

## Laneside, then left a bit? Britain's secret political talks with Loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland, 1973-76.

### *Abstract*

*This article examines talks that took place between British government officials and loyalist paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland at a critical moment in the most recent Troubles. In particular, this article describes talks that took place secretly at the Northern Ireland Office's 'Laneside' building, a secluded suburban house used by British diplomats and MI6 officers on the shores of Belfast Lough between 1971 and 1976. Drawing on both recently released archive material as well as interviews with those who worked at and visited Laneside, this article explores what went on at these talks and analyses their outcomes from three different perspectives. This article demonstrates that the most accurate perspective from which to view what occurred in these meetings is neither top-down (government led), nor bottom-up (paramilitary led), but one that looks at what went on there as part of a conversation which both sets of participants for a time found useful. For the Loyalists, Laneside had a role as a venue to think about strategy (rather than negotiate ends). For the British these were conversations that were useful in furnishing their understanding of loyalism, and as a place where policies could be explained and problems better understood. Looking at what occurred at Laneside as a semi-autonomous governmental body in Northern Ireland reveals key insights into both the loyalist paramilitaries' political ideas as well as the aims of British policy in Northern Ireland. Furthermore this middle perspective holds a mirror up to the more familiar talks then occurring between the very same British officials and the Provisional IRA.*

Keywords: Northern Ireland, Peace talks, Loyalism, Ulster Volunteer Force, Ulster Defence Association, Ulster Workers Council Strike.

Between 1971 and 1976 British government officials based in offices and accommodation at a house outside Belfast known as 'Laneside' discreetly conducted dialogue with the widest possible variety of political groups in Northern Ireland. Laneside therefore is almost exclusively known for the various talks organised from there between the British and the Provisional IRA. Laneside's work, however, also brought it into very close contact with

loyalist paramilitaries and their representatives in this era, many of whom would go on to have long careers in loyalist politics or community work in Northern Ireland. Despite this, British involvement in loyalist politics is entirely missing from all three of the (otherwise excellent) major academic studies into the recent history of loyalism (Bruce, 1994; Nelson, 1984 & Spencer, 2008). Papers released by both the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), however, clearly demonstrate the importance attached to talking with loyalists following Labour's election victory in March 1974. They also demonstrate the early political ambitions of the loyalist paramilitaries as they emerged in the 1970s. While papers from Laneside occasionally hint at attempts being made to strengthen political loyalism against Ian Paisley's emergent DUP, this 'mainstreaming' of loyalist leaders was not the dominant feature of the talks that took place there.

This paper will look first at the idea that Laneside was actively trying to mould and influence the emerging leaders of loyalism (a top down approach) before looking at how it was accepted that the loyalist leaders arrived at Laneside with pre-determined aims and intentions, and in fact proved difficult to influence (a bottom-up approach). Finally the paper will look at the aims and ambitions of those who worked at Laneside in an attempt to look at what went on there from the middle (the perspective of the talks themselves). In doing so the article demonstrates that, despite having no defined objective, Laneside nevertheless had a function in allowing the paramilitaries to vocalise their political ideas and ambitions and that those who attended talks there demonstrated a longer-term tendency toward politicising themselves away from the use of violence.

A good example of this long term tendency can be found in a 1979 photo essay in the Observer Magazine on prominent loyalists entitled 'At home with the UDA.' (*Observer Magazine*, 16 December 1979). Three of the ten men featured (Andy Tyrie, Glen Barr and

Tommy Lyttle) had played an active role in the talks with British officials. Lyttle and Tyrie continued in the upper ranks of the UDA until the late 1980s when Tyrie retired and Lyttle was replaced after it emerged he had become an RUC informant. After leaving Ulster Vanguard, Barr became a leading light in the New Ulster Political Research Group (at the time the UDA's political wing). Barr contributed significantly to the production of their independence manifesto *Beyond the Religious Divide* in 1979 before returning to community work in Derry for which he would receive an OBE for his cross community work in 2005. Of others involved, the UVF's Hugh Smyth became leader of the Progressive Unionist Party from 1979 to 2002 and was Lord Mayor of Belfast 1994/95, Billy Mitchell (though imprisoned for murder from 1976 to 1990) went on to work in community mediation and restorative justice; he aided the PUP during the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement and was deeply involved in the UVF finally announcing the end of its military campaign in 2007 (*Belfast Newsletter*, 4 May 2007). Among Laneside's contacts only Ken Gibson would fail to become a political or community figure within the loyalist community. Gibson's Volunteer Political Party fared so badly with the voters in 1974 that it undermined the UVF's own self-image and Gibson played no further role in political or social movements after 1975.

From the perspective of British policy in Northern Ireland, this article demonstrates that Laneside was being used in support of the public political process evinced by the Sunningdale Communiqué (that initiated a power-sharing executive) and the later Constitutional Convention. Despite the seeming contradiction in holding separate discussions with unelected paramilitary groups, Laneside, though it had little authority, used its influence at this time to implement the stated policy of the UK government. Laneside's

role was to support the establishment of sustainable political institutions in Northern Ireland whatever the main political parties there decided upon. Such political institutions required a stable peace which, it had become apparent, could not be imposed by the simple removal or internment of Northern Ireland's gunmen. Laneside was therefore involved in the pacification of paramilitary groups by encouraging them to organise political parties, listening to their viewpoints and explaining the benefits of the government's position. Laneside was not the site of political collusion that later did so much damage to relations between HMG and the nationalist community, though nor was it the murky lair of Britain's secret officials bypassing the democratic structures of Northern Ireland to some great unknown end that another recent work has labelled it (Ramsay, 2009: 85).

From the historiographical perspective the notion that loyalist paramilitary groups had ambitions beyond local defence in the 1970s is a controversial one. Only Sarah Nelson's 1984 work ever really examined these ambitions thoroughly but was later criticised for taking these views too seriously. Steve Bruce wrote that 'Nelson ... makes the mistake of giving more attention to the political thinking of some UVF leaders than the UVF gave' and he dismisses the relevance of the Volunteer Political Party (VPP) by describing it out of hand as simply 'a curious animal' (Bruce, 1994: 99). Unfortunately (and in contrast to much new work on Republicanism) this view of the loyalists in the 1970s has become the axiomatic basis for more recent analyses; even the constructive and comprehensive work of Graham Spencer, which successfully injects the role of loyalists into analyses of the Peace Process, dates the point at which loyalist paramilitary groups began considering their political role in a peaceful Northern Ireland to 1988 (Spencer, 2008: 1) rather than 1974. This research demonstrates that a more contiguous line can be drawn between 1974 and the Good Friday

Agreement of 1998, and that Spencer's thesis regarding the longevity of loyalist attempts at serious political engagement can safely be extended.

