

NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Friday 8 November 1996

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

ACT OF REMEMBRANCE

The Chairman: I have been asked to give the Forum an opportunity to pay its respects to those who fought and died in two world wars for our freedom. I ask you to stand.

Members standing in their places —

The Chairman: "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them."

Members: We will remember them.

HOUSING POLICY REVIEW

The Chairman: I seek the Forum's indulgence to make a personal statement.

The Forum will recall its housing debate of 20 and 27 September, which resulted in a resolution asking the Government to withhold any decision on the implementation of changes to the Housing Executive until after the forthcoming general election. I then wrote to the Secretary of State to put the resolution before him. I received a response from Mr Malcolm Moss, the Minister with responsibility for housing, and I hope that when you have read the letter you will understand why I am reluctant to let the matter rest there.

The tenor of our debate was our contention that the changes in the role of the Housing Executive would have the effect of reducing its ability to provide public-sector housing, in favour of that role being taken on by housing associations. Although Mr Moss's reply to me indicates that there is no intention to diminish the role of the Executive, I am sceptical. Despite his assurance, the Minister's answer argues in favour of giving more responsibilities to the private sector and, most importantly, points to the inability of the Executive to utilize private-sector funding, in an unfavourable comparison with housing associations.

I think, and I hope the Forum will agree, that when we argue in favour of a substantial role for the Housing Executive it is not in any way to diminish the important and vital work that the housing associations carry out. Nevertheless, I find it difficult to understand the public-expenditure imperative which continues to constrain the Executive's ability to raise funds from the private sector while at the same time allowing housing associations to do so. If the Executive could raise money, as it used to do, from the private sector, and if that finance did not count for public-expenditure purposes, it could clearly do more.

Yet Mr Moss makes what appears to the layman to be an absolutely extraordinary point. Because the 33% or so of housing-association finance that is raised from the private sector does not count for public-expenditure purposes it is regarded as providing houses at only two thirds of the cost to the taxpayer of the Housing Executive. Why cannot the Executive be allowed to raise the same funds from the private sector on an equal footing?

Mr Moss says in his reply to me that they have looked into the question of raising further private-sector finance, but this critical aspect of the treatment of such finance appears to have been left unchallenged. He also says that it is cheaper to borrow from the consolidated fund than on the market. I remain to be convinced. Nor does his letter deal with the possibility that there is substantial scope for private-sector investment through the Executive under private-finance-initiative (PFI) arrangements.

What I propose to do, with the consent of Members, is reply to the Minister on my own behalf to make three points — first, that the Forum notes with concern the disadvantageous treatment of private-sector funding, so far as the Housing Executive is concerned, and would like to see this changed; secondly, that we would like to know whether the scope for private investment has been investigated, when, and what the outcome was; and finally, that we should like to be kept abreast of the work of the working party that is involved in implementing the decisions in the housing-policy review. I hope that this is acceptable to Members.

Members indicated assent.

The Chairman: I understand that Mr Neeson, who moved the housing motion, would like to say a few words. Is that acceptable to everybody?

Members indicated assent.

Mr Neeson: I appreciate the Minister's response to the Forum debate on this issue, but I am afraid that it is very selective. And I welcome your intervention, Mr Chairman, bearing in mind your long experience in this field. The Minister makes the point that in the current financial year a total of 2,150 new dwellings will be built by the housing associations and the Housing Executive, yet between 1990 and 1995 the number of people on the urgent-need waiting-list of the Executive rose to over 11,000.

The intervention of private finance in the development of public-sector housing concerns me greatly. The rents charged by housing associations are already 7% higher than

those charged by the Housing Executive. If there is greater intervention by the private sector these will escalate and put public housing well beyond the means of people on low incomes.

As I have said, the Minister has been selective. I want to refer to one of the big problems that Northern Ireland has faced over the years. Unfortunately, we have had to deal with emergency situations. I question whether housing associations could deal with a situation such as we experienced during the past summer.

Finally, I call on the Minister once again to come clean with regard to whether there is to be a reorganization of the Housing Executive. In view of the proposal to reduce the number of education boards from five to three, Executive employees and public representatives are greatly concerned as to whether there is going to be a geographical reorganization of the Executive. The sooner the Minister makes this known, the better for all of us.

FORUM: STANDING COMMITTEES

The Chairman: Rule 14(2) requires Forum approval of the membership of the new Committee on the economy. A motion listing the members is the second item on the Order Paper.

Before putting this motion to the Forum I should like to make an important point on behalf of the Business Committee. The Committee appreciates the difficulty that smaller parties have in attending Standing Committee meetings. Indeed, there is provision in Rule 14(4)(a) for a party to nominate someone to attend on its behalf. However, it is important that that facility should not be abused. Such nominees can participate in discussion, but they cannot describe themselves as Committee members or as delegates. As the Rule also makes clear, they have no vote, nor should they attempt to force a vote on an issue.

I expect that the Committees and their Chairpersons will exercise this Rule pragmatically, but I have to make it clear that nominees participate only at the invitation of a Committee and subject to the Chairperson's discretion, and have no other standing.

FORUM: STANDING COMMITTEE E

Resolved:

The following Members shall comprise Standing Committee E: UUP — Mr Dermot Nesbitt (Chairperson), Mr Bob Stoker, Mr Jim Clarke, Mrs May Steele; DUP — Mr St Clair McAlister (Vice-Chairperson), Mr Samuel Wilson, Mr Eric Smyth, Mr Mervyn Carrick; Alliance — Mr Sean Neeson, Mr Steve McBride; UKUP — Mr Cedric Wilson; NIWC — Ms Monica McWilliams; Labour — Mr Malachi Curran; UDP — Mr Gary McMichael; PUP — Mr Hugh Smyth. — *[The Chairman]*

10.15 am

The Chairman: I understand that Mr McAlister would like to say a few words, in the absence of Mr Nesbitt, who was yesterday elected as Chairman of the Committee. Mr McAlister was elected Vice-Chairman.

Mr McAlister: I am deputizing for Mr Nesbitt, who has a long-standing business appointment in London. He sends his apologies.

I want to thank the Forum for endorsing the formation of this Committee. We had a very constructive meeting yesterday, and the very good feeling there augurs well. The attitude of everyone was marked by resolve.

The situation with regard to the economy is very important. As you, Mr Chairman, said a few weeks ago, next to security it is the most important issue that we have to contend with. In fact, in the last century C H Spurgeon said

“Economy is half the battle of life.”

We have a tremendous battle ahead of us. It will be a challenging time. However, I know that every member of the Committee will do everything possible in the Forum to forward our economy. We look forward to working and interacting with the Standing Committees on agriculture and education, realizing that those matters play a vital role in the economy.

I want to thank the Forum for its support. We look to better times ahead.

EUROPEAN UNION (POLITICAL INTEGRATION)

Debate resumed on amendment to motion (1 November 1996):

This Forum notes with concern the federalist ambitions of some member states of the European Union. As elected, but powerless, representatives of the people of Northern Ireland we recognize the dangers caused by excluding the governed from government. In light of our province's experience of remote and unaccountable administration under direct rule, we call upon Her Majesty's Government to pledge a referendum on the issue of European political integration in order that the people of the United Kingdom may decide whether or not to cede yet more powers to existing or potential European institutions. — *[Mr Alcock]*

Which amendment was: Delete the first sentence of the motion and insert

“This Forum recognizes the moves towards the development of the principle of federation among most member states of the European Union.” — *[Mr Neeson]*

The following amendment stood on the Order Paper in the name of the Democratic Unionist Party: At the end of the first sentence of the motion, after “Union”, add

“, the European Commission and the two largest political groups in the European Parliament”;

and in the third sentence, after “political”, insert “or economic”.

The Chairman: Ms Jane Morrice, who is in the Chamber for the remainder of the debate, is most welcome. She has done a splendid job as head of the European Community's office in Northern Ireland.

Mr McAlister: Last week this debate was ably opened by Mr Alcock, and other Members took part. Unfortunately, when a debate runs over, there can be a little disorientation. However, other Members will no doubt take up the challenge.

I support the motion, with the amendment proposed by the DUP. The people that we represent have real concern about what is happening in Europe — about the speed of change and the loss of control of their own lives. I think that it is down to a question of federalism and a question of sovereignty. There is no doubt that there are real concerns. We as a party and I as an individual are concerned about the loss of sovereignty. When one considers what is happening in the rest of Europe one looks in particular at the influence that Germany has had. My Colleague Mr Dodds talked last week about how the strong mark had influenced other countries. Indeed, countries like Finland would openly acknowledge that they are drawn into economic situations by their strong link with the German mark.

Members may have seen a television programme on Europe about 10 days ago. A very worrying trend was revealed. While I do not want to attack individuals, it must be said that this programme was quite right in singling out Helmut Kohl, the German Chancellor, and looking at his rise and his power struggles over several years, at how the European Union has been a vehicle for an individual to stamp his authority on people and situations. On that programme independent observers and, indeed, members of Helmut Kohl's own party said that if people did not conform to what Mr Kohl wanted they were sidelined, and their views overlooked.

The worrying fact about a conglomerate of states in Europe is that they might lose sovereignty to such an extent that one person would be steering the ship. It is not good for Europe, or any country, to have a form of dictatorship, whether military or economic. A real concern of mine is that, with a loss of sovereignty, someone would take control. Others will say "Oh, no. There are enough safeguards. There is enough legislation to stop that." But that is not the case, even in Germany, where many politicians have been put into the back room because they oppose Mr Kohl's views on Europe.

Others, of course, would use a conglomerate as a perfect vehicle for forwarding their particular line of thought. It is worth remembering that John Hume has often said, on the Nationalist and Republican trail, that we do not have to be little Northern Irishers, that we can be Europeans. The concept is used to the very worst in those situations. Our identity and our sovereignty are vital, and it is only right that on such an important issue there should be a referendum.

I agree with those who have said that the people are not well enough informed. A referendum would reveal what people feel in their hearts, so I would be prepared to run with that.

We as a party, and obviously I as an individual sitting on an economic Committee, are not opposed to doing business with others. We are in no sense against better business contacts throughout Europe and throughout the world. Let me give a simple illustration. When my children were young they played with Plasticine. While they kept the colours as they were and brought them together they could form something very beautiful and very constructive. The colours kept their own identity. But when the children mixed things together they ended up with a mass of grey/pink material which was dull and unattractive. Europe is much like that.

I am not against closer relationships in economic, social and other fields, but it is vital that we all keep our own colours. It is vital that we do not become some great conglomerate, some mass without form, identity or sovereignty.

I repeat that I support the motion, with the amendment proposed by the DUP.

Mr Tom Robinson: As Mr McAlister has said, it is sometimes difficult to pick up the threads of a debate that is carried over. However, I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Alcock, who proposed the motion on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party, for leading off and for his very worthwhile contribution to the debate.

I hope to be able to show quite clearly that the people of the United Kingdom have suffered a loss of independence. I take issue with Mr Neeson's comment that we have not lost our independence. The Member went on to say that people are afraid of change. We in the Ulster Unionist Party are never afraid of change, but we have to question whether the change is in the best interests of the people.

The question that many in the United Kingdom are asking today is "Who governs the British? Are we governed by Brussels or by Westminster?" I contend that more often than not day-to-day lives in this part of the United Kingdom are governed by Brussels rather than Westminster. When we went into Europe the then Prime Minister, Edward Heath, who was responsible for taking us in, said

"There are some in this country who fear that, going into Europe, we shall in some way sacrifice independence and sovereignty. These fears, I need hardly say, are completely unjustified."

How many Forum Members believe that Edward Heath was telling the truth? Very few, I suggest. In fact, it is on record that when Prime Minister Heath took this country into Europe what he had in mind was a united states of Europe with a single currency — the total opposite of what he led the people of the United Kingdom to believe.

The evidence is quite clear. Edward Heath was not one to create a community of sovereign nations — a family of sovereign European nations co-operating for their mutual advantage. What he wanted was a federal super-state governed by officials in Brussels. That is what is facing every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom today — a federal Europe where we would have absolutely no control of our own destiny.

How far have we already drifted towards federalism? How much power has already been handed over, of which the electorate are unaware? A great deal, I suggest. As

I understand the British democratic system, Parliament is supposed to be sovereign, passing laws which cannot be overturned outside the country. That is no longer the case. The facts are quite clear. According to the Treaty of Rome, European law — and I quote with much less experience of this than others here —

“shall be binding in its entirety and directly applicable to all member states.”

If anyone doubts this, there is further evidence. The European Court of Justice — the supreme Court — interpreted it quite clearly:

“Every national court must apply Community law in its entirety and must accordingly set aside any provision of national law which may conflict with it, whether prior or subsequent to the Community law.”

In other words, the British courts can stand on their heads.

Our Parliament is no longer supreme. European law takes precedence. In fact, we in Northern Ireland are probably worse off with our undemocratic system of government — governed, as we are, by bureaucratic civil servants from Whitehall, who, in turn, are governed by officials from Brussels. And that is not to mention the Dublin involvement in Northern Ireland affairs. There is clear evidence that our Parliament and Government have already conceded that, on a whole range of issues, European law takes precedence over United Kingdom law. What is the purpose of having a general election in the United Kingdom if, in fact, we are governed by civil servants from Brussels?

Let us look for a few moments at the facts. Huge amounts of money — our money: about £200 million this year — are being spent on European propaganda. In my opinion, this is to give us all a false sense of security so that we will have nothing to fear from European union. I suggest that we have much to fear from European union. The basic freedom to govern ourselves is being eroded.

Recently there has been much talk of European monetary union. The Government try to reassure us with the so-called opt-out clause. In spite of what they tell us, the issue of a single currency has not gone away. A recent report in the ‘Financial Times’ put the cost of a single currency to European retailers as high as £22 billion, and I have no doubt that this expense will be passed on to the consumer.

Let me pose this question: just how far have European laws or Directives crept into our lives? In 1975 we voted for entry into the Common Market. Setting aside Mr Heath’s assurance, let us consider what Lord Denning, the then Law Lord, said about Europe:

“The Treaty of Rome is like an incoming tide. It flows into the estuaries and up the rivers. It cannot be held back. It is equal in force to any statute.”

The number of European Directives, which are legal acts that affect our lives, has increased from 1,947 in 1973 to 21,392 today. These deal with everything from buying our petrol in litres to buying our potatoes in kilograms. Some Directives seriously affect our lives. Others, made by Brussels civil servants, appear so silly that one could be forgiven for asking that the officials be taken away by men in white coats.

Let us look very briefly at one of these directives. What about the instruction given to staff by environmental health-officers that to make a ham-and-tomato sandwich they must use two knives — one for the cooked produce, and the other for the raw produce? The guidelines give no instructions about which knife has to be used to cut the sandwich.

10.30 am

One could go on. I have not even mentioned the straight cucumber. Or was it the straight banana? I cannot quite remember. Then there is the issue of cattle passports and, indeed, passports for plants. Calls have already been made by leading European politicians for a European super-state: one Government, one court of justice, a single currency — all existing nations in Europe fused together. That is the direction in which we are heading: towards a federal Europe.

Let the people of the United Kingdom decide on Britain's future in Europe. I fear that we have gone so far down the road towards a federal Europe, towards European union, that it will be impossible to stop it. I can only hope that the people of the United Kingdom will be given the opportunity, the basic democratic right, to decide what sort of Europe they want.

Mr McCartney: I support the motion moved by the Ulster Unionist Party and the amendment proposed by the Democratic Unionist Party.

In the decision whether or not the United Kingdom should join a European monetary union, certain key issues must be borne in mind. First, a clear distinction must be drawn between a European single market and European monetary union. Most people see the good sense of, and support, a single market, stimulating the free flow of goods, labour and capital. That was the original purpose of the Common Market, but its achievement does not require a single currency, which could inflict serious damage upon the interests of several of the single-market member states, including the United Kingdom.

Those in favour of a single currency focus on the alleged core benefits of eliminating exchange-rate instability and the attendant exchange-rate transaction costs. There are, however, other methods of dealing with these problems, and the elimination of transaction costs must be set against the very real economic disadvantage of monetary union.

The main disadvantage is the loss of control which each region or state would suffer over the macro-economic regulation of its own economy. The national exchange rate would no longer be available as the means of maintaining international competitiveness. In short, if the pound is at a low rate against other currencies, the United Kingdom's goods are cheaper and more attractive for purchase at home and abroad, and the economy generally is stimulated.

But such control is to a large extent exercised by individual sovereign Governments, and if it is not available the substitute must be a flexible and competitive labour market. This concept is being recognized more and more by the Labour Party, under Mr Blair, the members of which are perhaps not concentrating, as the Tories do with a degree of justification, on the sovereignty issue. The Labour Party is increasingly concentrating with

equal force on the economic considerations, and the question of a flexible and competitive labour market is one upon which it has rested a good deal of its case.

A member state within the EMU which did not have a competitive labour market would suffer either high unemployment or high emigration. And both the Republic and Northern Ireland would fall into that category. Where the EMU formed a single market, worker immigration to the economic core of Europe, centering on Germany, would meet the barrier of language. The non-competitive regions would be forced to make demands on the European budget for conversion funds, but the German paymaster has made it clear in recent years that such funds will not be forthcoming. These considerations are the basis of the growing consensus among economists in Dublin that the Republic might fare very badly in a European monetary union.

At this point I take issue with Mr Neeson, who said

"It is going to create major problems for Northern Ireland manufacturers — those who trade with the Republic of Ireland. Anyone who has read history will know the problems that were created in the last century through Britain's splendid isolation. Well, there will be even greater difficulties if this path is taken by the United Kingdom."

What utter nonsense. If Mr Neeson were to read the most recent findings of the leading economists in the Republic, including Peter Neary and Loughlin Quinn, the brother of the Minister for Finance, he would see that what is abundantly clear is the direct opposite of the case that he advanced.

Mr Weir: Will the Member give way?

Mr McCartney: Not at the moment.

The key point has been stated by a leading Irish and international economist, Peter Neary: that until the structural deficiencies in the Republic's labour market — namely, high costs and low flexibility — are addressed, it would be utterly foolish to risk a severe loss of competitiveness against the United Kingdom in the event of a depreciation of sterling against the ecu.

