

CASTLE 22 JAN

RL

cc P/S Chairman  
Dr Oliver  
Mr Blackburn  
Mr Corbett  
MW (file copy)

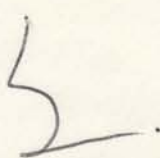
Note for the record

Meeting with S of S 22/1/76 - Stormont Castle

Present: Chairman S of S  
Dr Oliver Mr Janes  
Mr Blackburn Mr I Burns  
Dr Hayes Mr M Stewart

1. S of S was in rather an irritable mood and complained of leaks in prolonged Departments to Dr Paisley, and Mr Fitt's performance at Westminster. He said Westminster was fed up with NI.
2. Chairman reported in general terms on talks with the parties. He said they were still in play - there was a slight chance that talks would take place on a mutually agreed basis. The difficulties were that UUUC wanted to exclude any possible discussion of power-sharing at Cabinet level, and SDLP would discuss nothing else. Several ideas had been fed to UUUC about 'forms' of participation short of Cabinet level and they might well agree to pursue talks along these lines. SDLP were still a doubtful quantity - their morale was poor and they were hooked on the idea of power-sharing at executive level, as were UPNI. Alliance and Vanguard were willing to make an effort, but were unlikely to do much on their own.
3. S of S was generally pessimistic and concentrated on discussing his reaction to a failure of the Convention. Mr Janes pointed to the stipulation about maximum agreement. While S of S was requiring partnership at Executive level, if SDLP agreed to less, Parliament would probably accept.
4. It was agreed that S of S should not intervene until Convention was on the point of breaking down. When Chairman was satisfied that an impasse had been reached, Convention should adjourn for a week to allow S of S to come into play. S of S would not intervene until so informed - and he was grateful that he would have due notice in this way. Dr Oliver suggested that S of S should make quite a production out of intervention - bringing the parties to London and including other Ministers and possibly the Opposition. S of S took this coolly.
5. S of S dismissed the idea of a referendum without much discussion. He said he did not now fear a great reaction at Westminster in the wake of Convention failure. He said parties did not expect success and would accept breakdown stoically.

6. S of S said there would be no question of a pull-out - just indefinite direct rule. He saw no point in going to Parliament with yet another solution.
7. The S of S made it quite clear that no great effort would be made to ensure benign direct rule. The pay of Convention members would cease on 7 May - their status would cease the day the Convention ended and they would not be allowed to use the facilities in Stormont a day longer. There would be no election for the foreseeable future and no new initiative for a prolonged (but indeterminate) period. NI would just have to take its place in the devolution queue until Scotland and Wales had been dealt with. S of S would remain in charge of departments, and any representations would be through Westminster MP's.
8. In the longer term, S of S floated the idea of a GLC type structure for Northern Ireland to deal with some of the former local government functions and perhaps some of the Area Board functions - but not industrial development or economic or financial management. This would not be for some time.
9. Dr Oliver offered to prepare a paper setting out some of the possible ways of providing for local involvement in a direct rule situation. S of S said he would be glad to have this.
10. S of S reiterated several times that he had the full backing of the Cabinet for his policy - which would be a 'do nothing new' policy for some time after a failure of the Convention, but soldier on with direct rule.
11. Mr Blackburn suggested that the crunch might come even before the Convention met if parties failed to agree on conditions for talks. In that case Convention might never get off the ground. Agreed nevertheless to give S of S about a week's grace before bringing him into play.
12. Throughout the conversation it was very difficult to determine the time-scale in which S of S was working when he talked of prolonged direct rule before making another initiative. One fixed date was the requirement in July to review the legislation. Apart from that 'prolonged' seemed to mean 1½-2 years.

  
M N HAYES

23/1/76