

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

MEETING WITH UUUC LEADERS 9 FEBRUARY 1976

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

1. The meeting had been arranged at short notice at the Chairman's invitation in order to discuss arrangements for the UUUC/SDLP meeting on 12 February. Chairman said he would also be having talks with SDLP.
2. Chairman asked whether it would be appropriate for him to list a series of alternative forms of government which the meeting might consider. Should these be circulated in advance? He thought the parties owed it to Parliament and to themselves to be seen to have examined (even if to reject) as many options as possible. He felt it his duty and that of his staff to ensure that parties had the opportunity to consider as many options as possible. It would be necessary for somebody to draft a Report and this would be difficult if no options had been examined.
3. Dr Paisley objected strongly. He said they had put their proposals in the Report as no other party had done. They did not want to be put in the position of repudiating the reasonable proposals of the Chairman. Their followers would regard these as having been inspired by S of S and even the best proposal would be rejected out of hand. He would repudiate the Chairman's right to float solutions and the Chairman would be putting himself in political jeopardy if he were to do so. He did not object to Chairman's office supplying Alliance or any other party with suggestions, but proposals should only come to the Convention through the parties and not direct from the Chairman. They were not going to discuss power-sharing - the discussion had got dangerously near this topic in their meeting with UPNI.
4. Mr Baird said UUUC wanted to avoid appearing as the intransigents who rejected every option but their own. The way in which they would avoid being put in this position in the present context would be to refuse to allow Chairman to make any proposals. The Chairman noted the UUUC position.
5. Chairman said the agenda for Thursday would have to include consideration of par 24 of the White Paper. This contained the matters referred by Parliament and the Convention would have to satisfy Parliament that they had in fact been duly considered.

6. Dr Paisley said they saw no point in discussing 24(c) unless a permanent constitution were agreed towards which the evolutionary process would work. Westminster would not devolve control of security to a temporary set-up, and without control of security any government would fail in NI.
7. Chairman drew attention to par 20 of the White Paper. He thought a wide agreement would be readily accepted at Westminster.
8. Mr West said they were anxious to talk to any party, they would not discuss power sharing with SDLP, but would be prepared to listen to anything SDLP had to say. If SDLP came off their insistence on power-sharing UUUC would be generous, otherwise there was no point in talking. Dr Paisley said he had asked S of S to knock SDLP's heads together and tell them to forget about power sharing.
9. Chairman referred to the possibility of a S of S intervention if the Convention reached an impasse. How was he to convey this to S of S? What should they do? S of S would probably want to hold up Convention for a week or so while he talked to parties, while still leaving time for any additional matters to be considered within the Convention.
10. Dr Paisley said S of S strategy was to buy off individual members of UUUC by offering them office in a voluntary coalition and then hoping for a small majority in the recalled Convention. UUUC would not tolerate any interference by S of S. The matter had been remitted to the Convention by Parliament and they would report only to Parliament. The S of S could not legally intervene. If DUP were asked to meet S of S they would refuse to do so. Chairman said he thought S of S might propose voluntary coalition, or a Council of State, or two-tier government on a GLC Committee system.
11. When asked what they would do in the event of a breakdown of talks on Thursday, UUUC said they were willing to continue talks with any party and did not want to be seen to be the party which broke off talks. They felt Alliance would want to keep on talking, although UUUC did not want to spin out talks with Alliance or NILP. NILP they had found most disappointing and Alliance had not yet produced the promised papers. UUUC did not want the Convention to extend beyond the month. Neither did they want a series of meaningless debates. There should be no plenary sessions until the talks had been completed. If they had not reached agreement in the talks, they would prefer not to have public debates which would inevitably lead to acrimony.
12. UUUC agreed to postponement of Business Committee on Thurs, 12/2. There should not be a meeting of the Committee until there was business to arrange.