

m. Nolan
(22)

By-Election in the Lower Falls

The death of Sinn Féin Councillor, Pat McGeown, will cause a by-election to be held in the Lower Falls electoral district of Belfast City Council. This is Sinn Féin's strongest electoral area in Northern Ireland and in the 1993 local Government elections, the party managed to take four out of the five seats in Lower Falls under the proportional representation system. The result of that election was as follows.

Total electorate 19,978 Valid poll 13,003

Sinn Féin	9,264	71.2%
SDLP	2,736	21.0%
WP	794	6.1%
Alliance	108	0.8%
DL	101	0.8%

The SDLP fear that they could be humiliated in any by-election in Lower Falls in the current climate but have no option but to field a candidate. Their sole Councillor in the area, Mary Muldoon, has ceased to have any contact with the party and she will not be re-nominated for the next local elections in May 1997. This is the last area where the party would wish to have an electoral contest with Sinn Féin. The SDLP secured very little support in the area at the last Forum elections in May.

At the moment, the party envisages giving Margaret Walsh a run in the by-election with the aim of giving her some profile before next year's election.

The party has also begun to try to make changes internally to try to win back some of the ground lost to Sinn Féin in recent times. Tim Atwood, brother of Councillor Alex Atwood has been appointed to a new position in charge of party organisation and membership. In addition, a new communications officer will be appointed to liaise with the press.

Ray Bassett

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Anglo-Irish Division
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Joint Secretary
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