

## Electoral Politics in a Divided Society

by  
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### INTRODUCTION

Is Ulster sliding toward a situation of increased polarization and violence or is the middle ground being strengthened? Events of the past one and a half years, culminating in the 9 June 1983 general election for the Westminster Parliament, suggest that the former, more pessimistic assessment is the case. In the words of Barry White, that election "has been the most depressing election for years with the two voting communities (Nationalists and Unionists) not even trying to relate to one another."<sup>1</sup>

Politically, the most important events of the past eighteen months include not only the 1983 Westminster Parliamentary elections but also the Northern Ireland (Ulster) Assembly elections, and the formation of the New Ireland Forum in Dublin. These events illustrate the lack of trust and political cooperation between Nationalists and Unionists as well as fissures within these communities. Indeed, the bickering within the Unionist community over who is the "most orange," and within the Nationalist community over who is the "most green," is reaching epidemic proportions.

While the Westminster Parliament is the most important elected body in Great Britain, and the primary source of governmental authority, the Assembly is a purely local body with no official powers. The Forum is an informal arrangement among politicians and no official elections have ever been held. The election campaigns and results of the Westminster and Assembly elections, and the organization of the Forum indicate the major trends in Ulster politics, and the obstacles to cross-community cooperation. The Assembly elections and Forum activities illustrate the lack of cross-community cooperation which was epitomized in the Parliamentary elections.

The insular nature of Ulster's politics tends to magnify the problems that do exist and adds to the self-perpetuating nature of the conflict. Although Ulster is part of Great Britain, elections are won or lost on purely local issues. In essence, each is a continuation of the Irish Civil War, which ended in Eire in 1923. The political parties were all born out of and relate to the sectarian strife of the Province, and they exist nowhere else in Great Britain. Although there is a formal affiliation between the Official Unionist Party (OUP) and the British Conservative Party, it does not appear to have much effect on the direction of Ulster politics. The main British parties, Conservative, Labour, Liberal, and Social Democratic (SDP), exist in England, Scotland and Wales but not in Ulster. Like Ulster, Scotland and Wales also have unique local parties yet, unlike Ulster, the main political

parties are strongly entrenched and are the primary vehicle of political expression. The bickering among communities in Ulster precludes their involvement in the mainstream of British politics. This insularity prevents voters from viewing issues in their larger context where it might be possible to reach for new solutions. The Assembly and Parliamentary elections along with the formation of the New Ireland Forum serve to point up the insular nature of Ulster politics and their fixation on the unresolved issues of the Irish Civil War.

There are five important political parties in Ulster, the Official Unionist Party (OUP), the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the Alliance Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and Sinn Fein. The DUP is the most extreme Unionist party and its rhetoric is often inflammatory. Its electoral support had been increasing relative to that of the OUP, but the 1983 election seems to have arrested this trend. The OUP, considered the establishment party, did have unquestioned dominance over Ulster from 1922 through 1972. Like the DUP, they are strongly opposed to power-sharing and unambiguously in favor of the Union. The real differences between the OUP and DUP are minor. In many cases they reflect personality clashes between leaders rather than serious policy differences.

The only truly moderate Unionist party, the Alliance Party is committed to a policy of power-sharing in Ulster. They support the link with Great Britain but believe it is imperative to bring all sections of the Ulster community into the governing process. They are becoming increasingly frustrated. As they watch the extremists in both the Nationalist and Unionist camps battle internally, their middle ground becomes increasingly difficult to sustain and their support is decreasing.

The SDLP is the party of constitutional Nationalism. They wish to see a united Eire achieved through peaceful means. The SDLP differs from the extremist Nationalist groups in that it eschews violence. Its means are moderate but its goal is the withdrawal of Ulster from Great Britain and unification with Eire.

Sinn Fein, with their barely concealed contempt for the ballot box, believe violence is a legitimate means to their end of a united Irish state. According to Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein leader, "The IRA's campaign of violence is a necessary and morally correct form of resistance in Northern Ireland . . . The IRA needed no electoral mandate for its armed struggle, and Sinn Fein is unapologetic in its defense of the IRA's right to engage in armed resistance to the British presence in Northern Ireland."<sup>2</sup> As the official political wing of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), they are committed to a united Ireland at any cost. They envision some form of a "socialist republic" over the entire island as their final goal. The other four main political parties will have nothing to do with them, however, their support is increasing in the Nationalist community.

