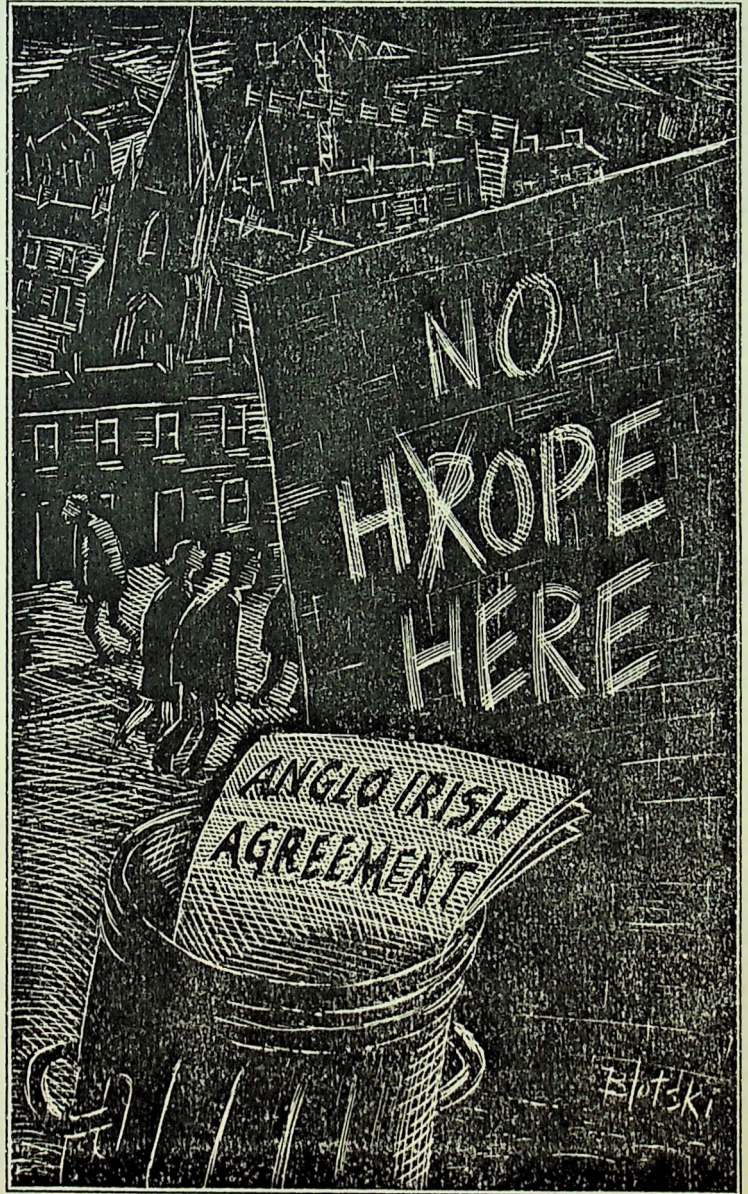


# FORTNIGHT

AN INDEPENDENT REVIEW FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

## Poll blow for pact

- Only one Catholic in six believes Accord has benefited minority
- 1% of Protestants think security co-operation has improved
- Sinn Féin bounces back from Enniskillen
- Two out of three see no hope for the future



**PLUS:** The stories behind the security headlines; ALAN DUKES on devolution; SEAMUS HEANEY on poetic commitment; MARK ROBINSON talks to the BBC top brass



Thinking back over the last six months, are there any events (more than one option) that make you concerned about the political future of the province? (%)

	Protestant	Catholic	All
Anglo-Irish Agreement	28	9	20
Stalker-Sampson report	14	30	21
Birmingham Six	2	17	8
Enniskillen	37	27	33
Some other event	13	16	13

And are there any events that would give you hope for the future here? (%)

	Protestant	Catholic	All
Anglo-Irish Agreement	2	8	4
Enniskillen reaction	11	12	11
Eksund find	5	2	4
'Talks about talks'	10	11	11
Some other event	2	2	2

