

Belfast
Telegraph

VIEWPOINT

Taking the medicine



HEALTH REFORMS: A prescription for the future

THE government's proposals for reorganisation of the health service in Northern Ireland add up to the most fundamental re-think for at least 40 years. Away go the four area boards, many of the 19 existing trusts and the whole concept of the "internal market", where fund-holding GPs had an advantage over others, creating two classes of patients.

dealing with a much smaller number of trusts, possibly nine.

In the second phase, all four area boards will be scrapped, with all their layers of bureaucracy, and the replacement will be health and social care partnerships working alongside the remaining trusts. Area boundaries will be redrawn, to meet current needs and conditions.

It has long been obvious that there has been far too much bureaucracy in the local NHS, and the previous government's crude attempts to add a competitive element only increased the problem. Hospital trusts vied with each other to produce the glossiest brochures and, while nurses toiled under heavier workloads, chief executives were awarded huge salary increases. Now that the bubble has burst, the public will want to know that the new system offers them much more than the last.

Many vested interests are at stake, so the reforms will not go unchallenged, although the Assembly will find little room for manoeuvre. The most controversial merger of many, with the reduction in the number of trusts, is the proposal that a monster amalgamation should be formed in Belfast, bringing together the Royal, the City, the Mater and Green Park.

The reforms, which must win the approval of the Assembly when powers have been transferred, will be implemented in two phases, probably over about four years, so fair warning has been given. Firstly, the GP fund-holding scheme is being abolished, to be replaced by primary care co-operatives which will bring together doctors, health visitors and other front-line staff who are fully aware of local needs,

For the patient in the waiting room, or the hospital entrance hall, the only real question is whether the new arrangements will work better than the old. The days when local hospitals provided a comprehensive service have gone, but people want basic care provided relatively close to home, accepting that only larger hospitals can offer high-tech treatment. It will be up to the GPs, who may balk at taking on more work, to co-operate with other professionals to make sure that services are up to scratch.

Why the peace

Today the Belfast Telegraph publishes the second of a two-part exclusive Queen's University/Rowntree Trust opinion poll on the implementation of the Belfast Agreement. **Dr Collin Irwin** reports on his research and finds there is overwhelming support for a 'peace package'.

%	All of NI	Protestant	Catholic	DUP	UUP	PUP	Alliance	SDLP	Sinn Fein
Yes	91	87	96	79	91	59	97	97	92
No	9	13	4	21	9	41	3	3	8

THE unionists want decommissioning before Sinn Fein enter the Executive and Sinn Fein insist that these new institutions of government be established first — including themselves. The SDLP want something in between. They want a compromise and they may get their way.

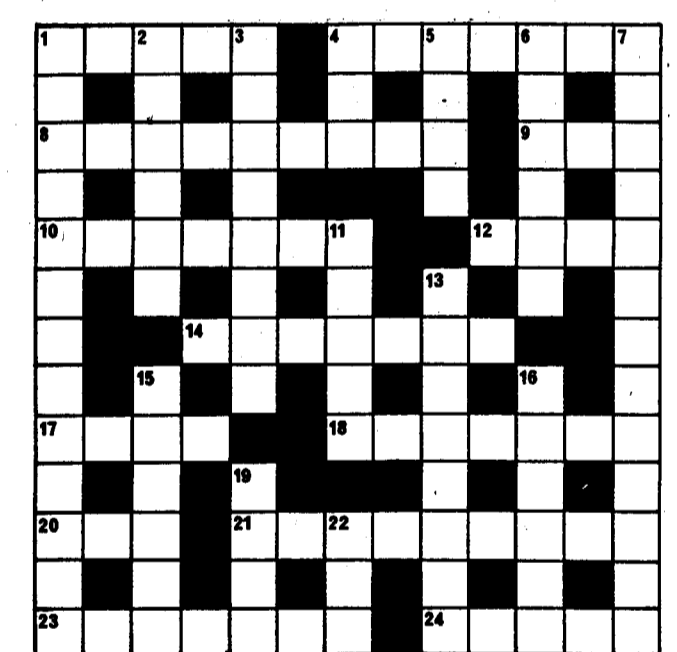
In today's poll the major elements of a possible 'peace package' were tested against public opinion and 91% of the people of Northern Ireland said Yes. In this question people were asked if they thought it would be a good idea for the parties who signed the Belfast Agreement to undertake a series of actions or 'steps', similar to those outlined here, in an effort to build confidence and trust between the two communities and move the peace process forward?

