

BT4 3ST

13th March, 1968.

PERSONAL

Thank you for your letter of 2nd March about a reference in the East Antrim Times. It looks as if this was taken from the book to which you referred at our recent meeting, and the position is precisely as I explained it then. Quite simply, it is that I had met Dr. Whitaker at World Bank Meetings, and when I decided to invite Mr. Lemass to Stormont, I knew he would be a suitable intermediary. But the idea that, before becoming Prime Minister, I had entered into some kind of commitment with him is completely untrue. Since no-one but yourself has expressed interest in, or concern about this reference, I can see no reason to make a public statement on the subject.

May I however take the opportunity of this reply to put some wider considerations before you? It is, I know, your opinion that I should not have met the Prime Minister of the Republic in advance of full constitutional recognition of Northern Ireland. I, on the other hand, have been satisfied - and so I think has the great body of public opinion - with a large degree of de facto recognition. This is because I recognise, as anyone must do who is realistic about the subject, that full de jure recognition including amendment of the Eire Constitution is not in the realm of practicable possibility for the foreseeable future. In practice, therefore, your policy would have meant no such meetings at all. I do not believe that this is what our people think. May I remind you that, within months of my meetings with Mr. Lemass, we held a General Election, at which our Manifesto included the pledge:- "The Ulster Government will strive to develop economic co-operation with the Government of the Republic". The outcome of that Election was, as you know, the most successful for Unionism for many years. More recently, the National Opinion Poll has shown almost 80% of the electorate in favour of my meetings with Mr. Lemass.

/However

- 2 -

However sincerely you hold the view that no such meetings should have taken place, I believe it is misconceived. First of all there have, as you know, been contacts between North and South both at ministerial and official level to discuss practical matters over many years. I believe that if such contacts are to take place at all there is something distasteful about arranging them in a slightly apologetic, shamefaced or "under the counter" manner.

At times your comments have appeared to assume that in any contacts we make with the South we must necessarily be the losers. This is a type of inferiority complex which I cannot comprehend. I have never heard that Craigavon or Ulster suffered from his meetings with De Valera or Cosgrave, and I am quite confident that we will not suffer from my meetings with Lemass or Lynch.

Since you were P.P.S. to Harold Macmillan I am sure I do not have to remind you that he set great store by his contacts with the Russians. I do not imagine for one moment that when he discussed matters with them he was in any doubt about their opposition to almost every idea and principle for which he stood. But he realised that even the most opposing forces have a degree of practical and common interest which could be explored to the advantage of both. There seems to me to be an obvious analogy here. He must also, I presume, have had some good reasons for his determination to take Britain into Europe - but that is by the way.

The plain fact is that the policies which we have been following and which I would remind you have the support of an overwhelming majority in the Northern Ireland Parliament have won for Ulster a degree of understanding and respect in Great Britain which will stand us in good stead. I have often said, and I repeat it now, that the only real danger to Ulster's constitution could come from a withdrawal of the support and understanding of the British

/people.

- 3 -

people. There is nothing which the South can do to alter our constitutional position but our partnership with Great Britain cannot continue to be effective without the goodwill of the stronger partner. Such goodwill is certainly not earned by, for example, the effusions of the "Protestant Telegraph".

Finally, might I suggest to you that your continuing public criticism of policies which are endorsed by the whole Northern Ireland Government is a strange way to protect Unionism which we both agree is the vital safeguard of Ulster's constitution? You may wish to remain in what you consider to be a strong defensive position established over the years, but I would ask you to recall what happened to the Maginot Line and to remember that in politics, as in warfare, one does not win today's battles with yesterday's tactics or yesterday's weapons.

Sir Knox Cunningham, Bt., Q.C., M.P.,
House of Commons,
LONDON, S.W.1.