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NIO Dundonchil!

1979 GENERAL ELECTION

Attached are tables to assist in the analysis of the 1979 General
Election results in NI constituencies. Table 1 is a detailed
breakdown of the results by constituency. Table 2 is the same in
tabular form. Table 3 analyses the results by party in each of
the 4 Belfast constituencies and table 4 is the same for
constituencies outside Belfast with an additional breakdown between
constituencies east and west of the Bann. Table 5 compares the
results by party in all the elections since 1973 (Assembly, general
election, Convention and Local Government). Table 6 is a more
detailed comparison of the results by party of the February 1974,
October 1974 and May 1979 general elections. Table 7 is a detailed
comparison of the results by constituency in the 4 general elections
since 1970 and Table 8 is the same in tabular form for the 1974 and
1979 elections.

2. The election sees the return to Westminster of 5 Ulster Unionist
(UUP) MPs - Molyneaux (S.Antrim), Powell (S.Down), Bradford (S.Belfast)
McCusker (Armagh) and Ross (Londonderry); 3 Democratic Unionist (DUP)
MPs - Paisley (N.Antrim), McQuade (N.Belfast) and Robinson (E.Belfast);
1 United Ulster Unionist (UUUP) MP - Dunlop (mid-Ulster); 1 Independent
Unionist - Kilfedder (N.Down); 1 Social and Democratic Labour Party
(SDLP) MP - Fitt (W.Belfast); and 1 Independent Republican - Maguire
(Fermanagh and S.Tyrone). The UUP polled over 250,000 votes to get
their 5 seats, the SDLP over 130,000 for their 1 seat, Alliance
over 80,000 for none and DUP 70,000 votes for their 3 seats.

3. The result has been interpreted as showing increased polarisation
of NI society, with the DUP challenge to UUP supremacy growing
stronger and with the SDLP suffering from the nationalist appeal of
the IIP. Certainly Paisley has claimed the unexpected victories in
North and East Belfast as a major boost to his party and as evidence
of increasing grass roots support for his consistently Loyalist
policies. The result certainly gives him greater prestige, and
possibly bargaining power, and if Kilfedder and Dunlop join with
the DUP MPs to make it a 5:5:2 split in the House, then it will
mean the end to the traditional UUP domination of parliamentary
representation at Westminster. On the SDLP side, commentators
point to increased dissension within the ranks and a loss of support
to the IIP.

4. Whilst there may be an element of truth in this, some care should
be taken in accepting it too readily (particularly the swing to the
DUP). Certainly the DUP had the easiest task and the results show

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no overall change in voting pattern. In 1979 the total Unionist vote equalled 57.8%, the nationalist vote 26.2% and the non-sectarian vote 15.9% compared with 58.2%, 26.7% and 14.2% respectively in October 1974 and 51%, 28% and 21% in February 1974. Moreover, the UUP is still overall the strongest party gaining 36.6% of the vote, and the SDLP is still the largest minority party with 19.7% of the vote; Alliance with 11.9% maintained its position in third place against the 10.2% of the DUP in fourth place. The regional distribution also shows that the UUP can poll consistently high figures throughout the Province, whereas the DUP like Alliance is strongest in Belfast and at its weakest west of the Bann. Alliance also maintained its lead over the DUP in all areas.

5. Compared with past electoral performances the DUP appear not to have increased their vote significantly (although direct comparisons can only be made with PR elections when they fielded many more candidates), whereas the UUP seem to have at least stabilised if not increased their share of the vote. Alliance shows a steady increase in general election performance (3.2% in February 1974 with 3 candidates, 6.4% in October 1974 with 5 candidates and 11.9% in May 1979 with 12 candidates) whereas the SDLP have dropped slightly (22.4% with 12 candidates in February 1974, 22% with 9 candidates in October 1974 and 19.7% with 10 candidates (including Currie in May 1979). The drop in the SDLP vote is directly matched by the IIP's performance (3.3% with 4 candidates) and their relatively successful performances in the traditionally nationalist areas of mid-Ulster (18.4%) and Londonderry (8.65%) may have worried the SDLP.

6. What the results do show is the continuing steady decline in the UPNI and NILP votes and the failure on the part of the RC-WP to gain a foothold of any significance. The RC-WP will be disappointed by the result - many of their candidates lost their deposits - and it will be interesting to see whether they will revert to their traditionally more militant (and militaristic) stance.

