guarantee that the IRA will disappear. As the NUPRG document stresses, independence must be a long-term solution. But the IRA see British withdrawal as a stepping stone to the 32 county Republic. It pursues the *ideal* and will brook no half-way houses. Why should a border between Irishmen remain after withdrawal? What should make an independent Ulster any more acceptable than an Ulster as an integral part of the UK? There could never be any security of possession for the independent Ulsterman. As Conor Cruise O'Brien has persuasively argued "Ulster Protestants do fear Catholicism", and that deeply ingrained historical fear would most likely be heightened, not eradicated, in an independent Ulster.²² Third, and probably crucially, no definite Ulster nationalism exists and certainly not one that would act as a cement to bind the religious communities together. The compliance of the Catholic community — obviously still a minority after independence, whatever the constitutional guarantees — is still problematical. For what is central to Catholic fears is not so much the British link *per se* but Protestant majoritarian rule.

The final point raises another crucial dimension to the argument for a negotiated independence. What we have been examining is the benign face of paramili-

tary politics. We stress that we do not doubt the continued sincerity of many of those who put forward the proposal. Yet to use O'Brien's classification of scenarios, there is also a malignant face that may look to a completely different prospect for independence.²³ In this regard the rationale of independence would be for the Protestant majority to have a clear field to "clear out" Republican, Catholic areas and so defeat militarily, the IRA. Protestant violence would shift from the reactive, the sporadic and the random to the calculated, the offensive and the sustained. In other words independence would facilitate a calculated pogrom. The result would be a final solution *and* a Protestant Ulster homeland maintained. For instance in a recent article in *Ulster*, the publication of the UDA, entitled "Why Independence is Feared by the IRA", the author boldly writes:

"It is no secret that if Ulster were to 'go it alone', the IRA would have their backs to the wall. The situation would also be similar if Britain withdrew and declared a United Ireland against the wishes of the electorate".²⁴

The author does envisage a final solution but although he makes the distinction between "the Catholic population" and the IRA he gives no satisfactory indication of how, in practice, this could be done; nor, how "the hiding places, the rat-holes, the sewers from which they (the IRA) emanate" could be destroyed without an open assault upon the whole Catholic population. Independence as retribution is the voice of angry Protestant despair in the tones of aggressive self-confidence. And the suspicion which Tyrie recognizes the public has for the paramilitary UDA is rooted in this potential alternative. There can never really be any adequate guarantee that behind the sweet words of reason there is no thought of destruction.

Which Way Forward?

The position of the UDA with regard to the established political parties has been a fluctuating one. The original rules stated that anyone who stood for public office could not be a member. Loyalist politicians however have courted their favour on occasions. Examples of this were the serried ranks of UDA men in evidence when William Craig addressed the massive Vanguard rally at Belfast's Ormeau Park in March 1972. Craig with his phrase "we must liquidate the enemy" concisely enunciated the view which has permeated loyalist paramilitary thinking throughout the present troubles. A second example was the Paisley/UDA alliance in the abortive 1977 strike. It was these two Unionist politicians who attracted most support from the paramilitaries but as the crisis developed so the UDA developed its own activist military philosophy, beyond the pale of parliamentary procedures. This was the line of argument — the army was continuing its "kid gloves" policy towards the IRA and there was no local control over the situation with both the Stormont parliament and the B-Specials gone. Someone therefore had to deal with a deteriorating law and order situation. The UDA assumed the role of judge and executioner imposing harsh penalties on dissident elements within their own community, assassinating suspected Republicans and on occasions confronting the army. It has been this overt element of violence in the UDA programme which has made a link-up between the paramilitaries and the political parties hard to achieve. A second factor has

been the growing resentment amongst the paramilitaries of “armchair generals” who raise the level of tension in the community with speeches denouncing the IRA and the government and then rush to disown the Loyalist prisoners in the Maze prison.²⁵

The spirit of Ulster nationalism which Glenn Barr and the UDA hope to kindle has as its *sinequanon* the view of the Ulster Protestants as a chosen people. The great difficulty the Barr faction have is of convincing Ulster Catholics that they will be welcome in the promised land. The interplay and contradiction between the political and military role is well illustrated by the recent comment of John McMichaels, a leading spokesman for the NUPRG. In the series written by Robert Kee *Ireland — A Television History* McMichaels argued that a political solution could only be reached when the Protestants stopped looking to London for support and the Catholics forsook their aspiration of a united Ireland; both concentrating on making Ulster a viable state. However, in a BBC Spotlight programme at the height of the hunger strike crisis he said:

“If there gives a complete breakdown of law and order the Loyalist paramilitaries would have to go in and take out the leadership of the IRA . . . That means eliminate them.”

