

## NATIONAL ARCHIVES

### IRELAND



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## Unionist reactions to the Prior Initiative

### Consultative Assembly

1. O.U.P.: The Party leader, Molyneaux, called into question whether "the so-called consultative process" had any value at all. (B.T. 6th April, 1982). In support of this view, he argued that the proposed committees of the Assembly would "operate in a vacuum", as they would be "unable to summon the Minister responsible, or junior Ministers or civil servants". Roy Bradford made similar criticisms of the proposed consultative Assembly. (N.L. 7th April, 1982). By contrast, John Taylor said that this first stage of Prior's initiative would be "of great advantage" to Northern Ireland. (B.T. 7th April, 1982). He gave as his reasons, that it would "present a better image of political stability to the outside world", thereby attracting investment, and that it would be in a position to "influence Government proposals" and "bring more pressure to bear on E.E.C. issues."
  
2. D.U.P.: Paisley stated that his Party could "give a generous welcome to the Convention Report-style scrutiny committees which are envisaged for the Assembly, as we see in these a much-needed chance to begin to bring direct rule to account." (N.L. 6th April, 1982).
  
3. Alliance: Ed Moloney has reported that along with the D.U.P. and "most members of the O.U.P.", Alliance has "waxed almost eloquently about the committee system and the opportunities it would provide to grill the direct rulers and to shine, collectively or individually, as the guardians of their constituents' interests". (I.T. 9th and 10th April, 1982).
  
4. U.U.U.P.: In its initial response, the Party welcomed the opportunity provided by the proposed Assembly "to, influence the unsatisfactory operation of Direct rule". (N.L. 8th April, 82).  
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## Irish Dimensions

5. O.U.P.: Molyneaux said that the Party was opposed to the White Paper's "Irish dimension aspects." (

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6. D.U.P.: The Party stated that the "Anglo-Irish aspects" of the Prior package were "totally unacceptable". (N.L. 8th April, 1982). Paisley stressed that his Party was "unalterably opposed" to the suggestion that "Assembly members could serve on an A.I.P.C., irrespective of the will of the Assembly and declared that D.U.P. would "bend all its energies to thwarting and destroying any planned Irish dimension." (N.L. 6/4/1982).

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7. Alliance: John Cushnahan said that his Party supports the establishment of the parliamentary tier to the A.I.C. (Martin Burke's report of his 5-6th April visit to N.I.).

## Cross-Community Acceptance

8. O.U.P.: Molyneaux stated that the breaking point for his Party as a whole with the White Paper was the idea of cross-community acceptance for devolution. ( ) This statement accurately reflects the O.U.P. view on power-sharing. The devolutionists within the Party have always been adamant in their opposition to this. As David McNarry, spokesman for the devolution Group within the O.U.P., expressed it on 7th December, 1981: "if the price (for devolution) is power-sharing, we are not prepared to accept that and he (Prior) should know that." (I.T. 8th December, 1981). If proof is needed of the currency of this view among O.U.P. devolutionists, it can be found in Clifford Smyth's and Ronnie Crawford's rejection of the Prior package as a whole on the grounds that it continues the S.D.L.P. veto contained in the 1973 power-sharing legislation in the form of the Secretary of State's reserved powers. ( ).

9. D.U.P.: Paisley said that the Party would "not have the enforced power-sharing which is inherent in the undemocratic 70% mechanism and in the repeat of the failed 1973 formula of republicans "as of right" in the Government of the province they are pledged to destroy." (N.L. 6th April, 1982).

10. Alliance: The Party leader, Napier, welcomed "the Government's reiteration that devolved powers will be restored only on a cross-community basis." (B.T. 6th April, 1982):

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John Cushnahan referred favourably to the "water-tight" guarantees in the White Paper "that any devolved Government must have cross-community support" and described the proposals in terms of "enforced power-sharing". (Report of Martin Burke's 5-6th April trip to N.I.)

11. U.U.U.P.: The Party stated that "many of the mechanisms by which the N.I.O. proposes that power be returned here will create more problems than they solve." (N.L. 8th April, 1982).

12. N.I.L.P.: The former Party chairman, Allan Carr, attacked the "permanent veto (in the White Paper) over the majority's wishes." (B.T. 8th April, 1982).

