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Mr. B. McCarthy
for response to Taoiseach's
note on page 3 please

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REPORT

Meeting with delegation from Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) at Government Buildings, Wednesday, 20th September, 1995.

1. The Taoiseach; the Tanaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs; and the Minister of Social Welfare met the PUP delegation which was led by Mr. David Ervine. He was accompanied by Mr. Billy Hutchinson, Mr. Jack Mahood and Mr. William Smyth. Officials present were Mr. Sean O' hUiginn and Mr. Fergus Finlay, Department of Foreign Affairs and Mr. Brian McCarthy, Department of the Taoiseach.

2. Welcoming the delegation, the Taoiseach described the meeting as historic. A frank face-to-face exchange of views was the only way to do business. Referring to the PUP's criticism of the Government that it was working to a Sinn Fein agenda in pushing for a date for all party talks, the Taoiseach explained the background to the Summit postponement. The concept of a date for all party talks was part of a package which involved Sinn Fein co-operation with an International Commission on decommissioning. This was aimed at taking the gun out of politics and the target date for talks would only become operational if in fact there was progress in this regard. The Taoiseach went on to explain the position adopted by Sinn Fein and the British Government which placed the Government in a position where the only course was to seek a postponement of the Summit.

3. The Taoiseach said the decision of the CLMC to declare a cease-fire was a courageous one but if the PUP were committed to exclusively democratic methods why was it necessary for an organisation associated with them to retain arms? The Irish Government had not gone along with Washington 3 but they were

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saying arms must be got out of the situation as soon as possible. The Irish Government since its foundation 75 years ago had stood by the principle that arms should be licensed by the State alone. Referring to his statement to the Dail earlier in the day, the Taoiseach said that the problem was not just for the two Governments - Sinn Fein and the Loyalist parties had a responsibility to come up with their own suggestions if they were not satisfied with what the Governments were proposing.

4. Mr. Ervine said that his party and the people he represented perceived that there was a substantial warmth towards unionists in the South. This goodwill was tangible but there was also the perception of pan-nationalism which led people to believe that the Summit was cancelled after Adams" had fired a shot across the Government's bows". There was ample evidence of the bona fides of the Loyalist Parties in the last year and they had no doubt that the Dublin Government had a genuine interest in peace. As regards decommissioning, they had not moved on this because they did not want to "put Sinn Fein behind the eight ball". The problem was that every action taken by Dublin had a reaction in the North. While the Summit cancellation might not be all bad it had done a lot of damage in the North. The concerns there were the patronising attitude of the British and what was perceived as the feting of Sinn Fein. The ordinary people in the North had absolutely no confidence in Sinn Fein.

5. The Tanaiste said that perception was indeed a serious problem. Weighing up all facts, the Government considered it was wise to call off the Summit. The Government wanted to see wider ownership of the whole process with cross community involvement - the hope would be that opportunities for movement on both sides would arise as you moved through the process. The Minister for Social Welfare said that the value of the postponement of the Summit was that it

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gave clarity to the Government's position vis-a-vis Sinn Fein. He referred again to the Taoiseach's comments in the Dail earlier in the day (copies of the transcripts of these remarks were subsequently given to each member of the PUP delegation).

6. The Taoiseach said that the decision on the postponement was taken on Tuesday 5 September and not on the previous Saturday when the meeting with Sinn Fein took place. The Government would not succumb to threats from that organisation. Referring to his recent speech in Dublin Castle the Taoiseach said that one-sided talks could not make progress. (The delegation confirmed that they had read the Taoiseach's speech)

7. Responding to a question from the Taoiseach, Mr. Ervine said that the problem was very much about what would satisfy the mainstream Unionist parties. Mark Durkan was right when he said that the unionist parties could undertake "a pub crawl of preconditions". In Ervine's view, David Trimble was the only person who could get everybody off the hook. Sinn Fein had made the problem by pandering to their hard men. If they were having problems at this stage they would never have a chance of selling twin referenda to the same hard men. Sinn Fein should be thinking of "forcing" the Unionists to talk to them - not by adopting their present tactics but by taking a reasoned approach which would give the Unionists no other option. If Sinn Fein moved to create the right conditions the Loyalist parties would also move. Mr. Smyth said that they had appealed to Sinn Fein to make a no first strike declaration - this would go a long way to creating the right conditions. Reiterating that they would like to do more, Mr. Hutchinson said that continuing IRA activity was preventing this - members of their Party, himself and Jack Mahood included, continued to be targeted and hooded Provos were going around Crossmaglen attacking military installations. Republicans should realise that John Major was not the British presence in Northern Ireland - the Britishness of the Loyalist people had to be

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recognised by Sinn Fein. The PUP recognised the Irishness of nationalists.

8. Commenting on their proposal for an elected Convention in Northern Ireland, Mr. Ervine said that it might be a way out of the impasse - "it would marginalise the dinosaurs" and might get around the decommissioning issue if the Provos signed up to Washington 1 and 2. In response to the Tanaiste's point that Nationalists would want the Government involved, Mr. Hutchinson said he did not see why this could not be done - a Convention could involve a three stranded approach. The Taoiseach said that the Government were not uninterested in other ideas although they were working towards all party talks. The Convention was a new concept although some thought had been given to it. To bring it into the equation now however might destabilise the situation away from all party talks. Mr. Ervine commented that all the plans could come to nought - in this situation the Unionists would be left alone and this would be serious. It was important to have somewhere else to go and the Convention might be the way. Both the Taoiseach and the Tanaiste emphasised that the Government would wish the PUP to take part in the all party talks process. Mr Ervine commented that their participation would suggest that they were there because they were perceived to have guns. Decommissioning was therefore the biggest issue.

9. Referring to the Framework Document, Mr. Ervine said that many ordinary people in the North were worried about elements of it. There should be a recognition that some of these elements would have to be rolled back. The Taoiseach said that the Framework Document was not a definitive blueprint and the Government would be glad to talk to the PUP again about it. Mr. Ervine responded that they were about to talk to the British Government on the subject.

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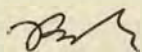
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10. In response to a question from Mr. Ervine as to the way forward, the Tanaiste said that the Government had been trying to find their way through the impasse but there was no obvious clear way ahead just now. In a brief exchange on whether the IRA would revert to violence, the PUP said that the story they had heard was that the Army Council had decided to recommence their campaign after the Clinton visit. Their assesment was that if the IRA felt that they were being "shafted" they would go back to violence.

11. In concluding the meeting, the Taoiseach said that the Government will wish to have other meetings with the PUP - it was important that the Party were able to put their point of view and to feel that it was being listened to. Mr. Hutchinson said that they believed the Government was genuine in its approach. It was proposed that a further meeting would take place in 6/8 weeks time.

12. The meeting, which lasted about two hours, was friendly throughout. The PUP delegation indicated that they would prefer to meet the Press separately and this was arranged.



Brian McCarthy
21 September, 1995.

cc Mr. Teahon, Mr. Murray, Mr. Donlon, Mr. T. Dalton, Mr. S. O hUiginn, Mr. F. Finlay.