

The Rt Hon John D Taylor MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

July 1997

Thank you for your letter of 23 July which followed up a conversation we had about measures which might help the confidence of the majority community in Northern Ireland.

I have discussed some of these issues with David Trimble and I know he has also raised them separately with Marjorie Mowlam.

Northern Ireland Grand Committee (NIGC)

The Government does intend that the NIGC should be re-established and Marjorie Mowlam is currently seeking colleagues agreement to the number of NIGC meetings and so forth. It is intended that a motion will be put to the House when it resumes in October to give effect to that agreement.

Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee

As you will know, this Committee has now been established and, in fact, met on 30 July to choose a chairman. It has four Northern Ireland members including two from your own party. I trust that this reassures you on this issue.

CJ/Holmes

UK Delegation to the Council of Europe

An announcement about make up of this delegation is expected before the House rises. I am aware of your interest in this group but I am sure you will understand that I cannot pre-judge the outcome of that announcement.

Gun Law

On the question of banning hand guns, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was intending to bring forward legislation this autumn to prohibit (as in Great Britain) on public safety grounds the private ownership of all hand guns. (Personal protection weapons would, of course, be exempt from the ban until the security situation indicates that the individuals concerned were no longer under threat.) However, in recognition of your concerns she is prepared to delay these proposals.

I do, however, share her view that such a delay may give rise to questions about the Government's commitment to public safety standards in Northern Ireland and the danger of ordinary firearms policy being linked to the debate on illegally held firearms. We may, therefore, need to look at this again.

Going back to the question of confidence building matters in general I would stress that I am anxious that the Unionist community should be clear that I am aware of and sensitive to their concerns. I am grateful, therefore, for the suggestions in your letter on how to build a positive and confident atmosphere.

I hope my reply goes some way towards giving you the reassurance you seek.