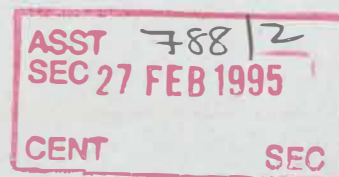


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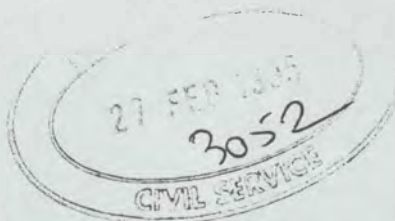
*Re 20*

FROM: TONY BEETON  
XDS  
27 FEBRUARY 1995



PS/Secretary of State (L&B) - B

cc: PS/Sir John Wheeler (L&B) - B  
PS/Michael Ancram (L&B) - B  
PS/PUS (L&B) - B  
PS/Mr Bell - B  
Mr Legge - B  
Mr Thomas - B  
Mr Bell - B  
Mr Brooke - B  
Mr Daniell - B  
Mr Leach - B  
Mr Shannon - B  
Mr Steele - B  
Mr Watkins - B  
Mr Williams - B  
Mr Wood (L&B) - B  
Mr Brooker - B  
Mr Maccabe - B  
Mr Stephens  
HMA, Dublin - B  
Mr Lamont, RID - B  
Mr Lever, Cabinet Office F  
Miss Collins, Cabinet Office - F



*cc Mr Maxwell*

Ref: XD/R5

**XD: RECORD OF FIFTH MEETING WITH SINN FEIN,  
7 FEBRUARY 1995**

The fifth meeting of Exploratory Dialogue with Sinn Féin was held on Tuesday 7 February in Parliament Buildings, Belfast. The Government delegation, unchanged from all the previous sessions, included Stephen Leach, David Watkins, Chris Maccabe, Jonathan Stephens and Tony Beeton, and was led by Quentin Thomas. Sinn Féin fielded a reduced delegation headed by Martin McGuinness with only Gerry Kelly, Bairbre de Brún and Siobhan O'Hanlon in support. The meeting opened at 11.45am.

## Ministers

Martin McGuinness began the meeting by stressing Sinn Féin's disappointment that no political representative had come from the British Government. They felt that by this stage the government should accept that there was wide public demand to move the process forward apace. One way of doing that would be the appearance of a representative of the British Government with political responsibility. He had asked for this at the previous meeting, and had asked for answers to questions about when and in what circumstances it would happen. The replies had been unsatisfactory. Let me repeat the question, Mr McGuinness said, and ask very forcibly when ministers would come. He added that he had noted the day before that a delegation of Orangemen had met the Secretary of State. They were elected by nobody, and were widely seen as anti-Catholic and sectarian. Mr McGuinness wondered why a minister should meet them and not meet a party which represented 1 in 8 of Northern Ireland's people and had received 12.5% of votes at the last local elections. He could only conclude that the British Government was not taking the process seriously.

Quentin Thomas said that at the meeting on 16 January he had given Sinn Féin an explanation of the approach which Ministers would adopt to their own participation in the dialogue. They would look for confirmation that all the relevant issues could and would be addressed and that progress was being made on a serious and substantive exploration across the key issues. Ministers, he said, wanted to join and recognized that that could be crucial in reaching a successful outcome. The press statement we had issued after the meeting last week had referred to precisely those points.

At that moment a JCB could be heard outside the room, prompting both sides to smile (through gritted teeth on the Government side) at the thought of another break in proceedings like that in the previous meeting. The threat passed, and with relief Mr Thomas continued. Mr McGuinness had made clear last time the importance



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Sinn Féin attached to this question, he said, but had stressed that it was not an ultimatum nor a precondition. Mr Thomas had reported this to Ministers and had been asked to explain that they did not see it as yet time for them to join the dialogue in person. Progress in the two meetings this week would be important, he explained, adding that he would give Ministers his assessment of progress on the workplan, particularly that any matter which either side regarded as important had been addressed. Indeed, he would report after today's meeting.