With so much focus, then and now, on violent republican groups in Northern Ireland, talks with loyalists, their nature, their substance and their ambitions have arguably been overlooked. By studying them and attempting to understand what took place, one can learn much about both how Loyalists saw themselves at this crucial stage as well as how talks elsewhere might have been conducted. It is hoped that an examination of these *available* papers, might hold a mirror up to the talks Laneside officials were also conducting with the Provisional IRA at the same time, the British accounts of which remain largely in the hands of SIS/MI6.

### **The Origins of Laneside**

In July 1971, after almost two years of residence at the Conway Hotel in south-west Belfast, the Office of the UK Representative in Northern Ireland (UKREP) moved to Laneside. The house there, near Craigavad, offered a view over Belfast Lough, a large garden, swimming pool, easy access to Stormont and the protection of the nearby Palace Barracks. In October 1971 Frank Steele, an MI6 officer, arrived at Laneside to provide extra assistance to the then UKREP, Howard Smith, in the wake of the introduction of internment without trial. Steele's arrival was linked with Britain's need to better understand what was happening inside Northern Ireland at the grass-roots level. The UKREP, whilst he maintained intimate connections with the main political and religious leaders, required someone who could dig deeper particularly into the nationalist community so that parliamentary politics could usefully resume. The task of the officials based at Laneside was therefore to make contacts

with those whose views were important, but which were not directly voiced in the course of normal representative politics (Craig, 2012: 101-103).

In 1972, with the swift descent into violence that led to the suspension of the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont, Laneside passed from the hands of the redundant UKREP to the newly established Northern Ireland Office under Secretary of State William Whitelaw. Whitelaw's Permanent Under-Secretary, Frank Cooper, asked that Laneside continue its role in establishing community contacts and, in line with this, Laneside was to play a vital role in the Provisional IRA's short-lived ceasefire of July 1972 (Taylor, 1997: 128-147). When it came time for Steele to leave Northern Ireland he was replaced by two new arrivals. James Allan, a diplomat, was tasked with handling the overt business conducted at Laneside while Michael Oatley, another MI6 officer, built upon the more secretive contacts Steele had originally made. Laneside itself continued to be used as a venue for informal discussions with Northern Ireland's political parties.

Although loyalist paramilitarism had emerged in the late 1960s, it was not until the early 1970s that it became a wider movement with significant community support in reaction to increased Irish republican violence. Glen Barr recalls that the Ulster Defence Association arose from small vigilante groups that had organised spontaneously in Protestant council estates from 1970 on. Their initial concern was 'protection, at that time everyone was looking for protection' (Interview with Glen Barr, 2010). With an estimated membership of up to 80,000 the vigilante UDA soon had enough committed members to form a more secretive paramilitary group, the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) which emerged first in May 1972 (Wood, 2006: 21). These groups were increasingly violent and unpredictable, they also had reputations for being poorly led and internal chaotic. They were also deadly; assorted loyalist paramilitaries were responsible for 461 deaths between

1969 and 1976, 359 of which have been attributed to the UDA/UFF and UVF groups (Sutton/CAIN, 2012).

The problem Laneside's officials faced when dealing with Protestant paramilitaries in 1972 and 1973 was therefore not simply that unionism had shattered so completely in urban working class areas, but that the members of these new groups had not previously engaged openly with the politics of Northern Ireland. There was a knowledge deficit within the Northern Ireland Office as to who controlled whom, how much support they had, and what their views were on the issues at stake in the main political talks. And although by 1973 the British government were clear as to what the Provisional IRA wanted, this was not the case with loyalist paramilitaries. Thus, when it seemed unionism was again beginning to condense around opposition to the Sunningdale Agreement in 1974, Laneside was tasked with exploring the views of the more radical loyalist groups. These groups included both the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) and the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).

Under the management of Allan and Oatley, contacts were made with potential representatives of loyalist groups initially through those elected within the neighbourhoods these groups operated from. Such was the nature of these initial meetings their actual number is difficult to quantify accurately. Despite this, the only published estimate currently (three) (*Sunday Business Post*, 2 January 2005) significantly underestimates the number of recorded meetings that are available in the UK National Archives. A closer look at the records available reveals that between April and December 1974 Laneside staff held formal meetings with representatives of the UDA on at least eleven separate occasions.<sup>1</sup> Ken Gibson, a prominent East Belfast UVF leader, also met the same officials at least seven times in the same period.<sup>2</sup>

The sheer number of these meetings alone is evidence of Laneside's determination to advance and support government policy and to garner support for the political process from all quarters.

### **'Mainstreaming': The Top-down Approach**

Studies on negotiation and the use of backchannel talks in conflict situations may allow us to theoretically categorise what occurred at Laneside from the British government's perspective. For Dean Pruitt there are five general and overlapping strategies available for dealing with terrorists groups. Governments, when faced with a terrorist campaign can either capitulate, combat and isolate, or mainstream and negotiate (Pruitt, 2006). And while Pruitt never explicitly discusses victory or defeat in his work (indeed such situations rarely arise in the types of ethno-national conflicts he is concerned with), the normative aim of his research is obviously toward the sustainable and peaceful resolution of all conflicts. Indeed Pruitt criticises the self-defeating tactics used in combating terrorist groups. He illustrates this well by citing Bruce Hoffman's analysis of the Irgun's fight to end British rule in Palestine:

[Menachem Begin] banked on the fact that the massive disruptions caused to daily life and commerce by the harsh and repressive countermeasures that the British were forced to take would further alienate the community from the government, thwart its efforts to obtain the community's cooperation against the terrorists, and create in the minds of the Jews an image of the army and the police as oppressors rather than protectors.' (Hoffman, 1998: 52)

For Pruitt, state actors benefit from marginalising, mainstreaming and negotiating; and should seek to end ethno-national conflicts by granting concessions to key supporters in an effort, to lure extremist groups into normal politics, to undermine their violent wings and



eventually, to negotiate a settlement. This process may first begin through the use of secret talks.

