

NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM

Monday 8 July 1996

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

FORUM BUSINESS/ SECURITY SITUATION (DRUMCREE)

The Chairman: We meet today in very dangerous and tense times in the province. It has been suggested to me that there ought to be an Adjournment or a postponement. Such a course should certainly be considered by the Forum. If a motion to that effect is passed — and that would require a 50-plus% vote — I am prepared to act accordingly. If that happens we will have to postpone the education item, which is first on the agenda. May I have a suggested motion, please.

Mr Taylor: You are quite right, Mr Chairman, in saying that a rather tense situation is developing across Northern Ireland. In that atmosphere of abnormality it would not be helpful for the Forum to continue its deliberations at any great length today. We have work to do in our constituencies. I suggest, therefore, Mr Chairman, that under Rule 6(4), after consultation with the Business Committee, you postpone this meeting and call a meeting on another date. I have not had time to discuss this with others, but we in the Ulster Unionist Party recommend that there be a sitting on Friday 19 July.

The Chairman: You are suggesting that I call a meeting of the Business Committee?

Mr Taylor: That is the procedure.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Are we going to have a discussion on this subject as an Adjournment debate? There are some matters that need to be put on record, and it would not do for this body, representing the people of Northern Ireland, not to express an opinion on this very serious matter. If we are going to adjourn we should have an Adjournment motion on which to discuss the issue. It would not do for the Forum just to adjourn and leave the matter without an expression of opinion from elected representatives. I know that there are various opinions — Members will not all be in agreement. These must necessarily be expressed today because the best way to defuse a situation is to have the elected representatives of the people concerned putting their case, and putting it clearly and distinctly. The press have a great habit of taking a jaundiced view of the situation. I have heard today reports that are completely contrary to any facts known to me.

If we are going to have an Adjournment, Members should not just walk out. That would be entirely wrong. This Forum was brought together for the purpose of dialogue and discussion — hearing other people's views. That is the purpose of real debate. We would be failing in our responsibility to Northern Ireland today if we did not use the Forum. People ask why Ulster does not have an elected body where their opinions can be expressed. Well, we now have this Forum.

I am quite happy with the suggestion that we adjourn, but I would like an Adjournment debate — not a Committee debate of which there is no proper press report. I would like a public debate now on a motion that we adjourn or on a motion that we refer this to the Business Committee — whichever is the better way to discuss the matter.

The Chairman: The problem is that the Rules on which we spent hours on Friday require me to call a meeting of the Business Committee before we can agree on an Adjournment. I am repeatedly assured that I have broken the law 23 times already, so I am prepared, if there is consensus, to waive the Rule to enable this urgent and delicate matter to be discussed. Of course, if a very strong contrary view is expressed, conceivably by a vote of more than 50%, my hands will be tied.

Mr Alban Maginness: Mr Taylor has referred to Rule 6(4), which provides for postponement of a meeting, after consultation. If one looks at that Rule carefully one sees that the intention is that consultation should take place prior to a meeting, and not when it is convened and about to consider its business. Therefore, there can be no postponement under that Rule in the present circumstances, and I suggest that it is quite invalid for the Forum to consider any such procedure. This is not the proper way to continue the business of the Forum.

Mr Paisley has said that there ought to be an Adjournment debate. In fact, there is no provision in the Rules for an Adjournment debate. The Member is referring to a parliamentary procedure by which matters can be fully debated and discussed. There is no such provision in the Rules of the Forum. Either you adjourn the Forum or you do not. You certainly do not have an Adjournment debate. That is not the way to proceed. Given the present situation in Northern Ireland, it could be irresponsible for us to engage in any debate that might excite greater tension.

Mr Ken Maginnis: I have listened with some astonishment to Mr Maginness making up and interpreting the Rules as he moves along. The interests of the people of Northern Ireland are a matter for this Forum. It is quite astonishing that someone who would have advocated the civil rights marches in the late 1960s, and who would advocate the right of every member of the Northern Ireland community to walk Her Majesty's highways, should now seek to curtail the business of the Forum by preventing us from discussing that very issue today. There is great fear and great concern throughout the community that we are all elected to represent.

Mr Alban Maginness: It was Mr Maginnis's colleague, Mr Taylor, who suggested that the Forum be adjourned. It was Mr Paisley, not Mr Taylor, who suggested that there be an Adjournment debate. What Mr Maginnis is doing now is in contradiction of what Mr Taylor suggested. Mr Taylor suggested that there was business to be dealt with in the constituencies and that the Forum should adjourn immediately. What Mr Maginnis is now doing is prolonging this and turning it into an Adjournment debate.

Mr Ken Maginnis: That is not a point of order.

Just as Mr Maginness tries to make up the Rules for the Forum, so he misunderstands what a point of order is.

The Chairman: A point of information.

Mr Ken Maginnis: I rose after Mr Maginness had sat down. I did not seek to impede, nor would I hinder any member of his party who wished to make a point. What I am saying — and this does not run counter to anything that is being proposed — is that there is no reason why the Forum should not consider, in the light of the interests of the people of Northern Ireland, any serious matter that is brought before it in good faith. I will be quite content if there is a considered Adjournment debate to look at the very points that have been raised.

Mr Peter Robinson: Mr Interim Chairman, may I say, first of all —

Mr Ken Maginnis: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I have some sympathy with the way people may feel today. I know that some may be angry, but that is no excuse for blatant and downright bad manners.

The Chairman: You were not here on Friday, Mr Robinson, when I made some comments about the words “point of order”, though you may have heard of them. Anyway, you may now say what you want.

10.15 am

Mr Peter Robinson: As you did not rule, Mr Chairman, I assume that it was not a point of order.

I agree that one has to attend to procedural matters in order to effect the Adjournment of the Forum. Such procedures would not exclude a full and proper airing of the issues giving rise to the Adjournment. The matter does not have to be dealt with through the procedure that was suggested by Mr Taylor, to which you referred. The Business Committee is entitled to meet and to put forward a motion. Such a motion can include the terms of an Adjournment of the proceedings of the Forum and the reason for such an Adjournment. That is perfectly within the Rules provided by the Secretary of State, never mind those that were passed last Friday.

The purpose of the Forum is clearly established in law as being the promotion of dialogue and understanding. I was led to understand that one party in the Forum believed that it was good to talk. Now it seems to want to deny us the right to talk about an issue which everybody outside this Chamber believes is of the greatest importance. I doubt very much whether it can benefit any of us to simply close our eyes, put our heads in the sand and pretend that this is not happening. We need a full and proper debate about the most important issue topical in the province at this time. I suggest that the meeting be suspended for a short period to allow the Business Committee to consider whether such a motion would be appropriate.

The Chairman: I have made up my mind to do exactly that. I am going to suspend the meeting for one hour.

Mr Cedric Wilson: I think that you have my name on your list as the next Member to speak.

The Chairman: I am not interested whether your name is on the list or not. Will you please sit down.

I invite the Business Committee to meet with me during the suspension.

The meeting was suspended at 10.18 am and resumed at 11.18 am.

The Chairman: We have had a very helpful meeting of the Business Committee. I want to thank all those who attended and who contributed. We have got a very good business plan for the rest of the day, which I would like to put to the Forum. I hope that you will be able to work to it. The plan is to suspend again, I am sorry to say, until 12 o'clock, during which time the members of the Business Committee will consult their parties with a view to having a discussion on the Drumcree matter between 12 o'clock and 1 o'clock and for the first hour after lunch. We would then devote an hour to the real business — the education matter. When I say "the real business" I am not being derogatory with regard to the previous matter. The interrupted debate of Friday last will be resumed.

Mr Peter Robinson: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I must have been at a different meeting. That was not the basis of the meeting at all. A number of propositions were put forward. We are all returning to our parties to talk about those propositions and to bring back our views. The structure that you have mentioned is certainly not one that I would accept.

The Chairman: Well, that is the structure as I understand it. We may have some slight differences about it. I thought that you made a helpful contribution in deciding that the debate on the Drumcree matter should be time-limited. That is what I am asking for.

Mr Peter Robinson: That is right.

The Chairman: I would like the parties to discuss this among themselves in order to achieve the best result in doing what I believe is necessary for this Forum — to have dialogue, even where there are extreme differences of view. May I please ask you now to adopt that programme.

Mr Benson: The education matter is of such importance that one hour's debate today would not be sufficient. This subject should be put back to a day when we could have a full debate on it.

Ms Brid Rodgers: I thought the decision was to suspend and let the groups discuss what the Business Committee had already discussed, and then go back to the Committee. The education matter has gone way down the list of priorities, and I am very disappointed

about that. As to the idea to further postpone it, the people of Northern Ireland will not forgive us, because that is a very big — *[Interruption]*

The Chairman: Let us be clear. We are going to have a Business Committee meeting at 11.45 am. Then we shall meet here at 12 o'clock for a discussion, to which we must give the maximum time. We hope to have enough time today — if necessary, by extending the sitting beyond 4 o'clock — to discuss the education matter. In any case, we shall give it the hour from 3 o'clock to 4 o'clock and, if necessary, have yet another meeting.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I would like to back-up what Mr Benson has said. Education is an important matter and cannot be handled in an hour. It ill becomes the Lady opposite to talk about this matter, for she held it up. We could already have had this discussion — it could be over. It becomes urgent only when people are going to be disappointed. But they are disappointed in her already.

