

# **THE FUTURE TOGETHER - THE ALLIANCE AGENDA**

by

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The Alliance Leader, Dr John Alderdice, has made it a practice to deliver his Annual Conference Speech to the Party, unscripted. This is the official transcript of the 55 minute address which he delivered to the Party's 25th Anniversary Conference, at the Balmoral Conference Centre, in Belfast, on Saturday 22 April 1995.

## THE FUTURE TOGETHER - THE ALLIANCE AGENDA

It's been a tradition in the Alliance Party that the Party Leader uses the Conference Address to reaffirm the Fundamental or Founding Principles of the Party. You will know that I have digressed somewhat from this tradition. I am not particularly one for tradition. In our family, we have a tradition that on the 12th July we all retire to Glenarriff Glen, because it's a tradition in Cargan, that there aren't any traditional marches on the 12th July! So I am not a particular one for holding to tradition for its own sake. But on our 25th Birthday I think it is very appropriate to come back to those Four Founding Principles. To look at them, at what they said then and to understand, as I have always done every time I have gone back to them, how fundamental they are, how critical they were, and how it is always of value to us to look again at what they have to say.

I'll tell you one of the reasons why it is very important. I find that in the hurly burly of political life - in discussion, in debate, in talks, and especially in a political forum such as Belfast City Council where I operate most regularly - it is very easy to get caught into a political game where the important thing is to win a point, score against your opponent, get a sound bite, make sure your statement is covered. It is very easy to get caught into a game like that in such a fashion that you simply become part of the political furniture, that you have nothing different to give, there is no particular contribution which is singular, no leads which help people to think in a particular way. And I have only ever found one way of escaping from that trap, a trap to which I think all of us as politicians are vulnerable, and that is to refer back to the principles, to the things that you believe in, to the reasons why you came into the business in the first place. For us as a Party the principles we must keep coming back to are the Founding Principles. I have always had an admiration of the group that crafted those principles 25 years ago because they are so singularly important to us 25 years later.

But we are living and working in a different political context. Of that there can be no doubt. And principles are there, not be set on the shelf, not to be put in a glass frame but to be applied to whatever political context we find ourselves in. So today as we look at those principles and we reaffirm our commitment to them, we do so in a new political context, an evolving context that I believe brings real hope to us if we apply our principles.

Now the first. What is really refreshing for me is that the Party got straight to the point when it wrote the principles. It didn't flannel about the place. The very first principle starts off by saying "We support the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom and we believe that is the wish of the overwhelming majority of the people, and provocative debate about it has been at the basis of all our most fundamental troubles." Let's be very simple and clear about it. It doesn't go round and round the houses. It would have been tempting, it would have been very tempting in those early days to have tried to equivocate on the question. For a Party that wanted to bring people together, people who were divided by this fundamental question, it would have been a tempting thing to have been unclear. But then again, perhaps if it had been unclear there would have been no 25th anniversary, there would have been no Alliance Party, because people would have simply said "We don't know where you stand on the important issues." So that

fundamental principle is clear, but that is only the first part of the principle. There is always a terrible danger when you pick little bits out of context. That principle goes on to explain **why** we take the view that Northern Ireland should remain within the United Kingdom. The principle goes on to say that it is in the best social and economic interests of the people of Northern Ireland to remain within the United Kingdom. It goes further - and here is where you begin to see how the context has changed - because it says that remaining within the United Kingdom will ensure standards of democracy and social justice. That is where you begin to see the change over the last 25 years.

Twenty-five years ago people could say with some sense of pride, of British democracy, that it was of the highest standard. We had a welfare state, a health service, a caring environment, which people from outside the United Kingdom looked at with some admiration, and that people from within the United Kingdom could see with some sense of pride. But I have to say to you that the last 15 years or so in particular has damaged the faith of many people in British standards of justice, in British standards of democracy and most particularly in recent years on the standards of social justice which have been set in our community.

