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FROM: PS/John Spellar (B&L)
18 August 2003

cc: See Copy Distribution List

Chris Maccabe - O

MEETING WITH UPRG: 15 AUGUST 2003

John Spellar met with a delegation from UPRG on 15 August. UPRG was represented by Tommy Kirkham, Jim Wright, Sammy Duddy, Frankie Gallagher, Colin Halliday and Frank McCoubrey. You, Dennis Godfrey, Mary Lemon and Billy Gamble supported the Minister.

2. Kirkham thanked the Minister for the meeting and, before moving onto the provided agenda, raised the issue of the **prison dispute**. UPRG was to meet the review team on Tuesday and would be arguing their case from a human rights perspective. He cited the case of one remand prisoner (John) who was housed between two of the prisoners on the dirty protest. Although he had nothing to do with the protest he was subject to 24-hour lock-up. Kirkham went on to say the UDA prisoners were not being treated fairly by the prison authorities - he cited a recent search for a dissident republic weapon when loyalist prisoners had also been locked in their cells. He also mentioned a prisoner who had had 19 boxed visits in a row because the dog had sat down, despite the fact that some of his visitors weren't even smokers. He argued that the dog was getting it wrong.

3. He believed that separation would happen because it was the right thing to do but was not arguing for political status. He said peace walls were being built at interface areas and the same logic should apply in prisons. Gallagher said the issue was not about creating regimes within regimes but about allowing people to do their time in a regime that was humane and fair across the board. Kirkham finished by stressing that UPRG welcomed the review and condemned attacks on the homes of prison officers. He said that all UPRG protest would be non-violent. The Minister undertook to pass their concerns, particularly over the remand prisoner "John", on to Jane Kennedy and the prison authorities (**Peter Russell - to note**)

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Kirkham passed over a folder giving details of the projects they wanted to raise at the meeting and each of the UPRG delegates gave a brief presentation on particular projects and concerns in each of their areas. Kirkham suggested that more regular meetings would mean that agendas in the future would not have to be so packed. The submissions raised similar issues. The key points raised were:

- Lack of funding and facilities were hampering efforts in the lower and upper Shankill despite the two areas being in the top 10 areas of social deprivation. There were real problems with housing and education in the area and UPRG wanted to develop projects to help. They had identified a number of troubled kids but had no resources to work with them. Applications for funding to the Belfast Regeneration Office had been rejected because its budget was already fully committed. It seemed that resources were channelled to trouble spots not areas that had been stabilised. Millions could be spent on peace-walls but not on projects aimed at reconciliation;
- The Glencairn multi-purpose centre had been subject to a number of delays in BRO – (including an application that had been lost in the move from the Shankill Office). Kirkham asked that the Minister intervene to speed the issue of the necessary paperwork so that the project could get underway. The Minister agreed (**Action please: DSD**);
- Kirkham referred to the investigation into an allegation of misuse of public funds at the Newtonabbey Community Development Agency. There was no foundation to the allegation, which had been politically motivated, and the delay in completing the investigation was preventing important work happening in Newtownabbey. He had been told that a DSD report was ready to be signed off and he asked the Minister to speed up its publication (**Advice please: DSD**). He also called for an investigation into those who had made the original allegation;
- Gallagher complained that resources for work in communities was always channelled through “the usual suspects”. This meant that UPRG and loyalist run projects did not receive funding. The UPRG needed to deliver for their



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communities to show that political engagement was the way forward. There were major problems in the communities that needed attention and there was a danger that others would take credit for tackling them because UPRG had no access to funding. He suggested, but didn't press, that this apparent bar might have had something to do with HMG's failure to recognise the UDA cease-fire. (He made a similar aside later but didn't press the issue);

- Gallagher said that there was no agency dealing with victims' issues in East Belfast and mentioned two project that had been refused funding. This gave rise to a sense of discrimination and feeling that the protestant working class were now the oppressed. It was vital that action was taken to deliver the peace for his community;
- Duddy felt that resources were being spent in the wrong areas and was unfairly skewed towards catholic areas. Nothing was going to Tigers Bay and there were no facilities for the population there. The Waterworks complex was supposed to be cross-community but protestant kids were attacked when they tried to use it;
- He complained the politicians claimed credit for calming tensions but in reality it was community workers like himself who did the work, and the police's job (he claimed to have quelled a potential riot at Skegoneil Avenue before coming to the meeting). The reality was that politicians didn't show up when there was trouble. There were major problems with drugs, drink and poor parenting in his area but it was loyalist community workers who were engaging on these hard issues and bringing calm. He recognised that UPRG was "on probation" but assured the Minister that they were sincere in their efforts;
- Duddy handed over some photographs of local housing estates pointing out how many NIHE houses had been abandoned and boarded-up. People in loyalist estates were not getting the services they deserved. He could not recall when the Council street cleaners had last been in the area. NIHE did a job but were not committed. The boarded-up houses were very bad for local



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morale and despite people wanting to move into areas the houses remained empty. The practise of housing bad elements in sink estates just made communities spiral down faster. UPRG supported a mix of public and private housing in estates to attract people back. There was contact with NIHE and others on redevelopment on vacant land and renovation of vacant houses;

- Kirkham mentioned a planned project to develop a "shared space" on the Limestone Road that would mark the boundary of the protestant community, rather than building a peace wall, so that the community could be consolidated rather than slowly eroded;
- Wright said they were vehemently opposed to the GFA but wanted peace. There were serious problems with drink and drugs in his area and they needed funding for workers to tackle them. In terms of community capacity he knew they were years behind Sinn Fein. He said there were people in his community who wanted to fight Sinn Fein and they were trying to convince them that that was not the way. The truth was that loyalist communities needed proof that peace was worth it and workers and facilities on the ground were needed. He mentioned that £1m would be enough to get their plans off the ground;
- The drugs culture was a big issue across the board and there were not enough rehabilitation places;
- Halliday referred to the Prisoners Enterprise Project in Sandy Row. Continuing to rent premises did not provide the sustainability needed. PriceWaterhouseCoopers was preparing a business case (arranged by Martin McAleese) into the purchase of premises (£215k). Existing funding for the three workers currently employed ran out shortly and in any case three workers were inadequate for an area the size of South Belfast (as defined by UDA brigade boundaries). He needed something to convince the militants that peace was the better option;



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Loyalist communities didn't have much but were very proud and with some help could achieve a huge amount. The perception that funding to these areas would be siphoned off by the UDA was not true

- UPRG contacts from Scotland were regularly harassed by Scottish police when travelling to and from NI. UPRG had nothing to hide in these contacts and was prepared to pass names, addresses and itineraries to the police if that meant the harassment would stop. (Advise please: SPOB)

5. The meeting ended with an invitation for the Minister to visit some of their estates and projects (**Advice please: PAB/DSD**).

Signed

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