



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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cc: Counsellors AI.

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20 May 1998

No of pages including this one: 3

To: HQ  
To: Secretary Gallagher

From: Belfast  
From: Joint Secretary

25  
PA address

Subj: Opinion polls

TAD: cank  
We must hope that the result in the North will be better than this. 59% prediction - but nothing is guaranteed  
cc: Ha. 7ack. 1. cc Ha. 7ack. 2. 59% prediction  
- but - nothing is guaranteed  
w-4-98

1. I had a word this morning with Chris Maccabe about the NIO's private opinion polling in advance of the referendum.
2. He told me that the poll which was carried out last weekend (and which we reported in summary form on Monday) was the last in the series and that no further polling will be done before Friday.
3. He clarified the details of last weekend's poll as follows:

51% Yes  
24% No  
24% Don't know

4. While the analysts produced from these figures a projected final breakdown of 56% in favour of the Agreement and 44% against (based on an assumption that the undecided vote would transfer almost entirely into the No category), the view now being taken by the NIO, on the basis of their own contacts, is that it would be more accurate to assume a two-thirds transfer from the undecided vote. This would produce a final breakdown in the region of 59% for the Agreement and 31% against.
5. Maccabe observed that the 51-24-24 breakdown which their poll established last weekend is very close to the poll in today's Irish Independent (which was conducted last Monday and reads 50-23-24).
6. Noting the suggestion in the Independent that "politicians in Belfast and Dublin detect

- a stronger move towards the Yes vote in the last few days", he said that the NIO's contacts this week (though he accepted that these could be fallible) would not support this.
7. I remarked on a comment by Trimble on TV last night to the effect that, if the Yes vote was as low as 55%, the British Government would have to consider whether it could go forward on that basis. Maccabe responded flatly that "an agreement is an agreement" and that, however slender the majority which it achieves on Friday, the British Government will proceed immediately with its implementation.
  8. I asked what kind of response British Ministers would give in public to a result in the region of 59%-60% for the Agreement. Maccabe said that they are giving thought to ways of "making the best of a bad result". If the outcome is anything below 65%, it will be very difficult to claim that a majority of Unionists have supported the Agreement.
  9. In explaining away a disappointing Yes vote, some limited assistance may be obtained from the fact that that only two pieces of information will be publicly available - the size of the turnout and the percentages for and against the Agreement. The No campaigners will no doubt claim that the criterion of widespread acceptance has not been met and charge that the Agreement has failed the "sufficient consensus" test. However, they will only be able to make broad political assertions to this effect, as they will not have the benefit of detailed figures showing the breakdown into Unionist and nationalist votes or other aspects of the poll.
  10. Maccabe's own inclination is to have Ministers focus on the very high turnout which is expected (in the region of 85%-90%) and make the case that more people will have said Yes to this proposition than have ever done so before in any election in Northern Ireland. He and his staff are researching previous election results and turnouts in order to develop lines of response of this kind for the Secretary of State and her colleagues.
  11. Finally, to update the earlier indication we gave about when the result may be expected here on Saturday, we understand that a note to No. 10 on this subject yesterday said that the result should be clear by "mid-afternoon" on Saturday. As I mentioned earlier, the boxes will be taken to the King's Hall in Belfast after polling

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booths close (10pm on Friday night) and counting will begin there around 8am-9am on Saturday.