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

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CHAIRMAN'S MEETING WITH SDLP NEGOTIATORS 3 SEPTEMBER 1975

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

1. The Chairman told the SDLP of his talks the previous day with UUUC leaders and Deputy Leaders and with Dr Paisley. He indicated the general tone and content of the talks and said that while UUUC negotiators had asked him to prepare an agenda for a discussion on the proposal for a temporary voluntary coalition, he was aware of considerable resistance with the UUUC to the idea, the UUUC negotiators had told him it was still worth investigating the possibilities. He had told UU simply that SDLP were interested enough to discuss the proposition, that they had by no means assented totally, and that their engagement in talks was contingent in being able to get what they regarded as 'copper-fastened guarantees'.
2. Mr Hume said SDLP were putting themselves in very great personal as well as political danger. They might be shot for agreeing to join in a coalition with UUUC - they could not be asked to run these risks and then be discarded at the end of a temporary period when the immediate violence would have been curbed but the system which in their view had been at the root of the violence had in fact been restored. Mr Hume talked in terms of a worthwhile period of coalition - a period of five years was mentioned several times incidentally, but this might not have great significance.
3. The Chairman said he had been assured by Dr Paisley that the objection was not to Catholics as such - and he wondered what SDLP could do to convince loyalists of their total support for the agreed institutions. SDLP said support for the RUC would provide few problems for them. Asked about the possibility of dispute on an Oath of Allegiance, SDLP said they had considered this and developed an 'ingenious' solution: all political parties to register, only parties fully aggeigant to the institutions to be allowed to govern. They wanted to bind not merely office-holders but the whole community in support of the state. The Chairman, while appreciating the difficulties arising from competing sets of symbols in a divided society, thought that the simplest and most persuasive way of demonstrating support for the state was a declaration of allegiance on traditional lines. SDLP said they were willing to discuss this matter fully on another occasion.

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4. On the question of 'copper-fastened guarantees' SDLP were not specific. They kept asking what the UUUC offered. Mr Hume suggested the possibility of an Act for 10 years renewable at the end of that period. He was not agreeable to the Bleakley/Alliance proposals because they omitted to specify what constitution such a government would operate under.
5. The Chairman said he was preparing heads of discussion as a basis for meetings with the two groups. Mr Devlin was anxious for the Chairman to be directly involved in all inter-party talks. The Chairman said in the end of the day both sets of negotiators would have to get down round the table and work out the political aspects of their package. He would not accept that the talks had failed until this had been done and they were still unable to agree.
6. The talks lasted about 1 hour. The SDLP were somewhat subdued and had not prepared any new material. It was agreed that SDLP would be available to discuss the Chairman's Heads of Discussion on Thursday.

M N HAYES

4 September 1975

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