# Poll shock for accord

The credibility of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, under mounting strain from the succession of crises between the two governments in recent months, receives another blow in a new poll of political opinion in Northern Ireland. **ROBIN WILSON reports.**

Looking at this list which of these forms of government do you personally think would be the best for Northern Ireland? (%)

	18-24	25-44	45+	ABC1	C2DE	Male	Female	Prot.	Cath.	All
Complete integration with Great Britain	24	31	35	41	27	32	31	47	9	32
Direct rule	2	2	5	2	4	3	3	4	2	3
Devolution with power-sharing	19	22	24	25	22	24	22	17	31	23
Devolution with majority rule	5	8	10	8	9	10	7	14	1	9
Independent Northern Ireland	10	5	4	4	7	4	7	7	4	6
Joint authority between London and Dublin	5	8	3	5	6	5	6	1	12	5
Federal Ireland	3	5	1	3	3	3	3	1	7	3
United Ireland	21	9	8	6	13	13	8	1	25	10
Don't know	10	9	9	7	11	6	13	8	10	9

**A** NEW OPINION poll finds that only one in six Catholics believes that the Agreement has benefited the minority community. And just 4 per cent of Protestants feel that it has been of benefit to them.

The poll, commissioned by *Fortnight* in conjunction with UTV, also indicates that the Enniskillen atrocity significantly damaged Sinn Féin support. But it further shows that the Provos entirely recouped their propaganda losses in the wake of the Birmingham Six Appeal and the Stalker affair—never mind Gibraltar.

Coopers & Lybrand conducted the province-wide poll, its third since the Agreement was signed in November 1985. A representative sample of more than 1000 people was selected across the province and interviews took place between February 15th and 27th.

The poll had been planned since Enniskillen but it took in the backwash from the attorney general's announcement on January 25th that there would be no prosecutions on foot of the Stalker/Sampson report and the judgment in the Birmingham Six case on January 28.

Respondents were first asked if, "thinking back over the last six months", any events made them concerned about Northern Ireland's political future. One in three (37 per cent of Protestants and 27 per cent of Catholics) ventured Enniskillen, a response particularly marked in the west of the province.

But 47 per cent of Catholics volunteered the Stalker/Sampson affair or the Birmingham Six (14 per cent of Protestants were also concerned about the Stalker imbroglio). Twenty-eight per cent of Protestants, however, said what concerned them was the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

The next question was: "and are there any events that would give you hope for the future here?" Remarkably, fully two out of three respondents could not think of anything at all. But an evenly spread 11 per cent saw hope in the reaction to Enniskillen, with a similar number—again evenly spread—looking positively upon the 'talks about talks' between unionist leaders and the NIO. By contrast, less than half of one per cent, even of Catholics, mentioned the highly-publicised meeting between the SDLP leader, John Hume, and Gerry Adams of Sinn Féin.

The interviewees were then asked what they personally thought was the best form of government for Northern Ireland. As in previous polls in recent years, integration with Great Britain came out clearly on top, with 32 per cent support. But, as before, this was heavily skewed, with only 9

What other government forms would you consider to be acceptable? (%)

	Protestant	Catholic	All
Integration	20	9	15
Direct rule	8	4	6
P-s's'g devolution	17	17	17
Majority rule	20	2	13
Independence	11	4	8
Joint authority	3	17	8
Federal Ireland	1	6	3
Don't know	17	25	21

Thinking now about power-sharing between the political parties in Northern Ireland would you say that you agree or disagree with this principle? (%)

	Protestant	Catholic	All
Agree	56	84	68
Disagree	42	15	30
Don't know	2	1	2

per cent of Catholics endorsing this straightforwardly unionist option. The 47 per cent Protestant support for integration, however, indicates a marked, 12-point shift from the C&L poll directly after the Agreement was signed. Those Protestants, disproportionately middle-class, have turned away from direct rule, and to a lesser extent from the options of power-sharing devolution and Stormont majority rule—an indication, perhaps, of the insecurity instilled by the Agreement and of alienation from the local political process. Those two years, of course, have also seen the rise of the Campaign for Equal Citizenship.

