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Confidential Report from Ambassador, London,
sent on the afternoon of 4th March, 1974,
immediately prior to the resignation of Mr.
Heath, Prime Minister.

The latest indications are that the stipulations of the Liberal Party in favour of a National Government are a non-starter. It is too soon as yet to judge what the reaction of the Conservative Government could be to the conditions laid down by the UUUC at their meeting today. We get the impression that there is, particularly in pro-Tory press circles, a certain disillusionment with the Prime Minister for even considering the possibility of support from the Northern Ireland MP's, given his unreserved attachment to Sunningdale.

The balance of opinion, at this moment, supports the idea that Mr. Wilson is likely to be called upon to form a minority Government. There are indications that if this were to happen, he would go ahead with the possible implementation of the policies set out in his party's manifesto and thus provide the opportunity for a further appeal to the country arising out of a defeat on a major issue. This being said, one has at the same time to take account of the persistence of Mr. Heath and of his determination to hold on to office even at considerable cost to his parties policies.

There are growing suggestions of a possible change in the Tory leadership in order to help a possible accommodation in Government with the Liberals and the Scottish Nationalists. It is extremely difficult to see that Mr. Heath, given his character, would easily relinquish the reins of control of his party. The possible alternative to him, if he were to do so, would be Mr. Whitelaw, and it is doubtful whether the Front Bench of Tory opinion would regard Mr. Whitelaw as of the calibre of a Prime Minister in the light of his performance as Secretary of State for Employment.

Insofar as it is possible for us to assess opinion at this moment in time, the balance would seem to be in favour of a call to Mr. Wilson to form a Government. I would, however, stress that this is the best view I can give you at the moment, as the situation is still very fluid.

If there is to be a Labour Government I doubt if there will be any significant change of policy in relation to Northern Ireland. In the context of a Tory Government, depending on support from other elements, I would not anticipate either that there will be a significant change of policy in relation to the North. In either circumstance, ratification could conceivably be delayed and the demands of Mr. Faulkner could become a good deal greater. My overall fear would be that the result of the election, insofar as the North is concerned, could influence even some moderate Protestant opinion there to think again about the viability of the Executive and the desirability of proceeding with a Council of Ireland in the present political climate.

Postscript: Above was of course drafted before news of Mr. Heath's resignation. I will endeavour to send latest assessment first thing in the morning.