Mr McGuinness said that meeting 6 civil servants was not the same as engaging with ministers directly. All the other parties had had opportunities to meet ministers including the Prime Minister. Similar treatment for Sinn Féin was long overdue. Indeed, he believed that Mr Paisley had requested a further meeting that very morning with the Prime Minister. Sinn Féin should have equality with others. They would not be treated as second class citizens. He repeated his earlier point that the government's treatment of this issue called into question its commitment to the peace process. For 5 months, he said, there had been peace on the streets. But even prior to that there had been contacts and discussions between Sinn Féin, 'and, Mr Thomas, with civil servants like yourself since October 1990'. This refusal was not taking seriously the rights of Sinn Féin's voters, and thousands more across the community Protestant and Catholic who accepted the case for Sinn Féin's involvement in such talks. 'I'd like to know specific reasons for this attitude,' he said.

The government was, in fact, extremely anxious to carry the process forward, responded Mr Thomas. He had to remind Mr McGuinness that the government had acknowledged that there was a channel of communication with Sinn Féin, and that unauthorized meetings had taken place. That was not the point at issue now; it was a matter of political reality. He agreed that it was important that Sinn Féin did reach the point of face to face meets with ministers important for the process. Ministers were, however, looking for

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progress across the workplan. It would be a difficult judgement we needed to produce the evidence to allow ministers to say that the time had come.

Mr McGuinness seemed despondent. Had ministers accepted that progress had been made? Mr Thomas said that they had. What then was their attitude to our completing these discussions this week asked Mr McGuinness. What exactly was this progress; did they recognize that there had been wide-ranging discussion of nearly all of the issues? Mr Thomas confirmed that was so as far as it had gone. But some issues we hadn't touched on, some we had only had preliminary discussion. The main message he wanted to convey was that we could help each other to help ourselves. The Government team could not commit ministers, but it could advise them. Mr McGuinness suggested that Mr Thomas should advise them that we were reaching a crisis. The credibility of the whole process was being called into question. The government needed to take the reality that Sinn Féin's delegation couldn't carry on without a sign of some return for the people on the ground. He repeated that they were opposed to preconditions and ultimatums, but there was a widely held perception of the need for development in the process. It wouldn't be a shock. Mr Thomas said that Mr McGuinness had used the word crisis. Would he be emphasizing that in public? Mr Thomas recognized that Mr McGuinness could, and that it might come to be a necessity to do so, but in the short-term he thought it might not serve Sinn Féin's interests. That was a point rather than a question, he added.

Mr McGuinness refused to rise to the bait. There was an appreciation in the knowledgeable media of what was really going on he said. Sinn Féin was not refusing to discuss any issue with the government, and political people should present themselves here in this dialogue. He chorused the familiar line, Sinn Féin could not accept that there voters were second class citizens, nor were they a second class party. They had been sensible participants in this process. Mr Thomas said that there was no question of the



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government wanting to treat Sinn Féin or its voters as second class, but we knew the history of recent years. Mr McGuinness had asked earlier about the Secretary of State meeting members of the Orange Order. Ministers, of course, did meet numbers of different people not directly involved in politics. Sir Patrick Mr Mayhew had given a speech to an Orange Lodge which had a passage in it about North-South relations. In the light of the leaks in the Times they had sought an urgent meeting to confirm that what he had said to them remained true. As to Sinn Féin's position this had been a helpful exchange and we knew where we stood.

Mr McGuinness repeated his dissatisfaction. It was scandalous he said. He recognised that the government had to be sensitive to and conscious of the fears of unionists. 'Fine', he said, 'we all have to do that.' But a number of people in the community from which he and his delegation came felt they were not being taken into account. Mr Thomas dismissed the fear. Ministers may not have taken a direct part but the delegation were there under political direction and authority. The government's overall objective was to be even-handed, and a central part of that was to foster and encourage the process of political development enabling people to take direct responsibility for their affairs. Mr Leach added that if Mr McGuinness's dissatisfaction was based on a belief that all the issues had been substantively and seriously considered he did not entirely share that perception himself. Mr McGuinness said that we had done so, but whether to the government's satisfaction remained to be seen. There had been precious little movement from British Government. This was totally unsatisfactory. The government was effectively saying 'you aren't going to be treated equally'.

