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Study on O.I. Poll by Mr. Dally

for information
25/5/82

Irish Times Opinion Poll on Attitudes
in Northern Ireland

Mr Murray
28/7

General

Opinion polls are to be treated with considerable caution. MRBI, the organization conducting this poll, predicted a 5% Coalition lead over Fianna Fail on 16 February. It is far from certain whether the findings can be trusted.

The Prior Initiative

On elections to an Assembly only 33% are very much in favour. The rest of the population could be said to be sceptical, only 38% of Protestants and 23% of Catholics being very much in favour, the rest being somewhat in favour, having no opinion or against. It would confirm the view that the Prior Initiative does not enjoy strong support. Obviously if there is to be an Assembly there has to be an Executive, and there is little surprise in that. There is little support for a purely consultative Assembly.

On the assumption that there is an Assembly 55% would be in favour of power sharing, and even 45% of Protestants are in favour as against 29% opposed. However, the Prior initiative does not offer power-sharing.

Voting intentions show that Unionist Parties between them, including Alliance, would, excluding undecided and non-voters,

pick up 77% of votes, as against 18% for the SDLP, showing that the 70% requirement provides no safeguard. While the SDLP has 61% support among Catholics of those who are decided and intending to vote as against 19% for Alliance, 42% of Catholic electors fall into other categories. Many of those would be opposed to any internal N. Ireland solution.

Anglo-Irish Talks

North-South cooperation on Tourism and Energy has a high level of support of over 70% with almost all the opposition coming from 1/5 of Protestant voters roughly coincidental with the DUP

Anglo Irish Talks at Ministerial level have the support of 44% with 29% opposed and 27% undecided. Overall, only 30% of Protestants are in favour as against 40% opposed, whereas 70% of Catholics are in favour and 11% against. There is much stronger support for the Anglo-Irish talks in the Belfast area (50%) and in rural areas (47%) than in other towns (37%). A majority are in favour of setting up a Parliamentary tier (44% as against 38%). There is however a two to one majority against among Protestants.

Other options

Integration with Britain as an alternative is supported by 49% of Protestants as against 3% of Catholics. This

shows clearly that it is not on.

There is no significant support in either community for an independent Northern Ireland.

30% of Catholics are not satisfied with any of the options on offer, although 40% favour a federal solution. This may reflect a lack of conviction, that a United Ireland on a federal basis is necessarily what they want.

A United Ireland some time in the future

This retains the support of the vast majority of the Catholic population 82%, attracting cross-community support of 40% of the 25-34 age group, thus making nonsense of claims that Catholics no longer want a United Ireland. 8% of Protestants are prepared to consider the idea as against 85% opposed.

Overall the poll shows good support for the Government's policy on Northern Ireland. It shows lack of strong support for the Prior Initiative, a good level of support for North-South cooperation and the Anglo-Irish talks, and continued adherence by the vast majority of the Nationalist population to a United Ireland, reaching an overall count of 40% in the 25-34 age group as a whole (cross-community)