

E.R.

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① Sir Ewan [initials] 65/4
② ~~PO~~ POL 12/4

PAB/804/RE

cc: PS/S of S (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
✓ PS/Sir E Bell, Mr Bourn
Mr Merifield
Miss Davies
Mr Angel
Mr Abbott
Mr Reeve
Mr Edis

NOTE FOR THE RECORD



UNIONIST ELECTORAL PACT

1. At the DUP's annual conference on Saturday 9 April, delegates agreed that an attempt should be made to secure an electoral pact with the UUP at the forthcoming general election. The DUP plan is that, in each of the six constituencies where the nationalists have the best prospect of winning, the two major unionist parties should maximise their own chances by fielding an agreed candidate and thus avoid the problem of vote-splitting. The six seats concerned are Foyle, West Belfast, Fermanagh/South Tyrone, Mid Ulster, Newry/Armagh and South Down. The DUP would expect to fight three of these seats and leave three for the UUP.
2. The response from the UUP has been luke warm to say the least. On the BBC "Spotlight" programme, Mr Molyneaux explained that the selection of candidates was a matter for individual constituency associations and it was therefore impossible for him to negotiate a deal. The UUP secretary, Frank Millar, reacted angrily to the DUP proposal saying that the attacks made on his party at the DUP conference had damaged "perhaps irreparably" any hope of a pact and argued that, in any case, there were only two seats where such arrangements were necessary. When I spoke to Mr Millar this morning he explained that there was no prospect of a unionist winning either West Belfast or Foyle; that both South Down and Newry/Armagh were UUP territory where the DUP had no right to intervene so that the only possibility of a deal would be for the DUP to fight Mid Ulster and leave Fermanagh/South Tyrone for the UUP. However, he stressed that, in each case, it would be for the local constituency associations rather than the UUP leadership to make the running.
3. The prospects of an electoral pact of the kind proposed by the DUP look remote. The major obstacle will be the degree of local autonomy inside the UUP which makes a deal inherently unlikely: the bitter rivalry between the two parties will also pose a problem. Such

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rivalry is most obvious in South Down where many DUP supporters would be delighted if they could unseat Mr Powell. One of the biggest cheers of the DUP conference was reserved for Cecil Harvey when he claimed that he had a real chance to "unseat the Wolverhampton Wanderer". Nevertheless, there will be considerable pressure on both parties to do what they can to prevent Sinn Fein from winning seats and it would be a surprise if agreed candidates could not be found to contest the two highly marginal constituencies west of the Bann, Mid Ulster and Fermanagh/South Tyrone.

4. The results in these constituencies will also depend on the tactics adopted by Sinn Fein and the SDLP. At the moment, the SDLP are sticking by their conference decision to contest every seat but they might possibly have a change of heart if a unionist deal was arranged. Local factors will also play a significant part as they did in 1981 during the two 'H-Block' by-elections in Fermanagh/South Tyrone.

S Hewitt

S G HEWITT
Political Affairs Division

11 April 1983

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