

THE FUTURE OF NORTHERN IRELAND: OPINION POLL EXCLUSIVE

Feasibility and reality of north-south bodies



Today, the focus from the Queen's University/Rowntree Trust opinion poll is on North-South relationships, the bodies that should be set up to deal with them, their responsibilities and powers. The survey's author, **DR COLIN IRWIN**, (left), reports on his findings.

Fisheries Commission seen as acceptable role model

On matters of mutual interest North/South bodies should		Acceptable	Tolerable
Be required to consult	Protestant	58%	71%
	Catholic	95%	98%
Be required to co-operate	Protestant	54%	60%
	Catholic	90%	93%
Have powers to administer laws made by the separate governments in the north and south of Ireland	Protestant	33%	51%
	Catholic	89%	93%
Have powers to develop and execute forward planning for the island of Ireland as a whole	Protestant	25%	37%
	Catholic	92%	96%
Have powers to make laws which would apply to the island of Ireland as a whole	Protestant	20%	30%
	Catholic	89%	95%

North-South bodies are contentious — while nationalists consider them to be an essential part of an overall settlement, unionists do not want them to develop into an 'unofficial' all Ireland government. How can these aspirations and concerns be reconciled?

The Stormont Talks have been divided into three parts called Strands. Strand Two covers relationships within the island of Ireland and deals with North-South bodies.

For example the Foyle Fisheries Commission has been established as a 'North-South body' between the former Northern Ireland parliament at Stormont and the Republic of Ireland to jointly manage the waters of the Foyle estuary.

Similar bodies, or a single body, could be established to

deal with other matters of mutual concern.

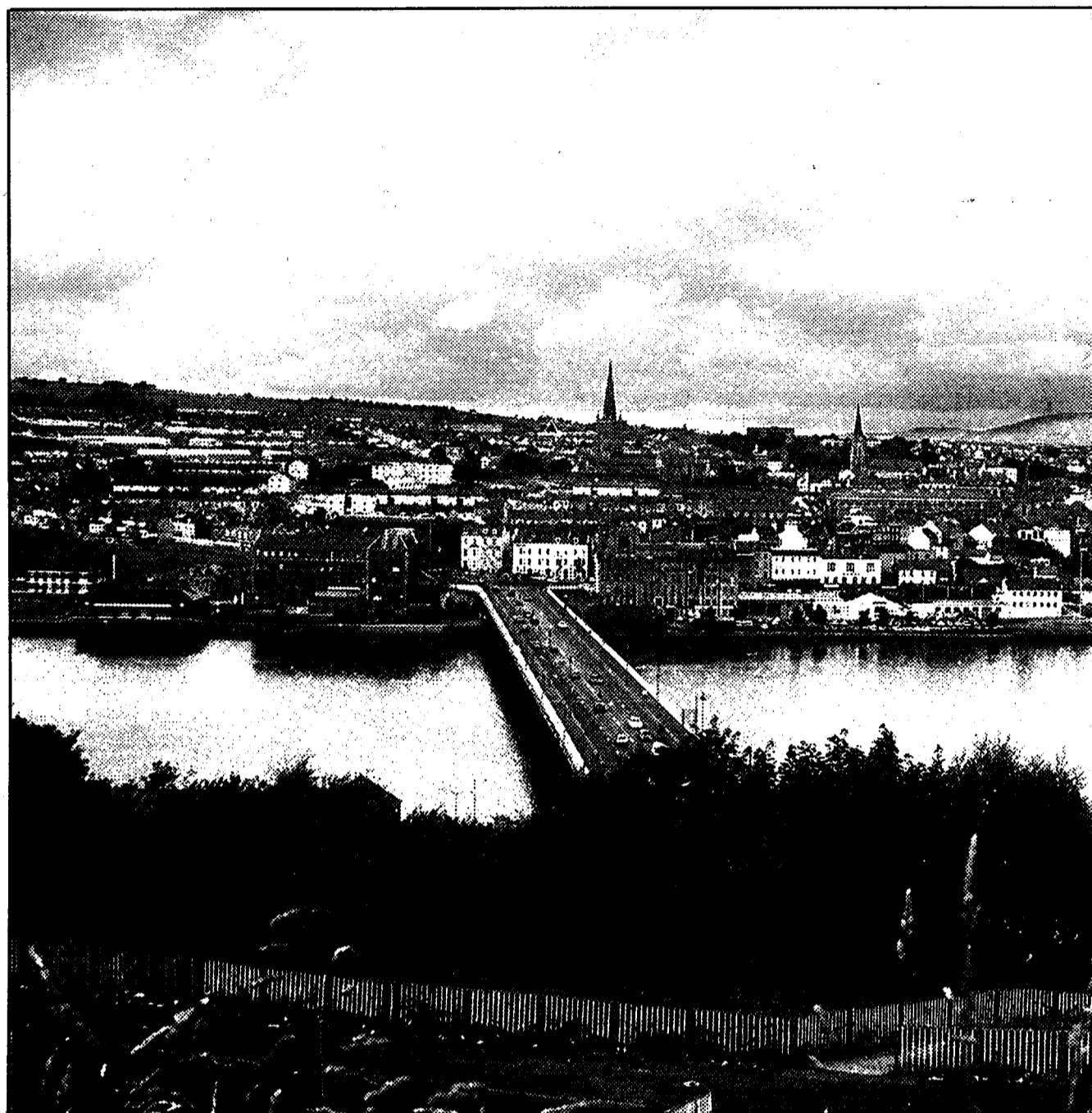
These bodies could be set up to deal with various aspects of government policy with different powers or functions.

