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RBS/3/86

cc. PS/Mr Bloomfield ^{3/1}

Mr J McConnell



ATTITUDE SURVEY ON POLICY DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

1. Mr Merifield invited me to comment on the proposed paper to PDG.
2. I support strongly the concept of a regular survey of political attitudes in NI. The limitations of such surveys are well-known, particularly the possibility that more extreme views may be underestimated. However, the availability of good intelligence about political attitudes is central to the development of effective Government policy.
3. On the information available, the Coopers & Lybrand proposals seem to be the "better buy".
4. The timing and frequency of such surveys will clearly require further thought. Is there much value in mounting a survey until the by-election fever is out of the way? On the other hand, we do not know how hot the political climate will be in, say, March! Surveying more frequently than every 3 months might be worth considering, certainly for the first year.
5. Turning to the suggested questions, my immediate reaction is to wonder about the value of the questions on knowledge of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I would welcome the proposed questions on "the wider options", though we will have to examine the wording carefully so that those being surveyed understand the questions and those seeking to draw conclusions understand the answers!

RM

R B SPENCE

Central Secretariat

2 January 1986

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PAPER FOR PDG: ATTITUDE SURVEY ON POLICY DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

Background

1. This paper considers the feasibility of commissioning an external agency to mount a survey of the attitudes of the Northern Ireland population to Government policy initiatives and in particular to the recent Anglo-Irish Summit. The intention would be to try to gauge the depth of opinion on key political options (especially as they may change over time) to assist the Government to catch the tide with its policy initiatives and proposals.

Possible Content of a Public Attitudes Survey

2. PPRU have identified a number of critical areas where periodic feedback on public knowledge, perceptions and attitudes could be of potential value to Government. Specifically questions might be constructed to address the following issues, with disaggregation of the responses by religion, age, sex, social class, geographical location and voting intention:

- (i) knowledge of the terms of the Agreement and the source of the knowledge;
- (ii) the perception and understanding of its implications;
- (iii) public reaction at a general level; and the support/antagonism directed at specific areas of the Agreement by various sections of the community;
- (iv) the (a) acceptance or (b) potential options for opposition;
- (v) attitudes to possible political opinions.

Limitations

3. Opinion polls reflect opinion at one point in time only. They give equal weight to each individual response (in practice some opinions carry more weight than others) and they reflect opinions which may or may not be strongly indicative of behaviour. (Experienced pollsters suggest that people occupying extreme political positions appear under represented in pre-election polls compared with actual votes subsequently cast).

Potential Contractors

4. We believe two agencies would be prepared to conduct a survey

behalf of Government.

5. Coopers and Lybrand (Mr Arthur Luke) have a panel which they already use on a regular basis for expenditure and consumer surveys. They would be unhappy to "contaminate" this particular panel with questions on political issues and prefer a new panel of some 2,000 adults, derived on a random basis from electoral lists, who would be contacted at home by interviewers employed by the company. It would take a month to set up the first survey. An initial survey, based on a 2 or 3 page questionnaire, and covering 2,000 respondents might cost between £7,000-£8,000 with repeat exercises (say every three months) costing an unspecified smaller figure.

6. Ulster Marketing Surveys (who undertook the fieldwork for the recent MORI poll), argue for a "quota" sample of perhaps 1,000 respondents. The quota would be defined taking into account variables such as religion, sex, age and social class. Variables other than religion were felt to be important in obtaining a profile of "extreme" opinion on both sides (ie SF and DUP support tends to be drawn from young working class males). Interviews would be conducted "on the street" at a minimum of 50 (and preferably 60) sampling points. These would involve most "hard-core opinion" areas such as West Belfast, Creggan, Shankill, East Belfast etc. UMS would envisage a questionnaire containing no more than 12 or 13 questions and taking 4-5 minutes per interview. UMS indicated that the cost of the initial survey would be in the region of £6,000-£7,000, with a reduced cost for repeat surveys. It was estimated that for four surveys undertaken over a period of 12 months the total cost might be in the region of £20,000. All would be conducted by interviewers accredited by the Market Research Society.

7. Both firms believe that they could maintain the necessary confidentiality. UMS have rather more experience in the opinion poll type of exercise but the Coopers and Lybrand methodology offers the possibility of a more intensive examination of attitudes and opinions than does that offered by UMS. (Coopers and Lybrand

have been approached by the local media to mount a similar type of survey on their behalf but would be prepared to give Government the opportunity of first refusal).

8. PPRU are happy that both Coopers and Lybrand and Ulster Marketing Surveys could undertake the kind of survey which Government has in mind and could complete it in a professional manner within agreed costs and time-scales. The emphasis of each company differs somewhat and depending on the precise requirements of the survey the recommendation would swing for one or the other. PPRU would be prepared to discuss the relative merits of the two proposals further.