Reading the papers relating to Laneside's loyalist talks through this lens one can see that with the coming of Labour's minority government following the first general election of 1974 (March) the new Northern Ireland Secretary, Merlyn Rees, his Permanent Under Secretary, Sir Frank Cooper, and his Junior Minister Stan Orme, set about engaging loyalist paramilitary groups in an attempt at just this kind of mainstreaming. Orme saw in some elements of loyalist thinking the same working-class solidarity upon which he had based his own political career, and one that needed a legitimate channel of communication with the government. Within weeks of taking office both the Ulster Volunteer Force and Sinn Féin were therefore 'de-proscribed' and Laneside opened channels of communication with both these groups. To do this, contacts were established through broader umbrella organisations from which the paramilitaries were soon siphoned off.

The first meeting recorded in the National Archives occurred between Rees' announcement of the end of the ban on UVF and Sinn Féin membership but before the Commons vote on this matter had taken place. The meeting took place on 9 April 1974 at the NIO's main offices at Stormont Castle between Stan Orme and what was billed as 'a deputation led by Mr Hugh Smyth.' Smyth, later leader the Progressive Unionist Party (1979-2002) was elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in June 1973 on a West Belfast Loyalist Coalition ticket (Whyte, 2009). The group also however included unelected senior UVF leaders and spokesmen including Ken Gibson and Billy Mitchell.<sup>3</sup>

The meeting began with an exploratory conversation on the opening up of further talks as soon as possible. To this end, Ken Gibson spoke of the UVF's concern that internment should be ended, particularly the internment of six of its most able political

thinkers. Orme preferred to talk about his view that he could help 'the working class Protestants to find their own political feet', and when challenged by the fact the fact that no working class Protestants had been represented at the Sunningdale conference, Orme responded passionately, that in his view:

'out of the shattered edifice of the Unionist Party, the working class Protestants and the working class Catholics were struggling to find some political leadership of their own ... at the next election there was no reason why the UVF might not have a number of members elected to the Assembly and indeed why they might not be a member of the Executive'<sup>4</sup>

At the end of meeting Hugh Smyth pointed out that two of the members of his delegation were 'wanted members of the UVF.' He asked that these men be allowed to return safely to their homes and though Orme gave no reassurance on this point, it served to highlight the irregular nature of the meeting. Despite their declared ceasefire at the end of 1973 (Taylor, 2000: 138) the UVF had still been responsible for the deaths of between eleven and fifteen people between December and this meeting on 9 April 1974 (Sutton/CAIN, 2012) and those who represented the British government at this meeting were fully aware that the UVF ceasefire was not being seriously adhered to.

Although not proscribed until the 1990s, the UDA was brought into talks in a similar way, through a willing elected representative, in their case Assembly member for Londonderry, Glen Barr (Whyte, 2009). Barr had been a trade union official at Coolkeeragh power station outside Londonderry and had helped organise vigilante groups within Protestant estates in the city prior to his election for Vanguard in June 1973. After the collapse of the Loyalist Association of Workers' Barr moved to the Ulster Workers' Council (UWC) and within days of their May 1974 strike beginning had become chairman of its co-ordinating committee. Barr too remembers Stan Orme's agenda as being complementary to

his own ideas, and indeed, as members of the very same trade union (the AEU) it is less surprising that later Orme would make special visits to see Barr at his own home on behalf of the Secretary of State.<sup>5</sup> Barr and Orme agreed on a great number of issues. Barr, for example, credits Orme with convincing him of the need to accept voluntary coalition later in 1976— in effect, power-sharing – a controversial view which led Ulster Vanguard to split from the last remaining institution of Protestant solidarity, the United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC). This demonstrates something of Orme’s reasoned influence over left-wing elements of Vanguard and Barr still remembers that ‘Stan Orme and me communicated quite a bit ... Stan and I got on very well.’ (Interview with Glen Barr, 2010)

The context in which these first meetings took place was the UWC Strike of 15-28 May 1974. Initially, prominent UDA figures appeared at meetings with NIO officials under the thinly veiled guise of loyalist trade unionists and gave their affiliations as workers at Rolls Royce or Mackie’s Engineering<sup>6</sup> (the UDA’s Andy Tyrie and Tommy Lyttle) although Barr was also present and spoke frequently on their behalf.

For the UVF, contacts with the British moved even more swiftly. Ken Gibson – who had also attended the 15 May meeting along with Tyrie and Barr – was invited back for a set of three private talks between 21 and 29 May. James Allan, who conducted these talks on behalf of the NIO, later stated that, his instructions were to simply talk and to pass any pertinent information up the line to the NIO, ‘I was told to have friendly chats up the chimney so to speak.’ (Interview with James Allan, 2010)

This first set of talks with the UVF took place just days after the UVF detonated the bombs in Dublin and Monaghan on 17 May that killed 33 civilians. Strangely however, talk did not turn at any stage to these atrocities despite the blame already being levelled at loyalists (*Daily Telegraph*, 18 May 1974). Instead, the meeting focused on the issue of

paramilitary roadblocks around Belfast during the strike although Gibson also spoke of his aim to find a 'non-violent' future role for the UVF.<sup>7</sup>

Only days after Prime Minister Harold Wilson had publicly described the UWC as 'spongers on British democracy' and accused loyalists of treachery (Wilson, 1974), Gibson was able, at Laneside, to voice his deep concern to these British officials at what he perceived as the sidelining of the UVF from the mainstream of unionist politics. Allan noted that, 'the UVF delegation found it difficult to articulate their demands.'<sup>8</sup> Without any such demands, and with the overt disgust of the British Prime Minister, there seemed little to talk about. James Allan noted his puzzlement by the UVF's attitude toward their talks at Laneside and commented:

'The UVF's relationship with us has become very strange. They are desperately in need of advice as to how to achieve their aims of ensuring working-class, and above all UVF, participation in politics and they seek this from us even though they know there are basic differences between them and HMG on the strike.'<sup>9</sup>

Adding to this confusion over intentions, when the strike ended with UWC victory on 28 May, the UVF began in earnest to organise their own 'Volunteer Political Party' and they again went straight to Laneside to discuss their options. There they spoke first to James Allan again (showing him a printed letter for distribution to 'their own people' regarding the founding principles of their party) before being escorted in for a personal meeting with the Secretary of State. Concern that Gibson was perhaps cosying up to Allan and Michael Oatley was expressed by John Falls, part of Gibson's delegation, when on leaving he expressed his concern that 'what the UVF or VPP were saying [to Allan and Oatley] might be repeated to

others.' Allan and Oatley reassured the men that 'it was a firm rule that confidence exchanged with one [Laneside contact] were not repeated to another.'<sup>10</sup>

When the meeting recommenced in the presence of the Secretary of State, Gibson explained that the VPP had been established 'to ensure a counter balance' at the United Ulster Unionist Council 'by the creation of a genuine working class party ... [and that] they saw themselves as progressive socialists.'<sup>11</sup> They sought the release of three men they believed could help them organise their political activity and supported power sharing with the minority. Merlyn Rees told the VPP that he would look into the releases and both parties agreed to deny the meeting had taken place.

