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SECRET

Meeting with Dr. Jack Weir, former Moderator of
the Presbyterian Church, 1 May 1992

I met with Dr. Weir at his residence on 1 May. Discussion focussed on the meeting which he and Dr. Godfrey Browne had on 13 April with Gerry Adams and Tom Hartley of Sinn Fein. Dr. Weir saw this meeting as an initial exchange of views. A follow-up meeting is planned. The main points of interest are as follows:

- Dr. Weir stressed that the meeting was a personal initiative on the part of Dr. Browne and himself. Whereas his meeting with the UDA Inner Council in February (my report of 5 March refers) had been loosely mandated by the Presbyterian Church's Government Committee, the meeting with Adams and Hartley was not linked in to Presbyterian Church structures. Arrangements for the meeting had been made by Dr. Weir, in contacts with Tom Hartley.
- The meeting lasted two hours. Dr. Weir was at pains to emphasise that he and Dr. Browne approached the discussion from a religious and pastoral, as distinct from political perspective. They argued for an end to violence, appealed to Adams and Hartley to abide by the democratic "rules of the game" i.e. renounce the Armalite and Ballot Box strategy and, in arguing for an end to violence, appealed to what Dr. Weir referred to as Sinn Fein's "sense of patriotism". (In this connection, Dr. Weir cited to Adams and Hartley the example of Eamon De Valera's movement towards constitutional politics after the Civil War.)
- the Sinn Fein response was an orthodox rehearsal of their standard analysis, i.e. the British presence is the root

of the problem. Sinn Fein believe that the Unionist community are deceived as to where their own interests lie. (Weir commented to me that, in his view, Adams has no understanding of Unionists). On violence, Adams argued that there is an equivalence of all violence in Northern Ireland. Weir and Browne, for their part, argued that IRA violence is unaccountable whereas Government violence is accountable, however imperfectly. Adams presented Weir and Browne with a copy of the Sinn Fein discussion paper: "Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland". Adams gave no indication of any development in Sinn Fein thinking about a possible cease-fire.

- Weir noted that Adams, although stating that Sinn Fein do not condemn or condone IRA violence, tacitly acknowledged that Sinn Fein has influence over the IRA. Weir intends to address this point at their next meeting (see below).
- there was little discussion of the post-election scenario facing Adams. As regards West Belfast, Adams ascribed Joe Hendron's victory to votes from UDA supporters. Adams seemed to believe that, elsewhere, shifts against Sinn Fein in the election arose out of a sense of "despair" (Weir's word) felt by potential Sinn Fein supporters who believed that it was impossible for Sinn Fein to win a seat.
- Weir has written to Adams/Hartley in an effort to further explore Sinn Fein's thinking and seek further explanation of Adam's remarks at the meeting. The next meeting will take up matters on the basis of that letter and any reply. (Weir expects that he will receive a reply). The next meeting will take place some time after Dr. Browne returns from the U.S., where he was to receive an honorary degree in a Southern University (and be a guest at a reception at the Embassy in Washington).

- Drs. Weir and Browne have kept the Presbyterian Moderator informed. He has kept in touch with the other Churches. Dr. Weir was not aware of any reaction to the meeting from Cardinal Daly or Archbishop Eames.

- a further meeting between the Presbyterian leaders and the UDA appears unlikely for the time being, according to Dr. Weir. The UDA do not wish to see the Presbyterian Churchmen emerge as mediators between the UDA and Sinn Fein/IRA. Adams/Hartley, for their part, showed no interest in any contact or dialogue with the UDA.



Declan Kelleher

8 May, 1992

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