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Why not treat Conservatives as an Ulster political party?

At the recent Conservative Party conference I asked Mr Peter Brooke whether the talks he is seeking to arrange between the Ulster political parties would include the Conservative Party. For the past two years the Conservatives have been organizing in Northern Ireland and now have eleven elected local government councillors. Mr Brooke's answer was that the Conservative Party would be represented by the Government, that is himself and his team. When I further asked whether the team would include any of the local Conservative politicians Mr Brooke said 'no'. This gives cause for disquiet. Mr Brooke has made it clear that he plans to be a neutral 'referee' at the talks, and within reason will accept whatever agreement (if any) is reached between the local parties. He cannot adopt this stance at the talks and at the same time urge the views of his own Party. As the resolutions put to conference by the Northern Ireland Conservative Associations show, local Conservatives desire the full integration of the region within the United Kingdom.

At the recent Upper Bann by-election the Conservative candidate got more votes than the Alliance, who *will* be represented at the talks. If Labour were organizing in Northern Ireland (as it should) Mr Brooke would not dare exclude their local politicians from the talks. How can it possibly be right to exclude local Conservative politicians from talks on the future of their own region? Mr Brooke should think again.¹

¹ *The Times*, 16 October 1990.