In considering Ulster politics, one salient point should especially be borne in mind. The main Unionist parties—DUP and OUP—share

a similar philosophy. They differ over tactics but they are both committed to maintaining the Union and making sure that Ulster's interests, as they see them, are not sacrificed by the British government. They are adamantly against power-sharing and believe that direct rule from London should be ended as soon as possible and local rule re-instituted. Of course, without some form of guaranteed power-sharing arrangement with the minority, community local rule will lead back to the type of situation that preceded the fall of the original Stormont Parliament in 1972. This would be totally unacceptable to the minority (Nationalist) community as well as the British government. Some Unionists have hinted that extra-legal methods such as Ian Paisley's "third force" might be necessary if they thought the British government were about to sell them out. "Neither the DUP or OUP acknowledge any Irish dimension . . . and there is no sign of a hand being held out to the minority or of an acknowledgement that one version of Nationalism is less desirable than another."<sup>3</sup> In spite of the strong personality clashes between OUP and DUP leaders it is at least theoretically possible for them to cooperate.

It is not theoretically possible for the SDLP and Sinn Fein to work together. They are philosophically irreconcilable and their tactics and goals are mutually exclusive. The SDLP recognize that their goal of a united Ireland can only be achieved with the consent of the Unionists of Ulster. They believe in the gradualist approach. Sinn Fein, on the other hand, is the party of the "armalite and the ballot box." This is a contradiction in terms, meaning, in essence, that Sinn Fein may use terror against its opponents while it claims democratic rights for its supporters.

Given these facts it is not surprising to find that the tenets and activities of the Assembly (a Unionist dominated body) and the New Ireland Forum (a Nationalist dominated body), plus the results of the 1983 Parliamentary elections, confirm the seemingly incompatible nature of the main communities in Ulster.

### **NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS**

Ulster had its own local parliament, Stormont, from the time it was formed as a separate political entity in 1922 through 1972. In 1972 Stormont was abolished and all its powers transferred to the Westminster Parliament in London. It has been the desire of all subsequent British governments to find a workable system for devolution of power back to Ulster. James Prior, appointed Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Affairs in 1981, has been strongly committed to fostering a power-sharing arrangement among Unionists and Nationalists that would provide a smooth path to devolution. To this end, he announced, at the time of his appointment, his intention to work quickly toward the formation of a local governing body with the organization of the Assembly in 1982 and scheduled elections for 21 October 1982. Prior believed that local instruments of government must be created in the Province where both Unionists and Nationalists will have an opportunity to accommodate their differences. The major

premise behind the Assembly concept was that agreements to engage in voluntary power-sharing were essential before powers could be devolved from London. Although the dominant Unionist and Nationalist parties were making statements which, if taken at face value, would have precluded a power-sharing arrangement, Prior believed that a first step had to be taken to break the log-jam. His philosophy was that once the Assembly was set up things would fall into line. However, this has not happened for several reasons.

Prior hoped that the SDLP, the party of constitutional Nationalism, would win a large enough vote to be able to consider it a mandate to participate in a dialogue with the Unionists in the Assembly. A closer examination of the situation of the SDLP in relation to Sinn Fein shows that it would have been virtually impossible for the SDLP to participate in the Assembly without harming their credibility in the Nationalist community. SDLP and Sinn Fein contested the Assembly elections to show their strength in the Nationalist community but, if the SDLP had agreed to participate in the Assembly, they would have been outflanked by Sinn Fein and their support undermined. The SDLP are forever worried that they will be accused of selling out by the extremist Nationalist groups. They have good reason to be concerned as the trend to increased support (see Table 1) of Sinn Fein continued through the 1983 Westminster Parliamentary elections.

The SDLP, therefore, viewed the Assembly as unworkable from the start. According to John Hume (SDLP leader), "It is a process to which the limits of negotiation and the terms of negotiation have already been set by the British government."<sup>4</sup> As the SDLP have as their ultimate goal a thirty-two county Irish Republic, the Assembly, as an organ of the British government, is basically antithetical to their interests. They are convinced that if powers were really devolved, the Nationalist community would find itself in the same situation as that which existed in the old Stormont Parliament, namely that the Unionists, being a majority, would disregard the rights of the Nationalist community.

Prior made it perfectly clear on many occasions that there would be no devolved government without SDLP participation. "I am certain that there is no way in which the Assembly can make progress towards devolved government unless the participation of the SDLP is insured."<sup>5</sup> While Prior was talking up the Assembly, SDLP leaders were stating very unambiguously that they were only interested in "a real solution . . . insisting the Assembly would not work and that no solution could be confined exclusively to Northern Ireland."<sup>6</sup> The SDLP belief in the importance of considering the Irish dimension was soon to manifest itself in the formation of the New Ireland Forum.