## "Workability" of White Paper as a whole

13. O.U.P.: Speaking in an Easter adjournment Debate in the Commons on 9th April, Molyneaux said that "the one thing ..... all (parties) have in common is simply that the plan is unworkable." ( ). As already noted, Clifford Smyth and Ronnie Crawford have rejected the initiative as unworkable. A number of leading O.U.P. devolutionists, however, have responded in positive terms to the White Paper. Perhaps the most positive reaction has come from John Carson, who described the proposals as "flexible, providing little more than a framework and leaving plenty of room for manouevre." (B.T. 8th April, 1982). Mrs. Hazel Bradford made a similar statement, saying that there was enough in the Prior package "to give the people of Ulster something to work for, without any sacrifice of principles." ( ). John Taylor also gave a relatively

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positive response to the White Paper, stating that "despite some reservations", Prior's devolution plans were "a great challenge for Ulster unionism." (B.T. 7th April, 1982). Harold McCusker's call for the "constructive change" of the White Paper indicates a similar attitude. (I.T. 8th April, 1982). Finally, there is Ed Moloney's report in the I.T. of 6th April, that the devolutionist wing of the Party was "privately more enthusiastic than Molyneaux". These differences of opinion within the O.U.P. on the workability of the Prior initiative reflect a basic disagreement between the integrationist and devolutionist wings of the Party and within the latter also, concerning the possibility of securing devolved Government on a majority rule basis in the foreseeable future. The integrationists, led by Molyneaux, are insistent that this is not possible. Molyneaux stated this clearly at the O.U.P.'s Annual Conference in October last in the following terms: "while we are entitled to hope and retain our aspiration, I cannot and will not mislead you into believing that this Government or the next will restore Stormont in a form acceptable to Ulster unionists." Molyneaux's line on devolution - whether it is fraudulent or not is irrelevant for the purposes of the present discussion - is that it will only come about if the O.U.P. follow his "strategy for devolution". ( ). This involves moving towards devolution gradually, by pressing for "British rights for British citizens" in the form of increased representation at Westminster and Local Government reforms.

14. Molyneaux's statement before a meeting with the N.I. Secretary of State on 31st January, 1982, that "we would aim to ensure a majority (and) ensure that the Assembly would not roll in a dangerous direction" betrays the fundamentally defensive nature of his attitude to Assembly elections and the Prior initiative as a whole. By contrast, it is clear from their

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relatively optimistic response to the Prior initiative, combined with their well-known resistance to the principle of power-sharing, that some devolutionists, such as Taylor, McCusker and Mrs. Bradford believe in the possibility of using the Prior initiative to secure devolution on a majority-rule basis. Confirming this is Taylor's statement that the White Paper could be divided into three sections: "an elected consultative Assembly with a Committee structure; an opportunity to negotiate the return of devolved Government; and a reference to ..... Assembly representation on the possible Parliamentary Tier ..... " (N.L. 7th April, 1982). Further evidence of this type of thinking within the O.U.P. may be found in William Craig's statement that Assembly members "must regard themselves as a vehicle which will be equipped as the democratic will decides and directed towards the destination which they alone will decide." (N.L. 7th April, 1982). Finally, there is William Craig's (considerably more extreme and less representative) statement that "if the Government insists on proceeding, then elections must be fought and the Assembly used to establish a de facto Government, albeit without legal power ..... (I.N. 7th April, 1982). Of interest is the analogy which Craig drew with the Tennis Court oath at the time of the French Revolution.. ( )..

15. The idea of "hijacking" the Prior initiative should not be dismissed as madcap or emotive. As Dr. Mansergh's analysis of the initiative makes clear, the White Paper is already biased towards the idea of majority rule. Committed O.U.P. devolutionists may well feel that in view of this, the British Government would be inclined towards accepting further moves in this direction, especially if Unionists offered the minority the type of weighted, powerful committee system previously mooted by them in return for the immediate establishment of full majority rule. In addition, it may be

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felt that unwillingness to dislodge the elected members of the consultative Assembly would reinforce the British Government's willingness to at least listen to Unionist proposals for full majority rule. The point can of course be developed at some length, but it is sufficient here to indicate that the idea of using the Prior initiative to secure majority rule should be treated seriously.

16. It is not possible at this stage to assess what degree of support the idea already has or is likely to gain within the O.U.P. Certainly, the integrationist wing of the Party, which will of course oppose the idea, appears to have been considerably strengthened in the recent past by Martin Smyth's success in the South Belfast Bye-election. The O.U.P.'s integrationists may derive further strength from the opposition to participation in Assembly elections which has been voiced by Clifford Smyth and Ronnie Crawford, and which may be representative of other Official Unionists. At the same time, it is equally possible that this group will be persuaded that the S.D.L.P. veto can be set aside and will happily return to the fold of the committed devolutionists. In addition, it should be remembered that this section of the O.U.P. has an invaluable counter to Martin Smyth in the person of Ian Paisley. Paisley's enthusiastic support for devolution and his threat to O.U.P. ascendancy among Unionist parties (still very real despite South Belfast and Kincora) can be used to resist what Harold McCusker has called the "do nothing" stance of the integrationists. ( )

17. The crucial point to bear in mind here is that the difference between the devolutionist and the integrationist line within the O.U.P. is by no means as clear as some of its champions would make it appear. Perhaps the most significant evidence for this is the statement by Mr. Richard O'Hara, a self-styled devolutionist, that the Party membership opposed

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Molyneaux's policy of integration and would favour pressing for a devolved Government at every opportunity, but that "as an initial step, would favour the return of greater powers to local Government." However, further clarification of the direction of O.U.P. thinking should become available from the further round of talks which Prior is planning to hold with the N.I. parties and the Unionist meetings on tactics concerning the Prior initiative (which are scheduled for later this month).

