Dr John T Alderdice

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To: Dr John T Alderdice
Subject: latest draft, incorporating WP figures

Principles:

We want to see talks on a inclusive a basis as possible, starting
at the earliest possible date, without continuing lengthy debate about
electoral systems causing further delay. The electoral system should be
easily understood by voters, parties, and officials, and should contribute
to the election of a body which is widely representative of all significant
groupings n the community.

The elections should be held on a constituency basis. Such an
approach is familiar to the electorate and will provide a sense of local
involvement and identification with the process across the province.
Candidates seeking election under a constituency STV system have an
incentive to make their appeal as wide as possible and to seek transfers
from the supporters of other parties. Representatives elected on such a
basis will be more likely to be conscious of and responsive to the wishes
of the wider community (which is likely to be pro-compromise) than
representatives who take their authority simply from appointment through
party mechanisms and who are answerable only to faceless party committees
(which are likely to be hardline).

Individuals should be elected rather than parties. Electing
individuals encourages a sense of identification and involvement for local
communities, and also, under STV, allows voters the opportunity to express
a preference between candidates of the same party. A party voting system
would require a full proof mechanism for party registration, which could be
the subject of legal challenge. A system of voting for parties would
inevitably lead to party nominees being tied to party manifesto's, having
to report back continually to party committees and conferences, and in
general lacking any real freedom to negotiate.

Elections should produce a result which is as proportional and fair
as is practically possible, and should involve a transferable vote system,
since a single vote system leads to arguments about wasted votes and
severely weakens smaller parties.

The lesson of European (province wide) elections.
The DUP has consistently beaten the Official Unionists in European
elections -which are the only NI elections to date to be province wide -
and always vastly outperforms in those elections in comparison to any other
elections. The SDLP also does better against Sinn Fein in European
elections than in local elections, at least since 1984. The local
government results provide the best comparison, since the parties are
fighting each other in most areas, while Westminster figures can be
somewhat distorted by the number of seats contested.

The reason for the marked different results in province wide
elections would seem to be that such elections concentrate attention on the
most prominent personalities and that many people set aside their
particular policy and party preferences and vote for the candidate they
see as being the strongest representative of their community. The result is
a divisive two horse race, with people voting not for the candidate or
party they prefer but for the representative of their community who they
see as most likely to do well. It becomes in effect a matter of voting for
tribal champions in a sectarian headcount.

The first European election in 1979 is particularly revealing and
shows in full force the electoral effect of using a province wide voting
system. In the local elections in 1977 the OUP got 29.6%, the DUP 12.7%.

In the Westminster election on May 3rd 1979 the OUP got 36.6% of the total vote (fighting 11 seats). The DUP got 10.2% (five seats). In the European elections on June 7 the DUP got 29.8%. The OU's got 21.9%. The Alliance vote fell from 14.4% in the 1977 locals and 11.8% in the 1979 Westminster to 6.8% in the European election; Oliver Napier got 15,066 votes in East Belfast in May, 39,026 across the province four weeks later.

There were no dramatic developments between the May and June elections such as to account for the changed voting pattern in the Euroean election, which was seem as a watershed in Northern Ireland politics, establishing Paisley as dominant figure and leading to the resignation of Harry West as leader of the OU's. The DUP, riding on the crest of a wave followed the 79 results with good results in elections in 1981 and 82. Their vote in constituency based elections has since fallen back sharply, but they continue to achieve very much their best results and to beat the Official Unionist by clear margins in European elections. In the May 1989 local elections the OUP took 31% against the DUP's 18%; in the European election in June the result was reversed to OUP 22% DUP 30%.

The case of the Workers Party, which has contested all Northern Ireland elections since 1973, also shows a very clear trend. Their best result in a European election was worse than their worst result in any other form of election (see appendix 2). In 1989 they took 1.7% in the Westminster elections (fighting 7 constituencies out of 12) against 0.8 in the European election a month later. In 1989 they got 2.1 % in the local elections, fighting a very limited number of seats, against 1% in the province wide European election.

On the facts the main conclusions are not open to argument - the form of election influences the way people vote, and the use of province wide polls in European elections has consistently and signifigantly favoured the DUP.

The smaller parties:
The experience of the Workers party shows that small parties are 'sqeezed' in province wide elections, even when the use of STV mitigates against the wasted vote argument. They and the smaller loyalist parties are only organised in limited areas. They do not have the resources to fight a province wide election effectively. In a list system - where electors can vote only for a single party - they would be marginalised; they would suffer from the wasted vote argument and from the 'one strong voice' argument. In a pure party system they would also suffer from the unfamiliarity of their names/initials. They will do best, even on overall percentage terms, in constituency elections, where they can concentrate on the areas where they are strongest. If it is felt essential to provide for circumstances in which they fail to be elected in any constituency their involvement can be ensured by providing, by a simply mechanism, that any party grouping which fights say 6 seats and obtains say 1% of the total vote is entitled to one at large seat.

The smaller parties 2:
A party system in which people voted only for a party name could well lead to the election of unknown and unpredictable Northern Ireland Conservatives or any range of oddball claiming to represent Labour, and perhaps other really fringe candidates. It is worth remembering that Huge Ross, standing on an independent Ulster platform, obtained   % in the 1994 Euro election.

A system which is based on individual candidates standing in individual areas, and then topping up the votes of candidates who associate with each other on their nomination papers ought in a minimum number of constituencies ought to eliminate the really fringe parties and candidates (and would also simplify the problems of party registration).

