



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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2. Mr. N. → h

TO: HQ  
FOR: Asst. Sec. Gallagher

FROM: Embassy London  
FROM: Joe Hayes

DATE: 2 May, 1991.

SUBJ: Proposal to reconstitute Standing Committee on NI

1. I forwarded to you in today's bag a report on a conversation with Murdo MacLean in which he informed me of Unionist efforts to have the above Committee reconstituted. This Committee last met in June 1985. It is open to all members sitting for NI constituencies together with not more than 25 members nominated by the Committee on Selection. It has none of the powers of a Select Committee providing little more than a talking shop. The Committee on Procedure in its report of last year, recommending the establishment of a Select Committee, stressed that the NI Committee was no substitute for a Select Committee. The NIO however have always made it clear that the Secretary of State was prepared to refer legislative proposals to the Committee if the members were prepared to reactivate it.
2. It now seems that the Government are ready to put down an Order reconstituting this Committee, possibly for moving by the Chief Whip early next week. In the course of this afternoon's NI Questions, Needham made a passing reference to it when replying to questions on electricity privatisation. He subsequently phoned McNamara to inform him of the decision to reconstitute the Committee, telling him that it arose originally as a result of a letter from Ken Maginnis to Peter Brooke. Brooke feels that the Government has no option but to accede to the Unionists request.
3. Our information is that the OUP propose that the reconstituted Committee consider Fair Employment. Trimble intervened on this issue in the course of this afternoon's questions making the overall point that discrimination in employment no longer existed in Northern Ireland. As far as I am aware, the SDLP have not as yet been told of this

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*solid, with the looks  
of a real one but not.*

proposal by the NIO. McNamara, when contacted by Needham, expressed reservations. He also told Needham that he doubted if the SDLP would go along with the idea.

*4.*

In our conversation on 1 May, MacLean insisted that agreement to reconstitute the NI Standing Committee in no way implied a change in the Government's opposition to the establishment of an NI Select Committee. Nonetheless, the question remains as to why, at this particular point in time, after six years in abeyance, the Unionists feel it necessary to resurrect this Committee.



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

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2 May, 1991.

Mr. Dermot Gallagher,  
Assistant Secretary,  
Department of Foreign Affairs,  
Dublin.

1. cc P247  
on Wilson's ASP  
C. L. H. H. 3  
2. (M. Cullen)

Conversation with Murdo MacLean

Dear Assistant Secretary,

Over lunch on 1 May with Murdo MacLean of the Whips office, two points of interest arose as follows:

Parliamentary Reform

The NIO are seeking the views of the Leader of the House and the Clerks on draft proposals for reform of the manner in which NI legislation is dealt with at Westminster. The NIO suggestions are set out in a lengthy and detailed discussion paper which has been passed to the Clerk, Sir Clifford Boulton.

Murdo told me he had only glanced at the document and professed not to be able to recall any of it other than to remark that some of the suggestions, in particular a proposal to allot specified segments of prime time to NI issues, were definite non-starters.

A preliminary meeting is scheduled with John MacGregor, the Leader of the House for this morning, 2 May to decide how best to formulate a response. The feeling is that the Clerk of the Committees and the Clerk of the Journals - (the latter is Bill McKay who is the Clerk on the British side of the Inter-Parliamentary Body) - will be asked to prepare draft comments.

NI Committee

According to Murdo, the OUP have formally asked John MacGregor to reconstitute the Northern Ireland Committee - a standing committee of the House which has been defunct since its last meeting on 25 June 1985.

Not to be confused with a Select Committee, this Committee is open to all NI members sitting for NI constituencies together with not more than twenty five members nominated by the Committee on Selection. Murdo compared it to the Welsh and Scottish Grand Committees which are little more than talking shops. The NI Committee may, for example, only report that it has considered the matter referred to it.

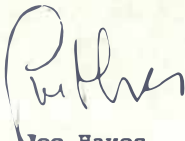
The Committee on Procedure made reference to it when it considered the case for a Select Committee on NI and concluded that it was not an adequate substitute for a Select Committee. The NIO have, however, always maintained that the Secretary of State is ready to refer legislation to it if NI members wish him to.

Murdo thought that this recent request was linked by the Unionists to the need to debate aspects of the Fair Employment legislation. He also believed they would get a favourable response from John MacGregor.

In response to my speculating as to why, just now, after six years, the Unionists would suddenly rediscover an urgent attachment to this apparently ineffectual Committee, Murdo stressed again that it should not be confused with a Select Committee and that if it were to reconvene it would not in any way imply a change in John MacGregor's negative attitude toward Unionist demands for the establishment of a NI Select committee.

Nonetheless, the NIO discussion paper and Unionist efforts to resurrect the Northern Ireland Committee highlight in different ways the attainability in a Westminster context of the main points of Molyneaux's integrationist agenda viz. reform of Westminster procedures for dealing with NI matters and enhanced parliamentary scrutiny of the NIO and NI legislation.

Yours sincerely,



Joe Hayes  
Counsellor