



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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1. The prospects for political development in the short term are not very hopeful and it is difficult to see what steps the Government and the SDLP can take, other than those they are currently embarked on, which will have a positive impact on the situation.
2. The positive factors are:-
 - (a) Statements by the British Government, particularly since the June Conference have made it clear that it will not budge on the Agreement, and Unionist parties no longer believe either Government will back away from it.
 - (b) The 'Ulster Says No' campaign is showing some signs of fatigue e.g., Mr. Molyneaux's withdrawal from press conferences on 11/8/86 and North Down OUP Councillors' decision to return to work 27/8/86. Other OUP Councillors have been meeting privately to do business and are understood to want an end to the Council boycott as it is not approved of by the electorate and having no effect on the Agreement.
 - (c) Mr. Molyneaux's strong, personal commitment against the use of violence and the continued efforts by Millar and Maginnis in particular to retain devolution as central to OUP policy despite efforts by McCartney and the integrationists.
 - (d) The imminent arrival of the Fund which will provide financial aid which Unionist politicians will find it difficult to ignore.
 - (e) The Protestant Churches' calls for talks, implicitly and explicitly without preconditions.

- (f) With the marching season over, politicians are considering the prospects for talks. Mr. Hume responded quickly and positively (21/8/86) to W. Ross (OUP) call to him to spell out his policies for the future (although Mr. Ross withdrew next day) and Mr. Hume's private agreement to a request from Scott to write to the Unionist parties seeking talks. (We understand that King previously asked him to write but believe nothing came of this).
- (g) The lack of support for the Unionist parties in Britain: only 26% of those polled in May in a BBC poll indicated that NI should remain in the UK. Unionists have begun to try to win back support (e.g., with the Friends of the Union organisation which is to have its first rally at the Ulster Hall on 10/9/86 and a further one at Bournemouth on 8/10/86 to coincide with the Tory Conference). However, they appear unlikely to be able to persuade a significant part of the present British Parliament or people to support their case. If they were to participate fully in Westminster, it would undoubtedly win them sympathy and perhaps open the way to some concessions to them. However, it should be possible for the Government and SDLP to work on the commitment to the Agreement and general British antipathy to integration, to prevent any significant concessions which would limit the effectiveness of the Conference or diminish prospects for devolution.
- (h) Mr. Hume's promise to speak to J. Cushnahan of the Alliance Party, which, while it cannot achieve any breakthrough on devolution will be helpful in keeping Alliance enthusiastic on the pro-Agreement side. (Alliance leaders do not expect any movement until after the next UK election). There has been some increase (350 members) in Alliance Party membership among people who were previously Unionist or non-aligned.

3. The negative factors appear more potent:-

- (i) The continued thorough dislike of the Agreement throughout the Unionist community generally, who blame it at least in part for increased tension and even (Sir. C. Carter in the Times on 20/8/86) for economic difficulties and the loss of investment.
- (ii) The growing intercommunal tensions, violence against the security forces, sectarian murders and intimidation. Sinn Fein and the IRA are still very much in business while the Protestant paramilitaries have become more active and better organised: each side is probably capable of a far greater level of violence.
- (iii) The relative strengths of the OUP and DUP: the former's involvement in the 'Ulster Says No' campaign is showing cracks, the latter's has been stepped up (Castlereagh ice rink notwithstanding). Incitement and threats by the DUP since June have yielded results - e.g., the Garvaghy Road decision. It has been indicated to us that the DUP is probably gaining ground electorally as a result of its high noisy profile as the party which is doing something (however misguided) about the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The OUP and DUP shares of first preference votes in local and Assembly elections since 1981 show the DUP is not so far behind the OUP that it could not mount a successful challenge to become the majority Unionist party:-

	1985 (Local)	1982 (Assembly)	1981 (Local)
OUP	30	30	27
DUP	24	23	27

- (vi) Even if the OUP could be prevailed upon to talk, given its weakness, lack of strong leadership and divided views, it is not clear that it alone would provide a credible interlocutor on behalf of the Unionist community. Discussions would have to be attempted but the SDLP, OUP and Alliance between them got just 55% of the vote in the 1985 local elections (60% in 1983 general election).
- (v) The fact that the DUP is clearly opposed to power-sharing (J. Wells repeated this on 20/8/86).
- (vi) The calculation by Unionists that it is worth waiting to see if either the Dublin or London Governments change in elections which are due by late 87 and mid 88. The divorce referendum has cost Ireland support in England, making it perhaps easier for another UK Government to do a deal with Unionists.

The most recent opinion poll (published on 28/8/86) gives Labour 301 seats, Conservatives 300, Alliance 25 and others 24. Labour and all of the others, including both the Unionists and SDLP would only match the combined Conservative and Alliance strength. While these figures would not give the Unionists leverage, they are close enough for them to hope the actual results would work for them. An alternative prospect of using votes - in this instance those of the pro-Unionist Conservative M.P.s - is hinted at in a Newsletter leader of 29/8/86, which suggests that Unionists' best hope lies in campaigning for a new Tory leader "who would show more concern for UK sovereignty and compassion for the unemployed and deprived". This is clearly a long shot, but indicative of the energy some Unionists are putting into trying to get away from the Agreement rather than working through it or even putting together a credible alternative.

