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Mr. W. St. Angelo

Report of Meeting on 4th April, 1973 between the
Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary
of State for Northern Ireland.

The meeting took place in the Secretary of State's office, and lasted just over an hour. Mr. Whitelaw had with him Mr. Philip Woodfield, Deputy Head of the Northern Ireland Office, Mr. Kelvin White, Head of the Irish Section in the Foreign Office and Mr. Stevens, Private Secretary to Mr. Whitelaw. The Minister was accompanied by the Ambassador.

After the usual exchange of courtesies, the Secretary of State said that the degree of acceptance of the White Paper had exceeded his wildest dreams. Mr. Craig "is rushing at everything" at the moment; Mr. Paisley "does not know what to do". The hardline Unionists are likely to form some sort of body. The indications are that the Alliance Party is gaining support in Catholic working-class areas. There are, as yet, no signs of increasing support for them in the Protestant working-class areas. At this stage, it is difficult to see how the Alliance Party will fare under P.R. Mr. Whitelaw thought that the SDLP and the Nationalists should do quite well in the General Election. He has doubts about how well the NILP will fare. From the overall point of view, the important thing is that all the Parties seem to be keen to go into the election. It now appears certain that there will be one 8-seat constituency with perhaps more than 40 candidates.

The Minister recalled that he had mentioned to the Prime Minister the difficulty of getting voters to go 'down the line' in large constituencies. He has, in the course of his personal contacts, tried to explain to representatives of the SDLP and the Alliance Party the great importance of passing on votes. Mr. Whitelaw intervened to say that it would be helpful if the Faulkner Unionists were to give their second preferences to the Alliance Party and the Minister remarked that a useful election slogan would be "keep your enemies out", in other words to persuade the voters to vote against their worst enemies, which would require them to give earlier preferences to moderates in the centre.

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Mr. Whitelaw then mentioned the undertaking he has given to see Party leaders about the White Paper. In these talks the sole intention will be to explain what the proposals in the White Paper really mean. He will also make it quite clear that the ensuing legislation will faithfully carry out the fundamentals of the White Paper. He fully realises that efforts will be made in the Unionist world to put different interpretations on what he says. But he is not going to change the White Paper. The Minister agreed that Mr. Whitelaw has been specific and firm on this matter and added that the Unionists must learn to live with what the White Paper contains.

Mr. Whitelaw expressed thanks to the Minister for the co-operation being given on the Border and for the way in which the Gardaí are working there. He asked that his thanks on this should be conveyed to the Taoiseach. The Minister said that anything the British can tell us on the security front would be welcome and Mr. Whitelaw promised to give this special attention.

Mr. Whitelaw, at this point, made a brief reference to the violence in the North. It is, he said, very sad that so many young people are involved. They now find 14-year olds, including girls, carrying bombs. He made a passing reference to the improved situation in Derry and said the great support for the White Paper indicated by a recent poll in the Creggan, which showed 1700 out of 2000 households wishing to give it a chance, was most encouraging.

The Minister asked Mr. Whitelaw for his assessment of the poor attendance at the recent Craig meetings. Mr. Whitelaw said he does not know how much support Craig really has. Moderate opinion is moving about a lot. At one stage P.R. was an issue and it was then forgotten. Later the question of assurance on the Border was the issue and this, too, was forgotten. The proposals in the White Paper are the current issue. Mr. Paisley does not know where he stands. In a recent conversation he told Mr. Whitelaw that when the elections are over, the majority representatives will tell the British Government what they want and the British government will have to give it.

The Minister intervened to say that he is very happy with the reaction to the White Paper. Mr. Faulkner's change of position after its publication was quite surprising. Mr. Whitelaw said that Mr. Faulkner is a very difficult person to understand and the Minister interjected that, while Mr. Faulkner is not greatly trusted by anybody, he is still the most popular politician in the North.

The Minister congratulated Mr. Whitelaw on the skill displayed in the drafting of the White Paper. He described the drafting as ingenious. He went on to refer to the RUC and said that something will have to be done in this area. It is hard to see what the best solution would be. A great many people of different political persuasions in the North hope that something can be done. Some members of the Force may have to be removed. It may be useful to bring in people who could help reorganise the Force.

Mr. Whitelaw said that his great worry is to discover how best to ensure the acceptability of the Police Force. The police are being quite effective in areas where they are accepted. This is not the case in the Creggan and Ardoyne. A decision has now been reached to change the uniform of the RUC. The new uniform will be "greener in colour."

The Minister said that while the unarmed national Police Force in the Republic works very well, more local community orientation of the police in the North may, perhaps, be necessary. The Minister suggested that Mr. Whitelaw might look back on their own experience in organising the Police Force in Britain. Mr. Whitelaw remarked that the breaking-up of the Force could present considerable difficulties. It would be likely to raise special problems in Belfast.

