

# NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Friday 24 January 1997

*The meeting was called to order at 10.02 am (Mr J R Gorman in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

## EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION

**The Chairman:** I was delighted, as I am sure you all were, to hear the news from yesterday's visit to the Prime Minister: that he has decided to put on hold — "on hold" has been interpreted variously — the restructuring of the education and library boards until after the general election. I am sure that the Forum will want to congratulate the party Leaders who met the Prime Minister and, certainly, Standing Committee B, which, chaired by Mr Gibson, did such splendid work. Mr Gibson would like to comment briefly.

**Mr Gibson:** I wish to congratulate the Forum. When I introduced a motion in June Members readily took up this piecemeal attempt to restructure education administration. Everyone realized that it was not a wholesome or, indeed, financially sound proposition. In fact, it was only a partial examination of a real problem. In adopting unanimously the two reports submitted by the Education Committee, the Forum took the right course.

I support what you have said, Mr Chairman. The four party Leaders who deliberated with the Prime Minister yesterday were representing the united voice of the people of this province. The act of unity indicates that the Forum and the people who represent the province at Westminster, when they work together, have great political clout. And we should say "Well done" to the Prime Minister for recognizing the reality and giving some useful advice to the junior Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office — advice which, apparently, they have at last undertaken to absorb and observe.

We all realize that the expression "postponed" may mean something different. But I will not speculate.

I congratulate the four Leaders, my Committee, the Committee Clerk and yourself, Mr Chairman. It is good that the Forum has at last done something that we can claim as an achievement. I listened this morning to all those who claim to be the fathers of success. In reality, the accolades should go to you, Sir, and to the Forum.

## NEIL LATIMER

**The Chairman:** Mr Ian Paisley has handed me a copy of a letter that Members might be interested to hear. Would you be kind enough to read it out, Mr Paisley.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** At its sixteenth meeting the Forum debated the issue of Neil Latimer. Neil's mother, having received a copy of the Record, sent a humble letter to Her Majesty the Queen. I am very pleased to report that she received from Buckingham Palace this most interesting letter:

"Although Her Majesty cannot intervene publicly, she has directed me to forward your letter to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland so that he may be aware of your views and approach to Her Majesty."

After reading the report, both Her Majesty and the Secretary of State will be aware of the message from this Forum: "Free Neil Latimer now."

## HOSPICE COLLECTION

**The Chairman:** I would like to convey to Members the thanks of my wife, on behalf of the hospice, for the great generosity that they and their spouses showed on 13 December. The collection played a considerable part in raising the contribution from Belfast from £11,000 to £14,000. The sum from the Forum was not as much as that, but it was very generous, and my wife has asked me to thank you.

## POLICE COMPLAINTS SYSTEM (HAYES REPORT)

**The Chairman:** The next item on the Order Paper is a presentation from Dr Maurice Hayes on his report on the police complaints system, which was published yesterday. I am delighted that Dr Hayes, whom many of you know, has very generously agreed to take the time to give us this explanation. In doing so, he will be the first non-Member to address the Forum. I take it for granted that, as our guest, he will enjoy a warm welcome and every courtesy.

**Dr Hayes:** Thank you very much, Mr Chairman and Members, for your welcome. It is a great honour to have been asked to address the Forum, and a particular honour to be your first guest. I hope that the occasion will be helpful and useful to you, as it is helpful and useful to me to explain the report that was published yesterday. I propose to talk for about 20 minutes about the main contents of the report and what I had in mind when I was preparing it. Then I would be happy to deal with any questions seeking clarification.

The executive summary which has been supplied to you contains the gist of the report, but, like all summaries, it compresses and does not include the full argument or the full examination. I hope that you will feel moved to read the full report at some stage.

I would like the report to be seen in the context of a tripartite review of policing. There are three aspects of that review. The first is how the police are organized in relation to public accountability and political control. That is the area that has been covered and will be covered in discussions on the White Paper. Secondly, there is how the police organize themselves in order to provide a service for the community. That is the ground largely covered in the fundamental review which has been carried out by the Chief Constable. The third element is how to deal with complaints against the police. If you get the first two right the third is less important. If there is not political and public consensus on the first two it is very difficult for a complaints system on its own to make up the ground.

I would also like the report to be seen in the context of international developments. In almost every country, people are searching for a means of ensuring the integrity and the credibility of police complaints systems. Certainly in all the common-law jurisdictions there is a movement towards greater civilian involvement in supervision of the investigation of complaints against police. After fairly wide discussions with people, and having received submissions from the political parties — at least those that were in existence when I issued the advertisement about this time last year — and talked to people at all levels, I tried to arrive at a set of principles which would underlie any police complaints system.

