

# VANGUARD BULLETIN



No. 2

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## THE END OF THE CONVENTION

The Convention failed in its second phase to gain the necessary agreement which would have resulted in Westminster agreeing to legislate for the establishment of a Government and Parliament of Northern Ireland. The reason for that failure lies mainly with the refusal of the U. U.U.C. to sincerely seek agreement on their own proposals as spelt out in the Convention Report. Other parties too must bear the responsibility for failure by their refusal to clearly state that agreement on Voluntary Coalition between parties in the Convention was the only way in which the Report could have found widespread acceptance and therefore made the Convention's conclusion a success.

The Vanguard Unionist Party can feel justifiably proud of their four Convention Members, William Craig, Glenn Barr, David Trimble and George Green, who used the final two-day debate in the Convention to argue constructively and responsibly the case for a Referendum on Voluntary Coalition. In a final debate marred by the personality attacks on our own Convention Members and characterised by the refusal of the U. U.U.C. to debate the real issues at stake, our four Convention Members stated clearly the only way the Convention could transform impending failure into success.

In this March Edition of "Vanguard Bulletin" we print extracts from the speeches of the Vanguard Convention Members

### BILL CRAIG'S SPEECH

It is with a great sense of responsibility that I move the **First Amendment** because it is evident to me that to-day, and to-morrow presumably, we will be reaching a point where the Ulster people will have no means of effectively taking decisions as to the future Constitution of their own Province and in particular its institutions of government. I had hoped that Mr. West would give us some indication of his appreciation of the gravity of the situation. He was reported in the Press some days ago as having said nothing this afternoon to support that statement in any way. On the present path he outlines the Convention is obviously going to fail. I do not really see anything in Mr. West's proposal which would in any way satisfy the Secretary of State's requirements. I would hope that my Referendum Amendment might be of assistance in this direction. Unlike the right hon. Gentleman I realise that the Parliament and Government of the United Kingdom have not accepted any portion of the Convention Report.

Mr. West would do well to refresh his memory and go back to the debate at Westminster on 12 January where he will find that the Secretary of State said:

"Provided that the necessary agreement can be reached, the Government accept in principle devolving power to a Stormont Parliament.

The Government's acceptance is conditional on our being able to reach a measure of agreement on the institutions of Government.

After the 1973 Act was put in suspense there was a great deal of rejoicing, particularly in U.U.U.C. ranks, that at long last the people of Northern Ireland were going to be given an opportunity of working out together how best the country should be governed. In fact, it was being constantly stated that no one could do the job better than the representatives of the people of Northern Ireland.

## MR. CRAIG'S SPEECH Continued

We have arrived at the stage where it **looks** as if we may have to admit **failure**, notwithstanding the considerable amount of progress that was made **during** the lifetime of the **Convention**.

The position is that the U.U.U.C. proposals — which I consider to be imaginative and constructive — represented a form of government. Other **parties** in the Convention **favoured** an institutionalised form of **partnership**. There were two very distinct positions **with** perhaps variations of both positions and the job of **the** Convention was to find some way of reconciling **them**. **All** through our deliberations there was only one line of thought which indicated the possibility of reconciling the two positions in an **agreement**. That line of thought was really born out of the S. D. L.P.'s willingness to **look** at **the** U. U.U.C. proposals and see whether the aspect of the British **system**, of coalition government **in** particular **situations**, would **not** assist us towards agreement **within** the U. U.U.C. proposals. No other single statement in **the** Convention **held** out any **hope**. **Unhappily**, this was **the** one aspect of the British Parliamentary system which the U. U.U.C. were unwilling to **explore**. They made **all** sorts of excuses **without** first talking the matter out **and** laying down what they would have considered reasonable terms and **conditions** for such a **move**. We were told by some **that** they could not do it because it **was** in conflict with what they **had** committed themselves to during the Convention **Election**, **and** that they had no mandate from the **people**.

