

# NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM

Friday 5 July 1996

*The meeting was called to order at 10.05 am (Mr J R Gorman in the Chair).*

**The Chairman:** I have been chairing the Business Committee meeting. We are pretty time-limited in the work we do, and we do not want to waste time. It is important that I start promptly and that people coming to meetings be on time.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** You are not on time yourself.

**The Chairman:** No, and I apologize. I will not be late again.

## IRA BOMB (MANCHESTER)

**The Chairman:** I should like to read a letter that I received this morning from the Lord Mayor of Manchester, Mr Derek Shaw. It is dated 1 July and says

"Many thanks for your extremely kind letter of 25 June expressing such warm sympathy from the Forum towards our city following the dreadful events on Saturday 15 June 1996. I would like to express, on behalf of all the people of Manchester, my sincere appreciation of your support and good wishes."

## FORUM: BUSINESS

**The Chairman:** I want to say a few words about the progress of the Forum.

First, it must be quickened. The public are getting restive. They do not see the Forum as performing any great function. We have made progress — there have been nine Business and Rule Committee meetings so far — but we must quicken our pace. You will all want a summer holiday. I would prefer to break after we have produced some definite results. I am sure that the preference will be shared by everybody here.

Secondly, Sinn Fein could walk into this Chamber tomorrow without a cease-fire, decommissioning, or anything else. It would be pretty shaming to have Sinn Fein walking in to find that the Forum had not been able to agree very much so far.

Thirdly, I believe that the Rules could be cleared quite quickly. The Secretary of State's Rules can be changed only if we agree among ourselves. If there are some contentious Rules — and there are four, I reckon — they can be parked, and we can revert to the Secretary of State's Rules.

**Several Members:** No.



**Dr Ian Paisley:** No way.

**The Chairman:** I am sorry, but that is the way I am going to treat this matter. All of the Secretary of State's Rules will run until we get agreement.

I understand that some Members have not received the excellent paper produced by the Secretary and the Assistant Secretary. It sets out, first, those draft Rules which have been agreed by the Committee and by the Forum; secondly, those which have been agreed by the Committee but not yet agreed by the Forum; thirdly, those which have not been agreed by the Committee and will require further study, probably in the Committee or here. The paper does not contain anything that Members have not already been made aware of.

Certainly I am not satisfied with the way things are going in the Forum. It is becoming too adversarial. We are not a parliament. We are here to find some common ground amongst people in this country, to show the world that Ulster people are not for ever fighting and arguing. There are matters which are basic to us all — to our children, to the country at large — that we can agree without leaving aside our own ideals and aspirations. I very much hope that we are setting off on that track, rather than adopting the rather absurd attitude that we are a sort of parliament and can argue about parliamentary procedures. As Chairman, I am not going to be at all interested in playbacks about parliamentary procedure.

As to my position as interim Chairman, I should say that unless someone wishes to put forward the name of a proposed permanent Chairman — a motion would have to be passed by a 75% vote, and it would also require that the individual concerned had signified intention to accept the post — I propose to keep going, to get some action and some results.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I am not going to take the line that you, Mr Chairman, have taken. Some of your remarks are offensive, and several of them should be directed to yourself.

I have here a paper indicating that you have ruled 23 times against the Secretary of State's own paper that controls you. "Physician, heal thyself" would be the best thing to say at this time. It is important that we get through these Rules as quickly as possible. But not all Members received the paper. We called a meeting of our party half an hour before this sitting, only to find that there was a Business Committee meeting in progress. I am asking for a half-hour suspension so that my party can look at these Rules and decide what to do.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** I support that proposal and Dr Paisley's comments on the manner in which this meeting commenced. I noted in the Business Committee this morning that you, Sir, had decided to adopt a different approach. I cautioned you privately against that because I thought that the manner in which you, as temporary Chairman, had been chairing meetings to date, while not perfect, allowed people to give you some licence as you had not had time to make yourself familiar with all the Rules and procedures by which we are governed.

I too find offensive the comments you felt it necessary to make at the opening of this meeting. I suggested to you in the Business Committee that something you had eaten last night must have disagreed with you. I have come to the conclusion, upon listening to you



further, that it was not any dietary substance at home but undoubtedly some food prepared for you by the Northern Ireland Office. Your remark that if Sinn Féin were to come to this meeting and find that we had not been doing business and had not been behaving ourselves it would be pretty shaming is particularly offensive. The gangsters and murderers and men of terror outside do not spur me on to do anything in relation to this Forum or any other body. For 25 years the people of Northern Ireland have resisted the violence and intimidation of the IRA/Sinn Féin, and certainly nothing that I do here will be spurred on, or otherwise, by those gangsters.

10.15 am

The fashion in which you have spoken to Members this morning demands an apology. It is not for you to determine that the Forum will operate under the Rules laid down by the Secretary of State. You are aware that every effort has been made to agree Rules of Procedure of our own. I do not think that anyone is attempting to delay the process, and I think that Dr Paisley's proposal for a half-hour suspension is eminently sensible.

**The Chairman:** Before we suspend, I would like to hear from Mr Gardiner and Mrs Rodgers.

**Ms Rodgers:** If the DUP requires a suspension because it has not had time to look at the Rules, we are perfectly happy to accept that.

*The meeting was suspended at 10.16 am and resumed at 10.50 am.*

#### FORUM: CHAIRMANSHIP

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I understand that you, Sir, are the person the Official Unionists want to be the permanent Chairman of this body. In order that we may move ahead, the Official Unionists should officially put you forward now, and then we will see whether this body has the necessary confidence in you. I regret having to say that I resent the fact that during an interview you told journalists that you expected great arguments with the DUP today. I do not think that that is in keeping with the role of the Chair of this Forum. What we do here cannot be anticipated. Such remarks do not befit the Chair of this body. I would like the Official Unionists to go ahead and propose you, Sir, and then we will see where you stand.

**The Chairman:** I gave no interview. In fact, I have only just got back from France. I did not take part in any interview.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** You were talking to a journalist outside.

**The Chairman:** I was not.

**Mr Trimble:** As you pointed out this morning, Sir, you are, under the Secretary of State's appointment, the Chairman of this Forum until it elects a Chairman by a majority of 75% of those present and voting. When this matter was discussed last week, it was suggested



that there be informal consultations between the parties to examine the prospect of bringing forward a person who would have the very high-weighted majority set out in the legislation. It was felt that it would not be suitable for the Forum to propose someone without discussion. There have been some consultations during the course of the week. I have spoken to the Alliance Party, the SDLP and the DUP on these matters. On the basis of those consultations it is unlikely that any person could achieve a 75% majority at the moment. It would not be appropriate to rush into the matter in the way proposed by Dr Paisley, because that would only create division in the Forum and help to undermine its work. Consequently I have no intention of making the proposal that Dr Paisley suggests. If he wants to make a proposal let him do so.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I will take up that challenge and say that Mr Trimble has not consulted with me this week. I would be very happy to consult with him, but if that is not possible I am giving notice that this matter must be brought to a head at the next Forum meeting. We are not going to be lectured as we were this morning. I am told that you, Sir, are going to push us ahead and that the Forum will not be conducted in a manner that befits elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland.

I also heard from our representative on the Committee that you had said you would take no more points of order. If that is how we are going to conduct our meetings, it is useless for us to be here. You have to take points of order, Sir, and rule on them in accordance with the Rules under which you govern this body. We need to bring this matter to a head. I suggest that Mr Trimble get his running shoes on and make his nomination. He has the largest party and thus has a responsibility here. The SDLP is remaining neutral, but it is time the other Members of the Forum had the right to vote on the Official Unionist Party's nominee.

I understand that you, Sir, are their nominee. Mr Trimble has been saying that you should be the Chairman. I am sorry that he is not prepared to test that. He says that it might not be helpful to do so. But you were telling us this morning that we must get on. You were urging us to rush. Evidently your exhortation has fallen on deaf ears. This is a very important matter, and we, as independent Members, have only one way to get our own back for some of the things that you said in your homily this morning.

**Mr Trimble:** Obviously Dr Paisley is not aware that during the course of last week I had a discussion with two leading members of his party — representatives at the talks in Castle Buildings. They may not have informed Dr Paisley of that consultation, but it undoubtedly took place.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** The Gentleman's mind was that you, Sir, should be his nominee. Is that right or wrong?

**Mr Dodds:** There were no such consultations last week. The Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party may have been referring to consultations he had with myself and another Member.

**Mr Trimble:** Confirm that they took place the previous week.



**Mr Dodds:** Yes, they took place. The point is that there have been none since then, and certainly not during the course of this week, as has been suggested. The fact that the Gentleman has accepted that point is the main thing.

**FORUM:  
RULES OF PROCEDURE**

11.00 am

**The Chairman:** Can we move on? We have the report of the Rules Committee, which I am sure all parties read and discussed, even though that discussion may have been rather brief in the case of one party. Draft Rules that were agreed in the Committee but not by the Forum can be dealt with collectively or individually.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** We are going only to those agreed at the Committee but not yet in the Forum?

**The Chairman:** Correct.

**Mr Poots:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman.

**The Chairman:** You do not have to say "On a point of order", as Dr Paisley has reminded us. I have already given my views on this. When people stand up to speak, they do not have to use an incantation.

**Mr Poots:** Fair enough. Some of our members do not have a copy of these Rules. Is there any possibility of our getting them now?

**The Chairman:** Of course. Does anyone else need a copy?

**Mr McKee:** It is very hard for people to follow this without a copy.

**The Chairman:** I agree.

**Rev William McCrea:** Some Members may be quite happy to have a suspension for this purpose, but all should be treated exactly the same. Members should receive their copies through the post. No person is in a favoured position, even if Leader or deputy Leader of a party. Each Member should be able to review the position at home in his own time. This matter has got to be addressed.

**The Chairman:** I agree. I am told by the Secretary that copies were all posted first class on Wednesday. The postal system, of course, has not been working entirely smoothly in recent times. Will we go ahead and hope that there are some quick readers in our midst?

**A. NOMENCLATURE OF FORUM AND DESIGNATION OF MEMBERS**

*Paragraph (1) of draft Rule A agreed to.*



## 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF A RULES COMMITTEE

**Dr Alderdice:** In respect of 2(2), I understand that it may have been our representatives who registered concern about the change from “across the communities of Northern Ireland” to “across the various traditions in Northern Ireland”. We withdraw that concern, having consulted about it, and would be happy to accept the proposition if it is agreeable to the rest. That could apply to draft Rule 3(2) and draft Rule 13(1) also.

**The Chairman:** That is very helpful.

*Amendment made:* In paragraph (2), leave out “communities of” and insert “various traditions in”.

*Paragraphs (1), (2), as amended, (3), (4), (5), (6), (7)(b), (8) and (9) of draft Rule 2 agreed to.*

## 3. GENERAL RULE FOR THE CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

*Amendment made:* In paragraph (2), leave out “communities of” and insert “various traditions in”.

*Paragraph (2), as amended, and (3) of draft Rule 3 agreed to.*

## 7. BUSINESS COMMITTEE

*Paragraph (1) of draft Rule 7 agreed to.*

## 11. ORDER IN FORUM

*Paragraphs (1)(a), (b), (d) and (e) and (2) of draft Rule 11 agreed to.*

## 12. CLOSURE OF DEBATE

*Draft Rule 12, as amended, agreed to.*

## 13. VOTING

*Amendment made:* In paragraph (1), leave out all the words after “opinion” and insert “That such an affirmative decision may reasonably be deemed to command support across the various traditions in Northern Ireland.”

*Paragraph (1), as amended, of draft Rule 13 agreed to.*

## 14. COMMITTEES OF THE FORUM

*Paragraphs (1), (2), (3), (4)(b), (5), (6) and (7) of draft Rule 14 agreed to.*



## 15. MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

*Draft Rule 15, as amended, agreed to.*

## 16. VISITORS

*Draft Rule 16, as amended, agreed to.*

## 17. NEWS MEDIA

*Draft Rule 17, agreed to.*

## 18. SUSPENSION OF RULES (previously No 17)

*Draft Rule 18, as amended, agreed to.*

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** We need an additional Rule regarding confidence in the Chair. People must think that, once they appoint the Chairman, he will rule so impartially that we will not need such a provision.

Any proposal here will go to the Committee for discussion and then come back to the Forum. Is that correct?

**The Chairman:** I do not see anything wrong with that. We have 18 Rules. We can have "Confidence in the Chair" as number 19.

## 2. ESTABLISHMENT OF A RULES COMMITTEE

**The Chairman:** In relation to the draft Rules not agreed in Committee, I would like to call those who expressed views about draft Rule 2(2) in the Rules of Procedure Committee. They have worked very hard.

**Dr Alderdice:** You may recall, Mr Chairman, that I withdrew our concerns about 2(2), 3(2) and 13(1).

11.15 am

**The Chairman:** You are absolutely right.

Is there agreement to 2(7)(a)?