Mr Neeson also said that there would be some loss to Northern Ireland if the Republic were to join the EMU and the United Kingdom were not. There is absolutely no prospect, in my considered opinion, of the Republic's joining the EMU without Britain. Moreover, if sterling were to appreciate against the ecu, this would adversely affect the Republic by way of increased import prices caused by the significance of imports from the United Kingdom. Our trade with the Republic amounts to about 6%, and when Dr Quigley and others, in their paper 'Ireland: An Island Economy', talk about a 50% increase in trade with the Republic they are talking about a 50% increase on 4% — from 4% to 6%. The key point here is that as a region within the EMU the Republic, because of its significant trade with the United Kingdom, would be vulnerable to both the depreciation and the appreciation of sterling against the ecu within a European monetary union, as the ecu would be the Republic's currency.

The forced United Kingdom exit from the European exchange-rate mechanism — the ERM — in September 1992 restored to the United Kingdom the use of sterling as a macro-economic instrument. The refusal to join the social chapter has maintained the United Kingdom's labour-market flexibility. Both these factors — exchange-rate policy and labour market flexibility — have significantly contributed to the United Kingdom's current performance as one of the fastest-growing economies in western Europe.

The second reason for loss of macro-economic control is the connection between monetary and fiscal policy. Monetary policy, which is basically the regulation of credit expansion within the EMU, would be in the hands of a European central bank, guided by the objective which determines the operation of the Bundesbank — namely, the control of inflation. The political devastation caused by the German experience of hyperinflation between 1918 and 1939 has left a permanent scar upon Germany's economic psyche, which it is attempting to impose upon the rest of Europe.

This means that the European central banks would be either politically unaccountable, like the Bundesbank, or under political control. But political control would require the emergence of federal political structures in the EMU, and it is at this point that the total federalist agenda takes over. Germany, having lost two world wars, is going to complete her success by economic triumph — by economic control over the whole of Europe. The point is simply that, in a modern economy, the financing of Government debt, which represents the excess of Government expenditure over income, will impact on the financial system to ease the expansion of bank lending and thus contribute to inflation. This is why Chancellor Kohl is insisting on the rigid fiscal criterion that annual Government borrowing must not exceed 3% of GDP.

But this has of itself two serious implications. First, the option of expansionary fiscal policy to counteract recession would no longer be available; secondly, the budgetary control of national Parliaments would be rapidly curtailed. As a result of this control of monetary policy in the EMU, there would be a push towards federalism, and at the same time the control of fiscal policy would radically reduce economic sovereignty.

I see you tapping at your watch, Mr Chairman, and I am conscious of the 10-minute Rule, but I have to submit that if we are going to debate serious and complex topics, and if Members are going to devote a considerable part of their time to preparing detailed papers, 10 minutes is literally a farce.

The Chairman: Mr McCartney's time is up. Do Members agree to his continuing?

Members indicated assent.

Mr McCartney: Political implications are driving an economic project the preparation for which has been highly detrimental to western Europe in terms of employment.

There is a similarity here with the national project in Ireland, the economic impact of which would also, of course, be disastrous. I draw this parallel. There is no doubt whatever that the framework proposals are aimed at putting into effect the political unification of Ireland by, first of all, having functional and factual unification of the economy and of all the

other sinews of government. There is absolutely no doubt that once that has been achieved, political unification will follow. That is the process which Britain is resisting, *vis-à-vis* Europe, to a degree but which it is willing to employ in order to unify Ireland. It is not good enough when it would mean the loss of British sovereignty within a federal Europe, but if you want to get rid of Northern Ireland into a united Ireland you accept exactly those principles.

The impact on the United Kingdom of staying out of European monetary union must also be considered. Let us take a core issue: the effect on the City as a centre of international finance. Now, the canard has been put about that, somehow, if we do not go into Europe, the City is dead, that London, as one of the great financial centres and counting-houses of Europe, is finished. Eddie George, in an interview in 'The Times' in September, killed that notion stone-dead. He said

"The effect on the City will be very little indeed because we have got to bear in mind that the City of London is a financial centre of a global kind, not just a European kind."

According to the paper, he felt that the effect of staying out of Europe would be minimal:

"Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, said yesterday that the City of London will thrive whether Britain joins the single European currency or not."

The point he made was that London is not just a European but a global financial centre.

10.45 am

Similarly, in a leading article in the 'Financial Times' of 30 October 1996 there was a general assessment of the prospect of the United Kingdom's staying out of European monetary union. This predicted that the British economy would do much better outside a currency union. A very different picture is painted by the Alliance Party, which claims that staying out of European monetary union will leave us in some way isolated and doing very badly.

As the point of determination gets closer, economists looking for the first time at the specific effects on their own economy are increasingly coming to the conclusion that membership of a monetary union would be a disaster. Now, if there is any country that is sensitive and alive to its own financial interests *vis-à-vis* Europe, as regards what it can get out and what it might in certain circumstances have to put in, it is the Republic of Ireland. It has turned the extraction of funds from Europe into an art form, and if its leading economists, including the brother of the Minister for Finance, Loughlin Quinn, and Peter Neary, a person of international reputation, say "This is not going to be a good thing" you can rest assured that it will not be a good thing. What is more, it will not be good for the Republic. A vast amount of the Republic's trade is tied into the United Kingdom, and if the United Kingdom were to stay out it would be a disaster for the Republic to go in.

Incidentally, I see that Mr Neeson has gone. The current political issue in the United Kingdom is that of whether or not the Labour Party will join.

A Member: Mr Neeson has gone to the loo.

Mr McCartney: I think he may have had a flux of the bowels.

There are currently very clear signs that the Labour Party is having fundamental reservations about whether it should go into Europe. It has moved away from the Tory Euro-sceptic position that the question of joining is all to do with sovereignty. Although many people in the Labour Party of an older variety, such as Peter Shore and Austin Mitchell, believe that there will be a significant loss of sovereignty, there are many who are beginning to oppose going into Europe on purely economic grounds. They realize that there will be an absence of labour flexibility and competitiveness that could be disastrous to British interests.

Far from the Labour Party being united about Europe, there are clear signs that it is beginning to realize that going into Europe would not be like finding a pot of gold and that it should at least be cautious and stay back and assess the situation fully. I believe that Labour will not go into Europe by way of participating in European monetary union, which will inevitably lead to federalism and will result not only in loss of sovereignty but also — and this is perhaps more important — in the loss of an individual state's control over its macro-economic situation, upon which the prosperity, the employment and the future of a nation and its people depend.

For this reason I support the Ulster Unionist Party's motion as amended by the DUP.

I thank the Forum for having allowed me a little additional time.

Mr Shannon: I support the amendment put forward by the DUP.

Since 1973, when the United Kingdom joined the Common Market, the European Parliament has featured increasingly in the life of everyone in the country. This is particularly the case in Northern Ireland owing to our largely agriculturally based economy. Vast tracts of legislation and information are spewed out at Brussels every year — much of it relating to the food industry — by nameless, faceless bureaucrats, many of whom have never worked on a farm, in a factory or on a fishing vessel. This red tape is being produced in the name of harmonization and equality between the member states. A wonderful aim, perhaps, but is it being achieved, or even worth achieving?

There are three main problems with the harmonization of legislation and consequently with the implied federalization. The first involves the legislation itself, the second involves the matter of who actually complies with it, and the third involves the cost. With regard to the legislation itself, as a consequence of the drive for standardization the Eurocrats have tried to introduce some idiotic laws, particularly with regard to the food industry. This has been mentioned by Mr Robinson.

Who can forget the attempted standardization of the curve of bananas? That provided front-page headlines in the 'Sun' newspaper many years ago. We had the five-and-a-half inch banana, and the bureaucrats wanted it straight rather than curved. Can we not also recall the matter of the straightness of cucumbers? And how many people know that a certain percentage of the strawberry crop must be rounded at the tip rather than of a square shape? If there are too many square ones, the crop is regarded as substandard. The whole thing is

really quite ridiculous. We have also had regularization introduced with regard to the shape of sausages and the ingredients of haggis (for those who are fond of that dish). The whole thing goes on and on. Another issue was that of potato crisps. They did not want to see cheese-and-onion or smokey-bacon flavoured crisps any more — just plain. These are the sorts of regulations they wanted. It would seem that there are civil servants at desks in Brussels or elsewhere thinking up schemes on which to spend their time over the next year.

Directive 92/2251, covering fresh fruit and vegetables, refers to quality inspection. The bureaucrats have tried to stop us describing British chocolate as chocolate, as ours is made to a slightly different recipe from that of the European norm. They have given us 23 amendments to make British chocolate conform to their shape and size. So those who like a bar of wholenut or fruit and nut should enjoy it now, for it could very well be the last one of the present shape.

Amendments concerning cocoa products intended for human consumption are typical of what the Directives are all about. The situation is ludicrous. We have standardization, specifications and recommendations for every product under the sun, from dates to dried mint, and from lamb to lobsters.

Can we still call Brussels sprouts by that name, or are they too covered by Directive 92/2081 (Protection of Geographical Indications and Designations of Origin for Agricultural Products and Foodstuffs)? That is quite a mouthful, but basically what it says is that as Brussels sprouts do not come from Brussels we cannot call them Brussels sprouts.

Let me take a stage further the matter of how EC regulations seem to work. One will not in future be able to ask for one's car to be greased, lest one give offence to the people of Greece, as they are now heading the way of the Common Market. And what about the poor turkeys when it comes to Christmas? Will we be able to ask for a turkey, or will we have to ask for a Thanksgiving bird instead, so that we will not cause any offence to the people of Turkey as they too line up to join the EC in the hope of a better future? Should we sit back and accept this regimentation of our food supply? More to the point, do the other member states comply with the legislation? Perhaps not.

The list of legislation emanating from the European Union is exhaustive. On the food side alone the number of items runs into thousands. Such paperwork is an administrative nightmare, and it is totally inconsistent with the deregulation approach of the United Kingdom Government, as the following examples show.

I have already made a comment about cocoa and chocolate products. There have been 23 amendments to try to make chocolate acceptable, in the rest of Europe if not here. As regards the importation of food from countries outside the Union, there have been 350 different EC decisions on the conditions that have to be satisfied. The measures taken cover animal health, human health and administration aspects such as the listing of premises.

The Council has issued Directives on the problems of intra-Community trade in fresh meat and poultry. There are 40 highly technical Directives dealing with specific diseases, veterinary-inspection arrangements and the financing of health controls. A body with what is, I presume, a Latin name — Codex Alimentarius Commission — specifies the laboratory

techniques that member states should use for the determination of a wide range of compositional aspects of foodstuffs. The whole thing is gobbledegook. It goes on and on. Foodstuffs can be either raw or processed, ranging from fruit juices to vegetables and processed meats. We are talking about 120 different but specific documents.

Who complies with all this legislation? It is beyond question that the United Kingdom has one of the best records of acceptance of and compliance with EU law. We have accepted practically everything they have flung at us, with the notable exception of the social chapter. Can we say the same for other countries? Since quotas were introduced for sea fishing, the fishermen of the British Isles have been careful to conserve the stocks in our waters. They have accepted minimal compensation for the loss of their livelihood and the surrender of their boats. They have upgraded the fish markets and the few boats that remain. They know that they must not over-fish waters, and they have operated under severe restrictions with regard to the number and the size of the fish that they catch.

But what do the Spanish do, just to teach us a lesson? Having decimated the fish populations in their own coastal waters and elsewhere in the Mediterranean, they look north. They see waters that still have fish in them, and they decide to operate in our traditional grounds. The fish they catch may be too small and too few for our men to land. But do the Spaniards care? Obviously not. Where is the consistency of enforcement so championed by the EU? When the United Kingdom Government decide to fight against an EU ruling they are charged with being anti-European, even xenophobic, by our French and German friends, who do not need to worry about what costs may be incurred by this country when subsidizing their tunnel-vision philosophy as to what is best.

That brings me to the third point: the cost. The EU policy that the United Kingdom Government fought against most specifically was the social chapter. This was intended to provide for a minimum wage and many other social and welfare reforms across the European board. The United Kingdom contended that the introduction of these reforms would render it uncompetitive and would cause mass unemployment and industrial unrest. Time has proven how right we were. Signs of industrial disquiet are growing in Germany and France, as multinational companies relocate to the former Eastern-bloc countries, which have a plentiful supply of cheap labour and little or nothing to lose.

Germany's high wages and costly welfare system are rendering it uncompetitive. This, coupled with the massive undertaking of rebuilding in the former East Germany, is leading some German policy-makers to reconsider their federalist ideals — and Germany supposedly benefits most from all of this. Some may rightly point out that Northern Ireland has benefited from the allocation of EU grants in recent years and that such assistance would not have been available without the EU. I would point out that the United Kingdom is one of the main contributors of funds to the EU and one of the smallest beneficiaries. The grants obtained for Northern Ireland are but a drop in the ocean compared to those received by areas such as Greece, Portugal and southern Italy. The grants are spent on projects that will be visible to the public and will be welcomed by them as a wonderful gift, when in fact they are poor recompense for the time, effort, goods and money we put into the EU.

I put it to the Forum that loyalty to the EU has cost Northern Ireland more than most. For example, in areas singled out as being in need of special economic aid the United

Kingdom Government, in their wisdom, have bowed under EU pressure and included us in the blanket ban on United Kingdom beef. In view of the limited economic base of this province and the widespread acceptance of the high quality of our beef, can we honestly believe that it is in our best economic interests to remain in such an organization? Would it not be better to take an independent stance on the world economic stage than to wither on the periphery of a European monster state?

Finally, where does the money come from to meet the cost of drawing up and publishing all the legislation, the cost of translation into and out of the many languages in Europe and the cost of moving offices every six months, alternating between Strasbourg and Brussels? This includes moving all people, documents, equipment and administration processes. Can an organization such as this possibly be efficient? Never. It is strangled by red tape and loss of sovereignty.

11.00 am

Mr Weir: I have great pleasure in supporting the motion, with the proposed amendment.

Mr Shannon made three main points. As a good Presbyterian, I am always glad to follow a three-point speech or sermon, so I commend the Member's words. I too am a bit disappointed that Mr Neeson has again left the Chamber. I am beginning to wonder whether there is some Aborigine blood in him, because he seems very keen on walk-about. He may be interested to know that his views on the Republic's joining the single currency and the United Kingdom's staying outside have been rejected not only by Irish economists, as highlighted by Mr McCartney, but also recently by Michael Smurfitt of the Smurfitt Group. But perhaps Mr Neeson knows more about the economics of the Irish Republic than the Republic's leading industrialist.

Unionists are often accused by their critics of being xenophobic, insular and anti-European. If that means that we are opposed to a European super-state and a single currency, I am happy to plead guilty. However, since the days of Wolfe Tone the real inward-looking and exclusivist tradition has been Irish Nationalism. A cursory glance at the constitution of Fianna Fail, for example, would show this. That document smacks of isolationism and the economic protectionism of the 1920s. Unlike the multicultural, outward-looking United Kingdom, Irish Nationalism seeks to establish a monocultural, socially backward and introspective united Ireland. I believe that Irish Nationalism is locked in the past, as are Euro-federalists such as John Hume.

Apart from the blight of terrorism, we have had 50 years of relative peace in western Europe. That peace was not sustained by seeking to remove sovereignty or extend one country's control of another. Rather, I contend the opposite: that peace has been secured by respect for each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The power-house of post-war European co-operation has been the good relationship between France and Germany, yet for three centuries those two countries fought numerous wars, and the disputed territory of Alsace-Lorraine changed hands on a number of occasions. Only since the war, with Germany recognizing the territorial integrity of France, and each respecting the sovereignty of the

other, have friendly relations been developed. That is a lesson that should be learned by John Hume, who constantly tells us to look to Europe as a means of solving our problems.

I reject the vision of Europe offered by Euro-federalists as narrow and unrealistic. Europe extends beyond Vienna, Berlin and Helsinki. Indeed, it stretches from Iceland in the west to the Urals in the east. We need to reach out the hand of friendship to those who have thrown off the shackles of Communism, rather than retreat to the trenches of a European super-state. The current tightly bound European Union cannot ever properly accommodate those countries. The kind of fortress Europe envisaged by the Eurocrats, with its barriers to the outside world, would be bad for us, bad for Europe and bad for the rest of the world. Better to have a wider, co-operative but more loosely linked Europe than one that tries to remove sovereignty to a higher authority. Taking sovereignty above people's heads inevitably leads to disaster. As was pointed out earlier in the debate, you have only to look at the former Yugoslavia for an example.

I would like the Forum to reject a single currency. As has been pointed out by other Members, it is not just the question of a single currency. Once you accept a single currency, you accept a single economic policy for the whole of Europe, and that inevitably means a single Government. That, to me and to this party — and to the Forum, I believe — is unacceptable. We have seen the mess that the Eurocrats have made of our farming and fishing industries, as was pointed out very well by Mr Shannon. We have often expressed a clear lack of confidence in our own Government, but we would have even less confidence in a European Government operating from Brussels. I do not think that they would be very good at looking after our interests.

In conclusion, I ask Members to be true friends of Europe by supporting the motion with the proposed amendment.

Mr Poots: I support the motion with the amendment proposed by Mr Dodds.

When the United Kingdom joined the EEC in 1973 the then Prime Minister, Ted Heath, told the nation that it would end unemployment. Remarkably enough, the dole queues grew from 500,000 to more than 3 million within about 15 years — and those are the Conservatives' massaged figures. It is surprising that the same discredited politicians, having seen the consequences of joining the European economic catastrophe, should urge the British Government to join a single currency and proceed with further European integration. The party to which I belong was the only one in 1975 to actively campaign for a vote to pull out of Europe. The success of that campaign was reflected when the votes were counted, Northern Ireland being the only part of the United Kingdom that voted to leave the EEC.

As a body, the EEC developed from a group of nations with common economic interests into a European Union which in some respects has a greater role in each country's affairs than its own sovereign Government. Further development into a European super-state which will control foreign affairs, finance, employment and the environment — to name but a few matters — is proceeding without consultation with the electorate. Some people may argue that we have the opportunity to elect people to make decisions on our behalf. The problem with that argument is that all three main political parties in the United Kingdom support greater European integration, which leaves the electorate with no real alternative.

