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From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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CC PC
B/JP



NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

WHITEHALL

LONDON SW1A 2AZ

(2)

Charles Powell Esq
10 Downing Street
London
SW1

Prime Minister
You should be
aware that the
press report that
the Unionists will
ask to see you, but
without Tom King present.

28th January 1986

Dear Charles

It is not, of course, for them
to say who should & should
not be present
CDP 20/1

MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, 30 JANUARY 1986

The Secretary of State thought it might be helpful for colleagues attending the Prime Ministers meeting on Thursday 30 January to see the attached assessment by NIO(B) of last weeks' by-election results.

I am copying this letter and enclosures to the Private Secretaries of the Lord President, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Defence Secretary, the Lord Privy Seal, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, the Chief Whip, Sir Robert Armstrong and to Christopher Mallaby.

Yours Sincerely
Neil Ward.

N D WARD

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NORTHERN IRELAND POLITICAL BULLETIN PAB(86)1

BY-ELECTIONS, 23 JANUARY 1986

Introduction

1. By-elections took place in 15 of Northern Ireland's 17 Parliamentary constituencies on 23 January following the resignation of the Unionist MP's in protest at the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The by-elections were conducted without major incident. One Unionist seat was lost to the SDLP. In all other cases the sitting Member was re-elected with an increased majority. This paper summarises results and immediate reaction: further analysis and comment will follow shortly.

Turnout

2. Turnout fell from 73% in the 1983 General Election to 61%. This was due almost entirely to non-Unionists failing to vote in constituencies where the agreed Unionist candidate was bound to win. The only constituency in which the turnout remained at its 1983 level was Newry and Armagh.

The Unionist Vote

3. The 15 Unionist candidates polled 418230 votes, only a few more than the combined DUP and UUP vote in the same 15 seats in 1983. With an increased electorate, however, this represents a fall in the percentage of the electorate who voted Unionist from 45 to 44. Unionist candidates nevertheless gained an impressive 71.5% of the votes cast, although this derives partly from the facts that they were the only group to contest all 15 seats and that in four of those seats their only opposition was the bogus Peter Barry candidate.

4. The performance of the two Unionist parties was solid, and in



practice it seems that all their traditional supporters turned out, even though the leadership is disappointed that the parties failed to achieve a substantial increase in their vote (and have blamed the weather conditions). The loss of the Newry and Aramgh seat is probably less significant as a loss to the Unionists, who have always been aware that it was at risk, than it is a boost to the SDLP.

The Nationalist Vote

5. The SDLP are delighted with their performance and Sinn Fein correspondingly disappointed with theirs. As well as winning the Newry and Armagh seat convincingly (and thereby doubling their representation at Westminster), the SDLP took 34% of the poll in the four seats they contested as compared with Sinn Fein's 18.6%. Their respective shares of the Nationalist vote are even more striking; the SDLP took 64.6% of the Nationalist vote in the four seats and Sinn Fein 35.4% compared with 53.8% and 46.2% in the same four seats in 1983. Adrian Colton, the relatively unknown SDLP candidate in Mid-Ulster, did particularly well against Sinn Fein's strong candidate, Danny Morrison. It is now possible that this will bring pressure on Sinn Fein leadership to underline the movement's continuing commitment to the military as well as the political struggle.

The Rest

6. The Alliance Party are likely to be disappointed with their overall performance. They stood in the five seats where they have traditionally found their greatest support, but their total vote fell by 17.4% on their 1983 performance in those seats. The Party leader, John Cushnahan, will be relieved at having held his own vote in North Down (polling 21% as compared with 22% in 1983), but support for his predecessor, Sir Oliver Napier, who opposes the Anglo-Irish Agreement and was standing in East Belfast only under pressure and did not campaign seriously, fell away from 24% to 17%.



7. Although they won less than 5% of the votes cast in the nine constituencies they contested, the Worker's Party will nevertheless be pleased at having increased their total vote by 77.5% to over 18,000. Half those votes, however, were won in two seats where the Party represented the only alternative to the Unionist candidate.