**Mr Neeson:** At the initial meeting of the Committee I expressed some concerns about this draft Rule. On that occasion 2(7)(a) was used to co-opt three additional members, albeit they do not have voting rights. I am concerned at the fact that they became permanent members. The Committee had been mandated by the Forum to appoint nine people plus the Chairman. It is my belief that the co-option of those three people required the permission of the Forum. That permission has never been sought. I have no objection to the principle of extra members for the three largest parties, but I feel that it is important that the co-option



have the permission of the Forum. If that were the case, I would withdraw any objection. It should be borne in mind that this must not be used as a mechanism to co-opt permanent members with voting rights.

**The Chairman:** Does anyone see anything wrong with that?

**Mr Neeson:** My point is that the appointment of the three extra people must have the consent of the Forum. Until that consent is forthcoming I shall object.

**The Chairman:** I thought you were agreeing to it as a mandate.

**Mr Durkan:** The point that Mr Neeson has raised in relation to 2(7)(a) concerns our decision of some weeks ago with regard to nominations for the Rules Committee. At that stage the Rules stated that the Rules Committee would have 10 members. Draft Rule 2(3), as amended, will refer to

“not less than 10 and not more than 16 members”.

The issue that Mr Neeson is talking about has been overtaken.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** That is exactly the point I was trying to make. The purpose of the amendment was to help the smaller parties such as ourselves and Mr McCartney's party. It enables us to send a person to a Committee, accepting that he will not have voting powers.

**The Chairman:** Mr Smyth acted for me with great distinction at the Rules Committee on Tuesday, and I am most grateful.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** It would help, Mr Chairman, if you were to call Members by name. Then there would be no dispute about the order of speaking.

**The Chairman:** I will do that. There are two or three people I do not know, and it would be helpful if they were to put up their hands and announce themselves.

**Mr McBride:** Draft Rule 14, which has been agreed, specifies that Committees are appointed by motion, setting out terms of reference, quorum and composition. It is a complete contradiction if a Committee can change that. Draft Rule 2(7)(a) does not make sense in its present form because it goes against draft Rule 14. That is the main issue. A further issue regarding the involvement of unelected people in the work of the Committees of an elected body has not been fully explored.

**The Chairman:** Would you like this matter to be parked?

**Mr Durkan:** Draft Rule 2(7)(a) relates to the Rules Committee. It is very specific. Draft Rule 14 relates to other Committees that the Forum may, in time, set up.

**Mr Neeson:** May I suggest that we park this provision for the time being?

**Several Members:** No more parking.



**The Chairman:** Would you like to vote on it?

**Rev William McCrea:** Before Mr Neeson made his speech the matter had been agreed. Then you took another statement. Once a matter is agreed, regardless of speeches thereafter, the agreement remains. You cannot park something which has been agreed.

**The Chairman:** I am not very happy about that. Even if I have pushed on and said "Agreed", somebody who is boiling to say something should be heard.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I hope you will be as liberal with the DUP.

**The Chairman:** I most certainly will. I usually am.

How strongly do you feel about this, Mr Neeson?

**Mr Neeson:** It is an important issue. I have asked that it be parked because I do not think that people fully realize the point that is being made. The question could be dealt with in the Rules Committee, which will be meeting again to deal with the matter raised by Dr Paisley. I propose that it be parked for the time being.

**The Chairman:** We can either accept that there is some feeling about this or go for a vote on it. It seems to me that the latter is a rather time-consuming process.

**A Member:** That is what we are here for.

**The Chairman:** What do we do in the three-minute interval?

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Meditate.

**The Chairman:** This will require 75% approval.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Can we be clear about the percentage?

**The Chairman:** It is 75%.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** With regard to the status of abstentions, may we have a ruling as to how votes will be determined?

**The Chairman:** At the moment, abstentions will not be counted.

11.30 am

*Question put:* That the proposed paragraph 7(a) of draft Rule 2 be agreed to.

*The Forum divided:* Ayes 51; Noes 23.



*Ayes: Antony Alcock, May Beattie, Robert Bolton, David Brewster, David Brown, Cecil Calvert, David Campbell, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, James Clarke, Wilson Clyde, Ivan Davis, Nigel Dodds, Jeffrey Donaldson, David Ervine, Sam Gardiner, Joseph Gaston, Oliver Gibson, Derek Hussey, John Junkin, Peter King, Trevor Kirkland, St Clair McAlister, Robert McCartney, William McCrea, Alan McFarland, Jack McKee, Gary McMichael, Monica McWilliams, Maurice Morrow, Dermot Nesbitt, Ian R K Paisley, Ian Paisley Jnr, Joan Parkes, Edwin Poots, Iris Robinson, Thomas Robinson, Pearl Sagar, James Shannon, Eric Smyth, Hugh Smyth, James Speers, May Steele, Des Stewart, John Taylor, David Trimble, Peter Weir, John White, Robert John White, Cedric Wilson, Sammy Wilson.*

*Noes: John Alderdice, Eileen Bell, Joe Byrne, Hugh Carr, Seamus Close, Arthur Doherty, Mark Durkan, Sean Farren, Frank Feely, Dorita Field, Tommy Gallagher, Steve McBride, Kieran McCarthy, Donovan McClelland, Alasdair McDonnell, Patsy McGlone, Paddy McGowan, Oliver Napier, Sean Neeson, Margaret Ritchie, Brid Rodgers, Jonathan Stephenson, John Tierney.*

*The Chairman ruled that, as the required 75% vote in favour of the motion had not been achieved, the Question was negatived.*

**Mr Dodds:** So that Members may be clear, Mr Chairman, will you please confirm that you are operating under the 75%-majority requirement.

**The Chairman:** It comes under the Act:

“A decision on the election or removal” —

note “or removal” —

“of a chairman or the adoption or alteration of rules of procedure shall not be regarded as taken by the members unless —

- (a) no member present has objected to it, or
- (b) it is approved on a vote by at least 75 per cent of those voting.”

Clearly that has not been reached.

**Several Members:** Park it.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** I am sure that if Mr Alban Maginness were here we would not have to park this provision. I chaired the Rules Committee when it met for about three hours earlier this week. This provision was actually designed by the SDLP, and my understanding was that the Committee had agreed it. Now the SDLP has voted against it. This is not on.



**Mr Gallagher:** I too was at the Rules Committee. We cast our votes this morning in the light of concerns that were raised by the Alliance Party. We have decided to park this Rule, go back to the Committee and have another look at it.

**The Chairman:** We are bound by how Members vote. Are we all agreed that we should park this provision and move forward?

*It was so decided.*

### 3. GENERAL RULE FOR THE CONDUCT OF BUSINESS

**The Chairman:** Rule 3(1), which was not agreed in Committee, requires Forum approval by 75%. What would Members like to do about this?

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** There was lengthy discussion on draft Rule 3(1). What we have in front of us is viewed by most people as less than satisfactory. We have an amended version to put forward. It boils down to the Forum exercising control of its own business. The wording that we suggest is as follows:

"The Forum shall exercise control of its own business. The Chairperson's ruling is subject to the Rules of Procedure, including the designation of business motions for purposes of Rule 13."

**Mr King:** The Ulster Unionist Party feels very strongly that the reference to the 1996 Act is superfluous. The Act is there. It is undeniable, and because the Forum is a creature of statute, everything has to be referred back to it.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** The DUP agrees. We had many arguments about this in another place. The SDLP has been adamant that it has to remain. I am sorry that Mr Mallon is not here to back us up.

11.45 am

**The Chairman:** Do I get the feeling that these two points make this a Rule which is unlikely to command 75% support? It is quite an effort to have a vote. Is this to be referred back to the Committee?

*It was so decided.*

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** There will be some parking tickets after this!

**The Chairman:** Indeed.

Dr Alderdice having withdrawn his objection to paragraph (2), that paragraph was agreed earlier.



## 6. SITTINGS OF THE FORUM

**The Chairman:** With regard to draft Rule 6(4), the Committee's discussions centred on a mild question of emphasis — whether we should use “after consultation with” or “having regard to the views of”.

**Mr Gallagher:** As we said in Committee, we are not entirely happy with “having regard to the views of”. The original contains a form of words which would give the Chair a certain degree of independence. That would not be the case if the wording were changed to “having regard to views of”.

**The Chairman:** Are you saying that you would prefer “after consultation with”?

**Mr Gallagher:** Yes.

**The Chairman:** Is that the feeling of everybody?

**Several Members:** No.

**Mr King:** Certainly not. The feeling was that the word “consultation” means all things to all men. Those who are involved both in the Committee and in local government have very strong feelings about what “consultation” means, especially in respect of Government bodies. They fear that the Business Committee could be consulted and then ignored. Originally the Ulster Unionist Party suggested

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

but, in a constructive gesture to those who had problems with that, we moved to the current position: “having regard to the views of”, as opposed to “... the wishes of”. That is still our view. “Consultation” is too wishy-washy, too woolly, to use in such an important context.

**The Chairman:** Is it the wish of Members that we first consider the second form of words?

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** There was lengthy discussion about the alternative wording. In the minds of most elected representatives in Northern Ireland the term “after consultation with” has become fairly meaningless, in that, repeatedly, Her Majesty's Government have consultation with all of us and the do whatever they like. The word “consultation” has become devalued. “Having regard to the views of” is slightly stronger, in that the Chairman would have to consider the views. As Mr King has said, the original version was “the wishes of”, but we changed that to “the views of” in an effort to have an agreed format. We would certainly prefer “having regard to the views of”.

**Mr Durkan:** After consultation amongst ourselves, and having regard to the views of others, we withdraw our objection.

*Amendment made:* In paragraph (4), leave out “after consultation with” and insert “having regard to the views of”.



*Paragraph (4), as amended, of draft Rule 6 agreed to.*

**The Chairman:** Very good. We move on to paragraph (7).

**Mr Farren:** Given the controversies that are associated with the display of flags and emblems — controversies which I trust we shall not rehearse this morning — and given the overall purpose for which the Forum was established, which is to promote dialogue and understanding, would it not be more in keeping with that purpose, and would it not send a very powerful signal to the people who sent us here, if this body were to consider adopting its own symbol, which might be an adapted emblem, for display when we are meeting?

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I find this disappointing. There was a Forum elsewhere, and I did not hear the SDLP propose that it should have a special logo to send a message to the North of Ireland. *[Interruption]*

**The Chairman:** Do you want to give way, Dr Paisley?

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I do not. I am going to take the business forward.

In keeping with what the Gentleman has said, I think that the Union flag should fly over an elected body in a part of the United Kingdom. If any message needs to go out at this time, it is that the vast majority of the people of this province want to remain within the United Kingdom. That is the message that the IRA needs to hear. All its bombing and murdering is not going to alter the strong determination of the people of Northern Ireland to remain within the United Kingdom. I feel very strongly that the flag of our country should fly when we, as an elected body, meet. In no other country in the world would you have people saying “No, the national flag should not fly because we want to send a message.” Well, the message from the vast majority of Northern Ireland people, including a large number of Roman Catholics, is that they want to remain within the Union and that the Union flag should fly when the Forum is in session.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** For the information of the Forum I wish to indicate that the Dublin Forum used a symbol representing peace and reconciliation, in the shape of a dove. It was very effective, and it would be useful for us to agree on a symbol with which we all could identify. Despite what Dr Paisley says, one of the problems in Northern Ireland has been, and is, that there is a conflict of allegiance and identity. We should not be here to impose views on others. We should try to reach consensus on a symbol that we all could identify with.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** The Tricolour flew over Dublin Castle when the Forum there was meeting. Let us have some truthfulness. The SDLP did not stand up at that Forum and say “You could send a message to Northern Ireland by lowering that flag.” That would have been a very helpful message.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** The issue that the SDLP has raised is worthy of consideration, but as a separate item. A crest or logo for the Northern Ireland Forum should not be considered as an alternative to flying the Union flag. As Dr Paisley and others have



said, flying the Union flag is not something that should be regarded as sectarian or divisive. This is the flag of the nation state of which Northern Ireland is a part. That should be a simple and straightforward proposal, with the weight of the Forum behind it. If, after it had been agreed, the SDLP or anyone else in the Forum were to put forward a proposition that we have a crest or logo on our headed notepaper, or somewhere within this building, we could consider it. However, that is an issue separate from flying the Union flag.

**Dr Alderdice:** I reiterate the point that has been made about the logo used extensively by the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin. It is true that it was not used as a flag. If we were operating entirely in our own clearly public building, such as Parliament Buildings, we would not have any particular objection. It would seem quite reasonable. Unfortunately, it was not possible for us to have a more appropriate building of our own, and some of us were not particularly impressed with the facilities made available to us. But they are not facilities that we have to ourselves.

When the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation was in session at Dublin Castle it did, of course, have exclusive use and, of course, the flag that is used there is flown on other occasions as well. It would be rather unwise for us to feel that we are taking over this building, that it is set aside for our exclusive use. That is not the case, and therefore we do not think it necessary to introduce this Rule or to make these arrangements.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** I understand that the owners of this building have said they would have no objection to the flying of the Union flag here, as in the case of their other buildings.

