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VIEWpoint

Divided Ulster

TELEGRAPH POLL: Little sign of consensus

THERE is little cause for optimism in this week's Belfast Telegraph/Queen's University survey, but at least it has identified the main points of difference between the unionist and nationalist community and has suggested where progress can and cannot be made.

Protestants would prefer no special relationships between Northern Ireland, the UK and the Republic, while 44% of Catholics would regard this as unacceptable. On North-South institutions, however, there is more flexibility among Protestants — with only 36% finding them unacceptable, compared to 64% who could tolerate them. Only on the Anglo-Irish Agreement, still hated by the Protestant population after 12 years' experience, does an unbridgeable gap open up — 57% reject it, compared to only 12% of Catholics.

As for the preferred structures of devolved government, that might replace the agreement, the only agreement is against separate institutions, or a form of apartheid, for the two main communities. Otherwise a surprising 43% of Protestants still favour majority rule, although 72% are prepared to support or at least tolerate direct rule. Power-sharing is the clear preference of 53% of Catholics (compared to 26% of Protestants), but, like the majority community, 65% will accept or put up with direct rule.

There, indeed, is one of the few areas where there is a consensus, which is a warning, as well as something to be built upon, for the next government. Direct rule is still a high preference. And although there is little faith in the present talks process producing agreement, both communities are ready and waiting to proceed with a referendum option. Only 12% want to leave Northern Ireland's future entirely in the hands of the politicians.

As the survey shows, people desperately want a negotiated settlement, but their idea of what could be agreed and how is what separates unionists from nationalists. The election should throw more light on what is and is not possible, in its aftermath, and the hope must be that the mainstream parties — as opposed to the fundamentalists — win substantial support. If those representing most unionists can reach an accommodation with their nationalist counterparts, the extremists can be isolated.

Martin Bell reporting

SLEAZE STAKES: Why Tatton will be the loser

Sleaze is the word that now haunts the Conservative party and after last night's re-election of Neil Hamilton, it will not go away. The Tory candidate may claim that he is innocent of accusations but he has already admitted too much to be respected as an MP.

That said Martin Bell may soon wish he was back in Bosnia. On the front line in Tatton, the BBC correspondent is up against a slippery opponent who is clearly defiant of the public mood and determined to tough out the election campaign.

Yesterday Mr Hamilton staged an ambush on his opponent, his surprise appearance at Mr Bell's first press conference clearing wrong-footing the independent candidate. Mr Bell, who is standing on an anti-corruption ticket, was forced to concede that he would give Mr Hamilton the benefit of the doubt on the allegations made against him. Whether the Cheshire electorate will be similarly minded remains to be seen.

Mr Hamilton is nothing less than a major embarrassment to the Tory Party high command. The media spotlight will inevitably turn on Tatton in the run-up to the poll, and the issue of sleaze is set to dog the Conservative campaign. Certainly, Mr Major cannot be seen to throw his weight behind him as he would any other official candidate.

While Mr Bell must be given credit for having the courage to stand in the election, his candidature is something of a gimmick. Mr Hamilton is defending a majority of 15,860, and neither Labour nor the Liberal Democrats had a realistic hope of unseating him, even in the current climate. Tatton is one constituency which will be inadequately represented no matter who wins. Mr Hamilton is the unacceptable face of the Tory party and Mr Bell, despite his distinguished reporting career, is ill-equipped to be an MP.

THE CHICKEN AND EGG VIEW OF DECOMMISSIONING

THE Belfast Telegraph/Queen's University opinion poll shows clearly the state we are in. One equation reveals all. Virtually 90 per cent of Protestants favour settling decommissioning before talks. Virtually 90 per cent of Catholics want talks first, followed by decommissioning.

Decommissioning is important to both sides, but for different reasons. Catholics regard Protestant arms as life-threatening. But Protestant attitudes to Catholic arms are more important in the search for a deal.

It is because civilian Protestants regard Catholic arms not primarily as life-threatening but as the instrument of sedition against the state.

