

NOTE OF TALKS BETWEEN THE SECRETARY OF STATE, THE ALLIANCE PARTY, THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY AND THE ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY AT STORMONT CASTLE ON 5 OCTOBER 1973 AT 10.30 AM

Those present:-

The Secretary of State  
Mr W van Straubenzee  
Mr D Howell  
Mr F Cooper

Alliance Party

Mr O J Napier  
Mr R G Cooper  
Mr J B C Glass

SDLP

Mr G Fitt  
Mr I A Cooper  
Mr J A Currie  
Mr P J Devlin  
Mr J Hume  
Mr E K McGrady

Ulster Unionist Party

Mr A B D Faulkner  
Mr J L Baxter (until 4 pm)  
Mr R H Bradford  
Mr H V Kirk (until 5 pm)  
Mr W B McIvor  
Mr L J Morrell

Also Present

Mr D J Trevelyan  
Mr K D McDowall  
Mr J N Allan  
Mr T C Platt  
Mr N C Abbott

Mr J F Halliday  
Mr D J Gowan  
Mr R Masefield

} Secretariat

1. The Secretary of State welcomed the three parties, and made the statement which is attached at Annex A. He said that the statement was the basis upon which the talks were taking place. The meeting would wish to consider how to proceed but he could see three areas which could be discussed:-

(a) Those matters which would be devolved and for which the Executive would have full responsibility. He hoped that they would be discussed fully between the parties.

(b) Those matters which were reserved to the Westminster Government - primarily security. Under the Constitution Act the Executive would form an Advisory Committee

to the Secretary of State on these matters, and the Secretary of State was willing to discuss them at any time with the parties, either together or singly.

(c) Standing Orders for the Assembly. This was entirely a matter for members of the Assembly and it would be wrong for the Secretary of State to be seen to play any part. He would, however, be willing to help privately if the parties thought that would be desirable.

2. Mr Faulkner said that the Secretary of State's opening statement had been very helpful. He suggested that all three delegations should first of all agree to accept the statement and its implications without reservation. The Unionists supported the Constitution Act, and they looked for a similar assurance from the other two parties. They did not minimise the problems of forming an Executive, but they earnestly hoped that the talks would be successful and that they would not harp back to past disagreements. It was important, though, that all three parties should accept the realities of the present constitutional position.

3. Mr Faulkner explained that there were other issues upon which the Unionists would wish to know the attitude of the SDLP, for example, whether it was accepted that the Executive would operate on the principle of collective responsibility. All parties had frequently repudiated violence, and it was now essential that they should declare support for the security forces. The Unionist Party also had to be satisfied that the RUC was unequivocally accepted as the police force for Northern Ireland; and it would need to know what the SDLP's attitude was to the rent and rate strike.

4. The Secretary of State suggested that as his opening statement was accepted as the basis of the meeting, it could be issued in his own name with an announcement that it was so accepted by all three parties.

5. Mr Fitt hoped that the meeting would be productive and memorable for the whole of Ireland. He agreed that all the parties present were opposed to violence; the belief of the SDLP was that political action alone could bring an end to the present violence in the Province. He said that it would be a mistake to minimise the responsibility placed upon everyone at the meeting. The SDLP believed that a just and democratic Government could only be based on the involvement of representatives of all parts of the community, and they hoped that an Executive would be constituted on this basis. They had come to this first day of discussions in the hope that the Assembly would work and the Executive would be set up, and they were prepared to accept the Oath and the Constitution Act.

Although the SDLP were not going to lay down any pre-conditions for the continuation of talks, they were anxious to know the Unionist attitude to the draft Standing Orders. Mr Fitt said that his party wished to discuss a new approach both in terms of broad policy and detail towards all aspects of life in the province. He thought that Mr Faulkner had appeared to lay down conditions upon which the Unionist Party would have to be satisfied before an Executive could be formed. Security, internment and police had been mentioned. All were reserved matters, which the SDLP were willing to discuss with the Secretary of State. They should not, however, be discussed at the present meeting. Mr Fitt concluded by saying that the SDLP accepted the Constitution Act, including the Executive Oath; they hoped that the meeting would agree in principle to the formation of an Executive; and that all the parties would accept the draft Standing Orders for the Assembly.

