

12 FEATURES

Spell cast on the ruled is lifted a little

If you want to know why Bush and Blair are rushing on regardless towards war, read between the pipelines.

Or for an even clearer view, consider the remark of Condoleezza Rice on Sunday that the US may have no option but to go to war without the backing of the United Nations because, otherwise, "the UN risks losing all credibility."

This has become a favourite line of Tony Blair, too, in recent days—that "we" must attack Iraq even if the UN refuses to give the go-ahead, in order to show that the will of the UN shall prevail.

People resort to such broken-backed logic only when they have no straight argument to offer.

Herein lies the immediate reason for the groundswell of outrage last weekend.

Bush and Blair have been rumbled. Hardly anybody would've been seen dead on a demo poured on the streets because they felt they had been taken by the Government for gullible fools.

This might provide the most profound, long-term effect of the weekend phenomenon — the settling-in of an angrier sense that leaders who speak to us in tones of high-minded morality are, actually, squirting cider in our eyes.

The case Bush and Blair made for war from the outset has been shot to pieces.

Their case was not that Hussein is a tyrant who ought to be removed to make way for democracy but that Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction and had or was developing the means and resolve to use them against his neighbours and against the wider world.

This was the case which they took to the UN in September and which, to the unadmitted chagrin of the Bush administration, resulted in weapons inspectors again being deployed.

If Washington officials are



openly impatient with the inspectors' performance, it's because they never wanted them back in Iraq in the first place. They wanted war. But Blix didn't deliver the casus belli they craved. Which is why they've resorted to ludicrous falsehood.

The core attitude of the Bush camp towards human rights in the region was brightly illuminated at the Security Council a week before Christmas when a resolution was tabled condemning "the killing by the Israeli occupation forces of several United Nations employees" and asking Israel "to refrain from the excessive and disproportionate use of force in the Occupied Palestinian Territory."

That was all. No call for sanctions, much less threat of war. But it was too much for the former gun-runner to the Contras, US Ambassador

John Negroponte, who tossed his veto on to the table and scuppered the resolution. Blair, predictably, plummeted to new depths of hypocrisy with his suggestion in the Commons last week — he repeated the performance in Glasgow on Saturday — that the anti-war movement, if it succeeds in preventing the bombing and occupation of Iraq, will be responsible for the continuing suffering of Iraqis from the effects of sanctions.

This fair takes the breath away, even from ageing cynics.

Every individual and organisation I know of which has campaigned against sanctions is now wholly committed to the anti-war cause.

The most belligerent supporters of sanctions, on the other hand, seemingly without exception, are gun-gho for Bush and Blair's war.

John Reid scoffs at suggestions that the "terrorist alert" at Heathrow was a put-up job designed to frighten the populace into backing a war.

What sort of people, he asks, wide-eyed with incredulity, would be so cynical as to essay such a stunt?

All over the land, citizens sternly reply — people like New Labour Ministers.

The pro-war arguments of the Bush/Blair camp have been dishonest to a degree which has insulted the citizenry.

The plain people don't believe them, and henceforth will be less minded to take — their word generally.

The spell that rulers must needs cast on the ruled has been lifted a little.

It is this which made Saturday such a good day for democracy.

“
Millions who previously wouldn't have been seen dead on a demo poured on to the streets because they felt they had been taken by the Government for gullible fools

The people's verdict

EXCLUSIVE: THE QUB/ROWNTREE POLL

By Colin Irwin

THE two Governments have set the pro-

Agreement parties a task. Come up with a plan for full implementation of the Belfast Agreement by

March 3 and then have Assembly elections on May 1. But even if a deal can be

struck do the people of Northern Ireland still want one or has this experiment in devolution

and accountable democracy run its course?

With these points in mind people were asked, "Do you think direct rule or devolved government is best for Northern Ireland?"

Sixty-six per cent said 'yes' to devolved government and 31% 'no'. But only a narrow majority of Protestants said 'yes', 49% to 47% 'no'. Catholics came in at 84% 'yes', SDLP 88%, Sinn Fein 82%, Alliance 76%, DUP 53%, UUP 50% and DUP 34%.

In general people do want devolution but, at present, Protestants could take it or leave it, or so it would seem.

With regard to elections three different options were put to the people of Northern Ireland and they were invited to say which ones they considered to be "essential", "desirable", "acceptable", "tolerable" or "unacceptable".

"Elections only when agreement is reached and devolution restored..." was the least popular option at 50% "essential" or "desirable".

