

NOTES OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE SECRETARY
OF STATE AND A DELEGATION FROM UUUC,
STORMONT CASTLE, 5 JANUARY 1976

Those present:	Secretary of State	Mr West
	PUS	Dr Paisley
	Mr Morrison	Mr Baird
	Mr Ramsay	Rev Smyth
		Rev Beattie
		Mr Empey
		Captain Ardill
		Captain Armstrong
		Mr C Smyth
		Mr Harvey

The Secretary of State said that the period of post-Convention consultations was now coming to an end. Contrary to some press reports he had found them useful. The Government was now moving towards decisions. He pointed out that the Commons Debate on 12 January would come before a four-day devolution debate; devolution was likely to be a major Parliamentary preoccupation for the next 18 months to 2 years. Unfortunately the NI Debate would be taking place against a background of widespread anti-Irish feeling in GB.

The Secretary of State disassociated himself entirely from the Chris Walker article in The Times of 13 December; he rejected the delegation's suggestion, however, that he should issue a disclaimer - misrepresentation was unfortunately too commonplace to justify a policy of issuing correcting statements.

On the subject of the Press Release which had followed the UUUC's last security meeting with him, the Secretary of State said that it had not been his intention to brand the UUUC as "armchair critics" of the Security Forces.

The Secretary of State said that he was satisfied with the exploratory talks which he and officials had had with the UUUC on such topics as finance and policing; he did not necessarily agree with the points of view put forward by the Coalition, but he now had a clear understanding of them and would be giving the Government's views on 12 January. He wished at the present meeting to deal with the wider issue of the Convention Report's overall objectives.

Mr West opened with a general UUUC policy statement. He said that the editorial article in that day's Belfast News Letter summed up a great deal of their views. They had gone into the Convention on the basis that HMG was turning to the people of NI to find solutions. They had carried out their task, as laid down in the 1974 Act and had striven hard to come up with comprehensive proposals; they would be extremely unhappy if this work were to be set aside. The UUUC had tried to bring minority parties into a dialogue about future arrangements, but no less than four major opportunities had been lost:

1. After the inter-party talks had broken down the SDLP had finally refused to resume talking.
2. UUUC members on the Business Committee had tried to arrange an advance request for an extension of time for the Convention, but the other parties' representatives had thrown out the suggestion.
3. Minority parties boycotted debate on the UUUC Report, even though it was clearly the most coherent and comprehensive document on offer (quite apart from the Coalition's voting strength).
4. Likewise, the minority parties boycotted debate on the Draft Constitutional Bill, which had been drawn up to let Members at Westminster see how the UUUC proposals might be given effect.

Mr West said there was now a clamour from other parties for the Convention to be recalled. But for what purpose? Had not the minority parties wasted their opportunities for dialogue in the Convention last year? The UUUC had passed an unanimous Resolution stating that they saw no point in the Convention's being recalled, if the intention was to ask the Coalition to discuss either power-sharing with Republicans or an institutionalised "Irish Dimension": these proposals had been firmly rejected and they were no longer open to discussion. Only on the details of a settlement as outlined in the Convention Report would a recall serve a useful purpose.

Mr West claimed that the will of the great majority of the people of NI was clear and had been registered at successive elections. In no way could the SDLP's claims to seats in Government be justified with a share of the vote which had been consistently under 25%. The memories which the Loyalist population had of the destructive tactics of the leading members of the SDLP were still too vivid for the electorate at large to tolerate the

inclusion of such men in government. The Secretary of State might imagine that he could get acceptance of power-sharing by means of a referendum, but even assuming his success on that score, the inevitable subsequent elections would certainly overthrow the system again.

Mr Baird said that there might well be a Loyalist boycott of a referendum.

Dr Paisley reviewed the options which he saw as being open to the Secretary of State if he did not accept the Convention Report:

1. Reactivate the 1973 Act and risk Assembly elections.
2. Hold a referendum which would put certain questions to the people.

But he agreed with his colleagues that once the issues came to an election, the UUUC appeal to the grassroots would be as strong as ever. Part of the strength of their appeal was that people could see that while they, the UUUC, were willing to accept a minority, Opposition role should they not at some future date command an overall majority at the polls, their opponents were demanding positions in government for having been voted into a minority situation.

Dr Paisley said it would be unfair not to spell out to the Secretary of State that if the Convention Report were to be rejected by IMG such a rejection would lead inevitably to a clash with the Ulster people.

The Secretary of State pointed out that in earlier debates in the House Dr Paisley had acknowledged that at the end of the day IMG and Parliament must decide.

The Secretary of State went on to say that he had been considering the general historical trend of events over the period 1920-1972 and he asked the delegation for their views as to why the minority community as a whole had never supported the Stormont system.

Mr Empey drew a distinction between unenthusiastic acceptance and downright rejection - there had been a large measure of acceptance by the Catholic community, otherwise the system could not have operated. Rev Smyth said that the lack of full acceptance of the State of Northern Ireland by the minority had its roots in the all-Ireland mythology peddled by the Dublin Government and sporadically thrust into the limelight by the activities of IRA gunmen.

The Secretary of State asked the delegation what made them think that the minority community would now accept a return to the Stormont set-up.

The UUUC delegation rejected the assumption that the proposals in their Report amounted to a return to the pre-1972 situation; they had put forward radically new proposals for the involvement of the minority. They firmly believed that the SDLP and the Catholic community generally would accept these proposals once it was made clear that nothing further was on offer. Dr Paisley claimed that in inter-party discussions the SDLP had said that what they basically sought was a guarantee of fairness in government - this they would receive under the UUUC proposals. Mr Baird said that the SDLP could not publicly agree to accept the UUUC proposals at this stage since the British Government had been seen, as early as July 1975, to be hinting at their insistence on power-sharing in Cabinet. Mr West said that open support from the Catholic community for the UUUC proposals could only be expected when the present wave of terrorism had passed.