Although Allan's notes reveal the potential for the UVF to be used to gain information on the UUUC (and to fuel possible dissent there), he also convinced them that guarantees given to the UVF in order to ensure 'working-class participation' would later also require granting militant 'Catholic' [i.e. Republican] organisations seats on any future constitutional conference.<sup>12</sup> This was not a deal Allan had the authority to make but in making this connection between the representation of militant working class Protestants and their Catholic equivalents, it remains the only recorded evidence that Laneside had any active part in the socialising agenda evident in Stan Orme's earlier meetings.

Whilst in his autobiography Rees noted his desire 'to bring the loyalist working class into the political arena' (Rees, 1985: 92) the emphasis these minutes place on what these groups had to say for themselves is compelling. There is no sense the VPP was perceived by the NIO as the Secretary of State's client, and the emphasis on progressive socialism makes it feel more that Gibson was intent on impressing Rees, Allan and Oatley, rather than the other way around. Thus, this thesis, that Laneside was used to politicise the left wing of loyalism in a direct attempt to outmanoeuvre the unionist right wing (led by Ian Paisley,

William Craig and Harry West) is much too simple. For one thing it ignores the great differences between Britain's representatives and the loyalists. Most importantly, it ignores agency within the loyalist groups themselves. The VPP's affinity with the Labour Party was not one the Labour Party shared with them. Moving beyond 'mainstreaming' and looking at the role of Laneside from the Loyalist perspective itself, may therefore be a better way of explaining what occurred.

### Talks without 'end'? The Bottom-up Approach

It is certainly apparent that after 1969 a new generation of working class Protestants, particularly in Belfast, became cynical with old forms of unionism. Ian Paisley's blend of rhetoric and inaction left those who felt the need to defend their streets cold. For Sarah Nelson, 'few [in the paramilitaries] were fighting to close the floodgates of sin' (Nelson, 1984: 66) and it is certainly true that many loyalists were angered at the sight of politicians leaving for the safety of their own homes at the end of every day, when they had spent their mornings making irresponsible or divisive speeches that aroused sectarian animosity. Andy Tyrrie later commented, 'there were no politicians in jail. And there were very few in the cemeteries.' (O'Malley, 1983: 318)

It also needs to be remembered that Belfast's Protestant working classes had seen this before. In 1920 the new government of Northern Ireland at various points identified with, and then distanced itself from, loyalist violence in the shipyards and elsewhere (Parkinson, 2004: 31). Thus there was a retained sense of insecurity and distrust toward the unionist middle classes among sections of Belfast's protestant working class.

Marc Mulholland has written that the generational shift that had contributed so actively in the revitalisation of nationalist politics had largely been stymied in the Protestant community. Here, a debate between Terence O'Neill and Ian Paisley, a debate between the right wings of unionism, had marginalised both the working class radicals as well as the kinds of middle class progressivists whose unionism was irreligious (Mulholland, 2010). In so doing it allowed for the (paradoxical) emergence of a new kind of militant middle-ground in unionism. The resurgence of the UVF and the conglomeration of the local defence associations into the UDA in September 1972 were part of the manifestation of this working-class loyalism, but one that was not sold on the type of scaremongering schemes of the Paisleyites. These groups saw themselves as part of their distinctive working-class communities and had a sense 'of being neglected by their own politicians and of being rejected by Westminster, [and from] there came the glimmer of a new consciousness' (O'Malley, 1983: 318). Some also saw themselves as having a more permanent role within these communities. The emergence of Vanguard led by William Craig (though widely viewed as a party of the far right) offered a voice to unionists opposed as much to Paisley as to the predominance of conservative unionism and, beyond their regalia, some members were independent thinkers of a variety of hues, from Glen Barr to David Trimble (Mulholland, 2010: 89). Seen in this light, if the VPP was established by the UVF's Ken Gibson to give a specifically working-class loyalist option to the electorate, then Glen Barr was working from within established unionism (the UUUC) to give the protestant working class a voice there.

From the perspective of those that worked at Laneside, Barr was particularly well connected. He was a leading light in Vanguard, had been a vocal trade unionist and was active within the UWC; and as political advisor to the UDA he was a highly considered interlocutor at Laneside. From the bottom-up perspective however, Barr was there because

Barr wanted to be there. He had his own views, and his entry and exit from so many political movements over the years demonstrates a clear ideological standpoint, rather than loyalty to any particular organisation. Barr's ideas on an independent Ulster – a minority view in both Vanguard and the UDA – typify a unique political approach that could be seen as self-indulgent.<sup>13</sup> But Barr's trade union experience made him an excellent figurehead and a key UDA strategist whether or not all his political ideas were fully accepted.

If Ken Gibson's talks at Laneside demonstrate evidence of a nervous, clientelistic attitude, then the UDA's talks there were often far more political and theoretical in content, though they achieved less from the perspective of the British government. For Glen Barr, 'We were interested in talking about a whole range of things, but politics was the main one' (Interview with Glen Barr, 2010). Unlike the UVF, Barr believes that, 'we didn't go looking for advice, we came to discuss. We told them our opinions – my theme was independence' (Interview with Glen Barr, 2010). British notes of meetings with Barr and Tyrrie at Laneside confirm this to an extent. During a long meeting on 12 June 1974, Tyrrie and Barr both expressed their desire that talks at Laneside include the IRA. They accepted the need for Catholics to participate in government and, while they rejected the idea of a United Ireland, they were happy to discuss a future in 'either a federal Britain or an independent dominion.'<sup>14</sup> On the 19 June, a second meeting with Tyrrie and Barr focused on detention and again, unlike the UVF, they gave their opinions and philosophy and did not enter into negotiation of individual cases. Barr passed on a personal copy of the final statement of a loyalist conference he had attended earlier that day but James Allan told them that he 'did not wish to comment officially since it was not for us [Oatley was also present] to interfere.'<sup>15</sup> At a third meeting however on 21 June, Barr and Tyrrie did begin to mention individual cases they were concerned with. These included rumours among the UDA in the