Responsibilities to consult and co-operate on matters of mutual interest are 'Acceptable' to a majority in both communities and powers to administer laws made by the separate governments in the North and the South of Ireland are 'Tolerable'.

Stronger powers to develop plans and laws for the island of Ireland as a whole are not acceptable to Protestants. In the opinion poll a cross section of the people of Northern Ireland were asked 56 questions covering all aspects of North-South relationships.

For each option they had to indicate which ones were 'Essential', 'Desirable', 'Acceptable', 'Tolerable' or 'Unacceptable' as part of a lasting settlement.

See table left.



Untroubled waters: The river Foyle is controlled by a north-south body.

Areas where action could be taken

APART from managing the waters of the Foyle estuary, what other areas of common concern could become candidates for co-operation in North-South bodies? (See table, right)

Catholics would like 'matters of mutual interest' to apply to all areas of government policy, but Protestants would like to restrict the mandate of North-South bodies to exclude taxation, local

government and planning, policing and security, defence and foreign policy.

All the other matters of mutual interest are either 'Acceptable' or 'Tolerable'. In the survey this included 20 areas of policy where action could be taken.

The acceptable areas of policy were the environment, agriculture, fisheries, tourism, medical care and research, roads

and public transport, water, gas and electricity, communications, trade and culture and sport.

The tolerable areas were industrial development, the management of financial institutions, economic development in general, training and employment, joint representation in Europe, broadcasting and film, minority languages, social services, human rights and education.

What areas of government policy should North/South bodies deal with?

		Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable
The environment	Protestant	24	42	65	79
	Catholic	63	86	96	100
Agriculture	Protestant	22	30	61	74
	Catholic	66	90	96	99
Fisheries	Protestant	2	6	63	77
	Catholic	6	11	96	99
Tourism	Protestant	1	5	68	77
	Catholic	1	11	92	99
Medical care and research	Protestant	1	5	56	70
	Catholic	1	11	92	98
Roads and public transport	Protestant	1	5	57	69
	Catholic	1	11	92	98
Water, gas and electric	Protestant	1	5	53	65
	Catholic	1	11	92	99
Communications	Protestant	1	5	52	68
	Catholic	1	11	92	100
Industrial development boards	Protestant	1	5	47	65
	Catholic	1	11	92	100
Financial institutions	Protestant	1	5	41	59
	Catholic	1	11	94	99
Economic development in general	Protestant	1	5	49	66
	Catholic	1	11	95	100
Training and employment	Protestant	1	5	47	61
	Catholic	1	11	95	98
Joint representation in Europe	Protestant	11	23	42	61
	Catholic	61	85	97	99
Trade	Protestant	13	27	50	61
	Catholic	62	84	96	99
Taxation	Protestant	6	13	29	41
	Catholic	43	62	82	99
Broadcasting and film	Protestant	7	20	43	57
	Catholic	43	69	92	99
Minority languages	Protestant	6	13	33	47
	Catholic	52	76	94	99
Culture and sport	Protestant	9	23	50	61
	Catholic	59	82	96	99
Local government and planning	Protestant	8	14	30	41
	Catholic	49	72	91	99
Social services	Protestant	9	16	33	47
	Catholic	49	72	91	99
Human rights	Protestant	18	33	44	61
	Catholic	75	89	97	99
Education	Protestant	13	27	50	61
	Catholic	58	84	96	99
Policing and security	Protestant	14	27	51	61
	Catholic	61	77	92	99
Defence	Protestant	12	23	30	41
	Catholic	58	83	93	97
Foreign policy	Protestant	9	16	30	46
	Catholic	53	79	91	98

Reform of constitution needed to put down a foundation

JUST as Catholics do not want a regional assembly to be 'a return to Stormont' and majoritarian politics, Protestants do not want North-South bodies to be a 'backdoor' to an all Ireland government.

With this point in mind, no one should be surprised to discover that Protestants would prefer a North-South body for each issue and for these bodies to be established (or dissolved) and controlled by elected politicians from a Northern Ireland assembly, Dublin and Westminster.

Additionally, while dealing with all aspects of government business is just 'Tolerable' for a majority from both communities — 50% for Protestants and 96% for Catholics — Protestants are more willing to accept specific projects and policies selected for action by their politicians.

Protestants would also like appointments to North-South bodies to be

made in proportion to the representation of each party in a Northern Ireland assembly.

Finally a majority of both communities are willing to accept the restriction that business in a North-South body must be passed unanimously — everyone has to agree.

Without North-South bodies it is difficult to see how any settlement package can receive the support of the nationalist community.

However, with all the safeguards proposed here in place, unionist politicians should have little to fear providing all of this is done in good faith. But good faith alone is not the stuff that good law is made of.

For unionists and nationalists, constitutional reform and an acceptable replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement are required to provide both the bedrock and context in which all the other reforms can be seen to be and are made safe.

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 Agriculture
- 2 Fisheries
- 3 Tourism
- 4 Medical care and research
- 5 Environment



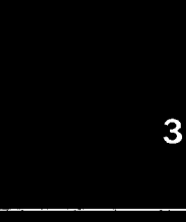
UUP

- 1 Tourism
- 2 Fisheries
- 3 Environment
- 4 Medical care and research
- 5 Agriculture



ALLIANCE

- 1 Environment
- 2 Tourism
- 3 Agriculture
- 4 Fisheries
- 5 Roads and public transport



SDLP

- 1 Human rights
- 2 Agriculture
- 3 Environment
- 4 Fisheries
- 5 Trade



SINN FEIN

- 1 Human rights
- 2 Tourism
- 3 Policing and security
- 4 Defence
- 5 Education