

STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

NOTE OF DISCUSSIONS REFERRED TO IN EXMIN 74/1/1 AND 74/1/4

1. The Chief Minister said that views were divided as to whether the result of the vote at Friday's meeting of the Unionist Council accurately expressed Unionist opinion in the country. There was however no doubt that there was great concern among Unionists about the Council of Ireland. He therefore felt that it was right to resign although the Standing Committee might well have taken a different view. He had fully discussed the position with the Assembly Party and was assured of the firm support of 18 members. Thus there was no practical change.

He was anxious to ensure that the country supports the Sunningdale agreement and his party must take steps to enable people to identify with them. There may indeed be growing support for considering a referendum, not immediately, but when the Executive has had a chance to demonstrate that it is effectively in business.

There was a short discussion on the relative merits of a referendum or an election. Feeling was generally against an election. The first step was to ensure that the debate on the vote of confidence should be fully utilised not only to win the technical approval of the House but to explain to the wider audience in the country the Executive's immediate intentions.

There was further discussion arising from the assurance which Mr Cosgrave had given to the Chief Minister on action against the IRA in the Republic. Mr Cosgrave was willing to meet the Chief Minister and discuss the situation but the Chief Minister did not consider that a meeting would be appropriate at this point in time. Members fully agreed with this opinion. Mr Hume made the point that we are interested in results, not in being seen to ask for them. Action should be seen by everyone, North and South, as being taken because it is needed and not because we are asking for it. Mr Bradford expressed the view that unless the Republic can deliver, the prospect of selling Sunningdale will be immensely more difficult. Mr Currie made the further point that publicly-made demands could increase reaction from Fianna Fail, unless Lynch was kept in the picture. This, however, was recognised as the responsibility of Mr Cosgrave. The discussion concluded that the most desirable course in all the circumstances, was that the Chief Minister should send a personal letter to Mr Cosgrave setting out fairly and frankly the Executive's views on the law and order situation and the dependence of the Sunningdale agreement on action by the Republic. It was also decided that the letter should be delivered to Mr Cosgrave by messenger.

2. ADMINISTRATION SURVEY

The rest of the day until approximately 5.45 pm was spent on a review of the activities of the Government.

Office of the Executive
10 January 1974