

STATE PAPERS Belfast and Dublin

Strain between Paisley and Robinson noted

A CONFIDENTIAL NIO assessment of the DUP in March 1988 suggested tensions between the once-dominant Ian Paisley and his ambitious, "secular" deputy Peter Robinson. Two decades before the DUP's inaugural leader was ousted in controversial circumstances, British government officials were highlighting the strains at the heart of a party with two conflicting wings. The author of the piece, J E McConnell of the NIO's political affairs division, also speculated that Mr Robinson's resignation as deputy leader and subsequent return to that post suggested a tempering of "the more zealous and evangelical aspects of the party" by political realities.

Even in 1988, he wrote how DUP party conferences were "largely stage-managed" while "very little of any significance happens in the DUP without the leader's knowledge and approval". Recent events, Mr McConnell felt had dented the DUP's solid front. In particular he detected "a more open split between the Free Presbyterian wing of the DUP and the secular grouping who see party politics as more important".

"[Peter] Robinson is clearly in the second category and the fact that his resignation as deputy leader [in October 1987] did not lead to the appointment of either [Rev William] McCrea or [Rev William] Beattie has been interpreted as an indication that an all-clerical



■ **DEPUTY:** Left, Peter Robinson when he was DUP deputy leader in the 1980s

leadership is recognised as undesirable," he wrote.

The official continued: "It was the emergence of Robinson in the general election of 1979 in East Belfast [largely helped by the UDA] and [Jim] Allister's appointment as Paisley's EEC adviser that gave fresh impetus to the party..."

The memo describes Robinson as a dominant and successful figure in east Belfast. "Indeed there are those within the DUP who might be said to owe their allegiance more to Robinson than to Paisley. He was able, therefore, to push through the building of the Ice Bowl at Dundonald during his period as mayor despite the supposed boycott of councils by unionists."

Building such a power base, the official noted, ran the risk of "drawing the leader's wrath". He went on: "There are some cynical views that Paisley encouraged Robinson along the path that led to Clontibret [a reference to the DUP deputy leader's incursion across the border into Co Monaghan in 1986], the [subsequent] Dublin trial and Robinson's embarrassment when forced to choose between a fine and prison."



■ **'LIABLE TO BE EXCITABLE':** Former DUP leader Ian Paisley in the 1980s

Concerns about DUP leader revealed

THE political ambitions of the DUP leader, Ian Paisley and whether he was capable of making the compromises necessary with nationalism to become the key political figure in Northern Ireland is highlighted in the Belfast releases. At a meeting in London on October 12 1984, the US ambassador to the UK, Charles Price, asked the

secretary of state Douglas Hurd for his assessment of the DUP leader. Hurd said he found Paisley courteous in his Stormont role as chairman of the agriculture committee of the assembly but he "quite understood that Dr Paisley was liable to be more excitable... in circumstances of constitutional controversy". Assessing the DUP leader, the

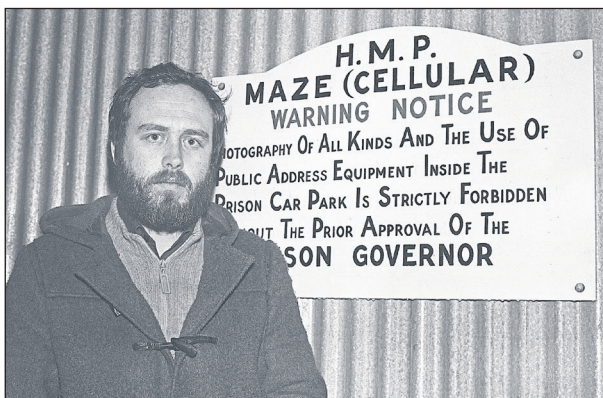
secretary of state said he "found it difficult to know whether Dr Paisley was content to be a significant figure within the current arrangements [the NI Assembly] or whether he would be prepared to make the considerable concessions which would be needed in any form of devolved government in which Dr Paisley could take responsibility for government."

Sinn Féin growth worried officials

THE challenge of how to deal with a strengthening Sinn Féin with more than 11 per cent of the vote preoccupied the NIO in 1988.

In a memo to officials dated January 26, 1988 S L Rickard of the Constitutional and Political Division, reviewed the development of Sinn Féin from 1905 through the Treaty split of 1922 to its fragmentation into provisional and official wings in 1970. He wrote: "Throughout the 1970s Provisional Sinn Féin acted as a political surrogate for PIRA. However, in 1981 [Bobby] Sands's victory in Fermanagh demonstrated it was possible to combine terrorism with elected politics and launched Sinn Féin's bid for support at the ballot box."

He noted that the republican par-



ty's vote rose from 10.1 per cent in the 1982 assembly elections to 13.4 per cent in the UK general election of 1983, falling back to 11.4 per cent in the 1987 local elections. He stressed

the significant impact of anti-personation measures since 1985, adding: "This limited electoral success along with [Gerry] Adams's election as MP in 1983 has helped to give Sinn Féin

■ **VOTE RISE:** The armalite and ballot box strategy, formulated by Danny Morrison, was pursued throughout the 1980s

an aura of respectability outside NI." Rickard argued that Sinn Féin dual policy of "the armalite and the ballot-box" had not proved easy to sustain. Its performance in the Republic had been "disastrous" while the party's 1986 decision to abandon abstentionism from the Dáil had produced strains.

Nonetheless, the dual strategy had been sustained "because a significant portion of the electorate, notwithstanding Sinn Féin's links with PIRA, are prepared to vote for Sinn Féin as the most promising vehicle for achieving a united Ireland" and because the IRA's strategy focused increasingly upon attacks on the security forces rather than "civil targets which might alienate voters".

In any policy change towards Sinn Féin, he stressed, the British govern-

ment must bear in mind "our interest in fostering the SDLP as the party of constitutional nationalism".

In his view, there were three possible approaches. The first involved proscription of Sinn Féin but "it might encourage political support for the Provisionals under other guises".

Secondly, they could try to "wean Sinn Féin away from violence" or "split the Provisionals into a mainstream non-violent party". Finally, they could "mark out Sinn Féin as a party which supports violence".

This was essentially the government's present policy and the best option. It entailed "bolstering the SDLP" while relying on the ability of PIRA "to damage Sinn Féin support through terrorist outrages such as Enniskillen".



CALA D'OR Majorca

Price includes:

- Return flights from Belfast City to Palma with Aerlingus
- 7 Nights accommodation at the 4* Club Marthas, Cala d'Or
- Breakfast & evening meals
- Return airport/hotel shuttle transfers

Departing:

30 April & 7 May 2016
14 May 2016
21 & 28 May 2016
3 September 2016
10 & 17 September 2016

8 Days from **£349** pps

Fly Direct
From
Belfast

from **£349**
from **£359**
from **£389**
from **£499**
from **£419**

Holiday operated by Travel Solutions & is subject to availability/minimum numbers. Please ask for booking terms & conditions.

Tel 028 9073 6529

THE IRISH NEWS
READER HOLIDAYS