When Gerry Adams declares that Sinn Fein will not accept any return to the majority domination of unionists in a Stormont assembly, Protestants recognise what this means.

Mr Adams means the same thing as Albert Reynolds means when he presumes to "rule out an internal settlement" in Northern Ireland.

But the alternative, an "external" settlement, can mean only one thing, the bringing to bear from Dublin of institutionalised influence within government here sufficient to dilute the unionists' preponderance.

It is at this point that we reach the real nub of the confrontation which the current opinion poll expresses so clearly.

Unionists reject the attempt to further institutionalise Dublin's role for two reasons. They know it flies in the face of the expressed will of the electorate here: that it is anti-democratic and would not be entertained anywhere else in western Europe.

But the second reason is the more menacing; they know it would further infringe British sovereignty.

That this recently won the confidence of the British officials who staff the Anglo-Irish Conference only aggravates the constitutional neuroses of the unionists.

Lurking beneath the troubled surface of the Stormont talks is the unionists' conviction that they are hosted by two governments who are in collusion in seeking an outcome that they, the unionists, cannot accept.

Despite repeated protestations that British sovereignty has not been infringed since 1985 by the

Still living in the shadow of the gun



WAUGH ON WEDNESDAY

Agreement and its offspring, the Declaration, and by the pliable state of the British official mind indicated by the Frameworks, unionists are convinced that it has.

Despite every effort to conceal what is discussed within the Anglo-Irish Conference, it is clear that an increasingly liberal interpretation is placed upon the Agreement's stipulation that the Government here accepts that the Irish Government "will put forward views and proposals" on political, legal and security matters and upon cross-border co-operation.

Robert McCartney has been most assiduous in pursuing the effect of this trend. Some weeks ago he elicited the disclosure in a written answer that Dublin officials are now being briefed by Northern Ireland civil servants here on average once a fortnight.

In particular Mr McCartney fastened upon the fact that a briefing had been given to Dublin on "public expenditure", a significant detail because it indicates that Dublin may now advise upon how our revenues are spent and possibly also on how they are raised. This naturally would represent Dublin's ideal:

possession of power, in this case an ability to call the financial shots, without having to assume any responsibility for contributing anything towards the cost.

To unionists it represents the core enshrined in the Frameworks. To unionists, sovereignty is being sedulously infringed: so their opposition will remain implacable.

To break this barrier to consensus, the first step must be to break the secrecy which so infects the Anglo-Irish Conference, itself notoriously the offspring of a secret deal.

A second should be the resolve to make the deliberations two-way, based upon an impartial British-Irish Agreement, or even the Dublin historian Richard Kearney's, Council of the Islands of Britain and Ireland.

It is not that we on this island cannot co-operate and share our ideas. It is that we must do it in the right way; and that means with equity, openness and honesty about both means and ends.

Without that, the 74 per cent in the poll who see no settlement will continue to be vindicated.

Eric Waugh

WRITEBACK The page where YOU have YOUR say

Article 'Ports' blockade laid a smoke screen

I WISH to outline the problems encountered by myself and five friends when trying to obtain accommodation in Portrush/Portstewart area recently.

On telephoning several of the campsites listed in the tourist guide we found that none were willing to let six twentysomethings stay for the Easter weekend — not through lack of space, but seemingly because we are not all married with two children.

This response that the only four people who could sleep in a

four man tent are in fact two married people in their thirties and two children seemed to be the common response.

We decided to visit Portrush a few weekends ago to let the owner see that we were respectable business people they could trust on their land. Again, the door was firmly shut at every campsite.

At what age do single people become trustworthy and responsible?

It is ridiculous, given the current economic climate and the continued efforts of the Northern

Ireland Tourist Board to put Northern Ireland on the holiday map, that prospective visitors such as ourselves are made to feel so unwelcome.

If this is how locals feel, how can we as a country expect to encourage visitors from further afield?

Come on Northern Ireland... what about the so called friendliness of the Irish? Its certainly not on display in the North Coast!

TRUSTWORTHY TWENTYSOMETHING, Co Antrim.