Mr Thomas said that clearly he would reject that account. There had been a number of moves in respect of security force deployments, broadcasting restrictions and so on, and there was the fact of this dialogue itself. Mr McGuinness found himself unable to resist ducking into a curiously imperfect recollection of history. The restrictions had been imposed in the first place, he said, by a

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previous Prime Minister in reaction to Sinn Féin's success in Assembly elections. Now the soldiers had been taken from the streets in response to the IRA's initiative. The government was minimalist and begrudging. At that rate demilitarization could go on over the next two years. It had been the same with the Economic Conference invitations, with Mr Moss refusing to shake Gerry Adams's hand in West Belfast, and with Christmas leave for prisoners. Mr Thomas reminded Mr McGuinness that many people would say that the IRA should never have started its violence in the first place. The truth was that there was an organization out there which was still training and keeping itself prepared. Although all the recent developments were welcome there was still a long way to go. Mr Leach observed that the Prime Minister's broadcast had shown how determined he was that things should not stall or slow down. As Mr Thomas had said the political reality was that we needed to help each other.

Mr McGuinness was not to be placated. The exchanges got a little more testy. He rejected the government's attempt to impose preconditions based on the alleged activities of any organization. We had no right to treat his party as second-rate. Those days were gone. Many unionists accepted this, he said, especially at grass-roots level. Mr Leach accepted that, but asked whether Mr McGuinness thought there had been substantive exchanges on arms. Mr McGuinness said that we couldn't link military matters to this process, and added, 'we see no basis in fact for these suggestions that the IRA is targeting'. That was looking for excuses. Anyway, Sinn Féin was talking to the same people they had been for some while...

Jonathan Stephens took advantage of a break in the flow to interrupt. Listening to this exchange, he thought that it was not moving either side forward. Mr McGuinness countered that listening to it he thought the government didn't appreciate how serious it was and that scared him. Not to be deflected Mr Stephens pointed out that Mr McGuinness was mistaken; it was an important reality



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that this was not easy for ministers, but that did not mean that they would not take the decision to become involved. Our concern should be to ask whether what happened at our meetings would encourage or discourage them. Sinn Féin had a need to demonstrate that they were meeting ministers. It was equally important for ministers to see a demonstration of progress. It was something that they would need to point to. Mr McGuinness suggested that events in the past week had made it easier - the leakers had a motive to destroy peace process, but the response on the ground had been that people want to see the Framework Document and it would be a farce if it took much longer. The leakers hadn't got the response they wanted, and now it was time to move on.

Mr Thomas said that he could agree with much of that. The leak had created what Mr McGuinness had described at the previous meeting as a hullabaloo. He thought they might have achieved some of their presumed aims, but not all. The leak had been selective, but what it brought out was the need, a point Mr McGuinness had made, for change all round. In a coda to a discussion obviously concluded for the present Mr McGuinness explained that despite Sinn Féin's wish for ministers he did not think they were like God. Actually they had no votes in Northern Ireland. Mr Thomas would not be drawn to comment on the nature of divinity.

**Ground rules for Talks**

At 12.30pm the meeting turned to the next agenda item. Mr Thomas said that the government had sent a paper to Sinn Féin the previous Friday. Were they able to respond to it today? Bairbe de Brún confirmed receipt of the paper and said that Sinn Féin had noted its contents. They would be guided by some broad democratic principles and against that background she had some brief points to make. Sinn Féin believed that the time was right to move to a process of inclusive talks led by both governments. These would be open to all democratically mandated parties, and there should be no preconditions and no predetermined outcome. Ms de Brún then

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referred directly to the paper Sinn Féin had received. In paragraph 13 on the ground rules for future talks she said that Sinn Féin believed this was a question for agreement between party leaders.

