

FROM: ANDY WOOD
DIRECTOR, INFORMATION SERVICE
28 JULY 1997

ASST
SEC
DL 414/7
28 JUL 1997
CENT
SEC

cc PS/Mr Murphy (B&L) - O
PS/Mr Ingram (B&L) - O
PS/PUS (B&L) - O
PS/Sir David Fell - O
Mr Thomas - O
Mr Steele - O
Mr Watkins - O
Mr Stephens - O
Mr Lavery - O
Mr Hill - O
Mr Maccabe - O
Mr Brooker - O
Mr Woods
Ms Jude - O

PS/Secretary of State (B&L) - O

A PUBLIC OPINION POLL? (MORNING MEETING ITEM - 24 JULY)

Background

The existing position, which I think addresses the Secretary of State's point is that such polling exists - indeed has already taken place on a number of occasions.

The advertising the NIO has commissioned over the years has, quite properly, been tested in terms of value for money. To this end, the initial concepts have been exposed to focus groups "on the wider front" and the completed adverts have been the subject of survey questions.

We have done this by "buying in" to rolling surveys undertaken by Northern Ireland's leading polling firm, Ulster Marketing Surveys. This has enabled the NIO to have up-to-date views of moods among various groups in the Province (RC/Prot, male/female, east/west, rural/urban and divided along the standard socio-economic lines) without anyone knowing that the questions were being asked by UMS on the behalf of the NIO. This is a very considerable advantage to Government.

Although such polling has, historically, been used to 'benchmark' the relevance and effectiveness of our advertising, there is no reason why it cannot be used as a "standalone" whether or not any advertising is under development, in actual production or even on air.

What do we need to know?

Previous polling has posed 6 core questions which taken together provide a valuable set of indicators of the public mood (broken down by the groups detailed overleaf).

The questions are:

1. At a personal level, have the developments over the past 12 months made you feel more confident or more worried about your future?

Much more confident
Little more confident
No difference
Little more worried
Much more worried

2. I disapprove of violence but admire the idealism of the paramilitaries from my community.

Strong agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree

3. Violence is futile.

Strongly agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree

4. violence has its role.

Strongly agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree

5. Should the politicians you support be willing to compromise or should they stick to their principles?

Willing to compromise
Stick to principles

6. Favourability to Protestants

Extremely unfavourable (1)
Extremely unfavourable (10)

Favourability to Catholics

Extremely unfavourable (1)
Extremely unfavourable (10)

If asked this set of questions would enable us to measure how these sentiments had changed since the last poll. Other questions could, of course be added to fine tune/extend the scope of the survey.

But if we were again to buy into the UMS Continuous Household Survey the results would not be available to us until 11/12 September.

However an 'ad hoc' survey (which would have a smaller but still typical sample size of 800 cf the 1100 polled by UMS) would answer these questions in about 10 days from fieldwork starting.

So either we continue the existing practise - and preserve our confidentiality as commissioning client - but the results would not be available in time for us to work them into a sustained series of messages before the talks resume

or

we commission our own poll, which has the advantage of speed but, since the sponsor - the NIO/HMG - would be known, might give ammunition to those who would say "a waste of money - if the NIO doesn't know what people want/fear by now, it might as well pack up".

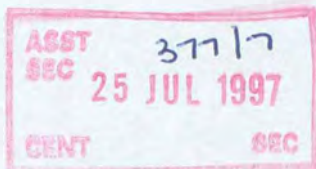
Recommendation: potential for criticism notwithstanding, commissioning our own ad hoc poll asap does at least put us in the position of knowing precisely which public fears and uncertainties and aspirations we have to address in the weeks between now and September 15.

I would be grateful for an indication of the Secretary of State's preference.

(signed)

A WOOD
☎ 28211

FROM: C D KYLE
PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L)
24 JULY 1997



cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B)
PS/Mr Murphy (L&B)
PS/Mr Ingram (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Thomas
Mr Steele
Mr Watkins
Mr Stephens
Mr Lavery
Mr Hill
Mr Maccabe
Mr Brooker

Mr Wood (L&B)

POSSIBILITY OF A PUBLIC OPINION POLL

The Secretary of State has expressed an interest in the Department having a look at undertaking a public opinion poll some time during August on something along the lines of "Talks/peace process/Sinn Fein".

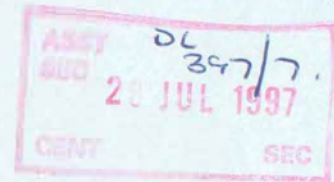
2. The Secretary of State would welcome advice as to whether this would be a good idea, the nature of such a poll and the best way of taking it forward (including timing).

David Kyle

C D KYLE
PS/SECRETARY OF STATE (L)
Ext 6461

CDKrm

FROM: D J R HILL
CPL DIVISION
25 JULY 1997



cc PS/Secretary of State (L&B)
PS/Mr Murphy (L&B)
PS/Mr Ingram (L&B)
PS/PUS (L&B)
PS/Sir David Fell
Mr Thomas
Mr Steele
Mr Watkins
Mr Stephens
Mr Lavery
Mr Maccabe
Mr Brooker

Mr Wood (L&B)

POSSIBILITY OF A PUBLIC OPINION POLL

1. David Kyle's minute of 24 July refers.
2. It will no doubt already have occurred to you that encouraging or funding a follow-up to the two polls previously published in Fortnight and the Belfast Telegraph might be easiest way forward. There may have been doubts about the methodology but the questions and answers in the previous polls were directly relevant to the talks process and the talks participants were engaged in drafting the questionnaires and might be similarly engaged in any follow up. I believe the previous polls were largely funded by the Rowntree Trust but the academic concerned has already approached us about part funding follow up work so there would be a natural lead in. I believe Peter Smyth will be able to give you the contact.

Signed David Hill

D J R HILL
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CPL/1819/AJH