I do not know — this is a **matter** of opinion — **but** certainly the policy proposals of the U. U.U.C. in **no** way **ruled** out this **step**. Before we **let** the Convention fail we should be looking to **see** whether we can make progress along the one hopeful **avenue**. The cost of failure **is** very heavy and no one should be tempted to minimise **it**. We are not **only** allowing the Convention to fail if we do not follow this English system; we are putting **the** possibility of worthwhile **devolution** on the long **finger**. **It** would be foolish to kid ourselves or the country **that** we **will** get this measure of **devolution** without an agreement in **the** **Convention**.

**From** the beginning the I.R.A. feared that the Convention **might** **succeed**. It was **the** declared objective of the **IRA** to destroy the **Convention**. It is not hard to seek **the** **reason**, because if there had been an agreement on institutions of government the IRA **would** have been as good as beaten because that would have brought not **only** stability **but** a response from the whole community that would have made the task of the forces of **law** and order **much** easier.

There is only one option **open**, that is to seek through a voluntary coalition an agreement within the **report**. That **is** the realistic position that we are **all** in. We have talked this **thing** through from every **possible** angle and we do not look like getting **anywhere**. Before we pass the motions that **will** **spell** the end of the Convention and **will** remove our hopes of worthwhile **devolution** is it not **reasonable** that we seek the help of the **people**? I have **heard** **all** sorts of rash assumptions being made on the U. U.U.C. side of this **House**. I do not believe that they are reading the **public** mind **aright**.

I would appeal to the U. U.U.C. that before they close the doors on the **Convention**, on this body of elected representatives with the opportunity to shape the future institutions of Ulster they should go back to the people

and **say**, "We need your **help**." The only way that can be done is to have **this** question put to **the** **people** by way of **referendum**. If the U. U.U.C. are afraid to **do** that then they are no longer sure or what their mandate **from** the people **is**.

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## MR. BARRS' SPEECH

In rising to support the Referendum Amendment may I say that over the duration of the Convention many of us have not been able to whip up the enthusiasm even to get **up** and speak because of the intransigent position of not only the U. U.U.C. but **also** the major bloc (S. D. L. X-') on the opposite side of the **house**? We must remember that when the Convention was brought into being we found ourselves in a position whereby most of the **parties**, and the British Government, **put** down their preconditions on what the Convention was **all** about. **Indeed**, when the British Government put down their preconditions — power sharing and the **Sunningdale** agreement — **the** U. U.U.C. **automatically** **put** down **their** precondition and said they **would** have nothing to do with **it**. **Likewise**, **the** S. D.L.P. **said** that **unless** there was power sharing at the other end **they** would have nothing to do with **it**. Each of us in **turn** came to this **house** expecting **100** per cent of **our** own policies.

**The** U. U.U.C. **took** the decision — rightly **so**, and so did my own party — that there would be **no** **institutionalised** power sharing in this **Province**, that there would be **no** **Council** of **Ireland**, and that no man as a right can claim a place in Government, whether he be from one side of the House or the **other**. We **believe** in majority **government**. We believe that it is the **only** way in which this province can be governed. **Then**, of **course**, we were caught **up** in **the** talks on **voluntary** coalition and because we had come to an **impasse** we believed that everything was going to be **lost**. There are some **people** in this House **who** would rather forget those talks on **voluntary** coalition, but let me underline on behalf of my party, that we made it perfectly clear that there could be no such thing as a voluntary coalition unless those entering into a **voluntary** coalition could give allegiance to the State, support publicly the forces of law and **order**, give up their aspiration for a United Ireland and for their aspirations for a Council of **Ireland**.

That was the **position**, and if the S. D.L.P. cannot give allegiance to the State then as far as my party is concerned the S. D.L.P. will not be **included** in **voluntary** coalition. That is the **reality** of the situation and we have stated it quite **clearly**.

**Mr. Chairman**, if everyone in this House would recognise the situation we would **all** agree that we need a devolved **Parliament**. Anything less is **disastrous**, **economically**, **socially** **and**, most important, **constitutionally**.