4. Prospects and Possible Tactics. While any opening towards talks within the framework of the Agreement should be taken up, attention realistically must focus on how to get through a period of inactivity in relation to devolved Government.

5. It is understood that the SDLP has not made a push for membership nor has its membership increased spontaneously this year; increased progress under the Agreement in the next few months should help consolidate the SDLP position and increase their support vis-a-vis non-constitutional nationalism.

6. Possible measures which may be considered in the next few months include:-
 - (i) Engineering of elections. Given that Unionists will not talk about devolved Government, Assembly elections are out of the question. The creation of any lesser type of central body e.g., with scrutiny powers only is likely (a) to run into Unionist opposition since the body would only scrutinise items on which the Conference would "make determined efforts to resolve differences" between the Governments and, probably (b) nationalist opposition since it would not involve power-sharing and might prevent power-sharing happening later. An alternative possibility would be to dissolve local authorities early. However (i) they have operated for less than 2 years (last elections were held in May 1985). (ii) On past experience, elections would require a move back into the political arena and a reduction of violence, but while SDLP and Sinn Fein would fight it out on the nationalist side, the OUP and DUP would either operate a pact on the basis of existing Council membership or, in the absence of a pact and if the indications as to relative strengths above are accurate, the DUP would take votes/seats from the OUP, thereby claiming a mandate for their

hard line. (It appears that the DUP in particular are considering resigning their Council seats in protest against the Agreement. If they persist in this, it would suggest confidence on their part in the likely result).

- (ii) Encouraging a split between the DUP and OUP. As indicated above, this may not result in satisfactory talks. The British thought they were helping such a development in negotiating with the OUP over the scale of the Orange march down the Garvaghy Road on 12 July. However, it was clear that the British did so because of the DUP threat and the decision rebounded to the credit of the DUP. For so long as the OUP do not have defined policies which are clearly distinguishable from those of the DUP, doing something for the OUP will appear as a concession to the more active DUP, if not to loyalist paramilitaries.

- (iii) Establishing more formal consultation arrangements for Northern Ireland parties in respect of the Conference. At present the British offer talks after each meeting but only the Alliance party takes up the offer. In the absence of other developments, it might be helpful to offer the OUP, DUP, Alliance and SDLP meetings with either or both Joint Chairman once every 2/3 months to discuss items likely to be taken at future Conference meetings. While the Unionist parties will refuse, the existence of the offer will make their arguments about the Conference 'diktat' less easy to sustain in Britain. In time, the system might be used by some Unionists to make points about measures that are particularly disliked.

- (iv) Seeking to split constitutional Unionism from non-constitutional Unionism. In the January Belfast Telegraph poll 85% of Protestants said they opposed violent action as a protest against the Agreement.

The proportion among lower social classes was 81%. These proportions may have fallen somewhat since but would have to have dropped very significantly to amount to full backing for DUP policies which are a mixture of incitement (e.g., Dr. Paisley's civil war call and the Clontibret march) and threats of what others will do if DUP leadership is not listened to (e.g., J. Wells' address to the Glenties Conference on 20/8/86). On the assumption that the bulk of the Protestant population do not support the use of violence, if the issue were put squarely the DUP would either have to pull back or lose support. However, in practice it is difficult to put the issue squarely. Essentially it can be done by (i) tough examination of the position of the parties - but this is not often done by the media - the electronic media give too little time and supporters do not generally read newspapers critical of their position. (ii) Criminal penalties for incitement to violence or involvement with those associated with it. Such charges can be difficult to prove and the court cases can provide useful publicity for the perpetrators. (iii) Political penalties such as pre-election 'peace pledge' requirements or exclusion from office/loss of office in the event of a pledge not being given or broken. In the past, the SDLP have feared that a pre-election pledge would not be signed by Sinn Fein whose supporters would abstain, while Unionists would sign the pledge (but many would not really keep it). Total nationalist representation would be much reduced as a result. This issue is likely to be a major demand of Unionists in any devolution talks and will have to be faced sooner or later. As a start, perhaps those found guilty on serious charges of incitement to or involvement in violence should also lose their council/parliament seats and any other public appointments and be rendered ineligible to stand for election for, say, 5 years.

- (v) Trying to persuade the British opposition parties to remain firm on the Agreement in the event of their coming to power. The London Embassy keeps regular contact with members of the Labour and SDP/Alliance parties, and the SDLP also have links. These can continue to be cultivated with good effect, but the most useful event would be opinion (and final) poll results showing a clear majority for any of the British parties, none of whom would normally wish to abandon the Agreement.

Anglo-Irish Division.
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