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Introduction

In releasing the following account of events in the coalition preceding the decision of 8th September, it is not Vanguard's intention to add to the recrimination or bitterness that so obviously exists among loyalists at present. We do not intend to indict or attack former colleagues. Although it is necessary to refer from time to time to the attitudes of individuals we have kept such references to the absolute minimum.

Although certain individuals have changed their approach on certain points we do not say that such changes necessarily stem from deceit or ill-will. In the period under discussion weighty matters were being considered. Matters on which it is perfectly legitimate for individuals to change their approach as the situation evolves. It is wrong to insist that a politician sticks rigidly to every phrase he utters or to a particular appreciation of the situation.

Principles must be adhered to but tactics must necessarily be adapted to the situation. So we intend no reflection on the personal integrity of those to whom we refer. Our objection is to the way in which debate, which this paper charts, was so abruptly terminated, and our object in publishing the paper is to correct some errors that have received wide circulation.

These errors are:-

the belief that the policy paper drafted by Mr. Craig on 26th August, and which contained in paragraph 8 (iii) a reference to voluntary coalitions in time of emergency, was unauthorised. As the paper shows this belief is untrue.

the belief that in the inter-party talks Mr. Craig acted in some unauthorised way. Again the paper shows the extent to which there was a constant reporting back of events to the U.U.U.C.

the belief that Mr. Craig offered a coalition to the S.D.L.P. as they now stand: again this is untrue.

the belief that the paper of 4th September entitled "the Voluntary Coalition Solution" was a product of Mr. Craig: this is false and this paper indicates the circumstances in which the U.U.U.C., through all three parties asked the Chairman of the Convention to produce it.

Note on Coalition structure.

Because of its size it was clearly impossible for the Coalition as a whole to meet to consider everything. Consequently a "cabinet" of 12 was established, termed the Policy Committee. This consisted of 4 members from each party as follows:-

<u>Official Unionist</u>	<u>V.U.P.</u>	<u>D.U.P.</u>
H. West	W. Craig	I. Paisley
M. Smyth	E. Baird	B. Beattie
M. Armstrong	R. Empey	G. Smyth
J. Taylor	D. Trimble	D. Hutchinson

Mr. J. Molyneux was invited, as leader of the U.U.U. M.P.s at Westminster to attend whenever possible and in the latter stages of the inter-party talks A. Ardill was invited to be present.

From the outset of the Convention both the Policy Committee and the Coalition met once a week, but in the latter stages of the discussions it became necessary to meet more often.

Sequence of Events

Early in the week commencing 18th August, the Policy Committee were told that the inter-party talks were rapidly approaching breakdown. The news was received with considerable unease, Ian Paisley in particular wanted to know if there was any way of keeping them going. Reference was made to the suggestion by the S.D.L.P. that the two teams of negotiators should exchange papers setting out their respective positions.

On Friday, 22nd August, there was a discussion in the Policy Committee with regard to the paper to be presented to the S.D.L.P. There was no discussion in detail, but Mr. Craig and the other two negotiators were clearly authorised to draft such a paper.

On the morning of Tuesday, 26th August, Mr. Craig drafted what became the U:U.U.C. Policy position. He arrived at Stormont around 1 p.m. and, over lunch, the paper was discussed by Austin Ardill, Billy Beattie, Mr. Armstrong, Mr. Smyth and Mr. West. Mr. Beattie had also prepared a draft policy position but after discussion this was discarded in favour of Mr. Craig's draft. At one point, Billy Beattie left and it was then believed that he took a copy of the paper to show to Dr. Paisley, (who has since denied that he saw the paper at that moment). Those at lunch agreed the paper, which was then re-typed and copied for presentation to the S.D.L.P. at the talks that afternoon which started around 2.30. Later that day copies of the policy position were given to the other party leaders, "for the record". The Coalition met at 2 p.m. In the late afternoon Mr. Craig came in. He was gloomy about the talks, referred to the Policy position in general terms quoting Paragraph 1. There was agreement that the paper be circulated for the next Coalition meeting.

Dr. Paisley requested that he be permitted to use the Policy position in his talks with Alliance. This was agreed. Dr. Paisley met the Alliance party later that day and presented the policy position to them. At the talks that afternoon, the S.D.L.P. produced their paper in which they rejected paragraphs 1 and 2 of the U.U.U.C. policy position but expressed interest in Paragraph 8. They were then told that Paragraph 8 was based on the principles contained in Paragraphs 1 and 2 which they had rejected and so there could be no possibility of exploring Paragraph 8 with a view to involving the S.D.L.P.

