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PAB/4729/JS

Mr Reeve



cc - PS/SofS (B&L)
PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Sir Ewart Bell ✓
Mr Brennan
Mr Brown
Mr Angel
Mr Merifield
Mr Carvill
Mr Edis
Mr Abbott

ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY CONFERENCE: NOVEMBER 1983

1. I attach a report on the Ulster Unionist Party conference which I attended at the Forum Hotel on Saturday 19 November 1983.

2. Outwardly bouyant and self-confident following their recent election successes, the majority of Official Unionists nevertheless remain uneasy about the Government's commitment to the Union and its determination to deal with terrorism. Fear of being forced into some kind of united Ireland continues to dominate party thinking and will probably become more and more significant as the New Ireland Forum draws to a close. Although elements within the party still favour the devolutionist approach, the realisation that powers will not be returned on a majority rule basis has persuaded most of the UUP to follow the leadership's integrationist line. There is little sympathy with the Assembly but no great pressure to withdraw. Importantly, nothing which has happened in the last year or so has led the UUP to re-examine its attitude to the SDLP and I detected few signs that party members see any real distinction between the SDLP and Sinn Fein. With a strong team of eleven MPs, we can expect UUP efforts in the new few months to be concentrated at Westminster. Not surprisingly, Mr Molyneaux remains firmly in control of his party.

① Sir Ewart Bell
② P. O. L. 21/11

S Hewitt

S G Hewitt
PAB

21 November 1983

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UUP CONFERENCE 1983

1. Although the UUP conference is not responsible for determining party policy, this year's gathering produced a number of interesting debates on such issues as security, the New Ireland Forum and devolution. A full list of the motions debated is attached as an Annex.

PARTY ORGANISATION

2. The first debate, on party organisation, confirmed the more professional approach adopted by Glengall Street since the appointment of the new party secretary, Frank Millar, at the end of last year. A great deal of time and effort is now being devoted to the recruitment of young people and it is intended that, in the future, more attention should be given to the publication of the party's policies in Northern Ireland and in London. We have for example recently seen the launch of the party's new magazine, The Ulster Unionist Review. In addition, Mr Millar is convinced that the UUP should attempt to put their point of view more forcefully in the United States but he has yet to convince Mr Molyneaux that expenditure on overseas publicity is worthwhile.

NEW IRELAND FORUM

3. The debate on the New Ireland Forum was fairly predictable with a succession of speakers voicing their total opposition to any kind of "all Ireland" solution. According to Assembly member Ray Fergusson, for example, it was Protestants who had created Ulster and they therefore had no need to apologise for occupying the six counties. A delegate from Strangford, who had the timerity to suggest that the UUP should have sent the Forum a written statement of the unionist case, was greeted with cries of "shame, shame" and forced to draw his remarks to a rather rapid close. It was then left to Mr Robert McCartney to round off the debate and he treated the conference to easily the most articulate and forceful speech of the day. Opening with a bitter attack on Dr Fitzgerald, he dismissed the Republic of Ireland as a failed, sectarian state and won loud applause from the conference when he asserted that it was not the form but the principle of Irish unity which he rejected. He was particularly critical of the Government and what he described as its "neutral stance" on the Union and attacked the Secretary of State for comments made during his Weekend World interview on Sunday 13 November, "the very day" according to Mr McCartney, that Ulster unionists were

"counting the cost of being British". While sharing the Secretary of State's concern at the growth of Sinn Fein, he argued that the way to defeat them was to defeat the IRA not to support "so-called" constitutional nationalism. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the speech (surprising that is to those who had not overheard Mr McCartney's confrontation with the press corps in the bar at lunchtime) was his extraordinary attack on the Irish Times for failing, in his view, to give adequate coverage to the Unionist point of view. Mr McCartney's speech was extremely well received and became the talking point of the conference for the rest of the day.

CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

4. The last debate of the day, on constitutional affairs, was potentially the most interesting and offered the chance for observers to try to gauge the relative strength inside the UUP of integrationist and devolutionist views. Unfortunately, the debate was rather inconclusive and merely demonstrated, once again, how successful Mr Molyneaux is at papering over the cracks in his party. According to Edgar Graham, who opened the debate, and David Trimble, who has been out of step with party policy ever since the days when he supported Mr Craig and his ideas of "voluntary coalition", administrative devolution should be seen as a first step towards full devolution. But Mr Molyneaux, who closed the debate, made it quite clear that he regarded administrative devolution as a possible alternative to increased powers for district councils confirming that the leadership of the UUP is only really interested in transforming the Assembly into some kind of upper tier of local government. Mr Molyneaux is apparently content to support a motion which calls for full devolution because he knows that devolution on terms acceptable to his party will never be granted. The debate did, however, make two points abundantly clear. First, the proponents of administrative devolution are actually talking about responsibility for the category of issues such as Planning, tourism, Harbours etc., which used to be the responsibility of local government before reorganisation in 1972. Second, everyone in the UUP is clear that these powers should only be exercised by the Assembly on a majority rule basis and that before progressing towards administrative devolution it would be necessary to amend the 1982 Act to do away with the proportional distribution of Committee chairmanships.