Maze prison that their food was being poisoned, an enquiry into the potential of the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) subsidising minibuses for visiting dependents of UDA prisoners, the imprisonment of Andy Beattie (who Barr contended 'was a goodie') and the personal matter of the extension of Barr's own gun licence (and the granting of one for Tyrie).<sup>16</sup> A month later, at another meeting at Laneside, patronage was back on the agenda. On his problems with the Unionist Party, Barr asked Allan 'Could not the British Government do something to finally discredit them?', while Tyrie asked that another of the UDA prisoners be released on compassionate grounds. As they were leaving Tyrie also made a request, 'with just a note of seriousness', that they be granted family holidays (though not to Cyprus) and for expenses to be paid for Barr's car as he'd managed to write-off two in the preceding months driving to and from meetings at Laneside.<sup>17</sup>

For Barr, these personal requests were always unsuccessful. 'We got nothing from them ... we were telling them what was going on in the streets, and we were going in to better our communities, not to better ourselves and that was the thing with us. Our principles were maintained, and were non-negotiable' (Interview with Glen Barr, 2010).

The question of patronage was in any case a double-edged sword as being seen to have powerful friends within such a volatile and physically dangerous political context as loyalism in the 1970s could quickly turn allies into enemies. Certainly there were no new cars, houses or honours emanating from what went on at Laneside, and the only physical benefit Tyrie gained was when he was allowed to pick a bunch of roses from the garden there.<sup>18</sup> The only conclusion left therefore is that Laneside was not actively offering patronage or support to any of the loyalist groups. Permanent Under-Secretary at the NIO Frank Cooper was simply genuinely interested in understanding the fringes of unionism better, and used Laneside as a passive means of staying informed in case something of use

came up. For example, the document from the UWC conference Barr had passed on proved useful a fortnight later when a meeting was held with a group of UWC dignitaries that included a wide range of paramilitary and protestant vigilante groups.<sup>19</sup>

### Talks from the Middle: Laneside and Amelioration

From this perspective, that Laneside was a passive listening post, and not a cloak and dagger intelligence station, one can look again at how loyalist talks began there. On 26 February 1974, two days before the election that would bring Merlyn Rees to Northern Ireland as Secretary of State, Frank Cooper and Michael Oatley met with a small delegation of community activists from the Northern Ireland Labour Party. The NILP members who visited Stormont Castle that day however came expressly as individuals 'who had been in contact with the leadership of Ulster Volunteer Force.'<sup>20</sup> Out of dialogue begun by Rev. Stewart in Woodvale Methodist Church this group had identified 'a genuinely moderate group ... within the UVF leadership [who] wished ... to bring the organisation's influence to bear through political channels.'<sup>21</sup> In a separate instance, Brian Garrett, a solicitor and member of the NILP also acted as an intermediary with elements of the UWC (Fisk, 1975: 84). Looking at what was done at Laneside with loyalist groups later (the intense listening, the provision of a venue for discussion, and the occasional piece of advice) it seems that these tentative intermediaries sparked Frank Cooper's curiosity before the arrival of Merlyn Rees and Stan Orme under the new Labour government.

In fact, months before the UWC Strike, a paper had been circulated in the Northern Ireland Office which also stated a preference for de-criminalisation of the UVF and secret talks. This discussion paper was written by Phillip Woodfield (NIO Deputy Secretary) just

before his return to the Home Office in early 1974.<sup>22</sup> Woodfield carried unique authority in this area as he had played a key role in the 1972 Cheyne Walk talks with the Provisional IRA, (along with Laneside's Frank Steele). Woodfield was thus one of a handful of officials who had spoken directly with the IRA.

Although Woodfield wrote of pre-conditions to de-proscription, he also recommended, despite the risks, that preliminary contact should take place *before* the order was put to parliament. Woodfield hoped that preliminary talks with a wide range of opinion within these paramilitaries 'might reveal something about the attitudes within the organisation.'<sup>23</sup> He also recommended having strong intelligence that might indicate the level of an organisation's involvement in terrorism and 'its extent would help indicate the real strength of those within the organisation who opposed violence.'<sup>24</sup> The aim of all talks however was the identification of moderates within organisations currently proscribed due to terrorist activity and de-proscription followed by a 'substantial release' of prisoners in order to 'strengthen those in the organisation who favoured political, non-violent policies and reduce the risk of proponents of violence asserting themselves.'<sup>25</sup> Of course this was only a discussion document at this stage and (upon his appointment) Merlyn Rees's statement that he would never speak to the IRA (again) (*Daily Telegraph*, 7 March 1974) was taken relatively seriously, even at Laneside.<sup>26</sup> The intense personal trust between Rees and Cooper however meant that the PUS always stood a chance of running a project without Rees' scrutiny if needs required it. And, if not against the letter of Rees' statement of 7 March, talks with the loyalists were certainly against the spirit of what Rees spoke of.

From this perspective, the talks at Laneside were not calculated to bolster the unionist left wing. More it was an attempt at amelioration that would, it was hoped, allow for a natural centre-ground in these groups to be found. Secret talks at Laneside joined its

public functions of entertaining the Press, holding social receptions for the elected elites of Northern Ireland, and meeting with peace and reconciliation groups. Talks with paramilitaries and their representatives (though seemingly incongruous) took place in this context, and thus they 'were not borne from any cast iron object or method ... we were not working to a particular agenda ... We weren't favouring any particular course' (Interview with James Allan, 2010). Diplomats were specifically chosen for their unique skills in conversation and for their amiability. James Allan recalls, 'they knew I could talk the hind leg off a donkey and something somewhere would emerge upon which their experts could get onto. My job was to be the listening post to everything and to report this accurately' (Interview with James Allan, 2010). Allan's considered view of those he spoke to was pragmatic:

'I didn't personally attribute evil to the senior people I met in [any of] these organisations. That may have been my superficial attitude to evil, but I genuinely felt that I was just dealing with organisation men ... we weren't counting the bodies because we weren't at the hospitals ... [that] was the background of Northern Ireland.' (Interview with James Allan, 2010)

The object from Laneside's perspective then was simply to stop people killing one another, not to negotiate major constitutional change and not to explicitly undermine Ian Paisley or William Craig.

