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**PARTY REPRESENTATION ON BELFAST CITY
COUNCIL COMMITTEES, OUTSIDE AUTHORITIES
AND PARTNERSHIP BOARDS.
A TESTCASE FOR DEMOCRACY.**

SUMMARY

After the last local government election in May 1997 Sinn Fein became the largest party on Belfast City Council, with 27.6% of the vote. However, a pact between Alliance and the other unionist parties, resulted in the systematic exclusion of Sinn Fein from all chair- and vice-chairpersonships on Belfast City Council Committees and outside authorities.

The allocation of chairs and vice-chairs on Belfast City Council Committees and outside authorities is characterised by unionist domination and nationalist marginalisation.

The figures which will be presented in this report suggest the following pattern:

- The domination of posts by unionists and the marginalisation of nationalists.
- The complete exclusion of Sinn Fein on Council Committees and outside authorities.
- The overall domination of the Ulster Unionist party.
- The over-representation of Alliance.

Sinn Fein, the largest political party on the Council with 27.6% of the vote, is excluded from chairs or vice-chairs. The Ulster Unionist Party received 20.1% of the vote in the election. It holds 25.49% of the seats - the same

amount as Sinn Fein - , but 43.75% of the chairs and 37.5% of the vice-chairs.

Alliance (9% of the vote) holds over 25% of all Council chairs and 19% of all vice-chairs on Council committees.

93% of all chairs and 87% of all vice-chairs are occupied by the unionist parties. The nationalist parties are marginalised: While they hold 43% of the vote and 40% of the Council seats, they have only 6% of the chairs and 12.5% of the vice-chairs. All chairs and vice-chairs held by nationalists are occupied by the SDLP.

Party representation on outside authorities resembles a similar pattern.

It is only on the newly created partnership boards that party representation actually comes close to their electoral performance. This proves that only a system of proportionality, as practiced in the nomination for the partnership boards, is able to redress these injustices in the democratic process and will lead to equal representation and participation.

The distribution of chairs, vice-chairs and membership on outside authorities, if left to the good will of the unionist parties, leads to the marginalisation of the nationalist parties and the complete exclusion of Sinn Fein. This unequal representation is discriminatory, undemocratic and unjust. It disenfranchises the nationalist electorate.

An equal representation of all parties involved in the democratic process can only emerge in the form of a guaranteed system of proportionality.

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1. Introduction

The democratic question will be one of the key issues towards the solution of the present conflict. Consequently, we should take a close look at how this democratic commitment is practised by the unionist parties at a Belfast local government level. The recently reported pact between Alliance, the UUP, DUP and the other smaller unionist parties to exclude Sinn Fein from chairmanships and vice-chairmanships on Belfast City Council and the outside authorities must be set in the context of the long history of discrimination practised by unionists against the nationalist population.

The figures which will be presented in this report suggest the following pattern:

- The domination of posts by unionists and the marginalisation of nationalists.
- The overall domination of the Ulster Unionist party.
- The over-representation of Alliance.
- The complete exclusion of Sinn Fein on Council Committees and outside authorities.

This violates against two fundamental principles of democracy: Equal representation and participation.

The two largest parties on Belfast City Council, Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionist Party, hold the same number of seats. However, whereas Sinn Fein holds no chairpersonship at all, the UUP holds more than 40% of all chairpersonships. All unionist parties together, i.e. the UUP, DUP, Alliance and the smaller unionist parties hold 94% of all chairpersonships. The nationalist parties, i.e. Sinn Fein and the SDLP, hold 6% of chairpersonships. This distribution of posts is but one example of a gross misrepresentation of the nationalist parties in general and Sinn Fein in particular.

Looking at individual parties, three observations are particularly interesting:

1. Firstly, the complete exclusion of Sinn Fein.
2. Secondly, the number of Alliance chairpersons is more than 100% higher than the seats they hold on the Council.
3. Thirdly, the UUP holds a quarter of Council seats but nearly 50% of the chairpersonships.

87.5% of all vice-chairs are held by the unionist parties; 12.5% are held by the SDLP. While Sinn Fein is completely excluded, all major unionist parties, i.e. the UUP, DUP and Alliance, are overrepresented.

To support our argument we will analyse the following issues:

1. The representation of parties on Belfast City Council.
2. The nominations of chairpersonships and vice-chairpersonships to the committees on Belfast City Council.
3. The nomination of councillors to outside authorities.
4. The nomination of councillors to partnership boards.