At the Policy Committee on the morning of Thursday, 26th August, Billy Beattie was gleeful at the S.D.L.P. being out-maneuvred on Paragraph 8. There was general expectation that the talks would collapse and that the consultations with the Chairman would then start. On their 1.30 News programme R.T.E. referred in detail to Paragraph 8. Their source is not known, although a local journalist did indicate that it did not come from a loyalist. The Coalition met at 2.30, there was some excitement over the paper, especially Paragraph 7. As a result, a message was passed to the negotiators to avoid reference to that paragraph. Some members were unhappy about Paragraph 8, G. Morrison because it had been on R.T.E. first, D. Allen because of the possible implications, but Paisley and Trimble, with support from other Policy Committee members, held the line on Paragraph 8 as a statement of one of the features of system to which the Coalition is committed, and implicit in the U.U.U.C. Election manifesto. Mr. Craig came in and reported that the talks had reached an impasse and that the negotiators would be going to inform the Chairman later that afternoon. The following account of their meeting with the Chairman was given by Sir Robert Lowry on the 3rd October. "At 4 o'clock, the six negotiators came to see me. They said they had reached an impasse. American committees were very briefly discussed. They said that nobody was particularly interested in that. I said 'in what way can I help if you have reached an impasse?'. All six (i.e. including Ardill, Beattie and Craig) said, 'We are by no means committed but paragraph 8(iii) has been discussed. We should like you to see the two groups separately in order to see whether there is any possibility of any progress being made on paragraph 8 (iii)'".

On the afternoon of Friday, 29th August, the U.U.U.C. negotiators had their first meeting with the Chairman, who reported that the S.D.L.P. had changed their approach, they were prepared to accept our Policy position of 26th August as a basis for further discussion and wanted to explore the possibility of agreement under paragraph 8 (iii). The U.U.U.C. negotiators met afterwards in the dining-room. They were generally happy with the situation and believed that they now had the possibility of a satisfactory agreement withing the U.U.U.C. policies, although it might involve a temporary coalition with the S.D.L.P. However it was recognised that further exploration was needed to see if the detail of such an agreement should be settled. Ian Paisley arrived and discussed the matter with Mr. Craig. On their way to their cars, Mr. Paisley told Mr. Craig that such an agreement would be satisfactory to the Unionist people if it was put in a referendum first.

At the Policy Committee on Monday and Tuesday, the outlines of the possible agreement with the S.D.L.P. became clear. At this stage the negotiations were tentative - they were in the form of exploring each other's position. It was understood that further detailed discussion and agreement in principle would be necessary and nothing then stated was intended to be a binding commitment.

It was stated that the S.D.L.P. appreciated that there could be no constitutional guarantee within the structures of government envisaged by the U.U.U.C., and that consequently they could have no assurance that any coalition would extend beyond the life of the first Parliament and that they would be liable to dismissal if they failed to support government policy.

It was also stated that the S.D.L.P. had agreed that "the first task of the new government would be to wage war on the terrorists". (Billy Beattie confirmed that this was said). They also accepted that the Parliament should control security and have appropriate forces - indeed they said that they would prefer the war against terrorism to be waged by local forces rather than by Westminster.

That the S.D.L.P. were content to accept a "gentleman's agreement" but wanted to investigate the ways of obtaining assurances that the U.U.U.C. would keep their word.

In the Policy Committee on Monday 1st September, E.A. Baird was silent and expressed no opinion, W.M. Smyth and A. Ardill spoke in favour and H. West who was in the chair did not express a firm opinion, that appeared to be in favour. Billy Beattie said little except to endorse Mr. Craig's report on the discussions. At some point on Monday or Tuesday, Reg Eapey gave an "academic" discourse on the advantages but without indicating his own views. Ian Paisley began to hedge a little, saying that it needed a lot of thought, he was unhappy and could they sell it to the people. Mr. Craig spoke clearly in favour.

Tuesday morning 2nd September a report given to Vanguard Convention Members who received with mixed feeling.

Because of the Vanguard meeting, the Policy Committee was postponed to lunch-time and held in Room 17 over a buffet lunch - the mood was relaxed and good-humoured, but hints were emerging that there could be a difference of opinion. Some expressed disbelief that the S.D.L.P. and U.U.U.C. could agree the policies for a coalition government, and there was a suspicion that perhaps the Chairman had misread their intentions. Consequently it was suggested that the three Party leaders plus their deputies should visit him to satisfy themselves that he was sure of the S.D.L.P.'s position. These six people (Ardill, Baird, Beattie, Craig, Paisley and West) left the meeting temporarily to see the Chairman. Reference was also made to the Chairman's willingness to prepare a paper setting out the position that the talks had reached and outlining the way forward. It was agreed that the paper be issued.