● **See Table 1**
From a high of 97% for Alliance and SDLP voters support for the package, by political party, it was 92% for Sinn Fein, 91% for the UUP, 79% for the DUP and 59% for the Progressive Unionists.

Eighty seven percent of Protestants said Yes as did 96% of Catholics. Unlike decommissioning by itself — before, during or after setting up the Executive — the package tries to deal with the reasons why decommissioning is so important — either to be undertaken or delayed — it is designed to build confidence and trust.

Very probable or probable	%	Protestant	Catholic	UUP	PUP	Sinn Fein
The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse because Unionists will not work the Agreement in good faith	35	60	23	34	83	
The Belfast Agreement and peace process will collapse because Republicans will not work the Agreement in good faith	59	40	49	86	44	
Dissident Republican paramilitary groups will become more active	74	63	69	89	72	
The IRA and other Republican groups will break their ceasefires and return to war	69	41	66	86	39	
Dissident Loyalist paramilitary groups will become more active	68	68	65	34	81	
The UVF and other Loyalist groups will break their ceasefire and return to war	58	49	57	20	61	
The British and Irish governments will impose the terms of the Belfast Agreement through Joint Authority	50	47	41	64	62	

TONIGHT'S CROSSWORD



No 1672

CRYPTIC CLUES

- Across**
- 1 Was up, hoping to get a seat (5)
 - 4 Is done with being nothing less than assiduous (7)
 - 8 Was lying too long to spot lever being moved (9)
 - 9 Equal value is not given in French capital (3)
 - 10 It's the prospect for one on the watch (7)
 - 12 What grew in Burnham was a pedigree (4)
 - 14 Taken down a grade to meet odd variation (7)
 - 17 Prejudice about a direction to play it twice (4)
 - 18 Odd to be back among the forwards
 - 20 The whole lot is the same each side on court (3)
 - 21 Add fictitious detail with a crewel needle? (9)
 - 23 Beg one to enter the Terriers like this (7)
 - 24 Make figure in clay one's exemplar (5)
- Down**
- 1 Scapula ought to be shown by real deb like this (8,5)
 - 2 Robe no different for Titania's consort (6)
 - 3 Find out what one will turn for the flip side (6)
 - 4 Where to drive off leaving hardbrake (3)
 - 5 The sorrow she showed in the OT (4)
 - 6 Man in white coat taking out endless premium (6)
 - 7 Fish a nag might catch with a sprat? (5,8)
 - 11 Show the colour gold up in first position (5)
 - 13 Space that may be filled by one's hat (8)
 - 15 Everything in the rain one can put one's money in (6)
 - 16 Mean odds Rhode Island laid out (6)
 - 19 Give way to force, desperately taking part (4)
 - 22 Flutter an eyelid at the man at the popping-crease (3)

QUICK CLUES

- Across**
- 1 Was on one's feet (5)
 - 4 By means of (7)
 - 8 Woke too late (9)
 - 9 State of equality (3)
 - 10 One set to watch (7)
 - 12 Boot-stiffener (4)
 - 14 Lowered in rank (7)
 - 17 One-sided inclination, prejudice (4)
 - 18 Enclosed field for horses (7)
 - 20 The lot (3)
 - 21 Do decorative needle-work (9)
 - 23 Earnestly ask (7)
 - 24 Mannequin (5)
 - 4 Goller's peg (3)
 - 5 Pity, remorse, sorrow (4)
 - 6 Cricket official (6)
 - 7 The scad or tunny (5,8)
 - 11 Body of soldiers (5)
 - 13 Space between one's crowns and roof (8)
 - 15 Pocket-book (6)
 - 16 Squallid (6)
 - 19 Give way, yield (4)
 - 22 Noctule (3)

Answers to No 1671

- Across:** 2 Wager, 5 Film, 7 Smut, 8 Instruct, 9 Coverlet, 11 Body, 12 Chronological, 15 Clay, 17 Crockery, 19 Homeward, 21 Boom, 22 Seam, 23 Derby.
- Down:** 1 Mammoth, 2 Wit, 3 Grill, 4 Risotto, 5 Fir, 6 Lucid, 10 Ebony, 11 Brisk, 13 Orchard, 14 Airport, 16 Loose, 18 Order, 20 Elm, 21 Bay.