The local government elections in May were a test for the UDA’s proposed political role, especially since the weeks prior to these were characterized by a severe increase in sectarian tension. This was due to the impasse between the Republican hunger strikers and the Conservative government on the issue of political status and to the election of Bobby Sands as MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. His death on hunger strike polarised political activity. So within the UDA an obvious problem arose for the “political” faction. Although Ulster independence was their central policy any open advocacy of it at this stage would have been politically dangerous.²⁶ Unionist opinion was not in the mood for constitutional tampering. The NUPRG decided to contest the elections on “bread and butter issues”.

The fact that only two candidates unequivocally stood on the NUPRG ticket shows the pressure on the political factions strategy.²⁷ It was only after a major meeting of leading UDA members from the entire province that the NUPRG was given the go-ahead albeit on a limited basis. However, their standing at all is proof of the skilful tactics of Tyrrie and Barr. Their approach had two main elements. First, that the security forces should deal with Republican violence. Only if this failed would the UDA become militarily active. Essentially the UDA stood back from the confrontation over the H-Blocks which as the leadership had hoped was largely confined to West Belfast. Secondly it was agreed that the political initiative should be equally low key. No mention was made of UDA support for political status. (No risks were taken to alienate hardcore loyalist support.) Both candidates were senior officials. In Belfast Area E the NUPRG candidate polled 1,135 first preference votes in a poll of 17,547. In the same area a candidate recognised as the political spokesman for the Ulster Volunteer Force polled 1,931. Their combined first preference vote was 17.47%. The NUPRG candidate lay fourth out of six on first preferences but failed to get

elected on transfers. In Area G the candidate polled 14.25% on the first count and was elected on the second. On the basis of this admittedly limited entrance to the political arena the result for the paramilitaries was more successful than any previous performance.²⁸

Since May the UDA has decided to launch a new political party, the Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party to replace the NUPRG. The announcement came at an opportune moment and helped to divert attention away from two distinctly unfavourable pieces of publicity. The first was the intimated links between the UDA and the National Front (categorically denied by the former) and the second the discovery of arms and ammunition at the Association's headquarters in Belfast. While the former might merely prejudice the UDA's avowed "socialist leanings" the latter might have entailed the organisation's proscription. The agitation for a ban we have already mentioned. McMichael denied that the *idea* of the party had been spawned by the threat of proscription. Nonetheless its *announcement* came at a most felicitous time. The press statement issued on the same day claimed that the ULDP represented an "urgent need for deeper political involvement with the community".²⁹ Independence is to remain the long-term goal but the short and medium term tactics are to concentrate on issues such as housing and employment. The problem with this, as the Workers' Party found to their cost in May, is that no one votes for any party without considering its stand on the constitution. It still remains doubtful if traditional Unionists or Republicans will be attracted by the independence option.

While many Protestants may look in a time of crisis for protection by the UDA there is a mental block against voting for a group many of whose members are in prison. Catholics fear that the birth of the independent state may involve a pogrom against them. These are the difficulties for the ULDP in politics.³⁰ Many people in Ulster want to believe that the child will not have the characteristics of the father, but they have serious doubts.

Footnotes

1. September 1971 was an eventful month seeing the formation of the Democratic Unionist Party and also the Loyalist Association of Workers which was the forerunner of the Ulster Workers Council, the group which co-ordinated the strike of May 1974. c.f. chapter "Enter the UDA" in D. Boulton, *The UVF 1966-73* (Dublin, 1973).
2. c.f. A survey conducted by Richard Rose in 1965 and included in his *Governing Without Consensus* (London, 1971), 82% of Protestants interviewed agreed it was right for people 50 years previously "to take up arms and stand ready to fight to keep Northern Ireland British" 52% felt that in 1968 it would be right to employ the same measures to "keep Northern Ireland a Protestant country". In a more recent survey conducted by Eddie Moxon-Browne, *Northern Ireland Attitude Survey 1978*, 43% of Protestants supported the actions of the Loyalist paramilitaries and a further 13% were ambivalent. All of this data show the existence of a large "ultra" group in the Protestant community displaying only conditional loyalty to the normal parliamentary rules of the game.
3. In June 1979 11 Scottish UDA men, including the overall commander were sentenced to a total of 164 years imprisonment for unlawfully acquiring arms and ammunition.
In December 1974, 2 men including the second in command of the UDA in England were convicted at Winchester Court of smuggling arms from Canada to Northern Ireland.