The Chairman: The important thing is to have discussion within the parties now.

Mr Nesbitt: At the conclusion of the Business Committee meeting we were of the view that if there were an Adjournment we could not have the education debate after it. We could not extend beyond 4 o'clock, as we would have adjourned. That aspect was not clarified.

The Chairman: Every minute that we spend now is one minute less for discussion.

The meeting was suspended at 11.25 am and resumed at 12.05 pm.

FORUM: BUSINESS

The Chairman: The Business Committee, concerned about the education question, has decided that there will be a meeting on Friday 19 July, when priority will be given to that issue.

SECURITY SITUATION (DRUMCREE)

Motion made and Question proposed: That this Forum do now adjourn. —
[The Chairman]

The Chairman: A Member from each of the parties will now be given an opportunity to put forward his or her party's view in relation to Drumcree. I ask all Members to be as measured as possible in what they say and to be concise.

Mr Donaldson: This is my first opportunity to address the Forum. It is an unfortunate occasion on which to do so, for two reasons: the present situation in Portadown — the main reason for this debate — and the unfortunate, unnecessary murder last night of an individual in the Lagan Valley constituency, which I represent. I know that everyone in the Forum will join me in condemning this murder, for whatever purpose it may

have been perpetrated. It cannot under any circumstances be justified. We want the family of the man concerned to know that our thoughts and prayers are with them at this time.

A situation has developed at Drumcree in Portadown, and I want to outline the issues that are relevant. We are talking about civil rights. We are talking about the rights of the Orangemen to parade peacefully from church back to their homes in the centre of Portadown. This is the 189th year the Portadown Brethren have gone to the Drumcree Parish Church to worship at Sunday morning service and to return via the main arterial route into the town. Garvaghy Road is not a Roman Catholic road; it is a public highway. It does not pass through any housing estate; it passes by a number of housing estates. When the Orangemen first walked that route, there were no houses along the way. In recent years estates have been built, and it is accepted, without dispute, that the majority of people living in the estates adjacent to this main road are Roman Catholic. It is not the intention of the Orangemen to cause offence, to confront or to engage in violence with anyone; it is simply their desire, as citizens, lawfully and peacefully to process along the highway, passing from church to their homes.

I want to look at the nature of this parade. We have heard much about the offence that is caused, about triumphalism. This is a church parade. It is not the 12th of July. It is not a Boyne demonstration. It is a church parade. The Orangemen are accompanied by three accordion bands, which play exclusively hymn tunes. I have posed this question on numerous occasions, and have yet to receive an answer: which of those hymn tunes causes offence to the people? What is it about the manner of this parade that is offensive? How could one possibly say that a hymn like "Safe in the Arms of Jesus" is triumphalist? We are told that these people are of the wider Christian faith. The spokesmen for the residents say that they want us to walk in silence, but do not explain why these hymns are offensive.

The Orangemen have conducted themselves with dignity and respect as they have paraded down the Garvaghy Road in the past, and I have no reason to believe that they would do anything other than that if they were permitted to parade along that route again. The Chief Constable, in announcing his decision, said that he was banning the parade because there was a threat of violence. That threat emanates not from the Orangemen in Portadown, who have no desire whatsoever to engage in violence. If there is a threat of violence — and there must be a perceived threat if the Chief Constable has taken the decision — from whom does it emanate if not from the people who wish to block the parade, even though they say that they want to be peaceful?

Mr Brendan McKenna, a spokesman — indeed, the chairman of the organization which opposes this Orange parade — has said on a number of occasions that the Orangemen have threatened violence and that the residents just want to be left in peace. Mr McKenna is a convicted IRA terrorist, having attempted to bomb the Royal British Legion Club in Portadown. There are many ex-servicemen in the Portadown Orange district who belong to the Royal British Legion. How do they feel when they hear someone like Mr McKenna telling them that they cannot exercise their civil and religious liberty by walking down this road peacefully? How do they feel? They feel that the law is taking the side of those who for years have flouted it and, indeed, sought to destroy it. Is it any wonder that passions are inflamed?

Therefore, let us understand the nature of what is happening here. There is no more question of walking; it is about much more than that. Last year the Orangemen demonstrated that they could conduct themselves in a reasonable manner when they were permitted to walk down the Garvaghy Road, and all that they ask this year is the right to do the same again. I say to the Chief Constable, who, we are told, made the decision — though one has to question the operational independence of the RUC in this respect — that there is a political agenda here. And it is not just the Sinn Féin agenda; it is the agenda which has operated through the Maryfield Secretariat since 1985.

This is a deep issue. It is not just about parades; it is about challenging the rights of the British citizens of Northern Ireland. We want to see a peaceful resolution of this problem. We seek neither confrontation nor violence, and we will do all in our power to ensure that violence is avoided. But such is the depth of feeling throughout Northern Ireland, and such is the depth of support, that I have no doubt that this will go far beyond the confines of Drumcree and Portadown. Therefore, it is a time for people to act responsibly. All we ask for is 15 minutes — 15 minutes in one year — to walk peacefully down this road. To Irish Nationalists, who tell us that in a United Ireland our culture and heritage would be respected, accommodated and provided for, I say “How do you think I feel when for 15 minutes in one year there is no place for my culture and my tradition?” Where is this parity of esteem for my tradition and culture? It has no place, it seems.

12.15 pm

We hope and pray that sense will prevail, that a lot of turmoil can be avoided, and that these people will see their way to agreeing to this parade taking place. We are not asking to go down the Garvaghy Road with Lambeg drums. We are not asking to go down the Garvaghy Road flaunting anything. The Orangemen of Portadown simply ask for their right, as law-abiding citizens, to walk on the public highway. The roads in Ulster are neither Orange nor Green. They belong to all of us, and the Orangemen feel that they have the right to walk on them.

To the Chief Constable I say “If you think that this is going to be your swansong, that you are going to leave Northern Ireland with a big black line on the CV which says “1996 — faced down the Orangemen of Portadown’, you are mistaken. You will leave Ulster with a CV which, if you continue down the road you are going, will have many black marks.” Already we have seen, sadly, the consequences of Mr Annesley’s decision. There are people in hospital, and we think of them because of what has happened.

We hope that we can now move forward to a peaceful resolution of this situation. I look to Mr Annesley, I look to the residents of the Garvaghy Road, and I ask for 15 minutes for the Portadown Orangemen to walk down this road peacefully. Then we can all go home and enjoy the rest of the summer in peace together.

Rev William McCrea: This is a solemn moment in the history of our country. I agree with everything that Mr Donaldson has said. We are in a crisis situation, not of our making, and certainly not of the choosing of either the Loyalist people or the Orange Institution. The tragedy of our situation is simply that it ought not to have happened and need not have happened. A challenge has been thrown down — a deliberate challenge because,

I have no doubt whatsoever, what has happened since last year has been burning inside the Chief Constable, and he desires, before leaving, to get his own back on the people of Portadown. The Chief Constable ought to be before this Forum today to explain why, for a petty personal reason, he will put this whole country in turmoil. He is willing to do that for his own ends — to be able to say, in the famous words of someone else in the province, that he faced down the Unionists, faced down the Loyalists. The time had come for the boil to be lanced — the other advice given many years ago.

We have got to bear in mind that the majority population of this country have endured great tragedy, great trouble and great sorrow. Mr Donaldson will know that quite a number of those standing around Drumcree last night were people who had suffered grievously in body — men who had been shot at, whom terrorists had sought to murder. They had gathered from all over the province because they believed that the time had come for a stand to be taken against the corrupt administration of the NIO and the Maryfield Secretariat that has been forced upon the good and law-abiding people of this province. This challenge is aimed at the whole Unionist population.

There has been much talk about parity of esteem. This is nothing more than hot air and empty rhetoric, for there is no such thing as parity of esteem for the culture of the Unionist population. It is in line with the media's desire to rob us of our British culture and identity and give us a foreign, Irish identity — a Republican Irishness. This is resented by the people of Northern Ireland and the law-abiding people of the majority community.

The serious matter is that alienation has occurred over a number of years. The Unionist population, after all the murder, all the destruction and mayhem of the IRA upon the law-abiding people of the community, see concession after concession being given to the terrorists and the people they represent. The civil rights of the Ulster people have got to be returned. Daily we see evidence of the removal of our rights. The Ormeau Road was the start; the Garvaghy Road is just a continuation. We see the undercurrent in the Nationalist and Republican movements trying to stir up areas where people live together in peace and harmony. The idea that the Roman Catholic community finds it abhorrent to watch the Orangemen walk by, or to hear their bands play their cultural tunes, is not the fact. I have always lived in a very mixed community, a Nationalist-majority community. We did not need grants or favours to live in peace with our neighbours; we did it because it was the right thing to do. We respected them, and they respected us.

Unfortunately, today we see community division that ought not to be there. The Chief Constable must bear much of the responsibility. It would have taken 15 minutes for the brethren to walk down the Garvaghy Road — even in silence. But the authorities yielded to political pressure, not only from the NIO but also from Dublin. They yielded to the interference of a foreign state in the affairs of Northern Ireland, as they have done down the years. It is interesting that last night TDs from the Irish Republic were on Garvaghy Road to report back to a foreign Government what was happening within our community. Many Nationalist people have been willing to play along with this. They have not been willing to take a stand for the rights of the majority in the province. There is a great feeling of danger in the community. There is talk about a peace process. The reality is that it is a piece-by-piece process, robbing us of every vestige of our rights and our culture, including our civil and religious liberty.

