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NI Select Committee

To keep you abreast of developments here I should report that I received a telephone call this morning from Murdo McClean - the Usual Channels - and the one through whom any negotiations on the formation of a NI Select Committee would have to be conducted. McClean said he was puzzled by all the fuss over today's meeting of the Select Committee on Procedure. (Incidentally, this will now take place in private session at 5pm this evening in Committee Room 20).

According to McClean, the Opposition Whip 'phoned the Government Whip's Office yesterday afternoon demanding to be told what was happening with regard to the Select Committee on Northern Ireland. The Whip's Office said that all their information came from the media. As far as McClean was concerned there had been no fundamental change in the Government's position on this, viz. a Select Committee was a good thing in principle in that it provided an element of parliamentary scrutiny but while the talks process remained active, it would be unwise to move on this. [As you know, there have been several subtle shifts in the Government's public statements over the past year.]

McClean went on to say that it was open to any member to write to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, raising any matter he wished. The fact that Jim Molyneaux had written a letter to Sir Peter Emery, did not necessarily mean that this afternoon's meeting would result in a revived recommendation to establish a NI Select Committee. McClean insisted that as far as he was aware there was no hidden agenda, although, of course, he couldn't say what might have been discussed between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the OUP.

In a separate development, Kevin McNamara phoned to complain that in the course of an RTE panel discussion on this matter last night, the Minister for Labour stated that the establishment of a NI Select Committee was a matter for the British Parliament. According to McNamara, he responded that if the Minister believed this, he would believe anything. McNamara hoped that the Minister's view was not representative of the Government's overall position.

He is adamant that the Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, Sir Peter Emery, will attempt to use this evening's meeting to revive the whole issue of a NI Select Committee. He has however, spoken to all five Labour Members of the Committee and they will oppose any move to formulate a new recommendation. They will insist that there should be, as a minimum, a full process of consultation and they will also attack it as part of the "deal" between the OUP and the Government.

27 October 1993