Ms de Brún turned next to paragraph 12 and asked for some clarification. Would ministers meet here (i.e. in exploratory dialogue) only after the Joint Framework Document had been published. Mr Thomas confirmed that this was not the case. If we were in this dialogue when it is published, he explained, we or whoever will be prepared to discuss it. Ministers would judge when to join the dialogue and that could be before the Joint Framework Document was published. But he had to emphasize that the delay in getting it completed and agreed was not only on the British side. Mr McGuinness chipped in that it was a poor example taking two years to complete the document. In the interests of accuracy Mr Thomas corrected him. As far as he recalled it had been begun in August 1993. Mr McGuinness's expression suggested that he thought that was still a long time.

Ms de Brún resumed. The discussion about moving to all-party talks must take place in the context Mr McGuinness had already defined, she said. There needed to be a timescale. Mr Thomas replied that on the evidence of the general points she had made there did not seem to be any difference to the government's own approach. He thought it worth saying that it could actually be difficult to draw up ground rules. Sinn Féin might not have hang ups, he said, and if they were prepared to be flexible and pragmatic that was good news, but our experience was that for different reasons all the participants in the previous talks had points to establish. For example, it had been important for unionists that the Irish government had not been a participant in Strand 1. Ms de Brún said that Sinn Féin would be very open-minded on proposals made by other parties or the British Government against the background of the democratic principles she had outlined earlier. She asked what the next step might be and Mr Thomas replied that we envisaged a possible round of bilateral talks. People were likely to react to



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the Framework Document with shock and horror... Mr McGuinness interjected 'or another way', which Mr Thomas conceded was possible, although he thought it realistic to expect some turbulence. Mr McGuinness contended that it was a general expectation that there would be a public debate on it. Mr Maccabe agreed and said that it was also the first time in a long while when all the parties would be involved on an equal footing. Mr McGuinness asked when the document would be finished. Would it be this Easter or next? Mr Thomas reminded him that it was not only in our gift but would depend upon the Irish government too. Good progress had been made but some issues remained outstanding. Mr McGuinness wondered with a faint smile whether Mr Thomas should concentrate on that while Michael Ancram came to exploratory dialogue.

Resolving the causes of the conflict/exploring the practical consequences of the ending of violence

At 12.45pm the meeting turned to its next business. Mr Thomas accepted Mr McGuinness's invitation to speak first on this topic. He would talk with particular reference to the decommissioning of arms. Sinn Féin had suggested, he said, that the government's position on arms was designed to stall progress. This was not the case. The government was committed to taking the peace process in its widest sense forward as expeditiously as possible. The Prime Minister had made that clear in his television broadcast the previous week. the government had no interest in slowing things down or manufacturing artificial crises. Equally it could not go forward without evidence of good faith and this did mean progress on the issue of arms. It might well be impossible to remove all arms, but if nothing were done to demonstrate that the threat of resumed violence had been lifted we might not reach the next step. As John Hume had said, 'if the violence is over, the explosives have to go, and I am looking to see this happen...'.

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The fact was that on the arms issue, as on some others, we could not leave everything to the end of the process. Because in that case the end might never be reached. To establish good faith, and to improve the prospects for success, it was essential to move forward on some of these difficult issues now. The government would like to see but were not looking for a complete solution to the arms issue immediately. This had to be a process of measured reassurance and confidence-building, with many elements contingent on progress in other fields (for example, in this case the decommissioning of loyalist arms). Initially we were looking for evidence of serious engagement.

How could that be measured in the context of this dialogue, continued Mr Thomas. The government accepted that Sinn Féin itself did not possess arms, but it was common ground that it had influence and a reliable channel of communication to the people who did. How Sinn Féin used that influence in analysing the situation for those people was a matter for their own judgement. But on the basis of the existence of a channel of communication and an influential relationship the government team would ask that Sinn Féin consider its paper with a view to initial progress on the issue through the development of an understanding of the modalities, the practical arrangements for decommissioning or through some other action which could demonstrate progress, for example a statement by the IRA covering three specific points listed in the paper. Finally, he said, it was important to make clear that the government is not in the business of offering any concessions in return for progress on arms. However, the issue did not exist in a vacuum and significant decommissioning would have a considerable impact on the political atmosphere, the perceived levels of threat and the stability of the peace. that could well enable a more flexible approach to be taken in other areas, and if there was an understanding that progress would occur on arms than the government team believed that it could be constructive to explore the parallel progress which might be possible in other fields as confidence built up.