I defy anyone to say that we, as a party, want to take away the civil and religious rights of any man. We believe that it is the right of every person to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. The Orange brethren of Garvaghy Road in Portadown district have the right to walk, on a sabbath afternoon, from their church service. The rector of that congregation was not saying anything that anyone could find offensive. He simply preached a message from the Word of God. That is not something to intimidate anyone. This country needs to hear the simple declaration of God's Word.

The act of a Chief Constable, aided and abetted by the Secretary of State and by the Dublin authorities, has put our province into chaos. It is interesting to note that both Hugh Annesley and the Secretary of State are now leaving the province, having done their dastardly deed. Next year, when we come to another occasion like Garvaghy Road, those two men will have left the scene — and not just as it was at the beginning of last week but with greater suspicion and greater alienation than ever before. They ought to be condemned because when they go back to the safety and comfort of their homes they will leave this province in turmoil. The good, decent people of Northern Ireland will be left to try to pull back from the brink of disaster.

12.30 pm

There was law-breaking last year, but let us nail the lie that the Orangemen were the law-breakers. The law-breakers were those on the Garvaghy Road. The Orangemen put in a legal procession notice but were not told that they would be denied the return route from the church. It should be remembered that the route we are talking about is actually a re-routeing. It was a compromise. The Forum should realize that Obins Street, down the Tunnel was the normal route. There was a compromise — a willingness to see if we could get over the difficulties, even though the Orangemen did not want to leave their original route.

Look at what has been happening, little by little. The Orangemen were removed from the Tunnel, they were removed from Obins Street, and now they are going to be removed from Garvaghy Road. Let us, unlike the Chief Constable, be abundantly clear. We are not talking about Garvaghy Street. Orangemen are not trying to walk down a street that is predominately Nationalist or Roman Catholic. They would be walking along the main thoroughfare into one of the most Unionist and Loyalist towns of the whole province.

If the signal that is going out is that Orangemen have no right to walk in the heart and birth-place of Orangeism, it is a very serious signal indeed. They wanted us to walk in silence. That was done last year, but this year they are not allowing us to walk even in silence. The terrorists have tried to silence the people with their bombs and their guns. Now they want to move us off the streets completely. There is a challenge, and that challenge must be taken up. The Unionist, Loyalist, Orange and other institutions cannot allow our last civil rights to be removed.

Brendan McKenna is a terrorist, yet he was chosen as spokesperson for the Garvaghy Road residents. It is important that we be aware of the fact that, last year and also this year, there was orchestration by the Provisional IRA to coerce people into submitting to their will. Letters were put through the letter-boxes of Garvaghy Road residents, demanding

that they get out. Quite a number of them did get out. They went on holiday, for they do not want to be associated with the thuggery of these people who are trying to hold the country to ransom. There are decent people in Garvaghy Road — decent Roman Catholic people who do not want to be associated with Brendan McKenna or any of the likes of Brendan McKenna, with his terrorist history. We cannot paint all the people of that area with the hue of a terrorist.

There is another fact that needs to be borne in mind. When the local commander was contacted concerning the route, particularly the return route from Drumcree Parish Church, he assured local elected representatives that there would be no undue operational problem in bringing the Orangemen back down the Garvaghy Road. That is an interesting statement. The local police chief found that there would be no undue operational problem in bringing the Orangemen back down the Garvaghy Road.

Where was the problem? The problem lay with the Secretary of State and the Chief Constable.

So our country is in a grave situation — a situation not of the making of the Orange brethren. I salute them for their fortitude; I salute them for their courage and determination. A stand has to be taken. The people of Ulster have said “Thus far and no further. We have gone as far as we are willing ever to go.” The people of Ulster are standing with the friends and the Orangemen of Drumcree. We salute them for their stand, and certainly I will be pleased to stand with them.

Ms Brid Rodgers: I should like, first, to express my condolences to the family of the man who was murdered in Aghalee last night or in the early hours of this morning — for whatever purpose, as someone has already said. I do not think that murder can ever serve any purpose, and I want to convey my party's condolences to the family who have been so tragically bereaved.

The issue that we are discussing should be considered in an atmosphere calmer than the one in the Forum today because it goes to the heart of the conflict in Northern Ireland. It is about a divided society with divided allegiances. The problem of marching is seen from different perspectives. It is an issue that can be resolved by dialogue. Increased understanding of one another's position can happen only through dialogue. It is something to which we should come later, in a calmer atmosphere. Some of the remarks we have heard so far have at least not been inflammatory, and I thank the Members concerned.

There is no such thing in a divided society — in any society, but particularly in a divided society — as an absolute right. No one is entitled to assert his or her rights without regard to the rights of others. That is where the marching problem arises. Some people believe that they have an absolute right to march anywhere and everywhere, regardless of the views of people in the areas concerned. Perhaps we should try to look calmly at the facts, and not at half truths or perceptions that are totally wrong. I should like to go through a few of the facts.

The origin of this problem in Portadown lies a long way back. This is not an Alamo; it is a problem in Portadown between local residents and the Orange Order, and there are

conflicting views about how it should be resolved. The problem goes back a long way, but particularly to 1985, when a perfectly peaceful march of a perfectly innocuous Nationalist band was prevented from taking place in a mixed area of Portadown — not Brownstown Road but the mixed area of Park Road. Although the police had allowed the march, it was blocked by people carrying cudgels. In fact, colleagues of some of those people are sitting to my right. They were elected representatives of Unionist parties, and they denied an ordinary Nationalist band — St Patrick's — its right to march. That created a situation in Portadown, in particular, where double standards were seen to be operating. Some people had the right to march everywhere, and other people's right to march was curtailed. The ideal solution in a normal society would be that anyone could march anywhere. Unfortunately that is not, and has not been, the case in Northern Ireland.

The second fact that I want to put forward is that the marchers were not prevented from returning from their church; they were re-routed along a perfectly reasonable alternative route. There are a number of main roads into Portadown. It so happens that only one of them — the Garvaghy Road — goes through a very strongly Nationalist area. The alternative route is the one that marchers use on their way to church. It is a new road, a highway built about 20 — perhaps 15 — years ago. It did not exist 165 years ago. To me it is the reasonable alternative route for the marchers on their return, given the conflict that arises in the present situation from going down the Garvaghy Road, and given the very strong feelings of the ordinary residents of that area. And I can speak for the people of Garvaghy, Ballyoran and Churchill. Having spent many years as their representative, I know them well. They are a peaceful people. They do not like triumphalism, and they have objected to marches in the past on that basis.

The question, above all, that they ask and that I now ask is this: "If it is possible and obviously reasonable for Orangemen to return by the route by which they went to church, why do they insist on using the only route that causes contention?" That seems to me a valid question requiring an answer. It is not sufficient for these people to say "We have marched there for 165 years." That long ago it was green fields. Nobody lived there. Neither did the other route exist 165 years ago, and I venture to suggest that on an ordinary working day most people would take the other road because it is now the main route into the town. It is called the North Road. It is not a question of inability to return to the centre; it is a question of unwillingness to return except by a specific route.

I have already said that the community in that area are peaceful, and Mr McCrea described the people of Garvaghy Road as decent. I agree: they are all decent people, and they are all opposed to the triumphalist marching to which they have been exposed for many years.

Last year a compromise was reached between the community in Garvaghy, the Orange Order and the police. A good compromise, it was, as has been outlined by Mr Donaldson, that the bands would walk down without any signs of triumphalism and without any flags flying. Unfortunately, at the end, the people in Garvaghy were subjected to a triumphalist display by two Unionist leaders, who maintained that there had been no compromise and that, in fact, they had simply done what it was their absolute right to do. That was seen, quite rightly, by the people in the area as throwing their compromise back in their faces, and it certainly did not improve the atmosphere for future compromise.

In spite of that, the community in the Garvaghy Road area have made very strong efforts since then to reach an accommodation, to have the situation resolved by dialogue. They have talked to many interested parties, including Archbishop Eames. They wrote to the Orange Order requesting a meeting to discuss the problem. Unfortunately, the Orange Order not only refused to meet them but did not even answer their letters. I do not think that the people in that area can be accused of not wanting peace and compromise. They have tried to compromise, but it has been thrown back at them. They have asked for dialogue, but it has been refused.

Mr Donaldson referred to civil liberties. I certainly think that civil liberties are important, but they are indivisible and should apply right across the board. In Rosstown, County Donegal — the county that I originally came from — the Orangemen had their march last Saturday. The Member may have been there. I am sure he will accept that it was a peaceful march. Nobody interfered with it. It took place, as he said, in the Republic of Ireland. That is an indication of how the Orange Order and its culture would be treated in the new Ireland that we would like to see.

A Member: They are allowed one day a year.

Ms Brid Rodgers: I am sure that if they were to apply for another, there would be no problem. As I have said, it is not a divided society, and there is respect for all cultures.

