

In other words, English impatience must not take over at this stage. It is also important that the Ulster representatives at Westminster should make it possible for the British Government to respond in a positive way. There will be a great responsibility on the 12 Ulster Members not to say anything in a way which would make it possible for the British Government to react irresponsibly.

I hope, therefore, that at the end of the debate at Westminster the door will be left open for further re-negotiation in this Chamber. That would seem to me to be more important than anything else. Among the 78 Members we have got to know that some people throughout the Province have not quite the jaundiced view of us we are sometimes led to believe. Deep down in their hearts the people realise that the Convention, for all its difficulties, is probably the only hope we have for the future. I hope there will be a future.

My summing up, after reading the documents, is that we have not succeeded nor have we failed; we have simply begun our task. I look forward to the next stage of this task and I feel that on progress so far the 78 of us can make considerable progress in the future and eventually evolve a Constitution. There must be no time limit on it. As I said before, we must do the job as quickly as possible but we must be given as long as is necessary to finish it.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY PROPOSALS

2.51 p.m.

Mr. Hume: Mr. Chairman, may I begin by apologising for the absence of the leader of my party, Mr. Fitt, who is, as I believe other Members are, engaged on important matters in another place? My only function in standing here is to present formally the points of view of my party on the form of future government for Northern Ireland. In doing so I am not under any illusions about the task or work in which we are engaged. It is well known that we, like the Alliance Party and the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland, would have much preferred the final Report of this Convention to have been drafted by impartial persons—preferably yourself, Mr. Chairman, and your staff—after having had submitted to them the proposals of all the parties. In that way we could have had a Report which genuinely reflected the views of all sections of the population. We could then have proceeded to weigh the opinions and the support of the different views and sought out where areas of common ground existed and where they did not.

Tragically for us all, that is not the course this Convention is following. Instead, we are being

asked and will be asked to accept as the views of this Convention a report which has not sought and does not have the consent of the representatives of a substantial section of this community. I would also point out that it would appear that Members of this Convention have not learned the lessons of the past few years, which very clearly show that each substantial section can exercise a veto on any system of government. That has been demonstrated by both sections of this community in recent years. One would have thought—and many of us expressed this in this Convention—that it was no longer the time to think in terms of vetoes but to look at the positive side and suggest that there can be no solution to our problems which does not have the active consent and full support of all sections. Instead, we are being asked to accept a report which, as I say, has not sought and does not have the consent of substantial sections of the community and is therefore doomed to failure as a possible solution to our problems.

That being so, there is no point in any pretence today or between now and November 7 that we are engaged in serious dialogue about each other's points of view because we are not. We are engaged in an exercise to give the impression that the view of a sectional majority is, in fact, a view which commands widespread acceptance in the community. This is not so and therefore there would be little point in our engaging in politeness and involving ourselves in line-by-line examination of a report we have already rejected and which, it has already been decided, will not in any way be changed. We have no intention of becoming Lobby fodder to add respectability to the views of a sectional majority, and therefore when Members opposite engage in the line-by-line examination they will do so without our no doubt valuable assistance.

As I have said, we will not attempt to give respectability to a report which not only wants a restoration of sectional majority rule, which everyone knows has failed, but sectional majority rule within what would, in fact, be an independent Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. That is the incredible proposition we are being asked to debate by the U.U.C. under its proposals which include a Bill of Constitutional Rights.

At the opening of our debates fine words were used by the Leader of the U.U.C. who said that we should leave the past behind us. Those words were accepted by us in the spirit we thought they were intended and throughout our debates we have sought not to refer to the past but to try to seek out other people's objections to our point of view and see how we could meet those objections. We honourably sought common ground and a way forward for the fu-

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ture. I can only regret that Mr. West did not take his own advice because not only in the publishing of pamphlets but in speeches and in all other attitudes he has shown that not only he himself but the Coalition which he represents continues at all times to rake up the past as a means of defending its present position. Therefore, there is no point in trying to pretend, as Mr. Bleakley in his statesmanlike way sought to do, that there is agreement in this document because there is not.

Mr. Ivan Cooper (Mid Ulster): Hear, hear.

