

# NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM

Friday 21 June 1996

*The meeting was called to order at 11.10 pm (Mr J R Gorman in the Chair).*

## FORUM: SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

**The Chairman:** Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome to the second meeting of the Forum. I am sorry to tell you that, as there has been a little problem, I have to suspend the meeting.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. As it was made very clear in the Business Committee that the SDLP would have the seats on the inner side of their block, as an interim arrangement — the matter to be considered further by the Business Committee — is it in order for the Alliance Party to take possession of those seats and thus disrupt the proceedings? Surely you have authority, under the Rules, to deal with this matter.

**The Chairman:** I am going to suspend the meeting and make my views very plain to the parties concerned.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Further to that point of order, Mr Chairman. First, how long will the suspension be? Secondly, will there be a break at lunch-time, or shall we continue until 4 o'clock?

**The Chairman:** The suspension will be until 12 o'clock, and lunch has been organized for 12.30 or 1.00, as convenient.

**Mr Dodds:** On a further point of order, Mr Chairman. Could we ensure that the announcement that is prescribed in the Rules, which is supposed to be made before you take your seat, is actually made? I certainly didn't hear any announcement, and it is important that Members should know when the Chairman is going to take the Chair.

**The Chairman:** That is a very valid point. In future an announcement will be made.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** With regard to Dr Paisley's question, Mr Chairman, can you say whether it is your intention to sit until 4 o'clock?

**The Chairman:** If necessary.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** May we have a meeting of the Business Committee during the suspension to sort this matter out? An agreement reached at the Business Committee seems to have been turned on its head.

**The Chairman:** I accept that. The Business Committee will convene at once.



*The meeting was suspended at 11.12 am and resumed at 12.05 pm.*

**The Chairman:** I am grateful for your patience, and I thank the members of the Rules Committee, who, for the moment at least, have been able to maintain the status quo.

### **IRA BOMB (MANCHESTER)**

**The Chairman:** I am sure I speak on behalf of every person here when I express bitter disappointment at the tragic dashing of our hopes when the bomb went off at 11.30 last Saturday in Manchester. That 200 people who set off with their families on a fine Saturday expecting to have a little shopping expedition should be treated like that in a "civilized" country is just abominable.

No doubt, every Member here would be glad to join me in this expression. Perhaps Dr Paisley, who raised the matter with me, and other party Leaders would like briefly to endorse my remarks.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Mr Chairman, we are grateful for your comments. I am sure that the people of Manchester, as they try to pick up the debris and renew their lives — especially those who will bear the marks of this deadly atrocity to the end of their days — feel very bitter. Perhaps today they have some inkling of what our own province has gone through. It would be most appropriate that your remarks at this the second meeting of the Forum — remarks which, I am sure, are supported by Members as a whole — should be conveyed to the people concerned.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** I should like to associate the Ulster Unionist Party with your remarks, Mr Chairman. We are all greatly relieved and thankful that, despite the terrible destruction that occurred in Manchester on Saturday, no lives have been lost. The police, in particular, did a wonderful job. There were literally thousands upon thousands of people in Manchester city centre when the bomb exploded. The police who got them out of the area so that not one life was lost deserve our praise and the praise of everyone else. And the members of the other emergency services deserve the same commendation. Those who were injured will face physical and mental trauma for many months to come.

One point that is worth making is that those of us who are committed to the democratic process, to working for the benefit of society in Northern Ireland — indeed, throughout these islands — by trying to resolve the differences between our traditions, are not going to be diverted by the IRA, even if we have to resist them for another 25 years. They have lost the ideological and intellectual argument — ideological and intellectual in their terms, as it is not one to which we would subscribe. Despite this or any subsequent threat, we shall act as a cohesive body to resist their attempts to disrupt our efforts to find a way forward.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** Mr Chairman, I would like to associate my party with the remarks that you have made. The shock, outrage and revulsion felt by the whole community in



Northern Ireland, of both traditions, at what happened in Manchester speaks for itself. Our feelings on the matter are undoubtedly the same as those of the whole community.

**Dr Alderdice:** One of the most painful and difficult things over many years was the requirement on politicians to make statements of condemnation after atrocities. When these happened on a very regular basis it became increasingly difficult to find words which would not only express feelings but also be of some help to those who were suffering most. We all desperately hoped that we had come to a time in the life of this community when that was no longer necessary, but it appears not to be so.

We want not only to associate ourselves with the sentiments of condemnation and revulsion and of sympathy and concern for the people who have been physically damaged, those who have been and will continue to be mentally damaged and those whose businesses, lives or homes have been wrecked, but also to recognize that this must do two things to us. First, it must encourage us to redouble our efforts to reach a political settlement, because without a political settlement the violence will return in larger measure. Secondly, we must now clearly take into consideration, as we move in this direction, the fact that we cannot in any way be sure that such atrocities will not come again and that the threat hangs over us in a very deeply serious way. Therefore any strategy, any approach that we take to the resolution of our problems, cannot simply hope against hope that there will be no more trouble of this kind, but must take that possibility into account as we redouble our efforts.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** May I endorse the remarks made by all party Leaders and take the opportunity of wishing all those injured in Manchester a speedy recovery, both mentally and physically. As one who comes from an area in Shankill that suffered the first bomb, which killed a six-month-old baby, I can say that we in Northern Ireland know just what it is all about. The people who plant these bombs are the ones who continually complain about lack of employment opportunities. I wonder how many jobs £100 million would have brought to Belfast or Northern Ireland in general.

I endorse what has been said and ask you, Mr Chairman, to consider writing to the Lord Mayor of Manchester, expressing the views of the Forum.

**The Chairman:** I would be very happy to do that, if you all agree.

*It was so decided.*

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** Mr Chairman, I should like to identify the United Kingdom Unionist Party with your condemnation of this act of depravity. One thing that added insult to very substantial injury, after the atrocity, was the crocodile tears of the IRA/Sinn Fein Leader, Mr Gerry Adams, and his attempts to distance Sinn Fein from the activity of the IRA. This is a feature that will no doubt become very large in the coming weeks, in an attempt to facilitate Sinn Fein's being brought within the democratic process. I can do no better than quote what the Prime Minister said when we questioned him about this at a recent meeting in Downing Street. He said that he considered the IRA and Sinn Fein to be two sides of the one coin, and he was in no doubt about Mr Adam's relationship to both bodies.



We should remind ourselves, as we are not here in isolation from the real world, that it is ridiculous that the people who support the activities in Manchester could today, in theory, walk through the door of this Chamber. We should always remind ourselves, as the keepers of democracy, of the need to make sure that we take every step to exclude these people from the democratic process.

12.15 pm

**Mr McMichael:** May I, on behalf of the Ulster Democratic Party, reinforce the messages and sentiments of sympathy expressed by yourself, Mr Chairman, and other party Leaders. We are absolutely appalled by the viciousness of the attack in Manchester, and we wish the victims a speedy recovery, physically and mentally. It has to be noted that this was an attack not just on the people of Manchester but also on the entire peace process. It was an effort to destroy this process. We must all bear in mind the fact that all of us in this Chamber bear a responsibility to ensure that those who try to destroy the opportunity that we have do not succeed.

**Ms McWilliams:** The Women's Coalition too associates itself with your remarks, Mr Chairman. We have written to the Lord Mayor of Manchester asking him to extend our sympathy to those injured and to all the citizens of Manchester at this time.

**Mr Curran:** On behalf of Labour Northern Ireland I add my voice to all the other voices of condemnation that have been raised against the utterly deplorable depravity that took place in Manchester. Every wee boy running around in Northern Ireland wearing a Manchester United shirt is turning to his father and saying, "Daddy, why are they doing this?" We have no answer. We cannot answer for the people who did this. But we must join our voices and say to the people of Northern Ireland, to the people of Ireland, to the people of the British Isles, "We want no more of this. Please let us have an end to it." It is a plea that goes out from the heart of every decent human being in these Islands: "Let us have no more of it."

## FORUM: CHAIRMANSHIP

**The Chairman:** Before getting down to the question of the chairmanship I should like to make a couple of housekeeping points. First, would people not bring mobile phones into the Chamber. I mean that very seriously. They are quite offensive to the dignity of the Forum, and they are a distraction. I refer to the press as well as to Members. Secondly, there were some Members who, through oversight, did not sign the Roll last Friday. Will they please legalize themselves by signing it today.

I want to start by referring to the first item on our agenda — the election of a Chairman. It has been a very busy week for the Leaders of the parties. Understandably, it has been extremely difficult for them to consider the role of the Chairman and possible nominees. You will be happy to know that I have chaired, I think, five meetings since last Friday. Sometimes I am unsure which meeting I am at. Anyway, we had one concerning this matter. The parties are going to deliberate further on it, and we shall have yet another meeting — next Tuesday, I think?



**Mr Hugh Smyth:** Are you asking me, Mr Chairman?

**The Chairman:** Next Tuesday was suggested by you-know-who. We will try to get the matter solved then. It is open to any Member to propose — with his or her consent, of course — a candidate for the position of Chairman, who, subject to being seconded, might command a 75% majority. I think that the right thing for me to do now is to thank everybody for their patience and tolerance last Friday — not Gorman's finest hour. I have been greatly helped by the fact that, arising from suggestions made by many of you, I now have assistance. I have an excellent Forum Secretary — Nigel Carson — and another great man in the shape of Murray Barnes. I shall take advice from them. There will be times when I have to tell people who want attention that I would like to consult with my colleagues. After all, they are wise and learned men.

As to the Chamber, we have made some changes. The Business Committee will meet early next week to consider seriously what improvements can be made. But I wish to remind Members that we are here only temporarily. We shall soon have a custom-built place located on the third floor. I have not seen it yet, but I am sure it is going to be a paradise.

Now, if I can be sure that you are all content that I should remain as your "Mr Interim" until the next meeting of the Forum I shall proceed.

