

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Monday morning

Dear Ronnie,

I thought you might be interested in a conversation I had on Friday evening with Trevor Hanna, one of our accredited Lobby Correspondents who was a guest of mine at a Lisburn function. On the way home we had a discussion on political matters, and here are a few of the many things he told me.

You may have noticed in the Press that last week Vanguard threw a reception to enable the Press to meet the Party's new Press Officer. Hanna was there and during it he had a conversation with three members of Vanguard, Bill Craig, Ernest Baird and Glen Barr - amongst others. Naturally Hanna probed the trio for their views on things in general and the Convention in particular.

On the Convention Craig said something like this, according to Trevor: "This time there'll be no committees working behind closed doors. We objected to them the last time and we refused to take part; this time we aim to have none at all. All the work of the Convention must be inside the Convention itself with the full light of publicity beating upon us. Nothing will be hid from the public who elected us and to whom we are responsible. No more of this secret diplomacy behind closed doors. We're just not standing for that." Naturally Trevor asked him what he thought the reaction of the other partners in the UUUC would be to this and Craig and Baird both replied that they would stand with Vanguard in this.

All three were optimistic that the Convention would succeed in reaching agreement on a legislative assembly and a system of government. Hanna, however, felt from what they said that it would be on their terms and that alone. This was reinforced by Barr's remark (sotto voce because others not favourable to Vanguard were present) "We'll not be sharing power with any b----- Republicans."

From another part of the conversation Hanna got the impression that after the election the principals in the three parties forming the Loyalist Coalition would get together, quickly confirm their embryro plans on power-sharing and government, get the approval of their followers and then present the package to the Convention on a take-it-or-leave-it basis.

In another reference to the Convention Craig said that the UUUC would want to get down to business fairly quickly after the election and they would then continue to meet regularly throughout the summer until the task was complete - all in the Convention Chamber. He thought there would be a fortnight's break about the July holidays, otherwise they would continue meeting without a break until they were finished. He thought this should be about August. Always a bit of a wag, Hanna made some facetious remark about Mr. Craig going on holiday, and in all seriousness Craig replied that arrangements were almost complete in his family for a late September holiday. By that time, he said, the Convention would be over.

Some of this you will readily see is confirmed by the article in yesterday's Sunday Times except there is more detail here. I hope you and anyone else you think would like to see this will find it interesting if nothing else.

In haste.

Sincerely

Fred. [Burns]