Mr. Hume: There is no doubt at all that we all agree that the security of the people of Northern Ireland rests in their own hands and should be placed in their own hands. After all we have been through that is one lesson we have all learned. There is also the lesson that our social and economic future is in our own hands but, because of our past, it must be in the hands of all the people of Northern Ireland and not just in the hands of a section of her people. It is that fundamental disagreement which makes nonsense of everything else. There is no point in closing our eyes to it. Neither is there any point in closing our eyes to the fact that the majority opinion represented in the Convention has decided on an "ourselves alone" policy which rejects the parameters laid down by the entire British Parliament and which says that the view of the majority alone, which, as I have said, neither has nor has sought the consent of a substantial section of the community, is the view that will prevail. It may well prevail but it will not provide the peace and stability which the Convention was set up to seek.

UNIONIST PARTY OF NORTHERN IRELAND PROPOSALS

2.58 p.m.

Mr. Faulkner (South Down): The proposals which my party puts forward are precisely in line with those we put forward and debated a few weeks ago and, from a reading of the documents put forward by all the parties, that seems to be virtually the universal situation. The debate we are initiating today is very much a rehash of the debate that took place some weeks ago. In my view we are neglecting an opportunity that we ought to have seized—the opportunity to achieve quickly devolved regional government for Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

We can argue for a long time as to the precise form of that government, but it ought to be obvious to everybody that only one government can be successful and that is one with which all sections of the Ulster community can identify, one having institutions which all sections will support. No other government will have authority in Northern Ireland. It should be

equally obvious that the only means of achieving an acceptable government is to form one containing representatives of the two main communities in Ulster. There is no point in trying to dodge that salient and basic principle.

In my view this Convention is coming to a tragic end. I use the word "tragic" because, perhaps for the first time in 50 years, we have an opportunity to get all elected representatives of the Ulster people involved in one government. The simple reason is that every one of them has accepted freely the decision of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland to stay within the United Kingdom. Whatever their aspirations, they are prepared to work in government within that context. I do not for one moment go along with those who say that Northern Ireland's first experiment in power sharing in government failed.

Mr. Hume: Hear, hear.

Mr. Faulkner: We achieved a breakthrough in January, 1974. (INTERRUPTION.) We showed that representatives of the two main communities could not only work together but could do so effectively and efficiently.

Mr. Hutchinson (Armagh): It did not work long.

Mr. Faulkner: There is only one reason for its not having worked long; subversion brought it down. That need not have happened. (INTERRUPTION.) It happened only because, regrettably, the British Government did not stand by the wishes of the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Faulkner: Since then we have had 101 opportunities to make a breakthrough, but we have not succeeded. We are told that this Convention will end within a few weeks. In my view it might as well end within a few days because it has proved that it is incapable of submitting to Westminster proposals which would provide regional government for Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

Mr. Hutchinson: A united Ireland.

Mr. Faulkner: It is facile to say that Westminster will look at the Convention's Report and say, "We can agree to lines 1 to 120, but you will have to think again about lines 120 to 150."

Mr. Hume: Hear, hear.

Mr. Faulkner: Other results could flow from the tragic culmination of the efforts in this Convention. We, especially those of us who want to stay in the United Kingdom, must

recognise that the Westminster Parliament is our sovereign Parliament.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Faulkner: We had an opportunity—indeed we still have—to take advantage of good will from the people of Northern Ireland in greater measure than ever before. Anyone who thinks that there will be good will for proposals representing the thoughts of just one section of the community is blind. I hope that between now and the closing hours of the Convention there will be another effort to produce a Report which can really be said to be from all the people of Northern Ireland. That is the kind of report which my party has tried to produce.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

THE UNITED ULSTER UNIONIST COALITION PROPOSALS

3.04 p.m.

Mr. West (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): There is not very much which needs to be said in introducing this draft report, which we hope will be forwarded from this Convention to the Secretary of State and thence presented to the Parliament at Westminster. All that is in it was discussed at considerable length during the debate on the broad outlines of the proposals which were submitted earlier by each of the parties represented in the Convention. However, I think it would be profitable to refresh our memories on what is and is not required of us by the legislation which established this Convention.

The Northern Ireland Act 1974 provided the only criterion for our work in the Convention. No other Statutory Instrument—not even the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973—has any relevance in this regard. Despite all the publicity, propaganda and brainwashing on both sides of the Irish Sea and further afield, the Northern Ireland Act 1974 did not demand from us proposals for a power-sharing executive or a voluntary coalition. It did not ask for proposals for an institutionalised Irish Dimension, nor did it require that any or all of our proposals should be agreed or unanimous. It simply asked this Convention to consider

"... what provision for the Government of Northern Ireland is likely to command the most widespread acceptance throughout the community there."

The Government also stated in the White Paper of July, 1974, paragraph 55:

"In the event of the Convention producing recommendations which command majority and widespread support from its members the Government will give the most serious consideration to them."