Thanks

I WOULD like to thank all the customers and staff of Stewarts Supermarkets, Lisburn Road who donated Easter eggs to our Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children Appeal.

We took more than 100 eggs along to the hospital, and it was so rewarding to see the look of delight on the children's faces when they received their eggs.

TANYA GILBERT Customer Services, Stewarts Supermarkets Ltd.

Candidates challenged on crossing campaign

POLITICAL representatives from the Cavehill Road area will be aware of the ongoing campaign by the residents of this area, for a pedestrian crossing at the Cavehill Road Post Office.

At present, customers, as well as children and their mothers having to cross the road to get to and from school, run the risk of being knocked down as they dodge and weave through double-parked cars and lorries which use the local shops.

Accidents occur regularly, as traffic tries to emerge onto the Cavehill Road from Sunningdale Park. Despite these problems the DoE

have rejected the needs of the people.

To add insult to injury they are giving consideration to the conversion of a vacant shop to a hofood carry-out, which could easily exacerbate the problem.

Prospective representatives for the area have a duty to let the people know what they propose to do, if elected, in supporting the call for a pedestrian crossing.

We again call on the support of Cecil Walker MP and the councillors who assisted in the past. RESIDENT BT15

Something to hide?

I RECENTLY attended a public meeting organised by Friends of the Earth regarding a proposal by Nigen to build a municipal waste incinerator on the site of the existing Belfast West power station.

TERRY MAGUIRE Belfast BT12

I was surprised to find

that Nigen did not attend the meeting, and I was informed by the organisers that Nigen had indeed been invited, but had declined on the grounds that they felt it was not "an appropriate forum for public debate".

Instead, they will not make public their plans until this week's policy inquiry.

I would like to attend the inquiry, but am unable to do so, as I work weekdays, when the inquiry takes place, and I am sure there are

many others in a similar position to myself. Surely Nigen realise that the public will be hard-pressed to attend.

Have they something to hide? CONCERNED CITIZEN Belfast

Euro danger at the polls

ONCE again, John Hume is reported as giving his views on "Europe", or "The EU" as it is currently named (Belfast Telegraph, April 4, "Think Euro Too, urges Hume").

He is reported as appealing to voters not to make their choice at the forthcoming election solely "on constitutional grounds, but to study carefully each party's European policy".

At the moment our fate in "The EU" is the big constitutional question above all others for those of us who value our parliamentary democracy within the United Kingdom.

A single European currency will mean an end of our country as an independent state, and our disastrous experi-

ence of the ERM, which we eventually left, should have warned us of the economic risks of a single currency, controlled by an independent central branch.

Has John Hume not understood that the United Kingdom is a net contributor in a big way to the EU's budget?

A common market of independent countries is a splendid idea, but a federal "United States of Europe" with an even more inflated bureaucracy and a mini-model of democracy, will be something very different.

Sadly, few people in Northern Ireland seem to understand what is at stake in "Europe". R FINLAY McCANCE

Malone Park Belfast

A man for all seasons?

I WAS interested in Peter Robinson's comments regarding the changing of street names in Castlereagh (Apr 4).

The council have a tradition of using historical names in new developments, but the local residents wanted more modern ones.

Mr Robinson insisted "the views of the local residents had to be given priority."

Ask him about contentious Orange Order marches, and the views of the local residents don't seem to matter, as Mr Robinson appeals to history and tradition.

Mr Robinson is truly the man for the day — every day he has a different viewpoint. EVELYN BARRETT, Doagh

The facts on Scots books

THERE appears to be a concerted attempt by "Writeback" contributors in an increasingly tedious campaign to undermine the concept of an Ulster-Scots cultural heritage.

A R (Writeback, April 4) exposes his/her lack of knowledge with the telling phrase "... I am ignorant of any Ulster-Scots or Scots language edition (of the Bible)".

May I attempt to fill this void by bringing to the reader's attention Lorimer's "New Testament in Scots" (Penguin ISBN 0-14-007571-2).