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Mr McGuinness had been listening carefully. Sinn Féin were prepared to discuss the question, he said, but would not accept the paper. They would, however, agree to listen to a presentation of it.

Mr Leach then read the prepared paper (circulated previously), referring back to Mr Thomas's introduction at the appropriate reference to three key points in paragraph 7. Throughout his presentation Gerry Kelly was most attentive and took detailed notes which he put carefully away into his case as he went. Mr McGuinness was also paying close attention and looked particularly interested at the references to forensic testing.

Mr McGuinness said that the Sinn Féin delegation had listened carefully to what had been said. In reaction he would simply say that we must address all elements of the demilitarization which was required. Sinn Féin couldn't accept any preconditions for the next stage of the process but the government was asserting that Sinn Féin's entry to talks was dependent on progress on arms, even though it acknowledged that Sinn Féin had no weapons. We're committed to removing all guns, he said and continued that it was the IRA's initiative on 31 August which had had the most effect to date. He then quoted, in what was probably a prepared reaction, from Towards A Negotiated Settlement 3: everyone has an influence over the present situation and the collective application of that influence can transform the political climate and put an end to the failures of the past. Sinn Féin wished to use their influence on all matters in a positive way and with the aim of advancing the peace process. How they use their influence and how much influence they have was a matter of judgement for them. Peace, he continued, was dependent on a lasting settlement, and the attempt by the British government to link the issue of the IRA's arms to the rights of Sinn Féin's electorate were unacceptable.

Mr McGuinness repeated that he had listened with great interest to what we had said. But it was cloud cuckoo land. How could we expect

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Sinn Féin representatives to take it seriously. You know better than most, he said looking straight across the table to Mr Thomas, that the IRA has not been defeated. The government should not expect Sinn Féin to get its surrender. Mr Thomas said that we knew we had not defeated the IRA. But he believed it was common ground that members of the IRA should take the view that a return to the campaign would be a mistake. We may be about to create a situation where members of the IRA do believe that violence is all in the past. What we were asking was that Sinn Féin as a party with a channel of communication and a relationship of influence should use them. Our paper had suggested that we open up the issue and exchange views. We should seek a willingness in principle to disarm if the peace process was real then the IRA would do so eventually and we needed a common practical understanding of how it should happen, and some tangible movement (John Hume had suggested on explosives for example) to show good faith. It was precisely because we hadn't defeated the IRA that we attached importance to this question. What was really significant was our wish to continue the dialogue and the process. We were certainly not looking to deny Sinn Féin electoral validity now.

Mr McGuinness asked whether the government was saying that Sinn Féin's involvement in bilaterals with ministers or in all-party talks was dependent on this paper. Mr Thomas said that the paper had been presented for discussion. We thought that was the best way to deal with the issue (of course, some movement could happen spontaneously and that would be effective too) and ministers had said that some progress on the issue was crucial. Mr McGuinness wondered what might be the position if he were to ask ministers whether they expected him to put this to the IRA without damaging Sinn Féin's position as a political party. What was needed was complete demilitarization and the British government had a responsibility there too. It had to provide signals of good intent. We had to remove the causes of the conflict. Mr Thomas returned to his explanation. We need not be tied to the content of the paper. The question was how could we get substantial progress. Sinn Féin



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appeared to be saying that for them to go to the IRA with these ideas now would undermine their credibility. If so what would the circumstances be in which it could happen without being greeted by a hoarse laugh?

