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From: T Watson
Constitutional and Political Division
28 October 1998

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NOTE FOR THE RECORD

SECRETARY OF STATE'S MEETING WITH UKUP: TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER

As part of a series of meetings with the Assembly parties, the Secretary of State and Mr Murphy met a delegation from the United Kingdom Unionist Party in Castle Buildings at 15.00 yesterday. Mr Jeffrey and I were also present. The UKUP delegation comprised Robert McCartney, Paddy Roche and Cedric Wilson. The meeting lasted for 45 minutes and was conducted in a fairly low key and amicable manner throughout.

2. Mr McCartney, in response to the Secretary of State's opening question regarding the UKUP's assessment of the present situation, said his party would not be attending the round table meetings scheduled for Thursday but would be seeking a bilateral with the First and Deputy First Minister. Mr McCartney said the political scene had changed little since his party left the multi party talks during the summer of 97. The British Government was still attempting to build institutions and arrangements on a totally undemocratic basis by including those parties who continued to have connections with illegal organisations and their arms in such a process. Mr McCartney said no other democratic system in the world would permit such an arrangement.

3. In assessing the present situation, Mr McCartney said he had listened carefully to the Deputy First Minister's comments in the Assembly on Monday. Mr Mallon had stated, inter alia, that decommissioning had to be circumnavigated. The UKUP leader said it seemed to him, given the present situation, that the only way decommissioning could be circumnavigated was to simply ignore the issue. The Secretary of State said decommissioning was to be dealt with within a two year timeframe and rather than ignoring it, the Government considered it very much as a real issue. Mr McCartney countered by saying that he couldn't buy into a two year approach even if General de Chastelain produced a series of markers over a period of time which would permit inaugural meetings of NSMC and /or BIC to proceed in advance of such a timetable. The UKUP leader said it was a matter of public record that he had advised the General to stick to the technicalities of the decommissioning issue and not become involved in its political handling. The Secretary of State said she had no indication of General de Chastelain becoming involved in the latter mode.

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4. Mr McCartney continued with his point saying he could never support the concept of inaugural meetings occurring on the basis that some chronological path, designed by the General, would be followed in the future - a proposal he believed had been put forward in recent days. Furthermore he was confident the unionist community wouldn't buy this scenario since the UUP leader's card had been well and truly marked at the party conference in Derry at the weekend. Mr McCartney added that he had spoken to 12 to 14 members of the UUP (it was unclear whether all or none were Assembly members) who were saying that nothing short of a substantial tranche of weapons handed in, as a commencement of a regular and ongoing procedure, would be acceptable in their eyes. Mr McCartney said his position as a democrat was unambiguous. He loathed Sinn Fein and the PUP and made no distinction between them. He said he also knew what ordinary people in the community were thinking at this time. Decommissioning must occur and couldn't be delayed. Furthermore the Government couldn't fudge the issue any longer.

5. Mr Wilson said he had listened to the Deputy First Minister winding up the debate on Monday evening and noted the comments made with regard to the demands of the nationalist community for decommissioning, never mind the unionist community. Mr Wilson said his party leader believed that there was now an opportunity to form a pan democratic front of unionists and nationalists to the exclusion of Mr Adams and Mr Ervine. Mr Wilson said surely the time had come when people like Adams and Ervine couldn't keep on saying they couldn't deliver on decommissioning. Pressure had to be mounted by the Government to get to these people. Mr Wilson added that David Trimble had signed the Belfast Agreement on the strength of the Prime Minister's pledges so surely the Government had an obligation to ensure those pledges were met.

6. Mr McCartney recalled the pan nationalist front of Hume, Adams and the Republic's Government in 1988. Relationships had been created through this front, in particular the relationship between Hume and Adams (or SDLP and Sinn Fein) since both shared a certain amount of common ground i.e the dream of Irish unity. Now the SDLP found themselves in a dilemma. It had entered such a front which included non democrats and if it was going to continue to espouse middle of the road nationalist politics it would have to divest itself of Sinn Fein. Mr McCartney said the Deputy First Minister was very much aware of this point but couldn't say that if Sinn Fein didn't decommission then the process would move on without them. Similarly if Sinn Fein were excluded from the process because no decommissioning was forthcoming, the British Government had to consider the danger of a return to violence on the mainland. All of this seemed to place more likelihood of a continuing fudge on the decommissioning issue yet there was an overwhelming moral obligation to decommission (though no legal authority in the Belfast Agreement to do so).

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7. Mr McCartney continued saying decommissioning should be a fundamental demand of the democratic requirements of any Government. However, in terms of the Belfast Agreement, the UKUP leader described the UUP negotiators on this issue as a "bunch of lemons". No start time had been negotiated for decommissioning, so the two year timeframe could run from any time. If institutions were in place and in some occasions working, it would become more difficult to insist on decommissioning because it would be politically more difficult to close those institutions down. Mr McCartney said he believed both Governments had had a good opportunity, in the context of the Belfast Agreement and more recently Omagh to take the high moral ground and demand decommissioning with authority, in co-operation with each other and with closer integration of the Dublin Government and the SDLP - all of which would have put Sinn Fein under enormous pressure. This had all been missed and now the unionist community had given its all. The bottom line had arrived and David Trimble couldn't deliver.

8. Mr Wilson said that if the current impasse wasn't resolved, the Government had to exert more pressure on Sinn Fein/IRA because it wasn't unionists who would be renegeing on the Agreement, it was terrorists ignoring it. Mr McCartney added that the Government was promoting a policy whereby it differentiated between an acceptable level of violence to enable the Agreement and the process to continue and that which was not acceptable. The PIRA ceasefire was a military one. It didn't include communal violence and the Government couldn't continue to draw a moral distinction between what these people were doing in controlling communities and shooting policemen or bombing towns. There had been 12 murders, excluding Omagh, since the Belfast Agreement, many shootings and some 60 brutal beatings. The position of the Government in looking for "authorisation" of such incidents was indefensible. The Government couldn't ignore this dichotomy and the unionist people were very wary of the Government's position on this. The fact that such incidents were carried out by people who were associated with a political party with a mandate, and by the Government's definition, were therefore considered to be acceptable was not the issue. The key point was that any lasting democratic foundations could not be solidly built when Governments permitted such matters to continue in this way.

10. Mr McCartney finished by saying Northern Ireland had to be treated properly and questioned whether the way in which Government treated such communal violence was really "a risk for peace" at the end of the day. The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy thanked the delegation for their views and all three members departed without further comment.

Signed: Tom Watson

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