

MEETING WITH PUS, 16 FEBRUARY 1976

PRESENT: Dr Oliver Sir Frank Cooper
Mr Blackburn
Dr Hayes

1. The meeting took place at PUS invitation. Dr Oliver explained the present position. The Convention had to all practical purposes broken down on Thursday last. In the eyes of the press and public the Convention was over and we should recognise this. UUUC and SDLP were refusing to talk except on mutually exclusive preconditions. Both maintained the public posture that they were ready to talk - especially UUUC. Only Alliance of the smaller parties was anxious to continue talking and they might continue to do so for some time. This made it difficult for Chairman to say that deadlock had been reached without appearing to give a veto to SDLP. Chairman would be likely to regard such a decision as having political connotations unless he had the agreement of all the leaders. The programme agreed between Chairman and S of S involved Chairman in reporting to S of S after having satisfied himself that impasse had been reached, and after having informed leaders.
2. Dr Oliver said time was important. If there was to be an intervention it should be this week. Chairman unlikely to move on his own, but likely to respond to an invitation from S of S to give a progress report. MNH/RHB strongly supported JAO.
3. PUS said the wheels were turning in London. His official colleagues had approved his submission to cabinet and particularly favoured two-part government. He had now some doubt whether HMG would put any options to leaders. Convention staff argued for the presentation of options and publicity of this.
4. Agreed that S of S should invite Chairman to London on Wednesday, 18 February. Chairman would report the factual position and S of S would then stage-manage HMG intervention. This would involve a summons of party leaders to Downing Street on Friday, when PM would indicate the attitude of HMG. It was agreed to dispense with the intermediate stage involving S of S.
5. Dr Oliver said loyalists would make a noise about the invitation which they would regard as an unconstitutional intrusion with the affairs of the Convention, but agreed they would probably not refuse to go. PUS said if they refused or tried to impose conditions, Convention would be dissolved. Convention officials advised against an arbitrary dissolution if this could be avoided.

6. PUS said parties would be given 7 - 10 days to think over their response. If they agreed to realistically consider the options, the Convention could go on, if not, Convention would be wound up about March 3.
7. Agreed Chairman should be asked to stay over in London for the Friday meetings and that invitations to parties should be sent directly and not through Chairman.

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M N HAYES

17.2.76