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Earlier today I talked to David O'Connell, the Vice-President of Sinn Fein and I put to him the large question - What right has the provisional I.R.A. to wage war on behalf of the Irish people or any section of them. He said there were 2 justifications, the first arising from the right to defence against attacks - attacks specifically by Stormont and the second justification he asserted was that the provisional I.R.A. would contend that they were pursuing the historic claims of the Irish people to self-determination without interference from Britain - a right written in the proclamation of 1916 and - he said - asserted on 5 occasions in this century. Also earlier today I talked to Sean MacStiofáin. I asked him first of all in a lengthy interview which we have condensed, did he think that anything Mr. Heath had said or did or the British Government had said or done recently had changed his attitude. And he said if by our attitude you mean determination to continue the armed struggle until demands have been met then no. They have said nothing and they have done nothing - he meant the British Government - which had changed this attitude. I asked him, therefore, if he thought there was any realistic chance of making the British change their mind. I put it to him that the bombing campaign in the North had been declining recently. He said you get ebb and flow in every war and certainly in every guerrilla campaign. But he said I can say with confidence that we can escalate at will and if we were not in that position we would be out of business. I asked him then if it was in the long term that they wished to drive the British out and he said when we met Whitelaw and Co. during the Summer we suggested a date I think January 1975 and we also feel, he said, if I might add, at this point, the declarations we demanded from the British Government would have the effect of bringing many Unionist people in the North to grips with reality. They would realise that the British have used them for years, that they were going to jettison them and they had no further use for them. Sean MacStiofáin said that in a conference with Unionists he believed they could achieve a solution based on the proclamation/

'12'

proclamation of Easter week which guaranteed equal rights and equal opportunities.

I put it to him that the very breath of the notion that the British were about to leave had had the very reverse affect. It had formed the U.D.A., U.V.F., L.A.W. Mr. Craig had come to the fore and his reply - well I think this very splintering of the Unionist population shows confusion among their ranks and it arises from the suspension of Stormont. We feel that this disunity among them and the confusion which is among them at the present moment will help us to achieve our full objective. But apart from the confusion I suggested it has also engendered militancy and he said it is well to keep in mind that quite a number of killings have been carried out by under cover British army agents and under cover British army personnel. Did he then discount the U.D.A., U.V.F. and tartan gangs and so forth as a militant force. And he said certainly not; only a fool would do that. But he said let me say this we hope that common sense will prevail with the leaders of these organisations, that they will realise the same as we the leadership of the republican movement realise that a bloody sectarian civil war would benefit no one. And if I can do anything he said with this interview, if I get that point across, we will have achieved something.

I am quite sure, he went on, that due to the circumstances of history a number of people, quite an appreciable number of people, that we have been talking about would have been antagonistic towards us and our ideas even without the campaign of armed struggle. For example look at the reaction that the peaceful demonstrations provoked several years ago. He said the impression I want to give is this that we are hoping civil war can be avoided. He said I am not saying we are confident it can be avoided. I am saying we are hoping that it will be avoided. We are hoping that even at this late hour those who are moving towards a civil war position will have second thoughts in the matter. But I asked what grounds for this hope have you given, that you intend apparently to continue a bombing/

bombing campaign which has already engendered some violence on the other side and if continued would shortly engender more. He said well now lets get our facts right it has, I suppose it is correct to say, engendered some violence but this is because our motives have been misunderstood and because many of our actions have been deliberately misrepresented. He said we have never directed any of our operations against people on account of their religion. Our operations have been directed against British Army personnel, U.D.R. personnel, R.U.C. personnel, and against economic targets and administrative targets. But I put it to him that this was a euphemism and he said that he directed activity against economic targets. It means I said you blow up buildings where people work; when the buildings are blown up the people have no work. He said there is always a very good reason for any factory that was attacked and if you check the records you will find that very few factories were in fact attacked and that those that were attacked had notorious records as far as sectarian discrimination in employment was concerned. Now turning to the political scene as he saw it, he once again demanded that the British Government recognise the rights of the Irish people as a whole, acting as a single unit, to decide the future of Ireland. The British he says have made up their minds as to the type of solution they intend to impose on the Irish people and I think we have got to look at things in that light. Whatever solution the British intend to impose they will not be imposing it on the people in the North alone; they will be imposing a solution on the Irish people as a whole and this comes back to our argument that we want the Irish people as a whole to be given the opportunity to find their own solution that this is where we clash head on with the British. We will not accept a British imposed solution. Some time ago we called for an all Ireland conference so that the Irish people themselves could come up with a solution to what is the Irish problem. And we feel that this conference should be held as soon as possible. That means that there has got to be a bit of give and take among the various groupings, but it means that if the conference is/

