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Mr Owen Reidy
Irish Congress of Trade Unions
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Our Ref: Reidy O/170227-pmc

Date: 27 February 2017

Dear Mr Reidy

Thank you for your letter dated 16th February relating to the election.

Before I answer the questions, I want to place on record my appreciation for the work the work that NIC-ICTU has done since 1998. This relates not just to your work representing members on a range of issues but to your support for sustainable, stable governance in Northern Ireland. At times when it has been politically expedient for others to criticise the institutions themselves, NIC-ICTU's support for power-sharing devolved governance has been helpful.

In relation to your first question, Alliance has been a long-standing supporter of practice of power sharing as envisaged and outlined in the Good Friday Agreement. Whilst we have advocated for reforms in these institutions, particularly around the petition of concern and the process of sectarian designations, we still believe that an inclusive and respectful power-sharing model would be best for the institutions in Northern Ireland.

In relation to your second question, Alliance did not support UK withdrawal from the European Union and, in the event that it happens, would like to see some form of Special Status for Northern Ireland. We especially would like to see a continuation of EU protections around employment rights, environmental law and consumer protection. Our recent paper, which I have enclosed, outlines how we feel this special status could operate. We remain committed to protecting employment rights in Northern Ireland.

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In relation to your third question, we supported the mitigations for the bedroom tax. We opposed both sets of welfare legislation by the UK Government. When in Westminster, I voted against the wave of legislation that included the bedroom tax. However, the principle of parity and the much greater size of the welfare bill in Northern Ireland makes it unlikely that we could refuse to implement much of this agenda in Northern Ireland without a significant financial penalty which would require us to make deep cuts to public services. At the same time, I do support a flexibility in implementation where our own circumstances makes this possible.

In relation to your fourth question, we believe that the publication by the UK Prime Minister, Theresa May MP, of a fresh industrial strategy for England alongside the ongoing absence of a fresh economic strategy in Northern Ireland, and the poor prospects of one now being produced given the political context is worrying. We would stress the importance of further investing in skills and infrastructure. Alliance is committed to creating a robust inter-departmental economic strategy which focuses on job creation and growth.

In relation to your fifth question, Alliance believes that social housing has always been an essential part of our housing infrastructure and is a key public service. We will further improve the provision of social housing by:

Ensuring any proposed reforms to social housing provision do not jeopardise fairness, quality or diminish equality of access.

Urgently seeking a derogation from proposed rule changes to housing association reclassification.

Working with NIHE and housing associations to identify new land for housing development.

Continuing to provide revenue funding to support sheltered and supported accommodation.

Providing Housing Associations with the flexibility needed to provide community infrastructure in larger social housing developments.

Working towards a situation where no families with young children are housed in high-rise social housing.

Developing a positive public understanding of the role of social housing.

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In relation to your sixth question, we in Northern Ireland have so far relied on the Human Rights Act, an essential component of the Good Friday Agreement, as a guarantor of our rights and believe attempts to repeal it will hold us back. We will oppose any proposed repeal of the Human Rights Act. Whilst Alliance is open to a strong Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, we believe that significant intellectual and political hurdles must be overcome to provide compelling arguments as to why Northern Ireland requires a fundamentally different human rights regime to other, especially neighbouring, jurisdictions.

Best Regards,



Naomi Long

East Belfast Alliance Assembly Candidate

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