2. Belfast City Council

After the last local government election in May 1997 the following parties were elected to Belfast City Council:

Table 1: Seats on City Council

	% Vote	Seats (total: 51)	% Seats
Sinn Fein	27.6	13	25.49
UUP	20.1	13	25.49
SDLP	15.6	7	13.72
DUP	12.1	7	13.72
Alliance	9.2	6	11.76
PUP	9.2	3	5.88
UDP	2.4	1	1.96
Indep. Unionist	0.9	1	1.96
Women's Coal.	1.0	-	-
WP	1.0	-	-
GP	0.5	-	-
Con.	0.3	-	-
NL	0.1	-	-
Labour	0.0	-	-

2.1. The Committees in Belfast City Council

Belfast City Council has 16 committees: 6 Principal Committees and 10 Sub-Committees.

2.1.1. Chairpersonships on Belfast City Council Committees

The party composition of chairpersons is the following¹:

UUP:	7
Alliance:	4
DUP:	2
SDLP:	1
PUP:	1
Indep. Unionist:	1

A comparison of the percentages of council seats with the percentages of chairpersonships allocated to the parties on Council Committees produces the following pattern:

Table 2: Chairs on Council Committees

	Seats on Council in %	Chairpersonships in %
Sinn Fein	25.49	-
UUP	25.49	43.75
SDLP	13.72	6.25
DUP	13.72	12.5
Alliance	11.76	25
PUP	5.88	6.25
UDP	1.96	-
Indep. Unionist	1.96	6.25

¹ On a detailed distribution of chairpersonships among the parties see appendix 1.

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Looking at individual parties, three observations are particularly interesting:

1. Firstly, the complete exclusion of Sinn Fein.
2. Secondly, the number of Alliance chairpersons is more than 100% higher than the seats they hold on the Council.
3. Thirdly, the UUP holds a quarter of Council seats but nearly 50% of the chairpersonships.

2.1.2. Vice-chairpersonships on Belfast City Council

Looking at the distribution of vice-chairs on City Council Committees we find a similar pattern as outlined above².

The party composition of vice-chairs is the following:

UUP:	6
DUP:	4
Alliance:	3
SDLP:	2
PUP:	1

A comparison of the percentages of council seats with the percentages of vice-chairpersonships allocated to the parties on Council Committees produces the following pattern:

² On a detailed composition of vice-chairs see appendix 2.

Table 3: Vice-chairpersonships on City Council Committees

	Seats on Council in %	Vice-chairs in %
Sinn Fein	25.49	-
UUP	25.49	37.5
SDLP	13.72	12.5
DUP	13.72	25
Alliance	11.76	18.75
PUP	5.88	6.25
UDP	1.96	-
Indep. Unionist	1.96	-

87.5% of all vice-chairs are held by the unionist parties; 12.5% are held by the SDLP. While Sinn Fein is completely excluded, all major unionist parties, i.e. the UUP, DUP and Alliance, are overrepresented.

2.2. The Pact between Alliance and the other Unionist Parties

Recently the media reported on a pact between Alliance, the UUP, DUP and the other unionist parties to distribute chairs and vice-chairs on Council Committees among themselves and exclude Sinn Fein.

If we compare the agreements of the pact alongside the actual distribution of chairs/vice-chairs, we can conclude the following:

1. In 12 out of 16 arrangements the distribution of chairs and vice-chairs coincides with the agreement as outlined in the pact.
2. In three cases, the SDLP did not participate in the deal. Therefore, Alliance gained one additional chair (Pers.Sub) and one additional vice-chair (Contract). One chair went to an independent unionist (H+E).
3. In one case we find a modified deal between the UUP and the DUP (Tourism).

Table 4: Alliance/Unionist Pact and Reality

	Pact		Reality	
	Chair	Vice-chair	Chair	Vice-chair
P+R ✓	Alliance	UUP	Alliance	UUP
Client ✓	UUP	Alliance	UUP	Alliance
Contract ✓	UUP	SDLP	UUP	Alliance
Develop. ✓	DUP	UUP	DUP	UUP
H+E ✓	SDLP	UUP	Ind. Union.	UUP
Planning ✓	PUP	DUP	PUP	DUP
Housing	Alliance	PUP	Alliance	PUP
Fin+Admin	UUP	Alliance	UUP	Alliance
Pers.Sub	SDLP	DUP	Alliance	DUP
Pol.Perf.	UUP	DUP	UUP	DUP
Arts	Alliance	UUP	Alliance	UUP
Ec.Devel.	UUP	SDLP	UUP	SDLP
Tourism	DUP	UUP	UUP	DUP
Parks	DUP	UUP	DUP	UUP
Com+Leis.	UUP	SDLP	UUP	SDLP
Waterfront	SDLP	UUP	SDLP	UUP

2.3. Summary

Looking at the figures we can draw the following conclusions:

The chairs and vice-chairs on Belfast City Council Committees are dominated by unionists. 93% of all chairs and 87% of all vice-chairs are occupied by the unionist parties. The nationalists are marginalised. Although they hold nearly 40% of the Council seats, they have only 6% of the chairs and 12.5% of the vice-chairs. Sinn Fein is completely excluded from chairs and vice-chairs. The Ulster Unionist Party, while holding the same amount of seats as Sinn Fein, dominates on the Committees. The exclusion of Sinn Fein contrasts with the over-representation of Alliance: While Alliance hold only 11% of the Council seats they hold over a quarter of all chairs and 19% of all vice-chairs on the Committees.