The Sinn Fein concentrated on stressing the uselessness of the Assembly. They attacked the SDLP for their moderate approach and blamed most of the Province's ills on the British presence. Their campaign was interesting from the standpoint of what it excluded.

**TABLE 1**  
**ELECTORAL TRENDS**

PARTY	June 1983		Assembly Election Oct. 1982		Local Council Election May 1981		General Election May 1979	
	Total Votes	Per cent Share		Per cent Share		Per cent Share		Per cent Share
OUP <sup>1</sup>	259,952	34.0%	188,277	29.7%	176,342	26.5%	254,578	36.6%
DUP <sup>2</sup>	152,749	20.0%	145,528	23.0%	176,816	26.6%	70,975	10.2%
ALLIANCE	61,275	8.0%	58,851	9.3%	59,219	8.9%	82,892	11.9%
SDLP <sup>3</sup>	137,012	17.9%	118,891	18.8%	116,487	17.5%	137,110	19.7%
SINN FEIN	102,701	13.4%	64,191	10.1%	---	---	---	---
OTHERS	51,236	6.7%	57,582	9.1%	136,596	20.9%	150,334	21.5%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>764,925</b>		<b>633,129</b>		<b>665,502</b>		<b>695,889</b>	

1- OUP (Official Unionist Party), 2- DUP (Democratic Unionist Party),  
3- SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party).

They paid little heed to the Protestant sector of Ulster society, giving the impression that the Protestants (Unionists) do not exist. This was almost a mirror image of tactics used by extremists in the Unionist camp, pretending that the Catholics do not exist. Ultimately they believe that if the Catholics do not like the governmental structure in Ulster then they should move to Eire. Likewise, extreme Nationalists view the Protestants as an alien presence, believing if Protestants do not like the idea of thirty-two county Ireland, then they should return to Britain. Despite the one-sidedness of their campaign, or perhaps because of it, Sinn Fein support picked up substantially. This trend continued into the 1983 Parliamentary election.

The Alliance Party, the moderate Unionist party, captured only ten of the seventy-eight Assembly seats. They are becoming particularly exasperated by the main Unionist parties which refuse to make concessions or to consider any compromise that would allow the SDLP to participate in the Assembly. The Alliance Party does not accept SDLP rhetoric literally. Rather, they believe that if the SDLP were guaranteed a power-sharing arrangement that would allow Nationalist participation in decision-making, and guarantee representation of Nationalist interests, the SDLP would give up their insistence on a united Ireland and participate in normal political life in the Province. Further, the Alliance Party refuses to consider that the SDLP actually feels that Ulster, as it is presently constituted, is not a "normal" political entity allowing "normal" forms of political participation. In any case, they believe Unionists must make the first move in order to induce the SDLP to change their position, realizing that if Unionists do not work seriously toward an accommodation with constitutional Nationalists they may find themselves faced only with extremists. Unhappily for the Alliance Party, most Unionists believe power-sharing to be a type of fifth column that will eventually lead to a loss of the Unionist rights and the SDLP must also take that fact under consideration.

The main issue of the election campaign between the OUP and DUP was which party would be the majority Unionist party. The OUP was able to stop the flow of support from its ranks to the DUP. The OUP gained on the DUP over the previous 1981 local government elections and this trend continued into the 1983 general election (see Table 1).<sup>\*</sup> Unionists won a majority in ten of the twelve multiple member constituencies. Only in South Belfast does the OUP have more votes than the combined total of other parties. In no other constituency does any one party have an absolute majority. Since the SDLP and Sinn Fein representatives pledged never to take their seats, there is a *de facto* Unionist majority in all twelve constituencies.<sup>\*\*</sup>

As a result, the Assembly is a "talking shop" for various shades of Unionist opinion, without any real powers. All power still emanates from London. Given the present political situation it is difficult to imagine that it will ever have any real power. Mr. Prior has been criticized for setting up the Assembly before he was sure of cross-community support, though his feeling was that the Assembly would

ignite this support. An editorial in the *Belfast Telegraph* the morning after the election results were tabulated summed up the situation very well: "Out of the general shambles . . . it is clear that there is now no hope of the Assembly achieving its original objective of devolved government. Some may still cling to this mirage publicly, but the makeup of the Assembly is such that it would be impossible to prove cross-community agreement." There cannot be power-sharing if there is nobody to share it with. London is not about to devolve power to an Assembly that has no minority community representation. The situation appears to be at an impasse.

