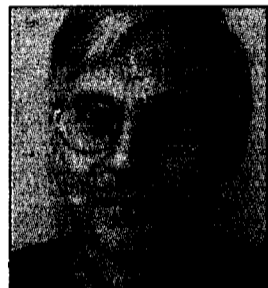




# DEADLINE ULSTER

## Majority say yes to the search for settlement

TODAY, the Belfast Telegraph publishes the first of a two-part exclusive Queen's University/Rowntree Trust opinion poll on the key issues of a referendum package. DR COLIN IRWIN reports on the findings of his research.



THE majority of people in Northern Ireland are behind the politicians at the Talks in their search for a comprehensive settlement, according to the survey. The poll reveals that if the parties can agree a settlement, then a strong vote of support from the people seems to be assured. But, if that agreement cannot be reached and the backing of the major parties is lost, the yes vote drops to 50% from 77%.

"Do you support the principle of a negotiated settlement for the political future of Northern Ireland?" Ninety four per cent said yes, ranging from a high of 99% for Alliance voters to a low of 90% for DUP supporters. But anyone could read what they wanted to into this question - for themselves or their own community. It did not test what could be a real comprehensive settlement. Now, a year later, that has been done and it includes a regional assembly, North/South bodies, a Council of the Isles, constitutional reform, a Bill of Rights and

reform of the RUC. All the major elements of what the people of Northern Ireland might be asked to vote on in a referendum on May 22 are set out in the panel at the bottom of the page titled, A Comprehensive Settlement. This was the question that was asked: "If a majority of the political parties elected to take part in the Stormont Talks agreed to this settlement would you vote to accept it in a referendum?" (Below) Seventy seven per cent said yes, ranging from a high of 96% for Alliance voters to a low of 50% for DUP supporters.

	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	77%	75%	79%	60%	72%	80%	96%	77%	70%
No	23%	25%	21%	40%	28%	20%	4%	23%	30%

But some of the parties elected to take part in the Stormont Talks may oppose a comprehensive settlement so a second question was also asked:

"If you said yes would you still accept these terms for a settlement even if the political party you supported was opposed to them?"

This time the yes vote fell to 50%, from a high of 87% for Alliance voters to a low of 22% for Sinn Fein supporters.

	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	50%	54%	47%	70%	50%	60%	87%	50%	22%
No	50%	46%	53%	30%	50%	40%	13%	50%	78%

Clearly, if the government tries to go over the heads of all the political parties at the Stormont Talks then the possibilities of securing a yes vote in a referendum would be very close indeed. However, the support of the major centre parties, the UUP, Alliance and SDLP, should ensure a positive outcome. The DUP seem to have arrived at a cross roads with 50% saying yes and 50% saying no. Evidently the leadership of this party is in a position to take their elec-

torate in either direction but their current no campaign would appear to have the potential to reduce their parties support for a comprehensive settlement to 24%. The loyalists seem to be in a some what similar situation with PUP and UDP support for a yes vote also falling to 24% if the endorsement of their parties are withdrawn. However, quite unlike the DUP, their yes vote rises to 68% if the loyalist leadership are willing to support a com-

prehensive settlement. Similarly the Sinn Fein yes vote falls from a high of 61% to a low of 22% when the backing of their party is removed. Apparently republicans and loyalists have something in common. Although their electorate may have deep misgivings about a comprehensive settlement they seem willing to place their trust in the leadership of their parties and, for the most part, will vote yes if encouraged to do so.

### A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT

- **A REGIONAL ASSEMBLY** made up from elected members who share responsibilities in proportion to their representation and employing a voting system, with other checks and balances, to ensure the fair participation of the whole community in government and the prevention of abuse of power.
- **NORTH/SOUTH BODIES** strictly controlled by the elected politicians who establish them to deal with a wide range of issues using various functions and powers appropriate to the areas of government policy being managed.
- **Replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement** and establish a **COUNCIL OF THE ISLES** to create a new relationship between London, Dublin, Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast appropriate to the needs of the region as a part of Europe.
- **CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM** that embraces the principle of consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland to keep or change its status, guaranteed rights of British and/or Irish citizenship, and any other balanced changes required to implement the various agreements made at the Stormont Talks.
- **A BILL OF RIGHTS** that deals specifically with the political, social and cultural problems that have aggravated the conflict and a Human Rights Commission with responsibilities and powers to educate, monitor standards and bring cases to court.
- **REFORM THE RUC** to create community policing units as part of a two tier service restructured with a view to recruiting more Catholics and improving community relations under the authority of a new Department of Justice in a Regional Assembly.

#### ABOUT THE POLL

This research was independently funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and was designed and carried out by Dr Colin Irwin of the Institute of Social Studies at the Queen's University of Belfast in collaboration with representatives of the 10 political parties elected to the Stormont Talks. The poll was carried out between March 22-23, 1998. It was a telephone survey of 1,000 people, with 500 in each of the two parts of Northern Ireland. The poll was carried out by the Market Research Society, Ltd. in accordance with their code of conduct.