These two quotations state, first, what is required of us in our work in the Convention, and, secondly, an assurance that recommendations which command majority and widespread support will be given the most serious consideration by the British Government. The paper which I hope will go to the British Parliament is not regarded by the U.U.U.C. as representing the result of phase I in this exercise. Because of the assurances contained in the White Paper it ought not to be so regarded.

It is untrue that most members of the U.U.U.C. believe that the Convention Report has no chance of getting Westminster approval; we do not take that view. Indeed, I have always taken an optimistic view of the Convention and of its work and hopes. I should have been very glad had we been able to achieve a completely unanimous set of recommendations.

Mr. Hume: If you had even tried.

Mr. West: I will deal with that remark later, if I may.

It was probably not in human nature, particularly the Ulster human nature, to achieve complete unanimity. I cannot imagine that complete unanimity would be reached in any country in the world on such issues as have confronted us. I feel sure that some Members of the Convention were surprised at the considerable measure of consensus which emerged during our deliberations. For instance, with only one dissident, we all want a devolved government. On many topics we were compelled to admit that we had almost all been thinking on pretty much the same lines.

Mr. Devlin: Except on security.

Mr. West: Even when we came up with somewhat differing proposals we found that many of them were the subject of no very fanatical feeling. There are matters on which all of us have been prepared and, I believe, are still prepared to leave our conclusions somewhat open-ended. This advanced measure of agreement has brought with it a high degree of mutual understanding which I believe has laid very important foundations for the future, on which I hope we will all join together, with God's blessing, to build for the common good.

Undoubtedly, the one really big issue on which we have not reached a high level of agreement all round is what has been called power sharing. The Act under which we have been meeting, and whose terms we in the Unionist Coalition accepted wholeheartedly and enthusiastically, left us to pursue our work

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with entire freedom and without any binding commitment in respect of specific power sharing or any other subject. I think most of us would have been very unwilling to participate in it on any other terms. However, since our deliberations commenced last May we have noticed with some concern that discussions are taking place at official level on the possibility of making some adjustments to the structure of local government. This is an action which many, if not all, Members of the Convention would strongly resent. Matters of this kind should be the responsibility of a future devolved Northern Ireland Government and should have been left to it.

Members of the S.D.L.P. would like the Unionist Coalition to concede a general participation of Opposition parties at Cabinet level whereas we are offering instead a committee system devised to give real and substantial influence to Opposition parties and to make Parliament more effective. While some minority parties may value the prestige to be gained by having a few of their members in a Cabinet controlled by the majority party, the value of the committee system to these parties, in terms of influencing Parliament towards what they believe to be better policies for the country, far exceeds Cabinet membership by contrived means and not in accordance with electoral support. It is undoubtedly more important and more beneficial for the supporters of minority groups or parties to have their parliamentary representatives influencing Parliament through the committee system than to have a few of them in a minority position in a Cabinet.

As the electorate take stock of discussion in the Convention many of them must be gravely disturbed about the amount of time given to the argument as to who is to obtain jobs in a future government. With evidence of this political narrow-mindedness we do not deserve a government.

MR. O'DONOGHUE (South Down): We certainly do not.

MR. WEST: Surely the premier task of the Convention is to consider how the Province can best be governed democratically, efficiently, economically, justly and peacefully—in a word, in a way which will greatly improve or, indeed, transform the quality of life of our fellow citizens. Surely this is what they deserve.

The two ways in which power sharing between political parties at Cabinet level can be achieved are either by a voluntary agreement among parties concerned or by some kind of guarantee which is written into the Constitution and which carries the force of law. A voluntary agreement between parties is

something that cannot be ruled out and it could easily arise out of what we have proposed provided electorate support was given for such a coalition government. It was from such an electoral pact that the U.U.U.C. gained an overall majority in the Convention Election.

We know that my good friend, Mr. Craig, has been eager for us to explore the possibilities of a voluntary and temporary coalition with minority parties to come into operation in any new legislature as soon as it is set up, with a view to establishing a stable government which would attract everybody's support and co-operation. The likelihood of such a legislature providing the strong government which is needed in this country seems remote because of the varied interests to be accommodated within the Cabinet. This whole matter must be left to the electorate to deliberate upon before going to the polls at the next election. Mr. Ivan Cooper has intimated publicly that the scheme is unattractive to the S.D.L.P. While it may have been useful to have the project ventilated it is clearly a hypothetical speculation not currently relevant.