6. Mr Napier accepted the Secretary of State's opening statement, the Oath and the Constitution Act. His party did not wish to look backwards but forward to the future; he reaffirmed that his party, like the other two, was opposed to violence, and that they wished to pursue political means to end the present troubles. In order to achieve this, they were anxious that an Executive should be formed.

7. Mr Napier thought that it was vital that there should be no argument in the Assembly between the three parties at the meeting on the Report of the Committee on the Standing Orders, and he hoped that any differences could be resolved in private discussion.

8. The first priority was to have discussions about social and economic problems; these were vital issues, and the agreement which was likely to be reached by all parties in the Executive would help bind up the divisions within Northern Ireland.

9. Mr Napier suggested that an Agenda on matters to be discussed should now be drawn up; how to deal with social and economic problems should be high on the list. Discussions about Standing Orders should be separate.



10. A general discussion on the Standing Orders ensued. Mr Faulkner said that, although he did not wish to enter into a detailed discussion at the present meeting, he thought the only controversial item would be the Prayer. While his party might not feel obliged to support any amendments about the Mace, the Serjeant-at-Arms or "Mr Speaker", they would be bound to support the amendment introducing a Prayer for the Head of State. The Secretary of State pointed out that attendance at prayers would presumably not be compulsory. This was certainly the position at Westminster.

11. Mr Currie suggested that it would be better not to discuss reserved matters at the present meeting but first to look for agreement in principle that an Executive should be formed, and then to discuss the implementation of an agreed policy. Mr Hume said that the parties should avoid areas of potential disagreement at this stage, and begin by looking at those areas where they were likely to reach agreement. The meeting might, therefore, first turn to social and economic policy, where, although the parties would have different approaches, there would be great scope for constructive discussion and agreement; only when these areas had been discussed should the parties look at those areas where they were likely to disagree.

12. Mr Hume said that it was important that the present meeting should be kept confidential. The Secretary of State agreed that the talks should remain confidential, and in the following discussion there was a general feeling that a single agreed statement should be released to the Press at the end of the day and that there should be no comment either by the Secretary of State or by any of the three parties. If the party leaders took part in TV interviews, they would inevitably be drawn into commenting on the agreed statement and this could only lead to dissension.

13. Mr Bradford agreed that a basis of confidentiality was essential. This would be an innovation, and if there were any leaks any future talks about the formation of an Executive would have to be on a different basis. The Secretary of State suggested that the form of the Press statement should be discussed at the end of the day.

14. In commenting on the proposal that the meeting should concentrate on likely areas of agreement, Mr Faulkner said that the parties could not ignore contentious issues such as the police and the Council of Ireland. Mr Currie and Mr Hume

said that as everyone accepted the Constitution Act and in particular section 2 of that Act, the first priority was to discuss the policy that should be agreed and adopted by a power-sharing Executive working over the next four years. The Secretary of State said that he was prepared, if it helped, to discuss areas of disagreement individually with the parties.

15. Mr Bradford said that all three parties accepted the principle of a power-sharing Executive and that there were unlikely to be difficulties in agreeing an economic and social programme. Nevertheless, the Unionist electorate was apprehensive about power-sharing, and it would be useful to know at the beginning of the discussions precisely what differences were going to emerge over the subjects which would probably be divisive. It was important that the meeting should grapple with these issues straightaway and he asked for an indication of the SDLP's attitude towards (a) policing and security and in particular whether the security forces would receive the support of the entire administration, and (b) the rent and rate strike. A clarification of attitudes would be helpful, and was expected by the electorate. He thought it would be wrong for the meeting to become involved in a detailed argument about the Standing Orders.

