

NIC/ISD

cc Dr Oliver
Mr Blackburn ✓
Mr Williamson (file copy)

CHAIRMAN:

PROGRESS OF CONVENTION

1. It now seems that the crunch might come in the Convention on Tuesday next when DUP/UVUC exchange papers - if indeed they do so. There is a slight note of despair in the air at the moment, and a significant section, particularly of UVUC backbenchers, are pressing for an early resumption of plenary sessions in order to wind the whole thing up and prepare a report. The received wisdom in these quarters is that the Convention has failed, but that some agreement might be reached next time round as a result of intensive and more realistic negotiations which would follow failure.
2. There is little time between Tuesday's inter-party exchanges and the Business Committee meeting on Thursday. If you are to intervene you will have to do so then. I think it better to go out with a bang than a whimper: perhaps you would consider the advisability of some fairly radical intervention to bring the parties to their senses and to keep the talks going.
3. This might involve you in calling the party leaders together on Tuesday evening or Wednesday morning to ask them to consider the serious consequences of a failure of the Convention to produce even some measure of agreement.
4. A general introductory line might be:
 - (a) Ulstermen have asked for a chance to settle their own affairs and have been given it.
 - (b) HMS has largely left it to Ulstermen to agree a form of government.
 - (c) Are they now to confess failure?

- (d) They are as well qualified as anyone to do the job. Able, intelligent politicians. If they don't do the job it is likely to be re-mitted to other politicians, no better qualified and with less interest or commitment.
- (e) Chairman is not a politician - the political judgements must be theirs - but a practical man of affairs. Long experience at settling conflicts and disputes - willing to use their skill if called upon.
- (f) What, frankly are the consequences of failure:
 - (a) for Northern Ireland; (b) for political parties.

5. What new line might be adopted to prevent a breakdown:

- (1) (a) plenary sessions on pertinent motions which would enable parties to establish their position, while inter-party talks go on intensively at another level;
- (b) they have attempted the most difficult question first - could they now change direction in the talks and seek agreement on lower level issues - the 'foothills and pinnacles' approach;
- (c) could 'power-sharing' be put in an ice-box while they seek agreement on other issues;
- (d) could manifestos similarly be put 'on ice'?
- (2) Chairman to force the issue - a clear answer from the parties - have talks succeeded or failed - if the latter, how should we address ourselves to the plenary sessions.
- (3) Postponement of plenary sessions while talks proceed - likely backbench revolt.
- (4) Chairman to play a determined interventionist role. Parties have spent about 6 hours discussing the most intractable problem of all - no surprise that they have failed to agree. Need a 'Kissinger' type figure to act as a go-between. Could Chairman and his team sit down for extended periods with the various negotiating teams seeking reformulations, analyses and compromises. This presumes:

- (a) written statements by parties, followed by long discussions with parties, separately and together;
- (b) use of expert advisers by parties. Where are their experts?

6. A further problem, not for discussion with the leaders in the first instance is what to do in the event of failure. How is the Convention to be wound down, and in what political and security context? Will members have a continuing role. The 'Check-list' indicated possible procedures for interim government on the presumption of agreement. What interim arrangements in the event of failure? Should Convention address itself to this. Perhaps recommend modifications to 'direct rule' for the interim period? If this kept the Convention in existence, what would the position of the Chairman be?

M E HAYES

22 August 1975

DRAFT:

Possible Agenda for Internal Meeting

Monday morning: 11th August. 10.00 am.

1. The Unionist Party Message and the proposed discussion on Monday afternoon.
2. The Chairman's letter of 2nd August to Party Leaders
 - a. Replies
 - b. Visits from Whips
 - c. Requests for Check-List
 - d. Any other action.
3. The Inter-Party Talks: Chairman's Role.
4. The Business Committee: Thursday 14th.
5. Plenary Sessions: Tuesday 19th.
6. Draft Motion in extreme situation.

JAO: 8.viii.75.