

5 July 1996,

Ms Lois Jefferson,
The Joseph Rowntree Reform Trust Ltd,
The Garden House,
Water End,
YORK YO3 6LP.

Dear Ms Jefferson,

The past year has been very busy and, in political terms, a year of mixed fortunes. This letter is a six months follow-up report, subsequent to my January letter.

The activity level in the East Belfast Office has been extraordinary. My assistant, Richard Good has built up the constituency work to an unprecedented level. His attractive personality and enthusiasm has encouraged more voluntary workers to help, and resources have been used very effectively. For example, we have taken on a young secretary from a Jobskills programme. Her wages are almost completely paid by government. By moving to the new accommodation which I mentioned in the January report, we have, on site, a small bedsit room, which will be taken up by a full-time volunteer from the USA in August. This gives us a complement of three full-time staff, although only Richard Good is being paid a salary.

Another example of the work is the Focus delivery network. This is a direct result of experience with the Lib Dem team in Littleborough and Saddleworth. The constituency is split into about 140 'walks', and this enables us to get leaflets out regularly and quickly. In the May 30th elections to the All-Party Talks, and the Northern Ireland Forum for example we put out something in the region of 180,000 leaflets, target letters, election newspapers etc. This was the heaviest campaign Alliance has ever run, and the most impressive by any party in this election.

This brings me to the elections themselves. While our target is still the Westminster Election, there was, on 30th May, an election to the new Northern Ireland Forum. Despite maintaining our position as fifth largest party and with seven members elected, the results were rather disappointing. Our campaign was excellent. We had a very good slate of candidates throughout Northern Ireland, and the technical excellence of our campaign was remarked upon by many pundits. The Party Press Officer, Paul McErlean, (paid from the Rowntree grant), has built up a very high reputation amongst the press corps for his effective networking, and briefing, and he was able to get us articles and coverage of a much higher order than would otherwise have been possible.

The outcome of the election was however a very polarized one. You may recall that I had warned in my January report, of a possible break-down in the IRA cease-fire. This actually occurred in February, with adverse effects on feelings within the community. The poll itself was seen as a border referendum. Alliance polled 6.54%, and although with 49,000 votes we were numerically up on both the last two elections (European and Local Government) it was only half the level of the opinion poll ratings of around 12.5%, which we had been achieving in recent months. Other parties in the broad centre also fared badly. SDLP lost heavily to Sinn Fein, and the UUP lost out to DUP and Loyalists. The Tories were totally wiped out, as were the Greens, the Worker's Party and Democratic Left, and the new Women's Coalition only took 7,000 votes in the whole of Northern Ireland, despite intense media interest. It is clear that if we had not had the resources and activity made possible by extraordinary efforts by our staff and activists, and financial backing from Rowntree, this election, the most polarized since the 1940's, could have seen the centre ground completely devastated.

There were some encouraging features however. Firstly, by having a good staff group, and especially young able people like Paul and Richard, we have bounced back, and post election party meetings have been very resilient affairs. Secondly, in terms of East Belfast itself the DUP result of 11,000 votes has brought Robinson within grasp of the 10,500 I got at the last Westminster election. Unfortunately the intervention of the SDLP, Women's Coalition and others brought my vote down by about 3,000, but they are unlikely to stand again for Westminster, and I think that most of their votes will return to me in the General Election. Certainly Robinson's vote has never been so low, and the split between him and the Unionists is now very deep, so our preferred scenario of a Unionist/DUP/Loyalist/Alliance split is now **very** likely indeed. This still provides an excellent opportunity to take the seat.

I am using the summer period to rebuild. Paul McErlean is in Washington for July, working with National Democratic Institute and in Senator Kennedy's office, learning American press techniques. Richard Good is up-dating our records, following up people and problems from the election, and preparing for a possible October Election, and I am currently five days a week in Talks and at the Northern Ireland Forum.

In summary, the year has seen the development of an excellent team of trained people, an unprecedented level of work, and organization, and the election, (which was something of a trial run for Westminster), had good features, in terms of the fracturing of the DUP vote in East Belfast. Unfortunately we were adversely affected by the polarization which swept the community and affected all the centre ground parties. Without the Rowntree assistance we would have been badly damaged. As a result of the Rowntree moneys we have bounced back, and our Press Officer, Paul McErlean, and the East Belfast operation under Richard Good, are ensuring that the liberal Alliance voice continues to build the challenge especially in East Belfast.

As a result of the much appreciated personal grant from Rowntree, I will be doing some personal reconstruction too. I am taking my long-suffering wife and children to France for three weeks. I have seen little of them in the past six months, and I am personally exhausted. I am therefore particularly grateful that the holiday season had arrived, and would thank you again for all your continued help.

Yours sincerely,

Dr John Alderdice
PARTY LEADER

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Dr John Alderdice
Alliance Party of Northern Ireland
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8 July 1996

Dear John Alderdice

Many thanks for your response to my request for a report on this Trust's grant to the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland and its personal award to you. This will now be incorporated into the annual review of all the Trust's grants.

Yours sincerely

Lois Jefferson