Conversely, Irish unity attracted 25 per cent of minority support—heavily concentrated, the poll shows, among young, working-class



Catholics. This is a marginal increase on a year ago. A further 12 per cent supported joint authority. Both options received negligible Protestant endorsement.

The option commanding a cross-sectarian plurality was, as ever, devolution with power-sharing. This attracted what has become a stable 23 per cent support, though this breaks down into 17 per cent of Protestants and 31 per cent of Catholics. Fourteen per cent of Protestants remained wedded to majority rule, which was entirely unacceptable to minority respondents.

But, when further questioned on what other form of government was acceptable to them, 17 per cent of both Protestants and Catholics offered power-sharing devolution—the highest figure for any option. In total, then, this was acceptable to 40 per cent of respondents.

And, when additionally asked if they supported the *principle* of power-sharing, 68 per cent (56 per cent of Protestants, 84 per cent of Catholics) said yes. In 1976, in the wake of the Constitutional Convention when the idea still had common currency, a BBC/*Belfast Telegraph* poll found 70 per cent support for it. Remarkably, the moral authority of power-sharing has endured the exit from the SDLP of some of its strongest supporters and the demise of Faulknerite unionism—and the fact it is now 14 years since it was, briefly, practised.

But, when further asked whether "any events in the past six months" had affected their views on power-sharing, a net 12 per cent of Protestants said they were now less disposed to it, as compared to a net 11 per cent of Catholics who said they were now more favourable to the principle. So the sectarian skew in its support may sharpen.

This suggests that the repeated calls from Protestant church leaders—particularly in the aftermath of Enniskillen—for cross-sectarian dialogue and progress towards devolution have fallen largely on deaf ears. There has not been what one might call a 'Gordon Wilson effect' towards political reconciliation in the Protestant community: on the contrary renewed polarisation seems to have been the trend.

And, taken with the strength of support for integrationism, there is precious little evidence here that the Anglo-Irish Agreement has succeeded in its objective of convincing unionists that they should accept power-sharing devolution—to lessen the evil, so to speak.

This will all be music to the ears of Jim Molyneaux, whose creeping integrationist strategy and 'steady as she goes' tactics have won him many critics—both inside and outside the OUP. It suggests that he, more than

anyone, has had the finger on the Protestant pulse.

Turning to the Agreement itself, all respondents were asked whether, in their opinion, the accord had benefited, first, "the nationalist community" and, then, "the unionist community". One in four Protestants thought the minority had benefited, and over a third of those thought they had 'got all they wanted'. But just 16 per cent of Catholics agreed. An overwhelming 81 per cent of minority respondents could detect no benefit to their community from the Agreement.

This was particularly true of the young, working-class Catholics most likely to feel alienated—and vote Sinn Féin. And, of the small number of Catholics who thought they had benefited, only 60 per cent said they had obtained 'more say' as a result of the Agreement—arguably its primary selling point.

Of all the northern parties, only the SDLP unreservedly supports the Agreement. Yet, if accurate, this poll would suggest that fewer than one in three even of its own supporters see any tangible benefit deriving from it.

In fact the new evidence graphically reinforces two earlier poll results. In the run-up to the general election last year C&L asked its sample whether they thought the Anglo-Irish Agreement or the economy more important election issues. While 31 per cent of Protestants picked the Agreement, just 5 per cent of Catholics though it more important—71 per cent said the economy.

And, in the background research by the Policy Studies Institute for last October's Standing Advisory Commission report on discrimination, again only 5 per cent of Catholics polled saw the Agreement as the most needed change to bring about a solution to 'the troubles'. By contrast, one in three selected the civil rights option of "equal rights and opportunities".