The Secretary of State said that the fundamental issue in a political settlement was how to overcome the deep division in the community.

Mr Empey said that the community position had deteriorated seriously in recent years, largely because the stability which had been gradually established over more than 40 years had been upset - most of all by IMG's interventions. Doors which had seemed to be closed for ever - eg Irish unification - had suddenly been opened again. This had given the IRA new hope - as had IMG's rejection of the possibility of total integration in 1972. Conversely these events had alarmed the Unionist population and made the Catholics unsure as to who would eventually win. He and other members of the delegation rejected the Secretary of State's contention that over the past 5 years the idea of Irish unity had no serious support in any quarter and they pointed to Mr Wilson's 15-year plan as the spectre which haunted Loyalist thinking on this issue. The Loyalists had seen concessions to the SDLP and other Republican elements on every hand - disbandment of the 'B' Specials, destruction of Stormont, introduction of PR voting, etc - and it was not surprising that less responsible elements should have decided that only by violence could concessions be won from HMG.

The Secretary of State asked whether the UUUC had considered the very real possibility of SDLP's losing their support to extreme Republican elements if

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the settlement did not include something very like power-sharing - on which the SDLP had won their mandate.

The UUUC did not accept that SDLP would lose out massively in another election. The law abiding elements of the Catholic community would accept their (the UUUC's) proposals and open co-operation would grow as people became free from intimidation. What was needed above all was for IMG to say clearly to the SDLP that they had no chance of a place in government at this stage because the majority community was against it; the SDLP should be advised to work the new system as a constructive Opposition, thus building up a new atmosphere of trust which was a prerequisite to their possible acceptance as dependable partners at some future date.

Dr Paisley said that the Loyalist community simply would not tolerate any further concessions to Republicans - the wilder men on the Protestant side would take over and the drift would be towards Civil War.

The Secretary of State pointed out that on the reverse side of the coin the SDLP were saying the same thing. Dr Paisley replied that ultimately IMG had to treat the majority as majority and the minority as minority.

In an aside Mr Baird said that the Secretary of State - and indeed the SDLP - should not be led astray by the temptation of Mr Craig's "voluntary coalition" - it was a dangerous red herring.

Elaborating on the background reasons for Loyalist fears (and therefore mood of "no compromise"), Rev Smyth pointed to Mr James Allan's award in the New Year's Honours List - with its emphasis on negotiations with subversive Republican elements and to the reports that Mr Mason had advocated a quick troop withdrawal from NI to be followed by the introduction of a United Nations' Peacekeeping Force. He blamed much of the community estrangement on the segregationalist policies of the Roman Catholic Church, which trained its young in loyalty to another state. Despite this, good relations existed between the two community groups in most areas and there was a need to support decent citizens against the gunmen.

The Secretary of State said that the policy of IMG was clear: there would be no opting out of NI; the Province could not be forced into the Irish

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Republic; at the same time, being part of the UK was a matter for the UK majority.

Mr Empey said that the traditional spirit of fair play had led Westminster to seek ways of avoiding coming down in favour of one side or the other; but it was a fact of life that they were dealing with two irreconcilables - no middle course was possible and the majority would have to be backed, with safeguards for the minority.

Mr Baird said that the Secretary of State had spoken in terms of the devolution time span being eighteen months; there was a greater urgency about the matter in NI. Without fully explaining his thinking he said that the SDLP's rejection of the Incident Centres had indicated to him that minority support could not, in the long term, go to any other party than the SDLP.

Captain Armstrong said that pre 1969 the Catholic population's acceptance of Stormont and the State of NI was becoming less and less reluctant but when around that time it had appeared that IMG was withdrawing support for Stormont a whole new and dangerous game had opened up.

Mr Empey said that the SDLP problem was: having once been sergeants how could they accept the rank of corporal - they would keep up their demands until they saw that they were not going to win.

Mr West said that NI had been making such progress on all fronts in the 1960s that Republicans could see the attractions of their cause vanishing for ever - hence the campaign of violence, disruption and dissention which they had mounted. The damage done had been accentuated by UK mismanagement of the situation. The UUUC now sought IMG's support for getting NI back on course with a new start. Without the UUUC no-one could improve the situation. The people of NI should have the opportunity, through elections, of endorsing or otherwise the UUUC proposals.

At the close of the meeting Mr West said that regardless of what the Secretary of State might say on 12 January, the UUUC would want to talk to him again about security, as they were increasingly concerned about many aspects of the present situation. Three specific items were mentioned:

1. The robbery and subsequent shooting in Dungannon on Saturday night (3 January). Mr West had been in the shop shortly before and had heard the incident reported on police radio, yet he had met no road-blocks on his way home via Ballygawley.

2. He had travelled criss-cross around the Province at the weekend - eg, Coleraine - Strabane - Mid-Ulster - Fermanagh - and had seen no security patrols on VCPs.
3. Mr Baird mentioned that on the night of the Tullyvallen killings, 3 known Republicans had left their homes in Newtownhamilton. (He would give details of names and addresses later.) They had since returned home and their house(s) appeared to be guarded by regular SF patrols. Obvious inferences had been drawn by local people.

The meeting ended without any formal discussion of policing as such and without any commitment on Secretary of State's part to see the UUUC again, as requested, on security matters.

R Ramsay

R. RAMSAY

6 January 1976

Central Secretariat
Stormont Castle