



VIEWPOINT

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The views of Ulster

OPINION POLL: "Yes" to a new deal?

Today's exclusive Queen's University/ Rowntree Trust opinion poll is published in this newspaper as an independent assessment of views in Northern Ireland at a particularly crucial time in the province's history.

The poll, the first part of which is published today, shows how much reliance the average person in the street is prepared to put on his or her political leaders.

While respondents showed broad support for a negotiated settlement — 77pc for and only 23pc against — with substantial majorities in both the Protestant and Catholic communities, this fell to 50-50 if their own political parties were opposed.

While the details of a comprehensive settlement are still being thrashed out at Stormont, the pollsters have assumed that it will contain a Bill of Rights, a Human Rights Commission and reform of the RUC, creating community policing units as part of a two-tier service, under a new Department of Justice in the Assembly.

On North-South bodies, there is also some convergence, with Protestants desiring or tolerating them by 60-40, while Catholics give them 92-8 approval.

The referendums in Scotland and Wales have whetted the appetite of people here for a degree of self-government, and their models of devolution obtained approval.

Finally, the question on whether Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom threw up some very interesting answers, which should provide considerable food for thought at Stormont.

Clearly it is wrong to think that all Protestants are unionists and all Catholics nationalists. There is a large grey area, especially in the Catholic community, which is committed to north-south co-operation but stops short of demanding instant unity, like Sinn Fein.

BIRTHDAYS

Herb Alpert, musician, 63; Roger Black, athlete, 32; Richard Chamberlain, actor, 63; John Fowles, writer, 72; Al Gore, US vice-president, 50; Shirley Jones, singer/actress, 63; Rhea Perlman, actress, 52; Lord (David) Steel of Aikwood, former Liberal leader, 60; Christopher Walken, actor, 55; Angus Young, rock guitarist (AC/DC), 39;

LIBBY KINNEY



Banks of tarnished trust



THIS picture of a child holding a gun was the one that really brought home the horror of what happened in Westside Middle School in Arkansas last week. How could any parent hand their smiling son a deadly weapon and then video it as if it was the most normal thing in the world? It is a lesson to us all about the need to guard not just our children's bodies but their minds as well.

HAVE you checked your bank statement today? As the scandal of 'loaded' accounts hits down south it looks like the fall-out is spreading northwards.

The Northern Bank has already launched a probe into interest rate hike claims.

And a new report out on Thursday alleges that three other banks are embroiled in an account free-for-all.

What has happened to that old symbol of trust and stability?

My grandfather used to call his bank manager's office the sweat room, for obvious reasons. It was an old-style listening bank — they talked and you listened.

We keep being assured that all that has changed. Long gone are the days when you had to grovel for a loan, indeed sometimes I've been approached with offers of extra cash with the zeal of a double-glazing salesman.

But where they haven't changed is in their approach to you once that loan has been secured.

I've been told about one person who was hauled over the coals for a 27p overdraft and charged £8 for the privilege.

A friend was sent what looked like a standard two-page letter but buried in the middle was an offer for an overdraft. It said that unless the bank was told otherwise it would deduct £15 for the unwanted facility straight from the account.

When contacted the banks generally hide behind the old computer error excuse. It's funny though how these errors only ever seem to make the banks more cash.

What other industry could exist where the tables seem constantly turned against the customer?

One of the problems in customer relations disputes is that the banks decide on what

is a legitimate levy and then take it. It is in justifying any intrusion into our accounts that they leave the door open to sharp practice.

Greater transparency is called for. A start would be intelligible statements which give an address for cash tills instead of a number.

I have to admit that I am one of those people who always over-estimates my credits and only thoroughly check statements when the debits reach shocking proportions.

But I'll be checking each line from now on. You can bank on it.

Forget it men... but women don't

EVER wondered why it's a woman's job to find the missing keys/shoes/TV controls?

According to new research it's because we are naturally superior in the memory department.

Scientists at Florida Univer-

sity found that women were able to find more items in 30 minutes around a virtual house than the men.

I think it's probably more to do with the way that women actually LOOK instead of lying on a sofa muttering, "Where has she put them now?"

Free speech is DUP cornerstone

COMING from a non-political background but firmly unionist in my beliefs, I was never persuaded by the so-called self-proclaimed 'defenders' of Ulster that murdering people even in the name of loyalism was the right way forward.

Instead, I listened to what Ian Paisley was and is saying. He is strong for the Union and in defence of our liberties but equally strong in denouncing the use of violence to achieve political objectives.

Part of the essence of civil and religious liberty which the DUP believes in is free speech.

