

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

MEETING WITH UUUC 26 JANUARY 1976

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

1. Chairman referred to SDLP disquiet at the tone of some UUUC speeches. He said it made it very hard for them to be seen negotiating with people who abused them. UUUC leaders dismissed the criticism.
2. Mr West said they had agreed a motion for the Business Committee asking for talks on the basis of UUUC report. Dr Paisley pointed out that the wording was quite flexible and allowed considerable scope for discussion. They were not anxious for a debate on February 3 which would lead to hard things being said by backbenchers on both sides.
3. Mr Baird tabled correspondence with Alliance about meetings. It was noted that the conditions imposed for talks in the reply to Alliance were more restrictive than in the motion for the Business Committee.
4. Mr West said they wanted the Chairman to chair all meetings and a full Hansard verbatim report of all the proceedings.
5. Mr West asked how S of S meant to intervene. Mr Baird was relieved when Chairman said he believed S of S would keep off until an impasse had been reached. He said this would keep the matter in a political forum for some time longer. MNH pointed out that the S of S intervention was unlikely to be a lengthy affair; he was more likely to use the opportunity to tell the parties that the Convention was now over and there would be no new initiative for some time.
6. Dr Paisley reiterated that they would not talk about Cabinet-membership as of right for any minority group, and they would not themselves discuss coalition with SDLP.
7. Chairman mentioned that 'widespread agreement' implied the consent of the loyalist electorate also. He noted that while a system of government required 'widespread support', a government elected or appointed under that system required only the support of a bare majority. Mr Baird agreed and said that in this case, if defeated in an election, they would form the opposition.

8. Dr Oliver outlined the possibility of other possible constitutional devices - two-tier Cabinets in particular. Mr West said there was no point in discussing this - they would not have SDLP in charge of departments. He set great store by the concept of cabinet collective responsibility and mutual trust - and spoke feelingly of his own happy experiences.
9. When Chairman outlined the likely closure of the Convention if there were no productive talks, Mr West appeared to draw back a little and asked Chairman to chair talks with Alliance and NILP. UUUC leaders agreed to talks proceeding before February 3. Mr Paisley left the meeting after 1 hour.
10. Messrs West and Baird were unhappy about the proposal for Hansard recording and went to speak to the Policy Committee seeking a more flexible line. Mr West returned to say the party was adamant in demanding a verbatim record. Mr West agreed to Chairman taking responsibility for arranging meetings. Chairman said he would prepare a programme of meetings which would ensure all parties had met in inter-party or multi-party meetings by the week-end. Mr West also said that the Policy Committee had considerably expanded the draft motion.
11. Mr West asked about money for employing experts - Mr Blackburn to find out position from NIO.
12. Mr West asked whether they were to expect a further letter from S of S on security. Confirmed that on Security [15 (1)] S of S would write to parties seeking views, on police authority powers and functions [15 (iii)] parties should write without further invitation.
13. The meeting lasted for over two hours. Although agreeable, it gave no grounds for optimism. UUUC were as rigid in their attitudes as SDLP. The demand for selective party talks (later ameliorated) and the requirement that there should be full Hansard recording seem designed to put the talks in a rigid framework which would inhibit any exchange of views and prevent real negotiation.

  
M N HAYES

27 January 1976