**Several Members:** Agreed.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** I speak for my party, which has made it clear that it is not putting forward a candidate for Chair of the Forum. We are neither agreeing nor disagreeing with any candidate that may be put forward. With due respect to you, Sir, and not casting any aspersions on you as interim Chairman, I think that it is important that before the Forum proceeds with any further meetings we should have agreement on the Chair. It is not good enough to have this business of putting a decision off and not having meetings — not even of the Business Committee, my understanding being that next Tuesday's meeting will be between the party Leaders or their representatives and yourself, Sir. That suggests to us that it is more a delaying tactic than anything else.

We would be happier if any further meetings of the Forum were postponed until we are prepared to proceed with this business. Indeed, the first item on the agenda is the election of a Chairman. We could continue today's business on the Rules Committee and on the report of the Business Committee, but we should postpone any other meetings of the Forum until we can proceed with the election of the Chair.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** Mr Chairman, I heard you say that you had chaired five meetings. In fact, you have had many more. As someone who was on that Committee, I thought that one or two of the parties seemed reluctant to bring forward substantive suggestions about whether there should be any change in the circumstances relating to the Chairman. With respect to the Lady who spoke last — *[Interruption]* Mrs Rodgers. I remembered her first name.



The reality is that, as the SDLP has not made any substantive proposal, it should not endeavour to bring to an end or interrupt the work that this Committee and the Forum are entitled to do. The work should continue, and the meeting that will take place next week should examine whether there is anyone likely to gain the support of at least 75% of the people in the Forum. Mrs Rodgers at least deserves credit for indicating that her party will vote neither for nor against.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I did not indicate any such thing. I indicated simply that we would look at whatever proposition came forward, that we were not ourselves proposing a Chairman.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** I hear what Mrs Rodgers says the second time. I also heard what she said the first time. The SDLP has very quickly changed its position. That is fine, but the reality is that we must have 75% support for whoever is going to take the Chair, and that may be very difficult to achieve. I think there is only one party in the Forum which could block anybody. *[Interruption]* I stand corrected. The point that I want to conclude with is that you, Sir, are the Chairman. You occupy the Chair, without apology to anyone, to ensure that the Forum carries out its business until a change is made.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I find it quite amazing that, while we are accused by Mrs Rodgers of holding up business, she wants to hold it up by having a complete adjournment. Evidently she doesn't think that you, Sir, are capable of occupying the Chair for more than two days. You are the Chairman because, legally, you were put there, and we are quite happy to work under your chairmanship until this body, by a 75% vote, appoints a Chairman. The point is that we are not going to stop our business. It would be ridiculous to suggest that after today we work on the Business Committee but otherwise have an adjournment. All the parties that I have talked to want the business to go on, and they are quite happy to work under your chairmanship to get on with the business, fix the Rules and procedures and deal with the matter of the chairmanship.

It is wrong to say that suggestions have not been made with regard to the chairmanship. My party has put forward two names, and we are prepared to continue. Of course, to be elected, a person must get 75%, but we have to continue in the meantime. The whole Forum should not suddenly come to an end just because Mrs Rodgers and the SDLP are not over-enamoured with it. The Forum has to go on, and the people who elected it expect its Members to get on with the business. We can do this until a Chairman is appointed.

**Mr Farren** *rose.*

**The Chairman:** Mr McMichael, you put your hand up a long time ago. Are you happy enough for me to go to Alliance first?

**Mr McMichael:** I am disappointed at the attitude of the SDLP in this instance. A meeting took place yesterday at which all parties except the SDLP were represented. Although each can speak for itself, I think I can say confidently that they all felt that there was no attempt to stall the procedures. Indeed, there was an effort to see the matter resolved speedily, and the reason it has not been dealt with is that we are required to put in the Chair



someone who has the ability to do the job and can command the support of 75% of the people in this Chamber. As we have not reached a point where that would be possible, it is entirely sensible that we have proceeded in this way. We will continue to do so, and I hope that we can resolve the issue as soon as possible.

12.30 pm

**The Chairman:** Are you, therefore, suggesting that we should continue with the business today?

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** We have suggested that the Forum continue with today's business. The meeting yesterday was an informal lunch, not a Committee meeting, and I informed you that we would not be present.

**The Chairman:** Yes, you did.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I attended that meeting yesterday. At no time did anyone indicate to me that it was informal. As far as I am concerned, we were there to represent our parties, to bring forth nominations for the Chair. A lot of work went on in the Committee, as you know, Mr Chairman. Also, the Rules Committee and the Business Committee have been working at this. I too am disappointed at the SDLP's attitude and its suggestion that, simply because we cannot get a Chairman who commands the 75%, the Forum should not meet. The reality — and I am sure you will be delighted to hear it, Mr Chairman — is that you could be there for another six or seven months.

**Several Members:** Oh!

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** I am only sounding the warning so that those who could do something about this 75% will bear it in mind. I, like Ken Maginnis, thought I heard Mrs Rodgers saying that her party was not going to put anyone forward, nor would it support anyone.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** No, no.

**Mr Durkan:** Neither proposing nor opposing.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** I look forward to reading the Record of Debates anyway.

We should not let anyone try to put us off the task ahead.

**The Chairman:** I think that Dr Alderdice or somebody wanted to speak. Is it Mr McBride?

**Mr Farren:** I have not changed parties, despite the fact that we re-occupied the seats originally allocated to us.

**The Chairman:** Sorry.



**Mr Farren:** The SDLP's reservations with respect to the establishment of the Forum are well known. We made a decision to participate constructively in the deliberations of the Forum, with respect to the overall purpose for which it was established — to promote understanding and reconciliation. We believe that, in order to do so, the Forum should proceed in an orderly way. We believe that the question of the Chair should be addressed and should be answered fairly expeditiously. We believe that delaying the process of establishing who should be in the Chair would not lend itself to the orderly conduct of business.

While we ourselves have taken the decision not to propose or oppose at this stage, we understand that names have been circulated. We suggest that the Forum proceed expeditiously to resolve the matter, rather than leave it undecided indefinitely. We believe that this would contribute to the orderly and dignified conduct of business.

**Mr McBride:** I took part in the meeting yesterday, whether formal or informal. It was actually a positive meeting. I think there was a clear feeling coming from most of the people participating in it that it would be best if we could select a Chairman by consensus — that is, if we could find a name that we were all content with. It may not be possible to do that, but it is certainly a very desirable approach, even if it takes a couple of weeks. I was very encouraged that people wanted to go down that road. I hope that the SDLP and other parties will play a positive role by helping to choose a candidate we can all be happy with.

**The Chairman:** I think Mr Robinson's hand was up first — before yours, Mr Curran.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** And before those of some others that have already spoken.

First, Mr Chairman, you must be slightly confused about the value of some of the meetings that you have attended, considering that matters generally agreed there seem to be overturned when we come here. We really must get down to the business of ensuring that those who attend on behalf of parties see fulfilment of the expectation of all those who are present when decisions are taken, that we actually have decisions implemented when we come here. It was agreed by all those who attended — and we cannot take into account those who absent themselves — that because of the very significant time that had been spent in another place during the course of this week it had not been possible to give this subject the attention that we would otherwise have wanted to give it. While a number of names had been put forward, fuller consideration was necessary.

Mr Maginnis is absolutely right. I understood, and it has now been confirmed for us, that the SDLP's position was that it would neither propose nor oppose. If it does not oppose, it will not be counted for the purposes of the 75%. It is those who are present and voting that you have to gain 75% of — not those who abstain. So it will make the business of getting a Chairman very much easier if the SDLP neither proposes nor opposes.

There is one further matter that I should mention in relation to this issue. There can be absolutely no doubt that the very high threshold set by the Secretary of State and by Parliament — I refer to the 75% support — was meant as a test for the Forum. I indicated this at the meeting that you, Mr Chairman, convened, which I should point out to Mrs Rodgers was not an informal meeting at all. It was proposed formally in this body, when we



last met, that you would convene such a meeting. Therefore it has formal status. The 75% threshold was set by Parliament because it expected a high degree of consensus on the issues on which the Forum would be deliberating.

On that basis, it will obviously take a little longer to get agreement as to who the Chairman should be. The Secretary of State made adequate provision in the legislation — that, until then, he would be in a position to appoint someone who would have all the powers that the Chairman, when appointed, would have and that the business would proceed on that basis. We are quite content that the Secretary of State has fulfilled that obligation by appointing you, Sir. We are quite happy to sit under your chairmanship until we can fulfil the expectation of Parliament and arrive at a decision which enjoys the support of 75% of those present and voting.

**The Chairman:** I should say, in fairness to Mrs Rodgers, that she always intended to come. At the very last moment she was unable to attend, and she was courteous enough to telephone me at home just as I was leaving. So I do not think there was any question of her not being present. I was asked to convene the meeting, and that was the best I could do.

**Mr Curran:** Let me pay tribute to you, Mr Chairman, for the courtesy and integrity with which you conducted the meeting yesterday. The musical chairs that we had this morning may well have given you the wrong impression. We can work together, as was clearly demonstrated at yesterday's meeting, at which every party in the Forum indicated its desire to participate.

I confirm what you have said about the inability of Mrs Rodgers to be present on that occasion.

It was quite evident from that meeting that there is a desire among all parties in the Forum to make it work. That is the most gratifying thing that I have seen in the last fortnight, and it augurs well. We may have got off to a rocky start in procedural matters — nobody seems to be quite sure what we are doing — but there was a spirit of good will and a desire to get somewhere. I came into this place thinking that that would not happen, but I have got good vibes now. They are coming across very clearly. People do want to make this thing work.

The Labour Party Members are quite prepared to sit here under your chairmanship, Sir, until we can get agreement on a Chairman. At yesterday's meeting some very interesting names were put forward by representatives of various parties. Those will have to be fully explored. However, I believe that if we can continue in the spirit of good will indicated in the meeting yesterday we will get there, and that the Forum will go on to make a very important contribution to the job we are all trying to do in Northern Ireland — to get the decent future for which everybody out there is asking the people in this room and the people at Stormont to fight, on behalf of all.