The Minister then enquired as to the likely date for the general election. Mr. Whitelaw replied that the election will be held in the last week in June but the date has not, as yet, been settled. One of the questions being considered is whether the election should be on a Wednesday or a Thursday. The Bill for the election will come before the House next week. It must be passed by the 15th May and Mr. Whitelaw is hopeful

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that they may get it through even before then. The main Constitution Bill will come before the House around mid-May and the Government's hope is that it will have gone largely through the House of Commons before the General Election. The General Election must be seen to be on the basis of the White Paper and of the constitutional legislation and it is, therefore, essential that the main provisions of the Bill should be fairly well known before the election takes place. Mr. Whitelaw's hope is that the Constitution Bill will, in fact, be at the Committee Stage before the election campaign begins.

Mr. Whitelaw went on to say that he had given a great deal of thought to suggestions that the local government elections should be deferred until after the General Election. He has, however, now decided that the local government elections must go ahead as arranged and he will, in fact, be making an announcement to this effect today. In this context, he mentioned that it is important to bring the Belfast Corporation to an end. It has achieved very little. He thought it a good sign that the Republican clubs are already selecting their candidates for the local elections.

The Minister said that he would have preferred to see the local elections take place after the General Election. He, too, regards it as a good sign that the Republican clubs are moving. The Minister added that he would like to see Sinn Fein taking part in the Northern elections.

Mr. Whitelaw said that if he did not continue to proscribe Sinn Fein they would begin to open up offices all over Belfast regardless of the elections. He cannot push Craig and Paisley too far. If the IRA called off everything he would have to think again about the position of Sinn Fein. Personally, he would dearly like to see Sinn Fein standing in the elections. As a proscribed organisation, members of it, if they were to stand in the election, could be prosecuted as self-confessed members of an illegal organisation. Mr. Whitelaw repeated that he must not "hand things on a plate to Paisley and Craig."

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The Minister said that the action of the Republican clubs may put some pressure on Provisional Sinn Fein to stand and Mr. Whitelaw remarked that if this were to happen he would see whether there is anything he could do. The Minister questioned whether Protestant groups could not be brought to see the value of having Sinn Fein contest the elections. Mr. Whitelaw said he would bear this point in mind and added that he has already gone a long way with the Protestants. The Minister referred to his contacts with the different shades of political opinion in the North and said that he may be in a position to help to convince people there of the desirability of getting Sinn Fein into the elections.

The Minister told Mr. Whitelaw of his visit to Belfast a few days before his appointment and of the useful talk he had with the Reverend Martin Smith and others. Mr. Whitelaw asked the Minister "what do you make of Smith?" The Secretary of State said that Mr. Smith seemed reasonable at one stage but his reaction to the White Paper has been very strong. Mr. Smith has, in fact, gone back a long way in his attitude. The Minister said that Mr. Smith's more reasonable attitude earlier on was probably due to a fear of violence after the issue of the White Paper. The risk of post-White Paper violence has now passed and this, possibly, explains his change of attitude. The Minister added that he had had letters of congratulation from Smith and Taylor on his appointment.

The Minister continued by saying that he is anxious to keep up his contacts in the North and the more of these contacts there are the better. He would propose to continue his visits to the North and would, of course, let the Authorities in Britain know of such visits beforehand. The Minister added that the more we can prepare for the Conference by contacts both ways the better.

Mr. Whitelaw said that the real key to a change in the attitude amongst the Protestants in the North is for the Republic to give some form of recognition to the North as an entity. If this could be done, it would open the door completely. He could not over-stress the importance of this. It would isolate the extremists. Mr. Whitelaw believed that if we could find a form of words for acceptance of the North we could count

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on considerable co-operation from Mr. Faulkner. Mr. Faulkner is in any event very interested in the Council of Ireland idea.

The Minister said that the difficulty in connection with recognition arises in relation to Article 2 of the Irish Constitution. Before the recent General Election an opinion poll was taken on Article 2 and the response was quite discouraging. Consequently, no reference was made to Article 2 by the Government Parties during the election campaign. The Minister added that he is very conscious of the need to find a suitable form of words to meet the situation and he will see what could be done in due course. Timing would be very important in this context.

Mr. Whitelaw said his impression is that the majority representatives in the Northern Assembly will opt for a Council of Ireland, which, at the top level, would involve representatives of the Executive and of the Government in Dublin. He is not so sure that the majority would favour at a lower level contacts between Parliamentarians. Mr. Whitelaw believes that the majority in the North will be prepared to go a long way through the Council on tourism, regional planning etc. Faulkner sees sense in the Council. The attitude of the Alliance Party and the SDLP towards the Council will be helpful. The NIIP would also, of course, be ready to co-operate, but Mr. Whitelaw expressed concern at the likelihood that they will not get more seats in the General Election.

The Minister said it is extraordinary how quickly voters learn about transfer of votes. In his experience in the Republic the sensitivity of voters to the wishes of a Party on this matter is quite remarkable. Big swings in transfers can take place in a very short period of time.

Mr. Whitelaw said that it is to be expected that during the election campaign those on the majority side in the North will maintain that acceptance by the Republic of the North is a prerequisite of any Conference. This is, of course, nonsense and should be disregarded.

