

ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY

The Ulster Unionist Party's manifesto was launched at a press conference in their newly restored party headquarters in Glengall Street on 18 April by Jim Molyneaux, party vice-president and leader of the group of Ulster Unionist MPs, Jo Cunningham, chairman of the Party's Executive Committee and Norman Hutton, the party's secretary. A single page sheet, the manifesto was devoted mainly to constitutional and security issues, and apart from its opposition to the EEC and comprehensive education, it did not specify any particular socio-economic proposals, emphasising only its general commitment to the Conservative values of private ownership and enterprise and the protection of Ulster's rural traditions. The main points of the manifesto were:

- (1) its commitment to the maintenance of the union - "As Unionists, our overriding duty is to uphold the unity of the United Kingdom and the supremacy of its Parliament";
- (2) its commitment to the principle of 'democratic' devolved government without power-sharing -
"...our objective, which we shall pursue unremittingly, remains the restoration of such a system of devolved government as will neither endanger the Union nor confer contrived privileges in any section of the community";
- (3) its reference to UTLG and to an increase in the powers of district councils -
"We shall not be satisfied until the electors of Ulster have the same democratic control over their own affairs as in all other parts of the Kingdom. The appointed bureaucratic machinery by which our main services are run must be put under the control of elected representatives responsible to the people - the missing 'upper tier' of local government. The district councils must be given more functions and larger powers than they possess at present";
- (4) its opposition to 'colonial' direct rule and to the system of legislating for NI by Order-in-Council -
"We are opposed to the making of laws for Ulster by Ministerial Orders under 'direct rule', as if we were a colony. We shall continue working for the full restoration of our birthright to live under laws made by due Parliamentary process and no other";
- (5) its satisfaction with the increase in NI's representation at Westminster -
"In implementation [of the right to enjoy as an integral part of the UK the same privileges and standards as the rest of their fellow citizens] we have secured by an Act of Parliament ... that ... Ulster shall have just and equal representation in Parliament";
- (6) its stress on the party's independence from other groups at Westminster -
"Whatever the political make-up of the new Parliament, we shall continue to act in it as a party, independent of all other parties, free to use every opportunity for securing the understanding and fulfilment of Ulster's needs and just claims";

- (7) its commitment to the Ulsterisation of the security forces and to the military defeat of the IRA -
 "We rejoice in the increasing strength, effectiveness and confidence of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, the RUC Reserve and the Ulster Defence Regiment, to which our own efforts in Parliament have contributed; and we look forward with confidence to the time when Ulster men and women will maintain the peace and security of their own Province, with the Army defending the United Kingdom land frontier and available as an ultimate reserve. The inevitable failure of the IRA will be brought about by the realisation, on the part of all concerned, that Ulster's place in the United Kingdom is unshaken and unshakeable";
- (8) on socio-economic issues its opposition to the EEC as diminishing the sovereignty of the UK Parliament and the imposition of an "alien" system of comprehensive education.

Little of this is in fact new and much appeared, though possibly in more positive form, in the party's manifesto for the 1977 local government elections - "The Unionist Way Ahead". Significant perhaps is the final omission of any mention of the Convention Report and the greater stress on the principle of integration with the UK. For example, in the 1977 manifesto the same opposition to NI Orders-in-Council was expressed but the implication was that NI should pass its own laws in a devolved government; in this manifesto, the implication is that NI matters should be included in UK legislation. On local government, the manifesto speaks of the upper tier of local government without specifying whether that implies 1 Regional Council on the Strathclyde model or 3 as proposed in 1977, and once again, there is no indication of whether UTLG is seen as an interim step towards devolution or as a permanent feature in a 3 tier system of regional government (Stormont, UTLG, district councils).

Molyneaux's exposition of party policy in reply to press questions was in his traditional low key style. He denied that Unionists were embarking on an integrationist policy. The party was committed to a "normal, democratic, devolved government not based on a contrived power-sharing system". Coalitions within a devolved government might be possible, but enforced coalition or the so-called partnership would never be acceptable. The separate demand for UTLG and greater powers for district councils did not preclude the need for devolved government; nevertheless it would be "irresponsible" not to accept an upper tier of local government if it were offered by the Conservatives. The Conservatives were, he said, unlikely to offer them anything more, particularly as they had opposed devolution in Scotland and Wales. Asked why the party's MPs had brought down the government in that case, he replied that in obtaining the passage of the seats bill, they had got as much out of the dying government as had been possible; there was no real inconsistency between their action and their belief that Labour might be more easily pushed towards devolution than the Conservatives. He sidestepped the question of whether he agreed with Powell's view that another hung Parliament would serve their interests better.

Molyneaux was particular in his criticism of the Provisional IRA's campaign of violence during the election, commenting that there was growing pressure within the party for the reintroduction of capital punishment.