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is held we can come up with a solution that can be presented to the British as the Irish people's alternative to the proposals that they would impose on the people again. Obviously, he went on, the republican movement will play a leading part in the conference but all involved Northern groupings would also participate. Such a conference without meaningful protestant or unionist representation would be meaningless.

Mr. MacStiofain asserted that he believed that the British Government's determination to impose a solution would disappear if the conference came up with an acceptable Irish solution and we asked him what kind of a solution.

He said we would be pushing our own proposals and we would hope to have the opportunity of explaining them in detail. We have said many times that we would welcome and do welcome dialogue with any Protestant organisation in the North. I do not want to use the term Protestant he said but it is unavoidable. We feel that contact with them and dialogue with them. In this we would convince them that we are not their enemies. We feel that we have a lot in common with any organisation that genuinely represents ordinary people. Were they, therefore, willing to negotiate on their proposals? They are a basis for discussion he said. We would obviously scrap them not scrap them or alter them radically but there is room within the frame work of the proposals for a fair bit of manoeuvre. We can assure the Protestants that their rights would be safeguarded. Well any Protestants that have been killed by the I.R.A. have been killed because they have been serving in one or other of the British occupation forces, so he asserted. The facts are these he said that the origins of all the violence in Ireland, all the responsibility for the violence in Ireland rests fairly and squarely on the British Government. Did he therefore contend that there was no way out but violence and he said we believe that by armed struggle alone can we achieve our objectives.

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Do you see any basis at all for dialogue with those who think differently, for instance in the recent talk about negotiated independence which John Taylor has talked about and various other people. And he said we would like to know rather more about what Mr. Taylor means by negotiated independence, what the object of this negotiated independence would be. For example he said a negotiated independence could lead to the establishment of a permanent totalitarian regime in the North in which the minority within the 6 county area would be very badly treated by the people in power there, the same as is happening in Rhodesia. What we would like to see he said is to see Mr. Taylor and his friends taking an interest in our proposals, particularly in our Regional Government proposals in Dáil Uladh. If he and his friends got down to a serious study of them that might possibly lead to a basis of dialogue between people who think like Mr. Taylor and people who think like us. Then with the plebescites and the local elections coming up in the North, was there any possibility I asked him that politically the Sinn Fein movement, of which he represented the military arm, might find it profitable to engage in politics, at least for the moment the battle being lulled. Well he said there are all kinds of obstacles in the way of republicans fighting a political fight in the North. Sinn Fein is banned; there are all kinds of republicans contesting local elections and the new proposals for local government could be seen as the thin end of the wedge leading to a reconstructed Stormont and we would have to move very warily he said in that direction. Also there are all kinds of difficulties regarding oaths and declarations. Well supposing some means were found to allow them, or they were enabled somehow to contest the Northern elections, would you think as the military mind of the republican movement that it would be worthwhile trying this in principle. That any participation in local elections would be a collective decision between the combined leadership, the leadership of the republican movement to decide but he thought at the moment it was very much pie in the sky. But one noted that
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they had not contested elections in the Republic. There was no Sinn Fein candidate in the mid-Cork by-election. Were they reluctant to put their ideals to the test? Under present circumstances he said we see no point in contesting the odd by-election. The odds he said were loaded in favour of what he called professional political parties in by-elections and he felt that the time was not opportune to contest general elections either. Of course they would have to take into consideration the circumstances that existed whenever a general election was called. If a general election was called in the near future, for example he said I doubt very much if the republican movement would contest it. The Sinn Fein organisation have stated that they intend to contest the local elections in the 26 counties next year and this is regarded as a step in the right direction if we are to have, he said, suitable candidates in the right organisations in certain other countries - certain other conditions. We believe that by armed struggle alone he said again we can achieve our objectives. Now that was the substance of an interview I had with Sean MacStiofain. It was in fact in the early hours of this morning.