

**P R E S S   S T A T E M E N T**

**THE FUTURE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND**

(Extracts from a speech delivered by Alliance Leader, Dr John Alderdice at a conference of The Bow Group, at Exeter College, Oxford, 26-27 March 1994. The Bow Group is a policy group within the Conservative Party. Its tendency would be on the 'wet' side of the party, and it was established about forty years ago to give younger party members an input to party policy making. This conference was on the Future for Northern Ireland, and was also addressed by Ken Maginnis (UUP), Mark Durkan (SDLP), Sammy Wilson (DUP), the Secretary of State, Sir Patrick Mayhew, former Chief Constable, Sir John Hermon, Senators Gordon Wilson, and David Norris, and Mr Colin Parry, whose son was killed in the Warrington bombing.)

Dr Alderdice said:

"The Downing Street Declaration of December 1993, was an excellent step forward. The two Governments took the initiative together, as I had pleaded with them to do. They established a set of principles upon which all future progress would be made. The British Government said what everyone already knew to be true - the Britain has no selfish strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland. That Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom only because of the wishes of the people who live there. The Irish Government on behalf of the people of the Republic of Ireland accepted the right of the people of Northern Ireland to determine their own

future. Henceforth the issue should not be a dispute about British sovereignty over Northern Ireland, or Irish sovereignty over Northern Ireland, but of the sovereignty of the people of Northern Ireland - their right to determine their own future.

What was the result of taking this joint initiative? Support was forthcoming from Britain, and Ireland, Europe and America. Even more importantly there was acceptance on the part of the Unionist Party, and strongly positive support from the Alliance Party and the SDLP, representing together some 70% of the people, right across the divide. Surely with such support the governments would seek urgently to build on this unprecedented cross-community support. But no! Both governments allowed Sinn Fein to take centre stage. After a while, and entirely predictably Ian Paisley also prances back from the margins, and the whole excellent process begins to unravel. Unless the two governments seize back the initiative we will slip again into the sort of vacuum that gave us Shankill and Greysteel in 1993, and this time another Downing Street Declaration will not suffice for an encore.

I have pleaded in the past for the governments to take the initiative, and when they did in 1993, they were rewarded with singular support. Surely it is reasonable to ask in the light of this, that the two governments should now move to put on paper what structures they propose to establish. Let us see what the British Government would propose for the internal government of Northern Ireland, and what the British and Irish Governments would propose for relationships and structures, North and South. Let them put proposals on paper, and use them for consultations with all who are prepared to be involved, and then put them in place, to give our young people a democratic alternative to violence as a political instrument.