SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

Dr John Alderdice
The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
55 Knock Road
Belfast 5   *14* November 1991

Dear John,

As you may have heard, the Lord President has raised with the
Opposition Front Bench how electoral law might be changed in the
interests of protecting the security of public figures. I am
writing to seek your views on what the Government propose.

The change which we propose to make to electoral law is a simple
one but it will not, we hope, be without its effect. As you know,
candidates at Parliamentary, European Parliamentary and local
elections are required by law to give their full home address on
their nomination paper. The full address thus disclosed then
goes on to the notice of poll and the ballot paper. We propose to
amend the Representation of the People Act, 1983, so as to remove
this requirement. A candidate would be able to choose whether to
give his or her home address in full or not at all, or could opt
to give a partial address, such as the name of the town where he
or she lived. This might, for instance, be used to alert
electors to the fact that the candidate was a local resident.
Under our proposals, the choice would be entirely a matter for
each candidate. It would not be constrained by the requirements
of the legislation or by what other candidates at the election
were doing.

The result of this reform would be greatly to diminish the possibility that terrorists and others could use the ballot paper, the notice of poll or indeed the nomination paper as a source for the addresses of their potential targets. In Great Britain the Government is proposing that it should apply only to Parliamentary and European Parliamentary elections. In Northern Ireland we believe, for reasons you will readily understand, that it should go further and apply to local elections as well.

As I say, this is a simple reform but it is, we believe, a worthwhile one as far as it goes. I should very much welcome your views on it.

PB