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Secret

Meeting with Dr. Jack Weir, former Moderator
of the Presbyterian Church, 4 March 1992

I met Dr. Jack Weir at his residence in Belfast yesterday, 4 March. He gave me an account of the background to the recent meeting between a group of Presbyterian Churchmen (Weir, Dr. Godfrey Browne (also a former Moderator), and Roy Magee, a Presbyterian Minister from Dundonald) and the Inner Council of the UDA. The principal points of interest are as follows:

- the decision to seek the meeting originated at a session of the Church's Government Committee on 6 February and reflected a wish by Weir and others to do something to stop the paramilitary violence. (Weir told me that, in principle, he sees the meeting with the UDA as a first step. He would like to broaden his contacts to include the IRA at a subsequent stage, and referred several times to his Feakle initiative, but frankly admitted that he sees little scope for this at present since he sees no evidence of IRA flexibility).
- senior office holders in the Church Committee were conveniently absent on 6 February, which allowed Weir and his colleagues to proceed with plans for the meeting. The initiative arose out of Presbyterian Church structures but does not have a Church mandate. The Moderator has been kept informed of developments by Dr Weir and his colleagues.
- contact was made with the UDA through Roy Magee, who works in the strongly Loyalist area of Dundonald, where the UDA have a significant presence. Magee, according to Dr. Weir, holds strong Unionist views and is sympathetic

to Loyalist concerns.

- the UDA, somewhat to Weir's surprise, readily agreed to a meeting and urged that one be held quickly. In the event, it took place a week after the original Church Committee meeting. Present were 8 senior UDA members, including overall commander Joe English. Weir was struck by the youth of several of those present, whom he judged to be in their mid-twenties. The meeting was frank yet civil and lasted about 90 minutes.
- the UDA delegation listened carefully to the Presbyterian points, and responded that their violence was reactive - it was first for the IRA to stop violence. The UDA would end violence if that happened, and they were confident that they had the authority to ensure that all Loyalist violence would cease if they so ordered. The UDA referred to the Ormeau Road shootings as a response to the Teebane bomb and told the Presbyterians that there was strong rank and file pressure to respond in this way.
- the UDA delegation were highly critical of politicians in general. They recalled that they and the UVF had arranged a ceasefire last year to coincide with the initial round of the Brooke talks. This ceasefire had not been reciprocated by the Provisionals. Moreover, the politicians had failed to make any progress. (Dr. Weir commented that there was no discussion at the meeting of the current status of the political talks. The meeting had taken place before the recently announced agreement to resume talks).
- the meeting ended in a prayer, at Weir's suggestion. Weir commented that the UDA leaders are not churchgoers

and should not be viewed as amenable to Presbyterian discipline. That said, he was encouraged that they all agreed to his suggestion.

- the UDA delegation, according to Dr. Weir, manifested no interest in changing the established political order. They had no political demands to make nor did they ask the Presbyterian delegation to carry any messages. The question of possible proscription of the UDA was not raised by the UDA delegation. Insofar as they referred to a political position, they stated that this was set out in the late John McMichael's document, "Common Sense". (Dr. Weir was not inclined to ascribe much significance to their political stance and downplayed their political sophistication).
- he and his colleagues have no plans for a follow up meeting with the UDA. The ball, he believes, is in his court but he proposes to let matters rest for the time being. The Moderator has kept the other Church leaders informed of the progress of the initiative. Archbishop Eames was apparently enthusiastic. Dr. Weir commented wryly that the Cardinal "has pardoned us because we went as individuals". He was not aware of any reaction from the Methodist Church.
- as to the timing of the announcement last weekend that the meeting had taken place, he commented that an increasing number of people within the Presbyterian Church structure had become aware of the meeting, and it was felt that an authoritative public statement by those directly involved would minimise misunderstandings.

Dr. Weir made clear to me that he does not accept any meaningful distinction between the UDA and the UFF. He prefers to describe the UFF as a ginger group of what is essentially a paramilitary organisation, the UDA. If there is any political counterpart to the UDA/UFF, in his view it is still probably the Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party.



Declan Kelleher
5 March, 1992

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