16. Mr Hume agreed that the contentious issues would have to be faced, but the objective of the talks was to find agreement; the meeting should, therefore, start with areas where agreement could be found and afterwards to move on to the more divisive issues. Mr R Coover added that there would have to be agreement on the divisive issues before there could be any final agreement about the Executive but it would help to get provisional agreement on the other issues first. Mr Fitt enlarged on this point and said that there were "wreckers" on both extremes of the community who were determined that an Executive should not get off the ground. Agreement in principle to form an Executive would diminish their influence. Mr Faulkner replied that the meeting would be in danger of going too fast if it agreed in principle to form an Executive before the divisive points had been discussed, and it was important that the Press statement at the end of the day should not be too optimistic and provoke a public reaction that the parties were ignoring difficulties which stood in their way.

17. The Secretary of State said that, while the meeting should start by discussing the areas where agreement could be found, it was important not to give the impression that all the difficulties in the way of forming an Executive had been resolved. He was of the opinion that once a meeting had dealt with the



non-contentious issues and had established an atmosphere of mutual confidence, it would be far easier to take a constructive attitude to the subjects which were going to arouse disagreement.

18. Mr Hume said that the meeting's approach should be to establish limited areas of agreement. This development would be greatly welcomed by the people of Northern Ireland; it would produce optimism and would help to change the present climate of public apathy in which violence flourished.

19. Mr Faulkner suggested that, if the meeting wished to win public confidence, it would help if there were a clear statement that the RUC was accepted as the Police Force of the country. This issue was "non-negotiable".

20. Mr Napier repeated the view of the Alliance Party that the form of the public statement should be decided later, but that its tone should be one of cautious optimism. The main object now was to devise an agenda starting with the non-contentious items, and then building on the atmosphere of trust which would be created to negotiate the more contentious issues. Mr Currie and Mr Hume repeated that the meeting should start with the subjects which would be the responsibility of the Executive in the Assembly, and then discuss the divisive issues - which were after all a Westminster responsibility - with the Secretary of State either privately or collectively afterwards. Following further discussion it was generally accepted that agreement on non-controversial issues would only be a first stage in reaching overall agreement on the basis of which an Executive might be formed: there would also have to be agreement on the major issues which divided the Unionist and SDLP Parties. The very fact, however, of reaching qualified agreement as a first step would be a help in the second part of the discussions. The Secretary of State added that the agreement to accept the Constitution Act was in itself a major political step, the importance of which should not be forgotten or under-rated.

21. The meeting then turned briefly to some of the contentious issues which had already been mentioned. Mr Pitt defended the origins of the rent and rate strike, claiming that it had been initially a means of preventing violence which would otherwise have occurred. Mr Devlin recognised that it would not be possible to take part in the rent and rates strike or oppose the security forces if one was a member of a power-sharing Executive.

22. Mr Fitt thought that the parties' differing views on the RUC could not be resolved at the present meeting. He suggested that Mr Paisley's amendments on the Standing Orders were purely an attempt to put the Unionists in an embarrassing position, and to prevent them from joining the other parties in an Executive. It was very important that a compromise should be negotiated on this. Mr McIvor stressed that the Unionist electorate had no great enthusiasm for power-sharing, but there was a general hope that some constructive scheme would emerge. Mr Faulkner said that his party was bound to vote for the Prayer for the Head of State. The SDLP indicated that there was scope for private discussion and that it was essential that the Standing Orders were discussed between the parties before 15 October. In the course of discussion, the Alliance Party pointed out that the Unionists were in a very difficult position, and Mr R Cooper wondered whether the Assembly might not, as a compromise, adopt the Lord's Prayer which was universally acceptable to all creeds. The Secretary of State repeated that he had no standing in this matter but went on to say that there was clearly scope for compromise and that his own good offices were available if he could help the parties to reach agreement.

23. The Secretary of State then turned the discussion to the afternoon programme. It was agreed that first there should be a session on economic and social issues, that the meeting should identify the more contentious issues and finally consider the form of the Press statement and decide whether TV and Press interviews should be given at the end of the day.