There again, we have to even look at the whole question of what kind of United Kingdom, because over those same 10 or 15 years there have also been changes in the way that our United Kingdom has been run. Power has been centralised at Whitehall. The Prime Minister's Office has virtually become an elected dictatorship. There is no sense in local government throughout the United Kingdom and not just in Northern Ireland, that local people have the opportunity to determine their own future, to be part of their own governance to make their own appropriate subsidiary decisions about how their community operates. That is particularly strong, not just in Northern Ireland, but in Scotland, in Wales, and in many of the English regions. So there is a fundamental question raised by our fundamental principle. What **kind** of United Kingdom do you want to belong to? In my view if over the next few years there are not radical changes made to democratise our United Kingdom - to take it away from being a Unitary Kingdom into a more United Kingdom, which recognises the diversity and difference, which gives opportunity for involvement for people at every level in their own governments - then there will be profound difficulties for the sustenance of the United Kingdom and major constitutional fractures of despair. I believe that it is critically important that the government, whatever government is in power, over the next few years seizes the opportunity to make the constitutional developments that are necessary if the United Kingdom is to regain its position of admiration, within and without, for its standards of democracy and indeed its standards of justice and social justice. So when we speak about being part of the United Kingdom we must ask ourselves what kind of United Kingdom. We must use our opportunities to change and develop that United Kingdom.

I believe we must fundamentally always ensure that in the end that it will be for the people of Northern Ireland to decide for themselves where they want to be. I have no doubt in my mind that our best social and economic welfare is to be found within the United Kingdom. No doubt at all. But I cannot say whether that will still be the case in 100 years time. I cannot say whether there will be changes in the social and economic framework of the United Kingdom, or of an increasingly United Europe, that

will change things, so that my children or my grandchildren will wish to find a different constitution or dispensation in which to govern their community. For me, what is critically important is that the decisions of that future will not be left in the hands of people in London, and certainly not left in the hands of people in Dublin. The decisions about the constitutional future of Northern Ireland must be in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland.

That is why, incidentally, I am quite happy to see changes in Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act. Why? Apart from the fact that it has been superceded in any case, it places decisions about the future of Northern Ireland in the hands of Westminster. Maybe there are some republicans who would actually be happier that it were to **stay** in the hands of Westminster, but I believe in the principle of consent. I will actually feel not a little relieved, that at the end of a long process of negotiations on which we will embark, both in the Constitutional Law of the United Kingdom and indeed in a changed Constitution in the Republic of Ireland, there will be unambiguous recognition that the future constitutional position of Northern Ireland is for the people of this Province and no one else to decide, and that is what we will be negotiating over the next few months and years.

So our first principle is clear. It is in a changing and developing context., but everyone knows precisely where we stand. When we come to the second principle it is much more fulsome. There is a great deal to it in many ways and yet you know that after 25 years I don't think there is anybody that is in any doubt where we stand. Remember that principle? It is the one that talks about the rooting out of prejudice, rringing an end to discrimination, ensuring that everyone has a fair crack of the whip, a just and liberal appreciation of everyone's views and aspirations. It goes on further. Equality in social and economic oppportunities, the highest standards of democracy at local government and right through to parliamentary level. And, of course, to ensure full and effective participation in political, governmental and public life at all levels by people from both sides of our present religious divide. An absolute commitment to equality of treatment. Much has been said about this notion of "parity of esteem". It sounds good. It sounds reasonable. I don't suppose any of us are against it. We are just not altogether sure sometimes what it means. But I **do** know what equality of treatment means and I **do** know that it hasn't always been present, and I **do** know that it frequently has not been present for members of this Party and their representatives, in comparison with the representatives of many other parties. But be that as it may. Everyone knows where this Party stands.

We want equality of treatment for everyone. We stand four square. Our primary objective above everything else, is to ensure an end of prejudice, an end of discrimination, rooting out any vestige of inequality of treatment for anyone in this community of ours. Everyone knows where we stand and everyone knows that is the direction we are firmly going in the future. That is a commitment everyone can be confident about. But let's be clear about it. We are not just talking about Protestants and Catholics, Unionists and Nationalists. Yes, those are important divisions and difficulties within our community, there is no doubt about that and there is no other Party, that brings together Protestants and Catholics, Unionists and Nationalists like this Party, so you can be quite sure it is not something we are going to forget about. But those are not the only minorities, not the only vulnerable groups that need

protected, that need their opportunities ensured. We have got to ensure that the place of women is recognised. That young people, and older people too, have respect and a place in our community. What about the sick, the vulnerable, the handicapped who can so easily be set to the side when the forces of the market are simply allowed to run riot into every corner of our society? Those communities, and racial and other minorities, all need to be protected and I want to say to you, and to them that if they want a Party that will stand up for their interests, popular or unpopular, then they know where we are. That is where we stand.