9. The Annex suggests in a preliminary draft, a possible line of questioning.

10. If PDG considered that there would be merit in launching a periodic survey of opinion, it would be necessary for further consideration to be given to the questions that would elicit the most helpful response at the first (and any subsequent) surveys, and to the practical details (confidentiality, frequency, cost etc). These issues might be examined by PAB with PPRU and Central Secretariat.

SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR PROPOSED SURVEY OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO
THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT

Party Loyalty

1. If there was a by-election in your constituency tomorrow,
which party would you vote for?

IF UNDECIDED OR REFUSED ASK:

Which party are you most inclined to support?

Alliance
Democratic Unionist
Official Unionist
Other Unionist
Sinn Fein
SDLP
Workers Party
Other
Would not vote
Undecided
Refused

Knowledge of Agreement

2. How would you describe your understanding and knowledge
of the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

- (a) Very Good
(b) Good
(c) Slight/Moderate
(d) Poor
(e) Very Poor
(f) No Knowledge

For those who have some knowledge of the Agreement ask:

3. What has been the main source of your knowledge of the Agreement?
- (a) Read copy of Agreement itself.
(b) TV/Radio programmes devoted to detailed discussion
of Agreement.
(c) General news.
(d) Political Representative (MP, Assemblyman, Councillor).
(e) Friends, neighbours, workmates.
(f) None of these.

4. Thinking about the Anglo-Irish Agreement on Northern Ireland. Which of these comes closest to your view?
- (a) I like the Agreement and it will help to solve Northern Ireland's problems.
 - (b) I dislike the Agreement and it will not help to solve Northern Ireland's problems.
 - (c) I am worried about the terms of the Agreement, but wish that it could bring peace.

Implications of Agreement

5. People have different opinions about how the Anglo-Irish Agreement will affect the constitutional guarantee that Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom as long as a majority wish it to do so. Do you think this Agreement will result in the status of NI as part of the UK being -
- (a) Strengthened
 - (b) Unchanged
 - (c) Weakened
 - (d) Removed
 - (e) Don't know
6. How far do you think that the views of the Government of the Irish Republic on matters concerning Northern Ireland should be taken account of by the Secretary of State?
- (a) Definitely should be taken account of.
 - (b) Only to a limited extent.
 - (c) Definitely should not be taken account of.
 - (d) No opinion.
7. From what you know about the Agreement, do you think it gives Dublin a veto over what happens in Northern Ireland?
- (a) Does
 - (b) Does not

8. In your opinion will the inter-governmental conference established by the Agreement result in the following?

Yes No

- (a) Reduced support for Republican terrorist organisations.
- (b) Greater confidence by the community in the security forces.
- (c) Greater general cross-border co-operation.
- (d) Better co-operation between the two communities in NI.
- (e) Better relationships between the British and Irish governments

9. How far do you think the views of (a) Unionists and (b) Nationalists will be taken into account in the inter-governmental conference established by the Anglo-Irish Agreement?

Unionists Nationalists

- (a) To a large extent
- (b) to some extent
- (c) Not at all
- (d) Don't know

10. Do you feel that an improvement in the Northern Irish economy would increase the prospects of peace, and will the Anglo-Irish Agreement lead to such an economic improvement?

Yes No

- (a) Economic improvement would increase prospect of peace
- (b) Anglo-Irish Agreement will improve economic circumstances

Opposition

11. ASK THOSE WHO OPPOSE OR ARE AMBIVALENT (4(b) and 4(c))

Here is a list of ways in which opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement could be expressed*

- (a) Organising of a public petition against the Agreement.
- (b) The holding of a mini general election by Unionist MPs resigning their seats at Westminster.
- (c) Withdrawal by Unionist politicians from public bodies.
- (d) Mass demonstrations/marches.
- (e) Rent and rate strikes.
- (f) Strikes designed to make the Agreement unworkable.
- (g) Armed revolt.
- (h) Declaring Northern Ireland independent of the UK.
- (i) None of these.
- (j) No opinion.

*This is a key question which could be asked in three possible ways, from which we suggest two options should be chosen. These are:

- (a) Do you think option is likely/unlikely?
- (b) Do you find the option acceptable/unacceptable?
- (c) Would you be likely to participate/no participate?

Wider Options

12. Do you believe the British Government will maintain the Agreement?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No
- (c) Don't know

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13. If the Agreement continues, would you agree to a system of devolution based on
- (a) power-sharing?
 - (b) majority rule with safeguards for the minority?
14. Which of these would be your preferred option (1st, 2nd preference)?
- (a) continue with the Agreement, and the present Assembly;
 - (b) direct rule with the Agreement but without an Assembly;
 - (c) the Agreement alongside a devolved Assembly [based on power-sharing]?
 - (d) UDI for NI with the loss of UK financial support.

DETAILS OF RESPONDENT

Age U21 21-34 35-50 50+

Sex

Social Class

Religion

Sampling Point (ie Geographical location)