Vote for a party, not a person?
As already suggested a system based on voting for parties rather

than individuals would result in negotiators who might be unknown to the public, who would not have had to go through the process of asking the public for their support, and who would be mandated entirely by party appointment. They would not be likely to represent the more independent and flexible strands of party thinking. They would be at all times under the direction of the party leader and of the party apparatus, would be tied to party manifestos and would have to report back to party structures.

Such a system also require a fool proof system of party registration, for which their is no British precedent or model. Disputes about ownership of names and variations of names could and would almost certainly would cause huge problems, with the very real possibility that such disputes could finish up in court, disrupting the process and reducing it to ridicule. if this seems far fetched it is worthwhile to consider:
* The S.D.L.P. (Slightly Dubious Liberal Party) led by John Hume (of Carrickfergus).
* The 'Literal Democrat' in the last European election in UK.
* The person who has changed his name by deed poll to Sir Nicholas Lyell and is proposing to stand against the AG as a 'Conversative'.
* The party led by David Trimble could hardly stand both as Official Unionists and as Ulster Unionists, leaving the other name, or similiar variations, free for others to claim.

There is an element of silliness to this issue but actually it is extremely serious - elections could be delayed or disrupted by court arguments about the right to use particular names. The utlimate absurity would be the whole process being delayed for months while various leftwingers dispute through the courts the right to use the name 'Labour'.

Legislation

Any new electoral arrangement would require new legislation, and that legislation would require to be complex and detailed. Any such legislation needs to deal precisely and exactly with every stage of the electoral process, and must be proof as is humanly possible against legal challenge -which, it cannot be stressed too highly, is entirely possible if not extremely probable if vitally important elections are conducted on the basis of a new, unfamiliar, not fully thought out and frankly thrown together electoral system. No British legal precedent exists for party registration or for any form of list system, and the legislative problems in devising and introducing such complex legislation at such short notice should not be underestimated. Given the extreme urgency of moving the process forward the case is overwhelming for the use of the existing electoral system or at most a slight variation on it, such as the use of a simple form of topping up procedure to bring in parties which obtained a certain percentage of the vote but failed to win a seat.

Appendix 1: Election results in Northern Ireland since 1970:

European Elections:

	DUP	UUP	Oth U	Alliance	Others	SDLP	SF
1994	29%	24%	2%	4%	3%	29%	9%
1989	30%	22%	5%	5%	3%	25%	9%
1984	34%	21%	3%	5%	2%	22%	13%
1979	30%	22%	7%	7%	9%	25%	

Local Government Elections

	DUP	UUP	Oth U	Alliance	Others	SDLP	SF
1993	17%	29%	4%	8%	7%	22%	12%
cllrs:	103	197	28	44	32	127	51

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1989   18%  31%   6%  |    7%   |   6%  | 21%  11%
cllrs: 110  194   32  |   38   |  27   |121   43
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1985   24%  29%   3%  |    7%   |   6%  | 18%  12%
cllrs: 142  190   14  |   34   |  26   |101   59
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1981   27%  27%   5%  |    9%   |  15%  | 18%
cllrs: 142  152   22  |   38   |  69   |103
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1977   13%  30%   9%  |   14%   |  13%  | 21%
cllrs:  74  178   34  |   70   |  57   |113
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1973    4%  41%  11%  |   14%   |  16%  | 13%
cllrs:  21  233   53  |   63   |  73   | 83
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Westminster Elections

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         DUP  UUP  Oth U | Alliance | Others | SDLP  SF
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1992   13%  35%   8%  |   9%   |   2%  | 23%  10%
MP's:   3    9    1  |   0    |   0   |  4   0
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1987   12%  38%   5%  |  10%   |   3%  | 21%  11%
MP's:   3    9    1  |   0    |   0   |  3   1
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1983   20%  34%   3%  |   8%   |   4%  | 18%  13%
MP's:   3   11    1  |   0    |   0   |  1   1
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1979   10%  37%  11%  |  12%   |  12%  | 18%
MP's:   3    5    2  |   0    |   1   |  1
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1974b   8%  36%  17%  |   6%   |  10%  | 22%
MP's:   1    6    3  |   0    |   1   |  1
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1974a   8%  32%  24%  |   3%   |  10%  | 22%
MP's:   1    7    3  |   0    |   0   |  1
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Stormont elections

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         DUP  UUP  Oth U | Alliance | Others | SDLP  SF
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1982   23%  30%   6%  |   9%   |   3%  | 19%  10%
seats: 21   26    2  |  10    |   0   | 14   5
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1975   15%  26%  22%  |  10%   |   4%  | 24%
seats: 12   19   21  |   8    |   1   | 17
-------------------------+-----------+---------+----------
1973   11%  29%  22%  |   9%   |   7%  | 22%
seats:  8   24   18  |   8    |   1   | 19
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Appendix 2: The Workers Party performance in difference types of elections.

1973 Council elections   3.0%
1973 Assembly election   1.8%

1974 Feb Westminster election	2.1%
1974 Oct Westminster election	3.1%
1975 Convention election	2.2%
1977 Council elections	2.6%
1979 Westminster election	1.7%
1979 European election	0.8%
1981 Council elections	1.8%
1982 Assembly election	2.7%
1983 Westminster election	1.9%
1984 European election	1.3%
1985 Council elections	1.6%
1987 Westminster election	2.6%
1989 Council elections	2.1%
1989 European election	1.0%

Post split:

1992 Westminster election	0.6% (+ 0.3% Democratic Left)
1993 Council elections	0.7% (+0.4% Democratic Left)
1994 European election	0.5%