But I said to you that there is a changing context, that we must look at things like effective participation in our own governance, ensuring that people are there from every corner of the society. The context is going change quite remarkably over the next few years and it may not be an easy transition, even for some of us in the Alliance Party. Let me say a little about what I mean on that. Suppose that over the next few years we negotiate a power sharing Assembly. We would have a great deal of satisfaction about that. We have been working towards it for a very long time and we will want to ensure that things like education, health and social services, and also crucially important areas like justice, are part of the remit of an Assembly. But what is that going to mean for the whole structure that has grown up in our community over the last 25 years: of quangos, appointed organisations, of Education and Library Boards, of Health and Social Services Boards, the people who are not elected by Northern Ireland people but are put in place by the appointment of a Minister. Now of course in the early days we could understand why such a system came about. The level of discrimination and irresponsibility in local government - indeed in regional Government in Northern Ireland - meant that if this society was not to fall apart some responsible people would have to be appointed to take responsibility and indeed it was important that government in making those appointments ensured that folk from right across the community were appointed. Many of those people have served the community very well indeed. But you know there is something very important about participatory, elected democracy.

It is absolutely critical in the long run that **the people** have the opportunity to put into place those whom they choose, and if they do not serve the people well, to remove them, and replace them with others with new ideas, with different energies, with new visions of how things may be for the community. I have to say that, in my view, if we have an Assembly with responsibility for Health and Education and Agriculture and Environment and all of these important issues, then that Assembly will have to take direct responsibility for those matters. The committees that are involved in that Assembly will do the monitoring, and people who stand for election will have to stand on a manifesto and a platform, and fall on a manifesto and a platform, on the basis of the performance that they show to the people of Northern Ireland. That is the democratising of this society. It will be difficult and possibly contentious but it is crucially important for the political and social health of this community that in taking that responsibility seriously in a power sharing Assembly we remove those unnecessary tiers of bureaucracy and administration. If we do that, it will mean that we can begin to direct those resources more fully - in some cases the resources are very limited - but we will be able to direct them more fully into teaching, into direct health care, into care in the community and make sure that whatever resources we have, from local rates and from the block grant, go directly to

the community that is involved. There is a lot for us to think about there, and a lot for us to work at. I do not believe that most people have quite realised yet how institutionalised we have become in this community with a non democratic way of governing ourselves. This Party must, as ever, lead the way in thinking through to the kind of new structures and new agenda we must have in the context of a new political dispensation. There are many other issues along that line that we will have to think through, but the **principle** will always stand. Fairness, justice, rooting out of discrimination, equality of treatment and equality of esteem for everyone.

That takes us on to our third principle. In our third principle we speak about social and economic policy, and we say clearly that we will not be bound by any doctrine or dogma, socialist or conservative. Sometimes people have felt we have said too little about the economy. Perhaps that is because Northern Ireland parties have had so little control and responsibility over the economy, but if we have a new Assembly we will have to work out relationships with the rest of the United Kingdom and with the rest of this island and we are going have to take serious responsibility for the economy. I am afraid that begging bowl politics and a begging bowl economy is not going to live up to the mark. We have developed a dependency culture economically in Northern Ireland where every time there is a problem it is a fault of the government. Where, if there are not jobs, it is up to the government to provide the jobs. Where, if there is a difficulty, it is always up to somebody else to fix it. Well, that will not suffice.

If we are to take responsibility for our own affairs then we must be prepared to stand or fall in taking over that responsibility. There is a section of our community that whilst it has not involved itself in the politics of the past 25 years, has kept this community going: the business community in Northern Ireland. And I am not just talking about big business. I am talking about community businesses. I am talking about individual people. I am talking about those people who run their own taxi business and have been shot for it. Those who have been running their own milk business and have been accused of collaboration and have been murdered. Those small builders who, because they were involved in the reconstruction of security buildings, suffered with their lives. Families were intimidated. They were "legitimate targets". The whole of the business community in Northern Ireland has kept this province going. They have sustained us through difficult times. They did not panic. They did not run away. They did not leave us. They stood up to the bully boys and the intimidation and to the bombs and destruction of their businesses and their premises and although there are many to whom we owe a debt of thanks it must be said that the business community too, stood up to the bully boys. What they do not need, are the vicious and bilious attacks of an ungrateful politician like Peter Robinson who is trying to direct the business community in his political direction.

