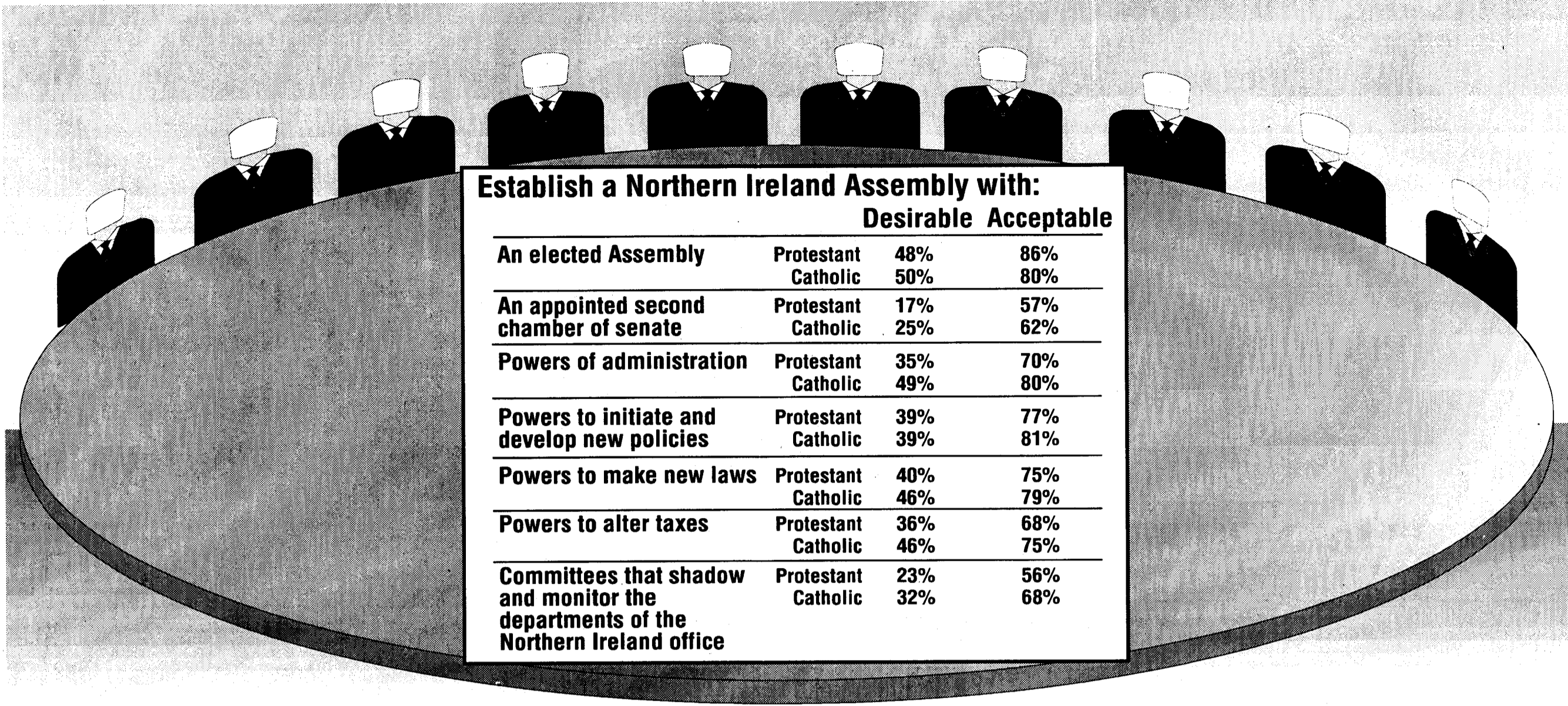


THE FUTURE OF NORTHERN IRELAND: OPINION POLL EXCLUSIVE



Why Ulster now wants to have new assembly

Today, the Belfast Telegraph publishes exclusively the second of a four-part series from an opinion poll carried out by the Queen's University/ Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the survey's author, DR COLIN IRWIN, (pictured) examines support for a local assembly.



All levels in government in Northern Ireland should be protected by laws that ensure

	Desirable	Acceptable
The views of representatives from the whole community are taken into account	Protestant 63% Catholic 94%	87% 100%
Political and administrative responsibilities are shared	Protestant 45% Catholic 85%	78% 97%
Power cannot be abused by one group over another	Protestant 71% Catholic 92%	96% 98%
And independent committees or courts of arbitrators should be established to resolve problems that become intractable	Protestant 51% Catholic 82%	82% 96%

Executive to be only from parties committed to non-violence

Wide cross section quizzed for views on regional organisations

TODAY the political parties returned to the Stormont Talks after a stormy, political recess. The first item on their agenda was Strand One, which deals with regional government. In other words who wants an assembly and in what form would it be acceptable to both unionists and nationalists?

At the present time Northern Ireland is governed under Direct Rule from Westminster and with many of the important decisions being made by the Northern Ireland Office. Most of these decisions could be made by a democratically elected assembly. Approximately 50% of both Catholics and Protestants consider this option to be 'Desirable'. An appointed second

chamber, powers to administer, initiate and develop new policies, powers to make new laws and alter taxes and the establishment of committees that shadow and monitor the departments of the NIO are all 'Acceptable'. But how can an assembly be structured so that these powers will be used for the benefit of everyone and avoid the dangers of majoritarianism or what

nationalists call 'A return to Stormont'. In the opinion poll a cross section of the people of Northern Ireland were asked 39 questions which covered all aspects of regional government and for each option they had to indicate which ones were 'Essential', 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' or 'Unacceptable'.
● See main graphic

The reform of local bodies is favoured by both traditions

WHEN it comes to local government reform a majority of both Catholics and Protestants find such a prospect quite 'Acceptable' and will be willing to have a new assembly decide how this should be done. (See table above).