The first of those principles was that the Chief Constable should be responsible for discipline in the force and should be accountable for that to the Police Authority for Northern Ireland. I think you cannot take control and discipline of the force away from the Chief Constable and give it to somebody else. The second important principle was that the public should have confidence in the system. The third, and equally important, was that the police should have confidence in it. There should be confidence that misconduct would be detected and dealt with and that malicious and vexatious complaints against policemen could be dealt with. The next principle, I thought, was that the system should be open and fair and easily understood and widely accessible, that it should not be burdened by excessive paperwork and should be affordable.

*10.15 am*

The predominant consideration that was put to me, on all sides, by members of all political parties and by people in all walks of life, including very many policemen of all ranks and former policemen, was that the system should be independent and should be seen to be independent. We have at the moment the Independent Commission for Police Complaints (ICPC), and we have investigation by the police complaints and discipline branch. Anything that I have to say is no reflection whatsoever on the way either of those bodies has carried out its work. What I have seen is a large number of people beavering away, working hard and diligently at the task they were given. But very few folk believe them. The lack of credibility is seen in the public opinion polls which were carried out by the Police Authority and the ICPC, as well as in some that I did myself and others. The failure, such as it is, is systemic. It is not a failure of people. The system does not lend itself to credibility in the eyes of the public, and that is the important element that we were searching for.

There is another important distinction that we try to make and would encourage. More use should be made of informal resolution. As many as possible of the complaints should be dealt with at as low a level as possible and by the police themselves. The process

of informal resolution would cover what I would call quality-of-service complaints — those which relate to indiscipline, discourtesy, lateness or failure in the interaction between the citizen and the police. There is a balance. As many complaints as possible should be dealt with informally.

Those which are not dealt with informally should be dealt with, I suggest, by a police ombudsman because that system is fairly well known to people and has an established reputation. It is known to politicians and practitioners as well. The ombudsman would be an officer of Parliament. He or she would report to Parliament, would be funded by Parliament, would by-pass the Executive in that way and would be an important public official.

The nature and importance of the job requires that it be filled by a person of stature — almost certainly a senior legal or judicial figure. It is important to have a person with legal knowledge and training because, as we will see, he or she will be dealing with important things like evidence and investigation. In particular, it is important that the police should have confidence in the person carrying out the investigations.

Independence would be seen through that person's having control of the process. What happens at the moment is that a complaint is not a complaint until the Chief Constable decides that it is. That takes one leg away from the stool of credibility. The ICPC cannot intervene until it is called in by the Secretary of State, the Police Authority or the Chief Constable, and that happens with a good deal less regularity here than in England and Wales.

Under the system that I am recommending, the ombudsman would have control of the process. He or she could decide what was a complaint and could decide to intervene, on those occasions when the public interest demanded it, without there being a complaint and without having to be called in. Control of the process would mean deciding how and by whom the complaint would be investigated.

One of the complaints made to me consistently about the current system was that police are investigated by police. I have no question to raise about the quality of the investigation; what I am talking about is public perception and the lack of credibility that flows from that. I suggest that the ombudsman should have a staff capable of carrying out investigations on his behalf. The staff would be recruited from other areas of the public service where investigations take place at present, like Customs and Excise, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department of Health and Social Services and the Serious Fraud Squad. It would be made up of people with police experience, either in the RUC or in another police force, and of lawyers and others who did not have that experience. I suggest that the current ICPC staff would probably form the core of whatever new office was set up. The main difference, I think, between what I am suggesting and what applies here and in the rest of the United Kingdom is that the ombudsman would inquire even where a crime was suspected, where a policeman was being investigated in connection with, say, an action which had resulted in the death of a person or a serious assault. The ombudsman would carry that investigation through to the point at which a recommendation was made to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

I see complaints falling into three main groups — a sort of triage. There would be a small number of specified complaints of a serious nature (those relating to death or serious

injury, or whatever, that the ICPC investigates at present), which the ombudsman would have to investigate; there would be a very broad range of complaints of the quality-of-service type, which would be remitted for informal resolution; and there would be a grey area in the middle where the ombudsman could decide either to investigate or to have the police carry out an investigation. In the early days, while confidence in the system was built up, the ombudsman would probably do more rather than fewer.

The metaphor I have used is the concept of sale and leaseback. The ombudsman would take control of all complaints, but as confidence in the system and in the police dealing with the complaints grew, more and more could be remitted to them.

One of the reasons complaints have not been sustained to any great degree in the past is the standard of proof required in disciplinary cases — the criminal standard. I am suggesting that there should be a sliding scale of proof in respect of disciplinary matters. In the case of trivial matters or misdemeanours the balance of probabilities should be enough, but as the impact on the officer of the action that is being taken increases, the standard of proof should rise. In other words, if you are going to do something affecting a man's or woman's livelihood or reputation you need to be fairly sure about it.

The present system lacks a degree of credibility. If the Chief Constable refuses to take disciplinary action the ICPC can ask for a tribunal. That tribunal is chaired by the Chief Constable and contains two members of the ICPC, and the case is put by a serving police officer. I am suggesting that there should be an independent tribunal, as in the case of industry. The benefit for the ordinary police officer would be that if a complaint were found to be groundless he or she would be vindicated by an independent external authority, and that should carry some weight. I think that there will also be a filter in the process to enable the ombudsman to decline to investigate what, for good reason, he decides are clearly malicious or vexatious or repetitious complaints.