**Mr Weir:** I note from the initial Rules that the aim of the Forum is to promote understanding and dialogue. I wonder how, if we were able to take the SDLP's proposal and hold no more meetings until the chairmanship had been resolved, that would promote dialogue and understanding. There is necessarily a delay in the election of the full Chairman.



Ideally, there will be a degree of consensus on this question. One might say that the aim is agreement amongst our divided people, represented by the parties here. That will take some time. It is quite clear that we have to get on with the business of dialogue and understanding. I urge that, even if the question of the chairmanship is not resolved swiftly, we continue with the business of the Forum.

**The Chairman:** I think that that is what Mrs Rodgers was saying.

**Mr Durkan:** To remove any misunderstanding, let me say that we are not seeking a *sine die* adjournment until we have had some indication with regard to the Chair. We want to make sure that at the next meeting we shall actually elect a Chairman. We believe that it will increase the credibility of the Forum if we are able to do that. Otherwise there will be a serious question mark over this body.

Last week we left here having been part of no disagreement on the question of the Chair. We had not objected to anybody, nor were we proposing anybody against anybody else. Yet we heard reports about disarray and disagreement in the Forum and about inability to agree on a Chairman. Let us be clear about this question: the SDLP is in disagreement with no one. We would have been happy to proceed with an election last week. We would have been happy to proceed with an election today. We want to make it clear that we feel that it is very important to proceed with that business at our next meeting. If we limp along, constantly deferring the question of the chairmanship, that will pose a credibility problem. If we work on the basis that you, Sir, will carry on until such time as this and then that, it will quickly be established that you are regarded, in effect, as a carry-on Chairman of a carry-on Forum. We do not believe that that would be good for the Forum.

We want to see consensus so that the Forum can work properly and can be seen to be working properly. But we shall pose serious difficulties for ourselves, both as separate parties and collectively, if we grant ourselves the luxury of repeatedly leaving the question of the chairmanship unresolved. That will only generate other issues and pollute the other work of the Forum.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Mrs Rodgers said that her party would not be opposing or proposing anyone for the Chair. She feels that until there is a Chairman the Forum should not meet. We have had the same proposal from Mr Durkan. He is just saying the same thing: it must be done next week.

Now, it would not help if the names of prominent people who have said they are prepared to help us were put forward but did not get 75%. What sort of asses would we look if we were to put up individuals capable of doing this job, perhaps with a good number of people supporting them, and they did not get 75%. We must continue the way we are going. We must get on with all the work of procedure and all the work of Committees. Let us keep at it and take this in our stride. One cannot say that we should adjourn next week unless we have a Chairman. I suggest that, as the question of the chairmanship has been fully debated today, we leave it and get on. We have lost a lot of time already over musical chairs, and we should now get on with the business. I propose that the matter of the chairmanship, as has been suggested from the Chair and in keeping with the consideration of yesterday, be deferred to next week. Whether it can be resolved then, no one knows.



**Mr Gibson:** I support Dr Paisley's suggestion.

**The Chairman:** The Rules say that if there is a motion, I ought to test the views of the Forum by seeking a vote on it. However, it seems to me that not every suggestion should be treated as a motion.

Is everybody happy?

**Several Members:** Agreed.

12.45 pm

**The Chairman:** So, do we need to heed Mr Smyth's dire warning of a few minutes ago?

Is this a convenient point at which to suspend the meeting for lunch?

#### FORUM: BUSINESS

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** It would be helpful to know if the Forum will meet next Friday at the same time. According to the Rules, we should meet at 10 o'clock.

**The Chairman:** If Members still want me as their interim Chairman, I have been able to reorganize myself to be here next Friday. Is 10 o'clock suitable?

**Several Members:** Agreed.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** May we return to this point after lunch?

**The Chairman:** Of course.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** Thank you.

*The meeting was suspended at 12.46 pm and resumed at 1.35 pm.*

**The Chairman:** Mr Maginnis.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** A considerable number of people will be missing from the Forum next Friday as commemorations of the 80th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme are to be held on that day. For that reason, and because of the importance that everybody has rightly attached to the whole issue of the election of a Chairman, I suggest that the business next Friday be that decided by the Business Committee, but leaving aside until the following week the matter of the chairmanship. Having sounded out other parties, I believe that there is a degree of acquiescence. It really is a matter on which you should rule, Mr Chairman, but I suggest that the election of a Chairman should not be an item of business next week, but, rather, be on the agenda for the following week.



**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I support what Mr Maginnis has been saying. There are some people here who, because of a long-standing commitment, will be unable to attend the meeting next Friday. This is a matter for the Forum to decide. It must have the final word, but it would certainly facilitate people if the matter of the chairmanship were deferred until the following Friday.

**The Chairman:** Is anybody opposed to that proposal?

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** We are quite happy to facilitate Members who wish to go to the Somme commemorations.

**The Chairman:** May I take it that nobody opposes the proposal?

**Members indicated assent.**

### **FORUM: RULES OF PROCEDURE**

**The Chairman:** During the week we had three meetings of the Rules Committee, including one this morning. I do not want to sound sentimental about this or to suggest that all is sweetness and light all the time, but there were nine people present at each of these meetings and I was delighted at the degree of harmony, constructiveness and willingness to accommodate. This gives hope for the future of the Forum.

The Rules will be the initial version modified as the Forum decides, not as the Rules Committee decides. Just as the matter of the chairmanship requires a 75% vote, so do the Rules. There is a further hurdle to be overcome in changing the Rules, and that is that what we produce has to be acceptable to the Secretary of State. We have discussed the Rules on three occasions. We have worked through all of them, as well as those which apply to the Business Committee, and I believe we have got very close to agreement in all but minor instances.

I think that it would be appropriate to give parties an opportunity to comment, though I do not think we need a major debate. We posted the suggested Rules to you all on Wednesday evening, but I am sure a number of you have not received them yet. I appreciate that this is short notice.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** We got them, and we do not agree with having no debate.

**The Chairman:** I just wanted to make the point that some people may not have seen them. If you would like to discuss this matter or to raise any points, please feel free to do so.

*1.45 pm*

**Mr Peter Robinson:** I should like to make two introductory points. There really has to be a better system of determining when people speak in this Chamber. There seems to be a



blind side so far as you, Mr Chairman, and those who are sitting around you are concerned. When we attempt to be heard, by using the normal means of raising a hand, nobody sees it. Can we please have that attended to?

There are a number of issues that flow from the Rules. I understood that during the course of today's meeting we would be having something similar to a Second Reading debate on the issues, that during the course of the coming week each of the parties or, indeed, any individual Member would be entitled to submit a proposed amendment to the Secretary, and that a sheet would be prepared with all the amendments for discussion next Friday and, if necessary, on subsequent days. We need some idea as to when amendments have to be in, so that the Secretary and his staff have sufficient time to prepare the agenda for next Friday.

With regard to the document we have before us, which I received this morning and read in the car on the way in, the Forum should thank all those who took part in these meetings. They have provided us with a very useful starting-point. Clearly there will be amendments. We have a number of proposed amendments, but they will be in the context that this is not a Parliament or an Assembly. Some might say that it is not even a district council. Whatever it is, it is not a parliamentary body, and the Rules must reflect that. We should not carry most parliamentary procedures into it. There are some procedures common to the conduct of good business anywhere. These will be included in ours. Indeed, many, if not most, of them are already in the papers that we have before us.

We have to attempt to provide Rules for the good conduct of business in the Forum, bearing in mind our obligation to get the broadest of consensus — the purpose laid down in the Act. I enter that caveat because I want to make it very clear that our acceptance of Rules and procedures should not be taken as a precedent for any future body in Northern Ireland which might have a role extending far beyond the functions of the Forum.

Let me turn to some of the issues contained in the document itself. Clearly, item A will be removed entirely as it refers to the Secretary of State's position in relation to the Rules of Procedure. There is a gender problem, which occurs almost immediately, whereby Mr Chairman or Madam Chairman is now a Chairperson. I am not terribly keen on this terminology, but if the Forum decides to use it, there should be consistency. Draft Rule 1(2) refers to

"A member, addressing himself to the Chairperson".

If there is to be no reference to gender, then either "himself" has to come out or, if we accept that the male terminology is inclusive, which seems eminently sensible to me from my impartial position, "Chairman" is appropriate. This conflict is repeated in several places throughout the document. If we intend to use the gender-neutral "Chairperson", clearly we have to make the consequential changes.

A further matter occurs to me that might clarify some of the problems, particularly the one to which the SDLP referred this morning in relation to proposing and not opposing. Draft Rule 1(4) provides for us to declare ourselves Ayes or Noes in relation to a proposition. When we voted during the Forum's last meeting, Dr Alderdice was the first Member to



indicate that he was not voting. Our Rules should make it clear that such a position is permissible and will be recorded.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** This matter was considered in the Committee — that is, whether we should have Aye, No, Abstain and No Vote. We decided that we would not adopt the European system, where an abstention counts as a vote. There is therefore no need for a No Vote provision. Abstentions would not be counted — the Ayes and the Noes would make up the percentages.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** I can see how using the terminology “Abstain” could include one in the 75%. But if the terminology is “No Vote”, one is clearly not voting, and one is not included in the 75%. It is a matter that we or the Rules Committee can go into in some detail at a later date. I am just pointing up the issues that I think we need to have clear in our minds. At some time in the future people will be abstaining or not voting — whatever the distinction may be — and we need to know whether they are included in the numbers that we are dealing with.

The next problem relates to draft Rule 2(4), which says that the Chairperson of the Forum shall be an ex-officio member and the Chairperson of the Rules Committee. The Chairperson of the Forum need not be a member of the Forum. Members of the Forum are those elected through the list system — either the constituency list or the regional list — and only they are entitled to be Forum Members. If the Chairperson is not a Member of the Forum I do not think that he or she can be ex-officio member of any Committee. Some drafting amendment is therefore necessary.

