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Meeting with David Ervine Mr Boughton

PUP Assembly Member

11 May, 2000

I called on David Ervine, the leader of the Progressive Unionist Party at his office in Stormont. He was in very good form. We had a cordial discussion during which he made the following points:

- The period up to 22 May will be a turbulent one with the parties "huffing and puffing" but in Ervine's judgement, everybody and in particular the two Governments, have "to keep their heads" to get us through this difficult period. The Governments should agree on a joint approach and stick to it.

- He was hopeful that Trimble would get the UUC to agree to re-enter Government but agreed that public arguments of recent days had cast a cloud of doubt over last weekend's optimism.

- He accepted that the Loyalist paramilitaries will be under pressure to match the IRA offer of placing "arms beyond use". However, he argued that the scheme outlined in the IRA statement was tailor made for the IRA and would not suit the Loyalists. The various groups had their own

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methods of storing of arms. The Loyalist paramilitaries would now have to give careful consideration to how they could achieve the same goal as the IRA, namely to remove the threat of armed action.

- He was surprisingly supportive of Trimble on the issue of Patten. He said that the Unionist community felt that the Provos wanted victory over the RUC and would not even provide a fig leaf for Trimble. He felt a bit of generosity from Republicans would go a long way on this issue.

- According to Ervine, Trimble has had to accept that decommissioning is not going to occur and although the IRA statement is much better than predicted, it is a long way short of the Unionist slogan "no guns no Government". As the UUP had to concede on the issue of decommissioning, Nationalists would have to give a little on policing.

- Ervine said that Sinn Féin's "behaviour" in Government was a cause of concern for the Protestant community. He said that Bairbre de Brún had initiated the controversy over flags by her decision to ban the union flag from the Department of Health building. Ervine added that he believed Trimble will get a concession in this area from the British.

- We discussed the part of the Agreement relating to symbols and emblems. At the end of the discussion, he said that Nationalists would simply have to accept that Northern Ireland was part of the United Kingdom and that entailed the flying of the union flag, on a very limited number of days, on public buildings.

- Ervine in conclusion stressed the need for close and regular contact with

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the Irish Government. He added that he was delighted to see the Government's commitment to incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic legislation included in the package of measures announced by the two Governments.

Ray Bassett
Anglo-Irish Division
12 May 2000

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