I want to finish by saying that, in the interests of this community and in the interests of peace, people should avoid turning what is, in effect, a local issue in Portadown between the residents of the Garvaghy Road area and the Orange Order, and now apparently a problem between the Orange Order and the forces of law and order, into an Alamo or a problem in the whole of Northern Ireland. It is nothing of the sort, and it is not in the interests of the people of Portadown or of the people of Northern Ireland that such an attempt should be made. There has been a lot of talk from the Unionist parties over the years about the need to support law and order. As I tried to get here today, and as I watched the proceedings in Portadown from a distance yesterday, I asked myself "Is that support conditional?"

12.45 pm

Dr Alderdice: On behalf of my colleagues, I wish to express condolences to the family of the young man who has died — and it looks very much as though he may have been murdered. I understand that there is another young man in hospital, and I should like to express our concern for him also. I think that all here will share our feelings for the families of both — concern for the young man who is injured, and great and deep sadness for the young man who has died.

Much as we might like to concentrate on local issues — and there are local issues, it is clear — this is much more than a local issue. We all know that. There is much more to this than a 15-minute walk from a church service.

I was turning on the radio on Saturday morning to hear the 10 o'clock news, and I suddenly had the feeling that I remember having in late 1968 and early 1969, when, each

weekend, I would turn on the radio hourly to hear what was happening at that weekend's demonstration and counter-demonstration. At that age I did not really appreciate what the future held for Northern Ireland. I suppose there was a sense of excitement as well as fear, but, looking back after all that time and after all the deaths, I am deeply disturbed that we may be moving back into precisely the same kind of horror, but with an even worse outcome.

Mr Donaldson's speech was a measured and thoughtful one, and that is appreciated at such a difficult time. He did, nevertheless, point out that this was not just about parades. We all know that over the past 12 months there have been preparations and a build-up, both amongst Nationalists and amongst Unionists and Orangemen, as to how this might be handled. Meetings have been held and plans formulated on how a stand might be taken — to use Mr McCrea's words.

It has been made clear that this is not just about the local issue. It is not just about a religious service or religious convictions, for there is little about humility, about turning the other cheek, or about esteeming the other better than esteeming ourselves — on either side. That is the reality. Nor is it about civil and religious liberty, when the result has been that some Members have found difficulty in getting here today because roads have been blocked without a "by your leave", without permission and without the agreement of the police. That is not what it is about. It is about the future of Northern Ireland. That is clear. It is not about religious conviction or civil liberties; it is about political control. And we know that.

The concern amongst Unionists is clear. Their concern has always been not just that political control of Northern Ireland would slip out of their hands but that the very existence of Northern Ireland might be put in jeopardy. The wish of Nationalists was clearly that it would slip away, that it would be taken away.

In the early 1970s — when Unionists still had a Parliament, which they regarded as their own, and a police force under the control of that Parliament and of the Ulster Unionist Party, and when society as a whole was largely under that control — a belief emerged that all of that was about to be taken away and that the only way of dealing with the situation was to stand, to demonstrate, to protest, to counter-demonstrate, and so on. I ask Unionist colleagues to reflect on whether this has worked. I ask them to reflect on whether the strategy that has been adopted has been successful. In 1974, of course it was possible to bring people out and bring down a power-sharing Executive. The result is that Northern Ireland now has no elected representatives in control. During our interrupted debate on education we were complaining because decisions about that area of life had been taken out of the hands of elected representatives. But no amount of protest, no amount of taking a stand at Drumcree, no amount of extending it beyond the parades issue, is going to resolve that problem in the way that Unionists would like.

When it came to 1985 and there was an attempt to bring down not a power-sharing Executive, which could be brought down, but an Anglo-Irish Agreement, it was not successful. It wreaked havoc in Northern Ireland, but it was not successful in the way Unionists had intended. I ask Members to reflect on what can possibly be brought down now by demonstrations. We can bring down the talks. I understand that there are some people talking about not returning to the talks. Let them reflect immediately on the impact of that.

The legislation makes it clear that if the talks are suspended, not just stopped but suspended, the Secretary of State shall stop the Forum.

Several Members: No.

Dr Alderdice: That is what the legislation says.

A Member: Are you happy with that?

Dr Alderdice: Whether I am happy with it or not, it is what the legislation says.

I have been asked by colleagues "What is the alternative?" I am clear, and have been clear for a long time, that the only possible alternative — and it is merely a possible alternative — is to get an honourable compromise. I do not know whether it can even be achieved any more, and the longer things go on, the more difficult it will be to achieve. We have seen how difficult it is to persuade Nationalists and Unionists to reach out to each other and to achieve some kind of compromise. We have seen it in the talks. We have been getting almost nowhere in agreeing procedures, never mind the substantive issues.

The police have been put in an impossible situation. They were asked to make decisions which were not going to resolve anybody's problems easily, and now they are under attack. They had a very difficult decision. Let me say that I, my colleagues here and my party will support them in trying to maintain law and order. If we do not have law and order in Northern Ireland, the ultimate outcome will be that there is no Northern Ireland.

I reflect with concern on what has happened over the last 25 years, and I am conscious of the concern that there must be about what will happen over the next few years. We could be looking down a very difficult dark tunnel. Is that going to make sure that Northern Ireland survives? I understand people saying "Do we just throw up a white flag? Do we just surrender?" No. The answer is to sit down and talk, to try to reach an accommodation, to try to reach agreement. I ask Unionist colleagues here to reflect and to ask themselves if they have a vision of what the future can realistically hold in terms of Unionists, Nationalists and others in Northern Ireland. If what they are doing is simply out of anger and frustration and hurt and resentment, I understand it. But it is not going to bring the result that they want. Look at how often their strategy has failed in the past. How likely is it to succeed in the future?

I see only two possible ways in which this problem can be worked out, and both involve, in effect, a defeat for Unionists. One is that the Orangemen withdraw or take another route. That, of course, would be perceived by them and by others as a defeat. The other is that, in some way, the police withdraw. That might be seen as some sort of victory, but it would be an entirely Pyrrhic victory because Nationalists would say "There you are. There is no context in which we can be absolutely sure that the police in Northern Ireland will be able to protect us against the overwhelming forces of Orangemen and Unionist superiority." I realize that Unionists do not see it that way, but if they do not understand that it is how it is perceived —

A Member: Perceived by whom?

Dr Alderdice: By Roman Catholics and Nationalists in Northern Ireland.

Mr Donaldson: By Brendan McKenna.

Dr Alderdice: By ordinary, reasonable, decent Catholic and Nationalist people. If Members do not understand that, I have to tell them that there is no future for Northern Ireland. That is not a threat. I love Northern Ireland. I want the place to survive. If people here cannot find a way of making peace with someone like me, how are they ever going to do it with people like Brendan McKenna? That is the reality, and those who turn away from it will do so at a cost to us all. Let Members shake their heads if they wish. My reality is the reality that we have experienced for 25 years.

Time after time, I have witnessed politicians from parties represented here standing on election platforms and telling us how they were going to win, how they were going to defeat the IRA, how they were going to smash Sinn Féin, how they were going to return to this, that and the other thing. I have seen campaigns established that were going to solve the problem through the election of other political parties. I have seen all sorts of people saying what they were going to achieve. What has it achieved? Has it been successful? It has been a disaster.

Mr Morrow: You shook hands with Gerry Adams.

Dr Alderdice: Because I am prepared to take any opportunity to help Northern Ireland to survive.

As time goes on, and as the community becomes polarized, the bridge could become less and less until we get to a Bosnia-type situation where Northern Ireland will not survive at all. That is not a situation that I can contemplate with any sense of satisfaction or pleasure.

A Member: Why put the onus on Unionism?

Dr Alderdice: I do not simply put —

A Member: Answer the question.

Dr Alderdice: I was prepared to go to the Dublin Forum and put the onus on Nationalists. I came away with this result: Nationalists saying that they accepted the principle of consent. Sinn Féin was unable to sign up, and others did not have the courage to go to America, until somebody else had blazed the trail. Other people did not have the guts to go to the Forum in Dublin but were prepared to send an observer for Loyalist prisoners. In this regard, I would be prepared to quote that Forum's report with approbation. Isn't it clear that Sinn Féin was not prepared to accept it? Who was there actually negotiating? Who was there actually trying to secure an outcome for Northern Ireland? *[Interruption]*

The Chairman: Members must be allowed to complete their speeches. I am sure that Dr Alderdice is coming to an end. *[Laughter]*

A Member: Well done, Mr Chairman.

The Chairman: I did not intend that to be any sort of slight. Let us hear the Member in silence.

Dr Alderdice: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

I know that what I have to say is not acceptable to Unionists, as I know that what I have had to say in other contexts has often not been acceptable to Nationalists. Some Members will have seen how the 'Irish News' lambasted me a couple of weeks ago because of the position that I had taken. I know that what I have to say is unacceptable to both sides because it involves compromise.

A Member: Between a rock and a hard place.

Dr Alderdice: We are all between a rock and a hard place, but the police in particular will be between a rock and a hard place in the next few days. I hope that Members will recognize that by attacking the police, damaging the police and smashing policemen's heads they put this whole community at risk. The police will have our support in trying to keep the peace. I hope that, as Members go home and reflect on this, we can all try to build peace together. The consequences of doing otherwise would be catastrophic.

