

RELEASE IN PART
B1,1.4(B),1.4(D)

CONFIDENTIAL

For: Hillary

From: Sid

Re:

1.4(B)
1.4(D)
B1

2. Polling shows 70 percent Unionist support for the new agreement, more than for the Good Friday Accord. See below.
3. A new poll in the London Times shows the Tories eroding in the key swing districts. It is leading the news in the UK tonight. Story below.

BBC News **BBC NEWS**

Public 'favour' devolving justice

More than 70% of people believe local ministers are best placed to take decisions on policing, according to a poll conducted by the NI Executive.

It also suggests that 70% of unionists favour Northern Ireland politicians being in charge of policing issues, compared to 83% of nationalists.

The poll of about 1,000 people was conducted by Red Circle communications.

It asked people who they thought was best placed to make decisions on policing in NI.

Seventy two percent of those polled answered local ministers, while 16% answered direct rule and 11% did not know.

Eighty five percent of those asked said they supported the agreement to transfer policing and justice power to the assembly and of these, 70% were unionist.

The poll cost about £37,000 and was prepared for the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister.

A separate poll commissioned by the Northern Ireland Office indicated 68% of people in Northern Ireland want to see local politicians taking responsibility for policing and justice.

A total of 1,000 people were interviewed for the NIO poll on Friday and Saturday.

A clear majority - 68% - told the pollsters that local ministers should make decisions on policing whilst only 14% wanted the powers to remain with direct rule ministers.

A similar percentage backed the Hillsborough deal negotiated last month.

The Ulster Unionist Party, who have asked for the costs of the NIO poll to be made public, have said they are not in a position to support Tuesday's assembly vote on devolving policing and justice powers from Westminster to the assembly.

The UUP has been refusing to endorse the Hillsborough Agreement, insisting that matters such as education, parading and "the dysfunctional nature of the current executive" must be addressed.

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The DUP and Sinn Fein have enough assembly members to ensure the vote has the necessary cross-community support to be passed in the assembly on Tuesday.

Story from BBC NEWS:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/uk_news/northern_ireland/8556510.stm

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From The Times

March 9, 2010

Labour and Tories neck and neck in marginals

The poll suggests that recent talk of a Tory 'wobble' has affected voters' expectations

Peter Riddell

Labour and the Conservatives are neck and neck in the marginal seats that will determine the outcome of the general election, raising doubts over David Cameron's ability to win a clear overall majority, according to a special poll for *The Times*.

The survey was carried out by Populus in 100 key seats currently held by Labour and targeted by the Conservatives. Although more voters are switching to the Tories in these areas than in the country as a whole, the results suggest that the shift is well below the hopes and expectations of Mr Cameron's strategists.

The poll shows that the switch of voters from Labour to the Tories is about 1.5 to 2 points higher in the battleground seats than nationally. That might be worth an extra 20 MPs to the Conservatives, smaller than many in the party would hope after the big spending on these targets. It might be enough only to take the Tories to the threshold of the 326 seats they need for a bare overall majority in the Commons. The election is weeks away, almost certainly on May 6.

Many voters still have doubts about the Tories. The poll shows that in the key marginals 41 per cent of all voters, and 45 per cent of women, believe that it is "time for a change" but are not sure the change should be to the Conservatives. Thirty-four per cent think it is "time for a change" to the Tories, with 19 per cent saying that it does not seem like "time for a change" from Labour.

Populus puts the two main parties on about 38 per cent in the seats it polled. That amounts to a swing of about 6.7 per cent to the Tories from Labour since 2005 in those seats.

The poll targeted 100 Labour-held seats where the Tories came second at the last general election and which are 50 to 149 in their list of targets.

The poll excluded the 50 easiest seats for the Tories but included those the party needs to win for an overall majority.

In the key seats, Labour is still just ahead, on 38.2 per cent, down from 45.3 per cent in the 2005 election. The Tories are on 37.6 per cent, up from 31.4 per cent. This means that they should gain 97 Labour-held seats. Taking account of boundary changes, it is likely that the Conservatives would need up to 20 further seats from the Liberal Democrats and others for an overall majority.

The poll suggests that recent talk of a Tory “wobble” has affected voters’ expectations. Only 32 per cent in the marginals expect a Tory overall majority, against 43 per cent in a national poll last month. Similarly, 25 per cent now think that a Labour overall majority is most likely, against 16 per cent.

The row over the tax status of Lord Ashcroft, the Tory deputy chairman, has damaged the party. Of the 68 per cent who said that they had followed the story quite closely or even vaguely, some 28 per cent — including 10 per cent of Tories — said that it had made their overall view of the party less favourable.

David Cameron is ahead of Gordon Brown on eight out of ten personal statements. More than two thirds thought that Mr Cameron was “a nice, likeable, person”, against just under a half for Mr Brown, but both leaders were generally regarded as family men and as being strong and determined.

The bullying row has damaged Mr Brown a bit: 38 per cent said that he treated his staff well, compared with 59 per cent who said the same of Mr Cameron. Thirty-four per cent thought that

Mr Brown and Mr Cameron sent their children to state schools, even though both do.

Populus repeated a question that proved revealing in the 2008 US presidential campaign, on whether change or experience was needed most. In the US, the margin for change over experience was about 2 to 1, highlighting Barack Obama’s edge over John McCain. In Britain, 56 per cent favour change and 40 per cent experience.

Populus interviewed a random sample of 1,500 adults aged over 18 by telephone between March 5 and 7 in 100 Labour-held constituencies where the Tories are second, those ranked 50 to 149 in descending order of marginality. For more details go to www.populus.co.uk.

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