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cc Secretariat

Select Committee on Northern Ireland

According to a report on this afternoons BBC programme 'Westminster Live', Jim Molyneux met the Prime Minister on 18 October. Two issues were discussed; the imposition of an exclusion order on Gerry Adams and the establishment of a Select Committee on Northern Ireland.

The Home Secretary imposed an exclusion order on Adams on 19 October.

In the case of the Select Committee, it now transpires that the Committee on Procedure is scheduled to meet tomorrow morning (27 October) where the first item on the Agenda will be the question of a Select Committee for Northern Ireland. We have verified with a member of the Committee that this is in fact the case. According to our contact, the issue will arise by way of a letter from Molyneux to the Chairman of the Committee asking that the Committee re-consider the allocation of seats on a Northern Ireland Select Committee on the basis of the changed party strengths following the April 1992 General Election. This letter would, of course, enable the Committee to have a general discussion and possibly reformulate its recommendation on the establishment of a Committee. I hope to obtain a copy of Molyneux's letter later this afternoon. (You will recall the Committee on Procedure last considered this matter in 1990 when the Committee concluded that "the possible establishment of a Select Committee on Northern Ireland affairs, whilst attractive in principle could cause difficulties for the initiative launched by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland" and it accepted that this was not "a sensible moment to recommend the establishment of a Northern Ireland Select Committee". The Committee promised to keep the matter under review and noted that "we may well wish to return to it once the outcome of the current talks is clear". Since then Molyneux has at least twice written to the Committee Chairman attempting to re-open the matter. We attach copies of these letters.)

McNamara is meeting with the Labour Whip later this afternoon with a view to instructing the five Labour members on the fourteen man committee to oppose any immediate decision on this matter pending consultation with the parties. There is a sense however, that given half a chance the Chairman of the Committee, Sir Peter Emery, may try, on this occasion, to have an immediate favourable recommendation on the establishment of the Committee passed to the Leader of the House, Tony Newton, who could then be expected to put it as a motion to the House.

There are eight (including the Chair) Conservative members on the Committee and one Liberal Democrat. Among the Conservatives, all can be expected in varying degrees to favour the establishment of a Select Committee on Northern Ireland. The Liberal Democrat member is likely to follow the majority opinion. Possibly two of the five Labour members would be equally well disposed but McNamara will seek to convince them that the arguments in favour of a Select Committee are tarnished by the fact that it is clearly now part of a deal between the Government and the OUP.

We are attempting to gather some further information on this and in particular to contact the Chief Whip's office and "the Usual Channels" viz. Murdo McClean, who is proving particularly elusive in recent weeks. The BBC journalist, who ran the story, Nick Jones, has been researching it for some days past and is adamant about his sources. To complete the picture, I would direct your attention to the remarks of Andrew Hunter, the Chairman of the Conservative Backbench Committee on Northern Ireland who in last Friday's debate on Northern Ireland remarked that he was convinced that the battle for a Select Committee had been won. We will keep you in touch with developments at this end.

26 October 1993