

UPNI/UUUC MEETING 5 FEBRUARY 1976

PRESENT: Chairman Mr Faulkner Mr West Mr Armstrong
Dr Oliver Lord Brookeborough Dr Paisley Mr Beattie
Dr Hayes Major Hall-Thompson Mr Baird Mr Empey
Mrs Dickson Capt Ardill Mr Overend
Mr Cardwell

Mr J Steele acted as Clerk.

1. Mr West asked for Hansard facilities for the first part of the meeting.
In the event a verbatim record was made of the whole proceedings [Remarks by the Chairman were not recorded].
2. Mr West began by asking whether Mr Faulkner was a free agent - whether UPNI had entered into any arrangements with any other party to oppose the proposals which had been approved in the Convention.
3. Mr Faulkner resented the question, but said that UPNI was entirely on its own. They were however committed to the maintenance of the Union above all else. They believed that only a government representative of both sections of the community could govern Northern Ireland, and parliament would not permit anything else. UPNI thought all sections of the community must share power at the top. Mr Faulkner said UPNI had come to discuss para 24 of the White Paper and nothing else.
4. On the question of UUUC Report, Mr Faulkner said they had voted against it, and it had been rejected by Parliament. The Secretary of State made it quite clear that HMG would only accept a power-sharing system. If the Convention recommended anything else next time round, that too would be rejected. When pressed by the Chairman as to what would happen if SDLP, or even the whole Convention agreed on a system which did not involve SDLP membership of Cabinet, Mr Faulkner said this was a hypothetical question, but reaffirmed his belief that Parliament would require power sharing at the top.
5. Mr West said that there had been substantial agreement on the Convention report, and but for the unreasonableness of the other parties, there would have been full agreement and acceptance by Parliament. He said Mr Faulkner was responsible for preventing the return of a devolved government to NI.

6. Mr West laid great stress on collective responsibility in Cabinet. He said UUUC did not trust SDLP who were Republicans determined to destroy NI. Mr Faulkner said he did trust SDLP - they had their long term aspirations, but both they and everybody else realised that a United Ireland was not on in the foreseeable future. In the meantime they had pledged themselves to work for the good of Northern Ireland. He had found them loyal and able colleagues in the Executive, and collective responsibility in cabinet had not been a problem. Mr Baird said that did not seem to have been the experience of Mr Roy Bradford. Mr Faulkner welcomed the SDLP statement on law and order and constitutional status which he said would have been unthinkable a few years ago and which Unionists would have been very glad to have 50 years ago.
7. Mr West asked Mr Faulkner to let them have a note of UPNI objections to the Convention Report. Mr Faulkner said there was no point in doing so. Their objection was not to detail in the report, but to the basic proposition which was to exclude the possibility of sharing power in Government. Chairman said this was not necessarily so. Mr Faulkner said the practical effect was to produce a Government representative of only one section of the community. UPNI proposals were contained in their draft report and they did not wish to go further than that. They favoured a voluntary coalition, if it could be achieved, but thought there should be no devolution without such a voluntary agreement.
8. UPNI advocated an early election. If there were a majority in favour of power-sharing then a power-sharing government could be set up and power devolved. In the event of there being an anti power-sharing majority in the election then S of S would act, and in Mr Faulkner's view should not set up a devolved parliament. In these circumstances Direct Rule would continue.
9. Mr Faulkner said there was no point in talking further, and the meeting ended without agreement to meet again.
10. The meeting was acrimonious in tone throughout - UUUC were very hostile to Mr Faulkner, and Mr West conducted a rather aggressive cross-examination. This was the first of the series of meetings at which Christian names were not used, and where there was no agreement to meet again. No useful purpose was served by the talks.


M N HAYES

9 February 1976