



VIEWpoint

Choices of the people

OPINION POLL: The most important issues.

WITH the future of the peace process hanging in the balance this weekend, it is ironic that the paramilitaries should be playing such a central role. Men who have cast a dark shadow over this province are now sitting in judgment on the political negotiations, and democrats anxiously await the verdict of those who have so brazenly flouted the law. The world seems to have been turned upside down.

Concern over the influence being wielded by the paramilitaries manifests itself in an opinion poll published today on this page. While constitutional issues might have been expected to be paramount, Protestants cite the disbandment of all paramilitary groups as being the single most important step on the way to a lasting solution.

Within the Protestant community, there is a perception that the paramilitaries are securing too tight a hold on many parts of the province. The fear is that a Mafia-style society is developing, with loyalist and republican areas effectively being controlled by the various groups. Already the RUC has limited access in many hardline estates, and the segregation of housing and schooling serves to intensify the grip of the militants.

Many nationalist areas are equally afflicted, but disbandment of the paramilitaries emerged as fourth in the Catholic wish-list. Significantly, Catholic respondents gave priority to the securing of a Bill of Rights which would guarantee equality for all. Only 46% of Catholics regarded British withdrawal as being essential, putting this option ninth on the list.

Those who are striving to secure a partnership administration in Northern Ireland should draw strength from these findings. Clearly there is a heartfelt desire for equality within both sections of the community, and this can only be achieved when constitutional politicians pull together. The paramilitaries are centre stage at present, but it is vital that democrats regain the initiative.

Steps we need to take to win peace

THE Stormont Talks start up again on Monday but have the Governments and the parties got their priorities right? What are the steps that have to be taken to secure a lasting peace?

Is social justice or an end to partition the number one priority for Catholics and what do Protestants want out of a settlement? With these points in mind a cross section of the people of Northern Ireland were asked to say what issues they thought were most important to them by indicating which ones they considered to be 'Essential', 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' or 'Unacceptable' as part of a lasting settlement. Catholics placed a Bill of Rights first — 78% said it was 'Essential' — police reform was second at 70% followed by security issues.

For Protestants security issues were their first and second priority followed by an end to the Republic's territorial claim.

Integration of Northern Ireland into the UK was their seventh choice while Catholics ranked British withdrawal from Northern Ireland as their ninth option.

The Stormont Talks with their primary focus on the reform of the institutions of government do not appear to be giving sufficient attention to many of the critical issues that the two communities consider to be essential for a successful peace process.

At the very best a Northern Ireland assembly, North-South bodies and a new relationship between London and Dublin must be seen as a means to an end and not as an end in themselves.

Today the Belfast Telegraph publishes exclusively the first of a four-part series from an opinion poll — 'in search of a settlement: the people's choice' — on the future of Northern Ireland. It was carried out by the Queen's University/Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the survey's author, DR COLIN IRWIN, reports on his findings.

PROTESTANT		ESSENTIAL	CATHOLIC		ESSENTIAL
1	Disband all paramilitary groups	70%	1	A Bill of Rights that guarantees equality for all	78%
2	Stronger and effective anti-terrorist measures	70%	2	Completely reform the police service	70%
3	The Republic ends their claim on Northern Ireland	62%	3	A Bill of Rights that protects the culture of each community	67%
4	A Bill of Rights that guarantees equality for all	37%	4	Disband all paramilitary groups	67%
5	End the Anglo-Irish Agreement	36%	5	Return the army to their barracks	61%
6	A Bill of Rights that protects the culture of each community	36%	6	Politics without a sectarian division	59%
7	Integrate Northern Ireland into the UK	35%	7	A right to choose integrated education	53%
8	A right to choose integrated education	35%	8	A right to choose integrated housing	51%
9	Politics without a sectarian division	32%	9	British withdrawal from Northern Ireland	46%
10	Separate politics and religion in Northern Ireland	31%	10	Open government and Freedom of Information Act	46%
11	A right to choose integrated housing	30%	11	Stronger and effective anti-terrorist measures	40%
12	Separate politics and religion in the Republic	30%	12	Reformed and shared government	32%
13	Open government and Freedom of Information Act	24%	13	Separate politics and religion in Northern Ireland	20%
14	Reformed and shared government	12%	14	Separate politics and religion in the Republic	15%
15	Return the army to their barracks	8%	15	End the Anglo-Irish Agreement	10%
16	Completely reform the police service	7%	16	The Republic ends their claim on Northern Ireland	7%
17	British withdrawal from Northern Ireland	1%	17	Integrate Northern Ireland into the UK	4%

Protecting the rights of the people

THE European Convention on Human Rights protects individuals by guaranteeing each person the right to life; not to be tortured or subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment; to protection from slavery or forced work; not to be unlawfully arrested or detained; to a fair trial; to freedom of belief and expression; to free association; to privacy and family life; not to be discriminated against and to a remedy for breaches of human rights.

The Labour Government plan to introduce this Convention into the domestic law of Britain and Northern Ireland. This will allow any complaints regarding failures to meet these minimum standards to be heard by courts here. Both communities consider this option to be 'Desirable'.

Some recent negotiated settlements have included a Bill of Rights to deal with many of the special political, social and cultural problems that lay at the heart of their conflict. Again both communities consider this option to be 'Desirable'.

With regard to the application and enforcement of Human Rights, Catholics consider the establishment of a commission with powers to monitor, investigate and bring complaints to court to be 'Desirable'. Protestants consider these options to be 'Acceptable'.