One of the areas of co-operation that is going to be necessary for us is North South economic co-operation. Now I don't want a North South economic co-operation that tells Northern Ireland businessmen and women, or Republic of Ireland businessmen and women, that they must do this, that or the other thing for political reasons. That's not the way to go. That's not going to be successful and it will be resented by business people North and South of the Border. A few months ago when there were suggestions around that the IDB and the IDA, the Investment and Industrial

Organisations North and South of the Border, should be merged as part of a North South initiative, I said very clearly that the Alliance Party would not accept such a proposal and we would fight to oppose any proposal of that kind. Why? Because we don't want North South co-operation? Nonsense. It's because the reality is that we are economic competitors. There are many ways in which we can co-operate, but it does matter to me whether investment goes into Northern Ireland or goes into the Republic. And I was very interested, that just 10 days after I said that, the Chief Executive of the IDA in the Republic said that, Northern Ireland, since the peace had come, was **the** major competitor for the Republic. That was the light in which he saw things too.

I think we have got to be clear that we do not want our business to be directed by a Nationalist political agenda. But we do not want our business to be directed by some kind of isolationist Unionist political agenda either. I heard Mr Taylor, who from all accounts would like to be the next leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, telling us what a disgrace it was that the television waves from UTV are crossing the border to such an extent that advertising revenue is now coming in from Dublin and worst of all UTV is prepared to acknowledge this and broadcast the Gerry Kelly show all over Ireland. My goodness me! I have to tell you that I have no time for that kind of political directing of business either. What the business community needs is not terrorism, or intimidation, or direction by ambitious politicians. What it needs is stability, encouragement, inward investment, co-operative ventures, and politicians, who are prepared to work constructively with the business community, and that is what our third principle commits us to.

Now we have never run away from the hard issues and the fourth principle speaks about law and order. Right back in those early days, we didn't, I suppose, as a Party, even imagine what an awful problem it was going to be. But the principle is clear, that we must **secure** and **maintain** respect for the rule of law and for the authorities that are appointed to enforce it. We must secure and maintain that respect. Securing that respect, inspiring a sense of allegiance. That puts an awesome responsibility on those who are elected as politicians and those who are appointed to be involved in policing and security matters. But it also put a real responsibility on the community as a whole, to support those who take great risks. And there are many who have taken very great risks. And I think it is only right for us that on this 25th anniversary to remember all of those who have served in the security services. Some of them have given their lives. Many of them have risked themselves and their families, and there are a considerable number who are injured, maimed, damaged physically and emotionally, and to whom we all owe a debt of gratitude. This Party has never been ashamed to say that we support and are grateful to those who have taken risks to do what is right and to protect the whole community without fear or favour from those who want to wreck, kill or destroy. We still support them.

Of course, there are those who are calling to disband the police. Well this Party will not accept disbanding the police. Expanding, maybe, the range of people involved in the police. That we welcome. We are glad to see an increasing number of Catholics applications to join the police. We welcome those who are prepared to take the initiative, and those who are preparing the ground to make sure that the police are more and more welcoming for people from every strand in our community, every

strata in our community. But, if we don't want the disbanding of the police, there is another bunch that I would like disbanded and they are the paramilitary organisation on both sides. And that is where we want the pressure for disbanding to start being applied, and I call today, and I know I have your full backing in doing so, for a disbanding of the IRA, the INLA, the UVF and the UDA and for every other sorry organisation that has wreaked havoc and destruction and misery on this community for the whole of the last 25 years. Disband them, and disband them now.

Let's not have some silly nonsense about suggesting that some of these paramilitary organisations should be put on the same level as the Irish Army or the Garda on the one hand or the British Army or the RUC on the other. It just isn't so. It just won't wash, and nobody, but nobody, with any wit could take it seriously.

Now those are our principles and as you can see when we look at them and think through them and apply them to the new political context in which we find ourselves now, they have something important and fresh to say. They are not just a set of principles, they point us to an Alliance Agenda. Bringing peace is only part of what we are about, it is only the creating of a context where we can build that new society. You will remember that I mentioned the New Ulster Movement, that Oliver Napier and so many of his colleagues brought together in 1969. What was that about? It was about creating a new Northern Ireland, where everybody had an opportunity. A Northern Ireland where every child felt welcomed and valued. Where everyone was at home and felt at home in their own place. But then the violence intervened, and as Jim Hendron was saying last night in that excellent speech, those were the lost years. The years of violence where it was so difficult for people to think rationally about what was going on. You know what it was like. All of us have been involved in arguments - maybe some of us even in fist fights, a long time ago - and you know what it is like. You get into the argument over perhaps some point of principle, but then once the fighting starts, the cause, the reason for the dispute goes out the window, and the only thing that is important, is to win, to beat the other fellow. That is all that is important any more, and it doesn't matter what the cost is, and the more furious the fight the less you consider the cost. Maybe the cost is the complete destruction and loss of an important friendship. But it doesn't matter, you have got to win, got to beat the other fellow. That is all that is important any more. You know, that is what happened in Northern Ireland. So many of the things that were around as causes in the 1960's, and there were many of them, so many of them have gone. Many of the changes have removed difficulties over housing, over who had the vote, over who had the control of policing. So many of those things have changed. They haven't all been resolved. But had Northern Ireland been, as it is now, 25 years ago, would there have been the same violence? I don't know for sure. Northern Ireland has changed. But once the violence starts, the thinking stops. It's almost impossible to get rational reflection, when the fighting is going on. And that is one of the reasons that things have been so difficult for us. To persuade people to adopt the kind of tolerant, reasonable, constructive, equitable agenda that has been the Alliance Party's Agenda for 25 years.

It is almost as though this great hunk of time has been taken out of all our lives. This 25 years space has been removed from the people of Northern Ireland. Like some kind of horrible alcoholic binge. No constructive thought, no constructive reflection,



no opportunity for our people to join together to build a new future. But now the campaign of violence appears to have stopped. Of course, it is possible that they could start again, although I have to say, for my own part, and not least after my discussions with - in the current parlance - "those who are close to the thinking of the paramilitary organisations", I don't believe a restarting of the violence is really on the agenda of the leadership of the Republican and Loyalist organisations. That gives us a tremendous opportunity. An opportunity that we have never, ever had before. It has been said so many times this weekend, but it bears repeating. This is the first conference that we have held without an active terrorist campaign out there on the streets. This is a tremendous opportunity for the Alliance Party, for all of those who want to build a new society in Northern Ireland, an unprecedented opportunity. That is why I am so pleased to see not only so many young people coming forward into the Party, many of whom weren't born when the Party was founded, but many other people who were around when the Party was founded. Maybe they found themselves overcome at times with despair over the recklessness and destruction on our streets. They have come back into things again with a new vigour and a new determination and a new inspiration and with the Principles that got the New Ulster Movement and then the Alliance Party under way, because they sense that something is happening - that there is a real chance, a real opportunity, a real hope.

Hope has often been difficult and sometimes in short supply, but it is tremendously important. I remember Bernard Levin introducing and interviewing the Dalai Lama in 1988 - a gracious, thoughtful, courteous man - and he said that "without hope, even the simple things, the easy things fail, but with hope and with tireless effort and determination and will, even the most difficult things can happen." That is what this Party has had. Not just hope, but tireless effort and determination and will, to make the difficult things happen. There are dangers on the way. Let us not be under any illusions about it. There are many people in the Unionist community who still don't realise that there have to be changes. I have to say to them, for goodness sake, look to the history of which you speak so much. What has happened in the last 25 and 30 years. Every time you said 'NO' to a new initiative, the next one that has come along has been even less in your interest than anything that went before. What kind of political leadership is it that you have thrown up over those years, that has moved you from the being the Party in sole government for generations to a position that your Lord Mayor cannot even get a street light fixed without referring to a Civil Servant who is not under his control.

Look to the reality of what has happened to you, at the sense of self esteem and pride that some people in the Unionist community once had in themselves, and no longer really feel. People in the Unionist community know that the emotional bonds between the rest of the United Kingdom and the Unionist people have gone. Those bonds died with many of those of who served in the forces in the last World War and then went to Westminster. John Biggs Davidson, Ivor Stanbrook, Ian Gow and so on, who served in Westminster and still felt those bonds from the last war. That war was 50 years ago. They are gone. There is no longer that sense, and I say to Unionist people, if you allow your leaders to wreck the Framework Process, I don't say agree with the Framework Document, because I disagree with some of the Framework Document, but I am prepared to talk about it. But if you allow them to wreck the **process** then what will happen? I will tell you.