3. Party Representation on Outside Authorities and Partnership Boards

3.1. Outside Authorities

The marginalisation of the nationalist representatives is also prevalent on outside authorities. Out of a total of 34 outside authorities³, nationalists are represented on 6. Belfast City Council nominates 76 members to outside authorities. Sinn Fein is represented on 2 outside authorities⁴. 86.46% of all members on outside authorities are unionist, 13.5 are nationalist.

To take two examples: On the important Belfast Education and Library Board 2 out of 14 Council members are nationalist (i.e. SDLP). The Eastern Health & Social Services Council has 6 Council members, only one of them is nationalist (SDLP).

Table 5: Party Representation on Outside Authorities (OA)

	Councillors on OA	in %	Seats on Council
Sinn Fein	3	4.05	25.49
UUP	34	45.94	25.49
SDLP	7	9.45	13.72
DUP	14	18.91	13.72
Alliance	13	17.56	11.76
PUP	2	2.7	5.88
UDP	-	-	1.96
Indep. Unionist	1	1.35	1.96

3.2. Partnership Boards

The nomination to the recently formed partnership boards is based on the principle of proportionality. Therefore, nationalist representation improves. Although Sinn Fein is slightly underrepresented, the two nationalist parties are fairly evenly represented, especially when compared with the council committees and outside authorities.

³ Out of the 76 members on outside authorities, 74 have been appointed so far.

⁴ These are the Road Safety Committees and the Advisory Committee on Travellers.

Table 6: Party Representation on Partnership Boards

	Seats on Boards (total:55)	Seats on City Council in %
Sinn Fein	12.5 (22.72%)	25.49
UUP	14.5 (26.36%)	25.49
SDLP	9 (16.36%)	13.72
DUP	6 (10.9%)	13.72
Alliance	5 (9.09%)	11.76
PUP	5.5 (10%)	5.88
UDP	2 (3.63%)	1.96
Indep. Unionist	0.5 (0.9%)	1.96

4. Conclusion

Party representation on Belfast City Council Committees and outside authorities is characterised by unionist domination and nationalist marginalisation in general and by the dominance of the Ulster Unionist Party, the over-representation of Alliance and the exclusion of Sinn Fein in particular.

A comparison between party representation on the Council Committees and on the outside authorities on the one hand and on partnership boards on the other hand seems to imply that only some form of structural change is able to redress these injustices in the democratic process. The representation of parties on the partnership boards is closest to their electoral performance.

The distribution of chairs, vice-chairs and membership on outside authorities, if left to the parties alone, leads to the marginalisation of the nationalist parties and the complete exclusion of Sinn Fein. This unequal representation is discriminatory, unjust and disenfranchises the nationalist electorate.

An equal representation of all parties involved in the democratic process can only emerge in the form of a guaranteed system of proportionality.

Appendix 1: Chairpersons on Belfast City Council Committees (Total: 16)

	UUP	All	DUP	SDLP	Ind.Un.	PUP	SF	UDP
Comm.								
P+R		1						
Client	1							
Contr.	1							
Develop.			1					
H+E					1			
Plann.						1		
Hous.		1						
Fi+Adm	1							
Per.Sub		1						
Po+Perf	1							
Arts		1						
Ec.Dev.	1							
Tourism	1							
Parks			1					
Co+Lei	1							
Waterfr				1				
Total	7	4	2	1	1	1	-	-
in %	43.75%	25%	12.5%	6.25%	6.25%	6.25%		

Appendix 2: Vice-chairpersonships on Belfast City Council Committees (Total: 16)

	UUP	DUP	Alliance	SDLP	PUP	SF	IndUn.	UDP
Comm.								
P+R	1							
Client			1					
Contr.			1					
Develop.	1							
H+E	1							
Plann.		1						
Hous.					1			
Fi+Adm			1					
Per.Sub		1						
Po+Perf		1						
Arts	1							
Ec.Dev.				1				
Tourism		1						
Parks	1							
Co+Lei				1				
Waterfr	1							
Total	6	4	3	2	1	-	-	-
in %	37.5%	25%	18.75	12.5%	6.25%			