



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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SDLP - West Belfast

Further to my report of 12 January on the forthcoming SDLP convention on 1 March to select their candidate to contest the next Westminster election for the West Belfast constituency, current indications are that the field of candidates has thinned out. The definite candidates at this point are Joe Hendron, Brian Feeney and Cormac Boomer. [Alistair McDonnell is now unlikely to put his name forward and Alex Attwood will not be a candidate.]

Three branches have now been registered for the Convention - Andersonstown, Lower Falls and Lenadoon. Of the three, Andersonstown is the only real branch and will dominate the convention, with roughly 16 delegates. Although Cormac Boomer is a member of that Branch, current indications are that he is unlikely to receive much (if any) support from that quarter given his reputation of being "a bit mad".

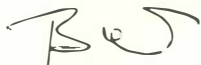
Lower Falls Branch is a "Hendron paper branch" which will give its 4 votes to Hendron, while Lenadoon Branch (also a paper branch controlled by Alex Attwood) is likely to throw its 6 votes to Hendron.

John Hume's recent decision to include Hendron with the three Westminster MPs for the SDLP meeting with Brooke in London on 19 January, clearly signalled Hume's support for Hendron and should prove decisive in ensuring a majority in support of Hendron within the Andersonstown Branch.

When I met Feeney last week he seemed disappointed but reconciled to the inevitability of Hendron's selection. He confessed that he was at a loss to understand Hume's attitude. According to Feeney, Hume has been telling journalists for the past year that Hendron cant win the seat, and yet he has again thrown his support behind Hendron for the selection. Feeney wondered was it a case of his heart ruling his head (Hume and Hendron get on well together), or whether there was some deeper reason for Hume's stance.

He mentioned that the day after the announcement that Hendron would be with the three MP's for the meeting with Brooke, he got a lunch invitation from Jim Alford (Political Affairs Department of the NIO). Alford quizzed Feeney as to the reasoning behind Hume's support for Hendron and mentioned that Brooke had earlier said to Hume that he felt that Hendron could not win, and had indicated to Hume their (NIO) view that Feeney would be the candidate with the best chance of winning the seat. Feeney confessed that he had been horrified to hear this. However well meaning Brooke may have been in making these comments, support from the NIO is not a plus point for any SDLP politician - "with friends like that, who needs enemies?"

While Feeney will still put his name forward for selection, he has no intention of getting into any kind of divisive fight within the West Belfast organisation. In his own experience, to win a selection in such circumstances can be something of a pyrrhic victory, leaving the winner with a divided and embittered organisation which would be in no shape to take on the Provos in the Westminster elections. For the moment he is content to take a somewhat cynical long-term view -viz- "I told Joe to remember that I am 15 years younger than him, and can afford to wait!"



Brendan McMahon  
15 February 1990

cc A/Sec Gallagher  
Counsellors A.I.  
Secretariat  
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