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Foreign and Commonwealth Office

London SW1A 2AH

10 December 1981

Prime Minister

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MS
Dear John,

NORTHERN IRELAND: MR CLARK'S REMARKS

I understand that the Prime Minister wishes to know how we responded to the unfortunate reference by Judge Clark, the United States Deputy Secretary of State, on Irish television, to 'reconciliation between the two traditions and certainly the hope, the prayer, of all Americans that this will ultimately lead to the unification.'

- will request if required

As noted in FCO telegram No 1889, Ewen Fergusson telephoned the Minister at the US Embassy early on 8 December to express our concern and indeed, dismay at the reports of Mr Clark's statement. He spoke firmly. The Minister at once reported Fergusson's comment. Later that day Judge Clark, after trying to telephone the Lord Privy Seal and the Northern Ireland Secretary, spoke to Sir Nicholas Henderson (Washington telegram No 3719 of 8 December), distancing himself from what he had said about unification, and making clear that it was not intended to be an announcement of new policy. He also blamed the US Embassy here for his failure to alert us to President Reagan's letter to Dr FitzGerald.

On 9 December the US Embassy, on instructions, clearly to make belated amends, transmitted to us the full text of President Reagan's letter, together with the full text of Mr Clark's remarks on Irish television and also the terms of contingency press guidance which the Americans proposed to use in answer to questions on the subject. I enclose the latter, (the former was contained in Dublin telegrams Nos. 422 and 426 to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office). You will see that it includes the helpful statement that 'The Administration has no position on the question of Irish unification.' This has now been used by the State Department spokesman.

The Lord Privy Seal returned Mr Clark's telephone call on 9 December. Mr Clark tried to claim that our objections to what he had said had been exaggerated and failed to take into account the context of his remarks. What he had said was purely an observation of popular feeling, not of policy. The Lord Privy Seal explained the problem caused for us by the creation of an apparent link between reconciliation between the traditions in Ireland, which we support, and unification, and reminded him that any statement on Ireland by a leading member of the American Administration must necessarily appear to reflect policy. That being said, the matter was now water under the bridge.

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It appears to us that Mr Clark's remark was made without thought. He was clearly surprised at the importance attached to it. He showed regrettable lack of sensitivity in this, and in his failure to refer to the President's letter. But the Americans have done what they can to make clear that there has been no change in their policy and in particular that they have no position on the question of Irish unification. Streater has just (this afternoon) told us that he has taken the opportunity of telephone conversation with Mr Clark since the broadcast to ram the same point home. He thought that the message had got home.

We for our part have made our position very clear, not least by the Prime Minister's remarks to Mr Weinberger yesterday afternoon. To press the Americans further could be counter-productive. It seems unlikely that Mr Clark will want to blunder on to the ice again soon. In the circumstances, the Lord Privy Seal is inclined to think that we should draw a line under this unhappy incident. I understand that this is the view of the Northern Ireland Secretary also.

I am copying this letter to Mike Hopkins at the Northern Ireland Office and to David Wright at the Cabinet Office.

Yours ever,

Adair

A K C Wood
APS/Lord Privy Seal

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