

It was agreed that Chairman should see what safeguards he could formulate, and to meet again after Chairman's meeting with UUUC on 3 September.

## CHAIRMAN'S MEETING WITH SDLP NEGOTIATORS 1 SEPTEMBER 1975

7. DUP were divided on the question of a resumption of plenary sessions. They  
 were divided in the debate - that public credibility  
 and relevance required a return of public Mr Devlin.

PRESENT: Chairman Mr Hume  
Mr Blackburn Mr Currie  
Dr Hayes Mr Devlin

1. The Chairman reviewed the present position arising from meeting with SDLP on Friday and touched in general terms on some of the points raised in the earlier meeting with UUUC. He thought there was some hope of securing agreement to a voluntary coalition for a period - although in his judgement UUUC would not accept any statutory arrangement which looked remotely like institutionalised power-sharing, nor could they get their supporters to accept it if they did. He had been searching for some form of non-statutory assurance which might enable SDLP to consider the proposal.
2. Mr Hume said they needed two things: (a) an adequate fixed period of voluntary coalition which would give the system a fair trial; and (b) provision for review at the end of the agreed period. In relation to the first, he thought 10 years a minimum, so that the agreed programme could be endorsed in two elections. At the end of the period, there would have to be provision for review of the working of the system, by Parliament or otherwise, otherwise they would run the risk of having, by participating in government for a short period, given the loyalists back the form of government represented by pre-1968 Stormont. While they accepted the honesty of the people they were dealing with, people changed and parties changed - they wanted something more substantial than a gentleman's agreement.
3. While seeking statutory guarantees - SDLP displayed little faith in HMG or in Parliament. They expressed the view that no British Government of either party would be willing to reopen the Ulster question in 10 years time, or again to impose direct rule if once a devolved form of government was set up.
4. Mr Devlin was anxious to keep talks going on any subject. He thought they were closer to DUP than either of the other UUUC groups and would like to develop these relationships. Mr Devlin said they should recognise that guarantees were not possible and go forward in trust. This view did not seem to attract support from his colleagues.
5. SDLP said they had asked UUUC to spell out what 'copper-fastened guarantees' they might be given. The Chairman agreed to pass this request on to UUUC.

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

4. On the question of 'copper-fastened guarantees' SDLP were not specific. They kept asking what the UUUC offered. Mr Hume suggested the possibility of an Act for 10 years renewable at the end of that period. He was not agreeable to the Bleakley/Alliance proposals because they omitted to specify what constitution such a government would operate under.
5. The Chairman said he was preparing heads of discussion as a basis for meetings with the two groups. Mr Devlin was anxious for the Chairman to be directly involved in all inter-party talks. The Chairman said in the end of the day both sets of negotiators would have to get down round the table and work out the political aspects of their package. He would not accept that the talks had failed until this had been done and they were still unable to agree.
6. The talks lasted about 1 hour. The SDLP were somewhat subdued and had not prepared any new material. It was agreed that SDLP would be available to discuss the Chairman's Heads of Discussion on Thursday.

M N HAYES

4 September 1975

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