

# Alliance

The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

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To: JOHN O'FARRELL

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From: JOHN ANDERSON

With sincere apologies for  
the long delay

John

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## AMERICA, HISTORY, AND THE IRISH PEACE PROCESS

The word 'historic' has been regularly appended to political events here during the last four years, and on some occasions the resonances of previous periods have been almost audible. Two stand out in my own mind. The first arose when the Prime Minister, John Major, called the leaders of the four parties who were then in talks, to a meeting in Downing Street. Sitting at that meeting in the Cabinet room, I suddenly became aware that we were occupying the same seats as the Irish plenipotentiaries, whilst John Major sat where Lloyd George had been, so many years before. Just then, I was deeply struck by how the years had peeled away to reveal the same old historic problems.

The second such 'deja vu' occurred in February 1994, when at the invitation of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, John Hume, Gerry Adams and I, addressed a conference at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York. The venue was significant, for it was the hotel that Eamon de Valera had used when he was trying to raise money and support for his cause. Such thoughts have left me more sanguine than others about the recent decision by President Clinton to permit Mr Adams and his colleagues to raise money in the United States. There is nothing new about American interest and involvement in the Irish Question. Even the name IRA was first used, not in Ireland, but in a border skirmish in America in 1866.

The New York Conference was highly significant however for it was followed by a major change in the approach of the American Presidency. When Irish-America had tried to enlist the support of Woodrow Wilson in raising the Irish question at the Paris Peace Conference, they were dealing with an Ulster-Scots Presbyterian who, despite his anger at British behaviour in Ireland, viewed the Irish Question as essentially an internal United Kingdom matter. He would protest privately, but he

would not endanger the special relationship with Britain. The intervention of British Conservatives against Clinton in the 1992 US Presidential campaign left Mr Clinton with no such compunction. Added to this he had installed at the White House people, like Nancy Soderberg and Susan Brophy, whose experience was not of long term US/UK diplomacy, but of that presidential campaign, and whose earlier loyalties were to their old mentor, Ted Kennedy (whose sister Jean's installment as the US Ambassador to Dublin was another indication of the influence the Senator would have on Clinton's Irish policy).

Unionists see this sea-change, and the co-ordinated approach of Irish Americans like the business magnate Bill Flynn, and the editor of the Irish Voice, Niall O'Dowd, supported by former congressman Bruce Morrison, as essentially 'a bad thing', and seek to combat it, as their Belfast City Council forefathers did in 1918, by counter-lobbying the White House. In this they may be mistaken. It is certainly important that Americans are presented with all possible views. The traditionally simplistic US view of our complex problem is potentially dangerous. But a simple 'Keep Out!' message will not work.

A peaceful future in Northern Ireland depends on political stability, and economic prosperity. A century ago the British Empire was a viable market. Now we need investment, employment, and business opportunities from Europe and America. Unionists need to understand that Americans and others will not warm to a message of 'Give us your money, but keep your opinions to yourself.'

The passing of time, the more pragmatic approach of the Irish Government, the less strident nationalism of John Hume, and the sheer intractability of the 'Troubles', have also ensured that whilst Irish-America has now girded its loins for a full-scale involvement on the side of a settlement, the commitment

is more to an Ireland united in peace, than an Ireland united in polity. Conservatives, unionists and many others may bridle at Mr Adams appearance in the United States, but it has, as with his predecessor Mr de Valera, made him and his party, slightly constitutional. The long and winding road to peace, and democracy leads through Washington. It does not, even in some smiling Irish-American eyes, necessarily lead to a United Ireland.

**Dr John Alderdice, Leader of the Alliance Party.**