LEADER'S ADDRESS

5. Mr Molyneaux's speech to the conference, as party leader, was a fairly

low-key affair and contained no real surprises. Integrationist in its tone and content, the speech concentrated on the need to defeat terrorism, rid Northern Ireland of direct rule, phase out the Order-in-Council system of legislation and confront the "enemies of the Union" in Whitehall. He argued that the surest way of ending the terrorist campaign is to replace the present constitutional guarantee, which simply gives encouragement to the IRA, by an unequivocal statement of the Government's commitment to the Union for all time. Mr Molyneux ended his speech by claiming that unionism would never be defeated and that Mr Adams would never win.

The following motions were approved by the UUP Conference:

1. PARTY ORGANISATION

Conference, recognising that the achievement of the party's objectives and the success of its public representatives is dependent on healthy party organisation, declares as follows:

- (1) That as far as practicable, every ward in Northern Ireland in which unionist electors reside should have an active branch of the party.
 - (2) That every unionist elector wishing to do so should be able to join a branch of the party with the minimum of formality.
 - (3) That every branch should, within the limitations of its resources, seek to enrol as many unionist electors as members of the party as it can.
 - (4) That every branch should lay particular emphasis on encouraging young people to join the party and play an active role in it.
 - (5) That each branch and constituency association should take steps to ensure that party members, particularly the young, who wish to play an active role are encouraged to do so.
 - (6) That each branch/constituency association should take steps to ensure that young people are adequately represented on branch and constituency executives, and delegations from branches and constituency associations sent to other organs of the party.
- Conference further recognises:
- (1) The need that adequate resources be made available to enable the party, as far as is practicable, to publicise its work and the unionist case in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and throughout the world.
 - (2) That party headquarters has already made a significant contribution to publicising the party and the unionist case and that this work must continue and expand.
 - (3) That although significant savings in costs have been made to non-essential areas of headquarters' work, the work of publicisation is so vital that, as far as is possible, all necessary resources should be made available for this purpose.
- Further, conference endorses and recognises:

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- (1) The work of the Young Unionists in the development of their organisation and, in particular, their efforts to develop Young Unionist branches covering every constituency in Northern Ireland.
- (2) That the future of the party depends on the continuing success of the Young Unionists in providing a forum for young people who wish to contribute to the political life of the Province.

2. THE ECONOMY

That this conference concludes that political equality for Ulster within the United Kingdom needs to be matched by economic equality and therefore calls for parity of price and choice in the field of energy and for the vigorous development of all forms of communication with the rest of the Kingdom.

3. AGRICULTURE

That this conference deplores the damage done to Northern Ireland agriculture over the years in which we have been in the EEC and, noting that the severe damage suffered by our intensive sector is now being repeated in the milk and other sectors, demands that every possible step be taken to preserve Northern Ireland agricultural production on which so many jobs in Ulster depends.

4. EDUCATION

That this Party rejects the divisive and discriminatory Articles in the Draft Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland Order) 1983, which if they become law will cause division where none need exist and escalate the trend to secularise education in the controlled sector of education only.

5. NEW IRELAND FORUM

That this conference calls upon Her Majesty's Government to end its neutral stance on the Union, as illustrated by the Anglo Irish talks, and to prepare a world wide information campaign to refute the "United Ireland" claims which will inevitably emerge from the New Ireland Forum.

6. SECURITY

Conference, recognising that the most fundamental duty and obligation of government is to maintain the Queen's Peace in order that her subjects may be assured of their right to life, liberty and the peaceful pursuit of their chosen vocations, calls on Her Majesty's Government to take whatever steps may be necessary to secure the

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restoration of peace and order in Northern Ireland and in particular calls on the Government

- (a) to ensure that the law provides a credible deterrent to terrorism,
- (b) to clarify the powers of the security forces so that they may act effectively and confidently within the law,
- (c) to review the structure and organisation of the security forces to ensure their maximum efficiency.

7. CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS

That this conference reaffirms its support for full scale devolution for Northern Ireland but, recognising the refusal of the Secretary of State and of the Democratic Unionist and Alliance Parties to proceed in that direction, calls in the first instance for the devolution to the Assembly of those administrative powers which the Macrory Report envisaged should be exercised by Stormont.