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SECRET

Meeting with Rev. Bertie Dickinson and Rev. Tom Simpson
(Moderator and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church
in Ireland), 6 September 1985

I met Rev. Bertie Dickinson, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, in Belfast on 6 September. Dickinson is a hard-line Unionist and is a leading member of the Orange Order. I also met Dr. Tom Simpson, a former Moderator who is currently Clerk of the Assembly and General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church. Simpson is a man of more moderate views and, accordingly, more representative of Presbyterian Ministers generally than the current Moderator. From other Presbyterian sources, however, I understand that the Orange element within the church is on the increase and that this explains Dickinson's recent election as Moderator. Dickinson is the leader of the fundamentalist, anti-ecumenist wing within the Church.

Partly no doubt, for the benefit of his colleague, Dickinson launched into a prolonged tirade against the Irish Government, which rehearsed most of the time-honoured allegations levelled by extreme Unionists against the South. Among the points made were the following:

- The South must recognise the right of the people of Northern Ireland to determine their own destiny and abandon its territorial claim, which represents a permanent obstacle to mutual understanding and cooperation. Dickinson sees no alternative to deletion of Articles 2 and 3 of our Constitution. In any Anglo-Irish agreement, furthermore, the Dublin Government must explicitly abandon its claim. If this is done, the door will be open for normal relations between Northern Ireland and a "friendly neighbouring state" (as the recent Paisley/Molyneaux document indicated);

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- Dickinson favours a devolved government. However, cooperation between two sections of a community should not mean that the majority section must surrender all its rights. Furthermore, Provisional Sinn Fein has no right to participate in the political process in Northern Ireland;

- Regarding the recent departure of Hurd and Patten, Dickinson took exception to the observation made in the media and elsewhere to the effect that "this shows that Northern Ireland is not very high on Mrs. Thatcher's list of priorities". He denounced this kind of phrase as mere shorthand for the Dublin Government's objective of achieving a united Ireland, which Unionists categorically reject. When I suggested that this was a misinterpretation of the phrase and that commentators were probably referring more to the urgent need to restore peace and stability to Northern Ireland, the Moderator's reaction was that the latter was no concern of the Dublin Government. He vigorously contested the right of the Irish Government to speak or make representations on behalf of the Northern minority;

- Dickinson threatened massive Loyalist resistance if an agreement emerged from the current talks which seemed to be "moving Ulster down the road to a united Ireland". His colleague Tom Simpson warned that decent, middle-class, professional people could be expected to join the Loyalist paramilitaries - "the criminal element in our midst" - in a campaign of militant protests;

- Dickinson castigated the Chief Constable for the re-routing decision taken in Portadown and drew attention to Seamus Mallon's remark that this decision had been taken under pressure from the Irish

Government. At the same time, however, he held that "our Chief Constable" was receiving no cooperation from his Southern counterpart and that there was grave dissatisfaction generally at the level of cross-border security cooperation. When I contested this, I was supported by Tom Simpson, who told the Moderator that, from his own contacts in border areas, he was satisfied that there was extremely close and effective security cooperation;

- Dickinson made the usual charges in relation to extradition. I explained the Government's position and recalled also the McGlinchey and Shannon cases. I again received modest support from Simpson, who has a legal background himself and welcomed the "courage" displayed by the Supreme Court in the foregoing cases;
- The Moderator made it clear that he is not an ecumenist. Simpson, on the other hand, referred positively to Bishop Daly. He also enquired into the efforts being made to liberalise certain aspects of society in the South and praised the Taoiseach in this regard. He made a point of asking that his best wishes be conveyed to the Taoiseach;
- In conclusion, I left copies of the Minister's "Between" speech and received in return a copy of a statement issued by the Moderator on the occasion of the last Presbyterian General Assembly.

David Donoghue
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(1 September, 1985

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