### THE NEW IRELAND FORUM

The first meeting of this body was held on 30 May 1983. No formal elections were held for the Forum as it was strictly an arrangement among the main Nationalist parties of the island to hold regular consultations on the subject of unity. Meeting in Dublin, the goal of the New Ireland Forum is to reconcile the different peaceful approaches to achieving Irish unity. It is hoped that the Forum will draw up a blueprint, or a number of blueprints, for a united Ireland. The driving force behind the idea of the Forum was the SDLP although it is composed of up to ten representatives from that party and each of the three main Irish political parties (Fianna Fail, Fine Gael, and Labour).

Specifically, John Hume (SDLP leader) wants to concentrate on "economic aspects of Irish unity and church/state relations to create an all-inclusive definition of Irishness and suggested forms of institutional expression."<sup>8</sup> By its very nature, then, the Forum is almost doomed to become a perpetual "talking shop." In order to attract the Unionists, the definition of "Irishness" will have to be greatly expanded. This will entail amending the Irish constitution to remove much of the Catholic component of Irish nationalism. It seems unlikely that the moderate to extreme republicans in the South will go along with this course of action and the 7 September 1983 abortion referendum and its accompanying campaign tends to support this viewpoint. In the words of Elaine Harvey, a delegate to the annual Irish Congresses of Trade Unions conference held in July 1983 "Chances for Irish unity could be set back for years if the Republic passes a constitutional amendment on abortion,"<sup>9</sup> and the amendment passed by an almost two to one majority. In addition to opposition from Republicans in the South, it is debatable whether a significant number of northern Republicans would support any accommodation with Unionist tradition. The SDLP is trying as best it can, given the constraints with which it is faced, to put forth the view that an accommodation with Unionist tradition is a necessary prerequisite to the peaceful unification of Ireland. The recent Parliamentary election shows Sinn Fein to be pulling almost even with the SDLP in the Nationalist community, a move which bodes ill for the future of constitutional Nationalism.

The Unionist parties have refused to participate in the Forum basically because they view it as an attempt to undermine the union between Ulster and the rest of Great Britain. The leaders of the DUP and OUP have denounced the Forum. Invitations to the three main Unionist parties in Northern Ireland to participate in the Forum was condemned by the spokesmen for these parties. A delegation of Alliance Party members met with the Irish Prime Minister (Taoiseach) to explain what they did not like about the Forum and was condemned by the DUP and OUP just for attending this meeting. This provides a good indication of how strongly the Unionists feel about the Forum.

As the Forum is committed to a peaceful resolution of the Irish conflict an invitation was not issued to Sinn Fein. The efforts made by the SDLP and other Forum participants to attract Unionists seem to be genuine although their approaches differ and seem doomed to failure. Fianna Fail was the most adamant about immediate British withdrawal as a precondition for progress. Fianna Fail's position is that Britain has to move first, whereas the Fine Gael and Labour position is that there must be a reconciliation between the communities in Northern Ireland. The SDLP position favours a little of both. "If you wish to persuade the British government to move, you must show that there is movement also for reconciliation."<sup>10</sup> This statement by John Hume marks the underlying dilemma of the Irish conflict, namely that the Nationalist and Unionist communities live in two separate worlds. The Unionists are not interested in removing British troops from the island. They consider themselves to be British, not Irish. They want no part of a thirty-two county all-island state. In Unionist eyes, participation in the Forum would negate this fundamental belief.

For their part, the SDLP wants no part of the Assembly because they believe participation would negate their fundamental goal of a united Ireland so Unionist never meets Nationalist. If the New Ireland Forum fails to make some type of progress, the cause of constitutional Nationalism will suffer a grave setback. As Sinn Fein support increases and as it becomes increasingly clear that Unionists will have no part of the Forum the position of the SDLP will become more precarious. Leaders of the main Irish political parties realize the gravity of the situation. The spreading violence in Ulster has a great destabilizing effect in Eire. Mr. Haughey (Fianna Fail leader) stated during the opening session of the New Ireland Forum that "We may have to consider some degree of autonomy for Northern Ireland be it on the basis of the same area, or a smaller one."<sup>11</sup> They are attempting to be reasonable. However, without some form of Unionist participation the Forum will remain stalled.

