

H.R.

Mr. Gee

- c.c. PS/Secretary of State(L&B)-M
- PS/Junior Ministers(L&B)-M
- PS/TUS(L&B)-M
- PS/Sir P. Kidd
- Mr. James(L)-M
- Mr. Hennigan
- Mr. Lane
- Mr. Marshall(L)-M
- Mr. Mayne(L)-M
- Mr. Burns
- Mr. Newington RID FCO(I)-M
(King Charles Street)
- Mr. Wilson(L)-M
- Mr. Buxton(L)-M
- Mr. Clift
- Mr. Gilliland

1. Mr. Cook
2. Miss Jones

M. B. K.

ELECTION MANIFESTOS

All the main party manifestos have now been published and a brief description and analysis of each is attached - we have yet to obtain a copy of the IIP manifesto, although its contents are predictable. The Liberals gave the greater prominence to Northern Ireland, including their proposals for the establishment of an elected advisory council and a constitutional conference immediately after a section urging full devolution within a federal UK structure. The Labour and Conservative Party manifestos on the other hand included passages on NI well into their documents. Of these, the Labour Party's was the more neutral in NI terms, recommending continued direct rule until agreement could be reached with the NI parties on a form of government for NI. In its emphasis on the maintenance of the union and the establishment in the absence of devolution of one or more elected regional councils with powers over local services, the Conservative manifesto will obviously be of greater appeal to Unionists than to the SDLP, particularly in their current mood.

2. Of the NI party manifestos, there were few surprises except for the virulence of that of the SDLP. The two Loyalist parties, the DUP and UUUP, came out strongly in favour of devolution, commenting that whilst local government reform might be necessary, it should be left to a devolved NI parliament to resolve. Of the two, the UUUP maintained a stronger commitment to the Convention report, with Baird calling for a referendum on the 1975 Convention report at his press conference. The DUP included in their manifesto their call for a new convention and referendum. Noticeable, too, was the UUUP's plea for the restoration of the office of Governor.

The UUP's manifesto maintained the party's commitment to majority rule, devolution and its opposition to contrived partnership arrangements, but there still seemed to be an uneasy divide on integration and local government reform. There was a call for an upper tier of local government and more powers for district councils but the issue of whether there would be a single council or several and whether they should be a permanent feature or an interim ^{one} step was left unclarified. The NILP has now finally sloughed ~~its~~ ^{off} its devolutionist skin and is firmly integrationist, with its plea for continued direct rule and the establishment of a regional local authority. UPNI put forward its proposals for a Royal Commission and referendum and for consideration to be given to the creation of a single region council at local government level, and the Alliance Party remained committed to its middle-of-the-road proposals for devolution by agreement.

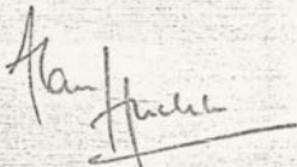
4. On the nationalist side, the Republican Clubs clarified their willingness to work for their long term objective of a 32-county democratic socialist republic of Ireland through a devolved government within NI buttressed by an entrenched Bill of Rights. Their manifesto avoided mention however of their long term aspiration (though they make no secret of it) which they justify by saying that since Irish reunification is not a practical possibility in the short-term it should not be an election issue. The IIP continued to hard on their single theme of British withdrawal.

5. The SDLP's manifesto gives cause for greater concern. Ever since their policy document "Facing Reality" published in September 1977, they have moved progressively further towards the green end of the spectrum and their manifesto represents a further significant shift. Their 1978 Conference motion on the inevitability and desirability of British disengagement was reaffirmed as was the call for a quadripartite conference. The new twist lay in the almost total concentration on agreed Irish structures rather than power-sharing within NI and the fact that there was nothing about Irish unity by consent. More significant, possibly, was the bitter criticism of the Secretary of State's and government policies towards Northern Ireland, and the accusation that Government policy was to seek to under-

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line the SDLP in order to hand back power to the unionist majority. The manifesto contained the oft-asserted call for an end to the negative guarantee and the party's total opposition to increased representation at Westminster. Whilst some of this is directed at personalities, it will make the handling of the SDLP after the election that much more sensitive.

6. All the unionist parties emphasised the need for tougher security measures against the increase in Provisional IRA violence during the election campaign, and it was noticeable that the principal unionist parties and the SDLP gave prominence to the constitutional issues. Although socio-economic issues were not ignored by unionists, it was the centre parties, like Alliance, RC-WP and the NILP, which laid the greater emphasis on bread and butter issues.



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Division 3(B)
25 April 1979
3B/15173/MR

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