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My colleagues and I fully accept the relevance of Northern Ireland experience to the scope of the inquiry which, in your letter of 14th November, you propose should be undertaken by a Royal Commission on the Constitution of the United Kingdom. For our part, we would welcome the opportunity which it would afford of presenting the facts regarding devolution in operation and the developments under it achieved here by successive governments in the past 47 years. We also hope that we shall have much that is useful to contribute to the work of the Commission whose examination should, I agree, be on a United Kingdom basis.

The use of the word "constitutional" - the need for which no doubt arises in relation to the present movements in Scotland and Wales - could give rise to some anxiety here. In that context we appreciate very much your specific assurance about the declaratory provision of the Ireland Act, 1949. Would it, I wonder, be possible to consider a minor change in the wording of the terms of reference, so as to make it clear beyond ambiguity that the remit is to consider the relationships of parts of the United Kingdom to the centre and to each other, but not in any circumstances to question the essential unity and territorial integrity of the United Kingdom as a whole? Quite apart from the assurance this would give us, it would have the merit of avoiding from the start wasting undue time on the unrealistic theories of extreme nationalism.

It may be premature at this stage to look forward to the time when the recommendations of the Commission have to be considered by the Government. But may I take it - because the matter is one of particular importance to us - that the appointment of this Commission in no way overrides your commitment to Mr. Attlee's pledge of 28th October, 1948, which you have re-affirmed on several occasions, that there will be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without our free agreement?

As for membership of the Commission, we are assuming you will be guided by the principles laid down in paragraph 15 of the Report of the Departmental

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Committee in 1910 (Cd. 5235) and adopted by successive British Governments. Again, we are glad that one member of the Commission is to be a person associated with Northern Ireland.

I think, if I may say so, that your idea of a panel is also a good one, more especially as the Northern Ireland situation is, as you say, unique. We, after all, have had our own Parliament established for some time and have gained much experience of the actual working of devolution. Moreover, it will be very necessary to take into account our other differences, especially the existence of a land frontier and our isolation from the central institutions of government.

Finally, we are most happy to give you our assurances that the Government of Northern Ireland and its servants will co-operate with the work of the Commission.

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