

26th August 1975

U.U.U.C. POLICY POSITION

1. The U.U.U.C. emphatically rejects any system of Executive government that is in essence an imposed or compulsory coalition of political parties or elected representatives. Furthermore the U.U.U.C. would oppose any such system of government no matter how it is arrived at.

2. The U.U.U.C. believes that it is fundamental to democratic government
 - (a) that it is elected to carry out policies submitted to the electorate and to fulfill commitments of an ideological nature and of a general political intent.
 - (b) the electorate must always be in a position to both endorse and reject.
 - (c) government must always be united on policy and general intent and the executive be collectively responsible for all decisions.
 - (d) the Prime Minister or head of government must always be in a position to hire or fire subject only to his ability to maintain a majority in Parliament.
 - (e) the government is ultimately answerable to the people but in its legislative proposals and day to day administration it is vital that the government be effectively answerable to Parliament.
 - (f) Accountability in any meaningful and responsible sense depends on powerful parliamentary opposition.
 - (g) It is desirable that all sections of the people identify with the institutions of the State but not at the price of giving any section a guaranteed position in government.
 - (h) The parliamentary system should seek in every practical way to safeguard minority interests and that such interests should be meaningfully represented and call into account any action that might be deemed unfair or unjust to them.

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3. The U.U.U.C. believe that the British Parliamentary system provides not only for effective government but for effective and powerful opposition. It is capable of further development to strengthen the position of opposition generally and more particularly, minority parties. The United Kingdom Parliament has developed the role and position of the Leader of the Opposition and has lately sought to aid the effectiveness of all political parties in Parliament. U.U.U.C. proposals for powerful scrutiny and investigatory Parliamentary Committees would significantly strengthen Parliament in its relationship with government, particularly increasing the power of the Opposition. The watchdog powers of such Committees would in addition be an important safeguard for minority interests.

4. It is envisaged that there would be a Committee covering each important department of government. It is proposed that each committee would have equal representation from Government and Opposition supporters. The value of the Committee depends to a large extent on their effectiveness. The demands on Members of Parliament would be very heavy. It is considered necessary that the Chairman should give virtually his full time to the job and would have to be provided with an office and suitable staff. The Chairman's remuneration would need to be on a Ministerial scale, whilst members of Committee would receive additional remuneration by way of attendance fees.

5. The powers of the Committee to scrutiny would be extensive either through sending for persons or papers. The Committee would be able to conduct enquiries and public hearings on appropriate matters. Legislation would have its first reading in the Committee when the principle of the Bill could be challenged. A public hearing procedure could be adopted. The second reading would be on the floor of the House with the Committee Stage bringing it back to the Committee. The Committee would have access to appropriate expertise and research.

6. The Chairmanship of the Committees is a critical factor. The U.U.U.C. believe that the role of the Opposition entitles opposition parties to a favoured position in the selection of Chairmen. The U.U.U.C. believes that in certain sensitive areas Opposition parties have a special claim to the Chairmanship. The position of the Chairman vis-a-vis the government and the exchange of information might be helped by a Privy Council status.

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7. Law and Order will be a function of critical importance particularly in times of Emergency. Special Powers to deal with an emergency would be dependent on the Declaration of a State of Emergency. A special Committee would exist for such a situation, both in respect of the declaration and acts of government following the declaration. The Chairmanship of such a Committee would be for an Opposition member.

8. Coalition Government:

The U.U.U.C. believes that a multi-party government can come into existence in three ways:

- (i) By agreement between Parties before an election and obtains approval from the electorate.
- (ii) Where the largest Party in Parliament has not an overall majority and needs to obtain it by agreement with another Party. At best this can only be a short term government.
- (iii) Where an emergency or crisis situation exists and parties by agreement come together in the national interest for the duration of the crisis.

- period.
- review

1. Very strong - will be taken as a total rejection by SDLP who will not read further. Second sentence rather menacing.
2. (a) Does not preclude coalition, even involuntary, as an agreed limited programme such as might be appropriate for a devolved government with most of the main social and economic policies fixed nationally.
(b) do.
(c) Desirable, but not essential. Doctrine of collective responsibility variously interpreted - eg labour and the Common Market.
(d) Desirable - in practice PM would have to secure agreement of Leader of other party.
(e) Yes.
(f) Normally - in the British parliamentary tradition. In most past colonial countries the opposition has become ineffectual or has disappeared. What gives an opposition power? In the British system, the prospect of themselves attaining all power for a period. A permanent opposition cannot become powerful in this way.
(g) As stated, the two propositions might not be true alternatives. It is not only desirable but necessary that not more than a small minority of people remain alienated or disaffected, the appropriate price to be paid for this must be worked out in each case - which is presumably part of the work of the Convention.
(h) Yes.
3. The British parliamentary system submits largely on Westminster practice and convention. These parties rotate in office, even if irregularly, and in the electorate, people can change their party allegiance. Indeed it is the swing of the 'floating vote' to a new alignment which often determines the outcome of elections. In Northern Ireland where membership of the main communal groups is by ^{ascription} ~~assumption~~ rather than by election, and where for the immediate future at least 'centre' parties will play a very small role, the likelihood is that an opposition becomes permanently fixed - and permanent opposition, even with the best will all round, is a frustrating experience.

9/4/5.

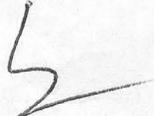
Having said this - the Committees proposed are quite significant. Only - what are the 'important departments of government'? How many? How many Committees? The sponsors have underestimated the potential conflict between the Committee Chairmen and the Ministers, and the effect of giving a strong public platform to a politician who is not only not bound to the government by the collective responsibility of cabinet, but who has a vested interest in opposing, embarrassing, and if possible bringing down the government. There seems to be a considerable dilemma here - if the Committees are strong they will be a source of conflict, if so weak as not to continually embarrass the government, they will scarcely attract the opposition.

The proposition to have equal membership is generous - although where opposition members are few they would perhaps find it hard to cast all the Committees.

6. Room for bargaining here - Chairmen should be privy councillors.
7. A very interesting cleft stick for the SDLP - would P Devlin sign internment orders?
8. (i) Could UUUC envisage any circumstances in which they would submit a common programme to the electorate with SDLP leading to a coalition government?
(ii) Does not have to be short term government? Most European governments are either coalition or minority governments.
(iii) Some hope here - surely we are today in a crisis situation and likely to remain so for a few years. Could parties agree to do this for the next 4/6 years for a fixed term while constitutional talks go on. The important thing is that the area be governed.

How would such a government be arrived at? Is it possible to have elections? Is it possible to have elections? Possibly by referendum on interim report of Convention.

UUUC have elevated non-power sharing into a principle in the same way as SDLP have dignified power-sharing. What are their aims? What are they trying to achieve or defend? Can this be done in any other way?


M N HAYES

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