7. Taken by constituency, in N.Antrim, Paisley gained his expected victory with an 18,543 majority. His share of the vote dropped from 73% in October 1974 to 52% mainly because of Burchill's challenge on behalf of the UUP; Burchill gained a creditable 23% of the vote compared with the 21% of Peter Utley in February 1974. The SDLP dropped from 12% to 7% with a 3% drop in Alliance's vote. In S.Antrim Molyneaux came away with one of the largest majorities ever of 38,868 votes, despite a small drop in his poll of about 3%. The SDLP dropped their vote from 13% to 10%, and Alliance held theirs steady. Kevin Smyth of the RC-WP made a poor showing of only 2%. In Armagh, McCusker weathered the DUP challenge from David Calvert - the DUP share of the vote roughly equalled the drop in his majority - to hold off a strong challenge from Seamus Mallon of the SDLP who increased the share of his vote by 4%. Alliance, hindered by a last minute change in their candidate, dropped their vote from 8% in February 1974 to 3%. The RC-WP also dropped from 8% to 3%.

8. In E.Belfast, a recount gave a surprise victory to Peter Robinson the young DUP secretary by 64 votes over Craig. It had been predicted that the DUP vote would undercut Craig's majority of 17,000 votes sufficiently to allow Napier to gain the first

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Westminster seat for Alliance, and Napier only missed the
opportunity by under 1000 votes. The result represented
significant gains, however, for both the DUP and Alliance, and
sharp drops in support for UPNI and the NILP. In N.Belfast,
vacated by John Carson who decided not to stand again, the DUP
gained another surprise victory with Johnny McQuade, a stalwart
Loyalist campaigner and ex-Stormont MP for the Shankill, gaining
about 1000 more votes than his less well known UUP rival Cecil
Walker. The SDLP's support dropped slightly from 24% in February
1974 to 18%, and Alliance must have been disappointed with only a
2% increase (although they never expected to do well).

9. In S.Belfast Rev Robert Bradford increased his share of the
vote by 3%. Basil Glass, the deputy leader of Alliance must have
been disappointed with only a 2% increase in a constituency in
which he has worked hard to increase his vote. The SDLP also
showed a small increase. In W.Belfast Gerry Fitt retained the
seat with the same percentage vote as in October 1974 and with an
increased majority. Both RC-WP and Alliance did poorly, and it
is noteworthy that of the 2,283 spoiled votes 1,913 were marked
with an 'H' as part of the H-block campaign.

10. In N.Down, Kilfedder maintained his personal share of the vote
(60% as to 61% in February 1974) with Clifford Smyth for the UUP
coming a poor third. Keith Jones increased Alliance's vote by 4%.
In S.Down Enoch Powell cruised home with a comfortable majority,
as was to be expected following Cecil Harvey's withdrawal. Eddie
McGrady with his 37% share of the vote could not match Sean
Hollywood's performance in October 1974 (45%), although the IIP
(Eugen Markey) with 3% made relatively little impact.

11. In Fermanagh and S.Tyrone, always a marginal seat, Frank
Maguire held off the 'independent' SDLP challenge from Austin
Currie who had defied party instructions to fight the seat. Currie
in fact came a poor third to Raymond Ferguson who polled 7000 more
votes than his UUUP challenger Ernest Baird. Overall, however,
the anti-Unionist appears to have increased slightly (33,000 to
28,000 in 1979 as opposed to 32,000 to 30,000 in October 1974).
In Londonderry William Ross increased his majority though with a
small drop in his share of the vote, but the IIP challenge was
sufficient to reduce Hugh Logue's poll by just under 10%. Alliance
just about maintained the share of the vote that they gained in the
1977 local government elections but the RC-WP made a very poor
showing. In mid-Ulster Dunlop's majority was increased because of
the IIP's serious weakening of the SDLP vote. Whereas Ivan Cooper
had polled a respectable 25,885 votes (40%) in October 1974, Paddy
Duffy despite a strenuous campaign could only poll 19,000 votes
(29%) with Pat Fahy of the IIP taking 12,000 votes (19%). The
RC-WP also saw their share of the vote reduce by 11% to 2%.

12. Overall, therefore, the conclusions must be:

    (a) the UUP remains the largest Unionist party with 36.6%,
    although the DUP's 3 seats will increase their perceived
    importance;

    (b) the SDLP remains the largest anti-Unionist party,
    weakened only by a 3% overall loss to the IIP (though the
    IIP challenge is considerably stronger west of the Bann);

    (c) the Alliance Party stabilises if not increases its vote,

but shows no sign of significantly increasing its support outside Belfast and its immediate surround;

(d) the Republican Clubs fail to make their predicted gains; and

(e) the small parties - UPNI, NILP, UUUP - continue to fade into insignificance, though the IIP secure themselves a base in the west of the Province.

A.E. HUCKLE
Division 3(B)
7 May 1979
3B/15364/MR

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