

From The Lord Alderdice

28 April 1997,

Mr B J S Kissock,
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Thank you for your letter raising the issue of negotiated Independence for Northern Ireland.

Let me first say a little about why the two sides are currently so far apart in Northern Ireland. Believing that the traditional 'talks' approach had failed, John Hume set out in 1992 to address the concerns of the PIRA and Sinn Fein, in the belief that if the violence could be stopped then a new resolution was possible. This 'peace first strategy' was a reversal of the traditional approach. Whilst we were very sceptical of this approach, at first all seemed well, with the Downing Street Declaration, the cease-fires and so on, but when PIRA began to realize that the outcome was likely to be based on the Joint Frameworks Documents rather than a United Ireland, they returned to the use of terrorism. The result of this strategy of focusing on the extremes, has been to increase polarization, and make finding a settlement **more** difficult. Here, a paradigm shift, or introduction of 'radically new thinking' has exacerbated rather than resolved the problem. One concern I have about the notion of Negotiated Independence is that it is a similar type of shift, (i.e. one that would make things worse, not better.) As far as support for the idea concerned, the only party which stood in the election of 30 May last year on this platform (the Ulster Independence Movement, led by Rev Hugh Ross), achieved a **remarkably** low poll.

Let me now say something about the content of the proposition.

From time to time the idea of Negotiated Independence has been proposed. Sometimes this has been motivated, as with yourself, by a belief that it would allow the emergence of a Northern Ireland identity which would unite the community. At other times however it has come from loyalist politicians unable to gain agreement for a devolved government with a dominant position for them. Their desire is therefore to obtain a Loyalist dominated Northern Ireland free of the external restraints of agreement and fairness. It is also generally accepted that Independence would lead to a lower standard of living, though this in itself is not sufficient to exclude it as an option. The idea that other independent countries would pay for its establishment in a more than very fleeting way, is essentially to suggest that the whole project is probably not really viable, and would not in any case be

economically independent. (The Isle of Man and the Channel Islands are not actually independent. They are Crown Dependencies. This anomalous status is one of things that makes them viable, but is a status unlikely to be acceptable to nationalists.) The biggest problem however with the notion of Independence is that because it would leave nationalists in a protestant dominated entity without recourse to external restraints, and is no closer to a United Ireland, it is wholly unacceptable to them. No package of constitutional safeguards is likely to change that position. Many unionists also express the view that the very notion of Independence is contrary to their basic philosophy and they are not prepared to consider it.

Having said that I cannot accept the specific proposition, I do nevertheless accept the challenge to Alliance to work at its own thinking, and to be prepared to consider, and indeed to produce, if at all possible, new ideas, which may help to develop new thinking and new possibilities, and we already look forward to what can be done in the post-election period. There will however only be new thinking if the people, in the way that they vote, tell the two sides that they want an honourable compromise, by voting Alliance. Anything else will be a vote for staying the same, and that will in fact be a vote for things drifting downwards into something worse.