The meeting was suspended at 1.00 pm and resumed at 2.00 pm.

The Chairman: The seconds are ticking away. I have complained about the clock, which is fast. If I am giving hell to people for being late I had better be on time myself. In future I will ask for the announcement to be made three minutes before whatever time I have said we are going to resume. If I have a meeting on my own it will be my fault.

I call Mr McCartney, who, I hope, enjoyed lunch.

Mr McCartney: Unlike you, Mr Chairman, I avoided the curry, as I wish to keep my address as cool as possible.

Most of the people here will be aware that I am not an Orangeman, though some of the most decent and honourable men I have had the good fortune to know were members of that institution. I can speak, with a degree of objectivity, I hope, upon not only what is happening at Drumcree but what Drumcree will come to symbolize for the political future of Northern Ireland. I could not disagree more fundamentally with Ms Rodgers when she says that this is a local issue which ought not be expanded into the general political arena of Northern Ireland, because I believe that Drumcree is at the very core of what is happening in this province.

It is unfortunate that already one person has died as a result of the residual fall-out from events that people may attribute to Drumcree. It is also unfortunate that persons have been seriously injured, and I extend my sincere sympathy to the relatives of those who have suffered. But the blame and responsibility, in the most fundamental sense, for those events rests on politicians, not from Northern Ireland but from the two sovereign Governments, and

on the Northern Ireland Office. They have been determined to pursue a course of political endeavour without taking into account the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland.

I should like to address what I believe to be perhaps the narrow legal situation in relation to the march at Drumcree. The fundamental position, as I understand the law, is that no community has the right to bar a public highway simply because they do not approve of those who wish to march on it. I think that that principle was established before the second world war, during the Mosley marches — marches of a kind different from that which was to take place at Drumcree.

But even in those extreme circumstances it was held that no community had the right to say "People will not march in this area." What they had a fundamental right to expect was that any march be carried out in such a manner as to be unprovocative, not to be insulting and not to be, by disorderly behaviour, likely to cause public disorder. That is the test that was applied. It was not a question of a community saying "We don't like the colour of these people." We don't like what they stand for. We don't like the political opinions that they express." The test was whether people taking part in a parade were conducting themselves in an orderly and decent fashion, even though the views that they represented were contrary to those of the people residing in the neighbourhood through which they passed. That is the fundamental principle.

If we apply that principle to what was happening at Drumcree we find that the Orange Order has marched on this Garvaghy Road route for decades — since 1807 — in a peaceful and orderly way. Until quite recently this was not the subject of any difficulty with the neighbouring residents. Why has there been such a change in attitude? The reason is simple. Sinn Féin/IRA have opened their second front, which is to foment discord and disorder at every conceivable flash-point.

We have Mr Brendan McKenna — a man, I am sorry to hear, now, by way of a demand for human and civil rights, espousing the prevention of a parade of respectable, decent people from a church service, offering no provocation of any kind, other than that they happen to represent a certain view of life and of the political identity of the province, and behaving in an absolutely decent fashion. In the past, of course, Mr Brendan McKenna has been very sensitive to human rights, particularly the most fundamental human right of all — the right to life. This gentleman, who has become a sort of Sir Galahad for the protection of the sensitivities of the people of the Garvaghy Road, has some form. His civil-rights form is that he likes to blow up, or attempt to blow up, people with whom he disagrees.

The SDLP, while I consider them to be my political opponents, I have never regarded as political enemies. They stand for a tradition and a view that can be deservedly and properly advocated in any free society. Unfortunately, they find themselves driven into the position where they have to defend the extreme views of people like this gentleman organizing public discord. If they did not they might be politically disadvantaged against those who are currently — to use a euphemism — borrowing votes from them. That seems to be the situation, and I find it regrettable. I do not see how democratic people, such as I believe inhabit the SDLP, can say that the Drumcree parade should be stopped. There may well be other occasions when they will have a perfectly valid and proper reason for such a proposal.

In Drumcree, the SDLP have picked an altogether wrong issue. Fifteen minutes per year, 15 minutes when people walk down a road they have walked for decades, is not a new imposition. This is a road they have traditionally marched for 15 minutes, playing hymn tunes, and, so far as I am aware, without any indication that they have provoked or caused disorder in any adjacent area. They are not walking through a housing estate; they are walking along a main arterial road flanked by housing estates. I say to the SDLP that this is not a parade to which they can conceivably, with any honour, object.

Let me turn for a moment to the Leader of the Alliance Party. The Leader of the Alliance Party has treated all of us to a piece of patronizing — I am lost for words; I was about to say “drivel”, but that might be objectionable — inanity in which we on this side of the house are given a stark alternative: “Surrender now or there may be something worse in store for you.” During medieval times, when a city was besieged the inhabitants were told “If you surrender now we may not rape your women and murder your menfolk, but if you put up any resistance that will be your fate.”

That is the philosophy of Dr Alderdice — that you take whatever is on offer. You take a dynamic central institution, with all the dynamism coming from the Republic of Ireland, you take cross-border institutions, when all the energy and development will be coming from the Republic, and you make the best of it, because there is something even more terrible in the woodshed if you do not agree to the deal. If that is the basis of the Alliance Party's programme for the future, it explains totally why their vote is collapsing in a quite catastrophic fashion. It explains why, after some 26 or 27 years, they have not really improved their position. Indeed, it is deteriorating.

Dr Alderdice wants to know what is the way forward in Northern Ireland. I will tell him. The way forward is for every citizen, whether Catholic, Protestant, Nationalist or Unionist, to accept the principle that the majority are entitled to determine the constitutional identity of this state. The majority are not entitled to govern in an authoritarian way. They are not entitled to deprive any man or woman, or any section of the community, of fundamental rights. Every person is entitled to equality, but that does not mean that the majority have to surrender to the demands of the minority about who will govern them, or what their state will be, or to share with the minority not equal civil rights but equal rights of government in some form of joint authority or condominium. If that is what Dr Alderdice is advocating he had better know that there is no way it is an acceptable solution to our problem.

What I really wish to make clear is that I will join with the SDLP and support them in any situation where I believe that the minority community, as a consequence of any march, are being insulted or provoked, or if their values are being given less than proper dignity, or if people are being subjected to disorderly or unseemly behaviour. I assure them that I will support them when such a situation arises. But what they and Sinn Féin have done here is challenge the very fundamentals of the heritage, background and civil liberties of the majority, and they have done so on the basis that the majority have got to be pushed into a corner.

The Northern Ireland Office, the two Governments, the SDLP and Sinn Féin have awakened a sleeping giant. I pray that they will not have visited upon them — and I will attempt to avert this in every way possible — the results of that provocation. The time has come when the pro-Union people of Northern Ireland will not be pushed any further, either by the machinations of government or by the guile of political parties. That is what Drumcree is about. It is symbolic of a people who have at last said “Enough is enough.” That is what it is about.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I am glad that today, in this Forum, the elected representatives of the Ulster people can have their say, can express their views, no matter how deeply diverse they may be.

Ms McWilliams: I seek clarification, Mr Chairman. Is it your intention to call Members in the order we agreed in the Business Committee — a representative of each party?

The Chairman: They are coming right now — doing it in reverse.

Ms McWilliams: I do not understand why you have allowed a second Member.

The Chairman: I am sorry, but that is the way I have decided to do it.

Mr Alban Maginness: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. Mr McCrea spoke on behalf of the DUP this morning.

2.15 pm

The Chairman: The SDLP will have another.

Mr Alban Maginness: The Women’s Coalition, the UDP and the Labour group have not spoken. It is surely right for all of them to speak before any larger party has an opportunity to speak again.

The Chairman: To keep everybody happy, and to make sure that everybody has a turn, after Dr Paisley we will have Mr McMichael, if he would like to speak, Mr Smyth, Ms McWilliams, Mr Maginnis and a Member — yet to be notified — from the SDLP. All happy now?

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: The right to speak in this assembly is for everyone, and there is no reason why there should be a time-limit. That is what the Business Committee decided. The day is but a pup, and I want to take a considerable time to set forth the case that needs to be outlined.

Let us come to the heart of this matter. What is the objection? The objection is to the fact that men who had gone to their place of worship, had worshipped according to the dictates of their conscience, and had come out of the church having been told by the police — I am referring to last year’s events — that they could walk down the Garvaghy Road were this year told by the police that they would not be walking down the Garvaghy Road. When

the police were asked why, they said that IRA gunmen had been through the Garvaghy Road estates and had organized a sit-down protest, determined to use whatever force they could to stop the Orangemen returning to their homes. Those are the facts. The police informed the marchers, as well as people here, including myself, in the police station in Portadown. That is what happened.

I take very great exception to what Ms Rodgers has said — that there was some sort of nice relationship whereby the people of the Garvaghy Road came to a compromise decision to let the Orangemen march down the road. They did nothing of the kind. They told the police that they would oppose the march, and the police said that they would have to remove them. The residents said that in that case they would have to be removed.

Two of the mediators, whom we have in our midst today, come to trouble-spots and tell us that they can reconcile the irreconcilable. They came to a meeting held last year in the police station in Portadown, and we said to them “Look, we are not asking for all the Orangemen who have now gathered at the Drumcree church to walk down the road. We are asking for those from the Portadown area who went to that church on the Sunday morning to walk down the road.” As the bands had gone home, there would be no music.

