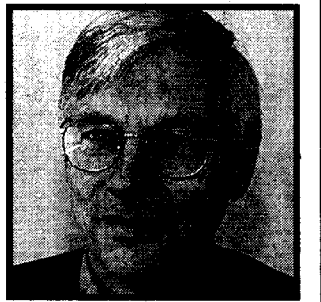


Senator Mitchell has likened the problem of decommissioning to a rock that must be broken or the peace process will founder upon it. There are many different ways to deal with the problems of setting up the Executive, devolution and 'taking the arms out of Irish politics for ever'. In today's poll Dr Colin Irwin of Queen's University reports on all the options at hand to break the rock and move the peace process forward



Breaking the Rock

Decommissioning under the terms of the Belfast Agreement

IN accordance with the terms of the Belfast Agreement General de Chastelain has published his programme for the decommissioning of all paramilitary weapons by his Independent International Commission. This programme includes commitments to undertake decommissioning by May

2000; the appointment of paramilitary representatives to co-operate with the Commission; confirmation of how decommissioning will take place and finally decommissioning with reports made to the two Governments. In the poll people were asked if they considered all the parts of this

Decommissioning Programme to be Essential, Desirable, Acceptable, Tolerable or Unacceptable as part of a successful peace process. Clearly there is broad acceptance for this programme across both communities and all the major Northern Ireland political parties with the exception of

Sinn Fein of whom 19% find it Unacceptable. But, fortunately, this picture changes when decommissioning is combined with setting up an inclusive Executive. If this is done then only 1% of Sinn Fein supporters consider the decommissioning programme to be Unacceptable.

	Essential	Desirable	Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
All NI	42%	31%	19%		3%
Protestant	53%	24%	18%		1%
Catholic	27%	38%	20%		6%
DUP	58%	21%	17%		1%
UUP	53%	28%	15%		2%
PUP	39%	36%	20%		0%
Alliance	52%	28%	18%		2%
SDLP	35%	44%	14%		1%
Sinn Fein	8%	41%	27%		19%

Decommissioning and devolution

THE Belfast Agreement is presently under review in an effort to resolve problems of implementation and at the centre of this, rightly or wrongly, is the question of decommissioning and setting up the Executive. Again people were asked to indicate which options for dealing with this problem they considered to be Essential, Desirable, Acceptable, Tolerable or Unacceptable as part of a successful peace process. It is not possible to publish all the results in the Belfast Telegraph but all the parties elected to the Assembly will receive detailed reports. To keep things simple

the results for the options that are Unacceptable are published here so that the proposals that a strong leader can not 'sell' to their electorate can be eliminated. In today's poll 37% of Ulster Unionists will not accept setting up an Executive including Sinn Fein without any preconditions at all, down from 58% when the same question was asked in March, so although all Sinn Fein supporters would prefer this option it still seems to be a 'non-starter'. Ulster Unionist resistance drops to only 13% when setting up the Executive is combined with de Chastelain's decommissioning pro-

gramme. It was 31% last March. This result is interesting for two reasons. Sinn Fein's resistance to decommissioning has now dropped from 19% to 1% when viewed in isolation to only 1% Unacceptable while UUP resistance for undertaking decommissioning in this way has risen from 2% to 13% Unacceptable. Having Sinn Fein in government seems to make all the difference for both Sinn Fein and the UUP. Predictably, Ulster Unionist resistance drops as more conditions are brought into play along the lines of the Hillsborough proposal (6% Unacceptable) and Way

Forward proposal (10% Unacceptable) going down to only 3% Unacceptable for a 'step by step' approach. Again, predictably, Sinn Fein resistance rises up to 15%, 27% and 22% Unacceptable respectively (52% considered the SDLP proposals Unacceptable in March). Clearly, if Unionist confidence could be increased in the de Chastelain programme as the best vehicle to accomplish decommissioning then the second option of setting up an inclusive Executive in combination with that programme might be 'do-able'. Perhaps some confidence building measures could help at this point as part of a Mitchell Review package.

Percentages for Unacceptable

	ALL NI	UUP	SINN FEIN
The Executive of the Assembly should be established, including Sinn Fein, without any preconditions and without any further delay	28%	37%	0%
An inclusive Executive should be established and the decommissioning process should be dealt with by General de Chastelain in accordance with his programme	14%	13%	1%
An inclusive Executive, the de Chastelain programme for decommissioning and a day of reconciliation when arms are placed beyond use	11%	6%	15%
An inclusive Executive, the de Chastelain programme for decommissioning and an end to devolution if these requirements are not met	14%	10%	27%
A step by step implementation of the Belfast Agreement in parallel with the de Chastelain programme for decommissioning	10%	3%	22%
A combination of the best features of these different proposals that can be agreed to by parties in the review	11%	6%	21%
Given the delays in establishing an inclusive Executive and starting the decommissioning process General de Chastelain should be given a little more time to complete his programme beyond the Belfast Agreement deadline of May 2000	18%	19%	9%

Confidence building measures

IN this question people were asked to consider various options for building trust and confidence between the two communi-

ties by indicating which ones they considered to be Essential, Desirable, Acceptable, Tolerable or Unacceptable as part of a

successful peace process. Again just the Unacceptable results are considered here. Many of the options are 'do-able'

and could end up in a Review package. (Author's comments are in italics.) See table top right

About the poll

THIS research was undertaken by Dr Colin Irwin of the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University of Belfast in collaboration with representatives of the 'YES Parties'.

