

PAB/7840/PM/RN

ISG(O): MORE SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES WITHIN THE PROVISIONAL MOVEMENT, AMONGST SINN FEIN SUPPORTERS AND AMONGST NATIONALISTS MORE BROADLY TO TRY TO IDENTIFY THE LIKELY IMPACT, POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE, OF DIFFERENT PRESENTATIONAL STYLES AND ARGUMENTS

There are essentially three different groups of people whose attitudes we wish to understand better in order that our own messages and information strategy can be targeted to greatest effect. They are those within the republican movement, those who support Sinn Fein and the nationalist community more widely. This latter group incorporates SDLP voters and those who see themselves as non-party political but sit somewhere between Sinn Fein and the SDLP on the spectrum.

2. The lack of data about opinions in general, and what reaction is caused by different presentational styles and arguments is at the root of the difficulty of providing satisfactory answers to these questions. The need for an increased database of information building on the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes Survey is clear - and that knowledge needs to be updated on a regular basis to give an impression of changing attitudes over time and to allow some conclusions, however tentative, about Government's role in any changes to be taken into account and appraised. Clearly there will always be difficulties in ascribing reasons definitively, given the multiplicity of factors involved.

3. In the broadest terms it is important to recognise the shifts on attitude Government would like to see brought about, and hence the way its messages must be tailored. Clearly it is not the basic

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tenets of nationalism or republicanism which Government seeks to change. Different aspirations regarding the future governance of Northern Ireland are as valid as wishing to see the status quo continue. It is the method of such seeking to introduce such changes which concerns government most closely. The prize of successful Government activity is the renunciation of violence in pursuit of change, and going beyond that an acceptance of the bona fides of the working of the apparatus of the state, even if the state itself is not recognised to be legitimate. It may be that ultimately our aim would be to encourage and create de facto (and de jure) acceptance of the Union as the right way of governing in Northern Ireland built on the principle of consent, but this is both more difficult and less realistic.

4. It is however important that the nationalist community as a whole come to accept the fact that the institutions of the state act without prejudice to religion. In the non-legal non-security areas of responsibility HMG is clearly much closer to that aim than in the institutions responsible for law, order and justice.

5. Inevitably the analysis must remain of a broad-brush nature given the lack of homogeneity of any group of the size we are examining here; but it may first be worth challenging some basic preconceptions many people hold. Not all catholics are Nationalists. In the 1990 Social Attitudes Survey, 33.8% of catholics responded they were in favour of Northern Ireland remaining part of the UK in the long-term. Indeed 46% (including those just mentioned) were not in favour of a United Ireland as a

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long term goal. More striking still, but clearly linked to the above responses is the result indicating 54% of catholics consider themselves neither Unionists nor Nationalists. That may have implications for the shorthand language we use ourselves.

6. Statistics are always open to interpretation, depending on factors included or not in the database question. Nonetheless, it is all we have to go on: it is important to realise that to restrict our analysis to Nationalists is to include only about half of all catholics. It is for this reason, and because data on Nationalists alone is non-existent, this paper looks at the catholic community more widely.

7. For additional background on the categorisation which it is possible to have, we have also examined the party political level. It is interesting to note, from NISAS again, that when questioned only 34% of catholics claimed they supported the SDLP, even though recent election figures show the figure of actual support to be higher at around 56% of catholics (provided one assumes a negligible Protestant vote for the SDLP) - Sinn Fein's support is also much understated with only 6% of catholics admitting to voting for the party. The reasons for this shyness are more obvious than those concerning the SDLP.

8. Our understanding of why so many catholics who vote for the SDLP, as an avowedly Nationalist party, clearly do not support that overall aim is incomplete. The most likely explanation looks at what else that party stands for that no others do; that is the

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representation of catholics, and opposition to violence.

Individuals not in favour of a united Ireland can safely vote for the SDLP knowing the majority in Northern Ireland will remain opposed to that overall aim, and yet secure representation for their interests as citizens of the UK. The party's Nationalism is in this scenario something of a by-product which some voters accept as part of the basket of policies offered, but which others feel able to ignore as not being integral to the party. This scenario, however, implies a degree of political sophistication which it is difficult to substantiate.

9. That said, what assumptions can we justify? In terms of catholic attitudes to the organs of the state in the law and order and criminal justice fields, one can identify a perceived discrimination of action by those institutions allied to a feeling of alienation from them. For example, while most catholics accept the impartiality of the courts in dealing with the two religions with 79% believing equal treatment is meted out and only 12% believing protestants are treated a little or much better, when it comes to giving evidence 50% admit they would probably or definitely not give evidence in Court if they witnessed a hijacking (9% don't know) and 30% would not give evidence if they witnessed a burglary (4% don't know).