I welcome the intervention of people such as Sir James Goldsmith and Lord Healey. Very often we are talked down to by individuals in the Government, the CBI and other bodies, who tell us that we do not know what we are talking about when it comes to Europe. I suggest that if the financial case for European monetary union were so strong, people driven by a desire as strong as that of Sir James Goldsmith to accumulate wealth would be tripping over themselves to join it.

As a farmer, I have had more experience than most people of how Europe operates. Most might imagine that, with a budget of over £30 billion, farmers would be rolling in it. The reverse is, in fact, the case. Most farmers believe that they are worse off now than they were prior to our joining the EEC. The people who have gained are the cheats, the smugglers and the countries that do not properly exercise the controls they were supposed to set in place. Corruption in the European Union is rife. The number of cases of reported fraud rose last year to 551.

In the European Union, 43% of costs are administrative. This is ridiculous. The waste in the Union is well known. For example, £1.2 billion is spent annually on support for fruit and vegetables, half of which are withdrawn as surplus goods and destroyed. Currently £5 billion is being spent to destroy British beef. Milk and fish are being dumped so that the producers may avoid being punished for going over quota. To me, such waste is immoral when there are 800 million people in the world starving. One watches on television at night the dreadful situation that the people of Zaire are in. And what is the European Union doing except paying money to destroy good food? It is an absolute and cardinal sin.

Another example of the waste is the £140 million lost when office equipment was moved from the Berlaymont office in Brussels to other offices in the city. Most of this — computers, desks and other items — was never traced. Other cases of waste include the lorry weights Directive that is being brought in. It calls for the reinforcing of roads and bridges to enable them to carry 40-tonne lorries. This will cost up to £4 billion in the United Kingdom, even though 40-tonne lorries are rare in rural areas. This makes me very angry. I take 15 to 20 minutes longer getting to the Forum because bridges on the motorway are being fixed. Then there are such things as the weighing machines Directives. In one case, a woman who wanted to buy a single slice of ham was told that she would have to purchase a second because one weighed less than 1.25 oz. We could cover many things. The aim of proposed bus and coach Directives is to standardize designs along continental lines, but the regulations will outlaw the traditional British double-decker, hitting export markets.

Our time in the European Union has not been good. What we have seen of it is a waste of money. There has been so much bungling, and any effort on the Union's part to spend well has been terrible. We have no faith in going into European monetary union at this time. Indeed, the British people would rather see us coming out of Europe. I believe that if the parties were to hold a referendum, we would in no way accept monetary union.

Mr Trimble: This motion calls on the Government to pledge a referendum on the issue of European political integration. Such action is entirely appropriate — indeed, necessary. A referendum is the appropriate course of action when one is contemplating a

fundamental change in the constitutional order, which is indeed what would be involved in further European integration.

The next significant step in terms of further European integration is the single European currency or economic and monetary union. A variety of arguments can be made with regard to economic and monetary union. There are arguments that touch on sovereignty, and there are arguments that touch on practicalities. I would like to take the latter first.

It is very important that one recognizes that, in the present state of western Europe, economic and monetary union is unworkable. That is a very important thing to bear in mind. This whole project has been driven not by economic considerations but by political considerations. The move towards economic and monetary union, spearheaded, of course, by France and Germany, has been driven precisely by political rather than economic considerations. If one were to look at simple economic realities it would be apparent that economic and monetary union is unworkable at present.

Economic and monetary union, with a single currency and the disciplines that would flow from that, will have consequences for a large economy. It is possible to run a single currency over a large economy, but it has consequences of a particular kind. The United Kingdom is itself an economic and monetary union. A much larger economic and monetary union is the United States. If we consider the experience of those two EMUs, two things come out quite obviously. Because the area is large, economic development within it will not occur at a uniform rate. Some regions will grow quicker than others. Some regions will prosper; others will lag behind — a product of purely economic factors in terms of resources and development of the economy.

In a large economic and monetary union, where there is uneven development of that nature you compensate for it in two ways — first, by fiscal transfers (redistribution of resources from the wealthy to the less wealthy); secondly, through labour mobility. In the United Kingdom we can see both those factors at work. We can see the fiscal transfers from the richer to the poorer areas. Of course, we in Northern Ireland benefit from that — but not we alone: Merseyside probably benefits to an even greater extent. It is part and parcel of being in a union that the union is concerned equally with the prosperity of all. Thus the well-off have an obligation to assist the not-so-well-off.

We can also see labour mobility in the United Kingdom. Such movement is entirely natural, and one should not stigmatize it by using the term “emigration” of people moving from one part of their country to another. The latter factor can be seen on a much larger scale in the United States, where there is tremendous labour mobility. That, indeed, is the primary way in which they take care of uneven development. It is immediately obvious that western Europe cannot cope with the consequences of economic integration. The European Community does not have anything like the financial resources necessary to equalize the poorer and richer regions, and, of course, job mobility simply is not possible.

I know that written into the Treaty of Rome is provision for the free movement of labour. That exists in theory, but it does not exist and cannot exist in practice on the scale that would be necessary. It simply is not possible for large numbers of people to migrate from the Mezzogiorno to Brussels. Difficulty is created by migration from the Mezzogiorno

to Milan, and we can see the political strains that are developing in Italy as a result. Similar migration into other parts of Europe is just not on, and English-speaking workers from the United Kingdom simply will not cheerfully relocate in Bavaria. The language and other cultural barriers are too great.

11.15 am

The basic point to make about economic and monetary union is that there is no economic case for it. In the attempt to bring it about, Europe is now coming forward with what it calls the stability pact, whereby considerable discipline will be exerted on countries in an effort to keep them to the Maastricht criteria and to ensure that those countries that cannot enter EMU, because they do not meet the criteria, will not have a deleterious effect on those that do. The stability pact itself will impose massive financial burdens on and make massive inroads into the sovereignty of all countries in Europe. It simply does not add up.

Besides what is happening at the moment because of the attempt to meet the convergence criteria under Maastricht, some countries in Europe, particularly France and Spain, are subjecting their peoples to massive deflation. This is reflected in growing unemployment — 22% in Spain; 12% to 15%, and rising, in France. We all know what happened to the United Kingdom when it unwisely joined the monetary system at the wrong point: it got blown out by economic realities. Economic realities dawned, and it had to leave.

Eventually that is going to happen with regard to France and Spain as well. The massive injury that the French Government have been doing and continue to do to their economy cannot last indefinitely. At some point the economic realities will assert themselves, and France will be unable to go into the economic and monetary union that the Germans are so set on. What we are likely to see emerging from all of this is what is emerging naturally — a larger Deutschmark zone. The zone already includes Holland and, even though it has reservations about economic and monetary union, Denmark. In effect, Denmark has been part of the Deutschmark zone for a long time, and Holland even more so. The very close relationship between the Dutch and German currencies does not depend on the administrative procedures of the European Union; it depends on economic realities.

And we can see that the Deutschmark zone will be joined by Austria and Switzerland also, as there is a very close economic union already. We may even see the Czech lands and others too move in. Indeed, at the end of the day, people may look at the map of the Deutschmark zone and find it very similar to one that dominated Europe's history from the tenth century to the eighteenth century. But we must not mention that in case people worry about references to the First Reich. Those are the economic realities. Those are the things that will work through in practice, and attempts to distort economic realities by Government agreements — Maastricht and so on — are likely to fail. Economic integration is not necessarily a bad thing, but it will happen in its own time, through economies converging and growing together naturally rather than artificially.

For a good example one might look at two other European economies that were put together in the course of the nineteenth century. I refer to the economic consequences of Italian and German unification. German economic integration started in the 1830s, with the creation of the *zollverein*, and was not completed until the end of the century, nearly 20 years

after political integration. The small economies of the various states of Germany grew together in a natural way. In Italy a different process occurred. There was political integration over a 10-year period, and economic integration was rushed. As a result, the Italian economy has never melded properly. We can still see the different economies in Italy more than 100 years after political integration.

Economic convergence, which is referred to in Maastricht, is important. The significant thing is that the economic cycle is becoming integrated. The economy is becoming fully integrated — not meeting paper targets which are themselves open to distortion.

One other important factor — which, in the minute or so left to me, I can only touch — is the need for institutional reform in the Community. The structure of the Council, of the Parliament and of other bodies tends to give a majority to those countries with a financial interest in so-called political integration. This is distorting the procedures in Europe, and it will distort the outcome of the next Intergovernmental Conference unless countries, like the United Kingdom, whose economic interests are different have the determination to stand firm and resist economic integration that is driven by political considerations rather than by proper economic ones.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: This has been an interesting debate. It is good that we are preaching to the converted. Some time ago people and parties were greatly divided upon this issue. I have here the handbook of the European People's Party, to whose Group the Official Unionist MEP belongs. Here is how this book tells us what the Group stands for:

“As was the case for the beginning of the process of European integration, it is up to us to keep steering a course towards a federal-type Union. This is naturally a delicate undertaking, but, as a powerful political force, the Group of the European People's Party knows that it can win the battle.”

Mr Nicholson is a member of that Group. I am very glad that we are coming to recognize what Europe is really about.

Mr Taylor: I do not think we can let the last point go without correction. Of course the Ulster Unionist Party — not the Official Unionist Party — is linked with the European People's Party. But there are three different ways in which a group can be linked. It can be a member under Rule 5A. The Ulster Unionist Party is not a member under Rule 5A and is not committed to the policies that the Member has just read out.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: It is a pity that Mr Taylor did not give the truth. I was very glad to give way to him as we are talking not about the People's Party but about the Group to which his party belongs and about the handbook of the Group of which his Colleague is actually a member. Let us get the facts straight.

Mr Dodds: Mr Taylor, as in the past, has attempted to disassociate the party in Northern Ireland from the European People's Party, although he himself was associated with the Tories, then with Le Penn's group, then with the Christian Democrats — the political itinerants of Europe, as somebody once said.

Under Rule 5B, associate members must subscribe to the basic policies of the Group. The basic policies that I outlined last week include economic and monetary union and increasing political federalism. The Ulster Unionists cannot have it both ways: they cannot be one thing in Europe and a different thing in Northern Ireland.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I was welcoming the conversion, but they must be perverts, not converts, because they repudiate their —

A Member: Will the Gentleman give way?

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: No. *[Interruption]*

The Chairman: Remember that when a Member gives way, the time taken comes out of his 10 minutes, except with the unanimous approval of the Forum.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Let me come to the real issue that we need to examine today. Member states handed over to the European Union all powers in two spheres — agriculture and fisheries. Look at the mess Europe has made in those two areas. I need not preach to this Forum about the mess agriculture is in. We all know that our intensive industry was clobbered by Europe. We could not buy on the world market the feed that we might need to maintain it. It was sliced by something like two thirds. We had the same situation in the poultry industry. The common agricultural policy has been disastrous. Let me give an illustration. When the three MEPs asked Mr Fischler what we would have to do to get up to the standard to sell our meat in Europe he replied “You are far above the standard of many parts of the European Union.” Yet they are keeping our meat out.

What about the fisheries? We had a most valuable asset in our fishing waters. Britain was supreme when it joined the Union. But it handed its waters over to Europe. What has happened? Spaniards are taking out of our waters fish that are denied to our own fishermen. We must face up to this. Mr Neeson thinks that Europe is a great thing. I wish he would go down to Portavogie and tell the fishermen that. Handing those two areas to Europe has been a catastrophe.

Now Mr Santer, not content with absolutely clobbering our fishing industry and our agriculture, wants home affairs, foreign affairs and defence. Well, if there are Members who want Padraig Flynn as Home Secretary of a united Europe they are welcome to him, but that would be totally unacceptable to any right-thinking democrat in the United Kingdom. We cannot have our home affairs interfered with by Europeans. We cannot hand over our foreign affairs or defence to Europe. If they made such a mess of agriculture and fisheries I wonder what a mess they would make of those matters.

I am sorry that the SDLP Members, who are supporters of this whole amalgam, are not in the Forum discussing with us across the Floor the things that we should be considering together. Mr Hume tells us that the European Union brought peace to Europe. It did nothing of the kind. We have peace in Europe not because of the European Union but because of NATO and its power. It is the deterrent of NATO that brought peace to Europe.

And if the European Union was so great at settling European wars, why did it fail in the Balkans? It failed because it does not have the power to stop wars. It is as plain as that. I went to every session of the European Parliament during the troubles and wars in the Balkans. What happened? It could not get one resolution. Every motion was negatived. The Parliament could not make one decision. And we are being asked to hand the peace of Europe to such a body.

We have in Europe a kangaroo committee. It is the committee in which the Socialists and the Christian Democrats unite to forward the view of a united Europe. The kangaroo leaps, and they say they are leaping into a united Europe. I want to make it clear that my party believes in co-operation between the nation states in Europe. I want to see co-operation. I want to see wider co-operation. I want to see those countries that have thrown out the tyranny of Communism brought in — the eastern European countries. I believe that we must bring them in.

11.30 am

I stand for co-operation between nation states in Europe, but not for the incorporation of us all in a European state. This is not the federalism that we are thinking about, where all the constituent parts would have tremendous power and would hand over their powers to a central body willingly. This federalism is the central body taking all power and then dishing out little bits to those parties it feels should have them — a different thing altogether. It is really a central state. A powerful Government in any part of Europe always led to opposition and war.

We have had Germany — and the militant tendencies of Germany are still there. With all due respect to Chancellor Kohl, I must say that he is always pushing the same line: "We can do without Britain. We can do without other countries. We are the masters of Europe." Well, I do not want to be mastered by Chancellor Kohl or by any part of Europe. We should be masters in our own house. Co-operation yes, but incorporation no.

We need to have a referendum because what is proposed would change the whole constitutional structure of our country. We would not have the United Kingdom as we know it. The United Kingdom would be just an addition to Europe, and that would be completely intolerable.

We have only to look at what happens to our money. Northern Ireland has never got back from Europe the money it has paid in per head of population. That is the first thing we want to say. When it came to the cohesion fund, we were not even considered. What happened? The South of Ireland, which was receiving £3 million net per day, had that doubled to £6 million daily — £6 million. When we came to objective grouping and were to have our structural funds increased, what happened? We got an 8% increase, while the Irish Republic got an 80% increase, and other parts had theirs doubled. The last time this came up we got just over £1 billion, while the Irish Republic received nearly £8 billion. We will have no help if we go down this road of integration in Europe. We have to pull back. In a referendum the people of this country will say overwhelmingly "No, that is not the road we want to go down."

Mr King: I support the motion and the amendment so admirably proposed by Mr Dodds. I do so not out of any sense of xenophobia but, rather, out of deep and real affection for our United Kingdom democracy and deep concern for its future.

I have to put my hand up as the draftsman of this motion. While delighted at the quality and depth of the debate, I am disappointed that there are one or two dissenting voices. The debate last week and this morning has given the lie to the accusation that we, as Northern Ireland politicians, are interested only in navel-gazing, that our horizons are no wider than the nearest sheugh. That is patently not true. Our past, our present and our future have been and will be played out on a world-wide stage. There are no narrow, parochial politicians here.

The case for the motion has been well and eloquently aired, and I do not wish to dwell on what has gone before. Those with more experience of the European Union and its institutions have spoken, and spoken admirably. I should like, for a few minutes, to comment on the opposition.

The Alliance Party claims that its amendment and its approach to Europe represent the real world. Let me underscore the grasp that the Alliance Party has of the real world. Mr Neeson told us that he regretted the United Kingdom's opt-out from the social chapter and then, strangely enough, welcomed our success in attracting inward investment. The contradiction there is too obvious for me to waste much of the Forum's time on. Suffice it to say that the link between the opt-out, with its anti-free-trade, anti-free-market fiscal constraints on employers, and our success in attracting employers from outside the Union, especially to Northern Ireland, is obvious.

In my constituency, the largest and most profitable employer in Antrim town is Daewoo Electronics, a South Korean firm attracted to the European Union because, yes, of the size of the market, but attracted to the United Kingdom because of its free market in employment. Would that South Korean firm have come to a peripheral region of the European Union — which is what Northern Ireland is — had we been constrained by German or French social costs? I suggest very strongly that it would not. As a peripheral region, Northern Ireland has to be very careful that it does not put its economic head in the noose of European bureaucracy and European controls on the freedom of employers to set their own rates of pay and their own conditions of employment.

Perhaps the Euro-enthusiasm shown by Mr Neeson is not unexplainable, especially as his party's Leader takes the Whip, in another place, of a Liberal Democratic Party which is happy to describe itself as being a bunch of super-nationalists. I am rather sad that this dogma seems to override the real needs of the people here in Northern Ireland, the people on the ground. Being a super-nationalist, as the Alliance Party knows, is one thing, but putting that ahead of the jobs and the well-being of people in Northern Ireland is indefensible.

More is to be lost than gained from our future being tagged to the European Union. Our future is up for grabs, and it is a prospect that is not to be embraced in a European super-state, but one that has to be advanced and embraced slowly and sceptically. A debate is needed, and that is why I return to the wording of the motion — a motion which I worded very carefully, not to be anti-European but to call upon the parties in Northern Ireland and

throughout the United Kingdom to embark on a referendum, to which I, as a democrat, look forward. I look forward to educating and informing the electorate about what is really at stake here. This is the only way in which we can advance in Europe and in the world. To do otherwise would be anti-democratic. It would mean surrendering to bureaucrats.

What our Parliament is being asked to give up is not its own to give up. The sovereignty of this nation and the sovereignty of Parliament belong to us, the people, and whatever our views on Europe — be we Euro-sceptic or Europhile — it has to be the people of the nation who decide its future. I think we all in the House agree on that. If we can send out one strong message that, as democrats, we want the people to decide the future, well and good.

We have heard in the Chamber today, and last Friday, the rehearsal, I hope, of the arguments that will take place during that debate on the referendum — one which we have to welcome. Let us not forget that all parties represented here, should the process at Stormont evolve to its natural conclusion, will embrace the idea of a referendum. The concept of the sovereignty of the people of Northern Ireland has been established, will be maintained and will be followed. That has to be welcomed. If only our own Government had taken the same view when tinkering with our sovereignty back in 1985. If only — but that is another matter, and we will debate it next week.