For example there could be fewer councils — at present there are 26 — with more powers.

But reforms could go further. A majority from both communities are willing to

accept the introduction of new laws to ensure that the views of representatives from the whole community are taken into account.

They also accept that political and administrative responsibilities are shared, that power can not be abused by one group over another, and that independent committees or courts of arbitrators are established to resolve problems that become intractable.

Indeed most of these reforms are considered to be 'Desirable' by both Protestants and Catholics.

CATHOLICS would prefer for the appointments in an assembly to be assigned equally between the two main traditions and for voting by weighted majority or 'sufficient consensus' — which requires a majority from both of the main traditions.

Protestants would prefer for appointments to be made in proportion to the representation of each party in the assembly and for voting to be by simple majority.

The clear compromise on these points is for appointments to the executive, the chairs and membership of committees to be proportional to the representation of each party in the assembly and for voting to be by weighted majority or 'sufficient consensus'. Additionally a majority from both communities believe the members of the executive should only come from parties committed to principles of democracy and non-violence and that they should be voted in by the members of the assembly.

With regards to the leadership in an assembly, a majority of both Catholics and

Protestants find it quite 'Acceptable' that there should be a leader and deputy leader representing the two main traditions and they also consider it 'Desirable' to be able to directly vote for these leaders.

■ 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.

Surprise in the latest findings

CONCLUSION:

Given the reservations nationalist politicians have about 'A return to Stormont' and the strong desire on the part of unionist politicians for

a new regional assembly the results of this part of the survey are slightly surprising.

Perhaps Protestants are not as enthusiastic about the prospects of establishing another layer of government as their

political leaders seem to think and perhaps Catholics desire for accountable government is stronger than their political leaders have judged to be the case. Providing adequate safe-

guards can be put in place to prevent abuse of power then an assembly could be a welcome part of an overall settlement package in both communities.

TOMORROW: WHO EXACTLY WANTS NORTH-SOUTH BODIES?

Talks record a blueprint for present day?



Patrick Mayhew: Earlier talks.

By Dennis Kennedy

DESPITE flickers of optimism, are the current inter-party talks heading for the same fissure which swallowed up the Brooke-Mayhew talks of 1991-92?

Judging from the full text of Brooke-Mayhew, now published for the first time, this is a distinct possibility.

Brooke-Mayhew constituted the most intensive attempt at an overall settlement by means of multi-party dialogue since Sunningdale. It involved the British and Irish governments, and four of Northern Ireland's five main parties —

the Ulster Unionists, SDLP, DUP and Alliance.

Over 19 months the participants met in Belfast, London and Dublin and explored at length, and in considerable detail, many aspects of the problem with the declared aim of finding 'a new and more broadly-based agreement' to replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985.

An official record of the talks, kept by a team of civil servants and confidential until now, runs to almost 200,000 words, and has just been unofficially published on the Internet by the Cadogan Group. While the negotiations

Is the nationalist side, therefore, courting disaster by once more going for broke?

failed, the record provides clarification of the detailed thinking of the two governments and of the parties, and of the fundamental divisions that led to that failure.

Unionists wanted a reduction in the role of the Irish Government in the affairs of Northern Ireland from that accorded under the Agreement, but did concede the principle of an Irish dimension, and proposed a Council of the British Isles and a

north-south Inter-Irish relations committee.

Nationalists went for an enlarged and more visible Dublin role, in the shape of an Irish Government nominee on a six man executive Commission to run Northern Ireland, and argued for 'parity of esteem' within Northern Ireland.

Brooke-Mayhew began with a set of principles which would govern a solution. This was achieved in Strand One in

May, 1992. The documents now available show interesting variations between the draft principles drawn up by the UK Government team, on the basis of party submissions, and those eventually agreed by all parties.

The Government draft talks of a 'fully pluralist society in Northern Ireland in which all traditions would have parity of esteem', while the text actually agreed is 'a society in which both main traditions would be respected'.

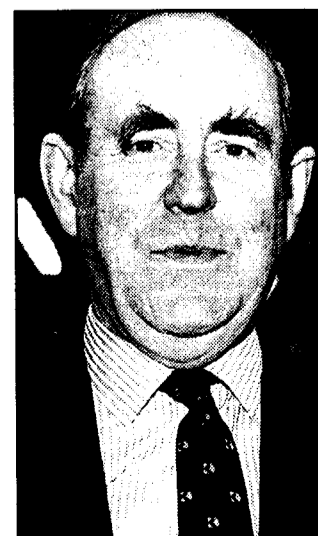
Northern nationalists could give allegiance to an institution in Northern Ireland only if the Dublin Government had representation on it equal to

that of the UK. Unionists could not accept this, nor indeed did the UK Government.

A settlement based on, as Mr Albert Reynolds once put it, nationalists looking to Dublin and unionists to London, would be a poor foundation for reconciliation, and unlikely to win majority support in Northern Ireland.

Is the nationalist side, therefore, courting disaster by once more going for broke?

● Dennis Kennedy is a member of the Cadogan Group. The transcript of the Brooke-Mayhew talks can be read on the Group's Internet web site www.cadogan.org



Peter Brooke: Intensive effort.