

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

## CHAIRMAN'S MEETING WITH UUUC NEGOTIATORS 1 SEPTEMBER 1975

PRESENT: Chairman Mr Craig  
 Mr Blackburn Capt Ardill  
 Dr Hayes Rev Beattie

1. The UUUC representatives said that their position had not been helped by the week-end violence, particularly the murder of 2 UDR men in South Armagh. Their back-benchers were restive and they had had a difficult party meeting.
2. The Chairman asked whether their parties fully supported the line they were taking. Mr Craig replied that some of the Policy Committee were not entirely happy, but he felt he could persuade them to accept a voluntary coalition if there were reasonable safeguards. It was difficult to bring people to discuss a hypothetical proposal - it would be easier to talk about specific proposals.
3. The Chairman said he had found SDLP receptive of the idea of a voluntary coalition. He thought they were interested and would take part. They would take a strong line on security. They did however require certain safeguards both for themselves and for their supporters. He had been considering the subject himself and wondered whether there could be a coalition for a fixed period with some sort of review at the end - perhaps by report to the House of Commons. Mr Craig was against such a review - it would create uncertainty and let people think the matter was still open. He thought the SDLP in a strong position - a new system needed the support of all parties - SDLP could wreck the whole thing simply by walking out.
4. Mr Craig objected to the term crisis government. They were not talking about an all party government, but a voluntary coalition between UUUC and whatever party they thought was required to attract support for the administration. [The implication appeared to be a UUUC/SDLP coalition only.]
5. Mr Craig said they were thinking in terms of a voluntary coalition for an initial period to get the agreed institutions off the ground. He had been thinking of what guarantees might be given to SDLP and found it difficult to come up with anything which would not be institutionalised power sharing under another guise. He thought the PM would have to restore the right to appoint and dismiss Ministers and to shuffle posts. If he were PM he would call for the resignation of any Minister, for example, who did not back the police, or whose party was not supporting government policy. Since the PM could dissolve

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parliament, any agreement would have to be for a limited fixed period.

Perhaps the PM should submit his cabinet to a referendum. When RB pointed out the difficulties of this, Mr Craig was prepared to consider a requirement that he secure the endorsement of a  $\frac{2}{3}$  or greater majority in the house.

6. Mr Craig thought it difficult to arrive at an agreed policy statement - even within UUUC. They had been out of office for so long that they would need time to study papers etc. They could not commit themselves to no change for a number of years. There were things they would change in government - including perhaps even the police.
7. Mr Craig said that since Westminster could review the working of the new system at any time, there was no point in drawing attention to the fact. Similarly they would prefer not to have a Border Poll in 1983, but thought it better not to raise the matter.
8. Mr Craig told his colleagues he thought it would be a small price to pay to get the new institutions accepted to have a couple of SDLP in government (for the first period?).
9. UUUC asked whether SDLP were going to specify the 'copper-fastened guarantees' they required, or whether UUUC were expected to spell out their ideas. The Chairman agreed to find out.
10. It was agreed to meet again on Wed 3rd at 3 pm - the Chairman in the meantime to consider possibilities of meeting the needs of both parties without loss of face or abandonment of principle by either.
11. Mr Craig said they envisaged a devolved system of government, with a Governor etc.
12. UUUC representatives were not anxious to recommence plenary sessions on 9 Sept in the present climate. The debates would be difficult to control and it would be difficult to find a motion which would not be divisive and which would not lead to parties enunciating fixed positions, thus preventing agreement in further private talks. Mr Craig in particular seemed to retain some hope of reaching agreement.
13. The talks lasted  $1\frac{1}{2}$  hours and were fairly low-key throughout. The atmosphere was slightly cooler than Friday and the negotiators appeared more wary, both as a result of coming closer to the central issue, and of pressure from their parties, particularly on security grounds.

5.  
M N HAYES

2 September 1975

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