I was not directly charged with looking at police personnel practices or with discipline within the police, but I think that these are important matters. It is important that they too change, and I make some remarks about them. A more modern personnel system would encourage management to take more control of things, would encourage a culture in which complaints were prevented and one in which people were ready to apologize and to answer to the public. I found the disciplinary system in the police quite Draconian. Officers find themselves under a charge and in a confrontational, adversarial system fairly early on. I hope that that will be changed to the practice that is used in the Civil Service and in industry, advice and admonition being more common than confrontation in the broad range of minor cases.

I hope that what is proposed will establish the police complaints system as being credible in the eyes of the public. The great prize being sought by all is acceptability and credibility of the police service. That is in the interests of the police and of the public. The bits and pieces of what I recommend have all, in one form or another, been sculling around the system for a while. Most of what I am recommending is to be found in Lord Scarman's report on the Brixton riots in 1981, which, if it had been acted on, would, I believe, have helped. Most of what I am recommending in relation to the ICPC has been recommended by the Commission itself in its triennial report. I suppose that is why I was asked to look at the

question. There are precedents in some Commonwealth or former Commonwealth countries for the different elements. This proposal puts them together in what I think is a more coherent form, and I believe that if they are accepted — that is a matter entirely, of course, for the political process — Northern Ireland will be ahead of the game in terms of the openness and comprehensiveness of the system for dealing with police complaints.

*10.30 am*

I have said that the ombudsman would be responsible to Parliament. I see it as an extremely important element that in his or her reports to Parliament he or she should be able to draw conclusions, refer to patterns of complaints and draw attention to those policies or practices or types of equipment that tended to give rise to most complaints. I hope that this would be an important contribution to management in the police. The great advantage would be to bring into the public domain the debate on these issues that people should be aware of. I have said that reports would be to Parliament, but there is a sub-note: that if at some stage law and order powers were devolved to a Northern Ireland Assembly, that Assembly and one of its Select Committees should take the place of Parliament.

That is the report. I am, in a sense, finished with it now. From here, it is a matter for the political process and for public representatives. I hope that what I have done is helpful. It is not intended to be prescriptive in the full sense, but I hope that it has been a contribution to the debate and that my observations and the observations that were made to me will be of value to the people, such as yourselves, required to carry these things forward.

**The Chairman:** Thank you, Dr Hayes.

We have until 11.30 for this item. I have the names of 20 people who have indicated that they might want to ask a question. It should be remembered that this is a question-and-answer session. I ask Members to keep the questions and — if he does not mind my saying so — Dr Hayes the answers as brief as possible. Perhaps more important is that Members should make sure that they are not repeating questions that have already been asked. It is very easy to say the same thing in slightly different language, but if Members do that they will make it impossible to get through the business in time.

**Mr Weir:** First, I want to thank Dr Hayes for his presentation.

One aspect which concerns me is his suggestion that in respect of disciplinary matters the standard of proof should be changed from that of beyond reasonable doubt to, I think, a vaguer and more unsatisfactory sliding scale. Can he elaborate on his thinking? How does he see this working in practice?

**Dr Hayes:** This is on its way anyhow. It has been accepted by the Home Office and is being promulgated in England and Wales. With or without my recommendations, it is on its way. It seems to me to be common sense. A current problem, which the public and many of those who spoke to me find hard to grasp, is that complaints fail to be upheld because of the standard of proof. Then the complainant takes civil action and, because the standard of proof is quite different, compensation is paid or a settlement is made. People said to me "If

there is nothing wrong, why is all that money being paid out? And why wasn't someone disciplined?" Last year the Police Authority paid out £500,000.

The Police Federation itself accepts the change in the balance of proof. I think everybody agrees that trivial matters should be dealt with on the basis of balance of probabilities. Indeed, I hope that a more open disciplinary system would not become confrontational at all. I am saying simply that the more serious the effect on the officer complained about, the more sure you need to be. So you get nearer and nearer to the criminal standard of proof.

This is something that faces most disciplinary bodies and professions. I have been looking around for phrases. The jargon is "mezzanine level of proof", but some say "clear and cogent", while others say "convincing". There is a problem for the draftsmen. I will be interested to see what they come up with. The basic point is that the standard of proof should be in some way commensurate with the seriousness of the act or of the effect.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** First, may I join in the welcome to Dr Hayes, and add that his report is welcome. It is a very useful contribution to the whole issue. Those studying the whole report will find that it deals with the subject in a very measured and very comprehensive way.

The issue about which I would like a bit more information is the actual carrying out of investigations. I feel that Dr Hayes may have underestimated the requirements for investigators. The one issue that I think has given rise to difference between Dr Hayes and myself is that of numbers. I think he underestimates the number of complaints that will come through a system of this type.