The meeting adjourned at 12 45 pm and the parties held separate discussions in their delegation rooms before going to lunch at 1 00 pm.



THE MEETING RESUMED AT 2.15 PM

Agenda

24. The parties agreed with the Secretary of State's proposal that economic and social issues should be discussed for the first hour during the afternoon, that the next half hour should be devoted to identifying the more contentious issues and that the remaining time should then be made available to enable an agreed press statement to be prepared.

25. The Secretary of State made it clear that he would not be prepared to go on television or radio to discuss any agreed statement. Whether any of the political parties would wish to enter into any such discussions would be up to them but he hoped that it would be possible for them to agree not to add anything to the agreed statement. Mr Hume and other members of the SDLP delegation said that they preferred that no interviews should be given after the agreed statement had been made. Mr Faulkner feared that complete silence on the statement might lead to undesirable speculation. Mr Bradford suggested that the statement itself should say that the parties had agreed not to add anything further by way of interviews or discussions. Mr Devlin put forward the view that a statement might be agreed which made it unnecessary for any party to go on television or add any gloss. A statement made by one party might easily lead to further and different statements being made by the other parties, which would destroy public confidence created by the agreed statement. It was agreed that this question should be decided once the formal statement had been agreed.

Economic and Social Issues

26. Mr Hume said that the powers which would be devolved to an Executive largely concerned social and economic issues. Agreement on those issues was, therefore, essential if an Executive was to be formed. Such an agreement need not extend to detail but could consist of agreed overall objectives such as those contained in the White Paper (Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals). It should be possible for the parties to agree on a programme which they would be committed to carrying out in their first term of office. It might be based on the common objectives of obtaining a rising standard of living, full employment and social justice. It should also be possible to reach agreement in specific areas under the following heads:

- a) an economic plan
- b) housing
- c) community relations
- d) agriculture



- e) transport
- f) education
- g) culture and communications
- h) the environment
- i) labour relations and industrial democracy
- j) poverty

He added that although prices policy would not directly concern the Executive it should be possible for the Executive to make a local contribution. He thought that it would be politically attractive to the Unionist Party for the Executive to agree to seek greater independence for Northern Ireland in the management of economic affairs. Clear targets might be laid down in such fields as employment and investment and an economic plan might be prepared by a central planning unit.

27. Mr Faulkner thought that there would be little trouble in reaching an agreement of the sort described by Mr Hume. He stressed, however, that Northern Ireland should stay within the broad framework of the UK economy and much would depend on how much assistance would be given by HM Treasury. However, the Unionist Party was not doctrinaire on economic and social questions and an Executive should be able to give a lead, as in the past, on such questions for example as the provision of capital grants and aid to shipyards. In the future, an Executive might, among other things, consider further aid to harbour development, a bigger house building programme and perhaps new forms of mortgage assistance. He would also like to see more effort being made towards educational integration, although he recognised the difficulties.

There was no alternative, he believed, to parity with the UK in social services. On agriculture it would be important to recognise that the existence of small farms in Northern Ireland set it apart from the rest of the UK, and in the field of transport any future Executive would immediately be faced with the question of what future the railways of Northern Ireland should have. Although it might be difficult to agree a 4-year programme in advance, he could see no serious difficulties in reaching agreement on broad objectives within which an Executive would be free to pursue those objectives with flexibility.

28. Mr Napier could also see no ground for disagreement with Mr Hume's proposals. All the parties desired economic and social development on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland. Basic principles could be agreed but flexibility would be important and parity in social services desirable. On education, agreement on the broad objective of integration would be more important than the detail and speed with which it could be achieved. Those matters would have to be decided from day

to day. Mr R Cooper suggested that the three parties should agree to form a sub-committee which could prepare an economic and social programme of the sort which had been proposed.

