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PAB/2710/RE

Mr Blelloch

*Miss Robb
Mr. Pabell
HT/r*

*12/11/1981
L. Kelly
Mr. Lytle
R/S*

- cc: PS/S of S (L&B)
PS/Ministers (L&B)
Mr Marshall o/r
Mr Wyatt o/r
Mr Palmer
Mr Chesterton
Miss MacGlashan
Mr R Templeton
Mr Harrington
Mr R Smith
Mr Tatham, Dublin
RID, FCO

FERMANAGH/SOUTH TYRONE BY-ELECTION

1. Nominations closed on Friday 7 August. There are 4 'serious' candidates:

Owen Carron (Anti-H-Block proxy political prisoner). Sands' election agent in the April by-election; PSF candidate.

Kenneth Maginnis (Ulster Unionist). A Dungannon school teacher; resigned his commission as a UDR Major.

Seamus Close (Alliance Party). Party Chairman with a well known name but little known face.

Tom Moore (Workers' Party, Republican Clubs). Trade Unionist from Newry, former internee.

2. In addition two maverick Englishmen are standing: Simon Hall-Raleigh (General Amnesty) and Martin Green (The Peace Lover). They will have little effect on the campaign.

3. The UUP nominated their candidate several weeks ago in order to forestall the nomination of a DUP candidate. They succeeded. The DUP are weak in the constituency and dared not risk splitting the Unionist vote. Despite some mutterings, they have acquiesced in Maginnis's candidature.

4. Despite some early speculation that the anti-H-Block camp might run a relative of a hunger-striker to fill Sands' seat, Owen Carron was chosen. His supporters include a number of Independent, IIP and ex-SDLP councillors in the constituency, ie a broad cross section of Nationalists.

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5. The Alliance Party felt obliged to give the middle ground - if it exists - an alternative to the two stark choices available in April, and to put up a Catholic candidate in an effort to take votes away from Carron. The Workers' Party - Republican Clubs put up a candidate after the SDLP's decision not to run, mainly in order to provide a Republican alternative to Carron. Neither party has much support in the area, or expects to do well.

6. The principle fight will, as in April, take place between the H-Block candidate and the Unionist. The electorate will again vote largely on tribal lines. However, as the voting figures in April show, the Nationalist majority is not overwhelming; Sands then won 30,492 votes to Harry West's 29,046. Maginnis is probably more popular among Unionists than West, and despite his UDR background, ^{he} does not arouse the same antagonism in Catholics (some of whom allegedly voted for Sands in April primarily to keep West out). He may therefore poll higher than did West. On the other hand, attitudes on the Nationalist side have hardened with the succession of deaths in the Maze. A vote for Carron will be seen as a gesture against the Government's stand towards the strikers, and in favour of an early settlement to the issue. While Carron will not have the pull of Sands, Catholics who felt inhibited about voting for Sands, a convicted Provo, may be more ready to vote for Carron. Moreover, 700 new voters have been added to the electoral list since April, and the majority are likely to be Catholic. Again, more Protestants than Catholics are likely to be away on holiday on polling day.

7. In a straight fight, Carron would almost certainly win the seat. It is difficult to judge whether the Alliance Party and WP-RC candidates will attract enough Catholic votes to let the Unionist in. Most people believe they will not, and that the constituency will have an abstentionist MP. But John Hume, for example, told the Secretary of State yesterday that he thought Maginnis would win. The main Northern Ireland firm of bookmakers are declining to offer odds on the outcome. Our guess (though it is no more than that) is that Carron will win by a short head.

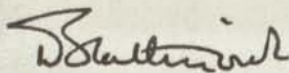
8. Whatever the result, one major political event has already occurred: the SDLP's decision not to put up a candidate. Some SDLP

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leaders believe that a Party which claims to be the major Nationalist spokesman must fight all elections; and that it is morally and politically wrong to allow a Provo candidate to go forward unopposed. On the other hand, the Party enjoys little support in what has long been a green Nationalist area. No local party man was willing to stand and the only nationally known potential candidate, Austin Currie, had made it clear in April that he did not want to stand in present circumstances. The SDLP could not win and ^{of the Party} many/did not want to be seen again as losers. Local party feeling was pro-H-Block, anti-British and firmly against splitting the Nationalist vote (for despite their comparative lack of support, the SDLP pulls many more votes locally than the WP-RC or Alliance). Once the local Party officials had decided not to put up a candidate, it was pretty much a foregone conclusion that the Executive would endorse them. The decision has been defended as realistic and all the fault of the British any way; but many people are angry at what they see as an abdication of political responsibility by the Party leadership. If Carron wins, this criticism will increase.



D E S BLATHERWICK
Political Affairs Division

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