Draft Rule 3(2) refers to “his duties” — another gender issue which needs tidied up. But there is a further issue towards the end of this sentence, which refers to understanding and consensus across the communities of Northern Ireland. Now, there have been many debates, in various chambers in which I have been, as to whether it is desirable to start identifying communities within Northern Ireland, or whether we should simply refer to the community of Northern Ireland. As it is part of the task of this body to create understanding and dialogue across the community, we should have it clearly in our procedures that we are talking about the community of Northern Ireland.

With regard to draft Rule 4, I do not like the term “Temporary Chairmen”. It almost indicates that somebody’s days are numbered. I should prefer “Deputy Chairmen”. Under the terms of this Rule, Temporary Chairmen would be permanent in that they would remain until the Chairman no longer wished to retain their services. It is important to give them that status because there will be occasions, like the one that could have occurred with regard to next Friday, when the Chairman cannot be present. “Temporary” suggests that their position is time-limited.

I am not sure that it would be satisfactory for 14 out of the 110 Members — 14 including the Chairperson — to constitute a quorum. I think that a higher number would be more appropriate. Again, we can look at that, but I think in most councils a quorum is a fifth of the membership or a set figure, whichever is the greater. That would take us into the twenties, I think. But this is a matter on which I expect we will have some amendment. We can look at it when the time comes.



On the next standing order, I would like some further guidance. This does not have to be in our Rules. Perhaps the Business Committee can resolve it. I am not entirely happy with the proposition regarding announcements. I notice that there are a number of people who gather in the quadrangle in the centre of the building. I am not sure that they can hear announcements. Usually the calling of people for a vote is done by some form of bell, which would be louder than the pleasant tones of an official making an announcement over the Tannoy system. We need to have a way of alerting Members that a vote is about to take place — one that goes beyond what sounds like a fairly routine announcement.

I almost feel like passing by paragraph (1), but I will touch on it, recognizing that there will be sensitivities on the issue of an opening prayer. The proposition is put forward that Members spend a minute in personal meditation. In fact, when I look at the words used I see that it is compulsory to spend a minute in meditation. Maybe it would be a good thing if we were forced to meditate at the beginning, but we need to look at whether it should be optional. We need to look also at what format might be most suitable — an opening prayer, for example, or meditation. As we shall be dealing with this matter later I do not want to open the debate further at this stage.

Paragraphs (2) and (3) of draft Rule 6 may strike a chord with proceedings elsewhere — the Chairperson having consultations with the Business Committee. I did not find that satisfactory elsewhere, and I do not find it satisfactory here. In fact, it conflicts in some ways with another Rule, which puts the responsibility for the work of the Forum entirely on its Members. To hand over such major matters as the very sittings of the Forum to one person, who has to consult but does not have to accept the judgement or views of the Business Committee that he or she is consulting, is unacceptable. The wording should be changed to either

“with the agreement of the Business Committee”

or, indeed,

“having due regard to the wishes of the Business Committee”,

but, in some way, the views of the Chairman must be shaped by the opinions of the Business Committee. He must take heed of the Business Committee’s views. That continues in 6(4), which says

“the Chairperson may, after consultation with the Business Committee”.

The substantial matter that we faced at our opening meeting comes up first in 7(2) — that is, the balance of parties in the Forum when we are talking about setting up Committees. At one stage I considered challenging the decision taken in the Forum last week. I have no doubt that if I had done so I would have been successful. I took legal advice after our meeting last Friday, and there is absolutely no doubt in the mind of the senior person that I used — who is not a Member of the Forum — what the position is. Indeed, I have to say — and I am not going to elaborate on this — that one of those who argued most strongly against me last Friday spoke to me in the course of the last few days to indicate that he agreed with my point.



The balance of the parties indicates very clearly that some degree of weighing is involved. It is not the range of parties, which would clearly include all the parties that are here; it is the balance of the parties. So whatever we do, if we are going to agree a Rule we must agree what it means. Therefore, during the course of our next sitting we shall come to this issue of the balance of the parties in the context of the Committees, both in terms of 7(8) and in terms of 14, which refers to full Committees. We really must come to an agreement that "balance" does mean size and substance, as well as range, or we will have problems when the first ruling comes. In my view, there can be no doubt that "balance" indicates size, as opposed to range, which would indicate the number of parties. But the wording can be changed. The view of the Forum is that if it is not the size of the parties that we are dealing with, then the wording should indicate very clearly that it is range and number. There may well be amendments to that effect.

But the Forum must be in no doubt about what it has passed. Of course, I enter the caveat that was hinted at by Mr Maginnis earlier: that 25% or more of the Members who are present and voting could stop a Rule from being accepted. We really must get agreement on that. I would be content with some means of representing the balance — the size, range and number of parties. What the formula might be is something that we shall have to use the usual channels to sort out, but we must avoid a situation such as we have, for instance, in the Rules Committee: five or six parties that have small numbers of Members here but, collectively, have five or six times the number of representatives on the Committee as, for example, the Ulster Unionist Party. There must be some way of determining both the balance and the range of parties. I am sure it is not beyond the wit of humankind to sort that one out.

2.00 pm

Rule 7(6) says

"The procedures in the Business Committee shall be such as the Committee shall determine."

This is an issue to which we shall come back. It indicates that the Business Committee will have its own rules of procedure. I assume, though it is not stated here, that its rules must not conflict with those for the Forum as a whole. They will, I assume, deal with issues such as whether determination should be by simple majority or by some other means.

Rule 8, which concerns the business of the Forum, contains both the gender conflict and the issue of consultation with the Business Committee, so it will require amendments such as I mentioned earlier.

With regard to Rule 10(3) —

"Subject to the discretion of the Chairperson a member may not speak more than once to the same question" —

I think that there would be some problems if the Chairman had such discretion. I should have thought that we would be far better off with a level playing-field where nobody could speak more than once on the same issue, save through a genuine point of order. To leave it to the discretion of the Chairperson would risk the possibility of a perception of unfairness creeping



in. Anyway, the cleverer Members will be able to make a second contribution by other means, without its being written into the Rules almost as a right.

In Rule 11(1)(c) there is reference to objectionable words. We may need a tighter definition than that. I am quite sure that each of us is prepared to be offended on occasions by words used by others. But it is more than the words being objectionable. We are almost trying, I think, to get a term that equals "unparliamentary language". If that is so, we should work a bit harder to avoid "objectionable", because many of the words spoken in the course of our debates will be objected to. But it is not simply the words that are used collectively and how they may be construed, but whether those words are offensive and unparliamentary, that this should be dealing with.

I have gone through a number of issues. There are some typographical errors, and quotes are left out at various points. However, these are simple matters that I can take up with the Secretary. But under the heading "Voting" — Rule 13 — we have a strange device in paragraph (1), which falls back to the issue of the valid poll of 30 May. Now, to put it in practical terms — and I go no further than that — we saw the difficulties that were faced by the Secretary at the last meeting in even undertaking a count of the Members present. Indeed, we did not get the right figure first time. If, instead of dealing with the numbers of Members voting, we were to have a trade-union-style card vote, with everybody holding up the number of votes he or she had obtained in the last election, we would have very considerable difficulties, and a very long period would be required to declare the result. We should be far better off dealing with the realities of our membership in the Forum and having the calculations based, as they would be anywhere else — council, parliament or assembly — on the number of people returned.

With regard to the Members attending, I am not sure that we give the Secretary an easy task to record the names, bearing in mind the fact that people will be moving into and out of the Chamber. I am not sure that it is necessary. The Record of Debates will show those who speak, and that Record and the Minutes will record those who vote and, indeed, those who do not vote. There are ways of recording people who make contributions in one fashion or another. I am not sure that simply having a list of those who attend will be of any great help.

On draft Rule 16, which relates to visitors, I wish to record the fact that paragraph (2) says

"for the purposes of this Rule, the term 'visitors' includes all persons other than Forum members and officials."

That could mean our having a Chairperson who was a visitor because he or she was not a Forum Member or official. Some amendment is required to ensure that the Chairperson, if not one of our own Members, is not considered a visitor so far as proceedings are concerned.

I am sure that I will have at least your support in the next suggestion, Mr Chairman. Paragraph (4) says

"Visitors shall not be permitted to take into the Forum any mobile telephone, camera, tape recorder, briefcase or large bag."



Certainly, no one — Member or visitor — should bring a mobile phone, camera or tape recorder into the Chamber. Or if a device is brought in, it should certainly not be switched on. Perhaps we can look at that. I have been at council meetings where telephones have gone off, and there is nothing more annoying.

Draft Rule 17 — “Suspension of Rules” — implies that the Chairman will have to satisfy himself that such suspension as is requested would not be an infringement of the rights of any Member. It is “Members” — plural. The Chairman’s job is to do more than protect the rights of Members collectively. If any single Member’s rights are being infringed, he has to consider whether it would be appropriate to suspend any of the Rules.

I am simply giving the Forum the benefit of half an hour’s reading on my way here. There are amendments that we will be putting forward. Some of us feel that over the last few weeks we have gained such experience of rules and procedures that we might start up consultancies after leaving the Forum. At any rate, there are a number of issues that we have to address. Whether Members accept the suggestions that I am making or wish to put forward their own, it is clear that when we next meet we will have what might be considered a Committee-stage debate. It is better that such a debate should be based upon a sheet of paper with all the propositions, rather than that somebody should simply make a proposal incapable of being considered, in advance or in context with the degree of study required for a proper decision.

**The Chairman:** I am very grateful to you, Mr Robinson. There are two points with which I entirely agree. I do think that there is a case for some degree of reflection — even prayer — before we start our meetings and that the presumption with regard to gender should be corrected.

