



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Note: Since the British were sensitive on our involvement (X below) any press reaction might stress that it was a matter for the Boundary Commission itself, but we have responded to widespread local unease at their initial proposals. Revised Recommendations: Speaking Points

cc PST
PSS
Mr Murray
Mr DeLeon
Mr Dalton
Blh

(Any potential nationalist concerns at the extra seat will be more than offset by relief at the new proposals) 241

- The N.I. Boundary Commission Revised Recommendations have been given to the political parties this afternoon.
- They are embargoed until midnight so there is no public political reaction to date.
- The provisional recommendations last year were deeply unhelpful from a nationalist perspective.
- South Down, Eddie McGrady's seat, was entirely altered and the proposed seat of mid-Down would certainly have a Unionist majority.
- A new seat of Blackwater (drawn mainly from Armagh and Dungannon) would also probably have been a Unionist gain (although with the proposed reduction of Belfast from 4 to 3 seats, the overall Unionist gain in terms of the 17 seats would have been 1 seat).
- The Tánaiste at several IGC meetings made strong representations to the Secretary of State on the provisional recommendations.

Revised Recommendations

- Belfast now retains 4 seats (with outward expansion) and as a consequence the number of NI constituencies is increased from 17 to 18 seats.
- Eddie McGrady's seat is now safe as is Seamus Mallon's.
- West Belfast becomes a bit more problematic for the SDLP as the inclusion of Twinbrook and Poleglass means Joe Hendron will have a tougher fight with Gerry Adams. However, the SDLP view on the ground (e.g. Alex Attwood) is that all is not lost.

- Mid-Ulster, where Denis Haughey has been making steady progress against Sinn Fein over the past two elections, becomes more complex for the SDLP. Strongly Sinn Fein wards from Dungannon come into the radically revised constituency.

- If there is again a split SF-SDLP vote in the next Election, Denis feels he faces a more uphill struggle to gain the seat from Rev. McCrea.

- Fermanagh-South Tyrone sees the present overall nationalist vote drop from around 7,000 to 2-3,000.

- The new West Tyrone constituency (comprising Omagh and Strabane) is a solidly nationalist seat and could, even with a split vote, be an SDLP gain.

- One point people in the SDLP have been making to us this afternoon is that there could be growing pressure for a SDLP-Sinn Fein electoral arrangement.

- Overall, I think we can be quite pleased. The loss of South Down has been avoided and there is a prospect of an SDLP gain in West Tyrone. At the least, the new seat will be solidly nationalist.

- The number of "nationalist" seats increases from 6 to 7 (Foyle; South Down; Newry and Armagh; West Belfast; Mid-Ulster; Fermanagh and South Tyrone and West Tyrone).

A7010

Boundary Commission: Revised Recommendations

1. The Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland this afternoon circulated revised recommendations in respect of Northern Ireland Parliamentary constituencies. The Commission's revised recommendations are embargoed until 12.00 p.m. this evening.

Previous Recommendations

2. The Commission published on 20 January 1994 provisional recommendations for new Parliamentary Constituencies in Northern Ireland.
3. The Commission recommended the reduction of Belfast from 4 to 3 seats. The four new constituencies created outside Belfast - Mid Down, Newry and Mourne, Blackwater and Castlereagh-Newtownards - were mainly drawn from radical changes to four existing seats: Strangford; South Down; Newry and Armagh and Fermanagh and South Tyrone.
4. SDLP objections to the provisional recommendations mainly related to the proposed new seats of Newry and Mourne and Mid-Down. The abolition of South Down involved part of the present constituency being incorporated into a Mid-Down constituency (which would also have included several mainly Unionist wards from the present Strangford constituency) and part to the new seat of Newry and Mourne.

Newry and Armagh (Seamus Mallon's seat) was redrawn to become Newry and Mourne, involving the loss of Armagh to a new seat of Blackwater and a gain of almost half the geographical area of the present South Down constituency.
5. Local inquiries on the Commission's recommendations were held in parliamentary constituencies in May and June last

year. The Inquiry in respect of South Down and Newry and Armagh was held in Newry on 27-28 June. With some reservations, the UUP and the DUP supported the Commission's recommendations in respect of the two constituencies with the SDLP expressing strong opposition.

