

THE YEAR OF THE WATERFRONT

BLAIR POINTS WAY FORWARD

By Desmond McCartan and Martina Purdy

THE PRIME Minister is working on plans for a new constitutional formula aimed at breaking the deadlock at the multi-party negotiations.

Details of the proposals, leaked to the Press today, indicate Tony Blair is discussing ideas that would involve a power-sharing assembly with a limited role for Dublin.

But SDLP deputy leader Seamus Mallon dismissed newspaper reports about the range and scope of north-south bodies as "inaccurate."

The Daily Telegraph report suggested the Prime Minister was in favour of making the Belfast-Dublin axis secondary to a Council of the Isles representing Assemblies in Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and the Republic.

Speaking on BBC's Inside Politics programme, Mr Mallon also said some elements of the proposals contained nothing new.

"There has never been a suggestion within the talks process that, in effect, the north-south bodies in relation to the island of Ireland would in any way be secondary or subsidiary to the Council of the Isles."

"I think this is a flier. I think it is being done for particular reasons and I think we will find very clearly there is no substance to it."

The proposals are being seen as a possible alternative to the Framework Proposals which are unacceptable to unionists but viewed as the minimum acceptable for Sinn Fein.

Although Mr Blair would not be drawn on the report, he said it was a question of seeking "the best arrangement for the future" in the quest for a political agreement.

But officials travelling with Mr Blair, who is currently in

Power sharing assembly on cards

Japan, confirmed the ideas, including a "Council of the Isles" were being considered.

The report surfaced after a meeting in London yesterday between British Irish officials attempting to hammer out a heads of agreement to be put to the talks participants shortly.

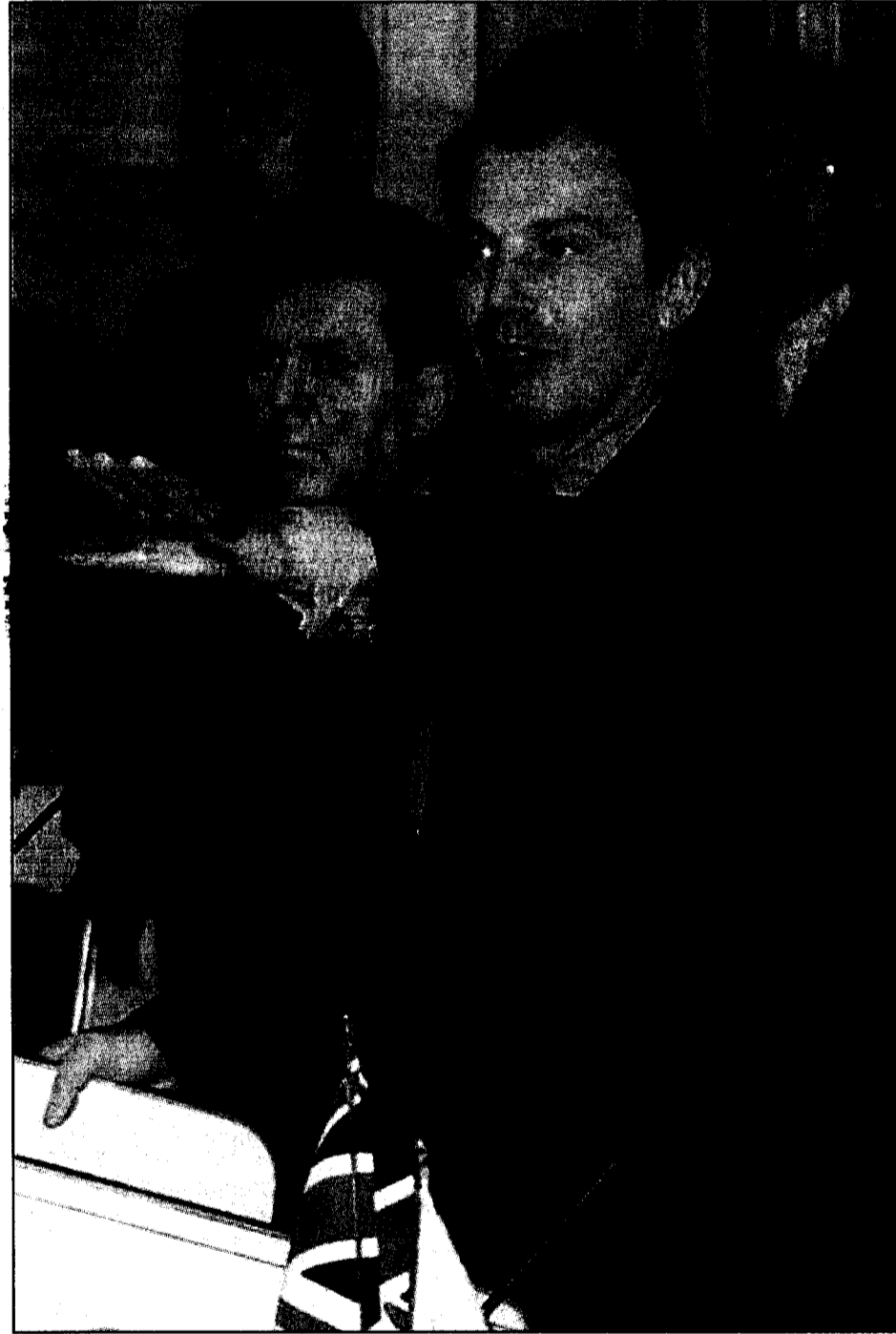
Although the leak was likely to have been intended to kick-start substantive negotiations, it was also seen as an attempt to determine how Dublin and the SDLP will react to the ideas.