This has been rightly described as "A majestic work" "the most considerable accomplishment in Scots prose literature" and "a great literary achievement". Given A R's apparent

expertise, I find it staggering that he/she can have missed such a significant volume. AR might also find "The Psalms in Scots" (Aberdeen University Press ISBN 0080350755) as something of an unpleasant shock.

To claim that Scots and Ulster-Scots culture is "the product of fertile imagination" is patent nonsense.

"Take the bank out o your ain ee first, an syne ye will see richt tak the spail out o your brither's ee ...". Luke chapter six, verses forty yin an foarty twa (Luke 6 v 41 and 42).

"It is not good to have zeal without knowledge" — Proverbs 19v2 (NIV) WILLIAM THOMPSON Ballyhalbert

The bishops, the clinic and the polls

THE chairman of the Health Board at the centre of the Donegal

vasectomy controversy was quoted yesterday saying that the decision to close the clinic at Letterkenny had been taken neither on moral nor on political grounds, but "purely for financial reasons".

Councillor Harry Blaney went on to say that the party which he leads, Independent Fianna Fail (IFF), would not be raising the issue during the imminent Southern general election.

These assurances will be welcomed by the many people, North and South, in whom the closure decision, as the Derry Journal put it yesterday, "induced grave doubts about the feasibility of the creation in the Republic of a truly pluralist society".

There is a gathering feeling in the area that meetings of two Board committees this Friday, and of the North West Health Board itself next Monday, will result in the clinic being reopened.

However, Councillor Blaney's pledges of a non-political approach are difficult to square with some other facts of the matter.

The closure decision was taken by a committee of the NWHB on March 20 following a picket by three doctors from the Letterkenny General Hospital after the first session of the once-a-week clinic. Reliable sources say that the picketers' concern was raised at the March 20 meeting by IFF Councillor, Larry McGowan, of Leitrim. (The NWHB covers Donegal, Leitrim and Sligo).

Councillor McGowan was widely quoted afterwards welcoming and defending the decision.

At the time the two councillors will have had electoral matters generally on their minds. On Sunday last Councillor McGowan led the IFF convention at the Clannear Hotel in Letterkenny at which Councillor Blaney was unanimously chosen to fight three-seater Donegal North East in the general election.

Councillor Blaney topped the poll in the by-election last year caused by the death of his brother Neil, but lost out on transfers to Cecilia Keaveney of "official" Fianna Fail. The IFF has high hopes of regaining its position when the South goes to the polls, almost certainly next month.

On the day before the Clannear convention I



SPEAKING MY MIND

vides that opportunity". Thus despite Councillor Blaney's no doubt genuine assurances suspicion will remain that the closure decision was an attempt to impose the moral teaching of the Catholic Church on a hospital serving an area with a large Protestant community and a growing number of people with no involvement in religion of any kind. There will be a lingering belief, too, to put it no higher, that some of those who played prominent roles in the affair were motivated by the prospect of political advantage for themselves.

The calculation will have been that the more sectarian the frame of mind of people going to

There will be a lingering belief, to put it no higher, that some of those who played prominent roles in the affair were motivated by the prospect of political advantage for themselves.

(for) different points of view". Asked whether his party would itself raise the issue Councillor Kelly said: "Most certainly."

"None of the other parties have been clear or consistent on the questions of family values. Our party is the only one with a consistent record. The opening of this clinic could be the first step towards the provision of abortion and we will be pointing that out to the people."

To the suggestion that this was going some distance over the top, Councillor Kelly replied: "The point is, these things are being introduced behind the people's backs, and if they can bring in one they can bring in the other. Our party maintains that these sort of decisions should only be made by the people themselves.

"The election pro-

One of the heartening aspects of the Donegal experience — and the main reason the balance of local opinion seems to have swung back, away from bigotry — is that despite the imminence of an election, there were mainstream politicians on hand who didn't sing dumb but denounced what was afoot. Dr Jim McDavid of Fianna Fail and Senator Sean Maloney of the Labour Party come to mind.

We could have done with the equivalents of McDavid and Maloney in Portadown last Friday night, but I suppose that's just wishful thinking.

Eamonn McCann

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