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Title: Copy letter from Donal O’Sullivan, Ambassador of Ireland to Great Britain, to R McDonagh, Assistant Secretary at the Department of Foreign Affairs, reporting a discussion with William Whitelaw, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, on the latter’s meeting with representatives from the Irish Republican Army.

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Personal and Confidential

July 14th 1972

Dear Assistant Secretary

I had an opportunity for a chat with Mr. Whitelaw in the Queen's Tent at the Buckingham Palace Garden Party yesterday afternoon. He said, first of all, that he very much hoped that no embarrassment was caused on our side by his meeting with the IRA. In particular, he asked me to explain to the Taoiseach that it would not have been possible for him to give advance notice of the meeting. The IRA let him down badly in spilling the beans.

As a result of the meeting he is personally convinced that O'Connell is a genuine moderate and that he can be counted on to exert a valuable influence. If Stephenson could be got rid of then real progress with the IRA might be possible. Stephenson monopolised the discussion. His attitude throughout was offensive and quite outrageous and he showed no disposition at all to see another point of view. "If you or we could pick him up this might be the right thing to do at this point in time".

A lot is happening behind the scenes in an effort to have the truce restored. Mr. Whitelaw is not without hope that these moves will be successful. People are now saying that he is a failure and should either throw up the job or be pushed out of it. He has no intention whatever of shedding his present responsibility. I said this was comforting news.

The Secretary of State went on to tell me that there was a lot of talk at the IRA meeting about the constitutional problem. In

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this context he made a very interesting remark. He said that if the atmosphere at the meeting were better it might have been possible to contemplate offering some form of words which would help the IRA point of view. When I mentioned the proposed plebiscite his comment was "We are in a bit of a fix there".

Mr. Whitelaw continued by saying that the UDA is now more a problem than the IRA. The truth, he said, is that the UDA believed the IRA to be at a low ebb and were doing everything they could to provoke a breaking of the IRA truce. This is something he could not admit in public. At this point we were joined by Prince Philip and Lord Mountbatten.

Mr. Whitelaw told them what we had been talking about and to my surprise repeated that "The Protestant side are the greater menace at this stage. The UDA do not want peace except on their own terms. They are looking for a confrontation with the IRA".

Because of interruptions I was unable to talk further on the Northern question with Mr. Whitelaw.

Yours sincerely

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