

TE FOR THE RECORD

cc: PS/Mr Bell
 Mr Wyatt
 Mr Burns
 Mr Blatherwick
 Mr Chesterton (L)
 Miss MacGlashan

44/5
 WJ
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 POC

NORMAN HUTTON

Summary

1. In a recent conversation Norman Hutton (UUP General Secretary) made the following main points of interest:

- (i) he believed that the planned centrepiece of phase 3 of Paisley's "Carson trail" was the symbolic occupation of various public buildings, especially the NIHE headquarters and Chichester House. However, the DUP had so far been unable to implement these plans;
- (ii) he was highly critical of the Rev Robert Bradford MP, who had little sense of party loyalty and was temperamentally closer to the DUP;
- (iii) in the next Fermanagh and South Tyrone by-election, Hutton judged that the UUP constituency association would once again go for Harry West as their candidate, on the grounds that he had done as well as could reasonably be expected on 9 April.

Details

2. I had lunch late last week with Norman Hutton, who was appreciably more cheerful about UUP prospects in the forthcoming local government elections. Glengall Street were particularly pleased at the neat way in which Harold McCusker MP had turned the visit of the ECHR Commissioners to advantage by getting them to accept a complaint from a UUP "war widow", although the work which McCusker's "European Human Rights Unit" had generated was placing some strain on resources. In addition, Hutton judged that the Party as a whole was recovering its nerve following Paisley's apparent failure to capitalise on the relative success of "phase 2" of his Carson trail. When I commented that for electoral purposes the Carson trail certainly seemed to have peaked too soon, Hutton said that he understood that Paisley's plans for "phase 3" had included the symbolic occupation of Government buildings like

Chichester House and the NIHE headquarters in Adelaide Street (particularly the latter, to dramatise objections to Poleglass, etc), but he had been unable to implement these so far. Hutton seemed to have gathered this from political contacts; although he commented that it was on the RUC'R' net that he had heard details of Paisley's first hillside spectacular on 5/6 February - eg that the "firearm certificates" waved by the demonstrators were in fact pieces of paper from a House of Commons notepad. Hutton went out of his way to stress to me the sense of responsibility which Molyneaux was displaying in the present volatile situation, contrasting with Paisley's inflammatory and headline-seeking behaviour.

3. The topic of responsibility in politics led on to a discussion of Robert Bradford, whom Hutton felt concentrated so exclusively on wooing the "hard" Loyalist vote in his South Belfast constituency that he sometimes sounded merely like a "DUP echo". (As an example of his lack of balance he instanced the fact that Bradford's advice centre was not in the Malone Road but in the tough Cregagh area!) Hutton commented that a large proportion of Bradford's 1979 election expenses had been contributed by wealthy DUP supporters - particularly a man called Foster in Castlereagh. If Bradford had to face a re-selection meeting in the near future he would certainly not retain the UUP nomination. (It was clear from Hutton's comments that Bradford's continuing and somewhat crude attempts to position himself for a bid at the leadership after the May elections have seriously alienated the Glengall Street establishment.)

4. On the Fermanagh by-election, Hutton remarked that West had emerged as the candidate partly because of a DUP "whispering campaign" against Raymond Ferguson, the UUP runner in 1979. The DUP had suggested that Ferguson was "soft on Nationalists" because he had not walked with his Lodge on the last 12th July and had voted in the Council in favour of a civic reception for the Catholic athlete Declan Burns. However Hutton did not believe that Ferguson could have polled any more strongly than West.

5. Hutton made a number of miscellaneous comments of which the following perhaps deserve to be recorded -

- (i) he was still sore about the RUC's retraction early this year of their denial that the police had notified Paisley of a UUP threat to his life. He commented darkly that Strandtown RUC Station (who originally warned Paisley without telling RUC HQ) was "too much in Paisley's pocket".
- (ii) He was currently in dispute with the BBC over local election coverage. The Corporation wished to give equal coverage to every party who were fielding more than 26 candidates, whereas Hutton believed that the coverage should be proportional to the number of candidates each party was running. (The UUP are of course running most.) He commented that if he could not get satisfaction he would make sure that the UUP were not covered at all, so that the BBC (on whom the legal obligation of ensuring balance fell) would be forced to scrap their plans for all the other parties.
- (iii) On the mood of the hard Loyalist areas, he believed that there was little danger of the Loyalist paramilitaries taking violent action unless HMG showed signs of giving in to the hunger strikers. I assured him that this would not happen.

Conclusion

6. It was paradoxical earlier this year that the by no means unqualified success of "phase 2" of the Carson trail seemed to inflict disproportionate damage on UUP morale: there was a widespread impression that the DUP would sweep the board in May. As Hutton's remarks show this impression is now receding - probably because the damaging contrast between Paisley's frenetic activity and the passivity of the UUP under Molyneaux has now to some extent been reversed - the Carson trail seems to have petered out while the UUP has seized the initiative on matters of more immediate concern - eg the ECHR coup. The firmness of the Government's handling of the hunger-strike has shown up the irresponsibility of Paisley's attempts to whip up another crisis.

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Moreover, Molyneaux has wisely let the more able McCusker (now almost fully recovered from his recent operation for cancer of the leg) make much of the running. My present forecast would therefore be that although the DUP will almost certainly gain some seats, the UUP will not be replaced as the largest Unionist party at local government level. However, much could still happen to change the position before 20 May.

Stephen J. Leach

S J LEACH

Political Affairs Division, Belfast

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