As a constituency Member, I am approached by many people making some complaint about the police. Naturally, my role is to suggest that they go to the Complaints Commission. A very high percentage say "I would not be bothered. There is no point in doing that. You end up with the police investigating themselves." I believe that as soon as it is shown that there is proper independence in the system the number of complaints will grow. I do not believe that the 30 investigation staff suggested by Dr Hayes be able to cope — initially certainly. Where will these people come from? What credentials will they require? And how will they be able to cope with a multiplicity of cases at the same time?

**Dr Hayes:** I had to make a stab, and I accept that I could be wrong. The big unknown, which Mr Robinson has put his finger on, is whether the new system will generate a flood of additional cases. The best estimate I could make was that a large number of cases would be of the type that I regard as proper for informal resolution and that a large number would be in the intermediate area that I talked about and would be rather run-of-the-mill. The cases requiring huge inputs of manpower and high degrees of investigatory skill would, of course, be the ones at the serious end of the scale — those involving death, serious assault, and so on. One hopes that that number would not grow — in fact, might decrease.

Having looked at what people are doing at the moment — and a large number in the complaints and discipline branch are tramping over roughly the same ground — I hazard a guess that about 30 investigators would do the run-of-the-mill business.

The big problem about this sort of thing is that, as you do not wish to keep a standing army waiting for the big case to appear, there has to be a means of expanding, forming teams, quite quickly. A homicide investigation might involve 60, 70 or 80 people. I think that the core staff will come, first, from among people who are there at the moment; secondly, from policemen, either seconded or with experience in the RUC or in other forces; and, thirdly, from among people engaged in Customs and Excise and other investigations.

With regard to necessary rapid expansion from time to time, the ombudsman would need to be able, like the Chief Constable at the moment, to call on the Chief Constables of other forces and ask them to supply teams. A great deal of what might be called the navvy work of investigation would still fall to be done by the RUC. If numbers of people were needed, say, to crawl on their knees around a site gathering evidence or to conduct door-to-door inquiries the ombudsman would call on the Chief Constable for that and would use the existing facilities for forensic testing and investigation. In that sense, there would be no duplication. It is on that that I base the proposal. Experience will tell. The important thing is that the system should be flexible enough and that the legislation should put responsibility, as at the moment, on the Chief Constable to assist, to the extent requested by the ombudsman, in investigations.

**Mr McBride:** I too welcome Dr Hayes. For all the Forum's limitations, this is a very useful exercise. It is the sort of thing that should happen more often, with people like Dr Hayes putting ideas to elected representatives.

In the same context, I welcome the fact that in his paper, albeit in a footnote, and in his address today Dr Hayes has referred to the possibility that some of these powers will eventually be restored to a Northern Ireland Assembly. That is a matter that my party has consistently stressed will have to be addressed sooner or later. I welcome the acknowledgement of the possibility somewhere in the distance, however remote.

Again I congratulate Dr Hayes on an admirable and clear report on a very important topic. In its representations my party argued for a fully independent system, as we have done for many years.

**Mr Shannon:** Where is the question?

**The Chairman:** Yes, will you please get to your question.

**Mr McBride:** I will come to it in due course.

**The Chairman:** Perhaps you will get to the question now.

**Mr McBride:** As I have said, our position has been one of support for an independent model. We welcome the fact that Dr Hayes has come out in support of such a system. He seems to have come down very firmly in favour of a model with a single person in charge. I see some merit in that, as I see the demerits in the collective system, but there is a danger that the individual concerned will be seen as an establishment figure and part of the system.

These ideas have been around for a long time. The Independent Commission has itself called over the years for reforms. Is Dr Hayes hopeful that his proposals will be dealt with promptly?

**Dr Hayes:** The answer to the second question is yes. The answer to the first is that there is always the danger of a single ombudsman becoming too closely associated with the body being investigated. I was concerned about the difficulty of getting a person of stature to fill this post. I think that it will be quite hard. Getting two or three might be a problem. My own preference is for an individual, though there could be a commission of two, three or four people. Some of them might well be part-time, as is the case at the moment, but I believe that, in the main, they should be full-time.

The thing that impressed me was the need for a figure that the public and the police would recognize. It is hugely important that whoever does this job convince the ordinary policeman on the beat that he or she has some idea of the troubles and difficulties that he is working under. Complaints very rarely arise out of a situation which has been sweetness and light.

*10.45 am*

In New Zealand there is a man called — slightly unfortunately — Judge Jeffreys. He is the head of the police complaints system. Everybody — even those people who rubbished the thing, saying that it was not good enough — said “But at least John Jeffreys is there.” He appeared on the spot and was a great reassurance to the public — even those whose complaints were not upheld. That too is important. I went for a single person to be recognizable, to be about the place, to walk the deck.

