

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTHERN IRELAND: 27 MAY 1986

Summary

The now familiar mixture of noises has continued in all quarters. Differences within the Unionist bloc remain apparent, but their goal remains unchanged. Speculation about the future of the Assembly has occupied both politicians and journalists.

The Unionists

2. DUP members have made it very clear that they remain committed to devolution and opposed to integration, primarily because they believe such a policy is likely to prolong the existence of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, that without the suspension of the Agreement 'there will be neither talks about talks nor talks themselves', and that the campaign of opposition to the Agreement must be maintained and intensified where necessary. They appear irritated at the continuing devolution/integration debate within the UUP, and together McCusker and his former Westminster colleague and a number of other UUP members were extremely critical of the four UUP MPs (Powell, Taylor, Smyth and Walker) who voted on the Social Security Bill in the Commons on 20 May. Dr Paisley indicated positively that he was due to raise this issue with Mr Molyneaux on 28 May.

3. The UUP remains clearly divided over the sort of political development they wish to see once the Agreement has been dismantled. Their confidence that that is inevitable is well illustrated by the editorial in the Newsletter of 22 May (attached). The leading proponents of integration - McCartney, Taylor, Smyth and Molyneaux - seem to feel that their course offers the best prospect of rendering the Agreement redundant, a view not shared throughout the party. There is evidence that some party members are worried that constant friction within the party would inevitably weaken it and reduce its influence, particularly in its relationship with the DUP and in the longer term its electoral support. The so called Charter group have petitioned the Queen to intervene against the Agreement (on the grounds that Her Majesty was likely to have withheld Royal Assent from any Bill implementing the Agreement) and has called on the protestant community to follow their example. This

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action was described as 'interesting' by Glengall Street, but most UUP members share the view of the DUP that West and his colleagues are out of touch.

4. Despite the tensions between the Unionist parties their determination to keep the anti-Agreement campaign going is undiminished. No doubt heartened by the large turnout at the Hillsborough demonstration of the Orange Order on 15 May, the two leaders launched a campaign on 19 May urging their followers to withhold payment of rates. The launch is to be followed by a Province-wide leaflet campaign. Boycotts of district councils and public bodies continue, and Ministers at the NIO remain the target of Unionist demonstrations.

SDLP

5. In a major interview published in the Sunday News on 25 May John Hume was predictably critical of Unionist behaviour since the signing of the Agreement, blaming them for increasing tension and threatening violence during the summer. Hume considers that the initiative towards constructive political dialogue must come from them. The SDLP have made 'constructive proposals' and 'now we have a framework where real dialogue can take place and we are happy to talk to any of the unionists on the basis of that'. Hume looks forward to elections for an Assembly involving 'a new form of devolution ... which will include power sharing where all parties can take part' which would have to be agreed in advance if the SDLP are to guarantee participation in the new body. Hume also confirmed in the article earlier indications that he may stand down in Londonderry for any Assembly election in favour of a colleague. The tone of the interview is optimistic - SDLP success in the Magherafelt District Council by-election on 21 May (in a seat previously held by Sinn Fein) has encouraged the party - and tries hard to avoid triumphalism. (On the same day, Sinn Fein held its seat in a district council by-election in Fermanagh, beating a UUP candidate with the support of SDLP preferences).

Church Leaders

6. At an ecumenical service in Belfast on 18 May Bishop Cahal Daly called for an end to sectarianism, remarking that 'only by sharing with one another responsibility for this land could there be hope of a better future to the children of both communities.' A similar view was

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-3-

expressed in a document adopted at the Church Of Ireland Synod in Dublin, which included the expression of hope that the Agreement 'may lead to the implementation of an acceptable form of government in Northern Ireland through which elected representatives who genuinely believe in constitutional politics can express their views and voice public opinion in a democratic manner.' Archbishop Eames said at the Synod 'There has got to be a sense of reality on both sides of the argument. The people of Northern Ireland as a whole deserve much better than they are experiencing at present.' It is important to recognise that these sentiments are an attempt to reconcile the divergent views of the congregations in the north and the south.

Comment

7. Although there is some evidence of irritation and impatience with the antics of their political leaders amongst middle-class professional unionists a majority of members of that community remain content to allow the campaign of opposition to take its course. Some indication of the level of passive support will be provided by the response to the call to withhold payment of rates, but it is unlikely that many unionists will be happy to break the law. Nevertheless the momentum of opposition will be maintained, boosted by weekly press conferences and debates in the Assembly which the Unionists are happy to use for as long as it remains in existence as a forum in which the Agreement can be attacked. Most observers now consider it likely that the Government will seek to dissolve the Assembly before it has run its present course.

Chronology of Events

8. Attached to this note is a brief calendar of the major political events in Northern Ireland (or of direct relevance to it) which have taken place since 15 November 1985. The list will be updated at regular intervals.

Political Affairs Division

27 May 1986

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EVENTS1985

- 15 November A/I Agreement signed at Hillsborough Castle.
- 19 November Dail debated A/I Agreement.
- 23 November 100,000+ loyalists attend a rally outside Belfast City Hall - to hear Paisley and Molyneaux condemn Agreement.
- 25 November Reps from UUP and DUP meet PM to voice opposition to Agreement.
- A/I debated in House of Commons carried by 473 to 47 votes.
- 29 November Following ratification in Dail and Westminster A/I Agreement came into force.
- 4 December Assembly unanimously carried a vote of No Confidence in Government (Alliance members had withdrawn from Chamber).
- 5 December Assembly, suspends all normal business and establishes 23 member 'Grand Committee' to investigate Agreement.
- 11 December First meeting of A/I Intergovernmental Conference at Stormont Castle - Paisley and McCusker hand in letter of protest at meeting at Stormont Castle - followed by loyalist demonstration involving workers from Shorts & H&W at Maryfield, 38 RUC injured.
- 17 December All 15 Unionist MPs resign seats as protest against A/I Agreement.
- 30 December Second meeting of A/I Intergovernmental Conference - held in London.

