

CONFIDENTIAL



THE CLERK TO THE ASSEMBLY  
STORMONT  
BELFAST BT4 3SY

20 December 1974

The Rt Hon Merlyn Rees MP  
One of Her Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State  
Northern Ireland Office  
Stormont Castle  
BELFAST  
BT4 3ST

THE CONVENTION

As you are aware, I have been awaiting a decision by Dr Paisley and Mr W Craig as to whether they were willing to accept your invitation to discuss with me procedures for the Convention.

Dr Paisley came to see me to-day and told me that Mr Craig, Mr West and he would be meeting to-morrow and that he anticipated their decision would be to refuse to take part in any discussion.

I pointed out to him that Mr West had already agreed to take part but he brushed this fact aside, saying that "Harry" had not consulted his colleagues properly.

I asked Dr Paisley the reasons for his refusal. He said that it was because I would be consulting Leaders of Parties which almost certainly would not be represented in the Convention and, conversely, that I would not be consulting parties who would be represented in the Convention.

I reiterated the terms of the Secretary of State's letter to Party Leaders whereupon he interrupted fiercely and said, that the British Government is trying to buy peace with the IRA at the expense of the Protestants. They are trying to withdraw from Northern Ireland and at the same time are anxious to buy peace with the minority. The British Government were so hypocritical that it was impossible to trust them and he and his friends would not engage in any talks at the behest of the Secretary of State.

I replied that these were political arguments and not for me. All I could suggest was that in the absence of talks I would send Dr Paisley and his two colleagues a paper inviting their views on certain procedural matters.



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Dr Paisley said they would consider my paper and perhaps comment upon it. In their view the Convention should have very few plenary sessions but should immediately resolve into committees to study aspects of the Constitution. The length of the Convention depended upon the attitude of the SDLP. If that Party were willing to abandon power-sharing and the Irish Dimension he and his colleagues would be ready to make "substantial concessions - very large concessions". If the SDLP proved obstructive then the Convention would end very quickly.

cc Sir Frank Cooper