What are the fears of failure?

UNDER the terms of the Belfast Agreement it has been agreed that an Executive will be established in the New Northern Ireland Assembly comprised of the First Minister, Deputy First Minister, three UUP Ministers, three SDLP Ministers, two DUP Ministers and two Sinn Fein Ministers.

ment created under the terms of the Agreement. But what will happen if the Executive is not established or if Sinn Fein are excluded from it? On this point everyone interviewed was presented with a series of possible outcomes and asked to say which ones they considered to be Very Probable, Probable, Not Sure About, Improbable or Very Improbable.

Seventy four percent of Protestants believe it is Very Probable or Probable that dissident republican paramilitary groups will become more active and 69% believe the IRA will go back to war because the republicans will not work the Belfast Agreement in good faith.

On the other hand 68% of Catholics believe it is Very Probable or Probable that dissident loyalist paramilitary groups will become more active because the unionists will not

work the Belfast Agreement in good faith. Critically the supporters of the political parties associated with paramilitary organisations express these fears most strongly. Eighty-six percent of Progressive Unionists believe republicans will not work the Belfast Agreement in good faith and that the IRA will return to war while 83% of Sinn Fein supporters believe unionists will collapse the Agreement.

● **See Table 2**
This Executive is essential for the successful working of all the new institutions of govern-

ment created under the terms of the Agreement. But what will happen if the Executive is not established or if Sinn Fein are excluded from it?

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Sensitivities on edge over weapons stand-off

LARGELY unnoticed, General John de Chastelain slipped into Downing Street on Monday to meet Tony Blair.



Number 10 is making no big deal of their meeting, arranged to allow the decommissioning body's chairman to brief the Prime Minister.

Downing Street may put whatever spin it wants on the comments, but they suggest to most people a firm Blair demand for the IRA to begin decommissioning now. Interestingly, Mr Blair went on: "So people are going to have to decide, because we are going to proceed with this, but we have to proceed on the basis that all parts of the Agreement come together."

Of course, public opinion should be mobilised in the cause of democratic principles. But, as Mr Blair told The Scotsman, people have to know "if they're sitting down in the government of Northern Ireland with people who have given up violence for good."

"Attempts to ratchet up pressure on republicans might have the opposite effect"

The other idea is that the parties simply get on with the job of forming the Executive and leave Sinn Fein out in the cold. It doesn't look like a starter either. A third (and, for Mr Blair, unacceptable) outcome of this impasse is that the Executive is put on ice, "parked" or whatever until public pressure begins to tell.

Since then, almost nothing has been said about the content.

Just 24 hours later, Mr Blair was interviewed by The Scotsman to herald his visit to Glasgow this weekend to kick-start Labour's campaign for the new Scottish Parliament. Within hours of publication, Mr Blair's chief spokesman was at pains to suggest that the Scotsman had over-interpreted the Prime Minister's remarks. The main story of the interview began: "Tony Blair has warned the IRA that it must begin decommissioning its weapons if Sinn Fein is to join the Northern Ireland executive due to be established next week."

It is an echo, perhaps, of the problem caused by the interpretation which the Sunday Times placed on the words of the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern. On the surface, this appears to be more about semantics than reality. But there is a grim awareness in London that, never mind warnings to the IRA about meeting its obligations, government attempts to ratchet up pressure on republicans might have the opposite effect.

One is that, since there is a big push to transfer powers before the first anniversary of the Agreement, Sinn Fein could take their Executive seats. The strict qualification would be that republicans publicly and unambiguously commit themselves to a firm timetable for decommissioning. This theory suggests that the IRA's refusal to decommission by the end of the two-year period in 2000 would spark Sinn Fein's expulsion from the Executive.

But, without political will and adherence to the spirit of the Agreement, he risks a serious rebuff.