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**Title:** Letter from Secretary of the Department of the Taoiseach NS Ó Nualláin to Taoiseach Jack Lynch, regarding the establishment by the Northern Ireland government of a series of committees in Stormont to facilitate power-sharing with the anti-unionist parties.

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Six Counties: Situation.

Taoiseach.

As arranged by the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland with you on the telephone earlier this afternoon, Sir Harold Black, the Secretary to the Stormont Cabinet, telephoned me at 4.45 p.m. and gave me the gist of his Prime Minister's announcement in the House of Commons in Belfast this afternoon as follows:-

The Prime Minister announced in quite a long speech the Government's proposals to set up a series of functional committees, three in all, plus the existing Public Accounts Committee. The three would cover the fields of social services, environmental services and industrial services. The idea would be that each would consist of nine people drawn from all sections of the House in proportion to the membership of the Parties and that it would be the Government's intention that at least two of the committees would be chaired by Opposition members. The idea would also be to make the posts of chairmen of these committees at a very high and dignified status and they would be remunerated accordingly. In addition the members would also be paid fees for attendance on these committees. The intention is that these committees would have a real say in the moulding of Government policy. Naturally, there would be certain elements of Government policy that would have to be decided without consulting these committees but, wherever possible, the Government would sketch out to these committees the broad outlines of Government thinking on matters coming within the bailiwick of these committees.

The following would be functions of these committees as announced by the Prime Minister:-

"One of the principal functions of the committees would be the consideration of major proposals of policy. These could be either "outside" proposals such as those contained in the Lockwood, Matthew or Wilson Reports or "inside" proposals such as the development programme or a hospital plan. The object would be to give Parliament


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a genuine opportunity to contribute to the making of policy at the formative stage. Certain types of policy decision would still have to be taken or announced without prior discussion or consultation but wherever possible the Government would seek the course of indicating the broad lines of its thinking in a consultative document and thus allow Parliament and the general public to take part in informed debate before reaching any firm final decisions.

The second major function of the new committees would be that of reviewing performance. In other words, to probe and assess after the event the performance of executive functions by the Government and its agencies. In this sphere the committees would have as raw material all major reports on the work and performance of all Departments and their agencies, including those made in the course of an investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration (the Ombudsman) and a further possible function for the committees would be the consideration of certain legislation. Many Bills would, no doubt, continue to have a Committee Stage before the whole House as at present but where, for example, a Bill represented the implementation of policy proposals already considered by the appropriate functional committee the House might consider it sensible to refer the Bill on Committee Stage to that committee, possibly with the addition of further members\*.

These proposals would involve the participation of the Opposition in the House. It would open up to the Opposition a greater degree of participation and also on a paid basis. It is a real attempt to bring the Opposition into the moulding process of policy.

Sir Harold added that they realise that the Opposition frequently turned to Dublin for advice and his Prime Minister thought it desirable that they should therefore give us an opportunity here of learning of the proposals as soon as possible so that we might be placed in a position of giving any 6-County Opposition members who approach us such advice on the proposals as we might think fit.

  
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