**Mr Robert John White:** It is interesting to note that, while we have allocated 30 minutes to the maker of a substantive motion, 20 minutes to a seconder and 15 to someone summing up, God Almighty gets two.

**A Member:** One.

**Mr Robert John White:** That is even worse.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** The Almighty acts with a great deal more determination and conviction than politicians, so he probably needs only one. I do not presume, as a member of the Committee, to speak for the Committee, but I should like to deal for a moment with some of the issues of the past week. I almost feel that I need to protect Mr Paisley, insofar as his Colleague Mr Robinson has suggested a large number of amendments, which, if every Member were to consider them in Committee, would cause great difficulty. It will be incumbent upon us, whether we like it or not, when we achieve a final draft of the Rules, to submit them to the Secretary of State before they are brought here for approval.

**The Chairman:** I do not think that that is right. Surely it is the other way round.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** Yes, sorry.



**The Chairman:** A slip of the tongue.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** I stand corrected in the detail but not in the spirit of what I am going to say.

If we have to submit our Rules to the Secretary of State it is important that we have some indication at an early stage that he is likely to approve them. Therefore, it is important that any amendments should be brought, first and foremost, through representatives on the Rules Committee to see whether they can be agreed in Committee and incorporated. This will get rid of a lot of the tedium of dealing with all of them in plenary meetings, and subsequent debate in this Chamber will be a great deal more constructive. There is no purpose in having a Rules Committee which is not given the task of presenting something which is as far as possible complete and likely to meet the wishes of the Forum as a whole.

Let me deal with one or two of the points that have been raised — for example, the Chairman's discretion as to whether people should be allowed to speak more than once. I am not sure how we would deal with the intention behind that Rule. the intention is to have people speaking once, but there may be occasions when someone will want, as I did while Mr Robinson spoke, to intervene. That should not be deemed a substantive contribution.

There is one other matter that might well be drawn to the attention of those in the Forum, and that is the feeling that it is quite improper that in substantive debates we should stand with our backs to colleagues. There should be provision for a podium where Members could face those whom they are addressing. *[Interruption]* It may not be a good idea, but I stick to my suggestion.

One other point that I think we agreed on in the Committee is that, irrespective of how hard we try at the initial stages, we will probably not be able to bring forward an ideal set of Rules at the outset. There will be opportunity to amend the Rules. There will be issues which cannot be included, but there should be understanding amongst Members of the Forum. Such matters could be included in a Chairman's handbook. If issues involving conflict between a Member and the Chairperson present difficulty, they can be resolved without our having to go back, virtually on a weekly basis, to amend the Rules. The amount of time available to representatives on the Rules Committee did not give people like Mr Robinson, who has made a considerable number of very sensible and useful suggestions, the opportunity — *[Interruption]* Well, I am a fair man.

2.15 pm

**The Chairman:** Enjoy it while you may.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** Those matters should be placed before the Rules Committee again so that we can have at least one further attempt to bring to this Chamber something that is worth while, rather than try to resolve everything in the Forum during a substantive debate.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** May I suggest that it would be better if the amendments to the Rules were left with the Committee and brought to the Forum when we have all had more



time to study them. It might be better to do that and to curtail discussion today. Draft Rule 11(1)(c) says

“uses objectionable words which he refuses to withdraw”.

Is that an oversight, or is it just an assumption that she — she — will not be making objectionable remarks?

**The Chairman:** It is certainly an assumption I would make.

It would be expecting a lot to ask people to comment fully on this when they have only just heard some suggestions.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I am sorry, Sir, but I disagree. There are people here who are not on the Committee. There are people here who have individual views on these matters. We should have a Second-Reading-type debate, in which we are not putting amendments as such but saying that there are some things we would like to see changed. Surely this is a pointer to the Rules Committee. I am rather surprised to be told that when members of the Committee asked officials to get them a copy of certain rules it was not forthcoming.

This is the third time elected representatives of Northern Ireland have been over this ground. I happened to be on the Committees that drew up rules for the first Assembly, for the Convention and for the second Assembly. These matters were thoroughly discussed, debated at a second stage and then went back to the Committee for further consideration. The Committee would do well to get those Rules and have a careful look at them. They were not drawn up merely to conform with the Standing Orders of the Westminster Parliament. The old Stormont worked on that line.

There is one thing that I find very discouraging about these Rules, and that is that there is no mention of the important task of getting reports on subjects in respect of which the general public have an input. What are we going to do with these reports? I would have thought that one of the major Rules should be that, after thorough discussion of a particular topic, and following investigation and the hearing of evidence, the Forum should draw up a report.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. Is that not a matter for the Business Committee rather than the Rules Committee?

**The Chairman:** As we have not yet spoken on Business Committee matters Dr Paisley will not be aware of that.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I am talking about the Rules now. There must be Rules governing our actions.

One of the basic tasks that the Forum has been given is to seek information. Having sought it, what will we do with it? I heard that people on the Rules Committee did not want these reports to be sent anywhere. They thought that the reports should not be allowed to leave this building. I think that the Lady's party is the one that sponsored this.



**Ms Brid Rodgers:** This is absolute nonsense. I do not know what the Member is talking about.

**The Chairman:** I do not recall this, Dr Paisley, but I do take your point.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** If I have wronged the Lady I humbly apologize. This Forum is not going to go to all the trouble of looking at a matter that the general public are concerned about, taking evidence and making a report and then send it nowhere. If I have converted the Lady to that point of view I am delighted. And if Mr Maginnis's podium makes him a penitent I am delighted indeed.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. No decision has been made by the Business Committee.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** It is the Rules Committee I am talking about.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** I am not on the Rules Committee.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Members of her party are.

**The Chairman:** We certainly had Mr Alban Maginness as a representative of the SDLP. He was extremely emphatic about the necessity for the public to be canvassed, not only on individual subjects such as health and education but also on thematic ideas that should be explored. So I think you can be confident.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** His party was also emphatic, I am informed, that these reports were not to be sent anywhere. I say that they must be sent somewhere.

**The Chairman:** And I agree.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** If the Forum studies a certain matter and takes time to call public witnesses, it should be within its remit to send its report where it thinks fit. And Members who are taking part in something elsewhere are entitled to such reports.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** The SDLP has participated in setting a precedent by allowing a message to go from this place to Manchester expressing our condemnation of a bomb. If it is proper for such a political message to go from this Chamber, it should be correct, in any circumstances, for this body to express its opinions and views to any authority deemed relevant.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** That is the point I am arguing. If there is some confusion about the Business Committee and the Rules Committee, and if I have said something that is not accurate, I am sorry, but I am making a very important point. The general public would be appalled to be called to this Forum to give their views and to have them taken on board and put through the mincer, only to find that a report enjoying 75% support could not be sent to the relevant authority with the power to implement it. This must be an issue in any Rules that are drawn up.



Secondly, I do not agree with what Mr Maginnis said about going to the Secretary of State and having a word to see if he would look favourably on the draft Rules. The Forum should be its own master. It should state what it wants having decided by a 75% vote, and see what the Secretary of State is up for. Let us put his feet to the fire and see what he is up to and whether he thinks we are puppets. This is not a quango. The people of Northern Ireland elected this assembly, and it has to act as an elected body. I would not consider saying anything to the Secretary of State until we had made our minds up. Then it will be up to whoever is the Chairman or whoever is the Committee Chairman to explain what we have decided, assess his views and come back to the Forum for further discussion. The Secretary of State would come under the searchlight of the Forum if that were to happen.

In relation to the matters of Prayers, I would like the Lord's Prayer to be said. If that would be an infringement of civil and religious liberty, then let us have a minute or two for reflection. It is not the amount of time that is spent; it is the attitude of the heart. Man looks at the outward appearance; God looks into the heart. Mr Maginnis seems to know the Almighty well, so he should realize that.

There is only one qualification I must put to the Rules Committee on this matter. The Forum should open with you, Sir, in the Chair. You should have that time. It is all part of the thing. Then the other Members could be summoned. No one is summoned to prayer in the British House of Commons, and the same applied to the old Stormont. After Prayers, people can come in as they please. The word should be "may", and not "shall". One cannot force people to do this against their will.

There is another matter that I want to raise. The flag of our country should fly over this building during Forum meetings. I have brought this matter to Mr Carson. He is in difficulty because, as he says, he does not own the building. It belongs to Shorts. Having been in touch with Short's I do not think that there would be any difficulty. When we go upstairs the flag of our country — the Union flag — should be flown while this body is in session. I put that to the members of the Rules Committee to take on board. I was told that Short's have rules about flying flags. Well, they do fly their flag outside their building in the Queen's Island complex. I remind the Forum of a statement made by a very prominent person: fly the Union flag, teach national history and heritage, play the national anthem more frequently, persuade the media to be more patriotic, recognize that the Government should stand up for Britain. So says a report of the Prime Minister. It would be nice to have him, for once, on the side of the Forum.

**Mr McCartney:** I will endeavour to be succinct.

The Rules Committee has produced a set of draft Rules. The contribution of Mr Robinson indicated a number of amendments that he thought to be relevant. It seems to me that we should now deal with a proposal that Members of the Forum, or the parties, suggest whatever additions, deletions and amendments they wish to have before the Forum in a Second Reading, so to speak. Those changes, which would be circulated to Members in advance of such a meeting, would be the subject of a debate, and the Rules, so amended, would be returned to the Rules Committee for further consideration and then brought back here for final determination. But we should get on with the business of settling the Rules.



