



SECRETARY OF STATE
FOR
NORTHERN IRELAND

The Rt Hon Antony Newton OBE MP
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31 July 1996

John Sang.

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE AND THE 1996/97 LEGISLATIVE PROGRAMME

Thank you for your letter of 17 July about the role of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee (NIGC) and the possibility of a specific Northern Ireland Bill in the next Session.

I regret that I was not able to write to you before the House rose giving you an opportunity to say something positive on the role and remit of the Grand Committee either in your last Business Statement or in the course of the Adjournment Debate. The "line to take" which my office provided was very much a holding reply but I understand that, in the event, this was not needed.

For reasons which I am sure you will understand I have been unable to take the role of the Committee forward with the Northern Ireland parties. I would still wish to do so, but in the context of the Talks process; I therefore intend to pursue this issue once the Talks reconvene in September.



As to the question of a specific Northern Ireland Bill the only potential candidate is the Police Bill to which you refer, but our thinking on this has not got to the stage where we could make a definite commitment. Would it be possible for you to keep the possibility open until the Autumn? Meanwhile we are pursuing a comprehensive legislative programme for Northern Ireland, partly by Order in Council but also via the extension of several forthcoming Bills, about which I am writing separately.

I am sorry that I cannot be more definitive at this stage but I am sure you will understand that there are many interlocking considerations which need to be borne in mind. I will write to you again in the Autumn.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister.

James F. Paddy