**Dr Alderdice:** There may be a number of questions in that regard. I gather that the situation is not quite as clear as has been spelt out, but that is not the point that I am making. This building is not reserved for us alone, and it is clear that, to date, the owners have not felt it suitable to fly the flag. It seems to us that it is not an appropriate way of dealing with the matter, particularly during a week when the colours of the flag have been emblazoned on footpaths in a way which is clearly divisive.

**Several Members:** Disgraceful.

**Dr Alderdice:** I agree that it was absolutely disgraceful and intentionally intimidatory. There is an unfortunate tendency to use the flag not with respect — respect that we certainly give it — but as something intimidatory or even threatening to others. We deem that disrespect.

**Rev William McCrea:** Nobody should try to equate the painting of footpaths or anything along the roadside to flying the flag of your country. If Dr Alderdice were to come to my constituency he would find green, white and yellow painted everywhere. His party and quite a number of others find no problem with that and have not been raising the issue. That is completely different. This is a week when we have been remembering the Battle of the Somme, the right of a people to be free and the sacrifice that citizens of this country made in order to keep their freedom. Our Prime Minister said



"Some constituencies felt that, compared to most other countries, the United Kingdom does not fly the flag enough. People are being prosecuted for flying the flag without permission. It should be legal to fly the Union flag from any building without consent. Fly the Union Jack at party conferences; teach national history and heritage; play the national anthem more frequently; persuade the media to be more patriotic. The Government should stand up for Britain."

This should not be a contentious issue. Everyone here is, no doubt, happy to take a cheque at the end of the week under the national flag, to be paid by the British Government. Dr Alderdice and the Alliance Party should consider the matter carefully in that context.

**Dr Alderdice:** I will take in order, so far as I can, the comments that have been made.

First, I find it just as unhelpful, repugnant and intimidatory to paint green, white and orange on the kerbstones as to use red, white and blue. That is neither a respectful nor a proper use of the flag. Secondly, the Member refers to the great sacrifice that was made at the Somme, for which due respect has been paid this week. The flag to which the Member refers flew all over Ireland at that time. Flags were not an issue then, as people from North and South served happily together. This was all one country then. That is my point. If matters had been handled more wisely on all sides it might have been possible for these islands to be kept within one broad jurisdiction. It is a matter of regret that that has not been possible.

To say that the flag might be flown more frequently could well be true for the rest of the United Kingdom, but it seems to me hardly possible to sustain an argument that it should be flown more often in Northern Ireland. Frequently it is not done with due respect, either for the other people in the community or, indeed, for the flag itself. I am not in any way suggesting that it is not appropriate for it to be flown on public buildings. I believe that it is appropriate, and I said at the start that if we had our own public building it might well be the proper thing to do.

It is not helpful to raise the matter at this time. We would not be happy to support the proposal on this occasion, though there may be other situations in which it would be appropriate, and I hope we will be able to find those at some stage.

12.00

**Ms McWilliams:** We too have some difficulties about adding this provision to the Rules as they stand. We wondered, indeed, why such a contentious issue was raised at this particular time in Northern Ireland. As has been said, we are here to try to reach some common understanding and have dialogue, and obviously we are going to have a dialogue about differences. The Women's Coalition is made up of women from various traditions in Northern Ireland — the main traditions and others. We have asked them how they would feel if the Union Jack were flown on this building. They have responded, irrespective of how they feel about the Union, that they would have concerns at this time about the Union Jack.

**A Member:** Shame.

**A Member:** Disgrace.



**Ms McWilliams:** May I finish, please? I never shout "Shame" or "Disgrace" when these Gentlemen are speaking, so I should be very grateful if they would be silent when I am speaking.

**A Member:** We are not traitors.

**Ms McWilliams:** We take the view, at the moment, that this is a contentious issue, and we have looked into the ownership of the building. It is a private building — a joint venture of Short's and the Flax Trust. As a private building, it has workers coming in and out every day of the week. I know that Members are asking for the flag to be flown only on a Friday, to signify that we are in session. In response to that, I say that there are other people coming in and out on a Friday. I know that the Flags and Emblems Act was introduced in Northern Ireland to address such matters. If this were a public building we would perhaps be having a different discussion. As long as it remains private, Members should give some thought to those who are coming in and out every day, as well as to the fact that we ourselves come from the various traditions.

Perhaps, in the end, we will be able to settle on a Northern Ireland symbol that meets with agreement. Here I want to enter a little point of humour. We in the Women's Coalition have given some thought to this, and we have decided that if we could all agree on a symbol, and if one day it were to become a flag for the Forum — I am saying it should be not a flag for the country but a symbol for the Forum — *[Interruption]*

**Mr Tierney:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman, Ms McWilliams asked for silence, and you should rule that she must get silence. We have listened to others. We should now listen to her.

**The Chairman:** I am about to call a spokesperson from the SDLP.

**Mr McClelland:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. While Ms McWilliams was speaking, a Member opposite shouted "traitor". I refer you to Rule 11 — Order in the Forum — and ask you for a ruling.

**The Chairman:** It certainly is an unsatisfactory word, but I did not hear it.

**Mr McClelland:** It was audible at this side of the Chamber. I am calling your attention to Rule 11 and asking you to make a ruling under it.

**The Chairman:** I am going to make this ruling: that Ms McWilliams be allowed to finish in silence the few words that she wanted to say.

**Ms McWilliams:** The point I was going to make is that if the Forum does settle on a symbol that Members can all agree on, we in the Women's Coalition would be glad to knit it.

**Mr Feely:** Do Mr Paisley and Mr McCrea agree that, in the interests of parity of esteem, reconciliation and understanding, the symbol of the Nationalist identity — the Tricolour — should fly on this building at the same time as any other flag they may choose?



**The Chairman:** I remind everybody that time is going on and that to get agreement on this matter, which is proving mildly controversial, we must have a 75% yes.

**Mr McClelland:** Sir, I have asked you for a ruling under Rule 11. The word "traitor" was called out when Mr McWilliams was speaking.

**The Chairman:** I am making no such ruling. Please sit down.

**Mr McClelland:** Why do we have Rules if you are not going to use them?

**The Chairman:** I have asked you to sit down. Will you please do so.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** We were asked a question, and we should answer it. The answer to the Gentleman from the SDLP is "Certainly not" — for the same reason he did not ask for the Union Jack to be flown over the Forum in Dublin. He is pledged to the national flag of a foreign country, and it signifies an attempt to rule this country under Articles 2 and 3. We will not have that flag flying over this building. We will have the national flag.

**Mr Taylor:** This is a most unfortunate discussion. There should be no question about flying the Union flag in Northern Ireland. I am horrified by some of the comments from both the Alliance Party and the Women's Coalition. The Alliance Party made it clear today that it was happy to sit in a Dublin Forum under the Irish Tricolour but would be unhappy to sit in a United Kingdom Forum under the Union flag. That is a message which people in Northern Ireland will resent very much indeed.

As for the Women's Coalition, the argument that this is not a public building and that the Union flag might upset some people who walk into and out of it, taken with the statement that it could be flown on a public building, is facile. People walk into and out of a public building even more so. There is no logic in the Member's argument. I am afraid that the more I listen to the Women's Coalition, the more I believe it is a Nationalist women's organization.

There should be no lengthy debate on this subject. The Union flag is the flag of the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, and should fly on this building, whether it is privately owned or publicly owned, every day we sit.

**Mr Carr:** This discussion points up the fact that identity and flags get us straight away to the raw nerve in this community. If we were all able to agree on a national or other flag to fly over a particular building, there would be no need for a Forum, and there would be no need for the talks process we are involved in. The sad fact is that we cannot agree.

My Colleague Mr Feely has made a suggestion, which, of course, I go along with. If it were possible, in these cases, for the flags of the two major identities to be flown, that would be a good thing. However, I am not naïve enough to expect it now or in the near future. The suggestion made by my Colleague Mr Farren is perhaps the best one — that we do not have a flag. The simple fact is that we cannot agree. While the Union flag may be the national flag for Members opposite, I do not consider it the national flag, and many people



like me are of the same view. The best thing is to have no flag and, possibly, to seek a symbol with which we can all identify.

**The Chairman:** Mr McCartney has been trying to catch my eye for a long time.

**Mr McCartney:** I was beginning to think, Sir, that your middle name is Nelson.

I have a healthy regard for the frankness of the SDLP in this matter. They are Irish Nationalists. They wish to live under the Tricolour, and I respect that. It is what they want. I see heads nodding in agreement. Who knows but that there may come a day when there are sufficient Nationalists in Northern Ireland to bring about Irish unity. I hope that when that day comes, the democrats will observe whatever happens to be the national flag. Certainly, when I attend rugby or other matches — and I have attended Gaelic matches at Croke Park, and will continue to do so because it is a very enjoyable game —

**Mr Carr:** Where did the Gentleman get his ticket?

**Mr McCartney:** If I were to say where I got my ticket the Member might be looking for one from the same source.

When I am there and the national anthem is played and the flag is flown, I observe the courtesies and dignities of the country in which I happen to be. There is no doubt that Northern Ireland currently forms part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. As I understand the position of the SDLP and of the Irish Government, and of everyone else except Sinn Féin, the principle of consent — that Northern Ireland will remain part of the United Kingdom until such time as a majority decide otherwise — is accepted.

I want to deal briefly with the idea of parity of esteem. I endorse parity of esteem entirely, as between individual and individual. I do not believe that anyone should be discriminated against on the basis of his religion or political aspirations or any other basis. I believe that he should have parity of opportunity of employment and equality before the law. There should be absolutely no distinction of any kind between any one man or woman and any other. But I do not accept the political principle of parity of esteem. I do not accept that a minority in a country are entitled to the same rights as, or to parity with, the majority in deciding the constitutional identity of the state.

The central issue is the flag. I am not into the business of flag-flapping. I abhor the idea of anyone's national flag being used as a means of incitement or as a symbol of triumphalism. But there are certain instances in which it is perfectly proper, and is acknowledged in every democratic state as proper, to fly the flag of the country, particularly if the building in question is a public building. The arguments I have heard are singularly unattractive. I can only describe them as "Heepish" — of the Uriah Heep variety. They are arguments in which all sorts of distinctions that do not exist are put forward. I am referring to the arguments of the Alliance Party and of the Women's Coalition.

I respect what the SDLP has said. It does not want a flag that it does not recognize flying on the building. That is fair enough, but I ask the SDLP to look at it this way. When it



asks for its negative — it does not want the flag to fly — it is asking others to do something that they do not wish to do. And these people happen to be the majority.

This issue is before us, and we cannot run away from it. The flag should be flown over this building. I am not interested in having it flown in any provocative way. It certainly should not be flown except when the building takes on some of the indicia of a public building, when it is housing public representatives elected to serve, as best they can, the country of Northern Ireland, within the parameters of the legislation. Let us not get hung up about it. Let us accept that when the Forum met in Dublin the flag of the country in which it was situated flew, and that flag was the Tricolour. If I had been going to Dublin in those circumstances I would have sat there with the Tricolour flying, and I think that everyone else should accept, in that spirit, the flag flying here. But please do not let us have nauseating political speeches that are meant to please everybody but do not have a tittle of logic.

**Mr McMichael:** You said earlier, Mr Chairman, that perhaps there was too much adversarial discussion. I wonder how you feel now.

I want to make clear the position of the Ulster Democratic Party on this issue. It is unfortunate that we are getting into an adversarial debate, which is degenerating into a squabbling match. However, we cannot ignore the reality that Northern Ireland is currently part of the United Kingdom and that it is the wish of the majority of people that it should remain so. The national flag of this territory is the Union flag. Others have aspirations which are contrary to Northern Ireland's remaining within the United Kingdom, but they have not achieved that objective. The reality is that the Union flag is the national flag, and it would be entirely proper, if a flag were to be flown over this building, that it should be the Union flag.

12.15 pm

**Mr McBride:** I want to repudiate Mr Taylor's references to the Alliance Party. He misrepresented our position by saying that we did not want to see the Union flag flying over public buildings. We made it perfectly clear that we were quite happy with that situation, that we had no problems with it. What we would have problems with is flying the flag over the Interpoint building at this time. Mr Taylor, who is something of an elder statesman around here, did not do himself credit by misrepresenting our position. That should be made very clear for the record.

I was in the Forum in Dublin. There may have been a Tricolour there. *[Interruption]* It would be quite appropriate to fly the flag there, for, of course, it is a public building owned by the Irish Government, and is used all the time for Government functions. But I was very conscious, in the Forum in Dublin, of sitting under the baronial arms and banners of the Knights of Saint Patrick and beneath the portraits of the Lord Lieutenants of Ireland over many years. Indeed, there are few buildings in Ireland so rich in respect for the heritage of us all as Dublin Castle.

**The Chairman:** We have not heard from Mr Hugh Carr. *[Interruption]* I am so sorry: we did. My mistake — you are getting a second bite at this.

