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EUROPEAN ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 1979

/ I attach at annex A a table giving the full breakdown of the results / of the European Assembly Election in Northern Ireland. Annex B gives the % distribution of transfers at the various stages of the / count. Annex C compares the performances of the main parties (and / Kilfedder) with the 1979 general election. Annex D sets out the overall sectarian balance as between the 1979 elections and the / October 1974 general election. Annex E gives the overall party performances in all the elections since 1973. [This particular annex should be used with care. Since elections are fought on different issues, at different times, and by different methods, comparisons can only be very rough. The figures do, however, give a general overall impression of party performances in the last 7 years].

2. It might be helpful to give a brief description of the progress of the count. The 1st count saw the election of Paisley with an unexpectedly large surplus of some 27,628 votes over the quota of 143,060. Since his surplus was larger than the difference between the votes of the last two candidates, his surplus had to be transferred before the exclusion of the minor candidates. The bulk of Paisley's transfers (45%) went to Kilfedder as expected, since Paisley had urged his supporters during the campaign to give their second preferences to him. 32.7% went to John Taylor, perhaps surprisingly since Taylor had fought an active anti-DUP campaign but possibly because of the strength of his personality and his unquestionably Unionist views. Only 15% of Paisley's surplus went to West. Political scientists will undoubtedly puzzle over the

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reasons for some of Paisley's supporters (0.2%) giving their second preferences to John Hume! It is interesting to note that the majority of Paisley's supporters (95.8%) had a second preference.

3. The third count saw the exclusion of the 6 lowest candidates, since the sum total of their combined vote did not exceed the difference between the votes given to Bleakley and McAliskey. The majority of the second preference votes of the moderate parties clearly went to Napier who gained a 25% share. Hume also did well enough (21.6%) probably from the RC-WP and Devlin supporters to exceed the quota; he was therefore declared elected. Kilfedder gained a surprisingly large share (13.5%) of the moderate vote and McAliskey with 8.5% must have drawn some RC-WP and Devlin support away from Hume and Napier. Hume's surplus was not distributed because it was not sufficient to bridge the difference between McAliskey's and Napier's votes.

4. The fourth count therefore saw the distribution of Bernadette McAliskey's vote. Here the significant factor was that 81.8% was not transferable. A large percentage of McAliskey's supporters must consequently not have put down a second preference, though some of course will have supported Hume (and possibly others). Roughly 15% went to Napier.

5. In count 5, Napier votes were distributed almost equally between John Taylor (31%) and Kilfedder (29%) with West picking up only a 7% share. This may have been due to the fact that the majority of Napier's support will have come from east of the Bann, therefore favouring Taylor and Kilfedder. This meant that West was excluded - a surprise since before the election most commentators had presumed that West as party leader would beat Taylor comfortably at the count. Some commentators put West's poor performance down to his relative lack of personality and even his personal unpopularity. It is significant that at no stage did Harry West pick up more transfers than Taylor. Nearly a third of Napier's votes were not transferable probably because they were to benefit John Hume. It is possible to argue from this that Alliance's support in this election was roughly one-third Catholic and two thirds Protestant.

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6. Count 6 saw the final battle between Taylor and Kilfedder over Harry West's votes, but the result was a foregone conclusion. Unionist voters had been urged during the campaign to give their first and second preference votes to their two party candidates according to area and by and large they dutifully followed orders. Nearly 80% of votes went to Taylor and only 5% to Kilfedder. This resulted in Taylor's election with 153,466 votes.

7. The count which ended at roughly 7pm on 12 June had lasted two days and was the largest PR vote ever in the UK and certainly the largest in the election. Well over half a million (572,239) valid votes were counted out of a total electorate of 1,029,490. The overall percentage turnout for the election was also a respectable 57%.

8. Clearly the results, particularly of the 1st preference votes (see Annex B) will give the DUP a psychological boost and Paisley with his 29.8%, following on his party's general election success, is demanding recognition as the only representative of Unionist opinion in Northern Ireland. Most see the election as having resulted in a polarisation of the electorate, particularly as the SDLP have held up (and increased) their vote (24.6%). Few see particular scope for consensus politics at least in the immediate aftermath of the election. The UUP, now the third party with 21.9% of the vote, are in apparent disarray and will clearly pay due regard to the combined Paisley/Kilfedder vote (36.5%). The UUP leadership may change as a result. Alliance, too, are bitterly disappointed with their poor performance in this PR election, given their relative success since 1977. The minor parties have shown themselves to be of no significance. UPNI may well fold and the RC-WP if they can manage to hold together politically can only look forward to a better performance in the 1981 district council elections. Bernadette McAliskey, unlucky to lose her deposit, will claim her 36,000 votes, gained despite a PSF boycott, as representing the hidden Catholic support for political rather than military republicanism. Annex D incidentally undermines John Hume's claim that he managed to pull in cross-sectarian support since the overall sectarian balance is very much the same as in previous elections. It seems likely that Alliance lost Catholic support to more traditional non-Unionist parties (and probably to Hume in particular).

A.E. Huckle
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