6. The Tánaiste raised the Commission recommendations at several meetings of the Inter-Governmental Conference last year. The Tánaiste expressed serious concern about some of the changes proposed and the effects they would have on the political representation of the two communities.

Revised Recommendations

7. The Commission recommends that the number of constituencies in Northern Ireland be increased from the current 17 to 18 (17 were also recommended in the Commission proposals last year).
8. The main recommendations are:
 - an additional constituency of West Tyrone be created (comprising all of Omagh and Strabane Local Government districts)
 - Mid-Ulster would now comprise the whole of Cookstown and Magherafelt District Councils and part of Dungannon District Council.
 - The present four Belfast constituencies would be retained but extend outward in a radical fashion. West Belfast would gain Poleglass, Twinbrook, Collin Glen and Kilwee wards of Lisburn District Council.
 - The present constituencies of Newry and Armagh and South Down are retained subject to certain changes

affecting adjacent Lagan Valley and Strangford constituencies.

- Fermanagh and South Tyrone to now comprise the whole of Fermanagh and Dungannon District Councils.

Assessment

9. The SDLP have not had time as of writing to fully assess the revised recommendations but the following is based on initial reactions:

- Eddie McGrady's present seat of South Down and Seamus Mallon's seat of Newry and Armagh are retained subject to certain modifications.
- Margaret Ritchie of Eddie McGrady's Office said this afternoon that, from a first reading Mr. McGrady's seat is now safe.
- Councillor Alex Attwood (SDLP leader in Belfast City Council) said the addition of Poleglass and Twinbrook to West Belfast (perhaps 7,000 votes) is problematic for Joe Hendron as these areas have a C. 60-40 Sinn Fein plurality. As against that, Hendron gains the middle class nationalist area of Collin Glen. Overall, in the view of Gerry Cosgrove of SDLP HQ, Dr. Hendron now has a somewhat more difficult task but by no means an impossible one.

10. Mark Durkan, SDLP Chairman, made the following points this afternoon:

- On mid-Ulster, the gain of the Torrent wards from Dungannon District Council involves some additional Sinn Fein votes coming into the revised constituency.

- Durkan said Denis Haughey is initially somewhat depressed as Haughey sees the momentum of recent years to an overall SDLP win in the constituency (even with a split vote) being dissipated.
- On the new seat of West Tyrone, Durkan said that this will be a solidly Nationalist seat with a 50-50 chance of an overall SDLP win even with a split vote.
- Durkan added that Denis Haughey may be tempted to seek a move to the new West Tyrone constituency but the SDLP locally are likely to successfully resist this.
- On Fermanagh-South Tyrone, the loss of Torrent and the gain of some Unionist areas of Dungannon means an overall decline in the Nationalist vote. Durkan feels the "comfort zone" for Ken Maginnis is increased if there is again a split SDLP-Sinn Fein vote.
- Overall, Durkan feels the prospect of 3 Nationalist gains West of the Bann (Fermanagh-South Tyrone; Mid-Ulster and West Tyrone) will now lead to considerable pressure for an electoral arrangement between the SDLP and Sinn Fein.

11. Denis Haughey said this afternoon that:

- the new Fermanagh-South Tyrone constituency will have a nationalist majority of around 2-3,000 instead of 7,000 in the present constituency.
- the new constituency of West Tyrone has a solidly nationalist majority and could be an SDLP gain.

- his own position in Mid-Ulster vis a vis Sinn Fein is now "problematic".

Conclusion

12. Overall, the revised recommendations appear to be a significant improvement (as against last year's provisional recommendations) in terms of nationalist community representation.
13. Three of the present 4 SDLP seats (Foyle; Newry and Armagh, and South Down) will continue to have a clear SDLP plurality. West Belfast, however, becomes somewhat more problematic in terms of the contest with Sinn Fein.
14. While the present nationalist majority declines in the new seat of Fermanagh and South Tyrone and Denis Haughey's position in mid-Ulster becomes somewhat more problematic vis a vis Sinn Fein, there is a reasonable prospect of a nationalist gain in the new seat of West Tyrone.

G. Corr

24 January, 1995

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