The project was independently funded by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. The public opinion survey work was conducted by Market Research Northern Ireland between

October 8 and October 15 to produce 1,000 face to face interviews that represented a cross section of the adult population of Northern Ireland in terms of age, gender, social class, religious affiliation and

geographical area. In all respects the poll was undertaken within the guidelines set out by the Market Research Society (UK) and in accordance with its code of conduct.

Confidence building

Percentages for Unacceptable

	ALL NI	UUP	SINN FEIN
The Review should establish a relationship building process among all the parties, in particular Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionist Party, with a collective public act which marks the beginning of the process of reconciliation - 'Do-able'	11%	3%	0%
The 'YES parties' should establish a special committee to co-ordinate the implementation of the Belfast Agreement - 'Do-able'	12%	6%	0%
All the parties should accept some responsibility for the conflict and state their determination not to repeat the mistakes of the past - 'Do-able'	7%	3%	0%
All the parties should state their absolute commitment to all the provisions in the Good Friday Agreement - 'Do-able'	7%	2%	0%
Temporary arrangements should be put in place to get the Assembly working providing they lead to the implementation of the Belfast Agreement in full - 'Do-able with leadership support'	12%	9%	2%
All the parties should state their recommitment to the Mitchell Principles of Democracy and Non-violence - 'Do-able'	4%	1%	1%
The two Governments should clearly say what is meant by a 'Complete and Unequivocal Ceasefire' - 'Do-able depending on what is said'	2%	0%	8%
Both the IRA and Loyalist paramilitary groups should say 'The war is over' - Difficult at this time	3%	0%	17%
Both Loyalist and Republican paramilitary groups should indicate their willingness to disarm as part of the peace process - 'Do-able as part of the de Chastelain programme'	2%	0%	12%
Both Loyalist and Republican paramilitary groups should end all so-called 'punishment attacks' - Difficult without implementation of Patten	2%	0%	16%
Both Loyalist and Republican paramilitary groups should co-operate with the new Northern Ireland Police Service to bring an end to all beatings and violence - Difficult without implementation of Patten	6%	2%	29%
Ex-prisoners should be encouraged to make a positive contribution to the establishment of a lasting peace through community work - 'Do-able' where their efforts are appreciated	14%	19%	9%
Decommissioning should include all privately held weapons - At last the UUP and Sinn Fein agree on decommissioning!	16%	17%	15%
The British Government should publish their paper on the demilitarisation of Northern Ireland - 'Do-able'	2%	3%	1%

What can be done if the Review fails

EIGHTY four per cent of the people of Northern Ireland want the Review to succeed. It should, but it might not, and even if a deal is cut that will probably not be the end of the matter. Northern Ireland politics just are not like that. The NO parties could try to bring the Assembly down or block the re-election of Trimble and Mallon. And then there is Patten. The Government say they do not have a plan 'B' but what are the options and what do the people of Northern Ireland think of them?

London and Dublin and over 50% of Sinn Fein voters definitely do not want a continuation of Direct Rule from London. Forty six per cent of Catholics and 64% of Sinn Fein supporters do not want to negotiate a new agreement. So radical solutions or just a continuation of the status quo are probably out of the question. The course of least resistance seems to be to establish a Civic Forum, Shadow Executive and Assembly Committees to advise government. Resistance to these options averages at only 7% Unacceptable for the UUP and at 9% Unacceptable for Sinn Fein. If all else fails these are potential first steps or fall back positions. They could even be elements of a creative Mitchell Review package if so required.

In practice the two Governments' plan 'B' is to implement as much of the Agreement as they possibly can. Of course they can move ahead with the new independent institutions such as the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and

Equality Commission without reference to an Assembly. But, at some point, the devolution of powers will become an issue. For the most part UUP, PUP, Alliance and SDLP voters have few problems with the gradual devolution of powers prior to setting up an Executive with resistance running at between 0% and 11% Unacceptable. These options are more difficult for Sinn Fein. About 20% of their electorate find this kind of staged devolution Unacceptable at this time. But only 10% of Sinn Fein voters strongly oppose the idea that 'Temporary arrangements should be put in place to get the Assembly working providing they lead to the implementation of the Belfast Agreement in full', and herein lies the heart of this particular problem. Sinn Fein supporters do not trust the UUP to set up an Executive once they get devolved powers by some other means. The recent statements by Trimble and the new Secretary of State that

Percentages for Unacceptable

	Protestant	Catholic	UUP	SINN FEIN
The two Governments should move quickly and decisively to fill the political vacuum	13%	2%	4%	4%
The Ulster Unionists and Sinn Fein should try and reach an agreement through intense negotiations away from Northern Ireland	26%	1%	13%	0%
The Civic Forum should be established as a consultative body to government	13%	6%	6%	9%
A Shadow Executive should be established to advise the Government	15%	5%	8%	9%
Assembly Committees should be established to advise each Government department	14%	4%	7%	9%
Continuation of Direct Rule from London with no Northern Ireland Assembly	15%	23%	9%	52%
A new Anglo-Irish Agreement	51%	31%	42%	47%
Joint Authority by Direct Rule from both London and Dublin	52%	9%	47%	13%
Joint Authority in combination with a Northern Ireland Assembly	24%	8%	18%	22%
Scrap the Belfast Agreement and negotiate a new agreement	15%	46%	18%	64%