From Ms McWilliams we had a wonderful insight into the thinking of the Communist Party of Ireland. I just wonder if she had to leave her office at the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition to get it. Anyway, I am delighted to have heard it. Ms McWilliams correctly stated that the world is now a smaller place. I should like to put a different spin on that, to express it in a slightly different way: the world is a bigger place than western Europe. This city was built on the values of Victorian free trade. Our city hall is a monument to that nineteenth century vision and version of free trade, world-wide capitalism. Not for us or Glasgow or Manchester or Liverpool is there a history of narrow-fortress European economics. To ignore the world beyond the 15 countries of the European Union is great folly. To tie ourselves to the world's most inefficient, bureaucratic, elitist, top-heavy trading bloc would be a disaster and a folly that future generations would not thank us for.

Our direction is not of a region of a centralized anti-trade area but of a member of a world-wide trading family, a trans-atlantic trading family, a family that can trade with the tighter economies of South-East Asia, that can trade with the developing economies of eastern Europe, and that can take advantage of the vast on-tap realities of China. GATT and the world-wide realities of trade are overtaking Europe, overtaking the notion of 15 centralized, highly industrialized countries trading amongst themselves. Our vision and our horizons have to be wider than this island and wider than Europe. To ignore the world beyond our small bailiwick would be fatal. We owe it to future generations not to fall into that trap.

I am already beginning to digress. I am not here today to say, rather tritely, that the last time the United Kingdom went into Europe with any success was in June 1944 — that is not the point of this debate. Our purpose is to point out the realities of the sovereignty of the people and to call for a referendum on the future of European integration. As a democrat, I have to welcome the chance to debate, to persuade, to put my point of view to the people. If

only that chance were to come sooner rather than later. If the people decide to bring the curtain down on 1,000 years of history and political development, so be it. That will be their choice. But let the message from the Forum and the province today be that this nation belongs not to the bureaucrats, not to the elite, but to the electorate. Let the electorate decide our future.

The Chairman: I want to try a little experiment, if Members agree. May I suggest that, rather than go through the rather time-consuming process of waiting three minutes before voting, we take the amendment in the name of Mr Neeson and vote on it by a show of hands?

Mr Dodds: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. I am sorry to use that phrase, but I think that this is indeed a point of order. No doubt, everybody would wish to speed our procedures. The difficulty is that there may be people in the precincts but not in the Chamber. They will rightfully assume that we are continuing to operate under the Rules, as agreed, and that they will be given notice of any vote. If there is to be a change like that, everybody should be made well aware of it beforehand. We are constrained to give that notice and to allow people who are not here to come in.

The Chairman: I have to agree. We shall wait for three minutes before voting.

11.45 am

Question put: That the amendment be made.

The Forum proceeded to a Division.

The Chairman: Would Members now consider the use of a show of hands?

Members indicated assent.

The Ayes and Noes having been registered by show of hands, the Chairman declared that the Noes had it.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment made: At the end of the first sentence, after "Union", add

“, the European Commission and the two largest political groups in the European Parliament”;

and in the third sentence, after “political”, insert “or economic”. — *[Mr Dodds]*

Resolved:

This Forum notes with concern the federalist ambitions of some member states of the European Union, the European Commission and the two largest political groups in the European Parliament. As elected, but powerless, representatives of the people of Northern Ireland we recognize the dangers caused by excluding the governed from government. In light of our province's experience of remote and unaccountable administration under direct rule, we call upon Her Majesty's Government to pledge a referendum on the issue of European

political or economic integration in order that the people of the United Kingdom may decide whether or not to cede yet more powers to existing or potential European institutions.

The meeting was suspended at 11.51 am and resumed at 12.06 pm.

WATER SUPPLY (FLUORIDATION)

The Chairman: As we have a quarter of an hour before the lunch break, we shall begin the debate on the interim report of Standing Committee C.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I beg to move the following motion:

That the Forum adopts the interim report on the proposed fluoridation of the water supply in Northern Ireland and decides to forward it to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Services with the request that he give serious consideration to its recommendation.

Mr Chairman, may I first of all thank you for all your help and support. I should also like to thank very sincerely my Committee members and, in particular, the Vice-Chairman, Mr Gardiner, for his assistance in conducting some meetings during what was a hectic period for the Committee.

The Committee worked exceptionally hard against the clock to produce this report, and I am very much in debt to all the members for their support. It was only through such pulling together that we were able successfully to reach this critical point. Lastly, I would like to record my thanks and the thanks of the other members for the contribution made to the whole process by Mr Denis Arnold, the Committee Clerk, who worked above and beyond the call of duty. The Committee completed its work on Tuesday afternoon, and the report was issued that evening.

The Committee looked at this issue because it is one of great public concern, as our postbag amply demonstrated. We felt beyond a shadow of doubt that it was a health issue. We wrote to the Minister, knowing that he was about to make a decision on whether or not to fluoridate the water supply. He responded, giving us a time-scale — a very short one — to look into the whole matter. It is an issue that has been around for years, yet we were being asked to deal with it in a matter of weeks. The Committee appreciated the urgency of the situation and rose to the challenge.

We took oral and written evidence from both sides. First, we heard from those against fluoridation — and, believe me, there were many, and they put their case very well. As there had been no response from the health boards, which support fluoridation and have done so all along, some of our colleagues were empowered to contact them to see if they wanted to put their case. This was done, and we can confidently say that we heard most of the arguments from both sides.

Fluoridation is complicated, and we did not feel that we could pass judgement on its merits or otherwise — certainly not within the time-scale of our inquiry. Instead, the report focuses on what we agreed upon, and we unanimously agreed that fluoridation should not be

introduced in the short term. It should not be introduced by the Minister in the short term, because of the significant public opposition to it. We recommend that local democratically elected bodies should decide such an issue, and not — I repeat: not — unaccountable quangos. There was considerable debate on whether the Committee should go further and recommend the setting up of some sort of commission of experts, but it was thought that this would contradict what we had already agreed.

So what does our report say? It is divided into sections. It covers the history of fluoridation and the results of the Committee's inquiry, and it indicates a way forward. I want to emphasize that no one has criticized the boards or their staff. That is not what we are about, and it is not what is in the report, despite what some people have been saying. It is a fair report, and it makes clear that the boards were only carrying out a set of procedures under the Water (Fluoridation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1987. No one — I repeat: no one — suggested for a moment that they were in breach of the Order.

What we are questioning — and this is one of our key points — is whether the Order is a suitable means of proceeding. In other words, does it allow for a sensible and fair process of consultation? It is our view that in practice it does not. There really can be no doubt at all about this, and we have recommended that the Minister look at the consultation process and the Order again.

I emphasize that we pay tribute to the professionals — doctors, dentists and others — and commend their good work. But we make it plain that decisions on blanket fluoridation of the water supply must lie with the people. Water is basic to life, and it should be thought of in the same way as the air we breathe. We do not add unnecessary pollution to the air. Instead, we attempt to clean it. Likewise, we should not add to our water supplies anything about which we are not happy, anything about which we cannot be sure. In these circumstances it would be wrong for anyone, whether the boards acting under the 1987 Order or anyone else, to fluoridate water against the wishes of the people.

It must be stressed that there has not been a satisfactory consultation process. The previous process showed one thing, and our findings clearly show another. How could a consultation process be said to reflect the public's view when the health and social services councils and the district councils are opposed to interference with our water? We need to take the views of the district councils into account and, if necessary, have the law changed so that the councils may deal with this matter.

We have invited the Minister to meet with us. We hope that a meeting will be possible very soon because the main issues here are democracy and common sense.

I hope that Members will find it in their hearts to support this interim report.

The Chairman: Thank you, Mr Smyth. You have made history by taking a shorter time than you were entitled to.

Mr Curran: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all the words of the motion and insert

"That the Forum adopts the proposals prepared by the Labour representative on the Health Committee on the proposed fluoridation of the water supply in Northern Ireland and decides to forward them to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Services with the request that he give serious consideration to the recommendation."

I preface my remarks by referring to the ruling that you gave this morning, Mr Chairman, under Rule 14. You will recall that on 19 July I said that it was the desire of my party to ensure the continuation of the Forum and to ensure that it would operate as was intended. My party initially took the decision to participate fully in all aspects of the Forum's work. We took it upon ourselves, although we are a very small party, to contribute representatives to all Committees. Dr Alan Evans, who attended the Health Committee for us, is an extremely distinguished medical practitioner and a man with tremendous compassion for the poor, which is why he is in Labour. He expressed to me the opinion that he had not been allowed to present his view fully in the Committee, that the Committee had conducted its investigations inappropriately. He was of the view that it might have been possible to produce a more balanced and effective report if there had been a fuller and more equitable discussion of the issues.

The Labour document opposes the idea of dismissing fluoridation without fair and full public debate. The Health Committee was unable to examine the medical and scientific evidence. It could only comment on the democratic aspect, on the fact that at this point the majority of local councils have opposed fluoridation. A fluoridated water supply, provided that it is safe, has the potential massively to benefit the poorest and most deprived sections of society, and as representatives of working-class people we cannot support a recommendation that does not give this option the fullest consideration.

Labour is very unhappy about the tone of the report produced by the Health Committee and its unfair and incorrect criticism of board staff, the dental and medical professions, and experts in general. The democratic aspect is fundamental in any consideration of this topic, but consultation and discussion in Northern Ireland have not been conducted equitably. Therefore, we are proposing that a commission be set up quickly to examine the scientific evidence and produce a report. That report should be circulated, and the district councils asked again to vote on the issue. This would help to generate an objective discussion on the medical and scientific evidence. We think that such an issue should be decided by the democratic process. It is extremely unfortunate that the Government choose to run Northern Ireland through unaccountable quangos. This has undermined the authority of the health boards to act on behalf of the population.

12.15 pm

I want to draw attention to three or four paragraphs in the draft proposals that we in the Labour Party have put forward. Paragraph 7.2 says

"The continuing high level of debate points to the fact that we are not dealing here with a simple, clear-cut issue. The subject is emotive, and opinions are strongly ... held."

Paragraph 7.8 says

"A commission or some such body with an independent and respected chairperson should be appointed to investigate and summarize the scientific evidence for and against fluoridation. The report of this commission should be publicized widely and, following this, local authorities should be asked to consult the community to decide once and for all on fluoridation."

And paragraph 7.9 says

"It is not appropriate to speculate on what conclusion a better prescribed, more rigorous and more acceptable process of public consultation will reach. However, such an approach would be the only equitable way to determine the merits or demerits of fluoridation and the opinion of the population."

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Does the Gentleman not agree that the Government, who seem to be so keen on doing this, even without consultation, have been making these points over and over again and expressing what is, in some people's opinion, a one-sided view of the advantage to children? All we have heard from the Government is a one-sided view of the so-called medical evidence, and it has been put and put and put again. Those who oppose fluoridation have not had the same opportunity to put the other side. This report calls for a thorough discussion of the whole matter. And where better to discuss it than at local-government level, where representatives are nearer the people?

Mr Curran: I accept entirely what the Member has said. We are attempting to establish this commission because we want to examine the evidence for and against. We want to see the evidence set out clearly so that we can come to an objective decision. What we need is equitable consultation. The usual "Nice to see you. To see you, nice. Good-bye." is no use.

We want to put to the Minister a specific proposal concerning an equitable form of consultation that would draw attention to the summary of the key recommendations in paragraphs 8.1 to 8.5. If this is done, the decision we arrive at will be based fairly on equitable consultation, and not on emotion.

Mr Gardiner: May I start by paying tribute to Mr Hugh Smyth for his able and wise leadership of the Committee and to Mr Arnold and the secretariat for their support and dedicated work in overcoming the many obstacles.

I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to chair a number of the meetings, both evidence-taking and deliberative, that dealt with this contentious subject, so I know only too well the strength of feeling and the emotions it can stir up. Like the Chairman, I was greatly impressed by those who came to testify. It was during the course of oral evidence that my personal views on the subject underwent a change.

I commend this report to the Forum for its even-handedness and fairness. It is a totally balanced piece of work and the product of some hours of agonizing for all of us. It represents compromise. Having chaired some of the Committee's meetings, I can say that there was much give and take. It is that which makes the report a document that can be subscribed to. It is true that everyone did not get everything he wanted, but that is the nature of such things.

The report does not set out to criticize. That was not our function. Instead, we record facts as we saw them. If that appears to some as unduly critical, so be it, but the tenor of the report is really and truly quite mild. Our recommendations are unanimous. No one, to my knowledge, disagreed with the conclusions. There are some, it is true, who wish that the Committee had gone further, but there is only so much you can take on board before the boat begins to take in water, and we felt that we had reached that point.

The whole problem, as we see it, stems from the statutory arrangements, and this is a central theme of the report. The present system highlights the democratic deficit. There will continue to be a democratic deficit in this area if heed is not taken of our recommendations. Chief among the concerns is the need to take on board, in full measure, the views of public representatives and, in this case, of the local authorities.

Today I make a plea for unity and for full-hearted support for this motion so that weight may be added to the sterling efforts of the Committee and of those who served it. That is the tone which should be set.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I felt rather insulted by Labour's representative, Mr Curran, when he stated — though I am sure he did not mean it the way it sounded — that his representative, Dr Alan Evans, had not been given an opportunity to present his view fully. Does Mr Gardiner, who chaired some of the meetings, agree that everyone — voting member or not — was given an equal opportunity to present his case? And can he confirm that at no time — in fact, I went to great lengths to spell this out — did we criticize any board or any person who came to us, no matter whether for or against?

Mr Gardiner: I agree, and I am sure that our colleagues on the Health Committee will also endorse what Mr Smyth has said.

Today I make a plea for unity and for full-hearted support for the motion so that weight may be added to the sterling efforts of the Committee and those who served it. That answers Mr Smyth, and it is a message to Mr Curran.

I should add that the health and social services councils fully oppose fluoridation. These bodies, set up to advise the public, also need to be taken seriously. It is the mind of the Ulster Unionist Party that mass medication should not be added to the water. We feel that the people of Northern Ireland should be given a free choice.

I commend this report to the Forum, and I have great pleasure in supporting the motion moved by the Chairman of the Health Committee.

Mr Gregory Campbell: I join in the tribute paid to the Chairman of the Health Committee, Mr Hugh Smyth, and to the Committee Clerk, Mr Denis Arnold, for the diligent work that was undertaken to produce this report.

Let me put the matter in its proper context. The issue of the possible fluoridation of the water supply came at the very end of the Minister's consultation process. Therefore, time was running against the Committee from the inception of the project. I concur with the Committee Chairman's interjection and with Mr Gardiner's response. At no time did I detect

a feeling on the part of any member that his view had been overlooked or had not been taken fully into account. In fact, at our last meeting, held yesterday, I made the very point that any reservations had been fully aired and could be raised again on the Floor of the Forum today, and I think that all members agreed.

The Committee faced a most difficult task. The fact is that Northern Ireland's dental health is very poor. That is admitted by everyone. Indeed, it is about the only thing that everyone does agree on. The fluoride debate is aimed at the dental health of young people. But, surprisingly enough, the dental health of young people in Northern Ireland, while poor, is not as bad as that of children in some fluoridated areas. So even there we get into a dispute about whether or not fluoride leads invariably to better dental health. That is one of the issues we were faced with.

A fundamental point is that the first evidence received by the Committee was unsolicited evidence from people opposed to fluoride. Such were our endeavours to ensure that the issue would be covered from both sides that we opened it up to those in favour of fluoride. We did not have to. Having advertised and received submissions from those against, we asked those in favour to come forward, and they did. We were given evidence of an extremely strong nature against fluoride, and later the same day we received evidence of a very strong nature in favour of fluoride. So the Committee was faced with the onerous task of trying to determine the best way to establish whether it should join all the health councils in Northern Ireland — the consumers' watchdog in favour of better representation for the public in terms of the delivery of health services — and 25 of the district councils and vote against fluoride.

The evidence from those in favour of fluoridation, when you boil it down, really revolves round the argument that fluoride in the public water supply will improve the dental health of children. They say that it will improve the dental health of everyone, but basically the problem lies with young people.

Those who are opposed to fluoridation say that the evidence is, at best, mixed. They say also that there are very strong indications that suppression of immune defences would result from fluoridation of the water supply, that there would be mottling of teeth and that brittling of bones would occur to a greater degree. So, again, the disparity between the two sets of evidence became more pronounced.

For me and for virtually everyone else on the Committee the issue transcended that of the dental health of young children. Were we to accept a project that would affect virtually every man, woman and child in Northern Ireland, a project out of which no person would be able to opt, because all of us, in some way or other, are affected by that which comes through the public water supply? Can we give approval to a project that would mean the fluoridation, to the extent of one part per million, of the public water supply, despite all the risks that were put before us in the evidence against fluoride?

12.30 pm

I put to several of the boards' representatives a question about our having two irrevocably opposed positions. At the moment there is no fluoride in the water, but those

who want it have ample opportunity to get it. They have fluoride in toothpaste, and they can have fluoride salt, fluoride tablets and fluoride drops. So there are options, choices, in the present scenario of no fluoride in the water. But if we move to the other position — if fluoride is put into the water — what choice will those of us who are against it have? If the public water supply is fluoridated how will we get non-fluoridated water? The answer is that we won't. Whether with regard to food, vegetables or drinking water, everything in our lives revolves round the water supply, and the situation will be very difficult.

One of the boards' representatives made an outlandish statement, to which I must refer. While we were wrestling with the mass of evidence for and against, the witness said that if we were to accumulate all of it, the evidence in favour, when stacked, would reach the top of the Albert clock in Belfast, whereas the evidence against would be about a quarter of an inch high. That was nonsensical, given all the evidence that we were getting.

Then we came back to the issue of freedom of choice. If fluoridation proceeds, it will deny freedom of choice. That is why, over and over again in the Committee report, one sees words such as those in paragraph 7.13:

"On the basis of the foregoing we conclude that any decision to proceed with fluoridation at this time would be a wholly irresponsible and premature decision that would fly in the face of public sentiment."

That is the key issue — public sentiment.

Twenty-five of the 26 district councils have opposed fluoridation, as have all four health and social services councils. I hope that the Northern Ireland Forum, representing the people — all the people — of Northern Ireland, will do likewise.

I support the motion.