**Mr McCartney:** I too welcome Dr Hayes to tell us something about his report.

I should like to deal first with the question of a sliding standard of proof. Does Dr Hayes agree that there is nothing novel in this? Thirty years ago Lord Denning was talking about being satisfied, or completely satisfied, instead of requiring proof beyond a reasonable doubt. Dr Hayes makes the point that someone can be acquitted of a criminal offence, for lack of proof beyond a reasonable doubt, but proven guilty of some civil offence. We have this in the current O J Simpson trial.

**Dr Hayes:** Absolutely.

**Mr McCartney:** There is nothing novel about this problem. Nor have the attempts to solve it been wholly unsuccessful. Dr Hayes would probably agree that it is a matter of practice.

**Dr Hayes:** Yes.

**Mr McCartney:** Both careless-driving and murder charges require proof beyond reasonable doubt, but, pragmatically, there is a sliding or adjustable standard of proof. Is

there any real necessity to depart from the practical administration of a standard already in place throughout the judicial system?

My second question relates to Dr Hayes's statement that he had no complaints about the quality or validity of the present system of investigation but had raised doubts about the public perception of it. Does not this public perception of the role of the RUC have its foundation in political rather than administration or judicial attitudes? For example, any comparisons between the police forces of England and Wales and that of Northern Ireland have this great difference: on the mainland, complaints are about the force as a force, in relation to the administration of the law, whereas in Northern Ireland they are almost entirely, if not entirely, activated by political perceptions, as was exemplified at Drumcree. To what extent is Dr Hayes's report driven by operational considerations concerning the behaviour of the police force, rather than by political perceptions as to where the force stands in the administration of the law, including its position on what people might call the constitutional issue?

**Dr Hayes:** These are two important issues.

With regard to the first, my report quotes Denning. Yes, that is the practical position. The Police Federation and the ICPC came at this from different sides. The ICPC argued to me in favour of, and have asked the Secretary of State for, a change in the burden of proof. The Police Federation resisted such change. I thought it important to draw out from other jurisdictions that the position is rather as Mr McCartney explains it. But that is not the perception of the participants on both sides of the debate internally.

Whether or not public perception is politically driven, it is important. Indeed, it is important to the police, as they recognize. However, that is something which I found not just in Northern Ireland but in all the countries I looked at. In every one of them the case was made that the police should not be investigating the police. It was very marked in Canada and is increasingly marked in Australia and in New Zealand. Most of the countries I looked at, having had supervision, want more than that and are saying that anything short of independent investigation is not enough. I go back to 1981 and Lord Scarman's seminal report on the Brixton riots, in which he raised and dealt with these issues.

**Ms Sagar:** I too welcome Dr Hayes.

Unfortunately, Mr Robinson asked my question regarding the possible number of future complaints.

The most interesting and important thing is that Dr Hayes has managed to get the Government to accept the idea of an entirely independent ombudsman. We look forward to his — or her — selection.

**Dr Hayes:** I have been very careful throughout to refer to "him or her".

**Ms Sagar:** I noticed.

**Mr Stoker:** I will ask a question rather than make a speech.

How will the level of public confidence and support be measured in the light of the stance taken by certain political parties in their very active roles against the police and the whole system?

**Dr Hayes:** It will be measured as it is measured at the moment. I have relied very largely on opinion polls and market research surveys carried out by the Police Authority and the ICPC and on several conducted by myself and others. In relation to this part of the subject anyway, you will find quite a degree of consistency. The ICPC survey found (Members will see this in the appendices to the report) that in both communities — if I may use that expression — independence was seen as the most important desideratum in investigation of the police.

The attitudes to satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current system are mirrored in the two communities. There is a higher degree of dissatisfaction in the Catholic community, but there are high levels in both. I commissioned a survey — difficult with the numbers involved — of people who had made complaints. There was a remarkable similarity between the two communities. The interesting thing is that the most dissatisfied people were ones who had never been in contact with the police before — upstanding citizens who had made a complaint and felt very bruised by the system.

That is how confidence would continue to be measured.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** Dr Hayes's report is a most erudite review, and I congratulate him on his expertise in this field. His candour is indeed refreshing.

Does he agree that the recommendations concerning a police ombudsman, if implemented along with other reforms that are pending, will make the RUC not only the most professional police force in the United Kingdom but also the one most supervised through rigorous checks and balances and that this will give the lie to attempts to denigrate it?

**Dr Hayes:** That is largely true. With regard to the description "most supervised", I should point out that I was trying to produce something which would not tie every policeman up filling in bits of paper and would not paralyse the system. I think that Members will see running through this the note that management should manage. It is with managerial changes in the police that many of the positive developments will take place. I am trying to relieve the policeman of the burden of petty, sometimes vexatious, complaints, in the hope that these will be dealt with internally at managerial level, leaving supervision for the more serious ones. But Mr Paisley's main point is well taken. I agree with it.