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The Minister recalled his recent discussion with right-wing Unionists in Belfast in the course of which he discussed, inter alia, with them the need for a Council with power to evolve. He had made clear to them his view that the decision to evolve into new fields of activity would be a matter for them and that they could be better off in such an arrangement than if they rejected the Council of Ireland and left the question of relations between the North and the Republic to be settled by future British Governments whose policies could not be predicted. His impression was that this idea did not fall on visibly stony ground and he intends to push it again.

Mr. Whitelaw said he would see no harm at all in the Minister pushing the idea. He added that Craig and Taylor think an independent Northern Ireland could take part in a Council of Ireland. An independent Northern Ireland is, of course, out of the question as the two communities must rely on the British Army for their safety.

The Minister said that anything Mr. Whitelaw could do to lower the profile of the Army in the next few weeks would have a profound effect. Mr. Whitelaw said he would do his best in relation to this. The practice is to reduce military patrolling when an area has calmed down. The Minister referred to a recent telephone call he made to Lord Windlesham. He said that the information he had given was correct, but the place he mentioned was wrong. He asked the Secretary of State to be good enough to convey his apologies to Lord Windlesham. Mr. Whitelaw said that he welcomed the transmission of information of this kind which was helpful. He added that one of the difficulties in that particular instance was that the Commanding Officer had had a nervous breakdown and had to go.

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Mr. Whitelaw then said that the past two days have been very quiet in the North. There is, in fact, no evidence of a resurgence of violence. It is known, however, that Twomey wants to go ahead at all costs. Derry has been very quiet in recent days. Where the minority are responsible for bombing they always give a warning beforehand. The Protestants never give a warning. There has been some stoning in the Creggan during recent days. This is perhaps because there is now a new battalion in the Creggan. It is doing an excellent job. Great progress is being made in clearing up areas and this is much appreciated by the local population.

The Minister again repeated that he would think about the question of acceptance of the North as an entity. He said that maximum contact between the Republic and the North is desirable. He might find it possible to get to the North before the General Election. The Minister said that if there could be some visible direct contact in the North between him and Mr. Whitelaw this could be a considerable help.

Mr. Whitelaw felt that a contact between them in the North before the election could present difficulties. The post-election period would, of course, open new opportunities and such contacts would then be possible. He cannot before the election do anything to feed Craig and Paisley. Their view is that "Whitelaw is trying to sell them out to the South."

Mr. Whitelaw went on to say that it is essential that the Constitution Bill should have passed all stages in July. He is confident that the Opposition in the House of Commons will give every support for the speedy passing of this Bill. There could, however, be some delay in the House of Lords.

The Assembly will not meet until the Bill is through.

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A meeting of the Assembly in July or August would hardly be a practical proposition as the members will be "either marching or on holiday." It is unlikely that the first meeting of the Assembly can take place before September or October. Authority of Parliament to devolve powers will then have to be obtained and it is very desirable that the Executive should be appointed before this authority is sought. Mr. Whitelaw is hopeful that all the details will be tied up by Christmas. The problem will be to get the extreme groups to agree to work the settlement.

The Minister told Mr. Whitelaw that he intends to seek the approval of the Minister for Finance for the setting up of a Community Relief Fund to help groups, North and South, to meet and also to provide help within the North. Anything done under the Fund in the North would, of course, be non-sectarian and some of its work might usefully be done in conjunction with the Community Relations Board. Mr. Whitelaw thought the idea a very good one. He conceded that mischief-makers would probably want to interpret this development peculiarly. Mr. Whitelaw went on to say that he is not happy with the Community Relations set-up in the North - the dual Commission and Ministry structure - and he wants to change it.

The Minister said that he would, of course, seek advice from political leaders and others in the North before deciding what the scope of the Fund would be. He would, naturally, want to come back and talk in detail again to Mr. Whitelaw in the matter.

Mr. Whitelaw mentioned the arrangement for getting children from the North into youth hostels on a non-sectarian basis and the Minister indicated that he could perhaps find money to finance the sending of children for holidays in the Republic, as the C.R.B. apparently did not feel able to finance holidays in the Republic. The Minister went on to say that his Government has the advantage of starting afresh. Many of its members have had a lot of contact with the North in

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recent years and many in the North have confidence in the Government. Mr. Whitelaw agreed that this is certainly most valuable. He again welcomed the Minister's idea for a Community Relief Fund although recognises that there are those in the North who might try to make political capital out of it.

This concluded the discussion. The Minister and Mr. Whitelaw were agreed as to the desirability of their keeping in close contact.

The atmosphere throughout the discussion was most cordial.

D. O'S.

5/4/73

Minister's additional note.

When taking leave of each other the Minister said he might have occasion to telephone Mr. Whitelaw direct from time to time as problems arose. Mr. Whitelaw welcomed this but warned that his telephone system in Stormont is not secure, vis a vis the Protestants.