1986

- 10 January Third meeting of A/I Intergovernmental Conference - held in London.
- 23 January 15 by-elections took place - UUP/DUP pact fought elections on an 'Anti A/I Agreement' ticket - 14 unionists returned to Parliament and 1 SDLP (Nicholson UUP lost seat to Mallon)
- 27 January Paisley and Molyneaux joint statement announced that unionist MPs prepared to rid Ulster of Dublin interference but not necessarily attend Parliament.

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- 29 January Assembly Committee on Government of Northern Ireland (so called Grand Committee) announced it had completed 1st Report.
- 1 February Meeting of the Unionist Councillors representing the 18 Unionist controlled Councils confirmed that they would refuse to strike a rate on 15 February.
- 4/5 February Assembly debated Grand Committee Report.
- 7 February Mr Justice Hutton handed down 4 writs re Belfast City Council Says No Banner etc - the most important requires Council to set rate by 15 February.
- 10 February Robinson resigns Assembly Environment Committee Chairmanship claiming civil servants were gagged, committees were being prevented from carrying out monitoring functions by Government. (Paisley and others subsequently resigned their posts).
- 11 February Belfast City Council lodge appeal against writs.
- 12 February Stays of execution granted against 3 writs but not including the striking of rate.
- 19 February PM met Taoiseach in London - Taoiseach announced that his Government will sign European Convention on Suppression of Terrorism.
- 25 February Paisley and Molyneaux met PM in Downing ST - discussion described as full and frank - following meeting Molyneaux quoted as saying 'we have moved away from deadlock' - though on their return to NI they gave their ^{full} support to a call for a Day of Action on 3 March.
- 26 February Belfast City Council voted against striking a rate.
- 26 February Assembly throws its weight behind 'Day of Action'.
- 27 February Robinson reveals that 1986 Workers Committee formed with aim of bringing down Agreement.
- 27 February Hume met PM in Downing St - in joint statement he reaffirmed SDLP's willingness to enter in discussions about devolution.
- 28 February Paisley and Molyneaux issue Press adverts calling for support for Day of Action (3 March).
- 3 March Day of Action - widespread disruption throughout Province.

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- 5 March Kilfedder met PM in Downing Street to discuss political developments.
- 5 March Harry West launches 'UUP/SDLP Charter'.
- 6 March Cushnahan met PM in Downing St to discuss political developments.
- 7 March Paisley and Molyneaux send letter to PM stating their wish to 'create framework within which dialogue could take place' - included in 2 resolutions attached to their letter.
- 11 March AI Intergovernmental Conference meets at Stormont Castle - symbolic protest by Unionists outside fence.
- 13 March Assembly - Paisley calls for suspension of Agreement before any discussions with PM. Assembly votes unanimously for amalgamation of Devolution and Grand Committees.
- (All 18 Unionist controlled councils have refused to strike rate - now await DOE intervention)
- 13 March Peter Smyth (UUP) launches a booklet entitled 'Why Ulster Says No' - well written and impressive work - detailing unionist grievances against Assembly.
- 24 March Unionist leaders receive PMs reply to their letter of 7 March - Paisley quoted as saying PM had closed door on unionist majority and unionists would go as far as it takes to bring down Agreement.
- 31 March Apprentice Boys of Derry march in Portadown banned by SoFS on recommendation of the Chief Constable - in ensuing riots 100+ PBRs fired at loyalists by RUC - one rioter later died (14.4.86)
- Since 31 March a number of Prison Officers and RUC families and homes have been attacked by loyalist mobs together with an increase in sectarian attacks.
- 26 March Kilfedder letter to PM suggesting Queen to call a conference on devolved government for NI (as King George V 1914).'
- 2 April Paisley and Molyneaux send letter to PM - they are disappointed that no acknowledgement of their suggestions for a 2 stage conference for devolved government for NI had been given.
- 14 April All 14 unionist MPs voted against Sunday Trading Bill at Westminster.
- 16 April PM replies to Paisley and Molyneaux 2/4 letter - PM ready to discuss a possible framework within which dialogue can take place.

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17 April Joint leaders issue statement welcoming preliminary talks - but state it cannot take place if AI still implemented.

19 April DUP Conference - Paisley 'still leader!'

27 April Apprentice Boys call off Portadown march on 5 May (following intervention by politicians, including Paisley).

30 April High Court imposes fines of £25,000 on Belfast City Council suspended for 1 week to allow it to resume normal business.

30 April McCartney attacks devolution calling for 'full-blooded integration'.

2 May Belfast Education & Library Board votes itself out of being.

6 May 5 'rebel' unionists carry vote for Belfast City Council to resume business.

6 May Newsletter casts doubt on 'talks about talks' taking place.

9 May AIIC meeting in London

10 May SoFS goes to USA (to drum up support for extradition treaty).

12 May Unionists pull out of 'talks about talks' - as A/I Agreement still functioning.

14 May Assembly calls on unionists to withhold rates.

15 May Hillsborough - about 15,000 people attend Orange demonstration to mark 6 months anniversary of AI Agreement (no incidents)

18 May Dr Fitzgerald hints at Power Sharing Executive as possible way out for Unionists.

20 May 4 UUP MPs (Powell, Walker, Taylor and Smyth) vote against Government on the Social Security Bill - DUP angry at break in boycott.

20 May Dr Eames tells CofI Synod in Dublin it is not sufficient to constantly say 'no' to a political initiative like the Agreement.

26 May Harry West (Unionist Charter Group) calls on all unionists to petition the Queen against the Agreement.