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Title: Letter from Seán Lemass, Taoiseach, to Frank Alken, Minister for External Affairs, regarding discussion with Edward McAteer, M.P., and nationalists in Northern Ireland.

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21st January, 1965.

Dear Frank,

I had a long discussion today with Edward McAteer, M.P., concerning the position of his Nationalist Group in the light of my meeting with Captain O'Neill. It seems that the group is considering the question of taking the status of official opposition at Stormont, but is in some difficulties regarding it. Mr. McAteer was seeking my advice.

I told him that my knowledge of the grass-roots political situation in the North was not such as to permit my offering advice. I expressed the view however that the Nationalist group needs a firm and logical basis for effective political action and that this might be sought by means of a statement reaffirming the commitment to Irish unity, recognising that this might be achieved on a federal basis which would involve the continued existence of the Northern Ireland Government and Parliament with their present powers, and that there was therefore no reason in principle why the Nationalist group could not work to improve the Government, and the laws enacted in Parliament, while devoting their policy to the immediate objective of equality for all citizens and effective practical cooperation between the two areas.

Mr. McAteer's main problem however relates to ceremonial and formal occasions, i.e. toasts, flags etc. I said that I did not think they could accept these, but that non-acceptance need not mean political ineffectiveness. I said that I saw no difficulty in making their position clear in this respect in their public statements, and that this could be seen to be so reasonable that he could start a movement to minimise these ceremonial occasions and thus to permit of their participation in various commercial and similar functions to which they are irrelevant.

I gather that there is some divergence of viewpoints within the Nationalist group, and that Mr. McAteer's concern is to resolve these as well as to avoid any loss of contact with, or misunderstanding of their attitude by, younger members of the nationalist community in the Six Counties.

I told Mr. McAteer about the probable course of future discussions on economic matters with the Northern Ireland Ministers, and indicated I would wish to have an arrangement, which would be known publicly to exist, of consulting with them on any practical

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proposals affecting Six-County commercial interests which might emerge through which they could influence their character and by which we would be safeguarded against possible mistakes. We are both to consider how this could be arranged.

I should like to have any comments you may wish to make in this connection.

Yours sincerely,

BEÁN F. LEMASS

Frank Aiken, Esq., T.D.,
Minister for External Affairs.