## **9 JUNE 1983 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS**

"Ulster's Prospects are Untouched by the British Votes,"<sup>12</sup> a headline appearing in the *New York Times*, was a fairly good condensation of the overall results of this election. The large Conservative majority gave the Ulster parties very little leverage. The Unionists obviously will not be in a "balance of power" situation. The Conservative gov-



ernment of Margaret Thatcher could put Ulster on a back burner if it so desired. (The final composition of the House of Commons is detailed in Table 2.)\*\*\*

The rivalry between the SDLP and Sinn Fein split the Nationalist vote to the advantage of the Unionists. Of the six constituencies where the SDLP or Sinn Fein had a chance of winning a seat (West Belfast, South Down, Mid Ulster, Foyle, Armagh-Newry, and Fermanagh-South Tyrone), the Unionists formed election pacts in the latter three. The OUP stood down in Foyle while the DUP stood down in Fermanagh-South Tyrone and Armagh-Newry. There was no chance of a Unionist winning in West Belfast because of the huge Catholic majority. Approximately 40,000 Catholics and 17,000-18,000 Protestants are registered to vote in West Belfast. Therefore, the Unionist rivalry put a Unionist majority in jeopardy in only two areas whereas the Nationalist rivalry jeopardized five of six seats (see Table 4).

The eleven other Ulster parliamentary districts were guaranteed Unionist representatives because of large Protestant majorities (most Protestants are Unionists and most Catholics are Nationalists). The only question was which of the Unionist parties would win. As there was no immediate danger of a victory by a Nationalist candidate, the Unionist candidates spent their time attacking each other. In Antrim South, Belfast East, Belfast North, Belfast South, North Down, Lagan Valley, Londonderry East, North Antrim, Strangford, and Upper Bann the winners all won by fairly substantial margins, despite the fact that the Unionist parties expended much effort campaigning against each other. However, Antrim East was a very hard-fought contest with victory going to Roy Beggs, the OUP candidate, by only 367 votes. Jim Allister (DUP) and Roy Beggs each accused the other of "betraying the Unionist cause."

**TABLE 2**

PARTY	NO. OF SEATS
Conservative	397
Labour	209
Liberal	17
Social Democratic Party (SDP)	6
**Official Unionist Party (OUP)	11
**Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)	3
Plaid Cymru	3
Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP)	2
**Popular Unionist Party (PUP)	1
**Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)	1
**Sinn Fein (SF)	1
**Ulster Parties	

The race in North Down was cut and dried, and there was never any doubt that Mr. Kilfedder, Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) candidate, would win. His large personal following gave him a 13,000 vote majority. He has represented North Down at Westminster since 1970 and has been feuding with the leaders of the OUP since 1974. He officially left the OUP in 1979 because of personality conflicts with Enoch Powell. There are no substantial policy differences between the OUP and PUP. The PUP is built around Mr. Kilfedder's individualistic style, and without him the party would probably dissolve.

The split between Nationalists allowed three of the six marginal seats to fall to Unionists. As Table 4 illustrates, there are Nationalist majorities in Mid-Ulster, Armagh-Newry and Fermanagh-South Tyrone. The battle in Fermanagh-South Tyrone was particularly bitter and is a prime example of how inter-Nationalist rivalry plays into the hands of the Unionists and is detrimental to the Nationalist cause. This bickering combined with the fact of a Unionist electoral pact to throw the election to the OUP candidate. The seat was previously held by Owen Carron (SF) who won it in a 1981 by-election after his predecessor Bobby Sands died in a hunger strike at Maze Prison. Because the SDLP did not run a candidate against Carron in the 1981 by-election, they were chastised by the Unionists for aiding the terrorist cause and taunted by IRA and Sinn Fein supporters for running away from a fight. For this reason, although the polls showed that the SDLP would probably lose the 1983 election, and possibly throw it to a Unionist candidate, they felt that failure to run would deal a heavy blow to their credibility. Maginnes (OUP) won the seat with a total of nearly 3,000 votes less than the combined Nationalist vote. According to Owen Carron, Maginnes won by default and "accused the SDLP candidate, Mrs. Rosemary Flanagan, of working in collaboration with the Official Unionists to deprive him of his seat."<sup>13</sup> Sinn Fein considers the SDLP more of a threat than the Unionist parties; therefore, the SDLP is usually the object of their strongest polemics, for example, "the SDLP was guilty of joint intimidation with the RUC against Sinn Fein voters."<sup>24</sup>

**TABLE 3**

PARTY	JUNE 1983 TOTAL VOTES	PERCENT SHARE	NO. OF SEATS
OUP	259,952	34	11
DUP	152,749	20	3
Alliance	61,275	8	0
SDLP	137,012	17.9	1
Sinn Fein	102,701	13.4	1
PUP	36,568	4.8	1
Other	14,650	1.9	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>764,925</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>17</b>