**Mr Carr:** I will be pleased to get a second bit, if you allow me.



**Mr Hugh Smyth:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I had my hand up about half an hour ago.

**The Chairman:** No point of order. I am ruling that Mr Carr may speak.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** A point of order has to be taken. We need to get the Rules straight.

**The Chairman:** I am taking the point of order, and I am announcing —

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** The point of order is that no person may speak twice in the same debate.

**The Chairman:** I made a mistake. I did not realize that the Member had spoken already. It is my fault, so I am going to allow him to speak now.

**Mr Carr:** In relation to Mr McCartney's point, let me say that I lived in England and respected the Union Jack there. I even took part in —

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** It is very unfair to give someone an opportunity to answer a speech that was made after he spoke. Indeed, it is absolutely ridiculous. Are you going to call us again, Mr Chairman?

**The Chairman:** I made a mistake. I called the Member, thinking that he had not spoken.

**Mr Carr:** We are getting into a debate which could usefully be held over. We could have a number of useful dialogues on the whole business of symbols, identity and all that, but at the moment we cannot agree. We should park this, and stick to Mr Farren's suggestion.

**Mr Eric Smyth:** So far as I am concerned, the people who have shown their ignorance against the flag of this country are bitter. The Union Jack is the flag of our country. People gave their lives for it so that we might have the freedom to meet together as we do today. There is nothing sectarian about the Union Jack. We are British and proud to be British. I went to Dublin as Lord Mayor. I did not tell the Lord Mayor of Dublin to take down the Tricolour because it offended me. And it does offend me in many cases. As the Bible teaches,

"Render . . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's".

If I go down to Dublin, I accept that I go under the authority of the Southern Government and the laws of that country. I do not have to go if I do not wish. I went as Lord Mayor, and I accepted the flag of the Republic of Ireland.

We are here to debate the future of this country, and we have the SDLP objecting, the Alliance Party compromising, as usual, and the Women's Coalition objecting. I am glad that Ms McWilliams has spoken, and I am glad that this is being recorded, because the people on



the Shankill whom I represent would not agree with what she is saying about the flag of their country.

It is a shame that we as a Forum cannot fly the flag of our country. Let us remember that this building was erected with British money. The owners were supported by British finance. The company, which our Leader contacted, said that it would not stop the Union Jack from being flown on the building when the Forum meets. I am glad that Mr Taylor made the point about the Leader of the Alliance Party going down to Dublin to sit under the Tricolour. Yet he comes here and makes excuses about not flying the flag by which he earns his money.

One should be proud to fly the Union flag. It is not sectarian; it is the flag of this country. I am not ashamed of it. I agree with Mr McCartney that people should not flaunt the Union Jack or use it as a sectarian banner. That brings the flag into disrepute. I would like to see it flying, because it is the flag under which I was born.

Until last year the Dublin Government did not recognize the Southern soldiers who gave their lives at the Somme. It took them 60 to 70 years to recognize men who died for the cause of freedom. Let us not hide behind these things. Let us be honest. The SDLP tells us that it wants a good future. Let it recognize that we are in the majority here and that the people of Northern Ireland want to see their flag flying. We do not wish to wave it in their faces or stuff it down their throats. We respect what they believe, but they should respect the views of the majority.

**The Chairman:** I am going to call four more people and let that be enough.

**Mr McKee:** I agree entirely with the sentiments expressed by Mr Eric Smyth. He has got the situation quite right. The arguments put up by the Alliance Party and the Women's Coalition are only an excuse, a red herring. They want to be all things to all people. They want to try to keep the Unionists on board by saying that they agree with the Union flag, and at the same time they want to keep the Nationalists on board by saying that they agree with the Tricolour. They want to sit on the fence with the Tricolour in one hand and the Union Jack in the other. Eventually they will fall off.

Let them take their stand and tell us exactly what they feel. Are they for the Union Jack or the Tricolour? No more excuses, no more red herrings. At least SDLP Members are honest. They tell us what they stand for. Alliance is less than honest with the people of Northern Ireland. I agree that the Union flag should fly from this building. There is nobody here today who will not take his money. Some people are loyal to the half-crown but not to the Crown. So fly the flag.

**Mr Gallagher:** I want to remind everybody that our primary purpose here is to engage in dialogue and to try to reach a greater understanding between our traditions. The SDLP's position concerning the flag on this building should be made quite clear. We do not wish to see any flag flown here. The reason, as I have pointed out already, is that if we are here to engage in meaningful dialogue, it has to be on the basis of promoting respect for the equal rights and validity of our traditions. If we were to put the flag of one tradition on the



building it would give the impression to many that only one identity was being considered here.

Many Members, especially opposite, have raised the matter of the Tricolour flying in Dublin and of some people from here attending the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in that city. It is abundantly clear to everybody that there is no issue whatever about flags or emblems in the Republic of Ireland. Circumstances in Northern Ireland, however, are entirely different. Just how emotive we are about this was illustrated when Mr McCrea was speaking about how frequently emblems crop up on pavements, gable walls, and so on. That arises because of the conflicting identities here and the insecurity about those identities.

**Mr Close:** I should like to remind Members that the purpose and business of this Forum, as stipulated in one of our own Rules, shall be to promote dialogue and understanding within Northern Ireland. Why was that Rule introduced? I ask those that introduced it to search deeply into their hearts and ask whether it was to promote dialogue and understanding throughout Northern Ireland. I would like them to consider the fact that the original Rules — drafted, presumably, by representatives of Her Majesty's Government — did not see the necessity for such a provision. Now everyone talks about how British and how loyal he is. But why did the representatives of Her Majesty's Government not feel it necessary to incorporate such a Rule? Could it be that, having established this body to promote dialogue and understanding, they recognized that the inclusion of such Rule would give rise to the very ranting and raving that we have heard this morning, leading to dissatisfaction?

**Mr Dodds:** I did not intend to speak at this stage, but I must comment on this language. Earlier there were references to parliamentary language and unsuitable language. Words like "ranting and raving" — I do not know whether Mr Close was referring to his own Leader or to somebody else opposite — are not helpful. The Member lectures people on dialogue and understanding, but when people express a view with sincerity and conviction he, like so many others, accuses them of ranting and raving. He should look into his own heart.

**Mr Close:** If Mr Dodds or any other Member is offended by the term "ranting and raving" I have no problem in withdrawing it.

The purpose of this Forum, let the record show, is to promote dialogue and understanding. Does the introduction of this paragraph do that? It strikes me that the essence of various words uttered here this morning is inconsistent with the promotion of dialogue and understanding. This has proved to be the most contentious, bigoted debate we have had since the Forum was set up, and that does not augur well. If people are interested in dialogue and understanding they should do the decent thing and withdraw this provision.

*12.30 pm*

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** The paragraph will not be withdrawn. I am the one who sponsored it. I did not think that it would come up so late. I wanted it to be debated earlier. As the person who put the letter in to the Committee, I am responding to what has been said. I deeply regret the words that Mr Close has used. He has attacked those defending the national flag, but not those who want another flag.



**Mr Cedric Wilson:** This has been a very useful exercise, and it certainly falls within the ambit of dialogue and understanding. That could not have been more clearly demonstrated. We all have a better understanding of each other's position. I agree entirely with my Leader, Mr McCartney, when he says that we can fully understand the position of the SDLP. It has consistently held that position. Perhaps the reason Mr Close and the Alliance Party are particularly hot under the collar at the moment is that it is getting close to "Make your mind up" time. Alliance presented itself to the electorate as, and Dr Alderdice told us the other day in the negotiations that it is, a pro-Union party. There is a lot of fear on the part of the Alliance Party. Today its members are going to have to answer to the people who elected them. My Colleague Mr Smyth is quite right.

The Women's Coalition finds itself in a similar position. Many of the people who supported it on other issues respect the Union flag and consider it their flag. This debate has been very helpful in addressing people's concerns. In the negotiations, there will come a time when the Coalition's chairman has to determine which parties are Unionist, which are Nationalist and which are otherwise. This may help Dr Alderdice, the Coalition, the Labour Party and others to get their act together when the time comes. They have a dilemma. Many people who voted for those parties want to see the Union flag flying over this building. Ms McWilliams talked about knitting an emblem for the Forum. I suggest that she get a large quantity of red, white and blue wool.

**The Chairman:** Do Members want to return to this matter after lunch?

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** I beg to move: That the Question be now put.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** I welcome the SDLP's recommendation about a logo. It makes good sense to have headed paper, but the more I listen to this debate and hear the reasons for not flying the Union flag, the more determined I am to ensure that it will fly. What are we asking for? We are asking to have the Union flag flown on the building when the Forum is meeting. We are talking about probably six hours a week. SDLP Members have said that it would send out the wrong message. What sort of message does that send to the people I represent — the Unionist community? Dialogue and understanding include the Unionist people. The vast majority of Unionist-minded people would like the flag to be flown on the days we meet. Therefore there is no argument against it. I do not believe that six hours a week should offend anyone. Many Members who have spoken belong to local authorities. To my knowledge, the Union flag is flown there, and it does not seem to create any great difficulties.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** Mr Chairman, you have a procedural motion to put the Question.

**The Chairman:** I am going to put the Question.

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

**The Chairman:** Is this a genuine point of order?

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** This debate originated with an amendment put forward by the SDLP. Are we going to vote first on the amendment and then come to substantive issues?



**The Chairman:** The SDLP did not put forward an amendment.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** It did, Sir — that we should consider an alternative.

**The Chairman:** That is not an amendment as such; it is a suggestion. Let us now consider how to approach this. I am keen to see you all getting a good lunch so that you will feel a little more comfortable with each other.

**Mr Stephenson:** Can the motion be put to the Forum?

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** If other people want to speak in the debate they should be allowed to.

**Mr Stephenson:** We have a procedural motion.

**The Chairman:** The idea of putting the Question now does not appear to command universal consent.

*The meeting was suspended at 12.35 pm and resumed at 1.45 pm.*

**The Chairman:** I call Dr Paisley to read out his amendment.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I sent my proposal to the Business Committee, which came back with

“(7) The Union Flag shall be flown on the Building when the Forum is meeting.”

That has not been agreed, either in the Forum or in the Committee.

*Question put:* That the proposed paragraph (7) be agreed to.

*The Forum divided: Ayes 50; Noes 23.*

*Ayes: Antony Alcock, May Beattie, Robert Bolton, David Brewster, David Browne, Cecil Calvert, David Campbell, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, James Clarke, Wilson Clyde, Ivan Davis, Nigel Dodds, David Ervine, Sam Gardiner, Joseph Gaston, Oliver Gibson, John Hunter, Derek Hussey, John Junkin, Peter King, Trevor Kirkland, St Clair McAlister, Robert McCartney, William McCrea, Alan McFarland, Jack McKee, Gary McMichael, Maurice Morrow, Dermot Nesbitt, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Ian R K Paisley, Ian Paisley Jnr, Joan Parkes, Edwin Poots, Iris Robinson, Thomas Robinson, James Shannon, Eric Smyth, Hugh Smyth, James Speers, May Steele, Des Stewart, Robert Stoker, John Taylor, Peter Weir, John White, Robert John White, Cedric Wilson, Sammy Wilson.*

*Noes: John Alderdice, Eileen Bell, Joe Byrne, Hugh Carr, Seamus Close, Arthur Doherty, Mark Durkan, Sean Farren, Dorita Field, Tommy Gallagher,*



*Steve McBride, Kieran McCarthy, Donovan McClelland, Alasdair McDonnell, Paddy McGowan, Monica McWilliams, Oliver Napier, Sean Neeson, Margaret Ritchie, Brid Rodgers, Pearl Sagar, Jonathan Stephenson, John Tierney.*

*The Chairman ruled that, as the required 75% vote in favour of the motion had not been achieved, the Question was negatived.*

**The Chairman:** So the proposed paragraph will go back to the Committee?

**Several Members:** No.

**A Member:** It is rejected.

**Dr McDonnell:** What decision are we taking? My understanding is that a draft Rule is rejected unless it commands 75% support.

**The Chairman:** It seems to me that it is rejected today. However, a considerable number of people are absent. We had better leave it that the item will go back to the Rules Committee. Several others will be controversial.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** The other ones that we rejected went back. It seems that some Members want a special way of getting rid of the national flag. When another provision was voted on, we let it go back. The arrangement was that these things would all go back to the Committee.

**The Chairman:** For better or for worse, I rule that it will go back to the Committee.

2.00 pm

**Dr McDonnell:** I want to know — and this is a genuine point — what will happen to other motions.

**Several Members:** The same.

**Dr McDonnell:** I am not asking other Members; I am asking you, Mr Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Exactly the same. This is the third such case.

**Dr Alderdice:** In any case, it is entirely open to Members to raise an amendment or a development in the Forum. There is no change.

## 8. BUSINESS OF THE FORUM

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** I understand that we have overcome the problem with regard to the wording.

**The Chairman:** Yes, indeed.



*Amendment made:* In paragraph (2), leave out “after consultation with” and insert “having regard to the views of”.