10. Accepting the clear differences between a case in which the individual is asked to take positive action rather than just assess a system from afar, there remains a distinction between catholic and protestant response rates. The equivalent figures for the not

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giving of evidence among protestants are 33% and 23% respectively. Why should there be such a difference? The fear element would obviously play a part, as might the particularly nationalist opposition to the concept of informing. Is the feeling of intimidation greater in nationalist areas - or is there perhaps a greater reliance on other bodies such as the paramilitaries to regulate such activities? Whichever the case is, the challenge for government is to slant its message so as to increase the levels of those prepared to come forward and place their faith in the accountable and legitimate system of justice?

11. The feeling of civic pride and identity always tends to be less in more deprived areas - but in Northern Ireland this is heightened given doubts about the legitimacy of the state in certain areas. In such areas, where law and order is at the closest point to failing to provide solutions to the crime problems that exist, and where concerted civil governmental activity may also not be sufficient to provide adequate employment and services for the local community, the willingness of local people to accept the manifestations of state activity will be lower in any case. Other inner city areas are by and large not affected by the central issue however - that of legitimacy - which runs through the whole corpus of attitudes held by nationalists. Logically it is there that attempts to influence attitudes should be focussed for greatest results - but it may also be the most difficult barrier to overcome. The piecemeal approach might be less spectacular and yet produce results.

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12. Views of the security forces are already well documented, and a substantial number of Catholics continue to believe all arms of the security forces (to a greater or lesser extent) discriminate against Catholics. This is particularly so of the UDR, and one might assume a general welcome for the proposed merger of the Regiment with the RIR among that community (especially given public SDLP acceptance of it). More widely, statements about Government policy regarding confidence issues, since the time of the Anglo-Irish Agreement might also be expected to have had some effect, although there is the possibility that wider publication of the problems might cause people's attitudes to harden rather than soften. As people's expectations rise, so failure to meet them can lead to a greater dissatisfaction than previously even if, in objective terms, progress has been made.

13. Looking at the Republican movement

debate on the future policy stance of Sinn Fein and PIRA following the Secretary of State's 100 days speech in late 1990 and the Secretary of State's avowal that Britain had no selfish interest in Northern Ireland in the Whitbread speech of November 1991. That debate concerning the better long term method of achieving their aims is ongoing and it is unlikely that Government could change its course whilst the current policy of not talking to Sinn Fein until they had renounced violence remains in place.

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14. All the available evidence suggests the Republican movement does not really understand how Government thinks nor the pressures on decision-making which it encounters. Their recent statements indicate a desire and willingness to talk with HMG. They may believe they have made this easier now they have stated Sinn Fein is distinct from PIRA, and that Adams has said he does not believe it is his role to defend or assert the right of PIRA to engage in armed struggle and that if talks were to take place, the Republican movement would be prepared to take risks. Its attitudes may be affected to some extent by Government utterances, but there is no evidence that any effects would be on a logical well-informed basis of understanding what Government is actually saying.

15. Beyond that it is difficult to go. Certain factors and types of incidents will inevitably tend to lead individuals to become involved in terrorist activity, but it is not Government alone which makes this difference, and hence not simply a question of how to frame statements to produce a certain response to prevent that. Indeed, arguably, HMG's statements play a very small part in causing reactions when compared to incidents such as the shooting of Sinn Fein/IRA members and inflammatory statements/actions from the majority side of the community.

16. The final grouping which this introductory paper of first thoughts has not addressed is the category of Sinn Fein supporters, whether voters or sympathisers. Recent elections indicate a bedrock of support of 11% - and their vote is notable for its firmness. It is not possible to evaluate how many others have sympathy either

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with their aim or with the control on anti-social elements the Republican movement is able to exert in areas the security forces find it difficult to respond effectively in. It is not easy to see how Government can have an effect on Sinn Fein supporters and sympathisers given their general antipathy to Government and especially to NIO related subjects which the important messages Government would wish to put across relate to. For as long as the SDLP fail themselves to make inroads it is unrealistic to expect Government oriented messages to get a fair hearing. Even if they get through messages can only cause a questioning of aims. Long-term change would require them to be reinforced by local opinion formers, including the clergy, and those who were not inherently hostile to Sinn Fein. The question then to be addressed is how we can influence these people to ensure they reflect points of view helpful to the overall strategy of Government.

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