Mr Close: Fluoridation has been an emotive subject over a protracted period. For years it appeared that the people of Northern Ireland were in many respects going to be ignored, that their views would not even be sought. Then, for a variety of reasons, the health boards decided to consult the people. They had to find out what folk were saying. Democracy had to be seen to be working. What happened? All the councils in Northern Ireland debated the whole issue of fluoridation. Twenty-five of them, on being asked whether they were for or against it, voted against. But the health boards, which are not really accountable to anyone, went ahead. They said "We have proceeded with the consultation. The people have spoken, but we are going to ignore what they have said. We will ignore their elected representatives and proceed to spend money on fluoridating the water. We will reduce the choice of the people of Northern Ireland." I am glad that other Members agree with me that that is totally unacceptable.

I hope that the Forum will accept this report and support its contents. Of course, whether it will do any good is another matter. Whether the Minister will listen, or whether his mind has already been made up, is something else. The evidence suggests that minds have already been made up, that fluoridation will proceed.

Why does the issue of fluoridation raise such questions in people's minds? I started to look into the whole subject many years ago, and it poses some very pertinent questions. Fluoride, no one doubts, is a toxic substance. The question that many people ask is "Why do you want to add a toxic substance to our water supply?" Water, which is the source and the means of maintaining life, is going to have what is in effect another poison added to it. Why in any democracy should the authorities wish to do that? The answer we are given is that it is because of the high rate of dental caries, particularly among young children. I have spoken about this to some of the top dentists in the Royal School of Dentistry, and there is incontrovertible evidence that our young children have higher rates of dental caries than those in many other parts of the United Kingdom and in Europe. I do not think anyone could refute that.

The question is: how does one deal with the problem? It is very interesting that, while the remedy seems to be to put fluoride into the water, the dental experts, not only here but throughout Europe and the world, argue that children under three years of age should not be given fluoride substitutes. For instance, they should not be given fluoride tablets for their teeth. Dentists tell us all that we should use the smallest quantity of toothpaste. Why? Because it has added fluoride and because it is recognized that too much fluoride is bad for us. Yet the argument goes that it can be put into our water supply. We are told that it will be added under controlled conditions, that the amount will be very small. But how can anyone control my intake of water? How can anyone control my intake of the various foods into which water will find its way? How can anyone control my intake of any substance contaminated with fluoride? How can anyone know what dosage someone is taking in? The answer is that nobody really knows.

There is another question: where does the fluoride that is ingested go? Is it all excreted one way or another? The answer is no. Fluoride is stored in the body. And where is it stored? More than likely, in the bone structure. And what do we read and hear about osteoporosis, hip fractures, and so on, in areas throughout the world that have fluoridated water supplies? If there is the slightest doubt about whether fluoride can cause any of the problems that have been suggested, why does a health board or a health authority wish to take risks with people's health?

I understand that a Glasgow physician — a Dr Sheila Gibson — wrote a paper pointing out how her research showed that fluoride can confuse the white blood cells, giving rise to the promotion of cancer cells. I understand that Dr Gibson is not the first person to come across this phenomenon: some Japanese scientists were able as far back as the 1980s to demonstrate it in laboratory conditions. I wrote to different doctors asking them to disprove it, but it has not been disproved to my satisfaction.

Why should I take a risk? Why should I ask society to take a risk? If your teeth go bad — and I am not minimizing this in any way — you can get false teeth. But if there is the slightest risk that half, or even a quarter, of the evidence about the toxic effects of fluoride is accurate, you could end up dead. Which is better?

This report deals with the subject in a balanced way. As one who nails his colours to the mast in opposition to fluoridation, I am prepared to accept it. I am prepared to go along with the assertion that more information is needed and, possibly, further debate. But the vital

question — and the question that I leave with the Forum — is: why take a risk with people's health?

Mr Cedric Wilson: I should like to join those Members who have paid tribute to the Chairman of the Health Committee and to endorse in full the Committee's proposal. In doing so, may I say a special word of thanks to Mr Gardiner and to my colleague Councillor Valerie Keenan, the United Kingdom Unionist Party representative, for taking up some of the slack. Mr Smyth has referred to the very heavy schedule and the many meetings that had to take place at the same time as negotiations at Castle Buildings. Unfortunately, Mr Smyth and I were not able to be present for consideration of all of the report. Much credit must go to Mr Gardiner and the team and to Mr Arnold for putting it together very quickly.

In supporting the motion, I have to say that I cannot understand the approach of the Labour Party in breaking ranks with their colleagues on this matter. Dr Evans had every opportunity to make his views known. It is divisive when, a Committee having done work like this, another body comes forward with an adverse or different report. The approach of the Labour Party is the one that causes me the greatest concern. They want the Government to commission experts to look at this subject. The old adage "Doctors differ and patients die" comes to mind when experts are asked for their opinion.

My objection to the whole notion of fluoridation of the water supply is based on principled opposition to any additives at all. This is something about which the people of Northern Ireland — indeed, the people of the United Kingdom — should be very wary. We ought to guard against accepting that the Government, even if on the strongest recommendation of the very best experts, should have the right to add anything to our water supply. It may be hypothetical, but some team of experts or some international body could recommend that the peace process in Northern Ireland might be helped if large quantities of tranquilizers were added to the water. Once you have established a principle, who knows where it will end? Some people may regard that as a flippant question, but it is one that has to be asked. In this context "If in doubt leave it out" is a very wise proposition. The people must be the final arbiters.

With regard to the appointment of a team of experts who would ultimately come back to the councils and others who have already expressed the opinions of those they represent, we say to the Government that they should stop this whole process. They should go direct to the people and ask them if they want fluoride in their water. I think that the answer would be a resounding no, despite the advice of experts or anyone else.

I enthusiastically recommend this report and ask the Forum to endorse it.

12.45 pm

Ms McWilliams: We too support the recommendation of the Health Committee that the fluoridation of water supplies should be deferred.

I do not think that what the Labour Party is suggesting is very different from what Mr Close is suggesting, because he is asking for more information. The jury is out on this, as Mr Campbell has said. He has put the arguments for and against, and he is saying that we do

not have enough information. That is what the Labour Party is suggesting in saying that an independent commission should be set up to gather more information. We cannot do that here — we do not have the expertise. I take the point that the information gathered in support of the proposal might reach the top of the Albert Clock, and the information against it barely leave the floor. Well, we should be adding to the information, which is what an independent commission might do.

We agree with the conclusion that any decision to proceed with fluoridation is out of line with the expressed concern of 25 district councils and, indeed, of the four health and social services councils, which I mention because they are the bodies representing the consumers. Obviously the consumers have not succeeded in getting their message through to the health and social services boards.

This report draws attention to the extremely high levels of dental disease in Northern Ireland. Obviously, we are very concerned about children, especially those in the poorer communities. It would be good to be at the top of the ladder with regard to employment and factors operating against deprivation. We in Northern Ireland have somehow ended up at the bottom. This is clearly reflected in the level of dental decay among children. We support the efforts of dentists and others to prevent dental disease and the serious complications that it causes. Dentists should be able to assess its full impact. They obviously see the daily suffering of children and others.

The research evidence produced by those who propose fluoridation is strong and clear. We believe that it is quite appropriate for dentists to be strong advocates of fluoridation. I am not sure that they are in a conspiracy to kill us — unless we take to heart this statement of Ivan Illich's:

"The medical profession is a danger to health."

One is reminded of the saying "The operation was a success. Too bad the patient died!" That probably applies to this proposal — as to other interventions that the medical profession has proposed from time to time. I have been at the receiving end. As an expectant mother, I had facts fired at me that were completely contrary to others I received, and was left in the confusing position of having to make up my mind.

Mr Gregory Campbell: On the matter of being faced with conflicting evidence, the point was raised in the Committee that no one contends that the present water supply endangers anyone's health in any respect whatsoever, but there appears to be evidence of some risk from fluoridated water. Which option would Ms McWilliams go for — the present situation, with no risk to the health of anyone, or fluoridation, which may present a risk to some people?

Ms McWilliams: Obviously, as a parent, and indeed as a consumer, I want to know what the risks are. The problem here is that we have short-term information without knowing the long-term consequences. We need to know the long-term implications of fluoridation. The Member is quite right: once it is introduced and becomes universal, it will be impossible to stop.

I am faced with a similar dilemma, unfortunately, on reaching this time of life, with regard to osteoporosis. Should I supplement my diet or take the medical profession's advice and introduce certain medication additives? The service provided for the health of people in this country is very poor. The issue of fluoridation brings that home to us.

My response to Mr Wilson's point about additives is that there are probably about 80 in our water already. We would all be suffering from massive doses of gastro-enteritis if that were not the case. What we need to know is whether fluoridation is going to be useful or whether it is going to have dire risks for us at the end of the day.

Opponents of fluoridation — there are some of them here today listening to the debate — have very strong views, and rightly so. These should be taken seriously. It is only fair to say, however, that such people ought to be provided with more resources. The medical profession has adequate resources, but those who are against fluoridation do not. We do not want cock-and-bull stories, anecdotes or impressions; we want to be properly informed. All those representing people in this country want to base their standpoint on the information in front of them. Clearly, the information from those who are opposed to fluoridation is minimal. They should be given the resources to enable them to build it up.

The main reason we wish to see the decision deferred — and this is why we agree with the Health Committee's recommendations — is our concern about democracy. We believe that local authorities should have a key role in decision-making. They should consult widely about an issue as complicated and sensitive as fluoridation. That is why we believe that the Labour Party's suggestion is a good one: that we should set up an independent commission to assess the evidence. That would be sensible. What I am saying is probably not a million miles away from the position adopted by Mr Close. He put forward a very good argument against fluoridation, but he summed up by saying "We need more information." On this question, Forum Members are not that far apart. Hopefully, the councils would get hold of any information the commission had gathered and would thus enable the consumers and others opposed to fluoridation to gather evidence in the way that the medical profession has been able to.

We support the general conclusions of the Health Committee's interim report. We feel, however, that it is inappropriately critical of the dental profession and the health and social services bodies, and that is a problem. Obviously it is very easy to be critical. Over the years those of us who are in the Women's Coalition have been extremely critical of the way the health and social services boards have acted, particularly in respect of issues of community care, child care, domestic violence and child abuse. Here too we are critical. But it does not help to be inappropriately critical. We believe that the Labour Party's proposals offer a sensible and clear way forward, and we support its amendment.

The Chairman: I think we should break for lunch now. There are two more Members on my list. I do not know whether Mr Smyth wants to wind up.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I know that Members want to get to the five-minute-speech debate — probably after lunch. I do not want to bore the Forum. If you want to call those two Members now, Mr Chairman, I will waive my right of reply and the Questions can be put.

Mr Thomas Robinson: I commend the report to the Forum. I want to refer to a couple of issues which have been mentioned by other Members.

First, I want to repudiate the points put forward by Mr Curran for Labour. Everyone was given a fair opportunity in the Committee. There is absolutely no question about that. In fact, we bent over backwards to accommodate the minority parties, including those that have only two Forum Members.

Also, there was no criticism whatsoever of health professionals. I quote from the report:

"It acknowledges the commitment and expertise of those involved in preventing and treating dental disease.

The Committee recommends widespread support for further efforts to promote dental health, including dental hygiene, encouragement for dental attendance, health education, and the involvement of the public in planning and developing dental services."

So, far from being critical, we acknowledge the work done by the health professionals.

We in the Ulster Unionist Party are against the setting up of a commission. In fact, we have far too many quangos in Northern Ireland. What we want to do is get rid of quangos, rather than create more.

Mr King: Does the Member agree that the interim report suggests a way forward, a way to democratize the consultative process in Northern Ireland? In paragraph 7.18 we call for the views of local authorities to be given proper weight, in the absence of a province-wide administrative body. So, far from advocating the use by the Government of an expert quango, we are pointing the way to democratizing consultation on this or any other issue.

Mr Thomas Robinson: I have no hesitation in concurring with the views expressed by Mr King on this subject and with his point about paragraph 7.18.

I will move on to the report itself, which I commend. Like others, I want to pay tribute to the Secretariat staff, especially Mr Denis Arnold, who gave us the best type of help that we could have had. Indeed, I will take it a stage further and say publicly that since I became a Member of the Forum I have been most impressed by all the staff. Should power ever be devolved to the Forum, we have the civil servants in Northern Ireland who can deliver the goods.

The issue of fluoride in the water is certainly an emotive one. It has caused a lot of debate, not only in council chambers but throughout Northern Ireland. So far as I am concerned, fluoridation must be ruled out until there is firm evidence that the public have absolutely nothing to fear. There is a perception among people at large that there is a danger in the addition of fluoride to the water. The vast majority of those I have spoken to, throughout Northern Ireland, are against the idea of mass medication. There is, I believe, a fundamental right. It is a matter of conscience. If a person believes that something could be detrimental to his health, his right must prevail.

Mention has already been made of the fact that 25 out of the 26 district councils are opposed to fluoridation. These are the people who are supposed to represent the public at large. I will take it a stage further: the Government's own health and social services councils — the bodies appointed to represent the consumer — have come out against fluoridation. Are the Government telling us that they are going to ignore the very bodies that they set up to represent consumers? If the Minister believes in democracy — and I must challenge the notion that any Minister in Northern Ireland believes in democracy — he has got to say no to the addition of fluoride to the water.

I am very pleased that the Minister, Mr Moss, has agreed to meet a deputation from the Association of Local Authorities — the representatives of local government — of which I am a member. It is very disappointing that, up until now, he has not agreed to meet a deputation from the Forum. I do not know whether there is anything we can do about that. Perhaps we could make further representations. It may be that we could join the deputation from the Association of Local Authorities.

In conclusion, may I say that there are too many unanswered questions from those who are opposed to the addition of fluoride to the water. Until such time as I am totally convinced that it is safe, I am not prepared to go down that road. I commend the report to the House.

1.00 pm

Mr McMichael: I should like to thank Mr Frank McCoubrey for representing me so well on the Committee which examined this issue and to pass on his tribute to the Committee's Chairman and support staff for the work they have done in preparing the report.

That this is a very complex debate is evidenced by the divergence of views on what action should be taken. Mr Curran's comments confirm that.

I was introduced to the issue about 18 months ago, when Lisburn Council was looking at it. Mr Close can confirm that we listened to the arguments of those who were pro-fluoridation and of those who were anti-fluoridation. The deeper you go, the more confused you become, particularly when there are ranks upon ranks of experts lining up on each side. This in itself is a matter of great concern.

The one thing which is clear is that the district councils are overwhelmingly opposed to the introduction of fluoridation. As they are the only elected bodies with any power, it is essential that their views be respected. The views of the Forum — the only recently elected body in the province — should also be taken into account.

We have heard a wide debate on various matters, but it comes down to two questions. First, is fluoridation safe? In that regard, the jury is out. Secondly, should we support what is tantamount to compulsory medication, or should we have the right to choose whether fluoride — recognized as a toxin — is introduced into the water supply? Malcolm Moss is going to have to make a decision, possibly over the heads of the people of Northern Ireland, and possibly without regard to the views which have been expressed overwhelmingly by the

councils. He should consider well the implications of his decision, for it will be one that cannot be reversed.

The Ulster Democratic Party's position is that if there is a risk we should not go ahead with fluoridation. We should side with caution. Essentially, that is what this report says. It makes the point that there is a need for more information, that we are not able to make a conclusive decision. There are too many questions that remain unanswered. We need a public inquiry so that the evidence can be examined in the open.

I support the report, and I hope that the people of Northern Ireland will have their many questions answered.

Question put: That the amendment be made.

The Forum proceeded to a Division.

The Chairman: Do I have your consent to our using a show of hands?

Members indicated assent.

The Ayes and Noes having been registered by show of hands, the Chairman declared that the Noes had it.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Forum adopts the interim report on the proposed fluoridation of the water supply in Northern Ireland and decides to forward it to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Services with the request that he give serious consideration to its recommendation.

The Chairman: We shall resume at 2.15 pm promptly. I am very keen that we should start on time. There are well over 20 Members to speak. Each has been allotted five minutes, and I am sure that there will be many more.

The meeting was suspended at 1.09 pm and resumed at 2.17 pm.

SPECIAL DEBATE (RULE 10(5))

Mr Foster: The matter that I want to raise is one of concern to the people of County Fermanagh. It is a workers' problem, and I am bringing it before the Forum because of the manner in which — especially given the low level of employment and pay — **workers employed by Compass Catering Services** at the Erne Hospital in Enniskillen and at the Omagh hospitals are being treated.

There is a real dispute afoot at the moment. It has led to staff taking the unprecedented step of going on strike for a two-week period commencing on the evening of Sunday 10 November. They really are pushed to the limit. The contention of these poorly paid workers is that the company has forced them into this action by terminating the contracts of staff who transferred from the trust — and this, nine months into contract — by hiring all new people on lower pay and worse conditions of service, and by failing to treat workers fairly.

This company, as I understand it, is one of the biggest and richest around. It is said to have made over £1 billion in profit last year. It now states that it cannot afford to pay time and a half and double time for Saturdays and Sundays. The pay is the paltry sum of £3.10 per hour in Tyrone and Fermanagh, £3.20 per hour in Londonderry and £3.29 per hour in Lisburn. Yet if the strike is forced upon these people, the company intends to bring scab labour into the area for the large sum of £3.30 per hour and will be willing to pay them time and a half and double time. Some workers are indeed in real difficulties, having lost £80 to £120 per month — a lot of money to the low-paid — and in several cases mortgages are very much at stake.

Can we in this day and age allow low-paid workers to be taken advantage of in such a high-handed fashion when managerial positions in the health service are being created almost daily? Does anyone think that less than £4 per hour is a decent wage? Is it not insulting to responsible working-class people?

It is said that people have been pushed to the limit when they feel the need to go on strike. Knowing those in the Enniskillen area, I can say that the last thing they want to do is strike. Taking strike action for a fortnight is a tremendous step for them. They should not be used and then abused in such fashion. The workers in the Erne Hospital want a fair day's pay for a fair day's work, but they are being pushed further and further down the wages scale. They are aware — I am sure we are all aware — that while people are serving, life is not meaningless. Why try to demoralize them? I want to highlight this matter today by calling upon the Government not to allow such practices to continue. Good conditions, good incentives and good pay are the ingredients for a good, loyal work-force.