Other international conventions include the right to food,

clothing and shelter; health care; education; work; safe and fair conditions of work; social security and cultural expression. Including these economic, social and cultural rights in a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights is also thought to be 'Desirable' by a majority in both communities.

Some international conventions also include collective rights of peoples and members of minorities. Both communities consider the right to self-determination, parity of esteem and not to be treated as a member of a community against their will to be 'Desirable'.

Similarly religious, language, cultural, educational and democratic group rights are all 'Acceptable' and these rights should be introduced into Northern Ireland law as part of a Bill of Rights.

It may also be necessary to include some rights that deal specifically with some of the political, social and cultural problems that are distinctive features of the Northern Ireland conflict.

Both communities consider the right to peaceful demonstrations and parades, freedom of worship and religious expression, freedom from intimidation or incitement to hatred to be 'Essential' and freedom of political expression 'Desirable'.

The right to choose integrated or single religion housing is 'Acceptable' as is the right to choose Catholic, Protestant or

integrated education and although Catholics consider the right to use and be educated in the Irish language to be 'Essential' a majority of Protestants are willing to tolerate these rights as part of a lasting settlement.

Various British Governments have taken several important steps in an effort to meet these demands for rights appropriate to the needs of Northern Ireland. For example, the establishment of the Fair Employment Commission (FEC), the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR) and now the incorporation of the European Convention into domestic UK law.

But still a very great deal more is required, by both Catholics and Protestants, as part of a lasting settlement. Perhaps the British Government should instruct their staff to produce a provisional draft of the appropriate legislation with a view to placing it before the parties for their consideration.

However, the results of this section of the poll also present a challenge to the Irish Government. If they wish to satisfy local nationalist aspirations in these matters, they will have to make an effort to meet these reforms, measure for measure, in their own domestic law.

Additionally any failure in these matters may well be met with cries of 'double standard' and 'hypocrisy' from unionists who value these rights and want both communities to enjoy their benefits in the North.

NEXT WEEK IN THE

Belfast Telegraph

SIX SUPER FALCON SUNSHINE HOLIDAYS TO BE WON

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Reforming RUC quite 'acceptable'

IN a report commissioned by the Government Dr Maurice Hayes has recommended the establishment of a completely independent agency to deal with all aspects of investigations into complaints against the RUC.

Both communities consider this proposal to be quite 'Acceptable', as is the recruitment of more Catholics.

Special training in community relations and human rights, the rigorous monitoring of policing standards and the establishment of a policing charter are all considered to be 'Desirable' by a majority in both communities.

However the recent changes to the oath of allegiance is only 'Tolerable' for Protestants while other reforms targeted at the culture and character of the police force, such as a change of name and uniform, are not acceptable to a majority of Protestants although Catholics consider these reforms to be 'Essential'.

At the present time the RUC is a single force that has responsibility for providing all policing duties throughout the whole of Northern Ireland.

Between the options of disbanding the RUC and creating a new force on the one hand and no change on the other, the most acceptable reform for both Catholics and Protestants is the creation of a two-tier service that includes new community policing units.

Perhaps this new service could benefit from a change of name and uniform, as well as being disarmed, so that their community role and duties can be seen to be very different from the established force.

Present responsibility for policing in Northern Ireland is divided between the Secretary of State, the Chief Constable and the Police Authority of Northern Ireland. Community Police Liaison Committees, established by District Councils, also have a consultation role.

Reform of these responsibilities could include giving more powers to any of these bodies or persons. However, the option that has the greatest cross community support is for the setting up of a Department of Justice in a new regional assembly to manage the provision of all policing services in Northern Ireland.

The drafting of a policing charter and the appropriate legislation needed for the implementation of these reforms would be welcomed by nationalists and should provide an acceptable basis for discussion by unionists.

Clearly setting up a Department of Justice can not proceed in the absence of an overall settlement but perhaps some of the proposals reviewed here could be implemented as confidence building measures before the coming marching season.

The research was independently funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and has been undertaken by Dr Colin Irwin of the Institute of Irish Studies at the Queen's University of Belfast in collaboration with representatives of the 10 political parties elected to the Stormont Talks.

The public opinion survey work was conducted by Market Research Northern Ireland between December 4 and 22 to produce 1,002 completed questionnaires that represented a cross section of the adult population of Northern Ireland in terms of age, gender, social class, religious affiliation and geographical area.

THE TOP FIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE FIVE MAIN PARTIES ARE



DUP

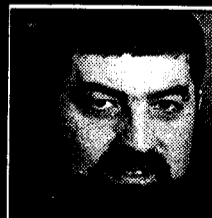
1, Removal of territorial claim; 2, crackdown on terrorists; 3, end Anglo-irish Agreement; 4, disband paramilitary groups; 5, integrate NI into UK.

UUP



1, Disband paramilitary groups; 2, crackdown on terrorists; 3, removal of territorial claim; 4 (tie) bill of rights, cultural rights, end Anglo-Irish Agreement, integrate NI into UK.

ALLIANCE



1, Disband paramilitary groups; 2, crackdown on terrorists; 3, a bill of rights; 4, school choice; 5, a new political culture.

SDLP



1, Disband paramilitary groups; 2, bill of rights; 3, cultural rights; 4, reform the police; 5, a new political culture.

Sinn Fein



1, Reform the police; 2, return army to barracks; 3, bill of rights; 4, British withdrawal; 5, cultural rights.

MONDAY: WHO WANTS A NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY?