

copy

Make it Work **- for All of Us**

The Alliance Party Election Manifesto, May 1996

CC :
PST, PSS, S/S Ó hUiginn,
Counsellors A-I, Section,
Messrs Teahon, Donlon &
Dalton, Ambassadors
London & Washington,
Joint Secretary

Alliance is committed to:

- ◆ **A regional power-sharing government for Northern Ireland**
- ◆ **A Bill of Rights, to protect every individual citizen and prevent discrimination**
- ◆ **A constructive and co-operative North-South relationship**
- ◆ **The right of the people of Northern Ireland to decide their own future, with no change in the constitutional position without their consent**

There is no other fair and realistic deal.

Why Elections?

After the ceasefires in 1994, we extended our discussions with the British and Irish Governments, and the other constitutional parties, to include talks with Sinn Fein and the Loyalist parties who were associated with the terrorist organisations. Our purpose was to try to find a way in which we could help to build a stable and lasting peace, through All-Party Talks.

As a result of these discussions, we came to the conclusion that there was no prospect of getting the Unionist parties into early Talks which also involved the republican movement, without an election.

It was also clear to us that a long delay in getting Talks started would lead to a fracturing of the peace process. Alliance did not need an election to continue its talks with all the parties, but we could clearly see that without an election, there would not be All-Party Talks involving all the parties.

As a result of these deliberations, in November last year Alliance published a document entitled "Let the People Have Their Say". In this paper we proposed elections as a means of initiating an inclusive talks process. Those proposals were well constructed, and gave a real prospect of All-Party Talks. Importantly, they also opened the door to the community to have its say, not only through the election of negotiators, but also by making direct representations to the elected body.

There have been unnecessary and frustrating delays caused by the opposition of some parties to our election proposals. The electoral system devised by the government also leaves much to be desired. Many commentators increasingly recognise that our original proposals would have produced a much more rational and workable system. Nevertheless the elections on May 30th still give us all an opportunity to build an inclusive peace process, involving the whole community. The decisions taken by the voters, by those they elect to the Forum and, most importantly, by the negotiators in the All-Party Talks, will affect the kind of society we live in, for years and possibly generations to come.

This process, through the Forum and the All-Party Talks, offers the prospect of involving the people of Northern Ireland in a genuinely inclusive and wide-ranging process which can address all the fundamental issues, and, if approached with genuine commitment, can reach real agreement. It offers possibly the last chance for us to reach a settlement ourselves, for many years to come. Failure in this present process will in all probability lead to the two Governments making such arrangements as they see fit for the future of Northern Ireland. This is our opportunity, as the people of Northern Ireland, to have our say in deciding our own future. If we are to succeed, then all parties must enter the Forum and the All-Party Talks, willing, and indeed determined, to make the compromises which will be needed if we are to reach an honourable and lasting settlement. It is also crucial that the wider community is engaged with, and feels ownership of, the process.

report they recognised the concern that "the paramilitaries will use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the negotiations, or to change any aspect of the substance of negotiations with which they disagree." The Commission recommended that all parties to any negotiations should express their "total and absolute commitment" to six principles of democracy and non-violence.

The Canary Wharf bombing, and the continuing threat and reality of terrorist violence, serves to emphasise how important it is that all parties to the negotiations fully accept the Mitchell Principles. It is important that the talks process be as inclusive as possible, and it is preferable that Sinn Féin be part of that process. But it is even more important that the Talks be free of coercion or threat. A genuine talks process can only develop if all those taking part share a fundamental commitment to the pursuit of agreement by democratic and peaceful means only. If Sinn Féin is to play a part in the talks process, there must be a complete renunciation of the IRA ceasefire and Sinn Féin, the Loyalists, and all the other parties to the Talks must fully accept the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the Mitchell Report.

Participation

The Talks will get nowhere if any party to them reserves the right to use violence, to take by force what it cannot achieve by argument. The principal obstacle to All-Party Talks in recent times has been the failure of Sinn Fein and the IRA to make a clear and irrevocable commitment to democracy, and to deal with the decommissioning of arms. Those issues have if anything been made even more pressing by the IRA's return to a bombing campaign in February of this year.

In response to the proposals of Alliance and others on the question of the decommissioning of terrorist arms, the two governments set up the Mitchell Commission last November. This international panel of experts consulted widely before publishing their report on 22 January this year. In their report they recognised the concern that *"the paramilitaries will use force, or threaten to use force, to influence the negotiations, or to change any aspect of the outcome of negotiations with which they disagree."* The Commission recommended that all parties to any negotiations should express their *"total and absolute commitment"* to six principles of democracy and non-violence.

The Canary Wharf bombing, and the continuing threat and reality of terrorist violence, serves to emphasise how important it is that all parties to the negotiations fully accept the Mitchell Principles. It is important that the talks process be as inclusive as possible, and it is preferable that Sinn Fein be part of that process. But it is even more important that the Talks be free of coercion or threat. A genuine talks process can only develop if all those taking part share a fundamental commitment to the pursuit of agreement by democratic and peaceful means only. If Sinn Fein is to play a part in the talks process, there must be a complete restoration of the IRA ceasefire and Sinn Fein, the Loyalists, and all the other parties to the Talks must fully accept the principles of democracy and non-violence set out in the Mitchell Report.

Decommissioning

Given the divergent positions of the various parties on the issue of the decommissioning of terrorist arms, there is a real danger that the Talks, so painfully constructed over such a long time, could not only begin, but also grind to a halt, on June 10th. For this reason Alliance has made proposals to the British and Irish Governments, and to the other parties, about how we might address this crucial problem.

We have proposed, in line with the Mitchell Commission Report, that an International Body be established with the necessary expertise and legal framework, to oversee the decommissioning process. In our published submission to the Mitchell Commission, we gave considerable detail of how this might work.

This International Body would then work in parallel with the All-Party Talks. There **must** be full decommissioning, and there **must** be a political settlement. But reaching these two necessary ends may be best pursued along the twin tracks which have already served us reasonably well over the last six months.

The Forum

The new Forum has an important part to play in the wider process. It will provide an unprecedented opportunity for non party political organisations and individuals to contribute to the process by making presentations and engaging in direct dialogue with the parties. It is vital that the wider community in Northern Ireland is fully involved in the process. Many groups and individuals have played a positive role in keeping this society together during the worst of times, and have the capacity to make a real contribution to shaping a new agreement.

The Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin offers a practical example of how such a body can involve churches, community groups, business organisations, trade unions, women's groups, academics and others in a positive and constructive way.

The All-Party Talks

The All-Party Talks will have to address the three sets of relationships - within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Some limited progress was made in the Talks in 1991/92. We will have to pick up the threads and construct an honourable settlement, which is broadly acceptable, recognises the diversity of our society, respects all of our traditions and gives the people of Northern Ireland real influence over their own affairs and real responsibility for their own future.

Every party has a duty to spell out clearly what future it envisages for the people of Northern Ireland. Alliance has published elsewhere, in detail, the structural requirements which we believe will best serve the needs of our divided people. We insist that others are prepared for a degree of flexibility in their approach, and in turn we are prepared to be flexible ourselves. However, there are certain principles to which we are unreservedly committed and from which we are not prepared to be deflected.

alliance is committed to:

A Regional Power-sharing Government for Northern Ireland

In a divided society like Northern Ireland, it is essential to ensure that representatives of all sections of our people have the opportunity to work together, at every level of government. Partnership in government, based on party strength in an elected Assembly, is not only the right framework for our community representatives to work together, it is also the only proposal which has sustained substantial support across the divisions in our society throughout the last twenty-five difficult years. Co-operation together in areas such as Agriculture, Health and Social Services, the Environment, the Economy, Education and indeed Policing, is the best way to build a partnership and a sustainable and lasting peace.

A Bill of Rights, to protect every individual citizen and prevent discrimination

Whilst every community needs a legal structure for the preservation of individual rights, it is particularly vital in a divided society like Northern Ireland, where there is a history of discrimination and disadvantage. Alliance will insist on the incorporation of a Bill of Rights and a series of other measures to give confidence to all citizens that their rights will be protected.

A constructive and co-operative North-South relationship

North-South co-operation is important for both practical and political reasons. On a small island like Ireland, it simply does not make sense to have so little co-operation on matters of mutual interest. The environment, transport infrastructure, tourism, and, as we have recently seen, animal health, are just a few of the sectors where better co-operation could be in all our interests. It is also true that there are areas where we are in competition with each other, and we should recognise that fact.

A constructive and cooperative North-South relationship does **not** mean a large institution on the border, running our affairs. It could mean Ministers from North and South meeting with each other, and, in so far as they could reach agreement on areas of common interest, working constructively together. Such democratic accountability ensures that everyone's interests are protected. . .

No less important for Nationalists, North/South co-operation gives some recognition of their aspiration to work towards a United Ireland, and some expression of their all-Ireland identity.

The right of the people of Northern Ireland to decide their own future, with no change in the constitutional position without their consent

In 1988 we published a very detailed and imaginative set of proposals which we entitled "Governing with Consent". That Principle of Consent, which insists that the constitutional future of Northern Ireland is a matter to be decided by the people here, has always been a fundamental principle for Alliance. It remains so, and we are encouraged that it has been so fully endorsed in the Downing Street Declaration, the Framework Documents, and most recently in the Draft Report of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation. It is the recognition and respecting of this principle which makes the achievement of a settlement in Ireland a realistic prospect.

There is another side to this principle, and it is the consent of the minority to the way in which Northern Ireland is governed. This other dimension of consent is also an essential feature. Dealing with this will amongst other things involve reaching agreement to ensure that those with responsibility for the law and its administration, receive the respect without which no society can give its citizens a sense of safety and security.

Conclusion:

Traditional sectarian politics in Northern Ireland, based on parties which speak for only one section of the community, has failed our people. Parties set up as the guardians of just one section of the community have often failed the very people and interests they claim to protect. Unionist inflexibility, failure of imagination, and lack of generosity have weakened the Union, not strengthened it. IRA violence has set back the cause of a United Ireland and deepened the fears which stand in the way of the nationalist goal. Neither Nationalists nor Unionists have delivered the prosperity, stability and peace that our people so much want and deserve.

We have all suffered a twenty-five year nightmare. Homes have been destroyed. Jobs, careers and businesses have been wrecked. For those who have been maimed, or have lost loved ones, and especially for those whose family members have been taken away by violence without even the possibility of a funeral, the nightmare continues.

We live at the junction between fear of betraying the past, and fear of betraying the future. It is a watershed. The opportunity exists - with hard work, courage and willingness to compromise - to step out into a new future, and to secure an agreement broadly acceptable to all. There remains the risk that the future could be jeopardised by intransigence, rigidity, and lack of imagination. The vast majority of people in Northern Ireland, and indeed across these islands, do not want a return to violence, or the failed old politics of the past. People want the process to succeed, and the peace to become permanent. But if we are to have a settlement, the people must vote for it. On 30th May they will have that chance.

Alliance is determined to make the process work - for all of us.