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OIFIG AN AIRE GHNÓTHÁI EACHTRACHA
OFFICE OF THE MINISTER FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH
DUBLIN

27 Eanáir, 1965.

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2. *28.1.65*
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You may wish to see.
Please refer these arrangements with file. No 28/1/65

A Thaoisigh, a chara,

I am in general agreement with the line you took in your discussion with Edward McAteer, M.P., on the 21st instant as outlined in your letter of that date.

The Nationalist group certainly needs at this time a firm logical basis for effective political action. I agree with you that this might best be achieved by a statement reaffirming their commitment to Irish unity but recognising that this might be achieved only on a basis which would involve the continued existence of the Northern Ireland Parliament with its present powers.

X I think it is better to avoid using the word "federal" in this context. Federation normally connotes a constitutional framework comprising a number of states or provinces of equal status, each with a legislature and government of its own and all of them subordinate to a federal legislature and government with jurisdiction over the entire state.

I think we should try to avoid at all costs getting ourselves into a position through the use of the phrase "federal solution" that we leave ourselves open to the charge that we were offering federation involving a Parliament in Belfast with its present powers, a Parliament in Dublin with similar powers to the Belfast Parliament over the 26 Counties and a joint federal Parliament in which both the Six Counties and the 26 Counties would be represented.

Federal constitutions frequently have special provisions to safeguard the rights of its component states or provinces. For example, in the case of the United States, the states of New York and California, each with a population of around 20 million people, have the same Senate representation (two Senators) as have the states of Nevada and Montana with a population of a few hundred thousand each.

Federal constitutions the world over would, no doubt, be examined in search of precedents of all sorts. We might well be faced with a demand for three parliaments and for equal representation of the Six Counties and the 26 Counties in the all Ireland Parliament. An all Ireland Constitution of this kind with a built-in veto would render normal government impossible - as happened in the recent tragic case of Cyprus.

In order to enable us to resist demands of this nature we should avoid talking of a "federal" solution and take the trouble of spelling out what our offer involves, i.e., that the Northern Government and Parliament should continue with their present powers for as long as they should so wish and that the powers at present vested in Westminster should be transferred to Dublin together with the Northern representation in London.

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In regard to the other portions of your letter, if the Nationalist group are to engage in effective political action I think it is important that they should set up a representative political organisation with a club in every town and village. As an immediate field of action the group might concentrate on securing social justice in such matters as housing, employment at Government and local authority level, etc. where this may be denied at present.

I agree with you that the Nationalist group could accept the status of official Opposition at Stormont without accepting toasts and emblems on ceremonial and formal occasions. If, however, British practice is any guide there is scarcely ever a lunch or dinner of any size - even a purely business occasion - without the "loyal" toast being drunk. If, as you suggest, the Nationalist group made their position clear in this respect in their public statements, they might start a movement to minimise these difficulties, provided sufficient goodwill could be generated all round. On the other hand, most Unionists could well be expected to be intransigent on this subject. This would mean in practice that the Nationalist representatives would have to absent themselves from most functions unless they had an assurance that the "loyal" toast would not be drunk or that it would be acceptable that they merely rise for the toast without drinking it.

With regard to the suggested arrangement for consulting Mr. McAteer and his colleagues on any practical proposals affecting Six County commercial interests arising in the course of future discussions on economic matters with the Northern Ireland Ministers, I agree that it would be useful to have such consultations. I doubt, however, whether such consultations should become any more formalised than those which take place from time to time with representatives of the Nationalist group. Naturally no Government wishes another Government with which it is negotiating to be in regular formal consultation with its own Opposition in Parliament.

Is mise,

Princess Mac Doon

Seán F. Lemass, Uasal, T.D.,
Taoiseach.