The two mediators thought that this was a very good proposal, and they went to see these “sweet” Garvaghy Road residents. According to Ms Rodgers, they are very sweet, very nice, very decent and very loving. The mediators were hunted. They were asked only one question: “Who did you speak to at the meeting in the police station?” They responded by saying that the police were there, as were Mr Trimble, the Member of Parliament for the area, and Mr Paisley, one of the MEPs. These people said “If you have spoken to David Trimble or Ian Paisley, get out.” The mediators were chased and were back up the road in two or three minutes to say that there could be no reconciliation and “We have committed the unpardonable sin of even speaking to you.”

Such are those now put forward by the SDLP as very consenting people who want to find an agreement. What did they do? They set about keeping people from returning from their place of worship to their own homes.

Everyone knows that I do not accept the Downing Street declaration. A succession of Southern Governments have presided over a country that has eliminated 80% of its Protestant population. When the border was drawn, there was a 10% Protestant population in the South of Ireland. Now there is hardly 2.5%. That means that there has been a reduction of almost 80%. These people tell us that they will stand for the right to freedom of expression and religion. This was a religious service in a church to which the participants’ forefathers had walked for more than a century. The police said that they had no objection to the Orangemen’s going down the road, but when they came out of the church the police told them “You cannot walk down there because IRA gunmen are in the area. The people are agitated, and they will not unblock the road.”

It was the duty of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to remove the law-breakers — the people blocking the road. They should never have been allowed to get into a position whereby they held a veto over the Queen’s highway, but that is what the RUC allowed them to do. The Orangemen rightly said “We have got to stay here until the police escort us down

the road.” We did not get any help whatsoever from the SDLP on this issue. In fact, the police spoke to Mr Mark Durkan. I happen to know this because I had given a man called Hall, who is a senior police officer, my telephone number, and he rang it by mistake. He said “Is that you Mark? I want to talk about Drumcree.” What Mark Durkan had to do with Drumcree I do not know, because he is not a public representative for that area. Nor is he an Orangeman. I must say that, although we got no help, we stayed there and sustained our position.

Now we are told “Oh, last year you compromised.” There was no compromise. They resisted to the very end, and when we went down into the town we committed “an offence”. I did not walk down the Garvaghy Road as I was not at the morning service. I said that those who went to the service should walk down the road, but that those who came to support them should not — and they didn’t. I went into Portadown by car. I met the parade coming in, and I walked in it. Evidently, the fact that Mr Trimble and myself held hands at the end of the parade was the greatest slap in the face to them. They said “Because Mr Trimble and Mr Paisley slapped us in the face we saw to it this year that the Orangemen wouldn’t parade.”

So this has nothing to do with anything but political agitation. Who is behind it? A well-known IRA man, as has been exposed by Mr McCartney. Who was invited in — no doubt Ms Rodgers will remind me — to organize this so-called carnival, which never took place? It was a farce. It was not going to take place. It was an excuse to say to people “They’ll break up our carnival”, which they never intended to have. The desire was to break up the Orange parade, not their own carnival, and they called the IRA/Sinn Féin in to organize that.

Why is it that certain residents of the Garvaghy Road estate left on holiday and said they would not be back until this was all over? Because they refused to be intimidated. As I might be expected to say, a Roman Catholic priest, a Jesuit who is very active in that area, personally visited the homes of the people and told them that it was their duty to put one person out on the road to block the Orangemen. That is the message that they were given. I happen to know because, strange to relate, there are people in that estate who are personal friends of mine and who know what is happening.

I know that the SDLP do not want these facts to be brought out. They want to vilify the Orange Institution. I am not an Orangeman — I am an ex-Orangeman — so they cannot say that I am making a political point. I am simply saying that anybody, whoever he is, has a right to attend his place of worship and go home from it, provided that he does not act contrary to the law of the land.

If this were turned the other way, and anybody in Northern Ireland dared to say that Roman Catholics could not return from their place of worship to their home, there would be an outcry among the Protestant people. Hibernian parades take place in Protestant areas of North Antrim, which you, Sir, know and have policed. The Orangemen do not say “No, you’ll not walk.” The Protestants do not sit down in the streets. The Hibernians have always walked there. I believe in civil and religious liberty, and I believe that they are entitled to do so. But this is not so in the Garvaghy Road area.

2.30 pm

Where did this come from? It all came from a conference held by Sinn Féin and Republican agitators in the county of Donegal, when they arranged that it was going to be a very hot summer. The Alliance Party's Leader had to shake hands with Gerry Adams, the man with blood dripping from his fingers, in order that he could sit in the Dublin Forum. He had told us today of the great strides he made in the Forum. Well, I want to tell him that he made no strides. They took him for a ride — and it was not a ride in an orange buggy. He got nothing out of the Forum. Northern Ireland got nothing out of the Forum. All he got was a slap in the face from Gerry Adams, who said "I don't accept what all this Nationalist consensus is about." These are facts that need to be told over and over again.

The media are telling us that the Orangemen want to walk through Roman Catholic housing estates. That is not true. The Garvaghy Road is the main road into the most Protestant town in County Armagh. Ms Rodgers would not allow the Protestants to walk from their church service, along the main road into the Protestant town in the county. What would we get from the SDLP if we had a united Ireland? The very same is being given to our Protestant co-religionists in the Irish Republic: we would be eliminated.

Mr McCartney was right when he said that the Protestants will not take this for ever. I have often said this to the British Government and to John Hume. They thought that they would get away with hammering the Orangemen into the ground and that we would lose out. Then Dr Alderdice would tell us "Well, you have lost out again." But last year we did not lose out. I am not a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but I have been around Northern Ireland a long time. It is not just the working-class people that I mostly represent but also the professional classes who are saying exactly what Mr McCartney said — that enough is enough.

If you beat a drum too loudly you have to go to court because of parity of esteem. Where is it going to end? In this very assembly the same people voted that we should not even fly the Union flag on this building because people would be offended. Well, the Orangemen are offended at what has been done to them. Give them parity of esteem. Instead of lecturing others, "Physician, heal thyself." That is the main issue that needs to be addressed today.

We are not looking for any form of triumphalism; we are looking for fair play, civil and religious liberty and the right to go to and from our place of worship — the very right that lies at the basis of our reformed and evangelical faith. Surely we are not asking too much, as part of what we are told is the great European ideal, that these things, which are near and dear to people, should be protected and defended. That is what this battle is about, and Ms Rodgers is blinkered if she thinks that it is a local matter. It is not a local matter. It has gone to every hamlet, every cottage and every family. What they have succeeded in doing is galvanizing the people of Northern Ireland, who have had enough. Who are these people? People that were indicted —

Mr Alban Maginness: On a point of order, Mr Chairman.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: People that were indicted by the Member's own friend, Dr Hendron, as Fascists.

The Chairman: Are you going to give way?

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: No, I am not giving way to him — in no wise.

Mr Alban Maginness: Are you finished?

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: Shut up, you.

The Chairman: That was uncalled-for. We do not want to hear remarks like "Shut up".

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I said "in no wise". There is nothing wrong with that remark.

Ms Brid Rodgers: Mr Paisley Jnr said "Shut up".

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I said that in no wise was I giving way to Mr Maginness.

Mr Alban Maginness: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. It is not an intervention; it is a point of order. Mr Paisley has spoken for approximately 20 minutes, and I ask you to ask him to draw his remarks to a close. If there is a 10-minute rule here it should be applied equally.

The Chairman: There is not a 10-minute rule, but there was a request from the Chair that remarks be kept as concise as possible, and I have read out a list of people who would like to speak.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I will finish in a minute.

The Member's own colleague told us after the election in West Belfast that he was fighting Fascists. Now, if he is fighting Fascism, so are we today. We are not going to allow Fascist thugs to dictate to us how we can go home from our places of worship. It is not on — today, tomorrow or ever.

Mr McMichael: I will endeavour to be brief and measured in my remarks. We find ourselves in a very difficult and critical situation, at perhaps a defining point in our history, and it would be inappropriate to further heighten tensions at a time when they are already so high. I completely understand the consequences of threats and incitement. Certainly we do not want to see any repetition of the tragic events in Aghalee, which may be attributed to the dangerous, volatile and tense situation at Drumcree.

The situation that we find ourselves in could have been avoided. There is no doubt that this is an issue of someone else's making. The stark reality of Drumcree, as has been pointed out by many others, is that had it not been made an issue, the Orangemen would have travelled that route in less than 15 minutes. It is reminiscent of the situation on Easter Monday on the Ormeau Road. The Apprentice Boys would have paraded for a matter of

minutes and at a time when people would not have been out of bed long enough to be offended. Unfortunately, the political direction of this issue resulted in confrontation and a stand-off and in an unwelcome situation which, of course, has an impact on the overall political climate.

To see where this originates, we have to look back to events that unfolded in 1986, when we came through the re-routeing phase for the first time following the Anglo-Irish Agreement. There were attempts then to subvert the Protestant culture and its expression. Unfortunately, in 1986 the situation turned very volatile and resulted in much trouble and unrest. Certainly no one wishes to see that replicated. In this instance the police made a fatal mistake when they decided in favour of the residents of Garvaghy Road. There is no doubt about the political direction behind that decision. If the police had had more concern for the Orange Order and its wish to proceed in a peaceful way along the route than about the reaction from militant Republicanism we would not find ourselves in this situation. I hope we will not come to a point where they regret their decision.

