

E.R.

PAB/4594/RE

cc: PS/S of S (I&B) (M)  
PS/Ministers (I&B) (M)  
PS/PUS (I&B) (M)  
PS/Sir E Bell  
Mr Wyatt  
Mr Angel (M)  
Mr Blatherwick o/r  
Miss MacGlashan  
Mr Abbott (M)  
Mr Boys Smith

(1) Sir E Bell  
(2) Pol  
27/8

NOTE FOR THE RECORD

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS 1982: SDLP

1. Early this morning, after a six hour meeting in Dungannon, members of the SDLP's executive committee and the party's constituency representatives agreed that they would contest the forthcoming elections but would refuse to take their seats in the Assembly. The decision was taken by 25 votes to 14. Speaking after the meeting, party leader John Hume described the Assembly as "totally unworkable and unacceptable" and declared that the SDLP would contest the elections in order to seek a clear mandate for the rejection of the Secretary of State's proposals.
2. Reaction to last night's meeting has so far been predictable. The Chairman of the Irish Independence Party, Fergus McAteer, spoke of a "dark day for Northern Nationalists" and added that even participation in the elections would be measured as a success in "British Government circles". The Irish Republican Socialist Party also condemned the SDLP decision and confirmed their own boycott of the polls. For the Alliance, Mr Seamus Close described the stance taken by the SDLP as "dishonest" and a "misuse of the franchise". Meanwhile, Mr Molyneaux has sent a telegramme to the Prime Minister urging her to recall Parliament for a debate on the Northern Ireland Act: he wants the Act amended to remove the need for cross-community support for devolution proposals and to enable chairmen of the departmental committees to be appointed by simple majority vote.
3. A decision to contest the elections has looked likely ever since the meeting of senior party officers in Londonderry last month at which Mr Hume had apparently spoken in favour of participation. But it was known that there was considerable opposition inside the SDLP, especially from the 'grassroots' level, and the voting at last night's meeting was expected to be very close. It may well be that the formula which has emerged - to fight the elections but boycott the Assembly - was the only one which would enable Mr Hume to hold his party together and avoid an open split.