

Dear Rt Hon Peter Robinson,

Excuse this intrusion. Yet I feel I must write to you: firstly to express sympathy with your predicament, and secondly to support and encourage you in what you are doing.

Lesser men have taken advantage of what they see as the popular mood, to dwell on your discomfiture for their own advantage. I could mention names, but that is not my purpose. I do not know you, but I have seen you appear in public over past days and have been most impressed with your composure and dignity. I hope that the character you have demonstrated in the face of acute personal difficulty can also be deployed in pursuing the cause of peace in Northern Ireland, the north of Ireland, the Province, the Island of Ireland and the United Kingdom (whichever view one takes of the place where you live). I read some of your history and see that twenty years ago you were viscerally opposed to the forces ranged against Unionism. Yet now you have found the courage to sit down with Martin McGuinness and talk peace. Congratulations. I do hope your discussions about the current obstacle to devolution (policing) will be fruitful, leading to further easing of tension and eventually to prosperity for all the peoples in your land.

I wrote to Martin McGuinness in similar vein when he took on the role of education minister: he who had been a fighter too, who similarly had made the difficult journey forward to political dialogue.

So I wish you both well in all you hope for your people.

As an aside, perhaps I might add that I cannot understand why it should concern anyone in authority that you did or did not officially disclose your wife's difficulties. These days surely individual adults, even if married to each other, ought to be regarded as separate, each with his own responsibilities. That said I wish you, your wife and your family well in the coming weeks and months.

Yours sincerely,

John Dexter