29. Mr Bradford thought that it might not be realistic to try to reach an agreed programme in detail because much would depend on the money that would be made available by HM Treasury; the Executive would have to work within the Public Expenditure Survey Committee (PESC) procedures. It would be wrong to say, however, that the Unionist Party was doctrinaire on economic matters; he accepted that there would be a mixture of free enterprise and Government assistance specially designed to meet the needs of Northern Ireland. Mr Faulkner was concerned to know what relationship an Executive would have with the EEC on regional aid. In particular, he wanted to know whether the Executive would have to work through HM Government or might be able to deal direct with the EEC (this point was dealt with later by Mr Howell - see below).

30. Commenting further on what had been said, Mr Pitt stressed that representation of Northern Ireland in the EEC was inadequate. As to education, the SDLP policy document looked towards integration after consultation with interested parties and the implementation of experimental schemes; their minds were not closed on this issue. He thought that the targets for house building had been too low; land was available and an Executive should agree to work for a dramatic increase. Like Mr Faulkner he was anxious to know whether HM Government would devolve more powers to the Executive in respect of the EEC regional programme.

31. Mr McIvor, speaking as a former Minister of Community Relations, stressed that Mr Hume had correctly placed community relations high on the list of priorities. In the past insufficient resources had been devoted to this field.

32. Mr Currie thought that it would not be surprising if the parties were able to agree on general economic and social policies. Over a 4-year period problems would arise from time to time which were not dealt with specifically in the agreed policy but coalitions inevitably had to try to solve them within the spirit of the agreed policy. This should not be allowed to obscure the fact, however, that the Unionist Party was largely "conservative" and that the SDLP was "socialist". It would be profitable for the parties to discuss their policies in more detail. They might consider, for example, the public ownership of privately rented accommodation and



of certain fishing rights. The SDLP believed in new economic and social policies which would have to be discussed further. Mr R Cooper suggested that such detail could conveniently be discussed by the sub-committee which he had proposed should be formed to discuss social and economic questions. Mr I Cooper also stressed that the SDLP were anxious to introduce new policies. For example, although parity in social services was probably essential, pilot schemes might be initiated which departed from parity and the SDLP envisaged more State intervention, for example in agriculture. Mr Devlin pointed out that the Fine Gael and Labour parties in the Republic of Ireland, although they had widely differing views, had formed their coalition on the basis of a statement on broad objectives. He suggested that the parties round the table could do much the same.

33. The Secretary of State said that it was important to appreciate that if an Executive were formed and got under way, many things could be done in Northern Ireland which were not done in the rest of the UK. If an Executive did not get under way, however, Northern Ireland would in all probability be dealt with in much the same way as Scotland and Wales. HM Treasury would be prepared to do things for an Executive which, if Northern Ireland were like Scotland and Wales, they would be unwilling to do. Further, the local government system in Northern Ireland demanded a system of devolved government since otherwise central control would be too remote from the local areas involved. On the other hand, he thought that any Executive would be well advised to stick closely to parity with the rest of the UK in social services. Mr Howell, replying to Mr Faulkner and Mr Fitt's questions about the BEC, said that this point made by the Secretary of State applied equally to arrangements made for the representation of Northern Irish interests in the context of the BEC. Northern Ireland, as part of the UK, was represented through HM Government but special arrangements had already been made to ensure that account was taken of Northern Ireland interests and the working of an Executive would ensure the continuation of this. It was agreed that a sub-committee would be formed by the parties, two members being supplied each by the Unionist Party and the SDLP and one by the Alliance Party, these numbers being without prejudice to the allocation of posts to each party in the Executive. Mr Howell agreed to assist the sub-committee and the Secretary of State made it clear that officials would be available, if needed. It was later agreed that the sub-committee would consist of Mr R Cooper (Alliance); Mr Hume and Mr Devlin (SDLP) and Mr Bradford and Mr McIvor (Unionist Party) and that it would meet at 10 am on Monday 8 October 1973.