I see Mr Trimble pursing his lips and wrinkling his brow. I am sure he has something very weighty and fundamental to contribute, and I shall listen to it with attention. I am simply suggesting that, in whatever the form, and to avoid the nit-picking, each party file amendments such as it thinks appropriate and have them brought back in recognizable form in advance of the next sitting so that we may consider them and be in a position to debate them constructively, and then go on from there.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** As a member of the Rules Committee, I should like to draw attention to the confusion about what the SDLP is supposed to have said about documents not leaving the building. There is mix-up somewhere. The Rules Committee did not even debate that issue.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. You will recall, as will the Secretary, that I wrote out a proposed amendment on this very issue. It was discussed, and Mr Alban Maginness of the SDLP indicated his strong political objection to this body's forwarding any report to another organization deemed relevant. His particular concern was that we would try to be the tail wagging the dog of the negotiations, sending messages to the negotiating teams. The argument was that we would try to help other statutory bodies in coming to decisions that reflect the will of the people of Northern Ireland. That is the concern that was put to the Member. Mr Smyth should reconsider what he has said.

2.30 pm

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** It was a long point of order. I do not want to go into this with the Member. I can speak to him after the meeting. I do not recall this particular incident to which he refers.

However, let me get back to the important business that we are here for. What we must all remember — and Mr Ken Maginnis has already mentioned this — is that the Rules Committee represented every party in the Forum, including Mr McCartney's. We all recognize that this is just the first draft. We all indicated that it was more than likely that there would be a debate on the Rules of Procedure. That is why the item is number 2 on the agenda. Dr Paisley rightly said that we should start with the Lord's Prayer. But I remember Mr Cedric Wilson saying that we could not do so as only certain people may say the Lord's Prayer. Mr Paisley Jnr had to chastise the Member behind the scenes. There are difficulties here.

I welcome many of Mr Peter Robinson's remarks. He has made very sensible recommendations. The only difference I have with Mr McCartney is that I believe that any amendments — naturally there will be amendments — should go back to the Rules Committee, where each party will be represented. Why bring them here if we can come to agreement in the Committee? If we fail to agree about something it will come back to the Forum for debate. I appeal to Mr Robinson on this point.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** I do not think any of us would have any difficulty in working out a procedure. It depends just how quickly, with other duties, such a Committee can meet again. If, for instance, the Rules Committee could convene on Monday or Tuesday to



consider the various points that have been raised during this debate, and if it could get unanimity on those issues to provide us, say by Wednesday, with a further draft to allow people to suggest amendments, that would cut out a lot of the debate that might otherwise take place next Friday.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** I welcome the Gentleman's kind offer. I hope that the Rules Committee will take it up.

I said that I would be brief, and, as Members know, I always keep my word. I welcome this debate. Mr Robinson has certainly gone through the Rules. All those who want to have Rules altered should give their amendments to you, Mr Chairman. You could call an early meeting of the Rules Committee. Let us see if we can deal with these matters without bringing them back to the Forum, other than for ratification.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Ms Bell has been patiently putting her hand up.

**Ms Bell:** I first put my hand up about 10 minutes ago.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I want to make a point of order before we leave this.

**Ms Bell:** Very well.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I am quite happy that an amendment should go first to the Committee. But that leaves the right of any individual in the Forum to put an amendment down when we come to discuss the matter, as Mr McCartney has rightly said.

**Ms Bell:** What I was going to say has been superseded. As a member of the Rules Committee, I was under the impression that we would get a preliminary report. I expected some debate, but not a long-drawn-out discussion, as there would be an opportunity for people to bring amendments, as Mr Robinson has done. I have no direct knowledge of parliamentary procedure or the passing of Bills, but I think that we should have a short debate at this meeting and then do exactly as Mr Robinson and, I think, Dr Paisley have said: put down amendments for debate later.

We had a meeting of the Rules Committee this morning but did not have time to discuss this matter as there was another meeting at 10 o'clock and yet another at 11 o'clock. My delegation — like others, I am sure — did not have time to go through the document. Therefore we were in no position to debate it at any length. If we are going to do this, the people who are on the Committee should be aware of what is happening so that they may go to their delegations and discuss it. Then we can have a proper debate, rather than a debate on individual points. I agree with Mr Smyth that there might be a meeting of the Committee on Monday or Tuesday. Then we could come back here and have a proper debate. I have no wish to stifle business. Indeed, we need to get on with it.

There is just one further matter to which I want to refer. Mr Paisley, talking about papers going out to other areas, said that Mr Maginness had said that he did not want that.



My recollection is that he and I said that we did not think it right for us to discuss something — say a submission — before it had been passed to the negotiating body. There should be a procedure for sending it to the relevant Department. That is something we should be thinking about at some stage in the future. So far as I was aware, the remit of the Committee was to get the basis of the Rules of Procedure. As we were doing business and saw what was happening on the ground, we could suitably amend the Rules as we went along. That is my reading. Certainly there is no way this was to be a final paper.

We need other people's suggestions. There is no way we are stifling debate. There is no way we are saying "Accept this or else." If we can stop the debate now and ask each delegation to bring its list of amendments to the Secretariat we will deal with them at the earliest possible time.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** I should like to refer to something that has been mentioned by a few people in passing. First, I ask you, Mr Chairman, to confirm that I cautioned the Rules Committee against the inflated view of some members that they were writing these Rules in tablets of stone, to be presented here today for rubber-stamping. I recall making that point very firmly, because while Mr Maginnis said that he did not speak for all here, I have no doubt he would wish to do so.

In relation to a comment by Mr Hugh Smyth, I would like to try to provide some perspective. The Member said that I had made some comment to the effect that we should not have the proceedings opened by people reciting the Lord's Prayer. I would like to place it very firmly on record that what I said is very much in accordance with Dr Paisley's view that we cannot make it compulsory for people to come into a Forum such as this and recite or take an oath on anything. That is a matter for each individual in accordance with his personal faith. In relation to my own faith, I would have no difficulty about reciting the Lord's Prayer. I made the point that such action on the part of people without faith would be vain repetition, to which I am opposed.

I want to make a comment which may help to clarify the difficulty concerning Mr Paisley Jnr's view with regard to items that were going to be discussed by the Forum and what should happen to them subsequently. There is a view, held widely by people in the Forum, that matters such as health, education, the environment, human rights, agriculture and the economy — I mention a few to give a flavour — are very suitable for debate and for interfacing with the general public. There was some difficulty when mention was made of the relationship between the Forum and the negotiations taking place at Castle Buildings. The point was made that reports, either from here or from Castle Buildings, should be debated in the Forum and that views on matters agreed or debated here could subsequently be issued to various Departments or bodies. I distinctly remember that Mr Alban Maginness had difficulty with that. Perhaps it sheds some light on the differences in people's understanding.

With regard to all the matters that I have outlined, it would be nonsense not to have the findings of the Forum sent to authorities, bodies or Departments that might gain from them.



2.45 pm

**Mr Hussey:** These have been described as draft Rules. It is disappointing that what we are dealing with is an amended version of Rules sent to us by the Secretary of State. I hope that this body can agree that, as has been suggested elsewhere, the Rules Committee should be free to consider the rules of other bodies, as appropriate, and introduce procedures that the collective intellect of this body determines are appropriate to its peculiarities and, indeed, to the expectations of the people of Northern Ireland, who sent us here. It should be accepted by the Forum that wishes can be expressed freely through our representatives on the Rules Committee.

Will the Rules Committee be a Standing Committee?

**Mr Alban Maginness:** I am grateful to Mr Smyth, Ms Bell and Mr Wilson for at least attempting to undo the distortions that Mr Paisley Jnr introduced in relation to my contribution to the Rules Committee. At that Committee Mr Paisley attempted, rather ineptly, to introduce the question of a report from the Forum to the negotiations. That is the manner in which he presented his proposition. I pointed out to him, and indeed to you, Sir, that that was contrary to section 3(4) of the statute under which we were established. Subsection (4) says

“But if, in accordance with any rules of procedure adopted by them, the participants in the negotiations refer any matter”.

That is the point I was making at the Committee. Under the statute, it is up to the negotiators to come to us — not the other way round. Mr Paisley was trying to reverse the process, contrary to the statute. That is the point I was making. It will be for the Forum to determine, in due course, where reports go. The SDLP has an open mind on that. We have not taken any considered position. I would like you, Mr Chairman, to note that.

We set up a Committee to get through the tedious aspects of establishing Rules. It is important to remember that that Committee is working for the Forum. There is no point in its presenting draft Rules for the debate to be opened again. I ask the Forum to let the Committee get on with it. If the Committee finds that certain Rules are contentious it can refer them to the Forum, but there is no point in unnecessary debate about Rules that have not yet been finalized. We now have sufficient flavour of the concerns of Members. Let the Committee get on with the work, and the Forum can deal with the contentious issues later.

**Mr Trimble:** I wish to speak very briefly in support of what I think was the essence of the point made, first, by Ms Rodgers and then by Mr McCartney, Ms Bell and Mr Maginness. The best thing would be for the Rules Committee to finalize its recommendations. This sort of general debate does not contribute very much, and I do not think that it should go on much longer. We need the finalized views of the Rules Committee and then an opportunity for proper debate.

Now, a proper debate is not a Second Reading. You do not have a Second Reading debate on Rules. What we need is to have the finalized report of the Rules Committee published in good time for any Member to submit amendments and have them circulated in



advance of a proper debate, which would proceed Rule by Rule. I remember that the report of the Convention's Rules Committee, of which I was a member, took two days to approve because a number of amendments came in. But that is what should happen. The crucial thing is to give every Member an opportunity to submit amendments and to ensure that all Members have a chance to consider them. This would take a little time, but we have got to get the job done properly.

**The Chairman:** It is absolutely essential that we get the Rules right. We would look totally idiotic going to the Secretary of State with a series of Rules that we thought had been agreed, only to find that we had to go through another debate.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** The debate today and, indeed, some of the comments made last week demonstrate the deficiency in this organization and its procedures. Of course the deficiency emanates from the fact that the Rules have to be corrected. The Rules Committee is obviously attempting to do that. There has, of course, been confusion over meetings and when they should take place. Some confusion has already been alluded to by Ms Bell of the Alliance Party. A meeting today at 9 o'clock ought to have taken place at 10 o'clock. This question must be addressed. It is part of the business of the Forum and of the Rules Committee to deal with deficiencies.

