

Alliance

The Alliance Party of Northern Ireland

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TO: LIAM CLARKE

FROM: JOHN ALDERDICE

DEAR LIAM,

I HAVE SENT THIS THROUGH TO THE SUNDAY TIMES LONDON NUMBER
071-782-5731) I TRUST THAT IT IS SUITABLE.

JOHN.

"MR ADAMS, PLEASE CLARIFY, WHAT IS WRONG WITH A CESSATION OF VIOLENCE?"

In the late 1960's, the New Ulster Movement, supported moderates in various parties, but quickly learnt that such politicians rarely last long in sectional parties. In unionism, Terence O'Neill, and Brian Faulkner, were unceremoniously dumped, and in the SDLP the same fate befell people like Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin. Others survived by bending towards the extremists in their own parties, or within their broader community - hence for many years the unhealthy relationship of the Ulster Unionists with Ian Paisley's DUP, or in more recent times the overweening concern of John Hume with the requirements of Sinn Fein. The early recognition of this problem created the Alliance Party, bringing Protestants and Catholics together in an anti-sectarian party - a political home for pluralism in a divided community.

I recount this background, because our experience, regularly confirmed since 1970, led me to warn Peter Brooke in 1991, that his Inter-Party Talks would not reach agreement. We might make progress, but we would not reach an agreement, if we required all parties to agree to everything. It remains my view that an agreement might be possible amongst the Ulster Unionist Party, the SDLP and Alliance, but including the more extreme elements will stymie progress. In the Middle East, Mr Rabin and Mr Arafat have not made progress by addressing the requirements of the most extreme components of the political spectrum. On the contrary, in order to reach an agreement together, Mr Rabin had to turn his back on Jewish fundamentalists, and Mr Arafat had to accept the resignation, from the PLO Executive, of hard-liners who would never accept an agreement with Israel.

Failure to recognize this principle explains the current dilemma in Northern Ireland. In December 1993 the Prime Minister, John Major, and the Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds achieved a remarkable advance. They agreed that the people of Northern Ireland have the right to determine their own future, and that London and Dublin will guard and facilitate that right. They affirmed that the decision of the people of Northern Ireland shall not be subject to coercion. They confirmed that full participation in the democratic process is open to all parties which eschew violence as a political instrument.

The Downing Street Declaration, which set out these principles, received the support of all the major parties in London and Dublin, and the approbation of Europe and America, but by winning the enthusiastic support of the SDLP and Alliance, and cautious acceptance by the Ulster Unionists, it also achieved an unprecedented level of consensus in Northern Ireland. These three parties took 70% of the vote in the

last election. All observers agreed, Sinn Fein and the DUP had been marginalized. This was the moment to capitalize on success, and build on the new Agreement.

But four months later, Sinn Fein is confident of victory, Ulster Unionists panic that their support is leaching away to Ian Paisley's Euro-campaign, and the prospects of Inter-Party Talks are now negligible. The reason lies in the failure of both governments to understand how to deal with extremists.

Let us take the matter of clarification. I recall during the 1991 Inter-Party Talks warning Peter Brooke through one of his Ministers that on no account should they capitulate to Ian Paisley's demands for a meeting with the Prime Minister to 'clarify' matters. They replied that there would be no difficulties. They had been assured that the unionists simply required this meeting for political purposes, to enable them to move forward. I told them I was not reassured, and that it would spell the end for the Talks. The result was a vintage Paisley dust-storm in Downing Street. It took two weeks for the minutes of the meeting to be agreed. By then the Talks were dead.

Now I hear Mr Adams seductive call for a direct meeting, for the purpose of clarification. Mr Adams like Dr Paisley is a fundamentalist, and so are his people. He too is a genius with words, but even were they pragmatists, neither can lead their people where they will not go.

Mr Adams asks for clarification but he refuses to clarify or even to publish the Hume/Adams Document which he says is different from the Downing Street Declaration, despite SDLP assertions to the contrary. Mr Adams refuses to clarify the questions which Mr Major must answer to put his mind at rest. Why not publish the list of questions, and let the Government give a public answer? Mr Adams tells us that after the three-day truce Republicans must go back to the drawing board, but will not clarify what is so wrong with simply ceasing violence.

Let us clarify our minds about Mr Adams position. He says that he cannot speak for the IRA, but he is only of interest to the two governments because they believe that he **does** speak for the IRA. Assume that he is telling the truth. Then is it wide of the mark to believe that Mr Adams will not suggest to the IRA that they cease their violence for good, or even for more than a derisory three days, because he suspects that his own clout is based, not on his party's elected mandate, but on its espousal of the lever of terrorism.

What then can be done? Is the Joint Declaration a failure? That depends on the two Governments. If they continue to concentrate on the response of Sinn Fein, they will strengthen both Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley. Both extremes are

uncompromising and insatiable. The door must remain open for each of their parties of course. If IRA violence is brought to an end, then Sinn Fein can participate fully in the democratic process with no more and no less rights than anyone else. If Dr Paisley chooses to re-engage in talks then he must have that right. Meantime Mr Major and Mr Reynolds should focus their attention on building on the Joint Declaration. Mr Major should produce proposals for the internal government of Northern Ireland, based on power-sharing and the protection of minority rights, and together with Mr Reynolds clear agreements must be reached on the arrangements for cooperation between Belfast and Dublin, and between London and Dublin. This process must not be done secretly as in 1985, but should involve consultation with those parties which are prepared to participate. It is now clear, beyond peradventure, that the search for the holy grail of unanimity between Mr Adams, Dr Paisley, and everyone in between, is dangerously futile, for it is a recipe for polarizing drift. The two governments must now build on the Joint Declaration, for the sake of the majority of good Northern Ireland people on both sides, and in the middle.

Footnote: If Mr Major were to take this advice and with Mr Reynolds resolve the Ulster problem with firm and judicious conviction, not blown aside by extremists of any hue, he will help Ireland, and create a future for himself. He may also come to understand how to deal with extreme views in his own party.

Dr John T Alderdice
Leader, Alliance Party.