

ULSTER UNIONIST PARTY

14 November 1996

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE

The Northern Ireland Grand Committee should as far as possible follow the provisions for the Scottish Grand Committee.

We appreciate that the Conservative and Labour parties will want to add members to the Committee and we are prepared to work with this, but feel strongly that the added members should be persons with an interest in Northern Ireland matters who are prepared to make a contribution to its work and not sit doing their correspondence as if they were government members on a Standing Committee.

We consider that the Northern Ireland Grand Committee should be closely modelled on the Scottish Grand Committee. That would be more appropriate than the slightly different provisions for the Welsh Grand Committee because Scotland, like Northern Ireland, is a separate legal jurisdiction with a separate body of statute law.

Most of the Standing Orders setting out the functions of the Scottish Grand Committee could be adapted for the Northern Ireland Grand Committee without any substantive change.

These are:

- questions for oral answer - SO 94B
- short debates - SO 94C
- ministerial statements - SO 94D
- substantive motions - SO 94G
- sittings - SO 94H



Provision for legislation will be more complex. The Scottish Grand Committee can take the second reading and the third reading of a Bill referred to it by the Government or, in the case of a private member's Bill, by the member having charge of it. These Bills have their committee stage before one of the Scottish Standing Committees (SO 94E).

Delegated legislation can also be considered either directly or on a prayer being laid (SO 94F). Both, of course depend on a motion by a Minister.

Northern Ireland legislation may take the form of a normal Bill or an Order in Council having the effect of primary legislation by virtue of the Northern Ireland Act 1974. The former may be more frequent in future as use of the Northern Ireland Grand Committee may cure the problems created by lack of parliamentary time. There is no requirement to use such Orders in Council; the 1974 Act is permissive. Consequently the Government may wish to use the time made available by the Grand Committee for more normal legislation. In any event the existence of the Grand Committee could be used to "normalise" Order in Council procedure.

To cover both of these it is suggested that the equivalent of SO 94E (1) be amended to read

"After any public Bill has been first printed or a draft Order in Council proposed to be made under the Northern Ireland Act 1974 has been laid, the Speaker shall, if of the opinion that its provisions relate exclusively to Northern Ireland, give a certificate to that effect" ... [continue as in SO 94E (1)].



The equivalent of the SO 94E (5) should be amended to commit the Bill or draft Order in Council, as the case may be, to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee for its Committee stage. It will then be necessary to insert a paragraph incorporating the relevant provisions of the standing orders relating to the committee stages of Bills (SOs 87 to 89, and maybe SO 91 as well). It may not be necessary to reproduce these provisions as a general incorporation by reference should suffice. It is intended that draft Orders in Council be considered as if they were Bills, with amendments being moved, and then the Draft Order, as amended, being reported. There will have to be amendments to SO 92 (consideration on report by a committee) to provide for report of these Bills/Orders to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee. The Draft Order, as amended, would then be made in the normal way.

The modification of SO 94F must take account of the Order in Council procedure under the 1974 Act, but otherwise it should be such as to enable occasional debates on particular items of secondary legislation.