Laneside did have some power (it had the ear of Frank Cooper), but this power was limited by its position as an appendix of the NIO. For example, as Merlyn Rees consistently

sought to end internment, he regularly released detainees and some of those released were undoubtedly identified by Cooper based on conversations with loyalists at Laneside.

## Maturity

By early 1975 talks with the UDA in particular had become a mundane, routine practice. The IRA ceasefire that was arranged by Michael Oatley's far more secret contacts with Republicans began to take up a much greater portion of Laneside's time. Oatley even began bringing Allan along to meetings in Derry with members of the Provisional IRA's Army Council. (White, 2006: 226). The stuttering PIRA ceasefire in the early weeks of 1975 however led some Loyalists to become concerned that a deal was being done behind their backs. Andy Tyrie got in touch with Allan at Laneside and visited him there on the evening of 26 February 1975. This led to two further meetings the following day where the UDA delegation, that included Glen Barr, met with Frank Cooper and subsequently the Secretary of State.<sup>27</sup> Whilst the initial topic that brought the UDA to Laneside and Stormont Castle was their concern over the opening of incident centres and their fear of the establishment of IRA police forces in Catholic areas, it soon became clear that their concern was mostly fear due to ignorance of what was going on. They had not anticipated an IRA ceasefire at all, and the implications of one made them nervous. Would *they* be picked-on now the police and army had so little to do? Was the IRA using the ceasefire and the more relaxed security measures to reequip their units in the province? Had the IRA made a secret deal with the British? Frank Cooper tried his best to allay the delegations' fears of any sell out, 'Provisional Sinn Fein' he told them, 'had exploited the situation cleverly. They had mounted a powerful propaganda effort which appeared to have taken in many people (including, by implication,

the UDA) ... [and that surely] it was better that they expend their energies in a political way than in terrorism.'<sup>28</sup> Allan, Cooper and Rees failed in their attempts to allay the UDA's fears and upon leaving these meetings Tyrie announced that they intended to police loyalist areas themselves from six p.m. the following evening (*The Times*, 28 February 1975).

Division (both within loyalism generally and within the UDA particularly) in early 1975 meant that Tyrie and Barr were bluffing this time round and in their final meeting with Rees, three hours before the scheduling patrols were due to begin, the delegates (which now also included Ken Gibson) sat amicably at Stormont Castle and listened to the Secretary of State carefully explain that 'the Protestant community would not be sold down the river.'<sup>29</sup> Reports of this second meeting suggest that the planned UDA patrols had been called off late the previous night due to a lack of support from within their own membership (*The Times*, 1 March 1975). Tyrie, in response, acted with a great deal more humility at this second meeting, knowing that any further threats he made would be empty. Tyrie was recorded to have remarked that 'the atmosphere had been so pleasant that he had not found an opportunity to shout.'<sup>30</sup> this was only half the truth.

In the end, the IRA ceasefire – which itself was pockmarked by serious instances of violence – was met by an increased loyalist paramilitary campaign which included some of these groups' most harrowing atrocities of the Troubles. The Volunteer Political Party, having achieved only 2,690 votes in the general election of October 1974 was wound up shortly after (Nelson, 1984: 187-188) when the UVF issued a new policy document that declared 'attack as the best means of defence' and calling on its activists to, 'employ the same tactics as our enemy, but [to] be more ruthless and determined' (Spencer, 2008: 62).

While meetings with the Provisional IRA were to dominate Laneside's work, it was personnel changes that probably served to undermine relations the most. Oatley was

replaced in March 1975 by a still unknown MI5 officer – referred to later as ‘the Horizontal Man’ because of his lack of enthusiasm for the work. James Allan was replaced at Laneside by another diplomat, Donald Middleton, and a fifth, unnamed British conversant is also believed to have taken part. There is some indirect evidence that meetings with loyalist leaders continued to take place<sup>31</sup> although Laneside itself became noticeably less secure as the year went on.<sup>32</sup> Merlyn Rees noted the great stir caused by Rev William Arlow’s repeated talk of Britain’s supposed intentions to withdraw (Rees, 1985: 231) and certainly the UWC were also vexed by Arlow’s talk (Fisk, 1975: 247). However, after their re-proscription on 3 October 1975, the UVF leaked both the location and details of those they had contacted to the Press Association, and the *New Statesman* confidently ran a story about under the title ‘Mr Rees’s Decolonising Mandarins’ that concluded damagingly that ‘for the (unelected) representatives of the bombers and gunmen there is always a cup of tea and a polite welcome for a chat in the civilised confines of Laneside.’ (*New Statesman*, 14 November 1975: 604-5).

Though for a while the offices at Laneside continued to be used, talks with paramilitaries there became more consultative and prosaic after its cover was blown. In a series of meetings a week after the *New Statesman* article, the Convention Report, formulated by Northern Ireland’s main political parties, was presented in turn to several groups at Laneside. These meetings were designed to establish where these groups stood on the key issues but had nothing of the openness and intimacy that the minutes from 1974 reveal. Andy Tyrie described to Middleton the feelings of virtual *anomie* among ‘the people’. He spoke openly and honestly, but ‘showed no curiosity as to the government’s position, and left his copy of the report on the table when the meeting closed.’<sup>33</sup>

## The End of Laneside

The sad case of the death of Sammy Smyth in March 1976 perhaps typifies the end of Laneside's talks with paramilitaries in Northern Ireland. Smyth, a founding member of the UDA in 1972, had been in and out of Andy Tyrie's circle of advisors and had been head of propaganda during the UWC strike. Thus he had been an occasional visitor to Laneside and was considered at one time, 'an individual with influence among the paramilitaries and trade unionists [but] without an established power base.'<sup>34</sup> Glen Barr described him more precisely as 'an odd ball. He was always an odd ball' (Interview with Glen Barr, 2010). Nevertheless Smyth was invited to Laneside in September 1975 so that Donald Middleton could hear out his ideas. He was invited back to talk about the Convention Report in November and turned up again in January 1976 where he spoke to Donald Middleton about his 'latest ideas for a political solution in Northern Ireland.'<sup>35</sup> Smyth came across throughout his meetings as a well-meaning community activist, but little else. Middleton's view, once he'd met with Smyth was that he was little more than 'an active busybody ... articulate but verbose'.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately Smyth seemed harmless, if over-enthusiastic.

