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Westminster Elections.

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SDLP Prospects;

While the SDLP will be contesting 13 of the 17 seats in the forthcoming Westminster Election, their chances of success are limited to 4 seats - Foyle, Newry and Armagh, West Belfast and South Down.

Foyle

In the 1983 Westminster Election, John Hume took the seat easily from the unionist candidate, with Sinn Fein in 3rd place. He secured this position in the 1984 European Election and is confidently expected to have little problem being re-elected.

1983 Westminster Election results - Foyle

John Hume (SDLP)	24,071
Gregory Campbell (DUP)	15,923
Martin McGuinness (PSF)	10,607

Newry/Armagh

After narrowly failing to win in 1983 because of the Sinn Fein candidate, Seamus Mallon gained the seat for the SDLP in the 1986 Westminster by-elections caused by the unionist resignations in protest at the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The unionists are known to be determined to put up a strong fight to regain the seat. Mallon is expected to be returned with an increased majority.

<u>Westminster results</u>	<u>1983</u>	<u>1986</u>
Seamus Mallon (SDLP)	17,434	22,694
Jim Nicholson (OUP)	18,988	20,111
Jim McAllister (PSF)	9,925	6,609

West Belfast

Gerry Adams won in 1983 from Joe Hendron and Gerry Fitt (the incumbent) and many would regard him as favourite to retain the seat. However, Joe Hendron is expected to secure a large percentage of Gerry Fitt's old vote. His prospects for success hang very much in the balance.

1983 - West Belfast

Gerry Adams (PSF)	16,379
Joe Hendron (SDLP)	10,934
Gerry Fitt (Ind)	10,326
Tom Passmore (OUP)	2,435
G. A. Haffey (DUP)	2,399
Ms M. McMahon (WP)	1,893

South Down

Eddie McGrady failed by less than 550 votes to gain the seat here in 1983. The SDLP estimate that there is a small majority of nationalists in the South Down constituency and that they can take the seat if they can persuade their people to come out and vote.

Results South Down

	<u>1983</u>	<u>1986</u>
Enoch Powell (DUP)	20,693	24,963
Eddie McGrady (SDLP)	20,145	23,121
PSF	4,074	2,936
WP	851	522
DUP	3,743	-
Alliance	1,823	-

Prospects for Political Movement:

In the light of a variety of speeches by unionist leaders, particularly Harold McCusker, it can be suggested that the unionist leadership will follow up "Campaign UK" by a return to Westminster after the election (and having secured some form of mandate to do so) in order to regain ground lost in the minds of the British public and those elements within Tory circles normally sympathetic to their views. They are likely to seek a meeting with the new Prime Minister, demand the suspension of the Agreement and in its stead offer a form of devolution which has control over security, and which involves neither power-sharing at executive level nor an all-Ireland dimension. The chances of the SDLP accepting such a proposal are non-existent.

Changes in Electoral Practices

A number of electoral issues have been raised at the Conference. The franchise has now been extended to allow "I" Voters (mainly Irish people born in the South but resident in the North) vote in Northern Ireland Assembly elections. The British have also agreed to remove the barrier against I Voters in local elections. This will require a bill at Westminster. There is no urgency as the next local elections are in 1989.

Proportional Representation for Westminster Elections was turned down but we intend pursuing the matter. The ban on simultaneous membership of the Oireachtas and the Northern Ireland Assembly (Seamus Mallon's disqualification from the Assembly in 1982 because of his Seanad membership). This too will continue to be pursued.

Some electoral abuses which mainly operated at the expense of the SDLP have been dealt with e.g. personation.

Outstanding issues include some unfair siting of polling stations and sectarian appointments of electoral officials. Concern has been expressed by the SDLP about the new more liberal access to postal votes which they fear may be exploited by Sinn Fein.

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