**TABLE 4**  
**RESULTS OF THE 9 JUNE 1983 GENERAL ELECTIONS**

	POLITICAL PARTY AND CANDIDATES							ELECTORATE <sup>3</sup>	POLL <sup>5</sup>	MAJORITY
	OUP <sup>1</sup>	DUP <sup>2</sup>	ALLIANCE	SDLP <sup>5</sup>	SINN FEIN	PUP <sup>4</sup>	OTHER			
<b>CONSTITUENCIES</b>										
ANTRIM EAST	*14,293 Beggs	13,926 Allister	7,620 Neeson	1,047 O'Cleary	---	---	1,322	58,780	65 %	367
ANTRIM SOUTH	*17,727 Forsythe	10,935 Thompson	4,612 Mawhinney	3,377 Maginness	1,629 Lavery	---	549	59,321	65.9%	6,792
BELFAST EAST	9,642 Burchill	*17,631 Robinson	9,373 Napier	519 Prendiville	682 Donaldson	---	1,064	55,581	70 %	7,989
BELFAST NORTH	*15,339 Walker	8,260 Seawright	3,879 Maguire	5,944 Feeney	5,451 Austin	---	3,546	61,128	69.9%	7,079
BELFAST SOUTH	*18,669 Smyth	4,565 McCrea	8,945 Cook	3,216 McDonnell	1,107 McKnight	---	856	53,694	69.8%	9,724
BELFAST WEST	2,435 Passmore	2,399 Haffey	---	10,934 Hendron	*16,379 Adams	---	12,219*	59,750	74.9%	5,445
FERMANAGH- SOUTH TYRONE	*28,630 Maginnis	---	---	9,923 Flanagan	20,954 Carron	---	649	67,880	89.3%	7,676
FOYLE	---	15,923 Campbell	1,108 O'Grady	*24,071 Hume	10,607 McGuinness	---	582	67,432	78 %	8,148
LAGAN VALLEY	*24,017 Molyneaux	6,801 Beattie	4,593 Close	2,603 Boomer	1,751 McAuley	---	809	60,099	67.8%	17,216
LONDONDERRY- EAST	*19,469 Ross	12,207 McClure	2,401 McGrath	9,397 Doherty	7,073 Davey	---	819	67,365	76.4%	7,262
MID-ULSTER	7,066 Thompson	*16,174 McCrea	1,735 Lagan	12,044 Haughey	16,096 Morrison	---	766	63,899	85 %	78
ARMAGH-NEWRY	*18,988 Nicholson	---	---	17,434 Mallon	9,928 McAllister	---	1,070	62,387	76.7%	1,554

NORTH ANTRIM	10,749 Coulter	*23,922 Paisley	---	6,193 Farren	2,860 McMahon	---	451	63,254	70.2%	13,173
NORTH DOWN	8,261 McCartney	---	9,015 Cushnahan	645 O'Baoill	---	22,861 Kilfedder	---	61,574	66.4%	13,846
SOUTH DOWN	*20,693 Powell	3,743 Harvey	1,823 Forde	20,145 McGrady	4,074 Fitzsimmons	---	851	66,987	77 %	548
STRANGFORD	*19,086 Taylor	11,716 Gibson	6,171 Morrow	1,713 Curry	---	---	430	60,232	65.2%	7,370
UPPER BANN	*24,888 McCusker	4,547 Wells	---	7,807 McDonnald	4,110 Curran	---	2,392	60,795	72.4%	17,081

Notes: 1- OUP (Official Unionist Party); 2- DUP (Democratic Unionist Party); 3- SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party); 4- PUP (Progressive Unionist Party). This party only ran one candidate; 5- Electorate (Total number of registered voters in each constituency); 6- Poll (% of registered electorate that voted); 7- Majority (Number of votes separating the winner from the second place candidate); 8- This total includes 10,326 votes for Gerald Fitt, Independent Socialist; \* (Winner)

In Armagh-Newry as in Fermanagh-South Tyrone, Nationalist bickering added to a Unionist electoral pact to throw the election to the OUP candidate. Although the combined Nationalist total was 7,000 more than the poll for the Unionist candidate J. Nicholson, he won with a majority of 1,554.

The election in Mid-Ulster was a free-for-all with intense battles within the Unionist and Nationalist camps as well as between Nationalists and Unionists. The Unionists were unable to shelve their differences and negotiate an electoral pact in spite of the large Nationalist majority in this district and the very real possibility that they might lose. The combined Nationalist total was over 3,000 more than the Unionist total, however the DUP candidate was able to win by 78 votes (see Table 4). This election was the closest contest in Ulster.