His meetings at Laneside however may have instilled in Smyth a greater sense of his own importance than he would otherwise have had. He was also at the time enrolled in a Master's course in adult education, neither of which would have helped Smyth reel-in his inclination to blether. In a completely unguarded interview with Jamie Delargy (editor at the time of *Gown* the Belfast student newspaper) Smyth spoke of his belief that a civil war was imminent and that this would result in an expanded Northern Ireland from which Catholics would (at best) be expelled. In the interview he stated, 'We will assume that Catholics are



fully armed and on that assumption we will take action against them.’ The interview was quickly reprinted in an issue of *Republican News* under the title ‘UDA Threaten Wholesale Slaughter’ (*Republican News*, 14 February 1976, reprinted from *Gown*, 6 February 1976) and within a month Smyth was dead, murdered by the IRA (*Irish Times*, 11 March 1976). Donald Middleton noted before the killing that he suspected in the interview that Smyth had been ‘letting himself be carried away by his own eloquence’<sup>37</sup> rather than expressing his true feelings. On his visits to Laneside Smyth had only ever spoken about his published notions regarding ‘community governance’ (Smyth, 1975).

Public records relating to Loyalist interaction at Laneside cease around this time. The end was not a direct result of the death of Smyth but the killing was certainly indicative of the upswing back toward violence that from late 1975 called into question talks with *any* paramilitary groups. While Merlyn Rees was to stay on as Secretary of State until September 1976, Laneside itself was closed before the arrival of Roy Mason and his belief, laid bare before the 1976 Labour Party Conference that ‘Ulster had had enough of initiatives’ (*Daily Telegraph*, 18 April 2004).

## Conclusions

Stan Orme always retained a private tendency toward Irish unification (Fisk, 1975: 63-64) and whilst this was an ambition he hid throughout his time as Junior Minister (with responsibility for Harland and Wolff), his pragmatism masked a broader goal of eventual Irish unity under the principle of consent. In a speech drafted on House of Commons notepaper (and which made up part of a subsequent debate) Orme noted ‘if the working class people of Northern Ireland can be convinced, that whatever their religious division,

they have economic interests in common, they will be able to approach the constitutional question of which the border is a small and long-term part, with open minds.'<sup>38</sup>

Orme's tendency toward unification would not have endeared him to the shipyard workers of Belfast but nor do his papers show any long term affinity or the continuance of personal contacts in Northern Ireland after his period as Junior Minister there. Indeed the actual speech Orme gave that night in the House of Commons underlined his belief that unionism and trade unionism were incompatible. On Vanguard's aim to garner working-class support through an emphasis on an independent Ulster, Orme declared in the Commons that, 'the airy-fairy scheme about setting up a little independent state ... is misleading tens of thousands of working-class Protestants' (Commons Debates, 846, 21 November 1972, 1209).

Orme could have gone further in his attack on this emerging unionist subset in 1972 had he wanted to. And the Labour Party itself were rarely considered pro-unionist.<sup>39</sup> But compared with what went on at the talks at Laneside, Orme was still an advocate of Irish unity and his aims and ambitions were only temporarily hidden under the greater requirements of office. Unlike the government, Laneside in this respect was crucially neutral on the question of Ireland's continued partition.

Neutrality in this sense, and on such a fundamental point as the partition of Ireland, can only exist when there is no predetermined aim or stance on the issue and there was none at Laneside. Dean Pruitt's work on negotiation with terrorist groups does not allow for what went on at Laneside therefore to be effectively characterised. Whether it be through negotiation, capitulation, mainstreaming, combating or isolating, (Pruitt, 2006: 373-374) the object for Pruitt is defined – to either give, deny, or negotiate the defined aim of the terrorist group. Without a political aim in mind therefore, much of the work at Laneside was

toward the basic amelioration of problems and did not stick to any predetermined model of conflict resolution. Diplomats, by not seeking to interfere in the goals of one organisation or another, and without any actual power to act, were thus the perfect arbiters of such discussion.

Furthermore, there was no link between Laneside and the various plans for British withdrawal written by Harold Wilson in conjunction with Bernard Donoghue and Andrew Graham (Craig, 2010: 176-181). Indeed, both Allan and Oatley profess that this had not occurred to them as a possibility during their time at Laneside. For Allan; 'If Northern Ireland was being planned as an atomic test site I'd no way of knowing. It had never crossed *my* mind.' (Interview with James Allan, 2010) And while this does not rule out what Frank Cooper might have known, the notion that Laneside was part of a deeper project beyond the gradual pacification of violent sub-political groups, is also refuted by this research.

Recently published research by Niall Ó Dochartaigh offers a delicately balanced view of the decision making context within which British talks with the IRA were conducted by Laneside's officials. It concludes broadly that:

'British decisions were shaped by the reality of loyalist violence and the threat of its intensification, the intensity of Unionist and Conservative hostility to any settlement with the IRA and direct resistance by senior military and police figures to the scaling back of military activity and to the reform of policing' (Ó Dochartaigh, 2011: 76)

From the loyalist perspective, their parallel talks with the British were being conducted within a matrix that was even more complex and restrictive thus had outcomes that were even more limited. The main problem however was that the changing nature of Loyalism's demands demonstrated their lack of a firmly constructed general objective. This all meant

that there was not even the pretence that these meetings were somehow negotiations that there was when Laneside officials met with the leaders of the Provisional Republican Movement.

Although no one personally involved in talks at Laneside would ever admit so, the very fact that the loyalists who participated in talks were given the opportunity to discuss their political ideas openly and without fear must surely have boosted their confidence and standing within the groups they represented. One can only accept *prima facie* Glen Barr's assertion that he came 'pre-cast' to Laneside when those who emerged from talks there would later become the driving forces behind the Ulster Political Research Group and the PUP. In the end, Laneside was talking to the right people, many of them minor figures in 1974, but who would remain the political strategists of loyalism for many years to come.

