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PST; PSS; Ministers Owen,
de Rosta & Taylor; Attorney
General; Minister of State
Coveney; Messrs. Teahon,
Donlon & Dalton; Amb.
London and Washington; Joint
Secretary; Counsellors A-I.

Conversation with David Ervine and Gusty Spence

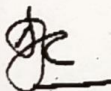
I had a short conversation in Castle Buildings this morning with David Ervine and Gusty Spence. Not surprisingly, they were in grim mood, although there was no sense of resentment directed towards the Government.

Both Ervine and Spence were convinced that the attack had been the work of the Provisional IRA. They dismissed speculation that the CAC could have "come up from the border" and launched such a sophisticated attack on Thiepval Barracks. Ervine went as far as to name the person who he believed had masterminded the attack. He claimed that this individual had been "peppering to get off the cease-fire" for some time.

Ervine claimed that yesterday's attack was a repeat of 1991, when the IRA had left bombs in Loyalist estates in an attempt to break the Loyalist cease-fire called during the Brooke talks. They had failed to provoke a resumption of Loyalist violence then and, he hoped, they would fail again. Spence pointed out that the bombs were clearly intended to harm Protestant civilians, who are among the most seriously injured.

Spence described yesterday's bombs in Lisburn as "an attack on both democracies - Northern Ireland and the Free State", but argued that the appropriate response was to "roll up our sleeves" and strive even harder to make the negotiations work. Violence, he said, would solve nothing.

Spence suggested that the Irish Government would have a role to play in this and that the PUP might wish to discuss this with us. I said that we would be willing and available to listen to whatever they had to say to us.



David Cooney

8 October 1996