The SDLP and the Dublin parties have tended to argue that the recent spate of Anglo-Irish crises has paradoxically strengthened the case for the Agreement. If it were not in place, the argument goes, only megaphone diplomacy would have ensued. This view is not reflected in the poll: asked about the impact of the "events of the last six months" on their attitudes to the Agreement, 4 per cent more minority respondents said they were now *less* favourably disposed than those who said they were more so.

If this is all dispiriting news for the SDLP, there is more bad news for the government, which has spent the past two years and more assiduously wooing unionists to the Agreement by holding out its alleged security benefits to them.

**In your opinion has the Anglo-Irish Agreement benefited the nationalist community? (%)**

	18-24	25-44	45+	ABC1	C2DE	Protestant	Catholic	All
Yes	19	21	23	25	19	25	16	21
No	79	75	75	71	78	72	81	75
Don't know	2	5	2	3	3	3	3	3

**(To those answering 'yes' only:) In what way? (%)**

	Protestant	Catholic	All
They now have more say	50	60	53
It has meant fairer employment	2	3	3
They have got all they wanted	35	2	24
Security links with Dublin	3	14	7
Some other reason	4	10	5
Don't know	6	12	8

It is not just that only one in 25 Protestants thinks the Agreement has been of benefit to them. Of that 4 per cent, less than a third—1 per cent overall—think there has been any improvement in cross-border security. Worse still, a net 23 per cent of Protestants interviewed said they were even less in favour of the Agreement as a result of "events over the last six months" than before.

Nor are many Protestants persuaded by the argument that real negotiations can take place while the Agreement remains in play. Asked if they agreed with the view that the accord had to be suspended before successful inter-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland could take place, only 17 per cent disagreed. Thirty-one per cent agreed, and a further 41 per cent agreed strongly with the statement.

**And has it benefited the unionist community? (%)**

	18-24	25-44	45+	ABC1	C2DE	Protestant	Catholic	All
Yes	5	7	5	6	6	4	9	6
No	91	89	93	92	91	94	88	91
Don't know	4	4	2	2	3	2	3	3

**(To those answering 'yes' only:) In what way? (%)**

	Protestant	Catholic	All
It has given them more say	16	33	26
Improved cross-border security	31	19	25
The governments are talking	20	19	19
Some other reason	7	17	15
Don't know	24	13	17

When put to Catholics, 28 per cent agreed or agreed strongly with the suspension argument. Thirty-five per cent disagreed, but only a further 16 per cent disagreed strongly. Again this suggests many Catholics feel they have not perhaps that much to lose.

Where the government has got it right, however, is in its belief that it could ride out the anti-Agreement protests. Whether because Protestants feel unionist leaders hyped up the threat to the Union which they presented the Agreement to be, or simply because they feel protest to be futile, there has been a marked dropping off in support for action against the accord. Only 37 per cent of Protestants, disproportionately young, still favour protest action in general, while 60 per cent are now opposed.



Of those protesters, 51 per cent agreed with non-violent protest such as boycotts and rent strikes, 34 per cent endorsed industrial action and 9 per cent supported violence. But these specific actions are less than half as popular amongst Protestants as a whole as they were at the time of the C&L poll after the Agreement.

The poll next sought to determine any political shifts brought about by "the events of the last six months". In terms of party support, the answer is simple: precious few. Just 4 per cent of respondents said they would change the party they voted for as a result, and there was no consistent pattern even there.

But what of Sinn Féin in particular? To tease out the impact of the various 'events', Coopers & Lybrand offered all respondents a list of five statements from which to choose the one which best described their personal view. These ranged from implacable opposition to Sinn Féin to diehard support.