When you opened this debate, Sir, you said that much had already been agreed, and you painted a very rosy picture of the Committee meeting that I had attended. I do not agree that the situation was all that rosy. The controversial and divisive matters that we were trying to address were set aside by the Rules Committee, largely because one party or other did not want to bother. Indeed, people wanted just to carry on and hopefully rubber-stamp this rather inept report. That led to this debate and to the confusion surrounding some of the points that have been made. We have to realize, as Members both of the Forum and of the Rules Committee, that one cannot just park issues and hope to muddle through. These issues have got to be addressed and resolved.

Mr Robinson made some very helpful remarks about the Rules. Indeed, my party will be tabling a number of amendments based on his comments. The Forum ought to be aware that, so far, we have had only one and a half hours to discuss the Rules — 30 minutes having been taken up by a working lunch. That was wholly inadequate for this important subject. Mr Robinson has alluded to some very weighty matters that must be addressed.

However, I welcome some of the amendments that have been made. I welcome in particular Rule 3(1), which highlights that the Forum is a free-standing body. It is not going to go, cap in hand, to the Secretary of State. The Rule says

"The Forum shall exercise control of its own business".

That is a good indication of the standing of this body. We are not the servants of the Secretary of State. It is rather unfortunate that some parties have indicated that they wish to treat the Forum in an à la carte manner and to use it like a public convenience.

**The Chairman:** Wait a moment. I do not think that I can accept that at all.



**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** If that is the attitude —

**The Chairman:** I must ask you to withdraw that offensive remark.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** I will withdraw “à la carte”.

**The Chairman:** It is not parliamentary. Is that the word I am looking for?

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** People who treat this place in that manner will obviously demean its Rules. They should consider their approach.

I also welcome Rule 6(1). However, I concur with the opinion, ventured by Mr Robinson, that this should not be obligatory. The minutes of our meeting last week indicate that the feeling of the Committee was that the word should be “may” rather than “shall”. Mr Smyth is the man who was most strenuous on that point. It is only right and proper that it be reflected in the Rules.

I would like to draw attention to the voting procedures — Rule 13.

“For an affirmative decision on a matter other than a business motion, it shall be necessary for assent to be indicated by not less than 66% of those voting”.

That alone is adequate. It is rather unfortunate that the current Rules indicate that there are hurdles to be overcome in order for something to pass in this body. In particular, an affirmative decision must be deemed to command support across the main communities in Northern Ireland. That is a wholly unnecessary additional hurdle which will mean that this body is stymied in much of its business. There should be a provision in Rule 13 that when something has been fully debated and has the support of the Forum we ought to be free to forward our decision to any organization deemed appropriate. That is the comment that I made at the Committee meeting. Mr Alban Maginness, who sees Reds under the bed at every turn, obviously became very concerned that I was talking about the negotiating body. He then produced a spurious interpretation of the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Act 1996. Section 3(4) of the Act says

“if, in accordance with any rules of procedure adopted by them, the participants in the negotiations refer any matter to the forum, subsection (3) shall not be taken to prevent the forum from considering that matter.”

Mr Maginness’s interpretation of what I said is in no way correct.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** The legislation is completely silent about a request in the other direction. It says that the negotiators can ask the Forum to deal with matters, but makes no comment on the issue of whether the Forum may send material to the negotiators. What the negotiators might do when they got it would be a matter entirely for themselves. They might give it no standing whatsoever, but that should not prohibit us from sending it.

**The Chairman:** Mr Dodds.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** I was giving way to Mr Robinson. I will wind up in a moment.



The importance of this point is that views and expressions coming from the Forum must be listened to. We must be able to give a voice to the people who elected us. That is why we are here, and it would be inappropriate if our decisions were simply locked away in some box, never to be considered by anyone. That is the view to which I was trying to give expression.

3.00 pm

There are a number of other minor points that I want to mention. I think that under Rule 11 there should be something with regard to a disciplinary body, probably representative of the party Leaders. With regard to 10(4)(b), the idea that we should speak, Napoleon-like, from a podium is an unnecessary addition, but perhaps some people will wish to wax lyrical. Mr Ken Maginnis indicated that he wanted to speak in my defence. I would prefer to plead guilty and hang. None the less, if he wishes to wax lyrical from the front, I am prepared to give him that opportunity.

**The Chairman:** We have taken quite a lot of time on this, and I notice a certain amount of ennui.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman.

**Mr Trimble:** Is it a point of order?

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** It is a good point of order. The Gentleman may be the Leader of the Unionist Party, but he cannot give rulings.

We do not need to stop at 4 o'clock. We came here today to start business at 11. When did we start? After 12 because of the musical chairs. That episode was not our fault. Any Member here today should be allowed to express himself. If you can show me where we have a 10-minute or 20-minute Rule, well and good, but to say that people who have vital points to make cannot be called or must be curtailed would be absolutely wrong.

**The Chairman:** Has anybody got a vital point to make?

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Yes — Mr Dodds.

**The Chairman:** I thought he had given way.

**Mr Dodds:** I indicated that I wished to speak after the first or second person —

**The Chairman:** You wrote a letter.

**Mr Dodds:** Yes, because you and your officials seemed to deliberately ignore my indication that I wished to speak. I do not necessarily blame you, Mr Chairman. You have a difficult task, and you have to keep an eye on all sections here. But the officials beside you, when they see people indicating that they wish to speak, should make a note and pass it to you. That is part of the problem that we have here. There are people who do not seem to be drawing your attention to matters that are indicated to them. I am glad to note for the future



that a letter actually gets some attention. It is something that other Members may wish to bear in mind.

Nobody here wishes to prolong the proceedings for any trivial reason. It is only right that Members of the Forum who are not members of the Rules Committee should have an opportunity to look at these proposals and debate them. What will be the point in the Rules Committee's meeting next week if it has not had an opportunity to hear from Members about their consideration of the Rules that have been brought forward? It will not know what points Members are concerned about or what they think should be added to or taken away. So it is absolutely right that we should have this debate today.

I have listened very carefully, and there have been very few points of substance, apart from those of Mr Robinson, Mr Paisley and one or two others who made genuine suggestions about what should be added or taken away.

**The Chairman:** Are you going to make one now?

**Mr Dodds:** Yes, Mr Chairman. I am in order in making these points, and I hope that by your comment you are not implying otherwise. I am somewhat surprised at such a comment at the outset of my remarks.

**Mr Farren:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I returned home last night at midnight and for the first time had sight of the amended Rules. Unlike Mr Robinson, when I drive from Portstewart to Belfast I have to keep my eye on the road, so I had very little time to consider any points arising from the amendments. We have indicated very clearly that we are prepared to put forward our considered view on the procedures that are before us, so it is unfair of Mr Dodds to suggest that nobody except Mr Robinson and a few others have considered views. The suggestion, which has come from a number of Members, that we curtail debate and invite parties to make considered submissions to the Rules Committee should be adopted at this point so that we may proceed to the next business.

**Mr Dodds:** I doubt very much — though it is a matter for you, Mr Chairman — that that was a point of order.

Referring to the comments that were made earlier by Mr Maginness, in which he indicated that this should be a matter not for the Forum but for the Rules Committee — *[Interruption]*. He did say that, despite the fact that Mr Durkan is shaking his head. There seems to be some conflict between what is said and what people do with what is said. The reality is that Mr Maginness made it clear that this should be left to the Rules Committee. After all, the Committee had been set up, and it should be allowed to get on with its job.

**Mr Alban Maginness:** On a point of information, Mr Chairman.

**Mr Dodds:** I am not taking a point of information.

**Mr Alban Maginness:** What I did say was —

**Mr Dodds:** I am not taking a point of information.



**The Chairman:** Can you please bring these remarks to a close some time?

**Mr Dodds:** Why?

**The Chairman:** Because your argument has been going on for some time and there are many other people who would like to speak.

**Mr Dodds:** I am well aware of that. The point I am making is one which Mr Farren too has raised — that some Members have not had an opportunity. If we were to agree to what Mr Maginnis has suggested, Members would never have an opportunity to deal with these points except when presented in a finalized report. There can be consensus on the way we take this forward. The members of the Rules Committee will have an opportunity to hear the various points being made. I am coming to some that I want taken back to the Rules Committee.

**A Member:** When? Next week?

**Mr Dodds:** If the Member wants to come back next week, that is fine. Maybe he will hear something of use to him. When the Rules Committee meets, it should give due consideration to the comments made. It should then produce a report for distribution to Forum Members. They should take this opportunity to make amendments before debate in the Forum. That is the proper way to proceed.

I do not imply any criticism of the Rules Committee. That is not what Members of the Forum are about. The Committee has produced a report as a basis for discussion, and it is up to Members to suggest other matters that might be considered.

One of the things that should be considered is in Rule 3(1), which says that the Forum shall exercise control of its own business. This, I think, is an excellent addition, but it says “subject to the Chairperson’s ruling”. It should be the other way around: the Chairman should make his rulings on questions of procedure and order, subject to the Forum’s exercising control of its own business. Anyone looking at rules and procedures for other places will find that this is indeed how it is done.

Another question that I want to raise is that of notification by announcement. It has already been mentioned that in certain parts of this building announcements cannot be heard. It would be better if Members could deal with that.

It is important that Members of the Forum and members of Committees should receive proper notice in writing of any meetings and any changes of times. We are receiving documents very late. There should be something in the Rules to address this issue.

Earlier, Mr Robinson raised a point about communities. Mine is a separate point — not a repetition. Rule 13(1) mentions the question of support across the communities — plural. This needs to be dealt with.



Although Committees have the power to move about Northern Ireland in order to take evidence, it seems to me, on a cursory reading of the Rules, that that power is not given to the Forum itself. It may be that the Rules Committee will want to consider this question. There might be some merit in such a provision. In any event, it should be considered as a possibility.