Meanwhile, Dr Mowlam is to attend a meeting of the talks' liaison subcommittee on confidence building measures on Tuesday to respond to the parties' concerns over prisoners.

In answer to a question from PUP spokesman David Ervine, the Government said it was committed to having all confidence building measures discussed in the talks process at committee level.

Political development minister Paul Murphy said the Irish government had agreed that it too would have a minister at the committee when it meets in future.

This is thought to be one of the key elements in determining whether the PUP will tomorrow night vote to return to talks on Monday.



Leading the way: Prime Minister Tony Blair in Tokyo during his visit to Japan

Poles apart on the road to peace

EXCLUSIVE By Martina Purdy

A HUGE difference of opinion exists between how Protestants and Catholics believe a lasting peace can best be secured in Northern Ireland, a survey reveals today.

In a wide-ranging survey published in the Belfast Telegraph, 70% of Protestants questioned said the most important step towards a lasting peace was to disband the paramilitary groups.

But the priority for Catholics (78%) was a Bill of Rights that guaranteed equality for all.

Complete reform of the RUC was the second most popular choice for Catholics, with 70% declaring it essential.

Only 7% of Protestants thought this essential and placed it as their 16th priority.

British withdrawal was the least popular choice for Protestants with only 1% believing it essential.

Catholics ranked this as their ninth

choice, with only 46% deeming it essential.

The survey, conducted by Dr Colin Irwin of the Institute of Irish Studies, polled hundreds of people in each community.

The sharpest differences included views on the Anglo-Irish Agreement, a return to barracks by the Army, and the Republic's constitutional claim on Northern Ireland.

While the Stormont talks are focussing on political institutions, these were not the priorities of either community.

The second priority for Protestants was stronger and effective anti-terrorist measures, followed by an end to the Republic's constitutional claim on Northern Ireland, and a Bill of Rights that guarantees equality for all.

The third choice for Catholics was a Bill of Rights safeguarding culture followed by disbanding all paramilitary groups and a return to barracks by the Army.

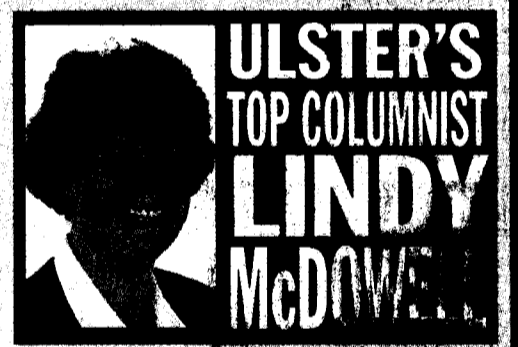
See Page 8. Further results from the survey will be published throughout next week in the Belfast Telegraph.