The Anglo Irish Agreement - in case it has escaped your notice - is 10 years old this November and it is not going to wither away. But what will happen if there is no power sharing agreed Assembly, none of the structures that we want to negotiate, none of those better things which are prefigured in the Framework Documents. If we don't achieve those, I will tell you what will happen. Over the next few years the British and Irish Governments will appoint their own North South quangos, to deal with tourism and agriculture and all of those other issues. They make it very clear that is what is going to happen. History tells us that is what is going to happen. Most ordinary sane people in Northern Ireland know that that is going to happen and it isn't in any of our interests to slide into the perpetual suspended animation of de facto joint authority. Not in the interests of this island as a whole. We only have a sense of self esteem when we fully participate in our own governance. We have got to find a way in which we take control of our own affairs and it will not happen by sitting around and complaining in Orange Halls and Unionist Clubs. It won't happen without stretching out the hand to those on the other side of the community.

And I say to Nationalists, that there are some of you I know, who could hear what I have just said and find a self satisfied and smug smile crossing your face, feeling that "After all, they had it coming". I tell you this. It is not in **your** interests either to slide towards de facto joint authority with some sort of quangoisation of Northern Ireland. You will not be able to represent your own views as Northern Nationalists. You will always be running on the coat-tails of a Southern Government in order to have your say. That is no way to build self esteem and confidence in the Northern Nationalist community either. None of us can gain. All of us will lose, if we let ourselves drift forward instead of taking control of our own destiny and making for ourselves a place of which we can be proud. Waken up Northern Ireland on both sides of the community. It's time for us to take control of our own affairs, and now that the end of the violence has come, the opportunity is unprecedented and we must grasp it.

You know, in all of that, there is a tremendous task of leadership. As you look around the political spectrum and try to find some leadership within our community, there aren't very many options, if we are talking about a community that comes **together**, where **everyone** feels at home in his own place. Do you really believe that such a person can be found in the ranks of the DUP? ..... Is there anyone who can really persuade a Newtownards Road Protestant that Gerry Adams is the best Prime Minister Northern Ireland could have?..... We all know that there is no hope on the extremes for a coming together of our people. But then there are some within the Unionist Party who say "Now is the time to open our doors to Catholics. There are voices within the Unionist Party, and within that part of the community, that appeal to Unionism to open its doors and bring in others from another religious section of the community. Well, I am glad to hear that there is an appreciation that Northern Ireland can only survive if we are all together. But I'll tell you this. Any Protestant Unionist who thinks that a Catholic or a Nationalist would feel at home in a Unionist meeting in an Orange Hall really hasn't even begun to understand the problems they are going to face in trying to reach an accommodation in this community. They haven't even begun to understand it, and I say it with a degree of sadness, that there is not even the slightest possibility that a sectional Party like the Ulster Unionist Party is ever going to be able to do more than simply represent the views of that section of the

community. That is a respectable position but it is also a sectional position and it can never be anything else.

Let me speak to you about the SDLP. I am sure that there are those within the SDLP who would aspire to a Party which represented the people across the community divide and they will certainly find a few Protestants, mostly from outside Northern Ireland, who are prepared and willing to participate in what is a Nationalist Party, which has stood out against violence, which has worked hard for the economy, represented their constituency very well indeed, but nevertheless is a Nationalist Party. If they seriously think that they can welcome into that particular Party significant members of the Protestant community, they haven't begun to understand the hurdles they are going to have to overcome to reach an understanding. Let me give you an example.

