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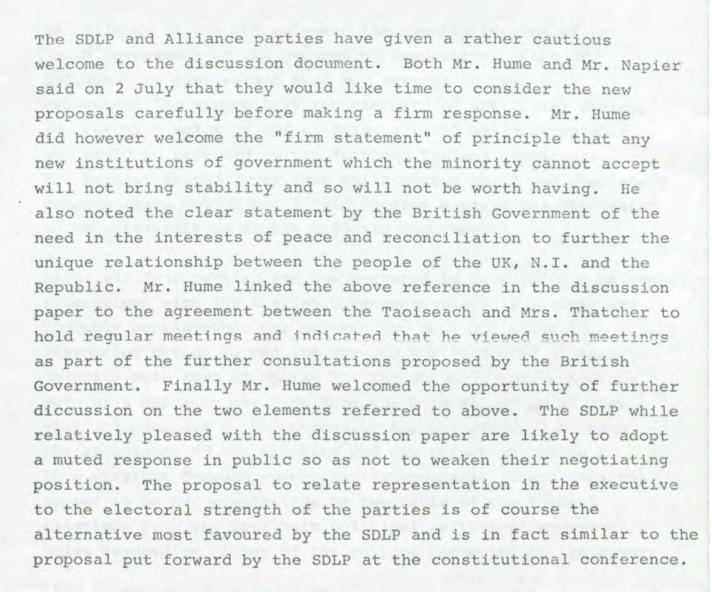
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REACTION TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER



Mr. Napier of the Alliance Party while not prepared to give a firm reaction at this stage indicated a willingness to enter into further consultations on the basis of the discussion paper. In accordance with Alliance party policy he expressed a strong preference for the power-sharing alternative outlined in the paper (option I).

Mr. Molyneaux (OUP) speaking at Westminister warned that any attempt to resurrect the "rigged executive" of 1974 would be rejected decisively the the N.I. electorate. Although also critical of option no. 2 as a recipe for disaster involving "two rival cabinets" Mr. Molyneaux stated later that he would be prepared to enter into bilateral discussions with the Secretary of State. He said that he would like to explore further the OUP policy of a system of individual select committees rather than the proposal for a "Council of the Assembly" (option 2).

Mr. Paisley of the DUP welcomed the non-involvement of the Irish Government in the process of discussion. Like Mr. Molyneaux he also warned that any attempt to have a government "so rigged that the minority by artificial devices can become a majority and exercise a veto" was unacceptable and would be rejected by the Northern Ireland electorate. Mr. Paisley stated later that while option no. I was completely unacceptable, option No. 2 "did provide a basis for discussion of majority rule as simple majority government".

While all four parties are now prepared to have further bilateral discussions with the British Government there is a clear and probably unbridgeable gap between the SDLP and Alliance (favouring option I) and the OUP and DUP favouring a straight majority rule form of option 2. The document can however be seen as a definite set back from the Unionist point of view with its emphasis on the necessity for any proposal to have the acceptance of the minority and the return in option I to a straight forward power-sharing proposal. There does not appear to be any possibility on the basis of the initial reactions from the four main political parties of agreement being reached on either of the options presented in the report.

The Secretary of State in presenting the report to Westminister said that he would engage in the widest possible consultations on the discussion document. He does not appear to have any intention of recalling the constitutional conference but will engage in bilateral discussions with the parties thus drawing the OUP into the consultative process. These discussions should be completed by the Autumn and Mr. Atkins remains publicly optimistic that progress can be made. He has not elaborated on the unusual reference in para. 64 that in the absence of agreement the British Government will explore other ways of making the Government of Northern Ireland more responsive to the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. It may simply mean that the Secretary of State is preparing a fall-back position if as seems likely agreement is not reached by the Northern Ireland political parties on a form of devolved government.