Last Thursday night, as I walked into the Orange Hall in Lisburn, I was jeered and jostled and had a leaflet thrust into my face by men in dark glasses.

I took my seat to discover that, nearby, there was another crowd of men heckling people who had come to hear what the DUP had to say about the current process and the direction it was taking.

It was clear from the start that they had the sole intention of ruining that meeting.

As the platform party arrived, the hecklers rose to their feet. I remember thinking: "Why did the DUP not see fit to disrupt the Republican rally at the

City Hall recently? Why do they think it is necessary to attack a unionist rally?" Jim Wilson, who was granted a full length feature in the Belfast Telegraph, was one of the chief disrupters that evening. He has tried to blame Paisley for making him go down a paramilitary path leading to imprisonment.

I have listened to Ian Paisley and follow the advice he gives. In doing so I exercise my democratic right to vote. I have not joined a paramilitary organisation, nor has the DUP advocated that I do so.

It is quite interesting to note that these critics "It's Ian Paisley's fault that I did it" have only started now that these 'former' paramilitaries are trying to forge political careers for themselves.

Mr Wilson, in the feature article, advocates the need for future cross-bodies, denying that they

have any executive powers. The spokesman for the PUP, David Ervine, said on Inside Politics that his party's position on this issue was similar to that of the SDLP. That clearly means all-Ireland institutions with significant executive powers. In other words, a role for Dublin in Northern Ireland affairs.

This is something that unionism has already rejected at Sunningdale — and something that will be rejected again. The fact that any unionist party should align itself with a nationalist party on such a key issue should alarm all unionists, not just the DUP.

I frequently ask the questions: "How has unionism benefited from the current political process? How has the unionist position been strengthened?" The answer is that

unionism has not benefited in any way and our position has been considerably weakened unlike the position of nationalists.

Even those unionists involved in the talks, in breach of their electoral mandate not to sit down with Sinn Fein, have admitted it is one-sided.

Sinn Fein now act out this sick saga on the world stage while still actively engaged in violence. This is something the PUP and other unionists propping up the concession process allow to continue.

They should pull the plug on what they admit is a flawed and fruitless process.

These people often say that there is no alternative. There is. The DUP has outlined it. What is needed is agreement between the majority of unionists and nationalists through their political representatives in constitutional parties.

The Government has given terrorists a leg up and democrats a kick down. I am confident agreement between these parties is achievable and will result in a democratically accountable structure of government for Northern Ireland.

Agreement, yes. An agreement to destroy the Union through cross-border bodies, no.



Personal view: Stuart Deignan, of the DUP. Picture by Roy Smyth

WRITEBACK The page where YOU have YOUR say

So much for open dealing

THE leaking of a Government strategy document concerning the proposed May referendum has seriously undermined the integrity of the Stormont Talks.

It appears that the Government is set upon a course in a propaganda war that will involve half-truths and misrepresentation to sell a "yes" vote to the Northern Ireland people.

Revelations in the document that "it will be important to ensure that not all of the results of opinion polling will be in the public domain" can only leave people believing that the Government's oft-repeated vow to be open and transparent in their dealings on Ulster to be nothing more than a fiction.

Mo Mowlam's assertion that she is glad that the public has had the chance to read the

document is quite laughable. Perhaps she might let us all know when she had intended to publish it rather than having to rely on the leaker to keep the public informed.

It seems that the people of Northern Ireland are not to be encouraged to make an informed decision in the May poll but that their consent to a predetermined package is to be manufactured through deception.

As the leaked NIO document states: "The focus should be on selling the concept of an agreed future, rather than the precise details." The hard sell is on. The acceptable faces of leading churchmen and members of the business community are to be made ready, standing on the touchline to be brought on to the field of play to peddle

the Government message.

Glossy brochures, an outdoor rock concert, a visit from Bill Clinton (Nelson Mandela?) and maybe even some more feel-good Van Morrison songs are all to be used by the Government in a style-over-substance propaganda push to obtain the result it wants.

However, it is on the precise details of any proposed agreement that the Ulster Unionist Party Talks team will remain focused so that the British people of the province can be in full possession of the facts and so make the correct decision on their future and not be hoodwinked by the machiavellian machinations of the Northern Ireland Office.

COLIN MCAULEY, Press Officer, East Antrim Ulster Unionist Association.



Mo Mowlam: 'British 'laughable.'

Seek views across British Isles

IF the current Talks process ever reaches an agreement, then I believe that agreement would have to be endorsed by referendum across the British Isles.

