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*Prime Minister*  
*Nothing good can come out of this meeting, I fear.*  
*It is an opportunity for Mr McCartney to let off*  
*steam. You have got no more than 30 minutes*  
*and should give him no longer. Do you*  
*want a checklist? (I suspect you*  
*know all the lines pretty well*  
*by now - and the main/ly December 1996*  
*one is to repeat that the Union*  
*is safe).* *John 4/12.*

I understand the Prime Minister is to meet Mr Robert McCartney MP (following your letter to me of 22 November) at 4.30pm tomorrow. The Prime Minister appears to have seen him last on 9 July, in the company of other Unionist leaders; he saw the UKUP alone on 22 May. Neither the Secretary of State nor Michael Ancram is able to attend.

#### Objectives

As with Dr Paisley last week, we have little to expect from this meeting. There is no prospect of Mr McCartney yielding on his positions in response to argument. He has in substance said that he believes that the Talks process is corrupt and a sham, intended to give cover to various sorts of betrayal. His present line in any event appears essential to his electoral strategy (he will have a close fight with the UUP in North Down, and is dependent on the DUP not standing against him). The meeting need not, therefore, be long.

#### The UKUP and the Talks

Mr McCartney's party, the United Kingdom Unionist Party, is more or less a one man band (though there are two other delegates in the Talks, including Dr Conor Cruise O'Brien - of whom, however, little has been seen since the early days). Though the party's vote was small (3.7%), Mr McCartney has made himself prominent both in the media, and in the Talks. His position - closely paralleling that of the DUP, with which he co-operates closely - has been entirely

negative. He has worked consistently to prevent the Talks from moving forward, and to embarrass the UUP into adopting a blocking position on successive issues. That was his endeavour over the appointment of the Chairmen, the rules of procedure and the agenda for the remainder of the opening plenary; on all of which the UUP nevertheless eventually compromised.

His greatest success has been in contributing to UUP nervousness over decommissioning: he has played a large part in generating the mood which has led them to re-emphasise a requirement for prior decommissioning, leading to the impasse of recent weeks. In discussions, he has almost certainly taken up more time than any other speaker (his main address on decommissioning lasted four hours) and his often ill-humoured and hectoring tone has done a good deal to worsen the atmosphere.

#### Principal McCartney Themes

Mr McCartney's policy positions tend to be negative - he denounces HMG's stance in Northern Ireland comprehensively, offering little in its place. The main elements of his criticism are:

- The Government is prepared to pay whatever price terrorists ask for the end of violence. There have been constant concessions to terrorism at the expense of democratic principles; the Joint Declaration as the result of the Baltic Exchange bomb, a date for Talks as a result of Canary Wharf, etc. Hence also, HMG's "retreat" from seeking a "permanent" ceasefire to an "unequivocal" one.



- It is folly to suppose that the IRA intends to decommission before a settlement. If they remained in Talks, they would be ready to decommission only in the context of a settlement involving gains that Unionists could not tolerate. In any event, parallel decommissioning would permit them to enter, see what was on offer, and resume violence if they did not like it. (Mr McCartney also adopts an interpretation of paragraph 34 of Mitchell - the crucial one on the "compromise" - as requiring the participants only to "consider decommissioning" during the negotiations, rather than actually do some of it. This is a highly implausible reading of the text.)

- The Union is at the centre of the negotiations: this itself is a violation of the principle of consent. The two Governments are trying to determine the terrorists' bottom line on constitutional issues so as to formulate a package acceptable to them and to constitutional Nationalists, the "acquiescence" of Unionists then being sought by "bribery".

As to recent developments, he opposes the Decommissioning Bill - or anyway the exemption in it from forensic examination of weapons recovered - which "subverts the rule of law". He was, predictably, highly critical of the 28 November announcement, citing three reasons: it called for an unequivocal restoration of a flawed ceasefire; the criteria about refraining from targeting, surveillance, etc, could be put to no objective test; and suggestions of a time-frame - likely to be of a sort that the IRA was looking for, around six months - would permit Talks to cover considerable ground before any weaponry was given up.

As to positive prescriptions, Mr McCartney merely says he favours an exclusive political process, with "private armies" being dealt with by the law.

Lines

Mr McCartney's attacks are so sweeping that it is difficult to offer rebuttals of all of them. In any event, that would be unlikely to do much good, as I suggested above. But I attach a number of lines on current developments, especially the 28 November announcement. (They are similar to those provided for the meeting with Dr Paisley last week.)

Due to the short notice, I have not had an opportunity to clear this with the Secretary of State of Ministers.

Yours ever  
*James Vyle*  
Sir W K Lindsay