"Reserved" subjects in the Assembly

34. During the discussion on economic and social issues, the question arose whether an Executive would be obliged to respond to any debate in the Assembly on "reserved" subjects. The Secretary of State said that the Executive would be in no position to reply to any such debate and should not do so. The Executive would constitute an Advisory Committee for the Secretary of State on such issues and would no doubt reflect points made during debates in the Assembly when it made representations to the Secretary of State through the Advisory Committee. Responsibility for things done on "reserved" matters would be accepted by the Secretary of State and it would be wrong for an Executive to take any share of the responsibility on such matters in the Assembly.

Contentious Issues

35. The Secretary of State said that it seemed to him that the first contentious issue which the parties would wish to discuss was policing. He hoped that it would not provide insuperable problems and would only comment at this stage that he did not see how a police force could be built up and strengthened if its very existence were threatened. The Secretary of State agreed with Mr Hume that a consideration of policing was bound to include the whole question of security and the Army's presence. HM Government wanted to build up the police and remove the Army which seemed to be an objective which would be acceptable to all three parties. The second contentious issue was detention. On this subject he would listen to all representations and proposals. He must point out, however, that priority had to be given to the ending of violence and any measures which contributed to that end would have to be kept. Nonetheless the parties might wish to recommend that some changes should be made. He was prepared for the fullest discussions on the difficulties which he faced in this matter. He agreed with Mr Fitt's interpretation that emergency powers generally came within the heading of detention as a contentious issue. Continuing, the Secretary of State recognised that the rent and rate strike was a third contentious issue for discussion although he had noted the implication of Mr Devlin's earlier remarks that no member of the SDLP would become a member of an Executive while supporting such a strike. The Secretary of State also recognised that the Council of Ireland should be included in the list of contentious issues. Although all parties had agreed that joint arrangements with the Republic should be made, contentious issues were likely to be those of timing, form and functions of any arrangements. His own view was that no tripartite conference could take place before an Executive had been formed unless all the parties represented in the Assembly were invited to it, which would be highly undesirable.



36. Mr Currie wondered whether the Standing Orders for the Assembly should also be added to the list of contentious issues and Mr Napier suggested that the proposed sub-committee on economic and social questions should also be invited to discuss points arising out of the proposed Standing Orders. It was agreed, however, that it would be inappropriate for a sub-committee which included the Minister of State (Mr Howell) to deal with Standing Orders as these were entirely a matter for the parties themselves. Mr Faulkner said that the Unionist Party was meeting on Monday afternoon to discuss the proposed Standing Orders and further progress on that subject would have to wait as far as he was concerned until that meeting had taken place. It was therefore agreed that each party would visit the Secretary of State individually during Monday afternoon. The times would be arranged with the Secretary of State's Office, taking into account the fact that the Unionist Party would not be free until 4.30 pm. A further meeting could then take place between all the parties together with the Secretary of State on the morning of Tuesday, 9 October, in order to consider what progress could be made on the contentious issues, including the Standing Orders, and on an economic and social programme.

#### Publicity

37. A statement prepared on the basis of the discussions so far was circulated to all those attending the meeting and each party then left to consider it privately in their delegation rooms. When the meeting resumed there was discussion about amendments proposed by the parties. As a result, the statement attached as Annex B to these minutes was agreed and the Secretary of State and the political parties agreed not to make any further comment to the Press, Television or Radio on the statement.

The meeting ended at 5.30 pm.

NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

8 October 1973

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND  
FRIDAY - 5 OCTOBER 1973

This is an historic meeting for Northern Ireland. None of us will under-estimate the burden of responsibility which rests upon us, either as individuals or collectively.

The Northern Ireland Constitution Act, 1973, provides the statutory basis of a constitutional settlement for Northern Ireland. It is not a negotiating document. It has been the law of the land for more than two months. All those who have a real concern for Northern Ireland and its citizens are looking to the parties represented in the Northern Ireland Assembly to make real and lasting progress. Forming an Executive cannot, by itself, solve all Northern Ireland's problems. But I am convinced that the great majority of people wish to see their elected representatives managing, in large measure, their own affairs. The forces of violence can only be defeated if those who believe in democratic processes stand together.