I think this is only proper as many people in these islands have suffered as a result of the conflict in Northern Ireland.

The Troubles have also bled the British taxpayer dry. Why then should there be taxation without representation?

British Isles will clearly expose the inherent flaws within unionist majoritarian thinking. They will also deconstruct the unionist concept of Britishness.

Unionists are a minority in Ireland and a tiny minority in the UK, yet they continually harp on about the greater number of people/ majority rule.

PRO-PLEBISCITE Belfast 15.

TO THE POINT

WALLOWING IN HATE: Is incitement to civil unrest not a crime any more? If it is, I can think of a couple of names regarding threats made to our Government if it allows legitimate parades to pass along some main roads.

One wonders why no check has been made on those spewing out spite, hate and threats of violence.

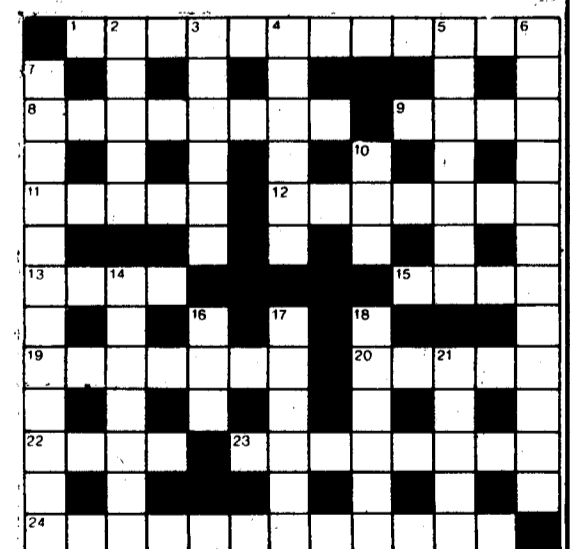
The real tragedy is that there are those on both sides who happily respond in their places of worship to our Lord's commandment to love our neighbours as ourselves and then go home to wallow in hate.

W.D.S., Hillsborough, Co Down.

CROSSWORD

CRYPTIC CLUES

- Across: 1 Garden tub, lot different at Hastings, say (12); 8 Statement of likely cost I'm including in dead man's effects (8); 9 Bother, some of us, seemingly (4); 11 Senior NCO has everything for such arms (5); 12 Each twist writer takes to make it tawdry (7); 13 Virginia to use its topless form to hold flowers (4); 15 Sort of gateway seen in particular churches (4); 19 How to arrive with one along the coast of the Med (7); 20 It may be the heart of music played in service (5); 22 Negative answer and its reverse when both hands are up (4); 23 Has nudes disporting with a parasol (8); 24 Very loud single part it represents (3-9); Down: 2 There are cavities in the human trachea (5); 3 Child's stomach, last month made a violent commotion (6); 4 Tempt one out of a net with diamonds (6); 5 Pursuer making a turn as he takes over another's authority (7); 6 End is, thus monotonously sung if no longer under illusion (12); 7 Continued application, for its own sake, can ever change (12); 10 Stone that might infect one right away (3); 14 He saves one from the taste that surrounds one (7); 16 The vigour of a savings scheme, in short (3); 17 Dog might have a sulk about one (6); 18 Stays with company as the rest seater (6); 21 The texture of a bit of sand (5);



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QUICK CLUES

- Across: 1 Field of conflict (12); 8 Judge the worth of (8); 9 Commotion (4); 11 Little (5); 12 Make less valuable (7); 13 Receiptacle for cut flowers (4); 15 Roguish (4); 19 Coastal area of S France, Italy (7); Down: 2 Church music instrument (5); 22 Middy (4); 23 Parasol, awning (8); 24 Deafening, very loud (3-9); 5 One supplanting another (7); 6 Having lost illusions (12); 7 Dogged quality (12); 10 Precious stone (3); 14 Saver of mankind (7); 16 Vigour, go, spirit (3); 17 Persian, Arabian grey-hound (6); 18 Foundation garment, stays (6); 21 Corn (5);

Across: 1 Static, 8 Noise, 9 Provost, 11 Trumpery, 12 Share, 15 Lass, 16 Spy, 17 Anew, 19 Edify, 21 Consider, 24 Revival, 25 Eider, 26 Others

Down: 2 Torch, 3 Tovarish, 4 Cast, 5 Gnome, 6 File, 7 Deny, 10 Trumpeter, 12 Sole, 13 Sandwich, 14 Sway, 18 Mitre, 20 Flair, 21 Clef, 22 Nose, 23 Redo