I conclude by saying that the person who holds that every human right is secondary to his profit must now give way to the advocate of human welfare. This, in my opinion, is exploitation of lower-paid employees, and the Government must investigate at once. The terms and conditions on offer adversely affect sick pay, holiday entitlement, maternity payments and week-end enhancement. These people are expected to give up their rights and to forget the TUPE principles, which they accepted on transfer from trust status, just a short

few months ago, in a contract which was to last for three years. The situation is ridiculous and grossly unfair.

Mr McAlister: I support the **decision of the Australian Government to deny Gerry Adams an entry visa**, and I commend them for their courageous stand against terrorism.

I suppose that as citizens of a Christian country — Christian in broad terms — we do not like to think of people losing their temper. But there is such a thing as righteous anger. Most right-thinking people in Northern Ireland and, I am sure, throughout the rest of the United Kingdom were rightfully outraged when Gerry Adams and his ilk were given visas to visit America and then proceeded to strut about the world stage as if they were God's own people. This stance by the Australian Government is much to be commended. The sham, technical cease-fire of the IRA/Sinn Fein gave the American Government the opportunity to allow Mr Adams to visit the United States to propagate his gospel and seek funding. This was the wrong decision.

Of course, he is still seeking to do that, but he has another interest in that he has a book to sell. The main reason for his going to Australia is to prop up IRA/Sinn Fein dogma, but he also wants to make a few pounds for himself. But the Australian Government have been first class in coming down hard and refusing him entry following the failure of the cease-fire — the sham cease-fire. If only that message would go round the world. If only Mr Clinton, staying in power, would take note of what the Australian Government have done and rethink any future visa for Adams and company.

I do not believe in wasting time, so I will conclude. I hope that Members will support me in this. Indeed, the Forum should send a letter to the Australian Government commending them for their stance against terrorism.

Mr McCarthy: I want to speak about the shame of so-called savings on service and safety.

So-called savings are more accurately described as savage cut-backs, particularly when they concern the **health service** and are made by the Government, who have completely annihilated the NHS. There is now a two-tier health service, to the eternal shame of the Tory Government. The latest effect is being felt by non-fundholding GPs' surgery patients who are being placed on long waiting-lists to suffer unnecessary pain and discomfort. Shame on Malcolm Moss and his Government. I call for the restoration of equality for everyone.

Yesterday's newspaper says "Brutal Blow to Ulster's Health", and today's says "Health Cuts Spell Disaster — Death". That is what Mr Moss is responsible for. He need not tell us that there is no crisis in the health service. Let him go and ask the people who have to wait and suffer.

The other matter that I want to raise relates to **safety and public transport**. Every year, at the start of a new school term, we have the real problem of overcrowding on school buses, run mainly by Ulsterbus. This gives rise to possible dangers for all passengers. On a

grossly overcrowded bus all safety regulations are tossed overboard. Undue responsibility is therefore placed on the driver. Pupils from the Ards Peninsula, as well as from many other parts, are crammed into a 53-seater bus, at times well exceeding the limit. One terrible example of overcrowding was related to me. A 53-seater bus was so full that a young pupil had to stand for between 10 and 15 miles on the step just inside the closed door. I am sure that every Member will agree that that is totally unacceptable. Why should young people be exposed to such dangers? Again, this is putting so-called savings before safety.

Another mode of transport involving children is the Portaferry/Strangford ferry. Following cut-backs in resources, passengers have expressed deep concern about safety. People who use this essential service on a twice-daily basis, including many schoolchildren, feel that safety standards on the short sea crossing have deteriorated very much in recent times. Having brought this concern to the Forum, I appeal to the Department to ensure that every safety precaution is taken and that maintenance is kept up to date.

All these aspects of service and safety have been put in jeopardy, and we call on the relevant authorities to initiate remedies immediately. Sufficient funding must be released now to avoid disaster. I call on Mr Moss in particular to fund health and environment services, and I hope that I have the support of the Forum.

The Chairman: On the point about bringing these matters to the attention of the Government, I should point out that the Record of our proceedings is read by all Departments.

Mr McCartney: I put it to the Forum, on behalf of my party, that any new cease-fire declared by Sinn Féin/IRA must be complete in nature and permanent in duration.

The issues of an IRA cease-fire and of decommissioning are central to the present talks at Castle Buildings. My party and, I believe, the Ulster Unionist Party and the Democratic Unionist Party have called repeatedly for any cease-fire to be complete in nature and permanent in duration.

In May 1996, in the presence of Mr Cedric Wilson and Mr Paddy Roche of my party, the Prime Minister informed me that his Government did not insist on the use of the term "permanent" because the IRA would not agree to such a condition. More recently, Sir Patrick Mayhew, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, has indicated that one reason the Government are not demanding the use of the term "permanent" is that the IRA constitution would not allow it. When, among others, Dr Paisley expressed our united abhorrence that a sovereign power like the British Government should be permitting its policy to be dictated by a terrorist organization, and asked that a copy of the IRA's constitution be produced, that document was not available.

2.30 pm

However, I have news for the Northern Ireland Office and for the people of Northern Ireland: the constitution of the IRA is available. It is available as an appendix to the book by Mr Martin Dillon entitled 'The Dirty War'. This book is very informative about the attitude of both Governments, exemplifying both their fraud and the intransigence and dedication to

terrorism of Sinn Féin/IRA. General order number 5 — this should give all of us here and the people of Northern Ireland a clue to what is likely to happen in the future — reads as follows:

“A volunteer shall not: 1. swear or pledge allegiance or recognition to the partition institutions of government of the six or 26 county states; 2. swear or pledge recognition of their legitimacy as sovereign governing bodies for the Irish people; 3.” —

this is most important —

“swear or pledge himself or herself in any way to refrain from using arms or other methods of struggle to overthrow British rule in Ireland.”

So there you have it. There can be no permanent peace. There can be no complete peace or cease-fire, because that would be counter to the requirement of the pledge that no soldier or member of the IRA will in any way refrain from using arms or other methods of struggle to overthrow British rule in Ireland.

I ask the Forum for unanimous support.

Mr Junkin: I want to speak on a subject which Mr McCarthy has already mentioned — transport. I shall refer in particular to the humble bus — that product of the need for mass transport for people to go to work, to go to schools and colleges, to avail themselves of shopping opportunities, to entertain themselves or to go on holiday.

People normally head for work between 7 o'clock and 9 o'clock, and they tend to come home between 3 o'clock and 6 o'clock. They can cycle or, if fit, they can walk, but there is a tendency to use **public transport**, and the bus has become a very important method of moving them *en masse*. Its development can be traced from the horse and cart, through the stagecoach, to the luxurious coaches of today. Progress has come on many fronts. Passengers have soft seats and air-conditioning. Imagine travelling behind today's farm trailer, which is the modern version of the horse and cart, and watching it jolt about, and then imagine yourself behind one of these modern buses, which seems to float on air as you jolt through Northern Ireland's famous potholes — I do in my old banger anyway. That is how far coaches have come. There has been progress with regard to the elements too. We are no longer exposed to rain or wind or japs. The European Union will probably bring out a definition of “jap”. Remember the straight banana?

Most buses are used around towns. They have to be practical, and they have to fit the needs of the typical commuter. I welcome all the developments adopted by coach-builders. I particularly commend the designers and the engineers at the local plant in Ballymena, which announced in the newspaper today an order for 247 vehicles. That is 3% of the fleet of the United Kingdom's largest operator — and in a small town like Ballymena. According to the paper, the deal is a seal of approval for the firm which pioneered in the United Kingdom the concept of low-floor buses, and all the vehicles will be fully accessible, low-floor models.

There is a lack of bus lanes in our towns and cities. I fervently believe, having seen the system working in Edinburgh and in other places, that we need many more bus lanes to discourage people from using cars. The more buses we have, the fewer fumes there will be in

shopping precincts. Faster, efficient buses will definitely cut down traffic jams, and we will not have to sit and look at the car in front — even if it is a Toyota.

I agree fully with Mr McCarthy on the question of bus overloading. I realize that everybody is trying to travel at the same time every morning. Our children are our most precious possessions, yet they have to be sent out to stand on 53-seater buses with an extra 40 people. That is scandalous.

I appeal to all parents, all bus companies and all schools for an improvement in bus boarding protocol. Nowadays, when you see people, especially schoolchildren, getting on a bus in the mornings, they are not so much boarding the vehicle as charging at it. It used to be women and girls first. I cannot remember when I last saw that principle observed at a bus-stop. How often has a pregnant woman, perhaps still going out to work, had to stand at the very back, with 70 or 80 children rampaging while she hangs on to a strap, nobody having the courtesy, or the decency, to get up and give her a seat?

If this can be disseminated through the community, care, courtesy and consideration may be the hallmark of the next generation of Ulster youth. If we start to change soon, we could all enjoy the benefits of a comfortable bus.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Mr McCartney has brought a very serious matter to our attention, and I want to say a few words on it.

The Secretary of State has said in the press and on television and radio that at present no talks are taking place between the **IRA/Sinn Féin** and either himself or his officials. He added, however, that if the IRA is anxious for them to restate their position, he and the Northern Ireland Office would welcome an opportunity to do so. Mr McCartney now reveals that the Secretary of State has said that the IRA has difficulties, because of its constitution, with regard to the word “permanent” and has suggested that there are other ways of skinning a cat. I suggest that he is not skinning the cat, but feeding it — with Kit-e-Kat or Mickey Mouse food. There is no doubt that the Government are not endeavouring to deal with this matter.

I want to put on record, very solemnly and without any emotion, that I do not believe the Secretary of State. Negotiations are going on. With regard to the IRA's refusal to use the word “permanent” because of its constitution, it seems that the Secretary of State and the British Government will be happy to have the IRA/Sinn Féin at the Stormont talks table, waving their constitution and saying “We have not departed one iota.” That constitution and the basis of the talks at Stormont cannot be made to agree. If the IRA holds to its constitution, it cannot be at the talks. The Mitchell principles state that it has to give up all its arms, renounce violence and refuse to go back to violent ways. How can it do that when it is saying “We cannot agree to the word ‘permanent’, because that would be against our constitution”? The constitution of the IRA and democracy cannot be married. The constitution of the IRA is anarchy. It is terrorism. The IRA is waging war, as terrorists, against the constitutional forces and people of the state.

I go further and put on record my belief that certain people in Mr Mitchell's office are talking with the IRA. If Mr Mitchell's staff and officials from the Northern Ireland Office are in such contact, then talks are certainly going on.

I was thrown out of the House of Commons for accusing Sir Patrick of lying. He said that neither he nor his officials had had any talks with the IRA. Then it came out that they had been talking for two years. In fact, the minutes were being sent to Mr McGuinness of Londonderry. They were not just giving out documents of their own but giving to the IRA confidential minutes of the talks at Stormont. But they denied that.

Why should we believe the Secretary of State now? Actually, he gave us a clue to what was happening by being able to tell us why the IRA would not use the word "permanent" and why it will not abide by the Mitchell principles. The Secretary of State says "We are not talking", but the fact is that talks are going on, to the detriment of democracy.

Democracy cannot be married to the constitution of the IRA.

Mr McMichael: I rise to support Unison, the health-care union, which has declared that it will strike in various areas of the province. I am aware of action in Enniskillen and in the Down and Lisburn Trust area on the issue of staff being mishandled by contracted-out companies.

In Down and Lisburn, a company called **Compass Ireland** took over some services in 1985 as a result of compulsory competitive tendering. At the time of the take-over, Mr Paul Hayes, managing director of the company, said that people who transferred to it would come with all their rights protected. That would include pay, holidays, services, pensions — right down to the payment of wages on the same day. Changes would be made only with the workers' consent and after negotiation. That promise has been reneged upon. Pay and conditions have been changed. Contracts have been tampered with, despite opposition and protests from the employees. Individuals now find themselves working under conditions inferior to those of colleagues.

Workers are quite rightly incensed at Compass Ireland's handling of staff and its disregard for the effect of the cuts. As a result of the failure of sustained efforts to expedite this issue, people have found themselves with no choice but to force a strike.

Mr Calvert: Last night Paul Hayes, the managing director of Compass UK, met the telephonists at the Lagan Valley. He offered them £50 per week, as a multi-skill bonus, to break the strike. Does the Member agree that, by their refusal to discuss emergency cover with the unions, Compass are putting the lives of patients at risk?

Mr McMichael: I wholeheartedly agree.

The efforts being made by Compass to take this matter off the public agenda expose its motives. Given the deep dissatisfaction, Unison's call on its members to strike is entirely legitimate.

2.45 pm

I have some case studies in front of me. It will not take long to read a couple of them to show the plight that people find themselves in as a result of the actions of this company.

The first relates to a domestic in the Thompson House Hospital in Lisburn who has worked for Compass for the five years since it took over. She works at week-ends. When employed by the health service she earned £47.50 a week, with a take-home pay of £46.50. Since Compass made its cuts, she has been taking home £26 — a loss of £27 a week. Another case concerns a domestic in the Lagan Valley Hospital earning £122 a week. Compass made changes to her contract, and she is now losing £22 a week. Next, there is the case of a hospital porter who has been in the same job for almost 18 years. He has had his week-end rates changed and is losing some £30 a week as a result. Then there is the porter who is getting only £3.29 an hour as opposed to the £3.78 that other porters who have transferred are getting. He is also losing out on holiday entitlement, sickness-benefit entitlement and annual leave.

Compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) was introduced into Northern Ireland five years ago, and since then issues such as this have arisen constantly. In an attempt to rationalize public spending, the Government introduced CCT and began the process of stripping public services to the bone. The health service has been particularly affected by rationalization, and we are all conversant with the effects. We have seen further evidence of this over the last week with the postponement of non-essential operations due to over-stretched budgets. The health service is being eroded before our very eyes, as hospitals are run by accountants rather than physicians.

For Unison, it is not just the medical service that is being eroded, but also the other services which make a hospital function — caterers, porters, domestics. It is a further example of people being funnelled into jobs as cheap labour, forced to work more hours for less money and in worse conditions than comparable workers. The effect is a deterioration in health services and dehumanization and degradation of employees.

The workers who are engaged in this strike want no more than fair treatment, entitlements and opportunities. I support them in their plight and call on other Members to do likewise.

Mrs Steele: Following the remarks of Mr McCarthy and Mr Junkin, I wish to raise another aspect of transport services. I refer to the two main roads in east Antrim — the **Larne-Belfast road (the A8) and the Larne-Carrickfergus-Belfast road (the A2)**. These are main arteries and are vital to the economic welfare of east Antrim and, indeed, as Larne is our second major port, to the rest of Northern Ireland. Both roads, for most of their length, are single carriageways. They have been earmarked for many years for upgrading to dual-carriageway status, but in both cases this keeps getting put on the long finger. It is always to be in the next five years, but it never happens. Indeed, the Department of the Environment, by its actions in the past few years, has given the impression of having no intention to upgrade them at all.

The A8 — the Larne-Belfast road — is the main artery from Larne harbour. With traffic increasing year by year, it is becoming a nightmare to travel on. Since the Moyle Hospital in Larne was closed in 1994 and the Antrim Area Hospital became our nearest centre for accident, emergency, maternity and general hospital services, ambulances have to travel on 12 miles of this 20-mile stretch of road, adding daily to the dangers from speed and frustration caused by traffic snarl-ups created by slow-moving vehicles, especially tractors in this mostly rural countryside.

Up to about 18 months ago we had a hard shoulder for most of the carriageway, where drivers of slow vehicles, or anyone else, could pull off the road. But what has the DOE's Roads Service done now? It has made matters worse by inserting a kerb about four inches high the whole length of the road. (Notice that I have not gone metric.) You could not now pull off the road for any reason without wrecking your vehicle. The cost of this kerb-laying must have been astronomical. One wonders about the mind-set of those who thought it up — making a bad situation worse. People in local councils, businesses, and so on, have been crying out for many years for a dual carriageway, but the Department is wasting money on things like this kerb.

Let me turn to the A2 — the stretch from Carrickfergus to the entrance to the university at Jordanstown (a distance of about four miles). This part of the road is especially narrow and twisting, with large houses on each side, and it carries continuously heavy traffic to and from Belfast. Well over 20 years ago it was scheduled for dualling, but upgrading has been deferred again. What has the Planning Service been doing in the meantime? It has allowed a large detached house to be built in every available hole in the hedge — right up to the roadside in many places. If the road project gets the go-ahead some of these new houses will have to be demolished because there is no room between them. Anyway, that is how I see it with my innocent eyes.

Where is the Department's logic? It puts unnecessary kerbs on the A8, making a bad situation worse; it gives planning permission for new houses on the A2, making it impossible for the road to be widened. I cannot understand the lack of vision, but I do recognize the continuing chaos, frustration, delays and cost to the public caused by lack of co-ordination, planning and common sense. I hope that people in other parts of the province are not suffering as we in east Antrim are.

Mr Peter Robinson: I regret that the subject with which I have to deal relates to the **Northern Ireland Tourist Board**. It is regrettable because over recent months I have been working very closely with representatives of the board, and, contrary to the attitudes often taken by politicians, I must say that I have been very impressed by the degree of professionalism that I have seen there and by the enthusiasm for projects to bring more people to Northern Ireland.

However, in the summer of 1995 I exposed — on the basis of confidential documents I had received — the fact that a conference had taken place in June of that year, the purpose of which was to brand Ireland as a destination without regard to the border. It was intended that the two tourist boards should almost amalgamate under an "Ireland" label and work on the whole island. Like many other people, I do not have any real problem about co-operation

that is of mutual benefit, but at a certain stage one crosses a line and ends up with one body taking executive decisions for the whole island — in fact, an all-Ireland executive body.

I regret to say that the source who provided me with that information in the summer of 1995 has returned with the information that it is intended that on the 11th of this month the tourist chiefs from Northern Ireland will go to Dublin to launch a project which will formalize the relationship between Bord Fáilte and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. It is no accident that they should choose a date which happens to be close to the anniversary of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which itself is about gradualism towards a united Ireland. Let no one misunderstand the political direction. Bord Failte, under instruction from the Dublin Government, commissioned independent consultants to provide information that would enable this all-Ireland project to be pushed forward. The aim, of course, is to market Ireland to the world as one entity.

