

14 Jul 1997 20:38

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No. 7134 P. 5/11

CONFIDENTIAL**PROGRESSIVE UNIONIST PARTY (PUP)**

Prominent Members - Alderman Hugh Smyth (Leader)
 - Billy Hutchinson (Leader - exploratory dialogue delegation)
 - David Ervine (Party Spokesperson)
 - William 'Plum' Smith (Chairman)

Support in Entry to Negotiations Election 3.5%

The PUP was founded in the late 1970s following the collapse of the Volunteer Political Party. It has offices on the Shankill Road, and the core of its support is focussed on Belfast, particularly in the North and East of the City. The impact of the Party is limited in the more peripheral areas of the province.

Despite its linkages with the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) paramilitaries the Party is now seeking to change its image, and is conscientiously trying to attract a broader (and non-paramilitary) spectrum of support. It acknowledges a Labour oriented outlook, and a belief in "commonality, equality and plurality", founded on a basis of non-sectarianism.

On the constitution, the PUP is committed to maintaining and strengthening the position of Northern Ireland within the UK. Within that context, the Party seeks to develop "a new era of peace and stability based upon the principles of democracy and consent".

These principles include - (i) a devolved system of government, based on a sharing of responsibility; (ii) a process of "conflict transformation" designed to take the gun out of Unionist politics; (iii) a written constitution for Northern Ireland, embodying a Bill of Rights; and (iv) the development of community politics based on education and training programmes designed to counter the effects of a profit-dominated market economy. Good neighbourly relations with the RoI are welcomed, but interference in the internal affairs of a different jurisdiction is eschewed.

The structure of the Party makes it difficult to discern a clear focus of authority. Smyth, by virtue of his year as Lord Mayor of Belfast, gave status and credibility to the Party; but his leadership sometimes appears eclipsed by the high public profile of Ervine and Hutchinson, both of whom are more articulate and forceful.

To the extent that the Party has made at least a gesture towards developing a social agenda, and is free of some of the more obvious baggage of Unionism, it has been hailed as possessing the potential to lay the foundations of class-based politics in Northern Ireland. That remains to be seen. The Party's 3.5% vote in the May 30 elections represents a significant increase in its electoral mandate, but whether it can maintain the momentum and make a genuine breakthrough seems doubtful. Many voters in Northern Ireland are conservative in their habits, and the taint of paramilitary associations may continue to hamper the PUP's progress towards securing widespread appeal.

CONFIDENTIAL

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S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722

No. 7134 P. 6/11

CONFIDENTIAL**ALDERMAN HUGH SMYTH OBE****LEADER OF THE PUP AND MEMBER OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL****Background**

Born in the Shankill area of Belfast in 1939. Married to Ellen. He was first elected to Belfast City Council in 1972, was Deputy Lord Mayor 1983-84 and 1993/94, before becoming Mayor in 1994-95. He has long-standing (and acknowledged) links with the UVF. First became active in Loyalist politics in the 1970's. Has been strongly identified with unemployment and Loyalist prisoners' welfare, and community work through campaigns such as 'Save the Shankill' and his association with the Greater Shankill Development Agency. He is the only District Council elected representative of the Progressive Unionist Party, but has a strong personal following in the Shankill area.

Personality and Political Views

An honest, working-class Loyalist. He is currently seeking to develop his political influence, with a view to making his Party a mouthpiece for the expression of Protestant working class views on a broader front. In private, he puts forward a political analysis which is surprisingly forward-looking, embracing a power-sharing Assembly, and meaningful North/South institutions; but to date he has not been prepared to go public with such sentiments.

As a person – particularly when he chaired the proceedings of the City Council – he comes across as a rough diamond; but there is more subtlety behind his approach than is immediately apparent. He was involved in helping to broker the (1994) Loyalist ceasefire; and he worked behind the scenes in his capacity as Lord Mayor to bring together politicians who might have a mutual interest in promoting progress. Evidence of his new-found respectability can be found in his having been invited to dine with Prince Charles, and meetings with the Prime Minister. Awarded an OBE in the New Year's honours 1996.

Although his appointment as Lord Mayor (June 1994) was initially widely greeted as a public relations disaster, even his political opponents subsequently acknowledged that Smyth brought a flexible and even-handed approach to the conduct of business; and that in his public capacity, he displayed an unexpected ability to present a positive and forward-looking image of Belfast. The promotion of a Belfast Partnership, which would co-ordinate the efforts of the public, private and voluntary sectors in developing Belfast, remains a favoured ambition.

His position within the PUP is currently uncertain. Although he remains Leader, there are suggestions that the Party's attempts to weaken its links with Loyalist paramilitarism and broaden its appeal have left Smyth somewhat isolated, and in the shadow of more media-wise performers such as Ervine and Hutchinson. At the Talks, it was they, rather than Smyth, who appeared to make the running.

CONFIDENTIAL

14. Jul. 1997 20:38

S OF S PRIVATE OFFICE 1712106722

No. 7134 P. 7/11

CONFIDENTIAL**DAVID ERVINE****PUP SPOKESMAN**

Born in July 1953, David Ervine is married with two children. Educated at Orangefield Boys Secondary School in East Belfast, Ervine was sentenced to 11 years imprisonment for possession of explosives in 1974. He was released in 1980. In 1994, Ervine came to prominence as a spokesman for the PUP, enunciating their position and setting out a socialist unionist agenda.

Ervine is one of the PUP's two negotiators (along with Hugh Smyth) at the all-party talks and Forum representative, following the 30 May election which brought the party into the top ten eligible to enter Negotiations.

Highly articulate and skilled at presenting the PUP's position as reasonable and pragmatic, Ervine clearly enjoys the spotlight. Rumours surface from time to time of his pronouncements earning the disapproval of Loyalist leaders who are suspicious that Ervine is representing their interests with less enthusiasm than his own.

Pragmatic, but principled, Ervine comes across as an attractive personality who is dedicated to maintaining peace within the Loyalist community. The strains placed on the CLMC ceasefire by the renewal of IRA violence were intense, but Ervine attempted at all times to make the best of a very difficult situation. The support (tacit or overt) he received from other political parties in the Talks was recognition of his status as a politician who has genuinely tried to transcend the limitations of his origins.

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