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The Conservative Party and Northern Ireland.

*Brief for Longman/Wilson
meeting
11/9/72*

At most there are probably not more than 40 to 50 Tory M.P.s who had reservations about Sunningdale or who would be unhappy with an arrangement closely related to that agreement. None of them could be regarded as occupying a position of great influence in the party and the number would certainly not include any front-benchers. If Mr. Heath were to win the next election, it is likely that he will be able to bring these back-benchers into line but Powell could stir up trouble.

There is a group of Conservatives which favours an arrangement with the Loyalists with a view to extending the Conservative whip to them. There are probably from 70 to 80 back-benchers in this group. The group, however, is not primarily concerned with the situation in Northern Ireland but rather with the strengthening of the parliamentary party.

It is probably true to say that the main anti-Heath grouping on the North among M.P.s is to be found in the Monday Club. But there are no more than 20 M.P.s, all back-benchers, in that club.

A much more significant element in the party is the growing move to have Heath removed from the leadership. Since the last election, there has been a strong feeling particularly among young Conservatives and apparently in a fairly widespread way at constituency level, that Heath is the wrong man to lead. This attitude is gathering support now that the election approaches. One of the reasons for it is the growing feeling that Heath is not the man to compromise with the trade unions. There have recently been moves by the daughter-in-law of Duncan Sandys. There was also the attempt to have Enoch Powell or Christopher Soames as candidate in Lincolnshire. This move was related essentially to the leadership. The anti-Heath lobby could well become more vocal in the weeks ahead.

If the election result should be a coalition between Conservative and Liberal, then one might expect a firm and, from our point of view, a helpful attitude on the North although there is some doubt as to whether Heath would be acceptable as Head of Government in the event of a coalition.