

ALD2/2/6/10/1/382



Northern Ireland Office  
Stormont Castle  
Belfast BT4 3ST

Lord Alderdice  
55, Knock Road  
BELFAST  
BT5 6LB

28 October 1996

*Jaav John*

During his Party Conference speech at Bournemouth on 11 October the Prime Minister announced the Government's intention to consult the Northern Ireland parties about how best to expand the role and remit of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee in line with recent changes made to its Scottish and Welsh equivalents.

I should stress at the outset that we see these consultations as being entirely without prejudice to any discussion there may be in the multi-party negotiations about the future relationship between any new political institutions in Northern Ireland and the Westminster Parliament. This exercise is intended solely to enhance the ability of Northern Ireland members of Parliament to bring Ministers to account in the context of the current arrangements - direct rule - in line with developments which have already taken place in relation to Scotland and Wales. The result should be more open and accountable administration.

I attach a list of the changes which might be considered as part of bringing the Northern Ireland Grand Committee on to all fours with the Scottish and Welsh Grand Committees. I should be very interested to have your observations. Any



changes are, of course, ultimately a matter for the House of Commons to approve on the basis of a motion to amend standing orders.

I should like if possible to proceed with the support of the main Northern Ireland political parties, particularly those represented at Westminster, and the opposition parties. I am therefore writing in similar terms to other Northern Ireland Party Leaders and Opposition Spokesmen.

*John L. Evans  
Patrick*

---



PROPOSALS FOR POSSIBLE CHANGES TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE

- i) Northern Ireland Office Ministers might make a PES statement to the Grand Committee in place of the present briefing arrangements;
- ii) Northern Ireland Ministers might make statements and take questions in Committee and a regular basis;
- iii) other members of Cabinet and other Departmental Ministers whose responsibilities extend to Northern Ireland might make statements and take questions before the Committee;
- iv) some Grand Committee meetings might be held in a Northern Ireland venue; and
- v) greater use might be made of the existing power to hold both general debates and those intended to consider Proposals for draft Orders in Council.

For the moment such changes would only involve those Ministers in the House of Commons (as they do for the Scottish and Welsh Offices).

If any of these changes are adopted (especially iv), there will be consequences for House business, particularly in arranging the attendance of the 25 "other" members of the Committee from GB constituencies.