Have the U. U.U.C. the guts to chuck Westminster out or are they going to listen to what Westminster **says**? That is the decision the U. U.U.C. are faced **with**. It is no skin off my nose one way or the other but it is going to be a lot of skin off **theirs**. We asked the S. D.L.P. to **sort** out their **allegiances**. Surely the time has come when we on the **Loyalist** side sort out our **allegiances**. Let me state quite clearly that my allegiance is to this **Province**,

to Ulster **first**. I do not on the one hand say that our **first** priority is **the** link with the United **Kingdom** and on the other hand spit in the **eye** of the sovereign **Parliament**. The U. U.U.C. will have to make up their mind one way or **th** other **bout** where their allegiance **lies**. I have nailed my **COLLUS** **to the** mast and my **first** allegiance is to this **State**. We on the Loyalist side have one guarantee which we **all** seem to forget about: our majority in the **country**. If there is something we **do** not like we can **pull it down**. **Therefore**, we can afford to be **mag-**  
**nanimous**.

The reality is **this**, you accept either **95%** of something or **100%** of **nothing**.

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### MR. GREENS' SPEECH

I support the referendum Amendment put forward by **Mr. Craig**. I **do** so because I feel it is only fair at this stage that the people of Northern Ireland should have **an** opportunity of **freely** expressing what they think should be done about government and what type of government they believe could now have a chance of succeeding

When we came into this Convention we did so for one **purpose**, as I have stated **before**. First of **all**, our main aim was to **try** to restore to Northern Ireland a system of Government that could **work**, not one that is going to please us all — we **do** not expect that — **but** one **that** could work and help run the **country for** the benefit of all the **people**.

The **one** thing we cannot afford is another period of Direct **Rule**.

Some things should be put straight for the **record**. **Mr. Craig** and myself and the other two members are more or less being pilloried by the Loyalist **politicians**. I should **like** to know **why**, because up to the present we have never voted against the U. U.U.C. and voted with them every time in this **House**.

We were not expelled for opposing U. U.U.C. **policies**. We were expelled because we dared — and I want to put this **clearly**, **Mr. Chairman** — to speak about a Voluntary Coalition **document** which you wrote and our people in the U. U.U.C. **commissioned**.

Some people are always preaching about the truth and about doing things in an honest **manner**. These people should look into their own backgrounds and their own consciences when they start talking about **principles**. I do not know exactly what some people mean by **principles**. Mine are very **simple**, I will state them **again**. I came to this Convention to try to have brought back to Northern Ireland a government run by the people of Northern **Ireland**. That is the main reason I **am here**.

If we are to **look** to the future we have to start now and get together a form of Government that is going to run this country for the benefit of **all** the people in **it**. Those who are not prepared to do that **should** say so clearly and state the reasons they will not do **so**. Strange as it may seem, I support a referendum

The members sitting **to my left** (U.U.U.C.) will probably recall the **basic tactic** and approach **that** the U. U.U.C. adopted when it came **into this Convention**. It was a question of adopting the **approach**, "We have reasonable proposals that we are going **to** put in a reasonable way; the proposals we have are ones capable of standing on their **own**; they do not have to be pushed through by a **diktat** or by a mere force of a majority **in the House** or anything **like** that, they can be argued through and defended and any alternative scheme can be knocked on the **head**."

Where that approach collapsed entirely was in the events of **8** September of last year after which it was no longer possible for the members (U. U.U.C.) on my left to assert that they were reasonable people making reasonable **proposals**. After other people **had said to them**, "Look, we **will discuss** your proposals with you to try to get agreement with **in them**," the **very** thought of **finding** themselves in the unfortunate position of **agreeing** with certain other persons caused **the U. U.U.C.** immediately **to bolt**. They then lost any opportunity of convincing **outside people**, and **particularly** people **at Westminster**, that their proposals were **reasonable** and ought to be listened **to**.