Labour's John Prescott campaigning for Scottish devolution - will Mo Mowlam lead a similar crusade here?

### COMPROMISE OR COMMON GROUND?

Some recent commentators have suggested that this comprehensive settlement represents a three all draw with a regional assembly, Council of the Isles and changes to Articles 2 and 3 a win for unionists and North/South bodies, a Bill of Rights and police reform a win for nationalists. The spin doctors may see it this way but what is the reality on the ground. To measure public opinion on this issue everyone interviewed was asked to say which parts of a comprehensive settlement they considered to be essential, desirable, accept-

able, tolerable, or unacceptable. A regional assembly is almost equally acceptable in both communities with only 11% of Protestants and 15% of Catholics considering this part of an overall package to be unacceptable. North/South bodies are essential for 33% of Catholics and unacceptable for 40% of Protestants while a Council of the Isles gets only a warm response from Protestants and is unacceptable to 30% of Catholics. Constitutional reform has the highest

support from both communities with 36% of Protestants and 20% of Catholics saying it is essential and only 7% and 9% respectively saying it is unacceptable. A Bill of Rights is also equally acceptable in both communities although a high 48% of Catholics consider it to be essential. Finally, reform of the RUC is essential for 40% of Catholics and unacceptable for 48% of Protestants. In all of this there seems to be as much common ground as there is compromise. The reality is not a simple three-three draw.

	Religion	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
A regional assembly	Protestant	18%	40%	40%	24%	11%
	Catholic	22%	38%	36%	20%	15%
North/South bodies	Protestant	3%	10%	19%	28%	40%
	Catholic	33%	28%	23%	10%	8%
Council of the Isles	Protestant	4%	20%	28%	21%	17%
	Catholic	8%	12%	30%	22%	30%
Constitutional reform	Protestant	26%	18%	27%	12%	7%
	Catholic	20%	28%	33%	13%	9%
A bill of rights	Protestant	12%	23%	38%	20%	9%
	Catholic	48%	23%	20%	6%	3%
Reform the RUC	Protestant	3%	8%	19%	22%	48%
	Catholic	40%	21%	21%	9%	9%

Additionally, the levels of unacceptable which can be considered to be equivalent to a no vote, rise to 30% for Catholics and 48% for Protestants on some issues. But, with the agreement of a major of the parties at the Talks, only 19% of Catholics and 26% of Protestants said no to the total package as a comprehensive settlement.

A negotiated settlement seems to be what is really important and many of those who said yes were willing to do so while considering many parts of the package to be unacceptable from their point of view. Under the right circumstances the whole can become more significant than the sum of its constituent parts.

### ALTERNATIVES TO A COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT

Some unionists do not want a comprehensive settlement along the lines of the one reviewed here. Some of them do not want devolution either but some of them

do. With this point in mind everyone polled was asked: "Do you want Northern Ireland to have a devolved parliament similar to those planned for

Scotland and Wales?" Fifty eight per cent said yes ranging from a high of 78% for UUP voters to a low of 23% for Sinn Fin supporters.

	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	58%	54%	61%	30%	22%	78%	24%	49%	77%
No	42%	46%	39%	70%	78%	22%	76%	51%	23%

In an effort to mirror the recent Scottish referendum everyone who said yes to a devolved parliament

was also asked: "Do you want a Northern Ireland parliament to have powers to alter taxes?"

Only 38% said yes, ranging from a high of 51% for UUP voters to a low of 15% for Sinn Fin supporters.

	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	38%	35%	40%	60%	49%	50%	66%	35%	15%
No	62%	65%	60%	40%	51%	50%	34%	65%	85%

The Scottish 'Yes-Yes' campaign was very well organised with all the major political parties speaking with one voice.

It should also be noted that the yes vote for a devolved parliament is only 58% while the support for a Northern Ireland Assembly as part of a comprehensive settlement is 77%. Clearly an agreed settlement is the way forward in this matter.

Some unionists would also like to have a border poll. With this point in mind everyone interviewed was asked: "Do you want Northern Ireland to be part of the United Kingdom?"

Ninety seven per cent of Protestants and 33% of Catholics said yes to give a total of 69% for Northern Ireland as a whole.

And just to be double sure the same question was asked the other way around: "Do you want Northern Ireland to be part of the Republic of Ireland?" Two per cent of Protestants and 70%

of Catholics said yes to give a total of 32% for Northern Ireland as a whole.

	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	69%	97%	33%	7%	2%	7%	59%	93%	32%
No	31%	3%	67%	93%	98%	93%	41%	7%	68%

Although nearly a third of the Catholic population (mostly SDLP voters) are presently willing to lend their support to the continuation of the Union it should not be

forgotten that most of these Catholics also support a comprehensive settlement. Undoubtedly any failure to reach a settlement, or a concerted effort designed to

undermine a settlement, will alienate these Catholics and their present good will for the constitutional status quo of the province as a part of the United Kingdom.

	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	PUP+UDP	UUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	32%	100%	100%	93%	69%	37%	10%	10%	10%
No	68%	0%	0%	7%	31%	63%	90%	90%	90%