Let me say at the start that though I, and I believe you, am anxious to see a sense of urgency, I would not wish in any way to be a party to trying to form an Executive on a hasty or ill-considered basis. Nothing - or almost nothing could be worse than an Executive which has been formed without proper discussion and could not hold together. This is not the intention of Her Majesty's Government; nor, I am sure, is it yours.

Equally, I believe that the burden of reaching agreement rests very much on the Northern Ireland parties here represented. The Executive can only work on the basis of understandings reached between you. In some matters Her Majesty's Government will be very directly involved. We shall do all in our power to help, but much will need to be clarified and worked out between you. Let there be frankness but let us avoid taking up positions which will damage the prospects of agreement. I have no doubt there will be some hard argument and bargaining. But if agreement is not reached only the men of violence will benefit; that would be a very great tragedy for the people of Northern Ireland.

I must make clear the basis upon which I, on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, have invited you to these discussions. I, like you, am bound by the Northern Ireland Constitution Act, 1973. The Government's aim and hope is that in due course, after proper discussion, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will



E 3.

be able to exercise his statutory duty under that Act of making appointments to the Northern Ireland Executive. But before we can get to that stage the Secretary of State is required by the law to satisfy Parliament at Westminster that a Northern Ireland Executive can be formed which, having regard to the support it commands in the Assembly and the electorate on which that support is based, is likely to be widely acceptable throughout the community. The Secretary of State is also required to satisfy himself, and the Parliament at Westminster, that the Northern Ireland Assembly has made satisfactory provisions in its Standing Orders for the purposes set out in the Act, including the setting up of Consultative Committees. It is encouraging that the Presiding Officers' Committee has produced a report recommending what the Assembly's Standing Orders should be and that they are to be discussed by the Assembly on 15 October. These are essential constitutional provisions which must be satisfied before an order can be laid before the Westminster Parliament appointing a day on which devolution can take place. When such powers are devolved the statutory basis for direct rule will disappear and a completely new relationship between the United Kingdom Government, the new Northern Ireland Executive and the Northern Ireland Assembly will emerge.

The Constitution Act also establishes a number of other matters of the highest importance. The Westminster Parliament retains ultimate sovereignty. Northern Ireland remains a part of the United Kingdom unless and until the majority of the people decide otherwise at a poll held for this purpose; and Parliament has decided that such a poll shall not be held earlier than 1983.

The Constitution Act also contains the initial legislative authority which provides for consultation, agreements, and arrangements with the Republic of Ireland, notably, so far as the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly is concerned in respect of any transferred matters.

The Act also includes strong safeguards against any discrimination in the public sector either by law or executive action. It provides for the setting up of a Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights. These are all matters of the greatest importance.

The Constitution Act is the only basis on which we can all move forward. We must all accept that the Constitution Act is the law and that an Executive must conscientiously fulfil its duties under it in the interests of Northern Ireland and its people.

AGREED STATEMENT

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland today had discussions with the leaders and delegates of the Alliance Party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party and the Ulster Unionist Party about the formation of a Northern Ireland Executive as provided for under the Constitution Act 1973.

The discussions opened with a statement by the Secretary of State (copy attached). All the parties accepted this statement and agreed that discussions should continue under the provisions of the Constitution Act 1973. The parties agreed in principle that they should work together with the aim of forming an Executive. There was a full and constructive discussion on the problems involved. Social and economic questions were considered. Some measure of agreement was reached and a sub-committee was set up to work out a more detailed programme. This sub-committee will meet on Monday. It was also agreed that each party should state separately to the Secretary of State its attitude on the more contentious issues such as policing, detention and a Council of Ireland on which there is a divergence of view yet to be discussed and resolved. Any agreement reached today is without prejudice to the basic political principles of the parties and must be seen to be subject to overall agreement being reached. No further public comment will be made by any of the parties involved before the next round of talks. Further discussions will take place on Tuesday.