**Mr Gregory Campbell:** I welcome Dr Hayes.

My question concerns the changes he envisages regarding scenarios that occur under the present system. All Members here will know of cases, particularly in public-order situations but not exclusively so, in which charges are levelled. First of all, a person makes a complaint concerning alleged action by a police officer. Initially the complainant does not have charges levelled against him, but subsequently he is charged by the police. How do you

see a scenario in which such problems could arise, as will undoubtedly be the case if the public-order situation that we had last summer occurs next summer?

**Dr Hayes:** This is a very serious concern. I spoke to a large number of solicitors who were dealing with people in just such a situation, and most of them told me quite roundly that they would advise their clients not to make a complaint because it would put them at risk. There was some anecdotal evidence of what was really a form of plea bargaining: "You take out your complaint, and I will ...". That is quite serious. The imposition of the independent ombudsman between the two bodies should help. Certainly I would expect an ombudsman to be extremely concerned should he see evidence of that sort of thing and to be watchful for it. Any system, including this one, has the capability of abuse and needs to be watched.

**Mr Nesbitt:** My question refers to accountability. To have accountability, one needs clearly defined responsibility and clear lines of authority. In his executive summary Dr Hayes talks about the ombudsman analysing policies. A paper reported last night that he had said that the ombudsman would have an input into police policy. Is the ombudsman going to analyse complaints? Is that his or her responsibility? Is there such authority? Is there an overarching element of an intrusive nature in the whole panoply of policing in Northern Ireland?

I welcome Dr Hayes's comment that the context of international developments had been considered. In his answer to Mr McCartney he referred to Australia, New Zealand and Canada. In all other Western democracies — all of them — the police operate within a framework where elected representatives are not, by words or actions, as in some cases here, trying to undermine the state. This does have a bearing. Garvaghy Road is viewed as a symptom more than as a cause.

*11.00 am*

**Dr Hayes:** Yes, I saw that gloss in the paper last night, and my blood ran a bit cold because it was precisely what I was not saying. I was asked to look at whether the complaints authority should be able to receive complaints about policy, and I decided that it should not. Policy, I think, is a matter for the Police Authority and for the Chief Constable accountable to it. But there has got to be some half-way house between police being able to refuse any explanation, on the grounds that something is a matter of operational policy, and total day-to-day interference. I think that the forum for that discussion is the Police Authority or whatever is put in its place.

I was thinking more of complaints in the context of management. Let me explain what put that in my mind. When I was acting as Ombudsman I used to write to Permanent Secretaries and heads of bodies at the end of a year saying that I had received 10 complaints about practice X or five complaints arising from office Y and that this might be something they would like to look at. They regarded that as a useful tool of management. I am offering this in the same way. I see the ombudsman doing what the PCA in England does — standing back from complaints from time to time and saying, for instance, "There are many complaints arising from the point of arrest. Let us see whether it is from the instructions that are given, the methods that are used, the forms or restraints that are used." Many complaints are resulting from the use of longer batons. It is that sort of analysis that I have in mind —

calling attention to such things. But it is then a matter entirely for police management to formulate the relevant policies.

**Mr McAlister:** I want to turn to the question of the person appointed as ombudsman. I am reminded of the circus that advertised for human cannon-balls. It said that the jobs were open to anyone, of any religious persuasion, male or female. The only stipulation was that people had to be of the right calibre.

Dr Hayes has indicated that the person appointed should come from the judiciary. I would like him to expand on that. Does he see the appointee as coming from the British judiciary? Given that there is a certain section of the community to which nothing British appeals, does he think that it will be possible to find someone who is viewed by the whole community as truly independent?

**Dr Hayes:** That is the huge problem. I think that my reference was to a person of the quality of a judge or senior legal figure or someone of similar stature. It is important to reassure people on all sides. In particular, the police, especially if they are going to be involved, almost as an examining magistrate, in directing investigations, need to know all about the law of evidence, and so on. So I feel quite strongly that it should be a legal person, though not necessarily a judge. I do not want to catch the eye of any senior legal practitioner today, but there must be people who would do this tough job. It would have been racist for me to specify where the appointee should come from, but I hope that we can find a Northern Ireland person. I am sure that there is somebody.

**Mr Morrow:** The question of safeguards is most interesting. Much time and great effort have gone into putting these in place. Does Dr Hayes think that they will work? How will we know that they are working? Does Dr Hayes feel that they will in any way impede the officer in the fight against crime?

**Dr Hayes:** You should not see the complaints system on its own; you should see it as part of a whole series of changes that are taking place. I think that the important changes will be in the management and training of the police and in police culture. I suggest, for instance, that there should be rather more training in human relations and communication. I hope that most of this will be preventive medicine. The difficulty with preventive medicine is that you can never measure how successful it has been. The measure of success, I think, would be growing faith, on all sides of the community, in the police and a feeling in the force that it was not just being set up for complaint. One hopes that as the system beds down it will justify itself.