ULSTER'S FUTURE NEW SHOCK POLL FINDINGS PAGE 8

Saturday Sunday



Weatherman Frank Mitchell



ULSTER'S TOP COLUMNIST LINDY McDOWALL

...and now for the good news

By Staff Reporter

AN Ulsterman on a gambling spree saved a whopping £20,000 when he suffered a heart attack on his way to a race meeting.

The man's recovery was speeded up when he later heard his "hot tip" of a horse had lost and he is now recuperating at home.

The middle-aged man took ill while driving on the main Limerick to Dublin road just before Christmas.

He managed to flag down a passing motorist who used a mobile phone to call an ambulance and he was rushed to Limerick's regional hospital.

A hospital source said: "By the time this

man got to the hospital he was critically ill and unconscious.

"He was given emergency treatment and placed in the intensive care unit.

"On inspecting his clothes to ascertain his identity, a staff member found money amounting to £20,000."

After regaining consciousness the patient was alert enough to communicate with staff and they immediately reassured him that his money was in safe keeping.

"When out of danger he told nurses the reason for having such a large amount of money on his person," said the source.

"His recovery was helped when he found out from another patient that the horse he fancied had lost."



Tracing roots: Senator Kennedy and wife Vicky at the Andrew Jackson Memorial Centre, today. Picture by Brian Morrison

Kennedy at Hillsborough to meet party leaders

By Noel McAdam

AMERICAN Senator Ted Kennedy was today due to meet Northern Ireland political leaders including Ulster Unionist leader David Trimble and Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams.

A round of talks on the second day of Senator Kennedy's visit to Northern Ireland was also thought to include Progressive Unionist Party leader David Ervine, Ulster Democratic Party leader Gary McMichael and Alliance Party leader John Alderdice.

Senator Kennedy was believed to be keen to encourage the PUP to stay in the Stormont

Bid to keep PUP at talks table

talks process, which resumes on Monday, but Mr Ervine said he wanted to stress economic and investment issues.

Mr Trimble, who has met Senator Kennedy a number of times in America, said he did not want to raise any specific issues. "It is a courtesy call," he said.

But Ulster Unionist MP Roy Beggs, who welcomed the Senator on his first visit of the day to the Andrew Jackson cottage in Carrickfergus, said: "He has shown great

maturity by acknowledging very publicly that there is a larger community here that has all too often been ignored by American administrations in the past."

Senator Kennedy was also expected to raise the issue of a new inquiry into the events of Bloody Sunday during a lunch with Secretary of State Mo Mowlam at Hillsborough.

Senator Kennedy said yesterday he believed the relatives of the victims of Bloody Sunday had been denied the truth.

His comments were to a packed Guildhall audience in Londonderry after which he visited the Bloody Sunday memorial at Rossville Street and met families of the victims.

Later today Senator Kennedy was also scheduled to chat to 20 Protestant and Catholic young people from Belfast at a City Hall reception hosted by Lord Mayor Alban Maginness.

During his visit to Carrick the Senator said he was delighted to visit the homestead of Andrew Jackson, founder of the Democratic Party and quipped: "We need a little of his energy and ability to organise today."

Local man Fergus Kemp, himself an ancestor of the Jacksons, managed to get an autograph from Senator Kennedy. "I didn't even know he was here until I heard it on the radio," said Mr Kemp, whose great grandmother was a Jackson.

WEATHER OUTLOOK

Mild and breezy everywhere. The west will see rain, especially during the first half of the night, but eastern areas will be drier. There will be a fresh to strong southerly wind. Min temp 9 C (48F) generally.

FULL REPORT ON BACK PAGE



LONDON HEATHROW FROM £69 RETURN inc. taxes

Look closely. There's no hidden extras in our return fares.

Table with flight destinations and prices: AMSTERDAM, BERGEN, BRUSSELS, COLOGNE, COPENHAGEN, EAST MIDLANDS, FARO, FRANKFURT, JERSEY, MALAGA, NICE, OSLO, PALMA, PARIS, PRAGUE, ZURICH.

Contact your local travel agent or call for details on 0345 554554 or book on the Internet http://www.flybritishmidland.com

British Midland The Airline for Europe

Special fares available on selected dates and flights. Subject to availability. Travel must include a Saturday night stay. Fares include UK and foreign taxes.