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At the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation a few weeks ago, at the height of the debate over the use of the National Anthem at Queen's University, (a debate which was largely brought about by Alex Attwood, of the SDLP) Seamus Mallon, the Deputy Leader of that Party, spoke out against removing the Soldiers Song from sporting events and occasions in the Republic because he said "You have no idea how emotional I feel whenever it is played." I respect that. I understand that. But does he not appreciate the emotional feeling that there is for Unionists when playing The Queen is set aside at The **Queen's** University. No real appreciation at all, I fear, and that is why I have to say to you, and it will be no surprise to anyone, that there isn't any other Party that can provide Leadership to this community. I was reading recently, and I don't do it as often as I should, but I was reading some back issues of the Belfast Newsletter. Now it's a very old, and, in its own way, a distinguished newspaper, but I don't often quote from it. Now that's not because of its political correspondent, because Mervyn Pauley is one of the longest serving and most distinguished of our political correspondents. He may have been doing it for longer than the Alliance Party has been around for all that I know! But on May 8 1969, this is what the editorial of the Newsletter said. It said, "We have a serious situation. We need the best brains of Northern Ireland, (they said the Government of Northern Ireland - there still was one then -) and of Britain and **not excluding** the South of Ireland to work jointly and with determination". Why? Because, it said, "If we don't find a way forward then we face the prospect of a quarter of a century when this part of the United Kingdom will be a cockpit of tension, violence and hatred." That's what the Newsletter said. There are no unexpected Rwandas, no unpredicted Bosnias. What happened in Northern Ireland was plain to see for anyone that wanted to see it. You know what the Newsletter went on to say. It went on to say this "As ever the truth is that here is a middle way and it is plain to see for anyone who wants to". Well I say to the Newsletter, and to every other paper, and to the people of Northern Ireland, the truth as ever is a middle way, and it is plain to see for anyone who wants to look for it. It's sitting here in this Conference Hall. It's spread throughout the whole of Northern Ireland. It's courageous, determined, gutsy. After 25 years, its Principles are burnished as bright as ever. Its standard is unfurled. Its determination is clear. Its vision is undiminished. It's the Alliance Party.

There are many people who have voted Alliance, many people who have never voted Alliance, and you know they are glad we are here. But it is up to you and me, and all

our workers throughout Northern Ireland, to make sure that next year, and the year after, and the year after that, we can be glad that **they** are here. Because **this** is the Party which is The Future Together for the people of Northern Ireland.

Thank you very much indeed Mr President for your very kind welcome. It is really nice to be here for our 25th Birthday and not only see a lot of young faces and other faces but also a lot of friends and a lot of guests. You are very, very welcome indeed.

Of course we have a number of our Liberal colleagues. We had quite a large bunch of them over here earlier in the year when Liberal International for the very first time since it was founded in 1947, came to Ireland, and we had lots of folks here at that time. We were most delighted again that last evening we had Richard Holmes following us, and there are quite a number of Liberal Democrats here today. We are also very pleased indeed to have our sister Party from the Republic of Ireland: the Party leader from the Progressive Democrats, Mary Harney, and a number of her colleagues. We are delighted to see you and you are very very welcome. We are also very pleased to see a number of those who we have begun to know as our colleagues in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin. We have got to know some of them very well as we are down there nearly every Friday, and sometimes other days of the week as well. We have made some very firm friends both during the meetings and also before and after them. I see Frank O'Reilly there and he knows a lot about both during and after the meetings. You are all very welcome indeed, particularly the O'Reillys, the Fennell, the Fennell and of course from the Progressive Democrats, but we have had speeches from some of the other sides.

I would also like to give a particular welcome to the British Labour Party Spokesman in Northern Ireland. I think that over the 25 years of the Party we have not had a Labour Spokesman actually come to our Party Conference and you are very welcome indeed, Mr Margate Mowbray. And Mow going to be bringing us greetings a little bit later on.

There are some folks of course who are not going to be with us and there many who have served the Party well over the 25 years who are not able to be here. We could mention a number but there are three who come very quickly to my mind. Not least because of the enormous contribution they made to the Party. Not least too because this is actually the first Party Conference at which some of them it alive to be with us. I am thinking particularly about Bertie McCannell, Tom Gernley and Phelim O'Neill. They took in the early days in Stormont, when we had no elected MP's, and there wasn't an election to give us that opportunity, those three men left their political backgrounds. Tom Gernley a Nationalist, Phelim O'Neill a very distinguished Unionist, and Bertie McCannell a liberal and moderately minded man from North Down. They left their backgrounds, with very considerable courage indeed, and formed the first Alliance Parliamentary Party. Over the years they gave tremendous support and even in later years we were always conscious of their backing and support. It was with particular sadness that we heard last year that Phelim O'Neill, the last of the three of them, had passed away. Phelim, of course, was the first Party Leader of the Alliance Party. It is sad that he is not with us. But it is a very great pleasure that, as a personal guest, we welcome Hugh O'Neill, the new Lord Rathfriland. We are very delighted to have you with us. We wish you all the very best.

