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Title: Report in the Irish Times of statements made by William Whitelaw MP, British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, after meeting various groups in the course of a visit to Derry. The statements refer to social and recreational facilities, violence and the security situation, marches, a peace petition, and rumours of talks with the Provisional IRA [Irish Republican Army].

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Report in the Irish Times of 6th June 1972 of statements made in Derry by Mr. William Whitelaw M.P. British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, after meeting various groups in the course of a visit to Derry.

I came to Londonderry this afternoon and I have seen various people. I received first of all the Creggan and Bogside women who had a petition for peace. They produced a petition with some 13,700 signatures on it. I then saw the Bogside Community Association who made various representations to me, which I listened to about social and recreational facilities, in which they have a considerable interest. Londonderry Development Commission is considering these.

I then saw the traders who represented to me their grave worries about the bombing and the effect on their trade and the security position and I have considerable sympathy with the position they put to me.

I then saw the Londonderry branch of the Loyalist Workers' who again put to me their strong feelings about the security situation and also repeated to me that they greatly objected to the march on Saturday having been banned from this side of the river. I explained my reasons for having that ban in the interests of security. So I have seen a very wide cross-section of people from Londonderry.

The Secretary of State said that some of the meetings had been more friendly than others. He added: "I should make it clear that they all had different points of view to put to me, which they did, in some cases very strongly. I appreciate their feelings and was glad to have an opportunity to hear their points of view."

In fact, the only one of Mr. Whitelaw's meetings with the various groups in which tempers quite obviously seemed to have run high was that with the delegation from the local branch of the L.A.W. The members of this delegation, led by their chairman, Mr. Glenn Barr, emerged from the room in which the meetings were held in an obviously dissatisfied mood.

Mr. Whitelaw, who earlier in Belfast had received a peace petition organised by women in the Andersonstown area of Belfast, obviously welcomed the Derry women's peace petition. "I certainly welcome very much the large number of signatures which the women from Creggan and Bogside brought to me. I thanked them for the work they are doing for peace and said that all of us who wanted peace must work together to that end," he said.

I regard it as a very considerable expression of opinion in a very short time. They have been a very short time doing this and I think it is a very significant development and that it will be widely regarded as such. They are asking for an end of violence and for peace, and I think that provided enough people make their feelings strongly enough felt, this will happen. If the community make their feelings felt like this, they are bound to have a very strong and considerable effect on the chances of securing peace."

The members of the women's committee said after their meeting that they would continue to seek additional signatures for the petition in the coming days. They would concentrate on door-to-door visits to obtain the signatures of old-age pensioners, people who were sick, and people on shift work who might not have been able to sign it last

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week. They indicated that five prominent members of the Provisional I.R.A. in Derry, including the O.C. Derry Command. Mr. Martin McGuinness, and the adjutant of the command, Mr. Sean Keenan, had signed the petition, adding after their names the words "peace with justice."

There was some conflict between the women's version of what their petition was about and Mr. Whitelaw's. He said that it was "a petition for an end to violence - full stop." The women, on the other hand, claimed that they were seeking an end to violence, but on the basis of certain demands.

These were an end to internment, an amnesty for political prisoners and men on the run, the withdrawal of troops to their barracks, and a promise that the Army and R.U.C. would not enter the Bogside and Creggan while political negotiations were carried on after the cessation of violence.

They made it clear that they were as determined as ever to obtain an end to the violence to allow these negotiations to take place.

Mr. Whitelaw, at a press conference after the meetings strongly denied recent suggestions that he might have been secretly in touch with the Provisional I.R.A. either directly or through intermediaries, or that he intended to do so even if the violence ended. "I cannot foresee negotiations with them, even after the violence has stopped," he asserted. Neither did he envisage negotiations taking place to secure peace within the context of a 32-county Ireland.

He pointed out that the terms of his appointment had made it clear that Northern Ireland would never cease to be a part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the majority of its people.