

NEWS LETTER ARTICLE

FOR ALLIANCE ELECTION PLATFORM

by Alliance Party Leader, Dr John Alderdice

AS REQUESTED BY THE EDITOR

Dear Geoff,

I understand from Paul McErlean, our Press Officer, and also from Harry Robinson, that you were looking for an article from me, around 500 words in length, for Thursday's paper. I trust that this is suitable.

Yours sincerely,

John

Uniting the People of Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has been bedevilled by two profoundly destabilizing problems. The Nationalist view that Northern Ireland had no right to exist has made it difficult to have good relations within the province, and between North and South. On the other hand, the insistence on a monolithic unionism to protect the state, has made dissent seem dangerous, and prevented the creation of a stable, tolerant Northern Ireland.

These two problems are currently expressed in the attempt to create a Nationalist Consensus to undermine unionism, and the fighting amongst unionists about the issue of 'unionist unity' with which to defeat nationalism. Neither of these approaches will solve our problems. Northern Ireland only has a future if we unite protestant, catholic, and dissenter in a common commitment to agreed institutions. What could that agreement look like?

The Downing Street Declaration was a key step in addressing the first problem by recognizing the Principle of Consent. Nationalist Ireland is slowly coming to accept that the future of Northern Ireland must depend on the wishes of all the people here. The overwhelming majority believe their interests are currently best served within the United Kingdom. Alliance agrees. It is not impossible that in the future our best interests could be served differently. Whatever happens that decision must be a matter for the people who live here. That is why the Principle of Consent must be written into fundamental law in the United Kingdom and with an equivalent amendment to Articles 2 & 3 of the Republic's Constitution.

If we are to have a stable, prosperous Northern Ireland, then everyone must be involved. That is why we want **a new power-sharing government for Northern Ireland**, elected by the people here, and a **Bill of Rights**, to protect every individual citizen. No society is stable without justice for all, and respect for the rule of law. Establishing such respect, acceptance and confidence is vital to our future stability.

Alliance is also committed to building **a cooperative relationship with the South**. This is not a grudging acceptance. North-South links have always existed in professional, cultural, sporting, and economic life, but we could benefit from further cooperation, as long as it is based on mutual respect, and accountable to a power-sharing Assembly in the North, and in the South to the Government there. Such North-South cooperation is also politically necessary if Nationalists are to be prepared to give allegiance to a Northern Ireland which remains within the United Kingdom.

We approach the All-Party Talks calling on others to be flexible, and we too are prepared to think creatively about new arrangements which will accommodate difference. At the same time there are certain principles from which we cannot move - power-sharing, the protection of human rights, north-south cooperation, and the Principle of Consent - these are fundamental. If our people want a fair and realistic settlement based on these principles, then it is vital that they vote for it - today.