Much attention was focussed on two races, Belfast West and South Down. There was never any doubt that Belfast West would be won by a Nationalist candidate. The main question was, which one? Gerald Fitt, Independent Socialist, had held this seat since 1966, and was a co-founder of the SDLP, with John Hume, in 1970. The combined total of the SDLP and Independent Socialist vote exceeded the vote of Gerry Adams (SF) by almost 5,000. Had Fitt and the SDLP been able to put aside personal animosities, they might have been able to negotiate an electoral pact. This should not have been difficult to do as there is so little philosophical difference between them. The main stumbling block would have been tactical. While Fitt is a Socialist with all the usual accompanying rhetoric, and decidedly to the left of the SDLP, Fitt and the SDLP have much more in common than either has with Sinn Fein.

Gerald Fitt had been denounced many times by Unionist politicians. Nevertheless, as the election approached, and it became more and more apparent that Sinn Fein might win, the Unionists woke up to the fact that they would be better off dealing with a constitutional Nationalist than one who relied on violence. "His defeat was described as a tragedy by politicians as disparate as Michael Foot (British Labour Party leader) and Dr. Ian Paisley (DUP leader)."<sup>15</sup> It is ironic that Dr. Paisley and other Unionist politicians waited until Mr. Fitt was defeated before speaking well of him, taking so long to recognize, as the editor of the *Irish Press* did, that "If the British Government and Northern Unionists refuse to deal with reasonable people, then they will end up having to deal with unreasonable ones."<sup>16</sup> This is typical of Ulster politics and is one of its tragedies.

There was one hopeful outcome of the Belfast West election. According to pollsters, Gerald Fitt's support came in almost equal proportion from Catholic and Protestant areas. According to Fitt, he had achieved one of the main aims of his political career, "the united support of both Protestant and Catholic working classes."<sup>17</sup> In truth, it is difficult to determine if this vote was more a result of Mr. Fitt's personal charisma than it was of any meeting of the minds between Catholics and Protestants. Given the general trends of Ulster politics

this lack of religious divisiveness probably was a freak occurrence.

The race in South Down pitted Enoch Powell (OUP) against both a divided Nationalist opposition and other Unionist parties. There is a deep rift between the DUP and OUP constituency organizations in South Down. Mr. Powell had represented South Down since 1974. Before then he was a Conservative MP from Wolverhampton W.W. (England) 1950-1974, and Minister of Health 1960-1963. He had always been a controversial political personality and one of the most well-known Unionist politicians. His many years experience in the House of Commons give him an understanding of the British political system not possessed by any other Ulster politician. He is strongly disliked by DUP leader Dr. Ian Paisley and they regularly engage in bouts of public name-calling where the language exceeds in vehemence the language they use to describe their feelings toward the SDLP and Sinn Fein.

Most readings of the polls gave the DUP almost no chance of winning or even making a respectable showing against Powell. Cecil Harvey, the DUP candidate, even lost his deposit because his vote total was so low. South Down was "a marginal seat with the vote divided almost equally between Nationalists and Unionists . . ." <sup>18</sup> On the Nationalist side the SDLP was the main contender with Sinn Fein given almost no chance. Therefore, on the face of it, all non-OUP Unionists should have stood down to allow Powell a clear field while the non-SDLP Nationalists should have stood down to allow the SDLP candidate a clear field. Exactly the opposite happened. The recurring pattern of self-destructive behavior took place and Powell won by 548 votes (see Table 4).

## CONCLUSION

Although Unionists captured fifteen of seventeen seats in the Parliamentary election, they have no cause for celebration. The SDLP remains the largest Nationalist party but its voter support is slipping. It received 65% of the Nationalist vote in the October 1982 Assembly elections and 57.4% in the 1983 Parliamentary elections. On the other hand Sinn Fein's vote increased from 35% to 42.6%. If this trend continues Sinn Fein will soon surpass the SDLP as the major Nationalist party. The significant growth in support for Sinn Fein and the decline in support for the SDLP, the party of constitutional Nationalism, indicates a strong disenchantment with moderate politics by a large segment of the Ulster electorate.

