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Dear Dr. Alderdice,

Thank you very much indeed for sending me a copy of the Report of the Alliance Party Study Group on the Future Government of Northern Ireland. I have read this with great interest and you will not be surprised to hear that I am in basic agreement. I think that the document is very cogent indeed, and, in my opinion, some form of devolved government is the only way forward.

I have some comments on matters of detail.

Paras. 2.4 and 2.5. Some proponents of independence do not seem to realise that, in an independent Northern Ireland, the treatment of the minority will be entirely in the hands of the majority. The history of Northern Ireland does not inspire one with confidence that this treatment would be more favourable than it is at present.

Para. 2.8. I think that the point here is worth emphasis. Integration does not solve the problem of securing a structure of government in which both communities can have confidence. It merely transfers it to another level - that of local government.

Para. 3.17. The central problem with a devolved structure of government, which my Lib / SDP Commission certainly did not solve, is how to ensure a change of government within the partnership framework. Suppose the public get fed up with the first Executive. How can they choose an Executive of another political colour which will follow different policies, without choosing those who wish to destroy co-operation. This would, I think, have been one of the problems which the Sunningdale scheme would have faced if it had survived. When all good men and women work together in a government, what is the alternative government to be?

Para. 3.26. I am very sympathetic to the idea of a referendum since I think that it is the only way of displaying the legitimacy of the new arrangement and so making it clear that the extremists do not have majority support. I believe that a referendum might have saved the Sunningdale arrangements. Of course, the main problem with a referendum is that one needs a majority in both communities.

Ch. 4 is the only part about which I have serious reservations. I am sceptical as to the wisdom of 4.4. allowing the devolved Assembly and Executive such wide powers vis-a-vis another sovereign state, and sceptical about 4.5, which involves treating Belfast and Dublin as, for some purposes, equivalent. I understand the arguments in favour of this - and indeed there is a good rational case - but I feel that, under present circumstances, North / South relationships of this kind will simply exacerbate Unionist ^{or} position, while not being of crucial importance to the Nationalists. I would like ^{to} see proposals produced so as to encourage a proper

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consideration of Northern Ireland business at Westminster so as to meet Unionist fears that power - sharing is a Trojan Horse. I agree that practical co - operation between North and South must be extended, but I am very worried at the dangers of allowing an Assembly to appear as a quasi - sovereign state, especially when it is untried.

I would also like some further consideration to be given to extending the influence of the Anglo Irish Governmental Conference so that it can form an embryonic confederation (not federation) of the North Atlantic. Perhaps the moves towards European integration would help to assist this process.

I do hope that these remarks are of help. I should be most interested to see how your proposals develop. Have you shown them to David Alton ? He has asked me to join an SLD group on Irish affairs; but, as your report is labelled confidential, I will not mention it to him until you give me permission to do so.

I am sorry that we did not meet when you were in Oxford. But I will make sure to remedy this situation next time you come. Please give me a couple of days warning,

Yours sincerely
Vernon
Bogdanor
