

cc PS to Chairman
 Dr Oliver
 Mr Blackburn
 Mr Williamson (file copy)

CHAIRMAN'S MEETING WITH UUUC NEGOTIATORS - 3 SEPTEMBER 1975

PRESENT: Chairman Mr Craig
 Mr Blackburn Capt Ardill
 Dr Hayes Rev Beattie

1. The Chairman referred briefly to the lengthy discussions he had held on 2 September with the UUUC leaders and deputy leaders (including those present) and to a conversation with Dr Paisley. He asked whether he could take it that there were no objections to Catholics as such being included in a cabinet, what SDLP would have to do to convince people of their acceptability for office and whether there was any point in carrying the discussions further. He was not anxious to engage SDLP in protracted discussion if there was not at least some hope of agreement by UUUC. He believed himself that the proposals for voluntary coalition for a period contained the best hope for the country and the participating parties. SDLP had expressed interest in the proposals as a basis for discussion - it would be wrong to infer that they found them wholly acceptable in their present form. They had asked for 'copper fastened guarantees' without however specifying these.
2. Mr Craig said there would be no difficulty about including, for example, Mr Oliver Napier in a Cabinet. However the political realities were that a coalition between UUUC and Alliance only was unlikely to solve the problem as he saw it. The objection to SDLP among the UUUC parties was two-fold and fairly deeply rooted. The present security situation - especially in South Armagh, had heightened prejudices and made their back-benchers very edgy. The involvement of Mr S Mallon, SDLP party Chairman in controversy there made it difficult for UUUC members to consider the matter calmly. Additionally, there was a historical antipathy to the main figures in SDLP, as the people, in the eyes of many loyalists, who had started all the trouble through their civil rights protests in the late 60s. Mr Craig said he considered that the SDLP would be needed in government in the early years in order to secure the support of the Catholic population for the RUC. Whether one liked it or not, the SDLP, by and large, were the elected voice of the Catholic community. Security was the way to any form of government, and he would not join even a UUUC government which did not form a coalition for the initial period with SDLP because the whole thing would collapse in a very short time. He would continue

CONFIDENTIAL

to urge the desirability of continuing along these lines upon his coalition colleagues.

3. UUUC repeated the difficulty encountered in giving any guarantees to SDLP or any other party - even in the event of party agreement. Difficulties were both ideological and practical. Several of their members had said they would not sit in cabinet with named members of SDLP. Mr Craig said their manifesto did not preclude coalition. Mr Beattie also mentioned the practical difficulties of campaigning on a common policy, which he did not think possible. They could only agree on their own behalf - an election might produce a new group of representatives who could repudiate any agreement they might make. They could not bind their successors.
4. Mr Ardill asked whether it was possible to have a constitution agreed on the lines of the UUUC document, but deferred until say 1980. In the meantime the Convention could continue in being with the Chairman perhaps appointed to govern, with power to appoint a broadly based Commission or Cabinet which would deal with the present mess and enable the new constitution to start in relatively favourable circumstances. Neither of his colleagues evinced any interest in this suggestion.
5. The Chairman said that sooner or later the parties to the negotiations would have to meet face to face. He could not act as an intermediary for ever - and he would be reluctant to accept that talks had broken down until both sets of negotiators had faced each other across the table on specific points. Arising from the meeting with UUUC leaders he had been asked to prepare a 'scheme' for discussion. He was in fact preparing Heads for a Discussion which could be the basis of talks with the parties separately and together and would give this to them on Thursday morning.
6. Before leaving, Mr Beattie said their members were becoming increasingly concerned with the gravity of the situation and with the consequences of failure to agree. They would not let the talks collapse without a great effort to come to terms and the Chairman should not be completely hopeless.
7. The talks lasted over an hour. Although little practical progress was made, the atmosphere was slightly more hopeful than on the previous day, perhaps reflecting a slightly calmer mood in UUUC. The most hopeful note was Mr Beattie's party remark that all was not lost. Mr Craig remained firm in his advocacy of voluntary temporary coalition, Mr Beattie was more cautious, perhaps reflecting Dr Paisley's reservations on grounds of conscience, while Mr Ardill seemed less ideologically committed and more concerned to get off electoral hooks.

CONFIDENTIAL