4. c.f. R. Murray, *Doorstep Murders in Belfast* (paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Institute of British Geographers, University of Lancaster, January 1980).
5. This point is well illustrated by the wave of killings carried out by the notorious “Shankill Butchers” gang who were in 1979 convicted of 18 murders. Although operating freelance largely outside the formal paramilitary structure their activities had as their *raison d’être* the stopping of Catholic encroachment into Protestant areas of North Belfast.
6. For a detailed account see Robert Fisk, *The Point of No Return: The Strike Which Broke the British in Ulster*. (London, 1974).
7. W.D. Flackes, *Northern Ireland — A Political Directory*, (Dublin, 1980) p. 138.
8. D.W. Miller, *Queen’s Rebels* (Dublin, 1978) p. 16.
 Loyalist violence has also been the articulation in an undiluted form of the frustration felt by many Protestants as they witnessed the British government renegeing on their obligations, forcing changes on them and failing to deal with IRA violence. Jack Holland “The Hooded Men” in *Too Long A Sacrifice: Life and Death in Northern Ireland* (New York, 1981, p. 83.):
 “The abolition of Stormont, the recognition of the republican guerrillas by the British, and their increasing violence brought into force the loyalists’ ultimate sanction: assassination”.
9. Notably the United States — At the beginning of August 1979 the State Department announced the suspension of the sale of handguns and ammunition to the Royal Ulster Constabulary.
10. c.f. *Irish Times*, 24 June 1980. The evidence for this rests with statements by UDA officials to the media e.g. Sammy Duddy in the *Guardian*, 15 August 1979. “The time has come for a shift of emphasis towards a positive paramilitary role The only thing that pays in this country is violence”. At this stage war-like statements were emanating from a variety of loyalist paramilitary groups — part of a struggle where each tried to outflank the other in an attempt to appear as the genuine voice of belligerent loyalism. The emphasis on a paramilitary role for the UDA was also used by the Tyrrie/Barr faction to satisfy grass-roots disenchantment with the prominence given to the NUPRG.
11. In 1974 after the UWC strike there was a “night of the long knives” purge of left-wing elements in the UDA. Many UDA men are also members of the Orange Order and this places a stranglehold on any major socialist component in the UDA programme, the Order viewing anything vaguely left-wing as communist inspired.
12. The most forthright statement of support for the campaign for political status by the UDA is by Andy Tyrrie in *Crane Bag*, 22, p. 21.
13. Speech in the House of Commons, 13 February 1981.
14. M. Dillon and D. Lehane, *Political Murder in Northern Ireland* (Harmondsworth 1973) p. 236 and *Newsletter*, (18 June 1980).
15. Dillon and Lehane, *op. cit.* p. 280.
16. *Crane Bag*, No. 22.
 Tyrrie in his most recent interview clearly states the problems in getting enough people to make the necessary mental leap to accept the political philosophy “If I was on the other side of the fence, I would not accept our independence plan. I would be thinking they want independence so they can get at the Taigs, or so they can control it for their own financial gain”. *Belfast Telegraph*, 26 August 1981, p. 8.
17. NUPRG was formed January 1978 after discussions between Tyrrie and Barr. The latter was a member of the N. Ireland Assembly (1973-74) and Convention (1975). He is a former Deputy leader of Vanguard Unionist Party and former senior political spokesman for the UDA.
18. *Crane Bag*, *op. cit.*
19. NUPRG, *Beyond the Religious Divide* (Belfast, 1978), p. 1.
20. *Ibid.* p. 2.

21. Adamson was historical adviser to the NUPRG.
22. Conor Cruise O'Brien, *States of Ireland* (St. Albans, 1975), p. 161.
23. O'Brien op. cit. pp. 278-283.
24. *Ulster*, vol. 1, No. 4, 1978.
25. In the elections for the N. Ireland Assembly, 28 June 1973, UDA Vice-Chairman Tommy Herron polled only 2400 votes of a possible 80,000 plus in Protestant East Belfast. In North Belfast another member Tommy Lyttle finished last of 18 candidates.
26. Even on the "Carson Trail" Ian Paisley has refused to countenance the presence of placards calling for support of the UDA or UVF.
27. An interesting feature of this election and now a common theme in Ulster politics is the number of candidates known to have connections with paramilitary groups but prefer to stand as "independents". This may show two things: first, a reluctance to stand under a Unionist Label; second, a reluctance to make explicit their affiliations.
28. The NUPRG candidate in Area E was Sammy Doyle a founder member and commander of the UDA in North Belfast. In Area G (covering the Shankill Road) it was Sammy Millar already a councillor and recovering from an assassination attempt by the Irish National Liberation Army.
29. *News Letter*, 3 June 1981.
30. The new ULDP had an early chance to test its strength in a by-election in East Belfast in August. The candidate Billy Elliott polled 1,007 first preference votes (8.4%) in a total poll of 11,947. He came last of 4 pro-union candidates but did double the vote achieved by a UDA endorsed candidate in May. It was significant in his election literature that the "independence" argument was aired in a very low key manner. The obvious question given the prevailing tense atmosphere in Belfast is how many people voted for the ULDP understanding their long term political approach and how many voted for the UDA as hard-line loyalists?