It was possible at that **date**, if the matter had been handled **differently**, that the discussions **would have** come to an end and the U. U.U.C. **would** have been able to go to Westminster and **say**, "We made an offer to include certain **gentlemen**. They were **not able** to come up to the **mark**. Therefore having gone as far as possible for us to go consistent with **our principles**, we have done **all** that could be expected of **us**," The U. U.U.C. might then have had a very real chance of **having its** proposals carried at Westminster.

The U. U.U.C. has lost **that chance**. It cannot get it back because the **clock will** not go **back**. If one is to **achieve** success for the Convention Report a slightly different way **will have to be adopted**.

In our Referendum Amendment we have tried to **map** out what we believe to **be the** only realistic course towards obtaining agreement **and** the restoration of a **Parliament**.

So far most of my comments have been **directed** towards members of **the** United Unionist **Coalition**. I want to turn my attention now **to** other **Members**, particularly those in the Social Democratic **and Labour Party**. **It** is well to bear some points in **mind**.

It is very easy to slip into the fallacy of thinking that it is **all** simply a matter of minority **rights**. The minority do have rights in many **fields**. The fact is acknowledged **in** the Convention **report**. **But** we must not **overlook** the fact that the majority has **rights**. Its members are entitled to insist that the institutions of government and the basic nature of the State should reflect their views and **aspirations**. Subject thereto the legitimate aspirations of minorities **should** be catered **for**. **It** is very easy to overlook majority rights because of my point about majorities having **rights**, it must **be** said to **the** members of the S. D.L.P. that the proposal that was being discussed not only by us but by others — it was generally referred to as the Voluntary coalition — **was the** best option that was available to **them**. In fact it was the only option that was

MR. TRIMBLES' SPEECH Continued

available to them. They may wish to have something more or something **better**. I know that they look with some nostalgia to the **1973 Act**, but they must appreciate that is not something that can happen **again** and it will not happen **again**.

The best they can hope for is the voluntary coalition we have referred to and on the terms and condition we have referred to. To hope for more than that is to be like the gentlemen to my left who asked for too much **and**, as a **result**, got **nothing**. This is something which ought to be **appreciated**. In the situation we are in today the **only** way of making that option a reality is through a referendum and by not being prepared to support the **call** for a referendum they are doing themselves and this community a very grave **disservice**.

It is our view that in the failure of this Convention we **will** be losing the chance of restoring a Parliament at **Stormont**. We believe that the failure to take that chance is a mistake as great as the mistake made when **Stormont** was surrendered in **1972**. In our view it was weak and **irresolute** leadership in **1972** that lost the Ulster Parliament. In our view also it is weak and irresolute leadership that is losing the chance in **1976** to restore that **Parliament**. I think it is a personal tragedy for the leader of the United Ulster Unionist Coalition (**Mr. West**) that he has been involved in both **situations**. I also **find** it interesting to note that the person who is to-day the driving force in the United Unionist Coalition (**Paisley**) did not in **1972** officiously strive to keep **Stormont** alive. I **will** not say he was **happy**, but he did not shed too many tears over its going and then he adopted an integrationist **approach**.

In **1972** he was not prepared to exert himself to defend **Stormont** and in **1976** he does not seem to be prepared to exert himself to restore **it**. We believe that the Amendment which we have down is the best way **forward**. Consequently I would recommend it to **members**. In the debate of the last few days I have been reminded of an old Russian proverb that I came across in the pages of the "**Gulag Archipelago**", volume 2, to the effect that we should look for our brave men in prisons and for the fools amongst **politicians**.



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Stranmillis - Every Monday 8-00p.m.  
11 Sandhurst Drive

Cregagh & Castlereagh - I. O.G.T. Hall  
My Ladies Road - Every Thursday at  
8-00 p.m.

Bloomfield - H.Q. - Every third Tuesday  
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All enquiries :- Vanguard H. Q. Telephone 651131