The Verdict on the Agreement

8. The elections were fought on the single issue of the Anglo Irish Agreement. The Unionists and Sinn Fein opposed the Agreement. The SDLP, the Alliance Party, the Workers' Party and Peter Barry supported the Agreement. 457,051 (or 78.1%) of the votes cast were won by parties opposing the Agreement. 127,937 votes (21.9%) were won by supporters of the Agreement. 369,244 people entitled to vote did not do so. Even though only a minority of the electorate cast votes against the Agreement, this represents nearly four fifths of those voting, and does not of course indicate majority support for the Agreement.

Reactions

9. Comments from victors and vanquished have been largely predictable. Unionist leaders said that the result clearly demonstrated the scale of the opposition in Northern Ireland to the Anglo-Irish Agreement and that their efforts to smash the Agreement would continue. Peter Robinson said that the Agreement was 'a sickly deed' and had 'died between the hours of seven yesterday morning and ten last night'. Dr Paisley interpreted the result as telling the Government 'we have absolute confidence in the leadership of Jim Molyneaux and Ian Paisley MP to organise resistance and the smashing of this act of treachery.' The next steps however are still far from clear; whilst Mr Molyneaux indicated that all fourteen MPs would return to Westminster, his deputy, Harold McCusker stated that he would not be taking up his seat, describing his mandate as being 'to withdraw the consent of the people of Northern Ireland to be governed, by being in the Province to organise that withdrawal'. Newspaper reports over the weekend suggest that McCusker may be joined in this action by at least two of the three



DUP MPs. Unionist leaders are now likely to demand an urgent meeting with the Prime Minister.

10. John Hume was delighted with the SDLP's performance, describing Seamus Mallon's victory in Newry and Armagh as a 'fantastic result'. He said that the SDLP's policy of having no truck with Sinn Fein had been vindicated, and the whole electorate had stood by them.

11. John Cushnahan described the performance of the Alliance Party as 'solid' but 'patchy'. Seamus Lynch of the Workers' Party was pleased at 'people coming out to vote for an anti - sectarian party'.

12. Gerry Adams repeated his criticisms of the SDLP for having refused an electoral pact and said that 'rumours of the death of Sinn Fein are greatly exaggerated'. He was confident that the Anglo-Irish Agreement would fail and that Sinn Fein's electoral strength would thereafter be restored.

The Media

13. Comment in the press has tended to be triumphalist in the Belfast morning papers on both sides, while London and Dublin papers have highlighted the SDLP success at the expense of Sinn Fein and the apparent uncertainty within Unionist ranks about the next steps to be taken. Coverage has also been given to Owen Carron's failure to return to prison after the election, the significant arms finds in the Republic, and the Taoiseach's delight at SDLP electoral successes.



BY-ELECTIONS - STATISTICS

	<u>1983</u>	<u>1986</u>
Electorate (15 constituencies)	923040	954232
Turnout: Votes Cast	72.8%	61.3%

Unionist Vote (15 constituencies)

Votes	415939	418230
Percentage of poll won	57.1%	71.5%
Percentage of electorate	45.06%	43.8%
Seats won	15	14

Despite the loss of one seat the Unionist vote has therefore stood up well.

Nationalist Vote (4 constituencies)

SDLP total vote	59,546	70,917 (+ 19.1%)
Sinn Fein total vote	51,052	38,821 (- 24.9%)
SDLP percentage of poll	27.9%	33.9%
Sinn Fein percentage of poll	24%	18.7%
SDLP share of Nationalist vote	53.8%	64.6%
Sinn Fein share of Nationalist vote	46.2%	35.4%
SDLP seats won	0	1
Sinn Fein seats won	0	0

There is thus a clear swing of 6 percentage points away from Sinn Fein and of 6 percentage points towards the SDLP. In terms of the share of the nationalist vote the swing is even more striking.

Others

Alliance	38832	32095
Workers Party	10226	18148
Peter Barry	-	6777

