

IN RÚNAÍOCHT ANGLA-ÉIREANNACH

BÉAL FEIRSTE

ANGLO-IRISH SECRETARIAT

BELFAST

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25 October 1996

Mr. Seán Ó hUiginn
Second Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division
Department of Foreign Affairs

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MR. P TEAHON	
MR. S. DONLON	
MR. T DALTON	

Dear Second Secretary

SDLP prospects in North Belfast

We had a dinner in the Secretariat last night which brought together a number of business people, some from the Unionist community, along with a Presbyterian Minister, community relations activists and the US Consul General, Kathleen Stephens.

One of the guests was Alban Maginness, who, as you know, is the SDLP's senior representative in North Belfast and is expected to be their candidate in that constituency at the forthcoming general election.

Maginness provided the following assessment of the SDLP's chances in North Belfast in the light of the current strife within the local UUP.

He has been aware for months back that Cecil Walker intended to stand as an independent candidate if efforts to de-select him persisted. He spoke this week to Nelson McCausland, Walker's rival in the constituency, who made clear that he had no intention of abandoning his efforts to have Walker removed and who regarded the apparent reconciliation at last weekend's UUP Conference as of no consequence.

Maginness expects, accordingly, that there will be either a two-way or a three-way split in the Unionist vote at the next election. If McCausland succeeds in displacing Walker and the latter runs as an independent, it is highly likely that Nigel Dodds of the DUP will also join the

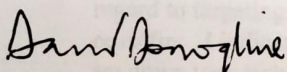
fray. If Walker manages to fend off the challenge, Dodds will probably still run against him in the hope of profiting from Walker's weakened position. While the former scenario would clearly be preferable from Maginness' point of view, a two-way split in the Unionist vote would also offer considerable scope for the SDLP to win the seat.

Maginness did not see Sinn Fein as a threat on the nationalist side. He believes that, in contrast to West Belfast, the North Belfast electorate would be quite opposed to having an absentee MP in the shape of Gerry Kelly or Joe Austen.

As for the Loyalist parties, he did not know if they would field candidates. In this year's election they gained a combined total of 14% of the poll and are, therefore, a factor of some significance. He thought it likely that, if there were no Loyalist candidates, this segment of the vote would spread itself fairly evenly across the mainstream Unionist contenders.

For these various reasons, Maginness believes that the SDLP stand a good chance of victory in North Belfast.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue
Joint Secretary