*Paragraph (2), as amended, draft Rule 8 agreed to.*

## 11. ORDER IN THE FORUM

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** Sub-paragraphs (a), (b), (d) and (e) of 11(1) have been agreed.

There has again been considerable debate about a way of describing objectionable words. I believe that earlier today some SDLP Members took exception to words that they thought they had heard from this side of the Forum. That is precisely why we wanted to include a reference to Erskine May. It is desirable that words used in a particular context can be identified as being objectionable — better than thrusting the decision on the Chairman.

**The Chairman:** We might be misled by the use of an Englishman so eminent as Erskine May. People in this province use words that Mr Erskine May never heard. We should guide ourselves as to what is objectionable. The Chairman has to call attention to words used. If a considerable proportion of Members should regard them as objectionable, surely it could be so assumed. That is how I see it. I do not know much about Erskine May.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Erskine May is a compendium of rules that govern parliamentary debate, and it contains a list of objectionable words from Ireland, England and Wales. It was a United Kingdom Parliament that started the process of picking out objectionable words. Erskine May is not an English book; it is a United Kingdom book, which used to include the South of Ireland. I think, Mr Chairman, that your view would not work out. The other members of the party of the person concerned could say “Oh no, that is not an objectionable word.” It would then come down to voting, and the Chair would have no authority. The Chair needs authority to deem certain words objectionable and the right to demand that they be withdrawn.

**The Chairman:** I am very grateful for that information. You have sold me Erskine May. I will not buy it, but I will study it. Perhaps we should send this matter back to the Rules Committee with the serious object of studying the words. I have a strong impression that Members would prefer not to vote on it just now.

**A Member:** Do not get Erskine May mixed up with Erskine Mayne.

**The Chairman:** To begin with, I did.

**Ms Bell:** I take on board what you say, Mr Chairman, but we had a long and deep discussion about this matter. It will serve no purpose to go back to it. We spent nearly an hour and a half on this one line.



**Mr Hugh Smyth:** As one of those who chaired that meeting in your absence, Sir, I am quite happy to let go if it is accepted in its present form. But if people vote against it, it will go back anyway. In any case, let us not go through that old count again.

**Rev William McCrea:** Perhaps I can help, Mr Chairman. Ms Bell may not have seen her Leader nodding his head in approval of your ruling that this would go back to the Committee. If there is conflict of interests, we need clarification.

**Ms Bell:** I would like to have my seat changed.

**Rev William McCrea:** Let us not go back to musical chairs.

**Ms Bell:** We may have a difference of opinion, but we do not have a conflict of interests.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Why did the Lady not tell us that the real basis of this argument was objection from the SDLP because Erskine May is a British Parliament textbook?

**The Chairman:** It has already been decided to refer the matter back. That seemed to be the feeling of a majority.

### 13. VOTING

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** With regard to paragraph (2), the problem revolved around those abstaining. I think it is fair and accurate to say that every party on the Rules Committee, except Alliance, was happy that abstentions should not be counted in determining the number of votes cast. That is why we have the Alliance amendment. We are quite happy to proceed with a vote, but, given that the matter would be referred back anyway, I do not see much point.

**The Chairman:** Perhaps I could short-circuit this. There is misunderstanding on the part of some people, including myself, about the treatment of abstentions. Am I right in thinking that the idea is to show Ayes and Noes as percentages of the total vote?

**Mr King:** Perhaps I can clarify the Ulster Unionist position on this matter. We are very concerned that people who have no opinion should not be able to block the views of those who have an opinion. If the Alliance amendment were accepted, we should have a situation in which, for example, with 77 Ayes, 34 Noes and 10 Abstentions, the Question would be negatived. Counting the abstentions would make it impossible to reach the 66% threshold. I can think of no democratic forum in the world in which that is acceptable or allowed.

**Mr Neeson:** As the person who dealt with this matter in the Committee, I think it important that abstentions be counted. Mr King's statement that there is no precedent in other democratic bodies is wrong. For example, in the Council of Ministers of the European Union the vast majority of issues can be settled by qualified-majority voting. In the case of a Commission proposal, at least 62 votes must be cast by at least 10 member states. An abstention therefore counts as a no. There are other examples: the United Nations, South



Africa, Switzerland, Belgium and Norway. In those places the weighted majority takes account of abstentions. The Alliance amendment — one of two before the Forum — should be endorsed.

**Mr Hussey:** Mr Neeson talks about votes counted. We are talking about percentages. Therein lies the difference.

**Mr McCartney:** It is extraordinary that in a democratic gathering, such as this, people can decide not to exercise their vote, one way or the other, but claim that doing nothing should influence the outcome. Maybe we should give a particular nomenclature to this type of voting. We could call it the Pontius Pilate vote. We could ask all the Pontiuses to stand up and be counted. That is what it amounts to. I think that St. Paul had something to say about this type of person:

“thou art neither cold nor hot ... I will spue thee out of my mouth.”

I have a good deal of regard for honourable opponents who state what they are about. You know what they stand for. It is not what you think, but you can at least take your cap off to them. But the Pontius Pilates of this world should not be given any encouragement.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I should like to inform my Friend that the words he quoted came from a higher authority — the Lord.

Mr Neeson is pushing us to a Council of Ministers — not an elected body but one consisting of delegates of Governments, such as the United Nations. We are elected by the people, and we should have views and be able to say aye or no. If anyone does not say aye or no his vote should be lost.

**The Chairman:** Dr Alderdice wants to have a word, but we should decide fairly soon whether to go for a vote.

**Dr Alderdice:** Advocates such as Mr McCartney are particularly familiar with contexts in which it is either this or that. It is for or against on all occasions. This tends to be the English approach to the constitution and to the legal system. It is not the traditional approach, of course, in Scotland or, indeed, in the rest of Europe, where the desire is to find the truth, and not just to play a game. When we come to important questions of law and constitution — *[Interruption]*. You obviously know very little about it — it is quite usual for even those who choose not even to come in and vote to be counted. Were not that the case, there would already be devolution in Scotland, where the very decision not to vote was taken into account when it came to working out percentages.

I entirely understand the position of a lawyer who works in this context and demands clarity, often at the expense of accuracy, but we take our position. We are strong in defence of our principle that everyone's position should be accepted, counted and taken note of. Of course, this would not be our first time to be voted down by a majority, on both sides, content to see toing and froing without any resolution of the problem. So be it, but we continue to take our position of principle, as expressed in this amendment.



**The Chairman:** It certainly was presented very strongly by Mr Neeson in the Rules Committee.

We could be discussing this for some time. There seems to be very little likelihood of our getting 75% consensus on the Alliance amendment.

2.15 pm

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** Some parties' representatives on the Rules Committee are not here today. What some Members will be voting against was agreed by all parties other than Alliance.

**The Chairman:** I think that everybody understands that.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** We need 75%. I am trying to save you half a day's work.

**The Chairman:** That is very generous of you, but we must have a vote.

**Mr Brewster:** Would the Alliance Party, in a spirit of assistance, back this paragraph if, instead of "Abstain", it were to say "Sit on the fence"?

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** The whole purpose of bringing to the Forum those matters not agreed in the Committee is to find out Members' views so that they can be taken on board. If there is not agreement in the Forum the matter goes back to the Committee.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** Mr Hugh Smyth mentioned that all parties on the Rules Committee, with the exception of Alliance, had agreed to this. I think that the Alliance members of the Rules Committee indicated that if we could not reach agreement they would be happy to proceed to a vote. That is what we should now do.

**The Chairman:** We have the three-minute interval, and one never knows what might happen in three minutes.

*Amendment proposed:* At end of paragraph (2), add

"For these purposes abstentions shall be included in the votes cast."

*Question put:* That the amendment be made.

*The Forum proceed to a Division.*

*A Member's name having been called, without response —*

**The Chairman:** We will come back to Ms Bell.

**Several Members:** No.

**The Chairman:** You are a very hard lot.



*The Forum divided: Ayes 6; Noes 70.*

*Ayes: John Alderdice, Seamus Close, Steve McBride, Kieran McCarthy, Oliver Napier, Sean Neeson.*

*Noes: Antony Alcock, May Beattie, Robert Bolton, David Brewster, David Browne, Joe Byrne, Cecil Calvert, David Campbell, Gregory Campbell, Hugh Carr, Mervyn Carrick, Hugh Casey, James Clarke, Wilson Clyde, Ivan Davis, Nigel Dodds, Arthur Doherty, Jeffrey Donaldson, Mark Durkan, David Ervine, Sean Farren, Frank Freely, Dorita Field, Tommy Gallagher, Sam Gardiner, Joseph Gaston, Oliver Gibson, John Hunter, Derek Hussey, John Junkin, Peter King, Trevor Kirkland, St Clair McAlister, Robert McCartney, Donovan McClelland, William McCrea, Alasdair McDonnell, Alan McFarland, Patsy McGlone, Paddy McGowan, Jack McKee, Gary McMichael, Maurice Morrow, Dermot Nesbitt, Conor Cruise O'Brien, Ian R K Paisley; Ian Paisley Jnr, Joan Parkes, Edwin Poots, Margaret Ritchie, Iris Robinson, Thomas Robinson, Brid Rodgers, Jim Rodgers, Pearl Sagar, James Shannon, Eric Smyth, Hugh Smyth, James Speers, May Steele, Jonathan Stephenson, Des Stewart, Robert Stoker, John Taylor, John Tierney, Peter Weir, John White, Robert John White, Cedric Wilson, Sammy Wilson.*

*Question accordingly negated.*

**Mr Neeson:** There is another amendment, and the Forum should make a decision on that today.

**The Chairman:** Does everybody agree that we should go through another vote?

**Mr King:** I am happy to have a vote on the Official Unionist amendment at any time, but surely, after the vote we have just had, the Committee can look at this again and come to consensus, in the knowledge that the Alliance Party has no support in the Forum for its proposals. To have a vote now would be time-wasting, and I understand that we have an important debate on education in the pipeline. That being the case, I consider a vote to be unnecessary.

**The Chairman:** It does seem like an exercise in futility.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Could we not pass it by saying "Aye"?

**The Chairman:** Yes, we could do that.

**Several Members:** Agreed.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Why don't we adopt the European method of voting and have a show of hands for and against? That would show a majority clearly, and you, Mr Chairman, would not have to call out all the names.



**The Chairman:** How do you all feel about a show of hands?

**Mr Gallagher:** I was in agreement with Mr King when he suggested that we send this back to the Committee. Mr Gregory Campbell did not quite articulate our position on this in the Committee. We agreed that it should come forward for the Forum to decide. Now that we have voted on the Alliance amendment, it should be taken back to the Rules Committee.

**The Chairman:** We shall do that.

#### 14. COMMITTEES OF THE FORUM

**The Chairman:** The position in respect of 14(4)(a) has already been clarified by Dr Alderdice.

**Mr McBride:** Draft Rule 14(4)(a) raises the same issue as the matter we voted on earlier.

**The Chairman:** It is agreed.

**Mr McBride:** No, it is not agreed. It has to go back for reconsideration because it raises the question of whether a Committee can add members after the Forum itself has made the appointments. A previous provision of the Rules Committee was voted down. This one too should go back for further consideration.

**The Chairman:** This is correct. So there are four items to go back to the Rules Committee.

2.30 pm

We have succeeded in getting 40 provisions agreed today. That is a wonderful effort. You did very well. I think I will go away again.

**Dr Alderdice:** A fairly significant number of Rules have been agreed. I understand that they will not come into force until approved by the Secretary of State. I do not take a particularly strong view, but I wonder if there might be value in forwarding to the Secretary of State, for approval, the Rules already agreed. We could then begin to operate on the basis of those Rules, and the remainder could be submitted as a small batch. Dr Paisley has indicated that there is a further Rule he would like to put forward, and there may well be others. However, it seems to me that we have a fairly large batch already agreed, and we may be able to put those into operation.

**The Chairman:** Dr Paisley, do you have a problem about this?

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** No, but we are so near the end that I think we should conclude. If we get some Rules passed, there will be those who say "We needn't worry about these". We should concentrate our minds. There is something in these Rules about voting. I should like to say to members of the Committee that there ought to be some system whereby an



ordinary vote — one that does not require a 75% or 66% majority — can be taken on a show of hands. That would greatly speed up our deliberations. I should like the Business Committee to consider this proposal, as well as a motion, which Mr Dodds will hand in on our behalf to the Business Committee, regarding how a vote of no confidence in the Chairman might be dealt with.

**The Chairman:** Very good. I suppose I have earned that. I shall answer it in just a moment.

I have already been in communication about the situation we now find ourselves in, which, being optimistic, I anticipated. We have agreed a great majority of these things. There are some additions, including a pretty interesting one that we have just heard about, and there are four which clearly need to go back to the drawing-board. The position, as I understand it, is that it is quite likely — I am probably talking a bit out of turn — that we will get all that agreed. Where we have not agreed, the wording in the initial Rules of Procedures will be retained. How do you all feed about that?

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** We should concentrate on finishing the Rules. We should put our shoulders to the wheel and not look back. Otherwise we are not fit to be Members of the Forum.