Despite this, Laneside was not a place where overt patronage was offered or given. The amelioration of basic problems and misunderstandings as they arose was the limit of what Allan, Oatley and Frank Cooper could offer the paramilitaries. In return, Laneside received information regarding the political disposition of groups and details of the political debates happening on the fringes of unionism. The proof of this lies in the small number of actual interventions Laneside officials made, their lack of authority within the NIO, and the ease with which the office was closed in 1976. Still, as a place where political ideas could be communicated in confidence, the Laneside experiment should be recognised in the history of loyalism as it increasingly is in the histories of the British Government (e.g. Powell, 2008: 66-73) or of the Republican movement (e.g. Taylor, 1997 or Moloney, 2002) in Northern Ireland.

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- <sup>1</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/342, FCO 87/343 and FCO 87/344. Meetings with Laneside Officials (mostly James Allan) and UDA representatives occurred on 12 June, 19 June, 21 June, 25 June, 3 July, 22 July, 20 September, 7 August (combined loyalist meeting) 7 October, 27 November and 10 December 1974.
- <sup>2</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/341 and FCO 87/342. Meetings with Ken Gibson, UVF representative, occurred on 9 April, 21 May, 27 May, 29 May, 26 June (X2) and 7 August 1974 .
- <sup>3</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/341, 'Note of a meeting between the Minister of State and a (UVF?) delegation led by Hugh Smyth in Stormont Castle', 9 April 1974.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/342, Meeting between the Minister of State and Mr Glen Barr, Londonderry, 25 June 1974.
- <sup>6</sup> TNA:PRO, CJ 4/404, 'Meetings with various loyalist delegations', 15 May 1974, Stormont Castle,. Unofficial accounts of these meetings were first published in Fisk, 1975: 64-65.
- <sup>7</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/341, 'Talk with Mr Ken Gibson of the UVF', Laneside, 21 May 1974.
- <sup>8</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/341, 'Meeting with UVF at Laneside', 27 May 1974. Present at this meeting were Ken Gibson, John Falls, Tom West, Stanley Grey, James Allan (FCO) and Michael Oatley (MI6)
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/342, Meeting with Volunteer Political Party (with Allan and Oatley), Stormont Castle, 26 June 1974, Kelvin White at the FCO's Republic of Ireland department added his concern to this, noting in the margin, 'it seems that the VPP is going to be even more subservient to the UVF than the [sic] Sinn Fein is to the IRA.'
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/341, 'Meeting with UVF at Laneside', 27 May 1974.
- <sup>13</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/341, 'Talk with Mr Ken Gibson of the UVF' Laneside, 21 May 1974. Ken Gibson described Barr's approach as 'hedonistic.'
- <sup>14</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/342, 'Meeting with G. Barr and A. Tyrrie at Laneside', 12 June 1974.
- <sup>15</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/342, 'Note for the record' Meeting with Barr and Tyrrie at Laneside, 19 June 1974.
- <sup>16</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/342, Allan to Cooper, 25 June 1974, recording another meeting with Barr on 21 June.
- <sup>17</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/342, 'Meeting with Messrs Glennie Barr and Andy Tyrrie' Laneside 22 July 1974.
- <sup>18</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/342, 'Meeting with Messrs Glennie Barr and Andy Tyrrie' Laneside 22 July 1974.
- <sup>19</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/342, 'Meeting with UWC Strike co-ordinating committee', Stormont Castle, 7 August 1974. Represented at this meeting, beyond the UDA, UVF and Red Hand Commandos were Down Orange Welfare, the Orange Volunteers, the Ulster Service Corps, and the Ulster Special Constabulary Association. The Secretary of State, two of junior ministers (Orme and Donaldson), his PUS Sir Frank Cooper, Laneside's James Allan and others represented the NIO.
- <sup>20</sup> TNA:PRO, FCO 87/341, 'Notes of Meeting with Northern Ireland Labour Party' Stormont Castle, 26 February 1974. Counsellor W. Boyd, D. McIlldoon, A. Scott and Rev. J. Stewart.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> De-proscription of the UVF and Sinn Fein had also been considered briefly by the Northern Ireland Office in early May 1973 but this was not implemented. See TNA:PRO, CJ 4/862.
- <sup>23</sup> TNA:PRO CJ 4/643, Undated memorandum on de-proscription, Philip Woodfield, c. February 1974.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> TNA:PRO FCO 87/342, 'Meeting with Seamus Loughran at Laneside', 9 July 1974. The first recorded meeting with British Officials and Sinn Fein at Laneside (with Seamus Loughran) did not occur until July 1974, although it is rumoured Jimmy Drumm and Billy McKee were earlier visitors.
- <sup>27</sup> TNA:PRO, CJ 4/838, Meeting between Frank Cooper, James Allan and a UDA delegation, 27 February 1975.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> TNA:PRO, CJ 4/2399, 'Meeting between the Secretary of State and the Ulster Loyalist Central Co-ordinating Committee', Stormont Castle, 28 February 1975.
- <sup>30</sup> TNA:PRO, CJ 4/2399, 'Meeting between the Secretary of State and the Ulster Loyalist Central Co-ordinating Committee', Stormont Castle, 28 February 1975.
- <sup>31</sup> In July 1975 contingency plans were laid down by the Northern Ireland Office due to 'talk in Loyalist circles for preparations being made for Doomsday.' TNA:PRO, CJ 4/1159 'Cabinet: Official Committee on Northern Ireland', note by Northern Ireland Office, 3 July 1975,.
- <sup>32</sup> LSE, REES 3/4. Merlyn Rees later commented that 'Belfast was full of incestuous gossip. It was becoming a pastime for those wishing to look important.'

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<sup>33</sup> TNA:PRO, CJ 4/974, Laneside talks on Convention Report, third meeting, Andy Tyrie and John Orchin, 21 November 1975.

<sup>34</sup> TNA:PRO, CJ 4/1359, Donald Middleton's note on 'Mr Sammy Smyth's "Community Convention" Plan, 25 September 1975.

<sup>35</sup> TNA:PRO, CJ 4/974, Laneside talks on Convention Report, fourth meeting, Samuel Smith, 23 November 1975.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> TNA:PRO, CJ 4/1359, Middleton to Leahy, 19 February 1976.

<sup>38</sup> LSE Archives, Papers of Stanley Orme 1/3, 'The Last Chance for Northern Ireland?' c.17-23 November 1972.

<sup>39</sup> At the same debate Kevin McNamara had described Vanguard as 'a queer sort of Nationalist Socialist body', Harold Wilson had famously also once described Unionist MPs as 'hacks supporting the English Tory Party' Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 846, 21 November 1972, 1186 and Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 711, 6 May 1965, 1562.

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