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Confidential

Conversation with the General Secretary OUP on 23 April

1. The following are the main points to emerge from a discussion with Mr. Norman Hutton, General Secretary, OUP:

(a) Prior initiative

Mr. Hutton reiterated the OUP position that the initiative was unacceptable because of the weighted majority element plus the requirement for cross-community support. The acknowledgement contained in the White Paper of the two identities and the Anglo-Irish process is also completely rejected by the OUP and seen as "inappropriate" to a proposal to devolve government to Northern Ireland. The OUP could accept the development of relations between the two Governments but not with the purpose of questioning or breaking down the Union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. The OUP would vigorously oppose the parliamentary tier and would fight the election on a platform of proper (i.e. majority rule) devolved government and no Irish dimension of any kind. The OUP does not expect the initiative to get beyond stage one involving the setting up of committees and the preparation of a report on a form of devolved government which reflects hardline Unionist attitudes. Mr. Hutton felt that the Secretary of State and his successor might regret a local forum which formed a basis for repeated criticism of his policies over a range of economic and political issues. The "hardline" being adopted by the Irish Government was seen by Mr. Hutton as helpful to both the OUP and DUP in the proposed election. The main Unionist parties will use the fear of Southern influence and attitudes to bolster up support from their own community;

(b) Outcome of election

Mr. Hutton was confident that the OUP and DUP would gain in the region of 23/4 seats each with circumstances at the time giving one or other party a one or two seat margin. In such a tightly fought battle between the two main Unionist

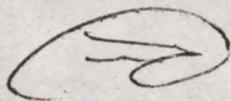
parties no concession would be made to minority interests and a deadlocked Assembly was the only outcome under the guidelines laid down by the Secretary of State. He thought that the Alliance Party would get up to 8 seats and the SDLP in the region of 16;

(c) The OUP is doing its utmost to mobilise opposition to the initiative as indicated by Mr. William Ross's resignation from the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations. The OUP is obtaining a lot of support from right-wing backbench Conservatives although the OUP does not seriously expect the initiative to fail in Parliament if the present Government survives. Mr. Hutton who is closely aligned with the Molyneaux element in the OUP hopes that the failure of the initiative will bring about greater integration combined with increased powers for local government perhaps on the lines of the Strathclyde Regional Council;

(d) Mr. Hutton expressed some apprehension over the next Summit meeting between the Irish and British Prime Ministers. Such a Summit meeting will he felt raise the temperature in Northern Ireland but Mr. Hutton's apprehension seemed to be related more to the fact that Paisley would utilise it to increase his support in the majority community at the expense of the OUP. Mr. Hutton repeated the view which is expressed in private by other Official Unionist politicians that they have no objection to cooperation on economic and social issues between the two governments but strongly oppose the institutionalisation of this relationship with overtones which threaten the Union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland;

(e) Mr. Hutton confirmed an earlier indication which I received that James Molyneaux is unlikely to contest the Assembly election while Martin Smyth and Harold McCusker will contest the election. Mr. Hutton envisaged Martin Smyth emerging from this situation as OUP leader in the Assembly and probably as the eventual successor to James Molyneaux. I had tried to arrange a meeting with Martin Smyth but due to Westminster and constituency pressures it was not possible for him

to see me. He invited me to call on him at a mutually convenient time next month.



Martin Burke
27 April 1982

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