**The Chairman:** All right. I am beaten again. We shall meet here again on Monday. Perhaps, over the weekend, people could consider any compromise or movement they might make.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Mr Farren will compromise over the weekend, when he hears the Lambeg drums!

**The Chairman:** Right!

**Ms Sagar:** I should like to comment on statements made this morning regarding the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. As everyone knows, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition is made up of a cross-section of the two main communities. I happen to be a Protestant. It is a pity you did not hear the word "traitor" being used this morning, Mr Chairman. I certainly did. I object and will continue to object, to anybody in this Chamber calling my Protestantism into question. I do not think that our position regarding the flying of the flags was made clear this morning. We want nobody's flag to fly on the Forum. *[Interruption]* This is not a public building. It is a privately owned building. That is the point we are making. We do not object to the Union flag. We are in Northern Ireland, and we agree that this is a part of the United Kingdom.

**A Member:** And you take the money too!

**The Chairman:** Quiet.

**Ms Sagar:** We object to flying the flag on a building to which people have come to work. Our idea is to include people, not exclude them. That was the basis of our objection.



**The Chairman:** Thank you, Mrs Sagar. Your comments have been noted.

**Mr Dodds:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. The last speech was a return to a previous debate. You should be ruling that sort of intervention totally out of order. It was a substantial speech which had nothing to do with a point of order. And it was not the next item of business. We could open up a whole new debate on ridiculous comments and statements of the sort being made today by this Member. Mr Chairman, you should discharge your responsibilities and rule a contribution of that sort out of order, because it clearly is out of order.

**The Chairman:** The day started with me being chastised for being too dictatorial. I think I am being too lenient now. Quite a point is being made here.

**Ms Sagar:** I indicated this morning that I wanted to come back to this.

**Mr Jim Rodgers:** Sit down and shut up.

**The Chairman:** We have a little time left.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** I want to object to some of the language that is being used. I distinctly heard someone saying "Sit down and shut up." That is certainly objectionable language.

**The Chairman:** We really must try to avoid this sort of situation. We are here for dialogue and to get on with each other. If I say things to which Members object, I shall apologize. People ought to be conscious that we do not want adversarial work here. We want to be as courteous with each other as possible.

**Mr Neeson:** In response to Ms Rodgers's comments, I should like to identify Mr Jim Rodgers as having made that remark. I call on Mr Rodgers to apologize to Ms Sagar.

**Mr Jim Rodgers:** I have absolutely no intention of making an apology. For Mr Neeson's benefit, let me make it clear that I stand by what I said. The Member was not talking on the subject, as Mr Dodds has pointed out.

**Mr McClelland:** Twice I have got to my feet since this started —

**The Chairman:** You have had very little luck so far, but you are up now.

**Mr McClelland:** On both occasions, Mr Chairman, I wanted to urge you to stamp some authority in respect of the type of language that is being used in the Forum. You should do that now.

**The Chairman:** I did use words which I hope conveyed that.

**Mr McClelland:** The only words that I remember were those telling me to sit down. If you are going to use some other words, will you please start now.



2.45 pm

**The Chairman:** Like "Sit down."

### EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION

**The Chairman:** We have made great progress, but there is one more thing that can be done today if we all put our minds to it. We have a consensual motion, would you believe? Do you all know what that is? I didn't, until I heard it this morning.

**A Member:** Between adults in private.

**The Chairman:** No. It is not something done by consenting adults, or anything like that.

We have a motion — our first motion — which has been agreed unanimously by the Rules Committee. It is on a question of education. We have a choice. I have a list of 12 to 15 people who wish to speak. The motion is in these terms:

"That in the light of the recent decision by the Minister responsible for education, the Forum invites submissions from education and library boards and other interested parties on the contribution of educational services and structures to the promotion of dialogue and understanding within Northern Ireland and, consequently, asks the Minister to have regard to the views of the Forum before implementing the decision."

I have a choice: to ask 15 people to speak, or to ask the Forum to agree to this without debate.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** We are going to propose an amendment, so the motion will not be consensual.

**The Chairman:** So the situation is not quite as I hoped.

**Mr King:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I note that 15 Members want to speak. It is after 2.45 pm, and the Forum normally rises at 4 o'clock. I wonder if we could have a ruling from the Chair, or a proposal from the body of the Forum, that this debate be suspended at 4 o'clock and resumed on Monday.

**The Chairman:** All agreed to that?

*It was so decided.*

**Mr Gibson:** I beg to move:

That in the light of the recent decision by the Minister responsible for education, the Forum invites submissions from education and library boards and other interested parties on the contribution of educational services and structures to the promotion of dialogue and understanding within Northern Ireland and, consequently, asks the Minister to have regard to the views of the Forum before implementing the decision.



This morning I made the pertinent remark that the electorate expects some action from this Forum. It is right and proper that we are all meeting today, that you, Mr Chairman, are allowing this motion and that the Rules Committee was prepared to present it even though Rules have not been completed. Last week, when we could equally well have had this discussion, the SDLP violently objected, but when they went home and got savaged by their own electorate —

**The Chairman:** Please withdraw the word “violently”.

**Mr McCartney:** You can object violently without being violent.

**Mr Gibson:** I am saying that these people objected violently to the discussion.

**The Chairman:** I see.

**Mr Gibson:** Therefore in the west of the province, where a board is to be taken away, the SDLP finds itself in great difficulty. Earlier this week party members had to redeem their position by running to Westminster. I believe that the flag was flying there.

The Forum is behind the motion, though possibly not unanimously. Anyway, it is behind the substance of the motion. The current regime at Stormont has made various moves to change education administration in Northern Ireland. The vast majority of people here take the view that it is Northern Ireland people who should change the administration. This view is also taken by a trade union representative who wrote to us.

**The Chairman:** I have a letter from the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance to that effect.

**Mr Gibson:** That is the one to which I refer.

In view of this feeling, being expressed all over Northern Ireland, and in view of the fact that council after council has supported the ground swell of opinion, the Minister should be asked to put his directive on hold. This is important. I have slight reservations about asking the Minister to have regard to our views. We may need to be somewhat stronger. Representations that I and, I am sure, others throughout the province are getting indicate that people would like the Forum to give this matter serious examination. They also expect us to gather advice from the various boards. That would be an excellent starting-point. It would let us see the current state of administration.

This is also an opportunity for the Forum to produce an advisory report. It would have to be a report of substance. It would have to be profound. We should get the best possible advice on what system could operate in Northern Ireland. If changes are to be made to boards they must be changes for the better, in terms of cost-benefit, social and administrative factors. They will have to carry the weight of thought and of the best advice and be profound. The Minister will not be stopped unless he is convinced that we can produce something of consequence. When I suggested the motion to you at our last meeting, Mr Chairman, I thought that it was a golden opportunity for the Forum to be very positive and constructive. I thought that you could approach the Secretary of State with a view to



advising the Minister for Education that the Forum intended to prepare an advisory report and take the matter very seriously.

We have an opportunity today to open up this discussion. Council officials are saying the same things as we have said: "Stop for the moment, Minister. Take time to think. Is this the best for the future of Northern Ireland?" Such questions are being asked not just by those on boards but also by parents, teachers and elected representatives. They are not simply saying no. They are saying much more than that. They are saying "This is the time for critical, honest, hard-headed examination of a commodity highly valued by every parent and every other person in Northern Ireland." Education in Northern Ireland is of such a high standard that it has been copied in many parts of the world. I understand that a cross-party delegation of Members of Parliament will meet the Minister on 11 July to put forward the same view.

I believe that the Forum should also approach the Minister with a request that he put this directive on hold. The Forum should then set about the serious task of deciding how to proceed. This would, I think, be a worthwhile job. It would be an indication not just of positiveness but also of the Forum's ownership of any report produced. We would bring the electorate with us. But what was presented to the Minister would have to be profound enough to convince him that it was a Forum landmark.

I suggest that we amend the final sentence of the motion to make it read

"asks the Minister to put the directive on hold until the views of the Forum are presented, in the form of an advisory report".

I shall be happy to hear the views of other Members.

**The Chairman:** Mr Nesbitt, you were the acting Chairman of the Business Committee. I do not know if I thanked you for doing a very good job. If not, I do so now.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Your thanks may be a little pre-emptive. I have a little difficulty, in principle, with this. It is highly important that the Forum get a consensual motion. This was tabled last Wednesday afternoon. The various parties present at that meeting were to consult and come forward at 9.30 today, when we hoped to have an opinion. At 9.30 this morning we still did not have an opinion from Mr Gibson's party. I understand that. Perhaps its representatives were not able to consult. I genuinely regret that we may not be able to consider that iteration.

3.00 pm

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Our position was clear. When we put it forward, the Member said that he could agree with every word of it. We are not changing. The Chairman is not being asked to convey to the Minister that his proposal should be put on hold. That is very important, yet it is left out completely.

**The Chairman:** So we are not quite as consensual as we were.



**Mr Nesbitt:** Dr Paisley has said that I echoed the motion last Friday. My precise words can be checked in the Record of Debates. I echoed the words uttered by Dr Paisley, which may not have been precisely those in the motion proposed by his party. I regret this because my party could accept that adjustment. We are asking the Minister to put the decision on hold until the Forum presents a report. Indeed, if we are going to meet with all the education and library boards, presumably we will have a report. In all likelihood, such a report would be forwarded to the Minister. Otherwise it would not be worthwhile having one.

What I say at this juncture is, first, that it is regrettable that we did not have it this morning and, secondly, that if we had consensus on the amendment, we could deal with it on that basis.

**The Chairman:** Does anyone have any worries about the slightly different words that Mr Gibson used?

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** We went in good faith to the Business Committee meeting last Wednesday. We had our own proposal, which we twice agreed to amend. We amended it at the beginning by adding

“in view of the Minister’s recent decision”

and then we added the last bit. As it has been discussed at length in the Business Committee, it is now a consensual motion. We are not prepared to change it again without further consultation. But in view of the serious issues facing this community as a result of the Minister’s decision, it would be unwise to delay discussion further. The Minister will have a record of the debate. We have accepted that he should be asked to have regard to the views expressed in the Forum. I have no doubt that the comments made by all parties will be quite strong and that the Minister will be left in no doubt as to the feeling of the people of Northern Ireland about his proposals. To delay this issue any further would be unfortunate because it is very serious and important.

**The Chairman:** The problem is that we have a very slight difference as to the content of the consensual motion.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** We have already changed the motion twice after consultation. We are not going to come here, having had a consensual motion agreed by everyone at the Business Committee this morning, to be told that one of the parties has not agreed it.

**The Chairman:** A slight modification.

**Mr McCartney:** I am rising only because I understand that Mr Nesbitt has given way. I am not speaking *de novo*, as it were, but only with my Friend’s permission.

It seems to me that all the parties are telling the Minister not to do anything about implementing his directive on reducing the number of boards to three until he has had an opportunity to read our report. The SDLP seems to think that the record of the Forum debate is sufficient. Others think that the Forum should provide some sort of report. What we want



is that the Minister do nothing until he hears from this body. It seems sensible that, rather than have him work his way through what may prove to be a somewhat disjointed debate, this body should try to distill the essence of its contribution and give it to him in a reasonably clear and digestible document.

**Ms Bell:** I share Mr Nesbitt's regret. What Mr McCartney has said does nothing to take away from the original motion. It will be within our remit to make a report at some stage. I take the point that Ms Rodgers made. We were given the material this morning to look at and discuss, and that is what we should be doing now.

**Rev William McCrea:** Are we saying the same things here?

**The Chairman:** Yes.

**Rev William McCrea:** Let us get it clear. The motion, which is consensual, does not say that the Minister should put his action on hold until we have produced a report.

**The Chairman:** Before implementing the decision. That is what it says.

**Mr Nesbitt:** That is the point I was going to make. We have no problem with either phrase because we believe they mean exactly the same. Asking the Minister to have regard to something before implementing it is asking him to put it on hold. However, the Business Committee is very conscious of the viewpoints of parties in the Forum and was bending over backwards — in the best of senses — to accommodate them through a consensual motion.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I do not know where the Business Committee gets the authority to decide that a motion cannot be brought to the Forum. It is saying that it will not let us discuss a certain motion, that there will be consensual motion instead.

**Mr Nesbitt:** We got our authority from the Forum last Friday. It was agreed that the Business Committee should find a consensual motion to bring forward this Friday.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Why does the Gentleman not tell us what happened at the Business Committee? Why does he not tell us that the SDLP opposed our motion? Why does he not also tell us that the SDLP said that it could not find time to discuss this matter but had time to take its own delegation to the Minister? The Forum should have taken the initiative. We should have been first, but we were not.

**The Chairman:** Before going any further we ought to remember that life moves on. Representations are made after people's ideas have been sussed out. Who is going to read this? Everybody is at it: the education and library boards — I have heard them myself — NIPSA, and so on. If we do not look out, we are going to spend our time arguing about trivia. Trivia it may be, but there are great numbers of people who want to speak on this.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** All those who have spoken so far have made one important point: the end result is going to be the same. The issues are going to be discussed, debated and put on record. We are asking the Minister to have regard to our views. How do we do this? We are dancing on the head of a pin. We are not elected as a body to direct Ministers.



