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- cc: PS/S of S (I&B)
- PS/Lord Gowrie (I&B)
- PS/PUS (I&B)
- Mr Brennan
- Mr Bourn
- Mr Angel
- Mr Gilliland
- Miss Davies
- Mr Palmer
- Mr Abbott
- Mr Boys Smith
- Mr Edis
- Mr Coulson

Mr Merifield

THE ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY (UUP)

1. I attach a short note on the UUP which seeks to identify the centres of influence in the Party, their interrelationships and their support; and to forecast in general terms how the party seems likely to behave over the next few months.
2. The main conclusion is that the UUP are likely to remain difficult. In so far as they can be influenced, it is perhaps by stressing the difficulties of integration and the likely unacceptability to Westminster of a return to Stormont rule. But we should stay well out of their *W* internal quarrels.

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ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY (UUP)

1. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the successor to the old all-embracing Unionist Party, comprises all the brands of unionist opinion which have not (like the DUP) broken away and set up more homogeneous institutions of their own. The Party has no clear policy objectives except a determination to maintain the union and to exercise power in the Province. In the absence of such objectives, the views of its leading members, their interrelationships and the support they enjoy are all the more important.
2. A comparison with the DUP is instructive. The DUP seems to draw its support largely from small farmers, blue collar workers and the lower middle-class: the UUP is a catch-all party. DUP supporters tend to be from the free churches, while the UUP leans towards middle-class Presbyterianism and the Church of Ireland. Geographically the DUP is strongest in areas where there is little mixing with Catholics - North Antrim and East Belfast, for example - while the UUP tends to flourish in mixed and border areas. The UUP represents the Protestant establishment which has links across the water while the DUP stresses its "democratic" support for the ordinary man. DUP members appear to have fewer personal ties with Great Britain; hence perhaps their firm commitment to devolution, while the UUP, although pulled by its supporters towards devolution, cannot make up its mind.
3. The UUP currently contains two main centres of influence, the leadership group and the Back Bench Committee (formerly known as the "Devolution Group"). It also includes several mavericks (Taylor, Carson, McCartney) and a number of individuals whose allegiance is divided or uncertain. However, despite this fluidity, the Party is quick to close ranks when threatened from outside, for example by Mr Paisley or by Mr Kilfedder's activities as Speaker.

The Leadership Group

4. The leadership group is based on the Party's Westminster MPs - Jim Molyneaux, Martin Smyth, Enoch Powell, Willie Ross and (since November, when he executed a political U-turn following the violence in Co Armagh) Harold McCusker. It also includes one or two Assemblymen - Clifford Forsythe and Billy Bell from Molyneaux's South Antrim constituency, William Douglas (a supporter of Mr Ross and the Assembly Chief Whip) and Tommy Passmore.

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5 However, even inside this group there are considerable differences of view. Mr Powell holds the integrationist doctrine pure and simple: devolution is a constitutional nonsense and a dangerous deception. This argument attracts a number of people from the middle and upper-class reaches of the Party, in particular the old guard of the Ulster Unionist Council (the party's governing body) and the Party office-bearers (for example Sir George Clark, Joe Cunningham and Hazel Bradford). Such people usually have links with GB and often with the Conservative Party, with whom they naturally identify - though they still remember the "treason" of the Conservative Government in abolishing Stormont in 1972 and this lends some devolutionist equivocation to their attitude.

6. The majority of Party members, however, (probably including Messrs Smyth, Ross and McCusker at heart) would ideally like the return of a Stormont Parliament with all its pre-1969 powers, in order to defeat Republicanism in the North and keep the Republic at bay through Protestant control within the Union. Like the DUP, they have few personal links with Britain and distrust Westminster. Mr Molyneaux, who knows this, professes that he too is a 'true' devolutionist; but that since Westminster will not restore 'true' devolution, Powellite integration is the only practicable way to safeguard the union and force the British Government to fulfil its responsibilities on security. Under the influence of Powell's intellectual abilities and pressed by the need to bridge the differences in the Party, the other MPs accept this line.

7. Mr Molyneaux thus shrewdly controls the Party by bringing together the 'Conservative and Unionist' allegiance of the middle-class, tinged with resentment at the implied slur of direct rule; and the gut grass-roots desire for devolution. These political strains he welds together through control of the party machinery and the support of the party's group of Westminster MPs, operating in a UK forum in close touch with members of the right wing of the Conservative Party. His sniping at the Assembly pleases both those who see devolution as a threat and those who regard the Assembly as inadequate.

Back Bench Committee

8. The Back Bench Committee is the title now given to the group which shares little but a conviction that Stormont is dead and buried and that

Unionists must and can reach some accommodation (unspecified) with the Catholic community if Northern Ireland is not to go over the brink. They see the Assembly as an opportunity to explore the possibility of an accommodation, and want the party to grasp the opportunity it presents. The Committee comprises those who supported McCusker last year: Ken Maginnis, Ray Fergusson, Billy Bleakes, John Carson and (more recently) William Thompson. Since McCusker's defection to the leadership group, Bob McCartney has sensed the presence of a power-bloc looking for a leader and is attempting to occupy that place. But again, the Committee is not homogeneous. Fergusson and Maginnis are middle-class liberal unionists with support in the border areas who have flirted with power sharing. William Thompson seems to come from the same stable. Carson is a working-class Protestant from North Belfast who has links not only with the DUP and Protestant paramilitaries but with Belfast Catholics such as Fitt and Devlin and Seamus Lynch of the Workers Party. He is a firm unionist, but class conscious and prepared to make compromises to get nationalists on board. McCartney is no less firm in his defence of the union, and professes to believe that an accommodation with nationalists would be possible (he does not spell out how) provided the British Government made it clear that it supported the union unconditionally.