Almost all Protestants subscribed to the view: "I've never had any

**Some people have said that before successful inter-party talks on the future of Northern Ireland can go ahead, the Anglo-Irish Agreement must be suspended. Would you agree or disagree with this statement? (%)**

	Protestant	Catholic	All
Strongly agree	41	5	26
Agree	31	23	28
Neither agree nor disagree	6	13	9
Disagree	15	35	23
Strongly disagree	2	16	8
Don't know	6	8	7

**Again thinking about the Anglo-Irish Agreement would you personally agree or disagree with protest action against the Agreement? (%)**

	18-24	25-44	45+	Male	Female	Protestant	Catholic	All
Agree	32	25	23	29	21	37	9	25
Disagree	63	70	74	67	74	60	87	71

**Would you say that you agree or disagree with each of these forms of protest against the Agreement? (% agreeing, compared with response to same question in December 1985)**

	Now	Dec '85
Boycotts/rent strikes	14	30
Industrial action	10	22
Violence	3	8

sympathy for Sinn Féin." So did 53 per cent of Catholics. Fourteen per cent of minority respondents, meanwhile, agreed that "none of the events of the last 12 months has caused me to lose support for Sinn Féin."

The three other statements tried to detect wavering Catholic sympathies. The statement "Any sympathies I had for Sinn Féin disappeared with the Enniskillen bombing" was chosen by 7 per cent of Catholics. However, 9 per cent selected "I never sympathised with Sinn Féin but the Stalker-Sampson report / Birmingham Six trial have changed that". And 12 per cent endorsed the view: "Whilst I would have been less sympathetic towards Sinn Féin after Enniskillen, the Stalker-Sampson report / Birmingham Six trials have changed that".

Adding the first and third figures together indicates that 19 per cent of Catholics—nearly one in five—became less sympathetic towards the Provos or lost any sympathy for them after Enniskillen. Set against the 14 per cent of unaffected diehards, or the 28 per cent or so of Catholics who voted Sinn Féin in the last general election, this indicated that the IRA spokesperson who said at the time that the "outer reaches" of republican support had been "totally devastated" was absolutely right.

Was—for the second and third figures, added together, indicate that that 'devastation' was completely reversed by the actions of the three Appeal Court judges and of the attorney general two months later. After

**Would you say that events in the past six months have had any effect on your views on power-sharing? (%)**

	Protestant	Catholic	All
No	79	81	79
Less favourable	16	3	11
More favourable	4	14	8
Don't know	1	2	1

**Or on your attitudes to the Anglo-Irish Agreement? (%)**

	Protestant	Catholic	All
No	73	78	75
Less favourable	24	12	19
More favourable	1	8	4
Don't know	2	2	2

**Or on the party you would vote for? (%)**

	Protestant	Catholic	All
No	95	96	95
Yes	4	3	4
Don't know	1	0	1

those events, Gerry Adams told *Fortnight* privately that there would now be greater "tolerance" and "understanding" of the republican movement in the Catholic community. That was before Gibraltar, of course, and before the funeral shootings.

Mr Adams, it is now clear, was absolutely right too.

**Can you please look at these statements and tell me which one best describes your own personal view? (%)**

- A I never had any sympathy for Sinn Féin
- B I never sympathised with Sinn Féin but the Stalker-Sampson report / Birmingham Six trial have changed that
- C Any sympathies I had for Sinn Féin disappeared with the Enniskillen bombing
- D Whilst I would have been less sympathetic towards Sinn Féin after Enniskillen, the Stalker-Sampson report / Birmingham Six trial have changed that
- E None of the events of the last 12 months has caused me to lose support for Sinn Féin
- F Don't know

	18-24	25-44	45+	ABC1	C2DE	Male	Female	Prot.	Catholic	All
A	66	75	81	84	72	73	80	92	53	77
B	4	5	4	3	5	5	3	1	9	4
C	5	6	4	4	5	4	5	3	7	5
D	8	5	4	5	6	7	3	1	12	5
E	13	5	3	2	8	6	5	0	14	6
F	3	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	5	4