Another matter that needs to be considered is how Forum Members address each other. Today, we have heard Members doing so in various ways. Some are very familiar with others and may be tempted to use first names. Some are being addressed as Aldermen, and so on. We should agree a common form of address for Members — preferably “Mr”, “Mrs” or “Ms”, as appropriate, followed by the surname. That should be mandatory. It would add to dignity and proper order.

Then there is the matter of how Members should be designated. I, along with some other Members I am sure, have received letters with the designation “MF”, which puzzled me until I discovered that it meant “Member of Forum”. We ought to agree on how Members should be designated, and whatever is agreed ought to be included in the Rules.

Earlier today somebody raised the matter of reflecting the balance of parties in the Forum. This is something that needs to be addressed in the Rules. We cannot have the same argument and debate when it comes to the make-up of other Committees as we had with regard to the Rules and Business Committees. Rule 4(2), which talks about how the temporary Chairman should be appointed, lends weight to the argument that Committee membership should be in proportion to Forum membership.

Mr Chairman, I am glad you have had the patience to listen to these points. I hope you will accept that I put forward my suggestions sincerely and genuinely. I trust that the Rules Committee will take them on board and that we will have an opportunity to consider individual amendments when they come back to the Forum. It will be for the Forum, not some Committee, to decide the Rules.

**Mr Eric Smyth:** I do not think that it is right for any Committee to make my decision. I was elected by the people to come here and speak on their behalf. Mr Alban Maginness knows well that representatives of every party debate matters at council committees, but these come to the full council and are debated all over again. That is what democracy is all about. We shout at each other and talk things over so that we all know what has to be done. Anyone who does not want to should not be here. Knowing that we are due to come here, we should keep Fridays free.

**Mr Thomas Robinson:** I assume that when the Rules are agreed they will come back to the Forum, which will eventually decide. I agree with what some Members have said. Not everyone in the Forum has been able to study the Rules that have been put forward, but, as was suggested earlier, Members and, indeed, political parties will have an opportunity to put forward amendments. I did not envisage a full-scale debate this afternoon. I think, Mr Chairman, that you should proceed to the next item of business.

**Mr Weir:** As the old saying goes, brevity is the soul of wit — something that seems to be lost on several Members — so I will be brief. I can be.



**Mr Ken Maginnis:** It's hard to be beaten by a junior, isn't it, Mr McCartney?

**Mr Weir:** There are two points that I wish to make.

First, when the Rules Committee is drafting proposed Rules of Procedure it would do well to bear in mind that on a number of occasions today and also last Friday some Members raised as points of order what were really points of information. The essential difference, of course, as everybody should be aware, is that a point of order relates to procedures, whereas a point of information is simply a means of making a particular point. For example, the procedure was used correctly when Mr Robinson made what was really a point of information, for which Mr Paisley Jnr had given way.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. Mr Robinson asked me to give way.

**Mr Weir:** Yes, that is what I said. Perhaps the Member should speak a little less and listen a little more.

**A Member:** The junior is in his place now.

**Mr Weir:** We shall see.

On at least two occasions today a point of information was raised correctly. The first was made by Mr Robinson when Mr Paisley Jnr gave way to him. Mr Maginness tried to raise a point of information, for which, I believe, Mr Dodds did not give way. That was perfectly correct. When Rules of Procedure are being drawn up, a distinction should be drawn between points of information —

**Mr Dodds:** There already is a distinction.

3.15 pm

**Mr Weir:** Well, it is not a distinction that has been used. On a number of occasions, both today and last Friday, people have got up on the pretext of making points of order but only, in fact, to give another speech. *[Interruption]* No. Let me tell Mr Paisley that I have enough information on this subject.

Having made that point briefly, I wish to say that I concur with the points made by Mr Trimble. This should be taken back to the Rules Committee. The Committee should take amendments from the various parties, and when it has a final draft, we should debate all the issues in full. I propose that this go to the Rules Committee.

**The Chairman:** We have an indication that that is seconded by Ms Rodgers.

May I take you back for a moment. The Rules Committee has met three times this week. It has done a pretty good job, and its members have been extremely hard-working, tolerant, informative and co-operative. Today we have heard some very useful and some very



businesslike points for the Committee to consider. I hope that those who have anything to add will let us have it, either verbally or in writing. It would be a shame to discuss provisions endlessly, with new ones appearing all the time.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Is it really a point of order?

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** Yes. I would like your direction, Sir, on the point to which Mr Weir has drawn attention. Something that you said to Mr McGrady last week is recorded in Hansard.

**A Member:** Hansard?

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** Sorry — the Forum Record of Debates.

You drew Mr McGrady's attention to the use of the words "On a point of order" and told him that such form was unnecessary. Perhaps you could tell us when we may use it.

**The Chairman:** I was probably wrong, never having been involved with this sort of matter before. My understanding is that a point of order is primarily to do with something in the Rules of Procedure and that when somebody raises a point of order he should be able to refer to the Rules. In other words, we do not want a disorderly House. I know that "disorderly house" can mean something else. *[Laughter]* What comes out is sometimes rather different from what one means.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** I am concerned about what you said last week:

"I shall listen every time. I have been listening to you for the last 20 years, and you have never said 'point of order' before. All you have to do is get up."

I would like a ruling.

**The Chairman:** Well, I was perhaps less than legalistic in my words to Mr McGrady, but what I said was true. We had dialogue on the board of the Housing Executive for many years. Anyway, I was making a very simple point.

**Rev Trevor Kirkland:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. When are we going to get back to the suggestion made by Mr McCartney half an hour ago?

**The Chairman:** I have forgotten what it was.

**Mr King:** I move, under draft Rule 12(1), that the Question on the proposal of Mr Weir, supported by Ms Rodgers, be now put.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. The Rule to which the Member refers indicates that there is a Question before the Forum.



**The Chairman:** There is.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** May I finish my point of order? The only Question that is before the Forum is the one that was proposed first by Mr McCartney. Someone who claimed to have some legal knowledge made a further proposal, which, of course, he should not have done, as there was a proposal before the Forum.

**The Chairman:** Perhaps, to be fair, we should refer back to Mr McCartney's proposal.

**Mr McCartney:** My proposition was that parties or individuals should formulate such amendments as they think appropriate and refer them to the Rules Committee, which would prepare fresh draft Rules incorporating those amendments. We should then come back and debate that set of Rules.

**A Member:** That is not what the Member said the first time.

**Mr McCartney:** It is what I am saying now that matters.

**The Chairman:** Please address the Forum through the Chair.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** I second the proposal.

**The Chairman:** Now we have a proposal and a seconder.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** According to the Rules we do not need to second anything. The House of Commons has no seconders.

**The Chairman:** Yes, you are right. We had great fun in the Rules Committee deciding that something was supererogatory — a big word for “unnecessary”. Let me put it this way: we have a proposal, no seconder and, I think, general assent.

*It was so decided.*

## FORUM: BUSINESS

**The Chairman:** I should like to make a few remarks about the Business Committee.

The Committee met twice in the past week. The attitude, co-operativeness and demeanour of its members lacked nothing of what I described in respect of the Rules Committee. They were very cordial and agreeable occasions, and I am most grateful to the members.

One of the key issues if not the most important one, was how we should take forward our role of promoting dialogue and understanding in Northern Ireland. If we are about anything, we are about that. I think that we should consider the best way of developing an interface with the public.



I have heard from all sides of the Forum the desire that our work, our findings, our values, our ideals should not just be put on pieces of paper to moulder on some shelf. We want to move forward as best we can. We want to keep our relationship non-adversarial. I beg you to be as non-adversarial as possible. In the Business Committee in particular we were certainly in that mood. I think that we should have a report from the Secretary to be discussed at the next meeting, rather than have a whole debate now. What do you feel?

**Several Members:** Agreed.

**The Chairman:** The report has been prepared and will be circulated. It would be slightly denigratory of the work of the Business Committee to bounce this on you at the end of what has been a reasonably long day.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Mr Chairman, can you tell us about the next meeting and its timing?

**The Chairman:** Yes. The meeting of the Rules Committee I will have to discuss with my colleagues and with the Forum team, but the Forum meeting should begin at 10.00 am.

I think there was general assent to the idea that we should not get into discussion about the chairmanship next Friday.

**Several Members:** Agreed.

*It was so decided.*

**The Chairman:** Any other business?

**Mr Peter Robinson:** Can we be clear that following a meeting of the Rules Committee there will be sufficient time for each Member to receive a copy of its draft report and to table amendments before the next Forum meeting?

**The Chairman:** We will not produce anything at the meeting next Friday which has not gone through that process.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** I do not see how the Rules Committee can do any business until it knows what changes are required. I hope that the parties will try to get that material to us as quickly as possible.

**The Chairman:** An excellent point, Mr Smyth.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** If the representatives on the Committee bring all the amendments from their parties, matters can proceed.

**The Chairman:** That is a better way of doing it. I hope that by Monday we will be in possession of everything that people want to reconsider.



**Mr Ken Maginnis:** I do not want to contradict what Dr Paisley has said, but I suggest that if we wait until these matters are brought to the Committee we will not have an opportunity to peruse them ourselves. Nor will the officers have an opportunity to look at the context. We will be at an instant disadvantage. It would be extremely helpful if we could have submissions earlier.

**The Chairman:** Yes.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** It is almost impossible to have amendments in time for Monday. Must this meeting be on Monday?

**The Chairman:** It is very quick, isn't it?

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I agree wholeheartedly. When the Committee meets, it will be starting off the way we started off today. On the other hand, it could expedite this business if it had notice.

**The Chairman:** May I have a suggestion as to when would be best?

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** We are in agreement. This has been our disadvantage during the past week, along with the fact that, for one reason or another, the many amendments which might have been submitted could not be before us. For that reason I suggest that the day be reconsidered — that it be Tuesday.

**The Chairman:** As the Committee pleases.

*During the course of the meeting the following Member signed the Roll: May Beattie.*

*The meeting was adjourned at 3.30 pm.*