The Coalition met that afternoon. The position was outlined. A few members expressed firm opposition. The Coalition were told that there would be a paper for distribution later that week and that we would then meet to discuss the matter.

As Sir Robert Lowry said in the convention on 3rd October.

"Later on, on Wednesday, 3rd September, the three U.U.U.C. negotiators came to see me. They requested me to prepare a paper on a voluntary coalition solution. I said I would do so provided the S.D.L.P. also wished it. An hour later I conferred with the S.D.L.P. that its representatives would also like such a paper. That paper was issued on 4th September". It rehearsed the positions of the groups and then set out an agenda for discussion. Paragraphs 3 and 4 of the Agenda are as follows:-

"3.

(NY. West N) 67)
The Parties have therefore asked the Chairman to arrange a series of discussions to explore the possibility of Parties agreeing on a structure of government for Northern Ireland and in a very broad outline on a security, social and economic policy which might form the basis for a voluntary coalition.

"4.

The following assumptions have been made:

- (a) That devolved Parliamentary government is envisaged.
- (b) Any Party prepared unequivocally to endorse the agreed programme is eligible for inclusion in such a coalition.

- (c) That an agreement to form a coalition should embody a fixed term of years.
- (d) That the Prime Minister should have the right to select his Cabinet, to shuffle portfolios, to dismiss Ministers and to seek a dissolution of Parliament.
- (e) The enabling statute should avoid statutory prescriptions for coalitions.
- (f) The agreement can be embodied in a non-statutory or extra-statutory form such as:
 - (i) a report from the Convention
 - (ii) a White Paper submitting the report to Parliament."

On Thursday 4th September the Policy Committee again met and copies of the Document arrived later. It was at this meeting that it became clear that the growing doubts of Dr. Paisley had crystallized into opposition. In the course of argument Dr. Paisley conceded that there was no alternative way of regaining a Parliament but nonetheless felt that the price was too high. He said that all we could do was await divine intervention. Billy Beattie privately informed a Vanguard member that the D.U. would leave the Coalition and said that they were going out to rouse the country against this "sell-out" although he had not clearly dissented from the initiative earlier in the week to find agreed policies. Mr. M. Smyth became somewhat unhappy in view of the clear difference of opinion and argued that we should not rush into a decision but he left early to attend a Service at the City Hall for the victims of the Tullyvannon massacre. J. Molyneux sought clarification on our position. He asked if the U.U.U.C. wanted a fully-blown Parliament with security powers for if we did he did not believe that we could persuade Westminster to legislate for it on foot of a report supported by the U.U.U.C. alone. However he felt that Westminster would agree to a lesser form of devolution without security powers on the basis of a majority report.

On Friday morning the Vanguard Convention Party met. Mr. Craig, Glen Barr, George Green and David Trimble spoke in favour. Tom Carson, D. Allen, and E.A. Baird were opposed. Of the others, some expressed reservations but tended to fall silent as the meeting progressed and some spoke in terms that indicated agreement.

The Official Unionists met that afternoon and, according to reports, were divided - some in favour, some against. Apparently a decision was taken that they should seek to have a decision on the document postponed and, failing that, if necessary they would vote against.

On Saturday morning (6th) there was a special meeting of the Loyalist co-ordinating Committee. It was attended by Convention Members, Barr, Trimble, Black, Green and Brush. Shortly after the meeting opened, Jim Smyth of the U.W.C. made a statement that indicated that he was aware of the recent discussions at Stormont. The room was then cleared of all who were not full members of the Committee and after an assurance from all that the proceedings were confidential, the Co-ordinating Committee were given the full details. After several hours discussion the Committee expressed their approval with only Jim Smyth of the U.W.C. expressing reservations. However he voted in favour of a motion to "continue talks".

The Coalition then met on Monday, 8th September, and the proceedings since are public knowledge.

Mr. Paisley's growing opposition to even explore the terms for voluntary coalition with S.D.L.P., even inside the context of U.U.U.C. proposals, culminated in a meeting he had with ministers and members of the Free Presbyterian Church on Sunday 7th September. We believe that Dr. Paisley was informed that any further support from him for the voluntary coalition idea would create division in his church as well as in his Party.