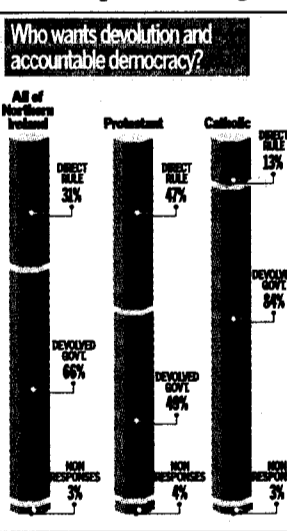
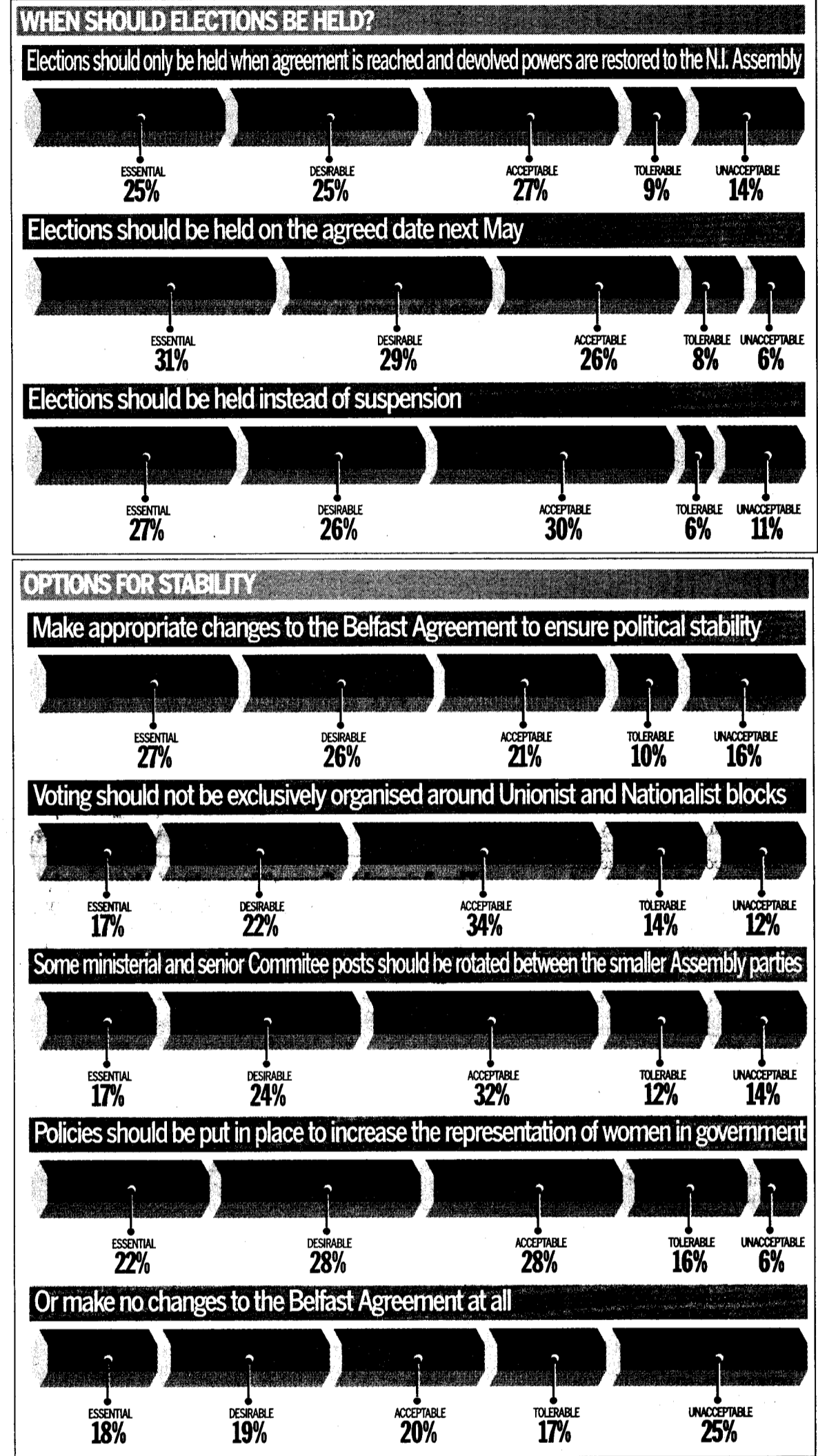
Then came elections instead of suspension at 53% and elections on the agreed date next May at 60%.

