ALLIANCE PARTY COMMENTS ON CONFERENCE SECRETARIAT'S PAPER ON
THE WORKABILITY OF ALLIANCE PROPOSALS.

There are five key questions raised in the Conference Secretariat's
paper on the workability of the Alliance Party's proposals for an
Executive Committee system of administration based on proportionality.
The Alliance Party considers that these are fair questions which
require an answer and in this paper we propose to answer them.

(a)   Do the proposals strike a fair and workable balance between the
      right of the elected majority to determine policy and the right
      of substantial minorities to participate fully in administration?

      In our view the proposals which we put forward do strike a fair
      and workable balance between the rights of an elected majority
      and the right of substantial minorities to participate in the
      administration. We recognise, however, that a delicate balance
      must be struck.

      As we have indicated in our opening submission to the Conference
      and in answers to questions posed to us subsequently, the Alliance
      Party is quite convinced that the minority in Northern Ireland
      (whether it supports or opposes eventual Irish Unity) will not
      identify with or be satisfied with a system of administration
      which fails to give its elected representatives the right to
      participate fully in the administration of the Province. If we
      are correct in this view, then any form of administrative
      structure which does not provide for this will increase community
      tension. However a system which in effect created minority rule,
      giving the minority the right to impose policy or to exercise a
      veto against policies which it simply did not like, is not only
      non-democratic but would be totally unacceptable to the majority.

      The difficult balance which has to be achieved is to provide for
      real participation in the administration by the minority while
      at the same time maintaining the principle of majority rule.
      Majority rule in this context does not mean the exclusive right
      of the majority to run the entire administration without
      reference to the views of the minority but rather the right of
      the majority to put forward the broad policy acceptable to it
      and to effectively prevent the imposition of policies to which
      it is opposed.

(b) Will the proposed structure be capable of generating sufficient
     cohesion and purpose to provide effective government. particularly
     without a central cabinet. operating with collective responsibility,
     and an agreed programme?

The proposed system is for a devolved or subordinate administration.
The Alliance Party does not argue that it would be an effective
method of government for a sovereign state. Within the terms of
the Discussion Document reserved and excepted matters will continue
to be run from Westminster and the government of the day in
Westminster will likewise dictate broad economic objectives.

The reason why Alliance is not proposing a central Cabinet
operating with collective responsibility and with an agreed
economic programme is based on the belief that initially at any
rate sufficient consensus would not exist to make the workability
of such a system likely. We would expect, however, that the
system proposed by us would gradually generate increased cohesion
and that eventually a tacit acceptance of collective responsibility
on most issues would arise within the committee of Chairmen. In
the early stages, however, and on issues where historic or
sectarian attitudes can become explosive, it at least enables an
administration to operate.

(c) Will the Chairman/Minister be able to operate effectively as
     Head of Department if subject to the majority view in his
     Committee on major issues?

The Chairman of a committee will of course be conscious of the
continuing need to bring the majority of the Assembly with him.
The committee being a microcosm of the Assembly will reflect the
general view points of the Assembly. It is recognised that there
may be things which a Chairman wishes to do for which he cannot
get the agreement of his committee or the agreement of the
Assembly. That is one of the constraints on a Chairman inherent
in the Alliance proposals and to depart from it would in effect
mean that a committee Chairman could take and implement major
policy decisions to which the elected majority was opposed.

(d) How heavily does the system as a whole depend on a satisfactory relationship developing between the Committees and Chairmen? How much instability might be caused by a failure to establish such a relationship, in even one committee?

There are two different ways in which a workable relationship between a committee and its Chairman might fail to emerge. The first is where the Chairman fails to take account of the views of the committee or to consult the committee properly in relation to major policy decisions. As the Secretariat document points out, there has not been in the past deep socio-economic differences between parties in Northern Ireland. While recognising that there will be issues of an historic or sectarian nature where minority Chairmen and their committees may disagree, in most other cases we would expect a consensus to arise provided that the Chairman consults fully and takes due cognisance of the views of his committee. Where a Chairman persistently fails to do so it appears to us that his removal and replacement are inevitable.

The second and far more serious possibility of an unsatisfactory relationship developing between a Chairman and his committee is if a concerted decision were taken by a political majority to make the task of a minority Chairman impossible. While accepting that this could happen the fact that our proposals do not involve collective responsibility make this much less likely because a minority Chairman can publically propound his grievances. Furthermore the services for which he is responsible are services for all citizens not simply his supporters, so frustrating his administration effectively frustrates the rights of all citizens. This type of political 'clout' shouldbe sufficient to prevent a majority gang-up against minority Chairmen except in a case where the objective was to destroy the entire system. If a majority or a substantial minority is determined to destroy the entire system of government whatever the cost, it can do so.

(e) Does the executive committee style provide for "open" government at the expense of effective government by detracting from the authority of the Chief Executive and the Chairmen? Might the Committee be given less rights whilst still having a real role?

The proposed system does certainly provide for open government. The influence and power of the Chief Executive and of committee Chairmen would be very considerable indeed. It would not, however,

be absolute, as major policy decisions will require the consent of
a majority in the Assembly.

If the committees were given fewer rights than those proposed in
the Alliance system, it is our opinion that the rights of a
political majority (which we recognise and respect) would be
seriously reduced and perhaps undermined. It would be quite
possible for a minority Chairman to continually bye-pass his
committee on major policy decisions, thus in effect implementing
a policy with which his committee were in total disagreement.
Not only would this in our opinion be wrong in theory, but it
would inevitably lead to critical disagreements between the
Chairman and the Assembly which would put immense strains upon
the whole system.

The best way to make government effective is to keep it as much
in tune as possible with the views and attitudes of the Assembly,
allowing for the enormous influence and inherent ability to
persuade which Chairmen will inevitably have.