

MEETING WITH SDLP NEGOTIATORS - 29 AUGUST 1975

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

1. Mr Hume said they had entered Thursday's talks with UUUC with no hope that the talks could be continued. They felt they were only keeping the latter going out of a sense of duty and in courtesy to the Chairman. However since then they had seen a glimmer of light in the willingness of the UUUC to consider some other options, and particularly par 8 (iii) of the UUUC policy paper. If some way could be found of giving adequate guarantees to them that arrangements agreed could not be upset unilaterally by the loyalists, they were willing to consider the implications of 8 (iii) as a basis for possible agreement. They were now thinking in terms of a temporary constitution - he would himself advocate 10 years - with the whole thing subject to review at the end of that time. They thought they could prove their point that partnership in government could work over such a period - and it was desirable to have the arrangements electorally endorsed at least twice. Mr Devlin said that once the issues had been broadened from the UUUC paper, he felt that any issue could be introduced. He favoured discussion on three or four main points at a time. All the SDLP delegates felt they had gained the personal confidence of the UUUC negotiators, and both groups respected at least the sincerity of the other.
2. The SDLP expressed disappointment at the poor reception of the UUUC to their points of principle. They felt they were offering quite a lot in pledging the support of the Roman Catholic community for new institutions. This would mean SDLP themselves taking on the IRA, often at personal risk and possibly at the risk of a civil war in the Catholic community. They would be prepared to take a very strong line with IRA and to put them down by quite rugged means. They were also prepared to ask the people of the Republic for their acquiescence to the new institutions so as to rob the IRA of legitimacy.
3. Most of the discussion centred on the possibility of a crisis government to be formed by a voluntary coalition for a fixed period. SDLP argued that the emergency was economic as well as security and that a 10 year social and economic plan was appropriate for dealing with this. This would require a government on an equal basis for that period. Mr Hume thought there should be at least two

elections on an agreed programme. At the end of that period, the constitutional arrangements could be reviewed in the light of experience. The Chairman suggested the possibility of a report or reports by the NI Parliament or participating parties to the Speaker of the House of Commons. It appeared from the discussion that SDLP would not necessarily insist on power sharing being enshrined in the enabling statute provided they could be sure the rug could not be pulled from under them after having made a gentleman's agreement to join a voluntary coalition. Their people would require some concrete reassurance and satisfactory public guarantees. They would appreciate help from the Chairman in formulating a possible range of guarantees. They thought the best way of making progress was on the basis of an agreed policy statement which they could use as a basis for political bargaining with UUUC. This would form the basis of an agreed policy as suggested in 8 (i) of the UUUC document, and for a crisis government under 8 (iii). Provided the arrangements could provide for an extended trial of the principle of partnership in government and could not be ended arbitrarily by UUUC after peace had been restored, SDLP were willing to play their part in such a government. It was agreed that SDLP should press on with up-dating the Social and Economic programme they had submitted in the pre-Executive negotiations, adding a section on security.

4. The Chairman conveyed the UUUC request for positive proposals from SDLP. It was agreed that putting aside for the moment par 1 of the UUUC policy document, SDLP should
 - (a) comment on the Committee system proposed by UUUC (in which SDLP were genuinely interested as part of an agreed new system); and
 - (b) outline at least one possible form of power-sharing in government which they regarded as workable;as well as the social, economic and security policy referred to above.
5. On the question of a 10 year period of partnership - the Chairman asked what would be the effect of a Border Poll in 1983. SDLP said they had never wanted a Border Poll and did not want this one. They did not want to look so far ahead, but would be quite happy to postpone or abandon the 1983 Poll. They accepted a need for a NI government to have police powers.