

Mr. J. J. Alderdice,
Leader, A.P.N.I.

September 4, 1988.

Dear John,

Thank you for sending me a copy of your draft report on the future government of Northern Ireland.

The recent escalation in I.R.A. activity has as usual captured all the attention. While we do not tend to see over here what A.P.N.I. spokesmen are saying I am sure you are continuing to take a tough line on law and order measures (excluding of course ones which would be totally counter-productive such as internment) because these must march hand in hand with attempts at political progress. I am glad to see that A.P.N.I. is still actively looking for a way forward on the political side and despite the initial inevitable hostile reaction of the Unionists the breakdown of the SDLP / Sinn Féin talks should leave the way open for some form of inter-party talks within N. Ireland.

So far as your detailed proposals are concerned I must say straight away that I have always considered that there is a lot of room for flexibility in such matters. I firmly believe that if the basic goodwill is there in sufficient strength to introduce power-sharing then almost any detailed structure will work. On the other hand if such goodwill is not present then nothing (however cleverly worked out) will succeed.

As a basic stance therefore I think restatement of adherence to the principle of cross-community devolved government coupled with some new proposals to capture interest and demonstrate flexibility makes

sense. The following points occur to me as immediate comment on some of your detailed proposals —

1. In the initial stages at least it is probably more practicable for the Sec of State to appoint the Executive rather than attempt election from within the Assembly but I think the longer term should see this in some manner being done by the Assembly itself. I have always regarded the "committee system" and the "Executive system" as both potentially acceptable and presumably APNI would be open to argument either way on this. The basic essential is proportionality excluding the men of violence and you have clearly stated this.
2. Allocation of portfolios is not easy, to say the least. I think it is too facile to say (3.19) that this "would be a matter for the Executive itself". Perhaps if realism is leading you to suggest appointment by the Sec of State allocation by him would be also the realistic initial approach. You do not mention a Chief Executive but presumably you have in mind such an appointment. Allocation could be by Sec of State in consultation with Chief Exec. and Speaker. Those appointed would have to find the allocation acceptable — otherwise there is no government — but someone has to have the authority.
3. I think your Anglo Irish section is O.K. as long as you make clear that some inter parliamentary tier is still desirable as well as the Executive level — your 5.2 d) may imply otherwise.
4. My only major criticism of your proposals is the weighted "test of acceptability" within the Assembly. Frankly I think if an Executive can be put together on a power-sharing basis and get the support of a simple majority in the

Assembly that is a remarkable achievement. To expect or demand more is too much ever to hope for. It must be borne in mind that extreme republicans are bound to be elected and there will always be some element on the Unionist side which will never participate in a power-sharing administration. Under your suggestion all these elements would have to do is achieve a blocking minority of 31% and bang goes your devolved government!

Is there not some confusion here between the proposal sometimes made to permit a "majority" Executive (i.e. no insistence on cross-community representation) with a weighted majority requirement as a way of ensuring the Executive could not act without some element of minority consent and your proposal which is for a guaranteed cross-community Executive? To insist upon a cross-community Executive having to get a weighted majority (especially one as high as 70%) would in my view make it quite intractable to get anything off the ground.

I think in the absence of a referendum (and I agree with your caveats on the referendum approach) the only way to ensure acceptability is to gain sufficient inter-party consensus before implementing the devolution procedure i.e. SDLP, APNI and a large section of the Unionists.

Please rethink carefully this aspect of your paper before publication to a wider audience.

I look forward to seeing you again and would greatly welcome a meeting at some time when you visit this side of the water.

Good luck!
Yours sincerely,
Denis /