

CONFIDENTIAL

Mr. O'Leary

*I have been hammering
 into our brains to your Party conference
 for our 'POLITICAL FILE' etc.
 I think it you have
 such a file?!! What
 papers would be
 P.A. O'Leary*

cc PS/SOS (L & B)
 PS/JMs (L & B)
 PS/PUS (L & B)
 → PS/Mr Bell
 Sir Maurice Oldfield
 Mr Hannigan
 Mr Marshall
 Mr Moriarty
 Mr Wyatt - o/a
 Mr Burns
 Mr Wilson
 Mr Clift
 Mr Gilliland

Sr. Cas Ru

W. J. 23/10
W. J. Davis
W. J. Gote

Mr Gee:

ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY CONFERENCE: 19-20 OCTOBER 1979

Miss Ireland and I attended the open session of the UUP Conference in the Stormont Hotel on Saturday 20 October. This was the first occasion on which the NIO had been invited to attend a UUP conference as observers. It is important to note that the policy making body in the party is the Party Executive and not the Party Conference. A full record of the debates is attached^x and a complete set of Conference papers is held in Division 3(B).

The two debates of main interest to the NIO were those on politics and security. The political debate revealed the tensions that still remain in the party between the integrationists and the devolutionists. Although the debate was far less outspoken and divisive than at last year's Conference in Enniskillen, David Trimble, Craig's close colleague and deputy in the Vanguard movement, took the lead in questioning the integratory policies of the leadership. In response, both Enoch Powell and Molyneaux argued that the party would continue to work for a system of devolved government in Northern Ireland provided that it did not endanger the union and that it did not confer contrived privileges on any section of the community. Devolution was still the party's main objective; but since it was unobtainable in the short term, the party would seek its subsidiary aim of a restoration of powers to local government. A policy of devolution or nothing would, Molyneaux said, lead to nothing.

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In essence, therefore, the party is still committed to devolution on their own terms but will work in the interim for greater powers to district councils and an upper tier of local government. Molyneaux listed 4 main objectives which are enshrined in a new policy statement -

"Maintain the Union with Molyneaux" - issued at the Conference:

- the unity of the UK and the supremacy of the Westminster Parliament;
- a system of devolved government that neither endangers the Union nor confers contrived privileges on any section of the community;
- equality of rights for all people in Ulster and the enjoyment in Ulster of the same rights as those enjoyed by other British citizens; and
- the end to colonial rule and the restoration of powers to district councils and of the missing upper tier of local government. There was no clarification at any stage during the Conference of whether the upper tier should be a single regional council or three/four councils.

This policy was endorsed unanimously and, whilst party leaders recognised that disagreements over the method of achieving their goals would still continue, most thought that Molyneaux had achieved the vote of confidence that he required. Certainly, neither Martin Smyth nor Jo Cunningham saw Vanguard or the newly-formed '79 Club' as any major threat. Bill Craig was, perhaps significantly, not present at the Conference, apparently complaining that he had not received an invitation. The inaugural dinner of the 79 Club which he had addressed at the Culloden Hotel on Thursday 18 October (and where he had made a major speech in favour of devolution) had only been attended by about 29 people, including Mrs Mary O'Fee and Cllr George Green of N Down District Council, none of whom was of major importance in the party. Harry West, though ordered by his wife to attend the dinner on the Friday night, when he was presented with a gold watch, did not remain for Saturday's Debate (unlike his wife) and seems content in his retirement from active politics.

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In his address to the party, Molyneaux emphasised that he did "not look with favour on time-wasting talking shops or political coffee-housing" and warned that he had purposefully ruled out inter-party talks on his election to the leadership because "it was essential that those in authority should be in no doubt about the attitude of [the] Party. Because doubt could have been disastrous in a period when plots were being hatched, plots which since have been revealed in the kite-flying exercises of faceless spokesmen and officials." What the party wanted, Molyneaux said, was the implementation of the Conservative Party manifesto; that surely was neither unreasonable nor inflexible? Privately, Martin Smyth commented that the proposal for an elected consultative assembly which he presumed had been deliberately leaked to the Belfast Telegraph had been firmly rejected within the party leadership as a talking shop and a waste of time.

On security, there could be no doubting the intensity of feeling and the debate was enlivened by an impassioned speech by Cllr Billy Bleakes, one of the authors of the joint UUP/DUP/UUUP resolution on security debated in district councils last week. Heavier sentences, an end to remission, the reintroduction of the death penalty, administrative detention and economic sanctions against the Republic failing the implementation of extradition were calls that received loud applause. Many people privately commented that whilst they might not have agreed with the wording or the timing of the joint resolution, it nevertheless reflected a genuine sense of grass-roots feeling that not enough was being done on the security front (and that the security forces were still being held in check by political considerations). Michael Armstrong's rather bitter personal attacks on the Secretary of State were also, somewhat worryingly, endorsed by many delegates in private.

The party clearly remains worried by Paisley and the DUP but there was no sign of any desire for a rapprochement. Instead Paisley was villified from all directions and accused of

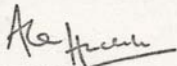
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flirting with independence. Several speakers, however, warned of the danger of losing votes to Paisley if there was too much emphasis on local government reform, and this may be the reason that both Molyneaux and Powell have maintained the emphasis on devolution as the party's principal objective. Many privately recognised that, whilst Alliance were losing votes to the UUP, the UUP were losing support to the DUP; none seemed particularly confident of the party's success in an early election.

On the whole, therefore, I gained the impression of a party that had suffered a considerable loss of confidence after its two electoral defeats this year and that was still divided over its constitutional objectives and how to attain them, but which was prepared to give Molyneaux its backing in the hope (but not in the certainty) that he would prove to be an effective leader.

Reaction to the Conference came from Gerry Fitt and John Hume on Monday morning. Gerry Fitt warned the Secretary of State of strong opposition from the SDLP if he attempted a local government solution in Northern Ireland and John Hume commented that there could be no possibility of agreement on a devolved government unless the negative guarantee to the Unionists was removed. They interpreted the Conference's endorsement of what was seen as an integrationist resolution (but which in fact was a somewhat vaguely worded umbrella motion) as further evidence of Unionist intransigence and commented bitterly on Molyneaux's rejection of power-sharing and partnership and his reference to inter-party talks as a time-wasting talking shop. In the light of that, media commentators saw little prospect of success for any Government initiative.



A E HUCKLE
Division 3(B)
22 October 1979

3B/JC/19903