Co-operation has been building up over recent years, to the extent that this year's edition of the leading hotel guide 'Best Western' has all Northern Ireland hotels listed under the Irish tricolour. It says that our national holiday is Saint Patrick's Day, and the Twelfth of July is not mentioned. Part of this, of course, is directly related to the Northern Ireland Tourist Board's policy.

I wrote to 'Best Western', as might be imagined, and, apart from the fact that it agreed that in future years the tricolour and details of the political unit would be taken out, this was the defence:

"As you will appreciate, it is the expressed wish of both the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and the Irish Tourist Board to jointly promote to these markets Ireland as a destination in its entirety, as can be seen by their joint presence at many of the international trade fairs. We therefore correctly list our member hotels under the name of Ireland."

It gives as its reason the fact that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board and Bord Fáilte are jointly promoting the island as an entity.

A marker needs to be put down at this stage, because political and constitutional decisions are being taken by these quangos. They have, in effect, decided to set up an all-Ireland executive body — something that I suspect most people in this Chamber would never vote for. We would never consent to such a thing, yet here it is taking place under the auspices of the Northern Ireland Tourist Board. I intend to take the matter up with the board, and I hope that the Forum will join me in expressing concern about it. We require the Government to take action to ensure that Northern Ireland consolidates its position as a destination in its own right so that our constitutional position will not be endangered by political decisions taken by the Tourist Board on its own.

Mr Cedric Wilson: Probably like many other Members, when I was thinking about a subject for this debate I had great difficulty in selecting the one that I thought was of greatest importance. Most Members will probably agree — and I do not wish to diminish all the other matters that have been raised — that the most important issue facing us, and the one of greatest urgency, is the **restoration of democracy**.

With regard to accountable government for Northern Ireland as a whole or at local level, what we have at the moment is a sham. There is only a veneer of democracy, which fails to cover the nakedness of the British Government's policies for Northern Ireland. Members have heard from my Colleague Mr McCartney something about the democratic deficit in the province. I want to use this opportunity to alert the people of Northern Ireland to the extent to which the Government have failed to implement democratic policy here.

The Government are attempting to sell as a democratic process the peace talks that are taking place at Stormont. In fact, these are nothing but a sham. Members have heard the reality — where the process is leading. The aim of the British and Irish Governments, who are jointly governing this province — we will hear a lot about that next week in the Anglo-Irish Agreement debate — is not to facilitate a meeting of minds of democrats but to bring into the democratic process those who are armed to the teeth and who have for 25 years tortured and terrorized the honest, decent, law-abiding people of Northern Ireland. That is their game plan.

We have heard empty talk about their asking for a permanent cease-fire or one that could be depended upon. We have heard empty talk of bench-marks and of twin-track decommissioning. We have heard today the bottom line, which Mr Martin McGuinness made very clear some months ago, at the beginning of this whole process: no guns will be handed in before, during or after. As we have heard, the constitution of the IRA forbids any disarming until the British presence is removed from this province.

3.00 pm

At the beginning of today's proceedings you, Mr Chairman, referred to the great price that had been paid for freedom and democracy. It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that the British Government, who are trying to short-change the people of Northern Ireland, do not pull the wool over our eyes about where this whole process is going. President Clinton, when he was here, often used the slogan "We must take risks for peace." What is it that they want us to risk? What is the risk? The risk, firstly, is to life and limb. If all this goes badly wrong, it will be the people of Northern Ireland who are left literally to pick up the pieces. Secondly, they ask us to risk property, business and the economic future of the province by trusting armed Republicans in the democratic process. The third thing they ask us to risk — and this is the kernel of my point today — is democracy itself. What the British and the Irish Governments want to do is bring armed terrorists into the democratic process. They want to foul everything that we understand as democratic. People who are armed to the teeth cannot become part of the democratic process.

Everything heard today from Mr McCartney and Dr Paisley about the current state of these talks can only lead the people of Northern Ireland to be greatly alarmed. If this process continues, if we cannot change the direction of the British Government, the armed wing of Republicanism, as Dr Paisley has said, will shortly be sitting in Castle Buildings. Mr Adams will hold up the constitution of his party — the IRA — and say "We are in the talks on our conditions." Mr Adams told us "They have not gone away, you know." The truth is that they have not gone away.

I indict the British Government today. They have only one policy, and that is appeasement. They have never said to the IRA "Lay down your arms and come into the democratic process. Plan B, if you fail to do that, will take you out in a different fashion. It will be a different form of decommissioning — permanent decommissioning."

Mr Speers: Various topics have been touched on in this debate. The one that I choose to raise has been mentioned in the past in other places — the need for a proper road between Armagh and Portadown. I can travel from this building — I will not say at what speed — to Portadown in a relatively short time. It takes quite a lot longer from the end of the motorway to Armagh. It is no exaggeration to say that this is one of the most frustrating **roads** in Northern Ireland. There is a plan to have it upgraded to dual-carriageway status, but, as Mrs Steele said earlier, these plans tend to slip. One does not know when the Department of the Environment, with its inability, will carry out the work.

Mr Donaldson: Dick Spring has not passed the plans.

Mr Speers: That is possible.

There is a hard shoulder on the Armagh-Portadown road. It came to my knowledge recently that a farmer was holding up the traffic by driving on the carriageway, although he had been told by members of the security forces to pull onto the hard shoulder. On another occasion he followed that advice but was told that he was committing an offence. I suggest that, as an interim measure — and this is really very urgent — the Department address the question of legislation with a view to having the hard shoulder made a carriageway. You could travel the length of the road day after day and never see anyone on the hard shoulder, yet there is normally a long queue of cars behind a relatively slow vehicle. As a first step, the Department must have the road upgraded forthwith. However, as I have suggested, that would be only an interim measure.

There is something else that we have all witnessed throughout the province. When a new road surface has been laid, British Telecom, Northern Ireland Electricity or someone else comes along and digs it up.

A Member: Drumcree.

Mr Speers: History did not start at Drumcree.

My point is that there seems to be little co-ordination between the various Government Departments and agencies. I have observed this kind of thing in my own area and have looked at ways and means of dealing with it. In future, when roads are being made, or pipes or track laid, some cognizance be taken of the need for a proper trunking system. Then wires, or whatever, could be fed through the system without disruption. The Department of the Environment, by failing to implement a sensible policy in this respect, has fallen down on its duty. I ask it to take this on board in future developments. Such a policy would avoid continuing madness.

Mrs Beattie: I take this opportunity to speak on behalf of the staff and the families of patients at **Belvoir Park Hospital**. It is my opinion that there is a need to maintain and,

indeed, upgrade the hospital and to ensure its existence as the number-one oncology unit in Northern Ireland.

This view is supported by a senior consultant oncologist, who has described the proposals as change for the sake of change. He has declared that no scientific reason has been given to support the move from the present site, as proposed by the Health Minister, Mr Malcolm Moss. The hospital deputy ward manager fully believes that patients benefit greatly from the unique Belvoir Park atmosphere and insists that this could not be found in any other location. I have spoken to members of staff, and it is apparent that there is a highly effective, efficient and caring team, with a back-up support service, including the newly formed patient support team, second to none.

I would like to refer to a gentleman known to members of the Health Committee of the Forum, whose mother and wife were suffering from cancer. Each of his loved ones was receiving radiotherapy and chemotherapy treatment, and from the outset all the family were aware of the sense of bonding which quickly became part of what he referred to as "the new family". He also stated that the dedication of staff, from consultants right through to porters and general workers, coupled with the quality of care, the environment and the support of fellow patients and relatives, provides an invaluable source of comfort for family members.

Therefore, I appeal to Members to support the "Save Belvoir Park" campaign. In the words of Mrs Armitage, Mayor of Coleraine,

"Upgrade and maintain Belvoir so that future generations can benefit from the care, compassion and attention which is on offer."

The Chairman: I note, Mrs Beattie, that you are a member of the Health Committee. I am sure I am not exceeding my role in suggesting that you bring what you have just said to the attention of your fellow members, including Mr Hugh Smyth, who is not here at the moment. I am sure he will take heed of what you say.

Mr Jim Rodgers: I would like to bring to the attention of the Forum the decision by the Training and Employment Agency to stop recruitment to the **adult jobskills programme**, which superseded the youth training and job training programme.

This decision is having a major effect on many of the providers, who are finding their income very badly hit. I am amazed that a relatively new programme, which the Training and Employment Agency says is a wonderful success, is being shelved or postponed. It is disgraceful. Many of those who are involved in the training of both young people and adults know of my political involvement in the Forum and at council level and have asked me to bring this matter to the attention of the appropriate people. I hope that the Members of Parliament will raise it with the Economy Minister, Baroness Denton.

The Training and Employment Agency has told us that its 1996-97 budget for this programme has been exceeded. I find that very hard to believe, and I am convinced that some of the money has been siphoned off for other uses. Whether it has to do with what the Secretary of State, Sir Patrick Mayhew, has been saying — that we have to pay for some of the damage done in Northern Ireland during the summer — I do not know, but it needs to be

fully investigated. A number of adults genuinely want to enter training but cannot get placements.

A few weeks ago the Forum discussed the new system, which was causing a lot of concern. The Social Security Agency decided to make it more difficult to get the jobseeker's allowance, yet those who want to enter training cannot do so unless someone leaves. The place of such a person can be taken up, but the Training and Employment Agency is saying no to additional recruitment.

It is time the Government released the necessary money to train the people who want to be trained. We hear a lot about new jobs, and I have already spoken in previous debates about my concerns. We are hearing only the good side. The fact that companies are closing on a daily basis is not mentioned. Nevertheless, if we are to make sure that Northern Ireland has a properly trained work-force we have got to give people the opportunity. With cut-backs, as I would describe them, in the jobskills programme, that is not going to happen. We should remember that there are still some five months of the Government's financial year to go. We need to address this matter. It is time the Minister came clean and told us if there has been a reduction in the budget and where the money has really gone. The providers of the jobskills programme certainly do not accept what has been put forward.

I hope that all Members will bear this in mind and take the trouble to write to Baroness Denton expressing concern on behalf of their constituents.

3.15 pm

Rev William McCrea: I have listened to the many concerns that Members have expressed, including those about **roads**. Taking the Larne line for example, I totally agree that the situation is urgent. I should like to talk about the area from which I come and how long it takes to get from one place to another.

If you were going to Magherafelt this evening — and any wise person will want to go to Magherafelt — you would spend a considerable time in Toomebridge because the new traffic arrangement there is diabolical. Whoever decided the present arrangement in the centre of Toome must be sitting in an office, far from reality. Of course, we are still waiting for the Magherafelt bypass and the Cookstown bypass. If the Minister concerned, who spends a considerable amount of money on visits to council districts, were to travel less and spend more on the roads instead, maybe we would get somewhere.

The issue that I particularly want to raise has already been discussed by the Forum, but I believe that it is urgent. It concerns a meeting yesterday at which some Members discussed education with Mr Ancram. The Department's current ploy with regard to the **education and library boards** is one of "Divide and conquer". It wants to divide Members and areas to side-track the main issue — retention of the five boards. It wants to get Members of Parliament and boards arguing about where the headquarters should be. It is trying to put Members at each other's throats. Once it has got people off the main issue, the three-board situation will be accepted. One of the arguments is about whether a headquarters should be in Armagh or in Omagh. The very same thing was done, very skilfully, on the matter of maternity services in hospitals in Enniskillen and Omagh.

Officials and elected representatives from the boards must unite. It has to be "United we stand" because if we argue about where a headquarters should be, we shall be accepting, by implication, that the Minister is going to reduce the number of boards to three. The Minister and the Department are playing a skilful game.

My parliamentary constituency includes parts of three board areas — the North Eastern, the Southern and the Western. I was greatly disheartened when I received from one of them a communication suggesting that I, as an elected representative, as a Member of Parliament, should support its argument for retention of the headquarters. That is despicable. We are still in the midst of the argument, yet there are those who have already given up the fight.

If democracy means anything, the political masters — those who come with their suitcases on a Monday morning and go out on a Friday night — ought at least to listen to what the people and their elected representatives are unitedly saying. This is an opportunity for the political-development Minister, wearing his education hat, to prove that he does listen to and heed what the people of Ulster say unanimously.

I appeal to the chief officers and members of all the boards to stand shoulder to shoulder, instead of writing off and demanding support for their claims about headquarters accessibility. That was the substance of the letter I received. I find it totally unacceptable. It is walking straight down the Minister's "Divide and conquer" road. I appeal to elected representatives not to give him that satisfaction. If we stand united, we will be able to make him change his mind.

Mr Donaldson: I welcome this opportunity for Members to address important issues. The one about which I want to speak is the **Fair Employment Tribunal**. In fact, there are several issues relating to how the "Fair Unemployment Tribunal" works.

The tribunal has two main functions. First, it hears complaints of discrimination and awards damages. Secondly, it hears appeals from the commission about companies, and it enforces commission directions, with the power to impose case penalties. The jurisdiction of the tribunal in relation to damages and penalties was initially restricted to £30,000. Following an FEC ruling, jurisdiction is now unlimited, and the only avenue of appeal open to a company which feels aggrieved by a tribunal decision is by way of a case stated to the Court of Appeal, but only on a point of law. There is no appeal on the quantum of any award. I feel strongly this is unjust.

I suggest that there should be a right of appeal to the High Court on a tribunal decision and, with leave, to the Court of Appeal and ultimately the House of Lords. As an alternative, the Government might consider establishing an employment appeal tribunal, along the lines of the English tribunal dealing with appeals from an industrial tribunal. It would be essential for a High Court judge to sit on such a tribunal.

Another matter which ought to be reformed relates to aggrieved employees who, feeling that they have been discriminated against on grounds of religion, approach the Fair Employment Commission. The FEC, if it feels that such a person has a good case, will back

him and fund the case against the employer. When the matter goes to the tribunal, which in Northern Ireland is actually quite an expensive type of court hearing, costs are not awarded. Even if the employer wins a contested case, he is left with a massive bill for his solicitor, junior barrister and QC. This is patently unfair. Employers, except the very largest, are put in an impossible position, knowing that proceedings will cost them a small fortune, even if they win. This situation needs to be addressed. Perhaps the solution is to enable the Fair Employment Tribunal to award costs against the applicant, or against the Fair Employment Commission if it is backing him.

There is another irregularity in FEC procedures which bothers me. I am aware of a number of situations in the past in which individuals have taken a case to the commission, on very substantial grounds, but have been unable to win its backing. It is unfair that the commission has absolute discretion in deciding whether to support an individual who wants to take a case to the Fair Employment Tribunal. Without the commission's backing, an individual has to cover his own costs. These can be prohibitive if, possibly as a result of the circumstances leading to his case, he is unemployed. There should be provision for appeal against the refusal of the commission to support an employee's case financially. The appeal could be to an existing body — for example, the Legal Aid Committee. This would be exactly the same sort of system as operates when an application for legal aid has been rejected.

I hope that when the Government are reviewing the workings of the Fair Employment Tribunal they will take all these issues into account. I am all for employees and other individuals having the right to pursue a case, but it is most unfair, particularly for small employers in Northern Ireland, that the Fair Employment Commission will back cases only where it feels that there is a political issue involved. That situation should not be allowed to prevail any longer.

Mrs I Robinson: I wish to use my five minutes to highlight the plight of a part of my constituency of Strangford — Comber. I regret that Mr John Taylor has just removed himself from the Forum. He could have stayed to hear what I am about to say.

Members may be aware that a considerable air of gloom has descended upon the area, given the recent news of the imminent closure of **John Andrews & Co Ltd**, flax spinners, in the heart of Comber. This company will, according to Mr Tom Andrews, the managing director, start cessation of production in January 1997, and the run-down process will take approximately three months to complete. In real terms, 117 employees will be out of work, many with no prospect of obtaining future employment. Bearing in mind that brothers, sisters, mothers, sons, daughters, husbands and wives work in the factory, one can only begin to imagine the impact of this news on individuals and families. Redundancies are hard to accept at any time, but given that we are fast approaching Christmas, one cannot but feel for those most affected by this news.

I had a private meeting with Mr Tom Andrews and his personnel officer at my office in Castlereagh Borough Council yesterday, in order that I might be briefed on the facts leading to this devastating news. I am sure the Forum will sympathize with the Andrews family, who have sustained jobs in this industry in the Comber area for 133 years. Low-wage economies, particularly in the Pacific Rim area, have been able to produce textiles at

very low cost, thus removing the competitive edge as customers opted for cheaper goods. This has left Andrews with the smaller, quality end of the market.

I mention Comber today so that I can make a plea, through the Forum, direct to Baroness Denton, the economy Minister, to start fixing her attention on the economic wilderness that the people of Comber are facing. If Baroness Denton and her Government were to take some time to address the growing problems in Strangford in general, and Comber in particular, in the same fashion as they address those in areas such as Newry, Strabane and Londonderry, the people of Strangford could look forward to a better and brighter future. Those people are being hit on all fronts. The fishermen are struggling for their very existence, and the local hospitals are suffering a grave shortage of finance.

I could go on listing the problems in Strangford, but the root cause has ultimately to do with lack of vision, coupled with investment practices. It is about time we had our fair share of Government spending in Strangford.

Mr Davis: May I draw to the attention of the Forum what I would describe as the **Millennium Commission's unfair treatment of Northern Ireland**. The figures that I have show that Northern Ireland received £7.4 million. Compare that to the following figures: Scotland, £90 million; Wales, £87 million; East Anglia, £6.5 million; East Midlands, £1 million; Greater London, £97 million; the north of England, £34.25 million; the north-west of England, £31.25 million; the south-east, £64.5 million; the south-west £45 million; Yorkshire and Humberside, £56 million — making a total of £336 million.

I bring this to the attention of the Forum because Lisburn Borough Council, along with Belfast City Council and Castlereagh Borough Council, had a Lagan navigation project under way. We were seeking £8.5 million from the Millennium Commission. It is interesting to note that, in England, a grant of almost £12 million was received for a similar scheme on the Rochdale canal, while we were passed over. The Lisburn, Belfast and Castlereagh councils had the support of the Department of Agriculture, the Rivers Agency, the Lagan Valley Regional Park and Laganside. Lisburn Borough Council produced a very detailed, comprehensive appraisal submission, at considerable cost in financial terms and in terms of time spent by officers and consultants. Commission officers made several visits to view the very worthy project, and they looked at it in a positive manner. Alas, we received the thumbs down.