However, the question of a political party, particularly a majority party, bartering seats in a Cabinet for agreement on a Constitution is repulsive to the U.U.U.C. and an insult to parliamentary democracy.

MR. DEVLIN: It is a question of your imagination as well.

MR. WEST: It may be, but no responsible politician would talk about bartering seats in a Cabinet for the sake of getting agreement on a Constitution.

Experience shows that coalitions have to arise from a deeply felt mutual need. In a Government publication issued before the Convention Election our attention was drawn to a coalition government in the Netherlands and yet Dutch politicians, when questioned, were adamant that if one party could manage an overall majority in the legislature they certainly would not be in a coalition. Coalition governments are born of a compelling need that arises naturally out of the actual political situation and this must be strongly experienced by the component parties. Leaders of the main political parties in Britain with nothing like the electoral support won by the U.U.U.C. have continually rejected the idea of coalition with other parties at Westminster even though their basic policies are much more akin to each other than are the policies of the U.U.U.C. and the S.D.L.P.

The S.D.L.P. is concerned that the political pendulum has never swung in its direction and that the Unionist Party has been in power in

Northern Ireland for 50 years. This has happened because the electorate in the most democratic way possible has always returned that party to power.

Mr. Hume: It was because the boundaries were drawn to give you that.

Mr. West: The boundaries were redrawn recently and the position has not changed very much.

Mr. Currie: You are a good example yourself.

Mr. West: You did your best but you did not succeed.

Mr. Currie: We did not break down boundaries.

Mr. West: During those 50 years other political parties had a similar opportunity to seek the favour of the electorate for their policies. It was the will of the electorate which kept one party in power for 50 years and for very good reasons.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. West: Its policies gained favour with the majority.

Mr. Hume: Why did you sell out the other three Ulster counties?

An hon. Member: Answer that.

Mr. West: However, the numerical margin between the majority group and the Opposition parties, that is, the parties which with one exception formed the last Government, has narrowed considerably. If the last Government had the great harmony and the potential which Mr. Faulkner reminded us about a few moments ago then one would have expected those parties to have formed an electoral pact and to have fought the Convention Election as a coalition. It is likely that this choice will be open to them at the next parliamentary election. If they win a majority then the U.U.U.C. will accept the verdict of the electorate and will form the Official Opposition. This has been said before by Dr. Paisley. Having made this offer publicly we would expect the parties presently on the Opposition benches to reciprocate by forming the Official Opposition if they fail to win a majority at the next election.

Mrs. Dickson (South Antrim): Would the right hon. Member give way?

Mr. West: Yes.

Mrs. Dickson: Mention has been made of the next parliamentary election to be held in

Northern Ireland. At the moment we are trying to decide on some form of government. We have not made great progress or achieved much in that direction. Surely it is premature to talk of an election when we do not know whether the Government at Westminster will ever have another election in Northern Ireland.

Mr. West: All parties agreed at the outset of the Convention on the need for devolved government. I do not think any of us would have sat here all this time if we had not had the hope of seeing a devolved government formed again. I readily agree that it is impossible to state precisely what the position of the other parties will be after a general election to a new legislature. It could be that the U.U.U.C. would be prepared, under certain circumstances, to form a coalition with some of the parties opposite, but I must say quite frankly that it would be difficult to foresee any circumstances in which the U.U.U.C. would enter a coalition government with the S.D.L.P. or any other Republican party.

Mr. Hutchinson: Under no circumstances.

Mr. O'Donoghue: Hard-liner.

Mr. West: Then there is the other alternative—the coalition Government brought about by some sort of constitutional device as applied to the Ulster situation in 1973. Without holding an inquest on that particular ill-advised venture I should like to draw Members' attention to just what a coalition created by a guarantee would mean. First, there could be no collective Cabinet responsibility as the members of such a government would not owe their positions either to an electoral mandate or to an appointment by the Prime Minister. Their loyalty towards Cabinet colleagues of other parties would not necessarily be compelling.

Such a government so formed would not be responsible to Parliament and the electorate and, because of the guaranteed position of its members, the electorate would not be free to change it. Democracy and honest debate, as we understand them, would be at an end. A guarantee which protects a particular party in government against the choice of the electorate invites the threat of a complete breakdown of government. Need we look any further for proof than to the Ulster situation recently?

Even if such a breakdown were avoided the means by which every party or group in government could have a veto over every Cabinet decision would render effective government impossible. Governments that have been compulsorily and artificially put together on a basis of a constitutional guarantee could very well bring the whole country to a complete standstill. A system of well-meant