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PRIME MINISTER'S MEETING WITH LOYALISTS: PERSONALITY NOTES

GARY McMICHAEL

UDP LEADER

UDP COUNCILLOR ON LISBURN BOROUGH COUNCIL

UDP NEGOTIATOR AND FORUM REPRESENTATIVE

Background

In his mid-20's, Mr McMichael is a financial consultant. Educated locally at Wallace High School, Lisburn. Involved in community politics from the age of 17, he co-founded the Lower Lisburn Community Group, which established a Community House in Hillhall, Lisburn in 1987. His father, John McMichael, a UDA Commander and author of 'Common Sense' - a document designed to encourage a move away from terrorism into democratic politics by the UDA - was murdered by PIRA in 1987. He took up his father's mantle from that time on and in 1988 co-founded the UDP (Ulster Democratic Party), retaining 'Common Sense' as the backbone of the fledgling party's political analysis. His friend Ray Smallwoods, another leading light in the UDP, was also murdered by PIRA in July 1994. Elected to Lisburn Borough Council in 1993, Mr McMichael was the UDP's sole elected representative until several DUP defectors in Newtownabbey joined the party in December 1994.

A member of the Loyalist delegation involved in exploratory dialogue (LXD) with HMG IN 1994/95. One of the two UDP delegates (with John White) at the Forum and Negotiations following the election on 30 May.

Personality and Political Views

Closely resembles his father in both looks and manners and fully shares his political viewpoint. A shrewd and reasonably mature politician, given his age, who has clearly set out goals and

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purpose. In a local newspaper interview some time ago, he admitted to higher political ambitions, above Council politics. Sees the way forward only through dialogue, and has gone on the record that he would be prepared to sit down with Sinn Fein after they are admitted fully into the democratic process. During the IRA ceasefire, he shared a platform with Mitchel McLaughlin, SF National Chairman, at a fringe meeting of the Liberal Democrats Conference in Glasgow (late 1995).

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JOHN WHITE

UDP PRISONS SPOKESMAN

UDP NEGOTIATOR AND FORUM REPRESENTATIVE

Background

Born in the Loyalist Forthriver area of Belfast in 1952, White first came to notice in 1972, when he was arrested in London on charges relating to arms procurement. Continued involvement in shootings and robbery led to prison sentences in 1975 and 1976; and in 1978 White was given two life sentences for the stabbing of SDLP Councillor Patrick Wilson and his personal assistant Irene Andrews five years earlier. In prison, White swung between associating with moderate prisoners (at one stage, he applied to join the Peace People) and extremists (the leadership of the Shankill Butchers gang). Towards the end of his imprisonment, however, he distanced himself from paramilitary contact, and was a model prisoner at the time of his release in 1993. Two of White's brothers have also served prison sentences for involvement in the Ulster Defence Association (UDA).

A member of the Loyalist delegation involved in exploratory dialogue (LXD) with HMG in 1994/95. One of the two UDP delegates (with Gary McMichael) at the Forum and Negotiations following the election on 30 May.

His inclusion in a Loyalist parties' delegation meeting (and subsequent handshake) at No 10 in July 1996 attracted considerable media attention, focussing on his past, and his suitability for presentation as a respectable political figure.

Personality and Political Views

A well-scrubbed appearance and mild manner seem at odds with White's turbulent past, and his somewhat nebulous present (he has interests in property dealing, and is reported to have been warned by the UDA hierarchy for drug-dealing activities). As prisons spokesman for the UDP, he has access to most of the UDA prisoners in the Maze, and

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seems to exert some moderating influence over them. Prior to the Loyalist ceasefire, he was active in promoting a cessation of violence. In a visit to the USA in October 1994 he created a good impression with his articulation of the Loyalist position, and this led some observers to speculate that he was capable of becoming an important player in Loyalist politics. He appears to be genuinely determined to develop Loyalist politics as a respectable activity divorced from criminal or paramilitary activity. Whether or not he can deliver remains to be seen.

Born in July 1933, Ervine is married with two children. Educated at Orangefield Boys Secondary School in West Belfast, Ervine was sentenced to 11 years imprisonment for possession of explosives in 1974. He was released in 1985. In 1994, Ervine came to prominence as a spokesman for the WUP enunciating their position and setting out a socialist unionist agenda.

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Ervine is one of the WUP's two negotiators (along with Hugh Sayth) at the all-party talks and Forum representative, following the 10 May election which brought the party into the top ten eligible to enter Negotiations.

Highly articulate and skilled at presenting the WUP's position as reasonable and pragmatic, Ervine clearly enjoys the spotlight.

Somehow surface from time to time of his pronouncements earning the disapproval of Loyalist leaders suspicious of Ervine representing their interests with less enthusiasm than his own.

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DAVID ERVINE

PUP SPOKESMAN

PUP CHAIRMAN

PUP NEGOTIATOR AND FORUM REPRESENTATIVE

Background

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WILLIAM SMITH

PUP CHAIRMAN

Background

William Blair 'Plum' Smith is in his 40's, married with a child. Formerly employed in the shipyard at Harland and Wolff where he was a senior union shop steward (with a reputation as a militant). Now a community activist in the Woodvale area of North Belfast. He has long standing links with loyalist paramilitaries but is not believed to have been actively involved in terrorism; considered to have played a role in bringing about the CLMC statement of a loyalist ceasefire in October 1994.

Stood unsuccessfully as an independent in the 1989 local government election in the Court electoral area of Belfast City Council; but nevertheless he attracted over 700 first preference votes.

Takes a close interest in loyalist prisoner issues. Replaced Lindsay Robb (following his arrest and subsequent imprisonment in Scotland on terrorist charges) as a member of the Loyalist delegation involved in exploratory dialogue (LXD) with HMG in 1994/95. Can be less urbane than some of his colleagues when presenting issues about which he feels strongly.

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