3.30 pm

Huge grants have been given for individual projects. For example, the Tate Gallery received £50 million, the British Museum £30 million, and Portsmouth Harbour £40 million. The criteria used by the Millennium Commission say that projects should enjoy public support; should make a substantial contribution to community life; should look back at the old millennium and into the new; should mark a significant moment in history; should exemplify high architectural and environmental design and partnerships; and should be ones not normally possible without Millennium Commission support.

Given all this, I honestly believe that Northern Ireland has been discriminated against. I ask our MPs to raise the matter at the highest level to see that we get our fair share of the financial cake.

Mrs Parkes: I would like to speak about the **current crisis in the health service**. I addressed the Forum some time ago about this vital issue and warned the Government that unless they took immediate action to tackle the crisis by providing additional funding, the health service would collapse.

The 3% cuts are having a catastrophic effect. The Royal Group of Hospitals recently announced that it has put a stop on operations for 1,700 patients of non-fundholding GPs in the Eastern Board area. These people will have to wait until the new financial year — April at the earliest — for surgery in major specialties such as cardiology, neurology and gynaecology. Indeed, we have already heard about other trusts that will be taking similar action. This situation is totally unacceptable and deplorable. It causes much misery and suffering for people already experiencing discomfort and pain. The blame must be laid firmly at the door of the Government.

An announcement by the Department of Health stated

“The people should not be shocked at the Royal’s decision. The Minister had served notice of what was needed, and people should have known what was coming.”

This scandalous reply greatly exacerbates the situation. The Minister, Malcolm Moss, also warned that there would be reductions in overall resources. This statement holds out no comfort for the health service, with providers having to make further cuts next year. In fact, the Minister stated this week that there is no crisis in the health service and that none of the additional funding — some £500 million — will come to Northern Ireland.

Rev William McCrea: Yesterday in the House of Commons I asked for an emergency debate on this issue. Unfortunately, the Minister denied my request.

Mrs Parkes: That is shameful. It sums up what we are saying on this matter.

Can the Government still say that the health service is safe in their hands when a two-tier system is being operated and patients who belong to a non-fund-holding practice are being discriminated against? The Government state that more money is being spent on health and that more patients are being treated. The Minister, Mr Moss, tells us that expenditure here is 18% higher per capita than in any area of Britain, yet I read in the ‘News Letter’ last week that the Royal’s spending has been reduced by 15% in the past five years.

Where and, more importantly, to whom is all the funding going? So far as I can see, it is not to nursing staff, ancillary staff, doctors or, indeed, patients. If one considers that every trust has its own management team and support staff, creating unnecessary levels of bureaucracy, it is not hard to work out how vital funds are being wasted: on administration, particularly large salaries for senior people. I am concerned to know what the Government are going to do next to save money. I am no forecaster, but it will come as no surprise to me when hospitals start to take emergency-only cases.

Also, it is only a matter of time until we are told that patients will have to pay to visit the doctor and pay for community care and respite care. This shambles of a Government has adopted what it calls the internal market for the Northern Ireland health service — purchasers (the boards and GP fundholders) and providers (the hospitals). The purchasers enter into contracts with the providers for a certain number of operations. The internal market is not viable in an area as small as Northern Ireland. It has produced disastrous results, including the closure of vital facilities like homes for the elderly, day centres, wards, theatres, accident and emergency units — I could go on. It has also caused inequality. There are now two tiers: those who can get immediate help and those who have to wait. In England, one trust has already been forced to cease trading. The policy is causing great division within the health service — putting patients against doctors, and causing doctors to be set against one another.

The NHS is our health service. It belongs to all of us, and we need to show the Minister and the Department that they have gone too far. Enough is enough. It will be no good for the Government to promise more funding next year — particularly with an election pending. The health service needs the money now — not next week or next month, but now. We must all come together to tackle this health crisis. We must not let our health service be destroyed. Future generations are depending on us.

Mr David Campbell: As we approach the seventy-eighth anniversary of the Armistice, I would like to draw the Forum's attention to a **Royal British Legion** campaign. It has two aims. The first is reinstatement of the national two-minute silence at 11.00 am on 11 November. As we approach the new millennium, it is important that new generations should be aware of the sacrifice that was made for them in two world wars and in other conflicts to ensure the continuation of civil and religious liberty, freedom of speech and a democratic system of government. The two-minute silence focuses the nation's attention on those who made the supreme sacrifice. We are one of the few nations that do not observe 11 November as a public holiday, and the least we can do is reintroduce the two-minute silence, when the nation as a whole could pause in respectful remembrance.

Secondly, the Legion is campaigning for the establishment of a Department for veterans' affairs. Again, we are the only nation which was part of the allied campaign against Nazism that does not have such a Department and a dedicated Minister. It is estimated that by the year 2010 the number of ex-servicemen requiring hospice or nursing-home care in the United Kingdom — Northern Ireland in particular — will have reached such a level that provision is insufficient. Such a Department would co-ordinate welfare issues. The ex-service lobby, as you, Mr Chairman, are only too well aware, is an important one that deserves specific Government attention.

As we remember all the people from Northern Ireland who served in two world wars, I ask the Forum to remember also those from the Republic of Ireland who in 1939 joined the allied war effort in their thousands. Sadly, this was done in spite of the position adopted by the Republic's Government. Their position was one of declared neutrality in the face of German aggression, and it caused a stigma to be placed upon all Irishmen. It was because of that declared neutrality that Ulster's Unionists considered that they could no longer think of themselves as Irishmen, and a speech to that effect was made by our Prime Minister,

Lord Craigavon, who declared that we were Kingsmen and would stand with the kingdom until the end.

Two weeks ago in the Forum I drew Members' attention to the way in which the Irish Unionist tradition has been discriminated against in the Republic of Ireland from the inception of that state. Since then, I have been called upon by Nationalists to apologize to the Dublin Government for making such a claim. I cannot apologize for that.

In 1945 the Republic's Government sent a message of condolence to the German Ambassador in Dublin on learning of the death of Adolf Hitler. This was in spite of the fact that from the summer of 1944, as you are aware, Mr Chairman, the Allies had been liberating concentration camps throughout Germany and in other regions of Europe, and in spite of the fact that the full horror of the holocaust against the Jews and other minorities was public knowledge throughout the world. That message of condolence was still sent, and diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany were never broken off. The Government of the Republic of Ireland owe an apology to the Jewish people.

Mr Carrick: I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the under-performance of **sewage-treatment works** and the resultant **pollution of waterways**. The decline in the quality of the water in our rivers and in Lough Neagh and its catchment area is well documented. We have the problem of agricultural run-off; we have local small-scale sewage and treated-effluent discharge; we have industrial spillage; and we have the spillage of chemicals from the water and sewage-treatment works of the Department of the Environment. Today, however, I want to talk about a particular significant reason for the low quality of the water in rivers and loughs — the poor management of sewage treatment work.

In this respect the Government stand indicted of gross negligence, particularly in the Craigavon area. There are three major treatment works in the borough — one at Seagoe, which discharges into the Upper Bann at Portadown and then into the lough; one at Ballinacorr, which discharges into Derryadd Bay in Lough Neagh; and Bullay's Hill, discharging into the Woodville River and from there to Kinnego marina on Lough Neagh.

The quality of water at Kinnego marina is appalling. Untreated effluent has been identified in the Woodville River, which discharges into the marina. Since the early 1970s Craigavon Borough Council has been campaigning to have the problems associated with the sewage treatment works addressed. For years the Department of the Environment withheld information, prevaricated, and even lied, denying that there was a problem. Indeed, in 1983 the matter was discussed by the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1983. Eventually the Minister visited Kinnego marina to look at the problem at first hand. When he was confronted with the appalling condition of the water he accused his officials of having misled him. That comment was heard by council members and officers.

It was only in the early 1990s, when Craigavon Borough Council threatened to take the whole matter to the European Court, that the then Minister, Mr Needham, instigated positive action. For the first time the Department acknowledged — after 20 years of prevaricating — that there was a problem, and it undertook to divert the Bullay's Hill effluent away from Kinnego.

3.45 pm

Eventually, on 16 December 1992, Minister Atkins visited Kinnego and informed the then mayor that the contract for the necessary work would be let by the end of 1994. The work was to be completed by the end of 1996. This information was given in a statement, which was confirmed by the Minister's private office in a letter dated 8 December 1992. Since then the Department has reconsidered its plans, and in 1995 a new strategy was being assessed.

Almost 30 years have passed, and still the Government prevaricate. Work has still not started. At a meeting in Banbridge on 14 October council officers were assured by the Water Executive that a phased programme, costing about £24 million to implement, would commence on site in 1997. Unfortunately, the latest rumour is that, because of the stringency of next year's public-sector expenditure, there will be no new starts.

I call upon Her Majesty's Government to ensure that, after a wait of nearly 30 years, resources are made available for work to start immediately on a programme to improve effluent discharge and thus protect the quality of the water in the River Bann and in Lough Neagh.

Mr Brewster: Again no press. No coverage — or very little. I suspect that they are all off to the **SDLP** Conference in Cookstown to sit at the feet of "St John the Divine". Why are they bothering? A large part of the conference will be held in secret tomorrow. What kind of political party is it that holds meetings in secret? What has it got to be ashamed of? We all know: tomorrow it will be sitting down to discuss how it will carve up seats with Sinn Fein/IRA at the forthcoming general election. Is that not disgraceful? Not only will it be doing that, but, just as in Fermanagh and South Tyrone in 1981 and in other places since, it will be doing it in secret. It is not letting the public see what deals are being brokered. We still do not know what is in the Hume/Adams document. We still do not know what agreements were reached for John Hume to give his imprimatur for the admission of Sinn Fein to the talks.

In 1992, I regret to say, my own council — Limavady — lost overall Unionist control. I assure my party that that will not last after May. After the last election the press mistakenly said that control had passed to Nationalists, even though the membership was seven Unionist, seven SDLP and one Sinn Fein. Nationalists had a choice between democrats in the Unionist tradition and terrorists in their own tradition. It will not surprise Members to know that they chose to side with Sinn Fein, and have done so ever since. That is not unique in Northern Ireland, but it is regrettable.

The SDLP has consistently shown a marked reluctance to engage in democratic politics. Members will recall that I pleaded with its representatives repeatedly to come back to the Forum to play their part. My colleagues and I recently had the misfortune to be engaged in conversation with one of the SDLP delegates at the talks. He indicated that his party was very proud of its prowess at what he called high politics. That is obviously the opposite of democratic politics, where you have actually to negotiate and are allowed an influence commensurate with your vote. High politics is the hugger-mugger of the field, whereby you can persuade somebody to come along and influence the Government to your

way when you do not win. The SDLP said at that time — or it was put to its members and they did not deny it — that in the present process not only do they have the insurance policy of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which is there if they can provoke failure in the talks, as they intend to do, but they have a golden handshake in the shape of the framework document.

It is easy to see why those parties — and the SDLP in particular — are anxious to bring the talks down. They have moved beyond trying to diminish the importance of this body, in which stance, I regret to say, they have had the support of large sections of the media, who are happy to ignore the good work done here, particularly by the Committees, and content to go and talk to the SDLP for sound bites and for rubbishing of this place. They are now attempting to wreck the talks. They and the Irish Government are attempting to fudge the issue of decommissioning. It is very much to be regretted, though it is unlikely, given their track record, that they will change.

We should use the Forum, since we cannot discuss what happens in the talks, to make it crystal clear to the people of Northern Ireland that we will use our utmost endeavours to find an alternative to and replacement for the Anglo-Irish Agreement which will allow a return to accountable democracy. Let us hope that if we fail, the people of Northern Ireland will place the blame where it belongs — on the SDLP, and none other.

The Chairman: It is seven minutes to four. We can either accept a motion to continue, or finish at 4 o'clock. There are nine more Members to speak, 22 having spoken so far. Perhaps we should have one more and finish at 4.00 pm. What do Members want to do?

Mr Shannon: I propose that we continue and give the remaining Members a chance to express their views.

Several Members: No.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: Could we not finish next week? These are constitutional matters and very important people.

The Chairman: Is that agreeable to you all?

It was so decided.

Mr Peter Robinson: I have one concern. We have an important motion next week. A carry-over of this debate would have to be time-limited so that we would not reduce the time available for debate on the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr Ken Maginnis: Dr Paisley's proposal is acceptable, but I do not think we should start with the resumed debate. Normal business should go ahead until a certain time, and we could end with the completion of this debate.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: I agree.

The Chairman: Anyway, we still have five minutes.

Mr Gibson: Mr McCrea has already made my speech, so I can save the Forum a minute or two. I was alarmed to hear that there are very hard shoulders on the **roads** in County Antrim and County Armagh. I am afraid that County Tyrone has only elongated ribbons of Lough Swilly. Unfortunately, these do not join together to create a harbour.

I am aware of the deficit in road funding. All Members should realize that in the western region the shortfall is £33 million. This affects the whole infrastructure of the region and creates major problems.

I wish to mention one road that is an artery right through the province — from the end of the motorway to Londonderry city. Designed over 40 years ago, it is now badly out of date. The volume of traffic has trebled since it was built. What is more, the weights of lorries and other vehicles have increased by more than four times — never mind their widths. The roads in the west cannot accommodate present-day traffic. In the farming community most vehicles are four-wheel-drive models, tractors, silage trailers or other heavy and cumbersome means of transport. Our roads are based on the marauding routes of the O'Neills of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The tarmac surfaces have now fractured underneath and are in a terrible state.

I am glad to hear of the concern of those from the opulent rolling east of Antrim and Armagh. I can assure them that there are no hard shoulders on our roads. We have hedges and sheughs.

Having saved the Forum two minutes, I hope everyone will support my plea for good roads in the west.

Mr Calvert: My topic is **war memorials**, and I would appreciate it if I could be heard this week.

The Chairman: You have two minutes.

Mr Calvert: Discussion of this subject is very timely. In February, my council received a letter from Down District Council, which, at its meeting on 19 February, resolved that all councils in Northern Ireland be requested to write to the Secretary of State asking for a change in the law relating to the power of district councils to have the names of local soldiers killed in the troubles added to war memorials.

At this time of the year we gather to remember all those brave men and women who gave their lives in two world wars. I regret that we in Ulster are not allowed to have inscribed on war memorials the names of all the brave soldiers murdered by the IRA in a war which has been raging since 1921. The fact that they are remembered and in our thoughts suggests that they are entitled to have their names inscribed with those of the rest of the glorious dead. The fact that they lost their lives on British soil does not diminish their sacrifice or the sense of their loss. Indeed, they had to face an invisible enemy, to whom the Geneva Convention and the rules of war mean nothing.

A person whose son — a member of the Ulster Defence Regiment — was killed by a land-mine explosion outside Castlewellan requested that his name be inscribed on the war

memorial in Downpatrick, at no cost to the council. I understand that this has now been done. It was done privately, as the council, having sought legal advice, was informed that it could be leaving itself open to legal challenge.

A district council's powers are defined in section 5 of the Local Government Act 1923, as amended by section 9 of and the schedule to the Public Health and Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1955, the Local Government (Modifications and Repeals) Order (Northern Ireland) 1973 and schedule 3 to the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Order (Northern Ireland) 1985. These various pieces of legislation permit district councils to incur reasonable expenditure on alterations to war memorials in various circumstances. The advice given is that the powers relate specifically to alterations in relation to persons killed during a war, and do not extend to persons killed in civil disturbances such as we have experienced.

4.00 pm

I have been given to understand that local authorities in the rest of the United Kingdom have a general power to alter war memorials by adding the names of soldiers killed in Northern Ireland. The situation here is therefore anomalous. The council in Lisburn supported the decision by Down District Council in writing to the Secretary of State. Of course, Paddy passed the buck. He passed it to Mr Moss, and this letter was sent in reply:

"Thank you for your letter of 27 March 1996 to the Secretary of State regarding war memorials. Your letter has been passed to Malcolm Moss, as this Department is responsible for the legislation in question. The Minister has read your letter and has asked me to reply. You indicate that your council supports a resolution passed by Down District Council requesting a change in the legislation to allow the names of local soldiers killed in the troubles to be added to war memorials. As you are aware, the legislation here, which is in line with that in Great Britain, only allows for the names of persons killed in a war to be added to existing war memorials."

Listen to this:

"The trouble here does not constitute a war."

What a ridiculous statement by a so-called Minister of State. Those boys should be chased out of the country.

"The Department therefore has no immediate plans to change the legislation where it operates in Northern Ireland.

With reference to the general issue of the erection of monuments and statues, the council may wish to obtain a legal opinion on the relevance of section 42 of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1890 in addressing this problem. This option would, of course, be for your own solicitors to pursue."

The Chairman: Mr Calvert, you are encroaching a little bit timewise.

Mr Calvert: I will not be a minute, Mr Chairman.

The council sent a further letter saying that it was not satisfied with the reply. Here is the answer:

"Thank you for your letter of 29 May 1996 on the issue of changing the legislation on war memorials. The Minister has read your letter and asked me to reply.

Mr Moss is sorry that the members of your Finance and General Purposes Committee considered that the tone of my letter indicated a lack of understanding and sensitivity on this issue. I would want to assure the members that this is certainly not the case. The office is acutely aware of the emotional feelings which do arise on the issue of honouring local soldiers killed during the trouble. I can also assure the members that Mr Moss has seen all the correspondence between our offices on this issue."

I would like the Forum to write to the Secretary of State and to Mr Moss, the Minister responsible for this matter, to ask that the legislation be changed as quickly as possible to enable the names of all our members of Her Majesty's Services who lost their lives in our local war to be inscribed on war memorials across Ulster.

Rev Dr Ian Paisley: It should be put on the record that that widow had to pay for the engraving. What a shame.

The Chairman: I am aware of that.

As I said earlier, Mr Calvert, the Record of these proceedings is read carefully, not only by junior Ministers but also by the Secretary of State, so your words will be heeded.

FORUM: BUSINESS

The Chairman: Next Friday we will have a debate on the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which will be 11 years old about then. After that, we shall hear the five-minute speeches that could not be taken today.

The meeting was adjourned at 4.05 pm.