2.45 pm

I fundamentally believe that the central issue here is an attempt to undermine and subvert the civil and religious liberties of Protestants. I am not a member of the Orange Order, though I am a former member. What is important is that all people in Northern Ireland should have the right to express their culture, religion or beliefs openly, without hostility and without being oppressed or subverted in any way. That is a fundamental belief that we all share. Unfortunately, in this case, we have a political issue that is dressed up in many ways and has very wide and far-reaching implications for everyone.

I should have thought that at a time when we had come through a period of relative peace, at a time when the hopes of the people of this country were lifted beyond the horizon they had seen for so long, we would be seeking to embrace, understand and reach out to each other's culture, rather than trying to create a form of cultural apartheid, which is what this issue represents. The situation could have been avoided but for the decisions of the police. We are in a very dangerous and difficult situation, and we all have to be mindful of the implications of seeing it escalate any further. I certainly do not want to see it develop into violence. That would not be in anyone's interests. It certainly would not be in the interests of the people of the Protestant tradition. We have to understand that we would be following the IRA's agenda.

It is quite clearly understood that Sinn Fein is primarily behind the orchestration of this campaign against the Protestant tradition. We see the same people and the same placards and the same demonstrations time and time again. We know these people as IRA activists. We know them as Sinn Fein activists. Their motivation is not as clear-cut as the propaganda makes it appear. Their motivation is twofold. Firstly, they wish to deny Protestant civil liberties, and they are succeeding in doing so because they have the upper hand on the parades issue, and have had over the past two years. Secondly — and more importantly — they wish to agitate Loyalists into violence.

Because of the wider implications of the stand-off at Drumcree, we will probably have protests in other areas of the province — today or tonight or for so long as the issue is to the

forefront. There is always the possibility of degeneration into violence. I appeal quite firmly to those in our tradition not to succumb to the agenda of the IRA, not to become involved in violence, not to allow this to escalate and not to play into the hands of the Provos, who wish to regenerate their campaign in Northern Ireland and would prefer to do so in a defensive role. Let us not give them that opportunity.

The Orange Order has an absolute right to protest at the decision wrongly taken against it. We each have a responsibility to ensure that the protest that takes place is peaceful and that the issue is resolved quickly and satisfactorily and in favour of the Orange Order.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I will be brief because most of the points have already been covered. I agree with Mr McMichael. So far as I am concerned, this really is the crunch. I believe that it is time not only for cool heads but also for true leadership. I hope and pray that the Loyalist paramilitaries' cease-fires will continue, because, like Mr McMichael, I believe that to break those cease-fires would be to give victory to the Provisional IRA.

I believe with all my heart that the Chief Constable has made a mistake. But even at this late hour he can put it right. He can stop the situation in Portadown deteriorating. In his statement on Saturday he said that the reason he was re-routeing the parade was that there might be a serious breakdown of law and order. He made that statement knowing that re-routeing would raise that serious possibility. He chose to run with the people in Garvaghy Road, and he did that for a very good reason.

I believe that this is part of a play that has been going on. It started three or four years ago on the Ormeau Road. The police caved in on that occasion also, and Sinn Fein quickly moved in on the situation, believing that that was the way to stop the Orangemen walking.

You have only to look at what happened in North Belfast two or three weeks ago to see the same type of activity and the same type of threats. At the Whiterock parade, which was not going into any Catholic estates, we witnessed the same thing. That parade has been taking place for some 25 years. It has already been re-routed, and the people have accepted the re-routeing. When the parade comes out of Workman Avenue onto the Springfield Road it passes only seven Catholic homes, yet there were hundreds upon hundreds of Sinn Fein supporters trying to get it further re-routed. I cannot for the life of me understand how these people can continually tell us that our rights will be defended in the event of a new Ireland.

When I was Lord Mayor, I, along with others, tried to extend the hand of friendship to all sections of the community. I believe that, like others, I was able to do that successfully. But love and friendship have to come both ways; they cannot come from just one direction. I have not seen the hand of friendship from Portadown. I believe that had those people been really interested in peace and reconciliation — and let us remember the difficult situation that we have because at the moment there is only one cease-fire — they would have tried to move the situation forward.

Things have moved on even from last year. We now have this Forum. We have all-party talks taking place, even if those talks have not moved as quickly as some people would have liked. The Forum may not have moved on as quickly as, evidently, even you, Mr Chairman, wanted, but at least we are here, offering hope of a better future.

I believe that the people in Portadown lost a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to peace and reconciliation. The Portadown parade would take probably less than 15 minutes, and last year, but for the confusion and fuss, it would probably have taken seven or eight minutes. As Mr McCartney rightly said, if the parade had been going into the estate none of us could have defended the right of the Orange Institution. But they are not asking to do that. They are asking to walk past a Catholic estate. Some of the people who seem to be offendable would have a hell of a way to walk to be offended. If they were to stand at their own doors or stay in their homes they probably could not even hear the bands.

All the goodwill and hands of friendship that we hear about are, so far as I am concerned, coming from only one direction. Nobody is prepared to grasp the hand of friendship. We, as Unionists, have rights too, as have Orangemen. Those people in Portadown are absolutely justified in defending their right to walk the route that they have walked for 189 years. I hope and pray that, even at this late stage, the Chief Constable can find an answer. As Dr Paisley said, there is absolutely no reason why, even tonight, he could not allow all those people who went to the church service to complete the journey that they started on Sunday.

I do not threaten anyone, but God forbid that anyone should play a part in returning us to the violence that this country suffered for 25 years. I say, plain and straight, to the Chief Constable "You, Sir, have made a mistake. We all have made mistakes, but you have an opportunity of putting right your mistake. I appeal to you: take that opportunity."

Ms McWilliams: Obviously these are difficult times in Northern Ireland. Once again we find ourselves in a state of high conflict and tension. When the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition went to the elections, we stood on three principles. One was inclusion, one was equity, and one was human rights. I believe that there are basic human rights at issue here. I believe also that the most basic of all human rights is to live free from the fear of violent attack. We deplore this morning's murder, and we hope that there will be no more. It is my firm belief that what is going on in this country right now should not lead to one more death.

We in the Women's Coalition have tried to have meetings about the issue of parades. We have invited representatives of the Orange Order and of local communities in order that we might understand both sides of the issue. It is my firm belief that we need a balance of views. It is not going to happen over the next few days. Indeed, it will probably take at least a year or two before we arrive at that balance. But right now, when tensions are high, when pride is at stake and when there is fear and insecurity, in this room as well as outside — I can feel the fear and the tension right now — the strong thing to do is try to de-escalate the situation. We are conscious of the damage done when that does not happen, and we firmly believe that we need to move away from the win-or-lose syndrome that we have locked ourselves into.

Accommodation should not be threatening. I came into the Women's Coalition because I believe in accommodation. I have had to make a journey within the movement, and I have learned a great deal from the other women about their views and their principles. I know that some Members may not want to listen to this and may choose to walk out. Well,

that is perfectly fine. Parades, I feel, should not be a battle arena where one side has total victory over the other, with the RUC caught in the middle. We need to arrive at a sense of fairness, and, given the calendar period that we are in, when we knew there was going to be tension in the country, we have to work hard at getting that sense of fairness over the next few days and, indeed, in respect of the issue of parades generally. *[Interruption]* Please! As I said on Friday, I do not give people verbal abuse when they are on their feet, and I ask that I be given the same courtesy.

We need to move away from the sense of exclusion, from the sense of defensiveness and, most of all, from the scalded memories that all of us in this country suffer. It is time to move towards a new vision — a vision of the society in which I want to raise my sons, and other Members want to raise their children. We need to create some confidence that we can address and accommodate the differences that have arisen at Drumcree. I would like Members, in tribute to the person who died this morning — indeed, to all those who have died in this country — to listen to these words of Evan Boland about the death of a child in the troubles:

“We must find, for your sake
Whose life our idle talk has lost,
A new language, child of our times.
Our times have robbed your cradle.
Sleep in a world your final sleep has woken.”

She wrote that in 1974. Twenty-two years later we are still in a position to write something similar. Over the next few days we need to calm the situation and to work hard to create a new vision of the society that we all want to live in. Most of all, we must try to create it together.

The Chairman: It is getting towards 3 o'clock, though I am quite ready to go on a little longer if Members would like that.

Mr Hugh Smyth: We recognized that the larger parties would have two speakers each. That would take in Mr Ken Maginnis and a member of the SDLP.

The Chairman: Alliance would like another speaker?

A Member: No.

3.00 pm

Mr Ken Maginnis: I referred earlier today, and will refer again, to the whole question of civil rights as expounded 30 years ago. At that time there were many who supported the whole concept of civil rights and had no difficulty with it, but there were many who were suspicious of what that demand for civil rights might lead to. In today's events we see both attitudes well justified. Those who believed, as I did 30 years ago, that there should be some fundamental rights — for instance, the right of any member of this society to walk on the Queen's highway and the right to housing — have seen those rights established. I find it quite startling and difficult to understand that those who would have denied human rights,

civil rights and even the very right of life are able to dictate to the Chief Constable who shall walk on a particular arterial road.