The last thing one wants to do is tie policemen and others up in systems in which they are filling up bits of paper all the time or are afraid to take what you and I would regard as reasonable action, lest somebody find fault with them or they be put on a charge. What we are talking about is sensible management of the police and the inculcation of behaviour which enables mistakes to be recognized and rectified quite quickly.

I will give one example. I discovered in the course of this exercise that until about 10 years ago a policeman was not allowed to apologize. It is a matter of people locally and at

a lower level being prepared to take responsibility to apologize when things go wrong and to meet the citizen promptly.

**Mr Carrick:** Dr Hayes has touched on the effect that his proposals might have in relation to policy. May I ask a simple, direct question: what impact, if any, will they have on the operational policy of the RUC?

**Dr Hayes:** The ombudsman is not there to deal with operational policy. However, I hope that those who decide operational policy will have regard to the impact of previous policies in causing complaints. But there will be no direct impact.

**Mr McKee:** Dr Hayes touched upon a question that I was going to ask. Does he accept that certain sections of this community will never accept modest reform of the police? Their policy is disbandment of the RUC — something that would be out of line with the views of the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland. Does Dr Hayes think that the people who are calling for disbandment of the RUC will ever accept anything else?

**Dr Hayes:** I have been performing the technical job of preparing a report and suggesting a workable system. I had to have some regard for the politics of the situation, in the sense that there would be no point in proposing something which was unacceptable to huge sections of the community. And I am flattered and pleased at the breadth of the acceptance. There will always be people who take the attitude to which Mr McKee refers. The rest of us can only behave in a reasonable way and produce systems and processes that commend themselves to fair-minded people, in the hope that the number of such people will increase.

**Mr Gibson:** I too join in the welcome to Dr Hayes.

With regard to the many spurious but predictable allegations, will Dr Hayes's report ensure that the ordinary, decent policeman who abides by the rules of the game is not inhibited in the normal discharge of his duty?

**Dr Hayes:** There are a couple of schools of thought. One is that every complaint is malicious. The other is that there has been a deliberate campaign of producing complaints. I must say that I did not find evidence of that. There was certainly quite an amount of evidence of what might be called defensive complaints, which fell by the wayside when the court case had been disposed of.

The Police Federation was anxious that I should recommend that it be made an offence to make a groundless complaint. I was reluctant to do that as it is not in the public interest to create hurdles that inhibit complaint. There is also a difficulty about trying to exclude paranoids and nutters, because every now and again they are right.

At the moment there are two defences for the police. There is the offence of wasting police time, which is sometimes invoked, and in some cases a policeman could take action for slander or libel. Anyway, the police do require protection against malicious, vexatious or repetitious complaints. The filter that I have recommended is that the ombudsman, before taking on the investigation of a case, would make a preliminary assessment. If it should

appear to him, on reasonable grounds, that the case was of such a type he would discontinue it.

**The Chairman:** Mr McCartney is going to put a second question. This time he is speaking on behalf of Mr Cedric Wilson. A DUP Member has kindly given way to him.

**Mr McCartney:** I should like, first, to correct Dr Hayes, who gave the impression that I was in some way opposed to an independent body to investigate the police.

**Dr Hayes:** No, no.

**Mr McCartney:** I am entirely in favour of the suggestion that there be an independent body.

Secondly, I would like Dr Hayes to address himself to the issue of operational control, which is related to the point that I made earlier. The massive opposition to the RUC derives from the attitude of one section of the community to operational decisions. It is hardly an answer to suggest that the police, in making future operational decisions, should take into account the complaints about earlier decisions. That, I suggest, is the fundamental issue. It has nothing whatever to do with the type of situation, with regard to investigation of the police, that pertains in other jurisdictions. It is a political issue.

**Dr Hayes:** I am sorry if Mr McCartney got the impression that I thought he was objecting to the idea of an independent body. That certainly did not come through to me. I accept fully what he says.

The point I am trying to make, in relation to complaints about operational policies, is that, under my system, that is a matter not for the ombudsman but for the Police Authority. What the ombudsman will be concerned with is the behaviour of policemen where citizen A says that policeman B did something to him. Policy is a political matter and, I submit, properly one in respect of which the Chief Constable should be responsible to, and held accountable by, the Police Authority. That is the forum in which I believe the discussion will take place.

**Mr Calvert:** I join other Members in welcoming Dr Hayes.

Primary legislation will be required to adopt this review. Does Dr Hayes expect any delays otherwise unforeseen?

**Dr Hayes:** Give or take an election or two, one would not know. Even with the best wind, one is thinking in terms of perhaps two years because of the time it takes to get legislation through. That is why I have suggested certain transitional arrangements. I have suggested that the ICPC should be strengthened in the short term and that those of its recommendations that could be advanced without legislation should be put into force. Issues, like the balance of proof, that are already being discussed by the Home Office and police forces should be moved on. The police themselves should adopt a more positive and managerial role in relation to complaints, and, with regard to such matters as training, people

should not sit on their hands for the next two years but should get geared towards whatever new system is to be introduced. That would avoid further delay.

