

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

MEETING WITH UUUC LEADERS 22 JANUARY 1976

PRESENT: Chairman Mr West
Dr Oliver Dr Paisley
Mr Blackburn Mr Baird
Dr Hayes

1. Chairman said he had completed one round of talks with all parties and had got the impression that no group would boycott the Convention, all wanted to talk and preferred to work through inter-party talks rather than plenary sessions.
2. Chairman said it was fair to add that all the other parties had said that they would not be content merely to talk about the 'agreeable' matters in the Report, but would insist on discussing the 'crunch' matters. This was particularly true of SDLP and UPNI. Mr Baird said they had had a letter from Alliance which seemed to apply no conditions.
3. Chairman gave his assessment of the tone of the Westminster debate. UUUC had no friends on either side of the House. Dr Paisley concurred in this view.
4. Chairman also said that his reading of the situation suggested that Parliament would only be satisfied unless UUUC secured the concurrence of SDLP. He did not think that S of S would accept the agreement of Alliance and UPNI as being sufficient to exhibit widespread support in both communities.
5. Dr Paisley said they would not agree to discuss the question of SDLP participation at cabinet level. When asked, he said they were excluding a place in cabinet as of right. Mr Baird corrected this to 'a place in cabinet, period'.
6. When Mr Blackburn said this might mean the collapse of the Convention before it had even begun, UUUC attitude was 'so be it'. Dr Paisley said despite what was said in the White Paper, S of S would accept any power-sharing at executive level and this they would never accept. Chairman said they were entitled to take S of S letter at face value: it asked only for a form of partnership and participation.
7. Dr Oliver sketched several devices providing for increased participation by all parties in the business of running the country which were potentially prestigious and effectual but stopped short of cabinet office. Dr Paisley said they had tried several of these on SDLP but had got the same reply every time. Cabinet office or nothing. Nevertheless UUUC leaders, without any commitment, evinced considerable interest in some of the possibilities suggested by Dr Oliver.

Dr Paisley in particular was anxious to see many executive functions which had been devolved to public bodies being brought back under the direct control of parliament and was prepared to examine how some of these devices could be made a vehicle for increased power-sharing - always provided that ultimate power rested in the cabinet elected by the majority in the Assembly.

8. Mr West asked what guarantee had they that SDLP would even consider any of these possibilities. Reply - none. Chairman urged on UUUC nevertheless the importance of showing themselves as open minded as possible and ready to discuss new ideas, even if in the end they had to reject them. He pointed out that the phrase 'widespread support in both parts of the community' meant widespread in that part of the community represented by UUUC also. This was their ultimate safeguard. Dr Paisley argued that with 22% of the total vote, SDLP could not claim 'widespread support' even in the catholic community.
9. Mr West was anxious to have an immediate election to a constitution set up under the Report. If UUUC were in the minority and a combination of other parties decided to form a coalition with SDLP. UUUC would acquiesce and form a parliamentary opposition.
10. Mr Baird said if the alternative to agreement in the Convention was extended direct rule, the loyalist people would not put up with this for long. There would be fierce opposition - not necessarily non-violent or constitutional and loyalist leaders would have to take a lead in this spontaneous movement or be swept away.
11. RHB suggested that if there was not agreement to discuss the matters in terms acceptable to all parties, it would be better to call off the convention without any plenary session. It was quite clear UUUC would oppose this. Mr West said this would be conceding that SDLP could veto any agreement. UUUC would insist on a plenary session to get their position on the record.
12. Mr West said UUUC would prefer to discuss with the other parties the amount of agreement for such issues as opposition to Council of Ireland, support for police, governor, oath of office etc. Chairman said other parties not really interested in this. Mr Baird said UUUC could only agree to talk if SDLP agreed first to drop the demand for cabinet office. Dr Paisley said they would have to reiterate their refusal to talk on participation at cabinet level.
13. Eventually Dr Paisley said it might be possible for UUUC to agree to a fairly low-key motion which would ask Chairman, in the light of the known attitudes of the parties, to explore the possibility of arranging a programme of talks.

Agreed UUUC would consider this matter and talk again on Monday,
26 January.

14. Chairman told Mr West he was unwilling to delay acknowledging Mr Taylor's letter of resignation. Mr West said Mr Taylor had asked for another day and was agreeable to the Chairman delaying his reply. Chairman reluctantly agreed to wait.



M N HAYES

23 January 1976