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18. D.U.P.: Paisley echoed Molyneaux's negative stance on the Prior initiative in stating that his Party saw the elected Assembly as one of the most effective ways of destroying all proposals for enforced power-sharing and an enforced Irish dimension. (N.L. 6th April, 1982). At the same time, however, he voiced the optimistic view of the opportunity for changing the shape of the initiative which committed O.U.P. devolutionists have expressed. Paisley said that the chances of setting up an Executive out of the Assembly proposed by the White Paper were "very good". (I.T. 8th April, 1982). The D.U.P. Leader further stated that his Party would be "campaigning for the removal of (the) impossible and undemocratic barriers (in the White Paper) so that the Assembly might be able to discharge its convention functions in a worthwhile manner." (N.L. 8th April, 1982). While Paisley referred in the last statement to "campaigning" as opposed to "negotiating" about majority rule, it seems likely from statements which he has made in the past that Paisley will be thinking on the same lines as the committed O.U.P. devolutionists. In this connection, reference may be made to his statement of 17th March, last that it was essential for men of goodwill to unite to see an elected democratic forum established "and then work such a forum for the salvation of our province". (B.T. 17th March, 82.) On the same occasion, Paisley said that through elected institutions, "we can claw back control of our destiny."



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19. Alliance Party: Their Leader, Napier, said that although they had reservations about certain details in the White Paper, his Party would be taking a positive and constructive view of it. (B.T. 6th April, 1982).

20. U.U.U.P.: The Party takes the same line as the committed devolutionists in the O.U.P. and the D.U.P., as evidenced by its statement that despite the problems with the White Paper, "there is still the possibility that by negotiating with the Government, and between the parties in the Assembly, a workable arrangement can be arrived at."

21. N.I.L.P.: By far the most outspokenly "rejectionist" Unionist statement on the Prior initiative has come from within the ranks of this Party. Allan Carr, its former Chairman, has claimed that the White Paper "with its permanent veto over the majority's wishes" pointed the way inexorably to the creation of an independent Ulster outside the U.K. "as a stepping stone towards some kind of federal Ireland" ( ). Insisting that total integration within the U.K. was the only real alternative to the initiative, Carr called on all genuinely pro-union forces to ensure that an Assembly was never elected.

22. U.L.P.: Brian Caul, Vice-Chairman of the Party, stated that the U.L.P. was prepared to contest Assembly elections because it was convinced that the plan for a local Assembly with gradually devolved powers "was the only way to achieve constructive debate". (B.T. 8th April, 1982).

## Participation in Assembly elections

23. With the exception of the N.I.L.P., all the Unionist parties referred to have indicated that they will contest Assembly elections. As already mentioned, however, a dissident grouping within the devolutionist wing of the O.U.P.



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are advocating a boycott of elections, although on different grounds to the N.I.L.P's.

S.H.

24 April, 1982.

Copies to

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GOVERNMENT STATEMENT

The Government have just received the British Government's White Paper on devolved government for Northern Ireland and will study it in detail.

It is at once apparent, however, that the proposals contained in the White Paper conform very closely to the descriptions given by Mr. Prior, the Northern Ireland Secretary, in the course of his consultations with the Minister for Foreign Affairs last week in London.

This being so, the Government can only confirm their view as to the unworkable nature and the mistaken focus of the proposals. Their unworkability is emphasised by the reaction of the Northern Ireland political parties. The Government consider the whole focus of the White Paper - which serves the aim of elaborating a form of devolved administration in and for Northern Ireland alone - to be mistaken because, in their view, it ignores the broader dimensions of the problem. It is the Government's view that only policies designed to promote peace, stability and reconciliation between the two major Irish traditions, and to develop the totality of relations within these islands, can contribute to a true solution of Northern Ireland's difficulties. Such policies should be brought forward through the operation of the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Council and, in particular, through the role of an Anglo-Irish Parliamentary institution in which Northern Ireland representatives participate.

The fundamental objective of Government policy remains the achievement of a united Ireland by peaceful political means.

5 April 1982.