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 Mr. Marshall (L)-M
 Mr. Lane
 Mr. Burns
 Mr. Newington RID FCO(L)-M
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 Mr. Clift
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 Mr. Culham DS10 MOD(L)-M
 (Main Bldg)
 → Miss Simmons (DH)

1979 GENERAL ELECTION

With all nominations now in, there is a record list of 64 candidates for the general election in NI - details are attached. Although a fuller analysis will be produced later this week, it might nevertheless be useful to highlight the main points of interest immediately.

2. Essentially the main battle-lines were drawn up as far back as mid-1978 when the prospect of an autumn general election was almost certain, and despite attempts by Baird (UUUP), Paisley (DUP) and others to achieve some sort of electoral agreement particularly in the marginal seats, the parties have conformed fairly well to their pronounced intentions. Only the Alliance Party are fielding a full team of 12 candidates and except for Arthur Barr in Londonderry these had all been chosen by the summer of 1978. The UUP had originally intended to fight all 12 seats and as early as May 1978 their line-up was almost clear, though they had to accommodate the resignations of Carson in N. Belfast, Kilfedder in N. Down, Bell in W. Belfast and Harry West's adoption for the EEC. The only major concession to Unionist unity was the subsequent withdrawal of Edward Turner from the fight in mid-Ulster in April 1979 to leave the field clear for John Dunlop (UUUP). The SDLP had nominated their 9 candidates by October 1978. They decided not to fight E. Belfast and N. Down where there was little hope of a respectable showing, but their bete-noire was Fermanagh/S. Tyrone where Austin Currie in a surprise move is now standing as an "independent SDLP" candidate. The intentions of the DUP and UUUP were always somewhat clouded by the party manoeuvrings but they are fighting

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5 seats and 2 seats respectively (with probably Cecil Harvey's withdrawal from S.Down being the most significant factor in the election). The main DUP threat against the UUP lies probably in E.Belfast. The Republican Clubs promised originally to field 6 candidates and have gone one better and the IIP are testing their chances for the first time with 4 candidates (although they too had originally promised to fight 6 seats). The NILP are fielding 4 candidates, if one includes Jeff Dudgeon as the Labour Integrationist, and UPNI 3. Bob Kidd of the newly formed United Labour Party (Paddy Devlin's brainchild) is standing in S.Antrim where he is a Newtownabbey councillor.

3. A quick run down of the seats show that the main interest will centre around the Belfast constituencies, particularly East, North and South, and Fermanagh/S.Tyrone. Mid-Ulster and S.Down would have been close but the withdrawals of Turner and Harvey respectively have probably guaranteed the return of the sitting MPs.

4. In N.Antrim Paisley is secure with his 72.6% majority although on this occasion he will be facing a UUP challenge from Jeremy Burchill, chairman of the Young Unionists. For the first time the IIP (John Turnly) will be challenging the SDLP. In S.Antrim Molyneaux again can rest at ease with his 71.5% majority particularly as the moderate and anti-Unionist vote is split between the Alliance Party, Republican Clubs and the SDLP. In Armagh, Harold McCusker is probably safe with his 60% majority although on this occasion he faces a challenge from the DUP. On the other hand the moderate and anti-Unionist vote is split between the SDLP, Alliance and the Republican Clubs and this will probably ensure McCusker's re-election. It is unlikely that his vote in favour of the Labour Government during the no confidence motion will affect McCusker's local standing; both his constituency association and Jim Molyneaux gave him a clean bill of health.

5. In E.Belfast Craig is under challenge from Alliance and the DUP; his position however would have been much more tenuous had Ernest Baird (UUUP) continued to stand for the seat. Oliver Napier himself was sanguine about his chances of being elected but thought that he could obtain about 16-17,000 votes.

N.Belfast is probably the most wide open constituency and has certainly attracted the most candidates. In October 1974, John Carson gained 62% of the vote against the 37.4% of his challengers. On this occasion, Cecil Walker is less well known even in the area and is facing a challenge from a well known DUP candidate, Johnny McQuade, who can always count on a popular vote in Loyalist areas. The moderate and anti-Unionist challenge however is fragmented between the SDLP, Alliance, Republican Clubs, UPNI and the Northern Ireland Labour Party.

6. In S.Belfast Robert Bradford faces an Alliance challenge from Basil Glass but although Glass may increase his vote it seems unlikely that the outcome will be radically different from that in October 1974. In W.Belfast, Gerry Fitt is probably secure in his seat given the fact that the Unionist vote is split between Tom Passmore of the UUP and Billy Dickson of the DUP. It is possible, however, that the Republican Clubs will increase their vote and that this combined with the new Alliance challenge may have an effect on Fitt's majority.

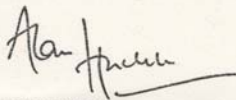
7. In N.Down Jim Kilfedder is probably safe with his personal popularity vote but on this occasion he faces a UUP challenge from Clifford Smyth because of his final resignation from the party. In S.Down Enoch Powell has probably been saved by the withdrawal of Cecil Harvey's candidature. Powell's slender majority in October 1974 might not have survived the combined challenge of Harvey and McGrady but with Harvey's votes assured he is likely to be returned since the anti-Unionist challenge is fragmented between the SDLP, Republican Clubs and the IIP, and by a new challenge from the Alliance Party.

8. In Fermanagh S.Tyrone the contest will be an interesting one. Ernest Baird who changed his constituency in the hope that he would be given a clear run by the UUP faces a challenge from Raymond Ferguson a local councillor and Harry West's nephew. Although Baird has always had support in the area, there may be some basis for the view that the UUUP vote is declining in transferring to the UUP. Maguire now faces the challenge of Austin Currie who in a surprise move defied the Party's decision not to field a candidate and has announced himself as an Independent SDLP contender. The Alliance Party are also fighting the constituency for the first time.

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9. Londonderry would appear to be a straight run for William Ross since the SDLP challenge is weakened by the contention of the Republican Clubs and (newly) of the Alliance Party and the IIP. In mid-Ulster the withdrawal of Edward Turner on 15 April leaves the field clear for John Dunlop particularly as the moderate and anti-Unionist vote is once again divided between the SDLP, Republican Clubs and also Alliance and the IIP.

10. Provisional Sinn Fein announced that they would be boycotting the election and they urged their followers to do the same but their call has not been given particular publicity. The Independent Unionist group was to have fielded candidates in N.Belfast (David Overend) and W.Belfast (Hugh Smyth) but they withdrew from the field on 22 April. Their UVF backed proposals will therefore not be put to an electoral test, nor will the independence proposals of the UDA's NUPRG.



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Division 3(B)
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