9. The Back Bench Committee enjoys considerable support at grass-roots level and growing support in the Party organisation. But its members are wide open to accusations of being ready to sell out on power sharing and find it difficult to make headway against the leadership group.

Mavericks

10. The UUP contains several prominent members who tread idiosyncratic paths of their own and enjoy personal followings. Three of them (Carson, McCusker and McCartney) have already been mentioned because they have allied themselves with the two main groups in the Party. The fourth, John Taylor, continues along a solitary course. He takes care to dissociate himself from the leadership group while proclaiming his belief in 'true' devolution. He steers clear of the Back Bench Committee too, since he does not want to be tainted with power sharing. He uses the European Parliament as a platform, and tries to act the role of an elder statesman.

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11. Three or four members of the Assembly - Jeremy Burchill, Dorothy Dunlop and Edgar Graham, with perhaps Jim Kirkpatrick - float uncomfortably between the leadership and the Back Bench Committee. They certainly want the Assembly to work, and are prepared to contemplate the possibility of (undefined) political compromises to the minority, but they keep an anxious eye over their shoulders and are careful not to offend the leadership group. They are professional people from Belfast and have some influence in professional circles. When put to the test, for example over participation in the Assembly Committee system, these people lend their weight to the Back Bench Committee (Graham, for example, was co-signatory with McCartney to the letter sent to the Secretary of State before Christmas about the role of the Speaker). But they are reluctant to come out against the leadership and are unlikely to do so unless they are hard pushed. Mr Molyneaux doubtless realises this, and has so far been careful not to put them to the test.

The Rest of the Party in the Assembly

12. It is difficult to put labels on the rest of the Assembly party. Roy Beggs and Jack Allen are individualists who share the traditionalist views described in para 6 above, but are anxious to see the Assembly succeed. Mary Simpson and Jim Nicholson, McCusker's colleagues from Armagh, would we are told be inclined to give their support to the Back Bench Committee were it not for their sense of loyalty to McCusker. Of the remaining few, all we know is that they too would like to see the Assembly work.

Conclusion and Prospects

13. The leadership group is therefore numerically small, but it holds disproportionate influence. There is no plausible alternative to Mr Molyneaux as leader, especially since Mr McCusker's volte face, nor a demonstrably safe alternative to his policy: the Back Bench Committee have no coherent policy, and each time they begin to spell out their ideas, they tread on dangerous ground. Moreover, the leadership group have devised a line which reflects the two very different concerns of the party - the union, and devolution. It is necessarily a negative line, and this is Mr Molyneaux's weakness; though he can criticise what is on offer in the Assembly, he finds it hard to convince

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his party members that he can produce anything better. So far Mr Molyneaux's secure Westminster base has helped him too; but it is likely that, if the Assembly takes off, influence will increasingly pass to the Assembly Party, where he faces a challenge from those who want to make the best of the Assembly - most of them without really seeing how - because they do not believe in Mr Molyneaux's alternatives. Such people are in the majority in the Assembly, and it is becoming clear that they represent the majority view of party members.

14. These divisions in the Party will continue. The leadership group are likely to keep riding the integrationist and devolutionist horses at the same time. They will disrupt the Assembly and try to prevent the Back Bench Committee from steering the Party towards the electorally dangerous policy of accommodation with nationalists. As in the past, they are likely to remind unionist opinion continually of the obstacles placed by Westminster in the way of majority rule - by waving the red rag of power sharing and by seeking, or threatening to seek, a showdown with the Government by demanding a change in the terms for devolution laid down in the 1982 Act. For their part, the Back Bench Committee - with or without McCartney as leader - will press for a more constructive and flexible approach to the Assembly and for an accommodation with the minority - though they will find it difficult and dangerous to define the terms. Mr Molyneaux and his friends are unlikely to destroy the Back Bench Committee, and the latter are unlikely to unseat Mr Molyneaux - unless, perhaps, terms for devolution acceptable to the mass of Party opinion can somehow be delivered.

15. In the meantime, the UUP will continue to be a thorn in the Government's flesh. Mr Molyneaux and his friends will respond flexibly to events - for example, by conceding to pressure for the Party to take its seats in Assembly Committees. He will be reluctant to bring the Assembly down unless he can point to a reason which satisfies the bulk of Party members. However, each faction will continue to judge political events not only as they might affect the Party as a whole, but according to their possible effects on the squabbles inside the party. It will therefore be very difficult for any faction inside the party to make a political move towards either the Government or another Northern Ireland party. More important, because no-one in the UUP even its leader, can deliver the Party as a whole, it will remain very difficult for the Government or the other Northern Ireland parties to come to effective agreements with it.

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