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**SECRET**

Meeting with Dr. Jack Weir, former Moderator of  
the Presbyterian Church, Belfast, 25 June 1992

I met Dr. Weir in Belfast on 25 June. He informed me of the current stage of the contacts which he and Dr. Godfrey Browne, also a former Moderator, have undertaken with Gerry Adams and Tom Hartley of Sinn Fein. (In a previous meeting, Dr. Weir had informed me of his initial meeting with Adams and Hartley on 13 April and the follow-up to that meeting (see my report of 8 May). The main points of interest to emerge from our discussion are as follows:

- Weir and Browne had their second meeting with Adams and Hartley in late May, shortly before the Presbyterian Church's Annual Assembly. That meeting failed to provide the answers and clarifications of Sinn Fein's position which Weir and Browne had sought following the first meeting.
- as in the first meeting, Adams and Hartley had rehearsed their standard analysis, and had laid particular emphasis on the Presbyterian origins of the United Irishmen. Weir commented to me that this point had its place as an historical observation but would not achieve any resonance with the Unionist community as a whole, particularly against the background of IRA violence.
- The basis of the Sinn Fein approach to the contacts with Browne and Weir remains the discussion document unveiled at this year's Ard Fheis: "Towards a lasting peace in Ireland", supplemented by confidential letters from Hartley/Adams which, Dr. Weir indicated, do not stray beyond the theoretical or policy limits of that document. For their part, Drs. Weir and Browne have handed over to Sinn Fein an internal Presbyterian discussion document,

(on attitudes to political and security issues, including law and order, allegiance to the State, violence) prepared for consideration at this month's Presbyterian Assembly. (I attach a copy).

- Weir had received a letter from Sinn Fein responding to points which he and Dr. Browne had put. This contained a standard recitation of the need for peace, an exposition of the failure of partition and a particular emphasis on the importance of self-determination. Dr. Weir commented that none of the Sinn Fein exposition mapped out a clear way forward. The Sinn Fein presentation took for granted that their definition of the concepts evoked were the only valid ones, and dismissed competing analyses or definitions as false.
  
- He and Dr. Browne will continue their contacts with Hartley and Adams on a personal basis with a non-political agenda as before, with the aim of moving towards a cessation of violence. Given the apparent lack of progress, I asked him what he felt Sinn Fein wanted out of the contacts. He believes that Sinn Fein are looking for some sort of legitimacy - to be regarded as players in the political process. He has made clear to Sinn Fein that he and Dr. Browne did not undertake the initiative as intermediaries. They have not in any event been asked to carry any messages.
  
- Dr. Weir signalled to me that he expects some criticism of the Weir/Browne initiative from within the Presbyterian Church. A hostile article is expected from the editor of the Church's newspaper. While his Presbyterian colleagues will not endorse his initiative, they remain just about prepared to hear reports from Dr. Browne and himself. He commented sarcastically that they remind him of "maidens faced with advances". He

continues to see advantages, however, in the relative freedom of manoeuvre which he and Dr. Browne enjoy but commented that Dr. Browne, who remains fully committed to the initiative, has felt somewhat embarrassed recently by public good wishes he has received from nationalists in his home town of Ballycastle.

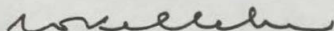
#### Gibney Speech

- We discussed the Bodenstown speech of 21 June by Jim Gibney of the Sinn Fein Ard Comhairle. Dr. Weir (as he subsequently stated to the media over the weekend) was unimpressed by this speech which, he felt, contained nothing new and which had been only partially quoted. He told me that on 22 June Tom Hartley had emphasised to him that there was nothing new in the speech. Dr. Weir noted that at most there were some possibly interesting straws in the wind, but that Sinn Fein are "not admitting anything". The media, in his view, had quoted selectively from the speech. (Note: the media's selective quotation is hardly surprising, given the fact that the Sinn Fein press office put out an abbreviated version of the speech on 21 June). His own view is that Gibney's remarks may or may not herald a possible change in Sinn Fein thinking but there is nothing as yet which would be hard evidence of any such change. In particular, he had discerned no hint from Sinn Fein of a ceasefire or any statement which entailed a particular change in their policy or attitudes.

- As to the comments attributed to Roy Magee (the Presbyterian Minister from Dundonald who had set up the meeting between Drs. Weir and Browne and the UDA Inner Council in February of this year) to the effect that Gibney's speech was extremely significant, Dr. Weir told me that Magee felt that he had been misquoted.

Follow-up

- Dr. Weir has established a rapport with Hartley and they appear to be the primary points of contact in this initiative. (Hartley, who was initially quite nervous about visiting Weir's residence, is now at ease and had been there the day before my meeting with Dr. Weir). Weir expects that the next meeting between Dr. Browne, himself, Adams and Hartley will probably not take place before August. He has no expectations of a speedy breakthrough in these contacts but feels an imperative to do all he can to work for an end to violence.
  
- The other Churches are not in any sense involved in the Weir/Browne initiative. The Heads of Churches of course remain in regular touch with each other. He indicated that he had no prior knowledge of Bishop Edward Daly's contacts with Sinn Fein in Derry.
  
- Dr. Weir is about to take a short holiday in Kerry and commented that Hartley is also going on holiday. When I wondered, partly in jest, if Hartley was also going to Kerry, Dr. Weir said that he understood that Hartley was going to the Basque country, for purely private reasons.



Declan Kelleher  
29 June, 1992

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