I am neither a member nor a former member of the Orange Order, but I have the highest regard for that organization. As someone who has been close to the violence and has seen it at first hand since 1969, I realize the extent to which the Orange Order worked to ensure that young men and women from the Protestant tradition would not become caught up in violence. God help us if those people who were seeking an eye-for-an-eye solution had not been prevented from so indulging. The Orange Order, in its quiet way in hundreds of little halls around the country, has been a force for good and stability through 25 of the most difficult years one can imagine.

Is it the desire of a very small section of society to orchestrate opposition to an Orange parade to or from a church? Has that to do with some offence that it gives to the greater Roman Catholic tradition, or has it to do merely with the sectarian hatred which has been expounded and pursued by a very small section associated with IRA/Sinn Féin? I travel a great deal throughout Northern Ireland and farther afield. I have sat on aeroplanes with people who have said "Mr Maginnis, I'm a Roman Catholic. I reared my family and saw my grandchildren grow up. I used to be fit to take them out on the 12th of July to watch the bands, but now these thugs tell me that I am not allowed to do so." That is the tragedy which has occurred over the 50 years since I, as a lad, first went to a 12th of July parade with my grandfather.

The Government and, sadly, the most senior officer in the RUC have allowed themselves to be dictated to by the worst element in society — an element who sat for a year in the so-called Dublin Forum for Peace and Reconciliation and who, at the end of that time, were the only dissenting voice: "No, we will never consent to the idea that the people will decide."

It is really a question that the Chief Constable must answer — a Chief Constable who, throughout his period in office, has, sadly, not shown any great degree of good judgement. He is the Chief Constable who is out of the province for 123 days in a single year; the Chief Constable who sought, although he did not always succeed, to promote only those who paid lip-service to him; the Chief Constable who, when so many serious incidents were taking place, was not in Northern Ireland. When we had the Chinook tragedy he was out of Northern Ireland. While that could be forgiven, the fact that he inquired whether it was necessary for him to come back in the wake of the disaster was quite shameful. He is the Chief Constable who told the Northern Ireland Select Committee that the IRA could not possibly go back to violence. Some judgement. Some Chief Constable. He is the Chief Constable who has done nothing amongst the most senior officers in the RUC but play upon divisions. He has not sought to unify the command structure. He is the Chief Constable who would have been glad to go a year ago, except that there was a pay rise coming, which would affect his pension.

This is the Chief Constable who, having made all those wrong judgements, has now made the judgement about a small church parade that was intent on leaving Drumcree and marching, in a way that would not give offence, in a way that could not be described as triumphalist, along its traditional route back into the town of Portadown.

Last night a young man in his early thirties — Mr McGoldrick, from Lurgan — was murdered. He was not murdered because of an Orange parade. He was not murdered because of an Orange service. He was not murdered because of anything that the Orange Order stands for. He was murdered because there are evil people in this community who are capitalizing upon the sad state of affairs brought about by a wrong decision on the part of the Chief Constable. This young man was innocent — somebody who, by the sweat of his own brow, earned enough money to take himself through university, to graduate quite recently. Unlike the Brian Gillans of Belfast, who come across town to provoke confrontation on the Ormeau Road, unlike the Gerard Rices, unlike the Brendan McKennas, this was a young man who wanted to make a constructive contribution to society. His death brings a great deal of sadness to us all.

I appeal to everyone in our society — even to the Chief Constable — to recognize that you cannot have proper civil and human rights by denying civil and human rights to others. I have got into trouble from time to time for criticizing those who would turn themselves against members of the RUC. Today I feel sorry for those young men who have been placed across the road at Drumcree. The Chief Constable does not realize that he is turning brother against brother, father against son, and son against father. That is the legacy of the decision the Chief Constable has made, and, irrespective of the excuse that it is an operational decision, it is now incumbent on those who have responsibility for government in this province to arrive at a solution that does not deny the civil rights of anyone and to consistently ensure that the law is implemented in a way which, in the future, will not infringe the rights of any man or woman. That, I believe, is the way forward.

I was depressed by the speech made by the Leader of the Alliance Party because it was a diatribe aimed at one section of the community. It posed all the questions of which we are already too well aware, but did not provide a single answer. I will close by repeating the answer. The answer is that every man, woman and child who is prepared to act within the law must be heard and must have the right of free movement throughout this province so long as he or she has a degree of sensitivity and is prepared to consider the welfare of fellow members of society. This is the way forward — not the confrontation that has been provoked by the Chief Constable on the Garvaghy Road near Drumcree.

3.15 pm

Mr Alban Maginness: I look forward to the day when this Forum can consider calmly and dispassionately the whole issue of parades and marching. I look forward to a time when we can seriously address the issues that arise. We have a local problem that has given rise to wider political problems and difficulties. In this atmosphere it is difficult to address issues properly because feelings are so high.

When we consider the question of marches we must remember that we live in a bitterly divided society, where there are competing rights between the various communities and traditions. There is no absolute right to march in a divided society that is devoid of political consensus. The right to march must be tempered, qualified. Residents must have the right to agree or disagree. That is the reality that besets this society.

How can we accommodate two different sets of rights — the rights of those who want to march and the rights that people feel are being trampled on by the very act of marching? It is for us as politicians to address these issues wholeheartedly and honestly to find a solution that everybody can agree with. This is the only way to unite the community and create a situation where an Orange march would be welcomed on the Garvaghy Road, and a Nationalist band could march unimpeded through the centre of Portadown. I wish that an Orange band were welcome on the Cliftonville Road or Duncairn Gardens, in my constituency of North Belfast, and that a Nationalist band were welcome on the Shankill Road or Sandy Row. This is the task that we should set ourselves.

There is no point in Members' shaking their heads. We live in a divided society where there are competing rights, and we have got to accommodate those rights. There is no absolute right to march. We have got to reach a situation where both sides can be properly accommodated.

With regard to this particular situation — a local difficulty with wider implications — we in the SDLP have long been of the view that local problems should be sorted out at local level, by the communities that live cheek by jowl, such as those in Portadown.

It should also be remembered that we all share a Christian witness and ought to approach this problem as Christians. We should be prepared to turn the other cheek. It should be recognized that the voluntary re-routeing of a parade of this sort — a church parade — shows not weakness but tremendous strength and impresses more people, through Christian charity and understanding, than defiance of a re-routeing order.

Archbishop Eames has made strenuous personal efforts to resolve the situation. Unfortunately, His Grace has not managed to do so, but he has recently made a very useful suggestion about parades throughout Northern Ireland, involving the setting up of an independent commission to examine the situation locally in terms of policing and public disorder. The purpose would be to analyse the effects of parades on the sensitivities of local communities. The establishment of such a commission would help to resolve many local difficulties until we have a consensus situation in which all traditions are not just accommodated but applauded.

Mr Foster: Mr Maginness speaks about the accommodation of parades. Does he mean accommodating those who wish to be constructive in relation to the state? How does he feel about those who wish to be destructive?

Mr Alban Maginness: The Member has misunderstood me. My party seeks to establish consensus. We want all political traditions — mainly the Nationalists and the Unionists — to be accommodated. That is the challenge for us as politicians. We must rise to it by establishing democratic consensus in Northern Ireland.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Mr Maginness says that it would be useful if these matters were dealt with locally. In the case of Drumcree, the local police had no objection to the route. Mr Ken Maginnis is absolutely right: it was the Chief Constable's fault.

The Chairman: I am sure we could debate this at great length, but we have a motion in front of us.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at 3.20 pm.

FORUM BUSINESS

The Chairman: There will be a meeting of the Business Committee next Friday to discuss further how we propose to move the Forum's work forward. Members have received a copy of a revised draft memorandum, which the Business Committee have decided to place in the paper as soon as possible, so that additional views from the public, to supplement the views that we think the Forum should concentrate on. I will be very eager to get the views of the parties on these issues.

I take it that the Forum is content for such an advertisement to be placed in the paper.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: I have agreed that we should get under way at 1.00 pm. I propose — as a topic on the current situation in Northern Ireland. We have seen that about and heard of disaster in recent days. Too many people have been hurt, too many homes and businesses destroyed, too many lives lost. Our country is in a state of confusion, our work apparently unmanageable. There is a pressing need to restore confidence, to tackle fear and to help return to the normal situation we people of Northern Ireland have known for a quarter of a century, which ended at the end of the last century.

We have looked into the abyss that exists. Let us now look at our country — at its love-hate just now — at our children and our grandchildren, at our homes and farms and businesses, and decide what we can do, collectively and with our Forum, to bring back the confidence that was creating the peace, which is a peace of a peaceful land in which Northern Ireland people, with all their great qualities of spirit, dependability, good humour, hospitality and hard work, showed the world that this country has a glorious future.

I am sure that each Member has ideas as to what he or she may want to say on this subject. I ask you to contribute constructively and, as many Members may want to be heard, to deal briefly with the problems that we face. I propose to handle the debate in the same way as last week's discussion on Drumcree. I shall therefore call a Member from each party in turn until the time is exhausted. Again, I ask Members to be concise, to allow as many contributions as possible.

At 2.00 pm we shall resume the debate on the advertisement that we agreed to place in the paper.