## APPENDIX

### INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME TO GUESTS

Thank you very much indeed Mr President for your very kind welcome. It is really nice to be here for our 25th Birthday and not only see a lot of young faces and older faces but also a lot of friends and a lot of guests. You are very, very welcome indeed.

Of course we have a number of our Liberal colleagues. We had quite a large bunch of them over here earlier in the year when Liberal International for the very first time since it was founded in 1947, came to Ireland, and we had lots of folks here at that time. We were also delighted again that last evening we had Richard Holme addressing us, and there are quite a number of Liberal Democrats here today. We are also very pleased indeed to have our sister Party from the Republic of Ireland: the Party Leader from the Progressive Democrats, Mary Harney, and a number of her colleagues. We are delighted to see you and you are very very welcome. We are also very pleased to see a number of those who we have begun to know as our colleagues in the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin. We have got to know some of them very well, as we are down there nearly every Friday, and sometimes other days of the week as well. We have made some very firm friends both during the meetings and also before and after them. I see Frank O'Kelly there and he knows a lot about both during and after the meetings! You are all very welcome indeed, particularly our friends from Fine Gael, Fianna Fail and of course from the Progressive Democrats, and we have had apologies from some of the other folks.

I would also like to give a particular welcome to the British Labour Party Spokesman on Northern Ireland. I think that over the 25 years of the Party we have not had a Labour Spokesman actually come to our Party Conference and you are very welcome indeed, Dr Marjorie Mowlam. And Mo's going to be bringing us greetings a little bit later on.

There are some folks of course who are not going to be with us and there many who have served the Party well over the 25 years who are not able to be here. We could mention a number but there are three who come very quickly to my mind. Not least because of the enormous contribution they made to the Party. Not least too because this is actually the first Party Conference at which none of them is alive to be with us. I am thinking particularly about Bertie McConnell, Tom Gormley and Phelim O'Neill. Way back in the early days in Stormont, when we had no elected MP's, and there wasn't an election to give us that opportunity, those three men left their political backgrounds: Tom Gormley a Nationalist, Phelim O'Neill a very distinguished Unionist, and Bertie McConnell a liberal and moderately minded man from North Down. They left their backgrounds, with very considerable courage indeed, and formed the first Alliance Parliamentary Party. Over the years they gave tremendous support and even in later years we were always conscious of their backing and support. It was with particular sadness that we heard last year that Phelim O'Neill, the last of the three of them, had passed away. Phelim, of course, was the first Party Leader of the Alliance Party. It is sad that he is not with us. But it is a very great pleasure that, as a personal guest, we welcome Hugh O'Neill, the new Lord Rathcavan. We are very delighted to have you with us. We wish you all the very best

in the new responsibilities you are taking up in the Upper House.

Of course there are a number of our other Leaders here too. There is John Cushnahan. John is a remarkable politician. I don't know whether it has anything to do with his initials being JC, that he was able to produce such a remarkable political resurrection when it came to standing in Munster, but it shows the enormous political calibre of the man that not only was he able to lead this Party through some of the most difficult and contentious periods of local history, but he was then able to go on and become an elected representative of the European Parliament for Munster. We watch that progress with great satisfaction and great pleasure, because we know that whatever Party he is now a member of, and we have many friends in that Party, he is also one of us and he is very welcome at any Party gathering, John it is very good to see you.

All of these folk I have been happy to welcome but there is one other man who needs to be spoken of, and it would be utter impertinence of me to **welcome** him. Oliver Napier wasn't just a Leader of this Party, he didn't just take us through some of the most striking periods of Northern Ireland's history. He worked with others, but I think all of them will agree with me that it was **he** who founded the New Ulster Movement. **He** founded the Alliance Party. And I have just one more request of you Oliver. There is a by-election coming up. And I really would rather like you to found the Alliance Party's Westminster Parliamentary Party..... because I intend to join you there after the next general election.

Dr John Alderdice  
Alliance Party Leader