Making no answer, Mr McGuinness asked 'why us' when the DUP were tied to Ulster Resistance and the British government was linked to loyalist death squads. Were we asking the IRA to humiliate themselves? Mr Thomas said that was not so. we wanted to take people at their word. If the IRA meant what they said they did not need a fully-armed and equipped organization. Not if the violence had ended. Mr McGuinness said that this was all nonsense and a distraction. The British government was not wishing to take the process to its limits. We were going towards a crisis and it was very serious and dangerous. The reality was that Proinsias de Rossa was sitting in government now yet where did those [the Official IRA's] guns go. No-one wanted to talk about that. The violence had begun 70 years ago with the threat of war by the British government to a previous Republican delegation. Mr Leach thought that it was a matter of practical politics. He said that Mr McGuinness was underestimating the IRA and Sinn Féin. Why believe that if they were to put a further analysis of the political situation to the IRA it would be greeted with derision? What was so different about this time? Mr McGuinness simply replied that Sinn Féin wanted a total decommissioning of all arms.

Returning to Mr McGuinness's question of a few moments before Mr Thomas said that there was a distinction between these present talks and multi-party ones, as he had explained previously. The government perceived that the linkage between the arms issue and Sinn Féin's participation in the latter might be a precondition for others. For the government's part that was political reality but it was not a precondition. As for the exploratory dialogue the government team had set out the considerations which ministers would have for their own involvement. Mr McGuinness said did that mean that ministers might come here in circumstances other than

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'substantial progress on the decommissioning of arms'. Mr Thomas assented. 'That's helpful,' said Mr McGuinness.

Mr Thomas said he thought there were two questions involved. We both saw a link between decommissioning arms and resolving the causes of conflict. That could mean at the end of the process, but we would hope and expect intermediate moves in political arena. There were two candidates for when and how perhaps when ministers joined this dialogue it would have some impact on their party. But if we were looking ahead further a significant defining movement would be when the two governments presented the Joint Framework Document. Then too an analysis might be given to the IRA. Mr McGuinness commented that both scenarios made a convincing argument that the sooner British ministers were in this dialogue the better. The Joint Framework Document would be examined carefully by Republicans, he said, to see whether fundamental change constitutional and political was possible. That might not be the answer the government wanted. Mr Thomas disagreed and said he thought he had heard a 'yes'. Mr Kelly laughed [nervously?] and Mr McGuinness said 'no' with a smile.

Mr Thomas observed that publication of the Joint Framework Document would enable Sinn Féin to determine whether the government was serious it was. Mr McGuinness said that appearances were very important. People would need to see a different attitude from the government. One way would be for Patrick Mayhew to meet Gerry Adams. Why couldn't that happen, he asked. Mr Thomas repeated that the publication of the Joint Framework Document would enable people to see the government's attitude. Suppose it was prepared to contemplate deep and fundamental change, would it be plausible to present an analysis to the IRA then without provoking derision? Mr McGuinness stressed that Sinn Féin did not have control over the IRA. They did have influence, he said, and they would do nothing to undermine their place in the peace process, but they would be prepared to do everything to carry it forward.



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At 1.45pm Mr McGuinness requested a short adjournment.

Other business

At 2.20pm the meeting resumed. Tony Beeton reported, in response to earlier Sinn Féin queries outside the meeting, on the position regarding a visit to prisoners in HMP Full Sutton. The governor of the prison had written confirming Mr McGeown's status as a permitted visitor. It would now be up to him to make arrangements.

Mr Leach said he wanted to pick up one point made earlier about Ulster Resistance. The government did hope to address those arms too through dialogue. They would not be overlooked.

Mr McGuinness said that he would like to summarize. Sinn Féin would not make a public issue of ministerial attendance at these meetings (Mr Thomas said that was helpful). On the ground rules for talks they were open-minded. He wanted to reiterate that it was essential that Sinn Féin had equality of treatment and parity of esteem. It was now time for ministers to join the dialogue, and also for a meeting between the Secretary of State and Gerry Adams. On Resolving the Causes of Conflict they had listened carefully and noted the government's position. The peace process required an address to all elements of demilitarization, and Sinn Féin rejected any obstacles put in the way of a move to inclusive talks. These were the best way forward.

Mr Thomas noted Mr McGuinness's points. He then showed the Sinn Féin delegation the draft press notice which the government team had prepared. After a short recess Mr McGuinness proposed a slight amendment to a description of his delegation's views which Mr Thomas accepted.

The meeting closed at 2.40pm.

(signed:)  
Tony Beeton  
XDS  
27 February 1995