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Reference Code:	2003/16/467
Title:	Copy letter from CV Whelan, Minister Plenipotentiary at the Embassy of Ireland to Great Britain, to HJ McCann, Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, regarding proceedings with regard to Northern Ireland at the Conservative Party conference.
Creation Date(s):	17 October 1972
Level of description:	Item
Extent and medium:	2 pages
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Access Conditions:	Open
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SWIX THR

Confidential

October 17 1972

Secretary
Department of Foreign AffairsNorthern Ireland Question at the British Conservative
Party Conference October 1972

Attached is a report on the Northern Ireland Debate and on the background setting to that Debate at the Conservative Party Conference. The undersigned attended the Conference for its first day, in the afternoon of which this particular debate took place. Mr McColgan, Press and Information Counsellor, remained at the Conference until its conclusion to maintain liaison with the press and other media representatives.

In brief, efforts by the Ulster Unionists and their right-wing allies in the Monday Club to obtain Conference support against direct rule and Mr Whitelaw's policy were defeated following a masterful speech by the Secretary of State. In the course of the debate, there was considerable applause for Unionists and other right-wing attacks on the Government in Dublin, but Mr Whitelaw made it plain that there would be no question of seeking "confrontation" with Dublin. He denied that there was any deliberate delay on the Border plebiscite but stated that the local elections would have to be held before the end of this year to avoid a breakdown of local government.

Mr Brian Faulkner did not speak in the Conference debate but addressed a Monday Club meeting later in the week. His speech was regarded as relatively conciliatory in that he appeared to agree to control of security remaining with Westminster until the present emergency ended. His association with the extremist Monday Club was not, however, likely to find him favour with the moderate majority of Conservatives.

Mr Whitelaw was strongly supported by the Young Conservatives. Their general support for moderation in Party policies was acknowledged by Mr Heath in his closing speech. Mr Heath's

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reference to Northern Ireland was brief, but he made it clear that it was the intention of the British Government to ensure the social and political rights of all the people of Northern Ireland. He did not find it necessary to repeat the assurance given by Mr Whitelaw that Northern Ireland would not be incorporated in a united Ireland without the consent of the majority.

Despite the strong Unionist delegation at Blackpool and the vociferous propagation of their viewpoint both inside and outside the Conference Hall, the net result for them could only be regarded as negative. This, at any rate, appeared to be the message that reached the Unionist areas of Belfast, where rioting broke out on the night following Mr Whitelaw's speech and has since intensified.



C V Whelan