**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** They do not want us to have any powers.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** The Forum does not have any powers. I am going by the law. The Gentleman and his Colleagues are very anxious to abide by the law. As we were told a few weeks ago, the law states that we are a deliberative body. We are not a consultative body. In this debate we are trying to find a way for the Forum — which has no powers of consultation, only powers of deliberation — to fulfil its remit to discuss this very important issue. I am afraid, listening to what is being said today, that some people are more interested in making party political propaganda than in discussing the issue and allowing the Minister to hear the very strong views of the Forum.

**Rev William McCrea:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. Is it not a fact that there is nothing to stop any party in the Forum putting forward amendments? Surely the purpose is to debate the views of elected representatives, whether they are on the Business Committee or not. There is an amendment. Should we not get on and actually debate this, and then come forward with our views at the end of the proceedings? This is a very important matter of deep concern to the community. We believe that the Forum has a vital role to play in preventing the Government from taking action that would ruin the lives and the future education of our children.

**The Chairman:** That is very helpful. Mr Gibson gave a lot of thought to this, and he brought out all the underlying problems. It would be a great shame, if we are so close to consensus, to argue about whose wording should be used.

**Mr Farren:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I simply want to ensure that the debate proceeds in an orderly way.

**The Chairman:** That is what I am doing.

**Mr Farren:** The hiatus arose from a request — from yourself, I think — that we take the amendment straight into the original motion. Having given the kind of consideration that we did, both in the party and in the Business Committee, to the consensual motion, we felt that we should not be asked to do that at this point. We are not objecting to any party's putting down an amendment. Let the debate proceed.

**The Chairman:** Very good.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I object to the Business Committee's butchering the recommendations of any party. It should allow time for debate. Members will put down motions that we do not agree with, and they will have to be debated.

**The Chairman:** The next Member on my list is Mr Hussey.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Mr Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Does Mr Hussey agree to stand down?



**Mr Hussey:** I am waiting to find out what the motion is, because I want to discuss the issue.

**The Chairman:** You have heard it read out.

**Mr Hussey:** When the motion is sorted out, the issue can be addressed.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I wish to do the same, and I have not yet spoken on the issue.

**The Chairman:** Then let us hear you.

**Mr Nesbitt:** Everyone agrees that the motion before us contains two elements. We wish to express concern about the education structure in Northern Ireland, and we want the Minister to do nothing until he is aware of our views. My views are quite clear. The boards were formed about 23 years ago, at a politically difficult time, with the expectation that there would be a Parliament at Stormont. We all know about the McCrory gap, as it was called. The boards operated in a political vacuum.

I think that there is consensus — if I may use that word — in Northern Ireland. People are, by and large, quite happy with the way the boards have worked. They are close to the people. They have a cohesive effect, encouraging the communities to work together in the operation of the education system. Indeed, the then Leaders of the four main parties — Mr Molyneaux, Dr Paisley, Dr Alderdice and Mr Hume — signed a document asking that the implementation of a recommendation that there be four boards instead of five be delayed until such time as there were Northern Ireland institutions to deal with the matter.

There is not unanimity among the various political interests in Northern Ireland as to what the Department of Education would appear to be doing. Indeed, the South Eastern Education and Library Board, of which I was a member — Chairman for a time — formed a committee of 10 people: two from each of the five councils. When they saw the Minister it was quite clear to all that they represented as broad a spectrum of political views as one could possibly have on such a delegation. There was therefore broad support.

In addition, it could be argued that what the Minister is doing is against the current United Kingdom trend in education administration. For example, on 1 April 1996 the Scottish education system will move from 12 authorities to 32, with smaller units of administration and management. In Northern Ireland the Minister is doing the reverse. Such is the background to the scene.

The fundamental question is this: what actually is the agenda of the Minister? He has said he wishes to save £2 million. Well, this is one way of saving £2 million. I therefore ask whether his agenda is financial. That is a simple question. My problem is that I am not clear about what his agenda is. If it is solely financial it reflects much of what Conservative Governments have been doing for 17-odd years. They are driven by a financial imperative — constraint in the public sector. In other words, they follow the dictum “Value for money”, which permeates all their functions, both in audit and, to a certain extent, in management structure.



This is fundamental to the point of the Forum. The Government are very keen on value for money, in the sense that they wish to acquire any resource as cheaply as possible. They are also very efficient, in the sense that they wish to get the maximum return from every resource. But there is a third dimension, accepted by all, in securing value for money — that you should first and foremost know your objective. When you know your objective you can deliberate on the funds that are necessary to achieve it. That is known as effectiveness. In a sense, the effectiveness of the policy that the Government are currently trying to implement does not seem to have been analysed at all. In other words, the Forum should be trying to recast the education argument, to raise it to a different level and state the objectives. Indeed, in that sense, this motion is on dialogue and understanding in Northern Ireland and the contribution that education can make to it. That is one objective, but the Government have refused to consider it.

Mr Gibson, who is not present at the moment, talked about cost-benefit analysis. When we in the public sector have to conduct what he calls economic appraisals the very first thing the Government tell us to do is establish our objective. When we know our objective we can determine its cost and its benefit. Unless you know your objective you cannot determine either cost or benefit. What is the objective of the Government? It is not clear.

Apart from the saving of £2 million, we are told that this will allow for a public representation increase of 50% to 48%, providing greater accountability. Is the Government's objective to provide greater accountability? If so, it could easily have been achieved by increasing council representation on the existing five boards.

Permeating my remarks is the fact that I am not clear about the objective. Until one is clear, one cannot make a judgement about what the Government are trying to do.

3.15 pm

My next point, to which I alluded a moment ago, concerns the function of this Forum, which is embodied precisely in the motion or, indeed, the amendment. It is dialogue and understanding with respect to the Northern Ireland situation. I should like to refer briefly to that from my board experience. The boards, as currently constituted, have clearly enabled people of widely differing political and religious perspectives to work and to learn to work together harmoniously for the good of the community, through education. There is no doubt that the existing boards have done much for dialogue and understanding, with the present structure. Perhaps the bigger the board and the geographical area, the lesser the social interrelationship. And that could be detrimental to understanding and co-operation between the smaller boards — a question that needs to be put to those who have an interest in education.

There is no doubt that there would be economies of scale, but if the logic is economy of scale, why not have just one board? I come back to the fundamental point that unless we are clear about the Government's objective we cannot decide whether or not this is right.

I conclude by advocating full support for the principles that have been enunciated. We wish to discuss and deliberate with education and library boards and other interested groups with respect to dialogue and understanding. We must ensure that our views are passed



to the Minister and that he will make no irrevocable decision until such time as he has heard from us. That is the position as I see it, and the Forum can play a very valuable role in considering and galvanizing these issues and bringing them together in one report representative of the Forum, which, in turn, is representative of the people of Northern Ireland, as a stated position on the way forward for education. We have to think of the objectives and content of the motion. I commend its substance to the Forum, however it is worded.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** For the Minister, before he sits down.

**Mr Nesbitt:** "For the Minister"! That is very pre-emptive.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Did the Business Committee, when it drew up this motion about taking evidence and contacting the boards, consider the appointment of a Committee of the Forum for that purpose?

There is one other point that I would like the Member to clarify. He thinks that the Chairman has a duty to bring all these things together. Is that not rather a duty of the Forum, the Chairman then acting as its voice? I am not sure that the Chairman always gets the points that we make.

**Mr Gibson:** I am very keen that evidence collected from the boards should be viewed as the starting-point. But coming into this is much more evidence on management and administration, particularly in the context of European regionalization policy. This is a matter that any investigative committee producing an advisory report should consider. Were these points discussed as part of the management strategy? If we produce an advisory report it must be of such consequence that a Minister will be duty-bound to take cognizance of it. It must be of such weight and import that the electorate will regard it as something befitting an elected assembly.

**Mr Nesbitt:** I will take the last point first — the question of evidence and of extending this to Europe. We did not in any way restrict the remit as to whom we would consult. The motion refers to education and library boards and other interested parties. There is no restriction on that remit.

Secondly, there is the point made by Dr Paisley about the Chairman. If I said that the Chairman would galvanize views and bring them all together, I did not mean it that way. Indeed, I do not think I said that. It is for the Forum to galvanize views and bring them together. I did say that the Forum is representative of the Northern Ireland community and that, therefore, we would get the views of Northern Ireland by this mechanism. I think I made it abundantly clear that I meant the Forum and not merely the Chairman.

The first matter about which Dr Paisley asked was the formation of a Committee. Indeed, this will come up as the next item on the agenda of the Forum, and we in the Business Committee will be considering how to deal with the Committee structure. As we know from the draft Rules, there must be a notice of motion giving terms of reference, quorum and composition. If this is accepted, we will bring forward suggestions for a Committee. Indeed,



when we initially discussed themes for Committees, before this motion was brought before us, one of those referred to was education.

**The Chairman:** I am going to take one more Member. We have a problem because a number of people are anxious to take part. I suggest that we adjourn at a quarter to four. We have to stop at four anyway unless we go through the process of a vote. We can take the matter up again at 10.00 am on Monday.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I thought that one of the things we established early in the proceedings today was that this meeting would continue until four o'clock.

**The Chairman:** I am just suggesting a time-limit.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** The time-limit has been set.

**The Chairman:** We tend to spend time discussing these questions when we should get on with the matter at hand and get more people involved.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** I seek clarification. If it was agreed that the Forum could continue until four o'clock why should we break at a quarter to four? The Business Committee, which you, Sir, chaired this morning, agreed that at least one person from each group would have an opportunity to make an opening address. If we are limited to a quarter to four, that will not happen.

**The Chairman:** We will sit until four exactly.

**Mr Gallagher:** I support the motion, as agreed by the Business Committee.

Mr Gibson's remarks about the SDLP misrepresented our position last Friday, which was that we would go to the Business Committee to find a motion that all parties in the Forum could support. With regard to meetings at Westminster, there were none. The reference to Westminster relates to a motion sponsored jointly by John Hume and, I think, Roy Beggs, which is due to go before the House of Commons. This was arranged before we met last Friday. A meeting took place at Castle Buildings between an SDLP delegation and Michael Ancram, but it too had been agreed before the Forum last week.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Why did you not tell us about that last week?

**Mr Gallagher:** We were not asked about it last week. We were discussing a motion with which the Forum could deal.

The position of the SDLP in relation to the education and library boards, since the consultation process began, has been clear and consistent: we favour the retention of all five boards.



3.30 pm

The aim of the Forum is to promote dialogue and understanding, thus removing barriers of distrust. Our task is to identify, clarify and explore issues and ideas which will contribute to the creation of trust and co-operation. It is therefore appropriate that the Forum invite from education and library boards and other interested parties submissions on the contribution of education services and structures to the promotion of dialogue and understanding in Northern Ireland.

Education by its very nature has a central role to play in the promotion of dialogue. The Latin *educare* — to lead out — tells us that education is about opening out to new ideas, new understanding of others and new self-understanding. In Northern Ireland, education for mutual understanding is a cross-curricular theme compulsory in all schools. Through it, children learn respect both for themselves and for others. As lasting peace in this society depends upon respect for the rights and views of others, the role of education cannot be overstated.

Throughout the lifetime of the five boards under threat, a broad range of interests have been successfully accommodated. The boards' membership includes elected representatives of district councils, the main churches, teachers, trade unions and others. The interests of this diverse group had coalesced to a degree that has empowered the boards to effectively deliver a wide range of services. In their more than 20 years of growing, the boards have become part of the infrastructure of the communities they serve. They have successfully brought together diverse interests and have engendered a sense of common ownership and identity in their areas. Besides carrying out their primary task of effectively and efficiently delivering educational services, the boards have provided opportunities for consensus, co-operation and dialogue.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Is not the Gentleman concerned about the number of small schools the boards have closed?

**Mr Gallagher:** I am a member of the Western Education and Library Board. We have more small schools than anywhere else in Northern Ireland, and our concerns in that regard are well known.

I was speaking about mutual understanding, which, of course, grows out of contact, friendship and shared activity. At board level the focus is on a mutually recognized need to deliver effective and efficient services to the community. The Western Board has been at the cutting edge of breaking down barriers, providing a model of co-operation and reconciliation. There are many cross-community projects and joint programmes initiated by the board, ranging from ski trips to school orchestras. All these activities transcend the sectarian divide.

Many conferences have sown the seeds of tolerance and respect, and just two years ago the Western Board, jointly with the Longford Vocational Education Committee, organized the first international youth festival of its kind in Northern Ireland — "Youth Against Intolerance". The opening address was given by Helen Lewis, who gave all those present a salutary reminder of the dangers for all civilizations in a situation where hatred and evil are allowed to flourish unchallenged. Young people at that conference were privileged to



hear her words of wisdom, forgiveness and understanding. As a survivor of the holocaust, she told them

"After all, we are all human, no matter where we live, no matter what religion or nationality we are. By learning about each other we can overcome the prejudice which is at the root of so much conflict."