Another important indicator of a decline in support for consensus politics was the poor showing of the Alliance Party, the party of moderate Unionism. They advocate continued ties with Great Britain but realize that the Nationalist community must also favor this political arrangement if the "troubles" are ever to cease. They endorse power-sharing with the Nationalists and prefer to normalize relations with Eire. Their voter popularity has declined steadily since the 1977 local elections, when they won 14.4% of the vote. They won 11.9% of the

vote in 1979, 9.3% in the 1982 Assembly elections, and only 8% in the 1983 Parliamentary elections. Their percentage in the 1982 Assembly election (9.3%) was a slight improvement over the 1981 totals (8.9%) but does not appear to have represented a permanent movement in their favour.

A key question is "who speaks for the Catholic minority?" Before the Parliamentary elections Sinn Fein was condemned by most British officials, Unionist leaders, and church leaders both Catholic and Protestant. Sinn Fein has made their position very clear. In the words of Martin McGuinness, Sinn Fein candidate for Foyle, "The war for national liberation is a legitimate war . . . Britain heeds only one thing and that is an Irishman or woman pointing a weapon to its head."<sup>19</sup> Fruitful negotiations with such an organization are, for all practical purposes, impossible, and increasing Sinn Fein support will probably mean an escalation of the troubles. Should Sinn Fein become the major Catholic (Nationalist) party, most Unionist, British and church leaders will see this as an endorsement of violence by the Catholic community.

A solution does not appear to be in sight. Solutions such as dual nationality have been proposed, that is, Unionists would have the option of retaining British citizenship along with their citizenship in a united Eire. Another suggested solution is a loose confederation of the British Isles which would include Scotland, Wales, England, Ulster and Eire. It is hard to envision any Irish politician supporting this arrangement and still winning another election. Repartition has been proposed by Conor Cruise O'Brien,<sup>20</sup> among others. This would entail large population transfers, especially in Belfast. Without a total population transfer the same Nationalist-Unionist dilemma would persist, though in a smaller geographic area. Moreover the IRA would interpret any ceding of territory to Eire as a first step toward eventual unification and, probably, as an incentive to step up terrorist activities.

Prerequisites for a reduction of tensions are control of the backbiting between the Unionist parties and Unionist recognition that Nationalists belong in the mainstream of Ulster politics. Perhaps a bit more Unionist flexibility in acknowledging that moderate Nationalists view meaningful power-sharing at the local level as a prerequisite for a settlement would be a start. Some form of Unionist acknowledgement that the New Ireland Forum might produce results beneficial to all inhabitants of the island would go a long way toward halting the slide into extremism. Nationalist politicians, for their part, should be aware of the importance of the Protestant dimension of "Irishness." There will only be hope if both sides avoid maximalist positions. As things now stand Nationalists and Unionists hold radically divergent views on the proper shape of the state. Much needs to be done to heal the fissures in Ulster society. The politicians have their work cut out for them.

Footnotes

- \* A short note on mechanics. The single transferable vote method of proportional representation is used for local elections. There are twelve multiple member constituencies to match the twelve Parliamentary electoral districts. The House of Commons, 'Redistribution of Seats' Act, 1979, which took effect with the 1983 elections, increased the number of Northern Ireland constituencies to seventeen. The next Assembly elections, if they occur, will be based on these seventeen constituencies.
  - \*\* In the Assembly election, the Official Unionist Party took 26 seats and the Democratic Unionist Party 21 out of a total of 78.
  - \*\*\* For the purposes of this article we are interested primarily in the seventeen seats held by the Ulster parties. As British Parliamentary elections are run on the first-past-the-post system, the number of seats that each party wins does not necessarily reflect their overall share of the popular vote (see Table 4).
1. *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 June 1983.
  2. *Belfast Telegraph*, 20 June 1983.
  3. *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 March 1983.
  4. *Belfast Telegraph*, 21 March 1983.
  5. *Belfast Telegraph*, 1 October 1982.
  6. *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 October 1982.
  7. *Belfast Telegraph*, 23 October 1982.
  8. Paul Arthur and Norman Gibson, "How Much is the South Prepared to Pay for a New Ireland?," *Fortnight*, 194 (May 1983), pp. 11-12.
  9. *Belfast Telegraph*, 7 July 1983.
  10. *Irish Press*, 11 June 1983.
  11. *Irish Press*, 31 May 1983.
  12. *New York Times*, 13 June 1983.
  13. *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 June 1983.
  14. *Belfast Telegraph*, 14 June 1983.
  15. *Irish Press*, 11 June 1983.
  16. *Ibid.*
  17. *Manchester Guardian*, 11 June 1983.
  18. *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 June 1983.
  19. *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 May 1983.
  20. *London Observer*, 18, 25 May 1981.