There was very little difference between the two communities and various parties on this issue. People would prefer to exercise their democratic rights in accordance with the law.

But none of the options were strongly opposed with large percentages choosing "unacceptable".

The outcome of a May election is too close to call. The gap between the UUP and DUP is closing and the gap between the SDLP and Sinn Fein may have already closed.

But people want greater political certainty in their lives and, with this point in mind, they were asked which combination of First and Deputy First Minister they thought would produce the great-



People power proves a point but not always with desired effect

It was a discussion on Newsnight which moved me to enter the lists of the Great Demo Debate.

Kenneth Baker, the former Tory Home Secretary, he who was rather unkindly cast as The Slug in Spitting Image, was opining that demonstrations were all very fine, of course, but he couldn't think of a single issue which had been changed by one in his time in politics.

The academic who was on with him thought he was casting his net too narrowly — what about France, what about Bloody Sunday?

Those examples are proof that demos do matter but usually have unintended consequences, ranging from tragedy to the opposite of the desired result.

In our system, all demos, however moderate, are an unscripted intrusion into the parliamentary process.

As a threat to the system therefore, they are feared by elected politicians, however much



Brian Walker
Eye on London

they may lip-service to personal freedom.

Never do demonstrations matter.

The great year of demo in my lifetime was 1968. In a wave of demos, the newly educated and newly affluent young, challenged the stultifying regimes East and West to trial of strengths and generally lost.

Behind the Iron Curtain, Soviet tanks rolled in to crush the Prague Spring and impose a long winter of renewed oppression for another 30 years.

In France, de Gaulle took the hint and resigned but only after his Prime Minister had called out a bigger demo of loyal Gaullists than the students and the unions

could muster. His Fifth Republic survived its founder.

In the US, the anti-Vietnam protests in front of the cameras at the Democratic National Convention indeed showed up the brutality of the Chicago police but they created the silent majority who voted Republican and elected Richard Nixon. And while he promised to end the war, he escalated it instead.

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights movement can claim to be the only movement at the time actually to bring down a government. The trouble was, by crossing a bridge too far at Burntollet, it had the (mainly) unintended consequence of feeding the backlash

which led to the toppling Terence O'Neill, snuffing out the last, albeit faint, chance of peaceful change for a generation.

The demo of course has pride of place in the mythology of the revolutionary Left. It was a vital instrument in destabilising the old regimes during the French and Russian revolutions while the conspirators nipped up the stairs and ousted them at gunpoint.

But all Left factions will tell you that the single-issue protest, the demo as spam without a political strategy behind it, tends the feed the forces of reaction.

So is that what the Surrey couples with the baby buggies were doing in Hyde Park on Saturday?

Inside the gentler British political system, they can take heart from history.

The anti-Suez demo in Trafalgar Square on the eve of the 1956 invasion of Egypt swung the Labour leadership away from a national unity stance and undermined Anthony Eden's leadership.

The anti-war demos of the Sixties reinforced Harold Wilson's determination to refuse US appeals to send British troops to Vietnam.

While these precedents are anxiously studied in Downing St. today, Tony Blair has clearly not been deterred by history as decision time over Iraq inexorably approaches.

He has joined the moral argument over war and believes he can win it.

The polls suggest that a majority can be won round to military action under UN authority and even without it after a tight vote.

Blair shows no sign of wavering for as long as the majority of Labour MPs, fresh from their half-term break, refuse a frontal challenge to his leadership.

As real national unity still seems unattainable, we may expect more and angrier demos. But these will strike an uncertain chord with public opinion as British troops are committed.

I still believe Blair will see it through.

DEBENHAMS EXCLUSIVE

Free! 8-piece gift!

Your latest Clinique Bonus. Yours at no extra charge with the purchase of any two or more Clinique products.

Bonus News:

- Glosswear For Lips Sheer Shimmers in Sunshine

Bonus Favourites:

- 7 Day Scrub Cream Rinse-Off Formula
- Dramatically Different Moisturizing Lotion
- High Impact Eye Shadow in Foxy
- Naturally Glossy Mascara in Jet Black
- Different Lipstick in Sweet Honey
- Clinique Happy Perfume Spray

Bonus Exclusive:

- Three Little Soaps Mild
- 'Your Time with Clinique' Appointment

www.clinique.com
CLINIQUE
Allergy Tested. 100% Fragrance Free.

Exclusive offer available until Saturday 8 March 2003
One gift per customer, while stocks last.

DEBENHAMS
11-12, RAULSON SQUARE, BELFAST, BT1 1AB
www.debenhams.com