With a stroke of his pen, Mr Ancram tells us, this board, which was shaped on the anvil of a 23-year struggle to bridge the divide in this community, will no longer exist. We have had reference to the question of savings, and I agree with what has been said. Over the last few years the five education and library boards have met the savings targets set for them by the Government. In the recent paper the figures regarding the number of children were inaccurate. Members may not know that three services are to be generalized, in addition to the removal of two of the boards. One of these services will cost significantly more to operate under the new structure.

Can this community afford to cast aside boards that provide models of reconciliation and have become part of its infrastructure? Enlarging areas and changing boundaries will simply throw into disarray the work of more than two decades — work that transcended the worst violence of that period.

The number of boards in parts of England is referred to. We are told that Yorkshire has only one. The needs of Yorkshire in respect of education administration cannot be compared with those of a divided community in Northern Ireland.

The removal of good public-sector jobs from towns like Omagh and Enniskillen will increase the marginalization of people in the west of the province. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a deep sense of outrage at the Minister's proposals. The submissions of the boards and of other interested parties will confirm the important role that the boards play in promoting dialogue and understanding.

**Ms Bell:** Mr Nesbitt covered much of what I intended to say in relation to the South Eastern Education and Library Board, of which I have been a member for the last three years. It was with a certain amount of shock and *deja vu* that I heard the Minister's statement last week. As Mr Nesbitt pointed out, I was part of the 10-party delegation to the Minister when his proposals were first mooted. I therefore welcome this motion and will certainly be supporting it. I share Mr Nesbitt's concern about the objectives.

There are a number of other concerns to which I should like to refer. First, the timetable for implementing the Minister's suggested process is very unclear. This is extremely dangerous and could have a disastrous effect on morale levels among the staff of board and schools and, of course, the pupils. I hope that the Minister will enlighten us, if he is going to implement the proposal, as to how this will be done. The financial gains are unclear, but I hope that if they do materialize they will go straight back to the classroom. What is clear, however, is that the proposals will be detrimental at all levels of education and, in turn, will directly affect the people we should be most concerned about — the pupils. We should unite to deal with this situation. Local accountability and responsibility have been strong features of all the boards, and I am sure that they have worked consistently against



these proposals so that the children may be given every opportunity to have the best possible education.

The problems facing the boards over the last 25 years were dreadful, and they are to be complimented on the work they have done in the education system in spite of financial cut-backs, restricted proposals, assessment tests, and so on — not to mention paramilitary activity. It is ironic that the Minister should choose to put these proposals forward at a time when there is apparent peace and when we are deliberating on issues, including education, pertaining to the future governance of Northern Ireland. I know that the education and library boards will welcome any action on our part and will respond.

My party is very happy to support the motion, but we must remember that, in spite of the comprehensive and consistent campaign against this review, last week's announcement went ahead. I hope the Minister will take the views of this body on board.

**The Chairman:** I now call Mr Wilson, in the hope that he will not use all the remaining 19 minutes.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** I can assure you that I won't, Mr Chairman.

There are a few things that I need to get clear before concurring with the comments of the DUP, the Ulster Unionists, the Alliance Party and the SDLP. There is a major flaw in the process we are engaged in. Ms Bell has referred to support for the motion. I am not quite sure which motion I am speaking to. We have one proposed by the Business Committee, as outlined by Mr Nesbitt, and an amended version has been suggested. There is not a great deal of difference between them, and I hope that the matter can be resolved.

As a member of the Business Committee, I would like to enlighten some of those who are familiar with the problem that the Committee had. Dr Paisley raised a question about the Business Committee's authority to alter or tamper with a notice of motion. The proposed change was an attempt to find an accommodation between the DUP's original motion, tabled by Mr Gibson, and the proposal put forward by the SDLP, which was never tabled. I am sure that SDLP Members would be happy to let people have a look at their motion, which differed greatly, insofar as they did not want the matter to be referred to the Minister in any shape or form. The reason for that was their belief that this body has no authority to write to any Minister, or instruct you, Mr Chairman, to do so. The Unionist representation at the meeting made it very clear to the SDLP that we did not accept that.

**Mr Farren:** I would like you, Mr Chairman, to rule on whether the Member is speaking to the motion.

**The Chairman:** I was beginning to wonder.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** I am sorry, Sir, but this is a very important issue — one that perhaps you, as Chairman, should have dealt with.

**The Chairman:** Are you talking about the subject of the motion or about discussions in the Business Committee? Let us stick to the motion, please.



**Mr Cedric Wilson:** Mr Chairman, perhaps you would like to make a ruling — something you seldom do. Would you like to tell me what motion we are speaking to?

**The Chairman:** We are debating the motion proposed by the Business Committee, and Mr Gibson has suggested an amendment.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** Maybe Dr Paisley would like to deal with that.

**The Chairman:** What we are discussing is of considerable importance in showing that Forum Members can work together. If you can help us to do that, you will have all my support.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** I do not mind being lectured if I am wrong. It must be decided, as a point of order, whether a motion that was tabled by the DUP last week, and has not been dealt with, can suddenly be taken off the Floor by the Business Committee, and another motion substituted. I have genuinely sought your advice, Sir. I want to know if I am speaking to the DUP motion or the amended motion put forward by the Business Committee.

**The Chairman:** I do not think that the motion we heard today is the same the one we discussed last week.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** No, it is not.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** If Mr Wilson looks at the Record of Debates of 28 June he will see that our motion was read out after opposition from the SDLP. What is this assembly coming to? Ms Rodgers wanted a ruling that it was out of order to read it out. Mr Nesbitt, referring to the Committee, said

“We are inclined — and, as I have indicated, we echo everything that Dr Paisley has said — to wait because we are extremely mindful of the importance of education in Northern Ireland.”

We thought that the Committee would deal with the proposed motion, but they butchered it. There is nothing in their motion, Mr Chairman, about your approaching the Secretary of State, which was the heart of ours.

3.45 pm

**The Chairman:** It was agreed last Friday that there was general acceptance, with possibly some difference of emphasis in the case of one party. The matter was to go to the Business Committee for discussion. That happened, and it was believed that consensus had been reached. It seems tragic that we should be arguing about forms of words.

**Mr Morrow:** May I speak?

**The Chairman:** Is it to do with this motion, or is it to do with education?

**Mr Morrow:** It is to deal with the Business Committee's transactions this morning.



When I arrived 60 seconds late I was berated by you, Mr Chairman, yet four people came in behind me.

**The Chairman:** And they were berated too.

**Mr Morrow:** I am not so sure about that.

**The Chairman:** Would you like me to repeat what I said?

**Mr Morrow:** No. That is not important now.

In relation to the DUP's motion, I asked the Business Committee if it intended to redesign and redraft every motion put before it. I did not get a satisfactory answer.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** Will you accept a point of order, Mr Chairman?

**The Chairman:** Of course I will.

**Ms Brid Rodgers:** I understood us to be discussing a motion and the amendment tabled by the DUP. We are now discussing what happened at the Business Committee this morning. We are not discussing education — the boards or the motion. Will you rule, Mr Chairman, please. Do we discuss the motion before us, or do we go back to discuss the Business Committee's report?

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** Perhaps I can help to move the process on. I am satisfied that I am speaking to the motion put forward by the Business Committee.

I raised the earlier point in order to establish exactly where we were. If, at the end of these deliberations, the SDLP is still of the opinion that this body cannot express a strong opinion in relation to this matter, we will all have been wasting time.

**The Chairman:** You are going back to the point we have already cleared.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** It is an important point. *[Interruption]*

**Rev William McCrea:** Mr Chairman, there seems to be a difference in your attitude —

**The Chairman:** I did not call you, Sir; I called Mr Wilson.

**Rev William McCrea:** Mr Wilson gave way.

Mr Chairman, there seems to be a difference in the approach you adopt when you look in this direction. A Member was speaking, and he did not give way. Ms Rodgers got up on a point of order, and you said, in the tone that I am now using, "Yes, Ms Rodgers." Is there something wrong? Fairness is something that ought to come from the Chair and is expected from all parts of the Chamber.



**Mr Cedric Wilson:** The United Kingdom Unionist Party concurs entirely with the comments made by the other parties. The attitude of the Minister and the Government is nothing less than we in Northern Ireland have come to expect. In a letter to party Leaders regarding the reduction in the number of boards, the Minister said

"My decision brings to an end a lengthy and complex review of our structures — a review which has been conducted in an open and fully consultative way."

This is what the British Government mean when they talk about a fully consultative way. We have letters and representation from right across the spectrum and the divide in Northern Ireland. This has united the parties and the people. Despite that, the Minister goes on to say in his letter

"Most expressed" —

this is in reference to the people who were consulted —

"a preference for awaiting the creation of a new local political structure, before making any changes to the administrative arrangements."

The public and elected representatives, from the councils through to Members of Parliament, had made it very clear that this was an issue of such concern and magnitude to the people of Northern Ireland that it deserved a stay of execution. But the Minister could not agree on this issue, which would have united the people.

This is an unprecedented example of social vandalism. It has cut to the very heart of our education system. I agree entirely with Mr Nesbitt that the normal way of evaluating these things is to decide upon an objective, analyse it, look at the financial implications and come to a conclusion. I have seen nothing to indicate that that exercise ever took place. This is something that the Minister has decided summarily to impose upon the people of Northern Ireland.

I am sure that my Leader, Mr McCartney, will want to enlarge on these comments next week.

**The Chairman:** If I sounded irascible towards you, it is possibly because I am slightly tired. It has been a long day.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** Thank you, Mr Chairman.

**Mr Neeson:** Mr Chairman, can you tell us the agenda for Monday?

**The Chairman:** We will continue this debate and develop more fully some thoughts of the Business Committee for which we have not had time today.

**Mr Hussey:** Mr Chairman —

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** Surely it is in order —



**Mr Hussey:** Is this a point of order? If not, I will not give way.

**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** It is a point of order, and you have to give way.

Surely representatives of parties that have not spoken should be given an opportunity to do so before any party's second spokesperson is called. We have had one spokesman, the United Kingdom Unionists have had one, the SDLP has had one, and the Official Unionists have had one. Mr McMichael was attempting to speak but has been ruled out.

**The Chairman:** I do not recall that, but I have been asked to take a note to cover this very point. I intend counting the number of speakers from each party, large or small, as I am very keen that there should be a proportionately larger number of speakers from the larger parties — recognizing that the smaller parties too need to be heard.

**Mr Hussey:** I share the dismay being expressed round the Chamber in relation to the proposed changes. To add insult to injury, Ancram has the audacity to declare that the die is cast and that there will be no further consultation on the reorganization of the five boards into three. He is ignoring the stability that the boards have provided for many people throughout the period of attrition leading to our being in this Chamber.

There is overwhelming support for retention of the five boards. There is very little support for the Minister's decision. Despite the so-called consultative exercise, all local opinion has been ignored. This is a major upheaval, reputedly to save £2 million — less than one quarter of 1 per cent of the education budget. What fiscal explanation have we had as to how this money is going to be saved? If these people cannot even count the number of schoolchildren involved, how can we know that their calculations are right? What educational arguments have been put forward to support the proposal? I have yet to hear them.

We are once again witnessing the results of the ongoing democratic deficit that has been evident in Northern Ireland since the imposition of direct rule. Representatives have been completely ignored, despite the fact that the original consultation was on the basis of a four-board option. The goal-posts have been moved: now the number is to be three. We are told that the decision will stand, with no recourse to representation. We cannot accept this. If I carry a second flag into this Chamber —

**A Member:** I hope it would the Ulster flag.

**Mr Hussey:** I have carried the Ulster flag on many an occasion.

I have spoken as a member of the Ulster Unionist Party, but, of course, it is also as a constituency representative that I want to address the question of the Western Education and Library Board. The proposal will undoubtedly have the most catastrophic effect on that board. I can only describe the division as rape, pillage and the final destruction of what we in the west regard as the finest education administration unit in Northern Ireland. We are witnessing the asset-stripping of the west of the province, amidst the dying throes of a near-bankrupt administration at Westminster. Recently many of us were delighted at the



logical creation of a new parliamentary constituency, comprising the areas of Strabane and Omagh District Councils. Now we are faced with the prospect of administrative division of the new constituency in the vital field of education — the Strabane and Omagh areas being administered from different centres.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** On a point of order, Mr Chairman. It is 4 o'clock.

**The Chairman:** This is it, Mr Hussey.

**Mr Hussey:** May I have permission to finish on Monday?

**The Chairman:** Will you be here on Monday?

**Mr Hussey:** I certainly will.

**The Chairman:** Then you may finish.

*The debate stood adjourned.*

#### **FORUM: BUSINESS**

**The Chairman:** The agenda for Monday is continuation of the debate on education, future business of the Forum and, if parties so wish, statements by party Leaders.

*The meeting was adjourned at 4.00 pm.*