**Mr Shannon:** Does Dr Hayes accept that an accurate interpretation of his proposals concerning complaints and discipline powers is that they will operate on a sliding scale? If so, does he accept also that as community confidence in the police increased, more power to deal with such complaints could be given back to the police?

*11.15 am*

**Dr Hayes:** That is the dynamic that I hope will be built into the system. The police themselves need to have an interest in it. That is why I talked about sale and leaseback. I believe that in the early days the ombudsman will do more investigations but that, as everybody gets used to the system and confidence increases, whole classes of things can be remitted for investigation, either direct or under supervision. I see it as a raising of the threshold to enable more and more investigation to be dealt with informally. I am not, therefore, in favour of defining too rigidly the thresholds between the different groups. That can be done by negotiation between the police and the ombudsman as they gain confidence in each other.

**Rev Trevor Kirkland:** Dr Hayes referred to complaints being used as a management tool. As he knows, this is a two-edged sword. What safeguards will there be to prevent the police from becoming a football?

Dr Hayes referred also to the public's ignorance regarding this whole matter. Are there any plans to educate people?

**Dr Hayes:** I will take the second question first. An important part of the role of the ombudsman will be to educate the public about what he is doing. I think he will have an important role in police training and education too.

The whole purpose of systems like this and of the other changes that are being made is to stop the police being made a political football, to take policing out of the realm of politics.

**Mr Neeson:** With regard to questioning, a precedent has been established today. My party will certainly take note of it. I can assure Dr Hayes that there was no lack of interest among Alliance Members in putting forward more questions.

The executive summary is very helpful, but all Members would like to have copies of the full report because it is very informative. Only a few do. I am sure that I speak for the vast majority of Members when I say that major Government publications should be distributed to all Members immediately on release. This applies in particular to the North Report on parades, which is to be released next week, especially as we shall be debating a motion on the subject next Friday.

**The Chairman:** It would be hard for Dr Hayes to answer that one. However, as Chairman, I will certainly make a point of seeing whether copies of the North Report, which,

I understand, is to be laid in the Library of the House of Commons next week, can be supplied to all Forum Members as quickly as possible.

**Mr Casey:** On behalf of Labour I join in the welcome to Dr Hayes and congratulate him.

Like Mr Neeson, I am at a disadvantage as I do not have the full text of the recommendations. However, I do have a couple of questions.

Will the decisions of the ombudsman be final, or will they be subject to review by a higher authority — a Minister or the Government? And if the ombudsman finds against the complainant will there be a mechanism for appeal?

**Dr Hayes:** There will certainly be no role for Ministers. There are two tracks. In the case of a potentially criminal act the ombudsman could do his investigation and pass the papers to the DPP, who would take the matter on in the usual way. In the case of an alleged breach of discipline he would pass his findings and recommendations to the Chief Constable. The first principle I enunciated was that the Chief Constable would be responsible for discipline in the force. It would be up to him to discipline. If he were to decline to accept the recommendation, as can happen at the moment with the ICPC, there would be an independent tribunal, which would adjudicate on fact, leaving the matter of discipline to the Chief Constable.

There would be no appeal against the ombudsman's decision, except to the extent that the ombudsman would come within the responsibility of the Assembly Ombudsman in relation to his office and its administrative actions.

**The Chairman:** I am sure that Members wish me to thank Dr Maurice Hayes on their behalf for being the first person to do this job, which comes about as a result of the Women's Coalition's motion, which, with the DUP's amendment, was adopted two weeks ago.

Thank you very much indeed, Dr Hayes, for coming and for answering Members' questions so fully, succinctly and clearly.

**Dr Hayes:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am grateful to the Members for their courtesy, their interest and the nature of their questions. It has been an honour for me. I commend you on the work that you are doing, and I hope that it will bear fruit.

**The Chairman:** Thank you.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.25 am and resumed at 11.46 am.*

## DRUG ABUSE

**The Chairman:** We come now to the very important and highly relevant matter of drug abuse. It so happens that the Northern Ireland Select Committee reported on the subject yesterday. This debate is therefore timely.

**Mrs I Robinson:** I beg to move the following motion:

This Forum expresses grave concern at the alarming rise of drug abuse in this community; calls for a more co-ordinated approach from the Government and its agencies, coupled with a more effective educational programme; and urges that greater resources be made available and that an urgent review of drug-related sentencing be undertaken.

The consideration of this subject is timely, planned as it was by the Business Committee to follow the publication of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's report on the subject. That report is a valuable backcloth for our deliberations and is essential reading for anyone interested in this topic.

I should like, first, to quote from literature published by a respected voluntary organization in Northern Ireland which offers help people who are addicted to alcohol or other drugs. Unfortunately, we tend to overlook the fact that alcoholism is as much a social evil as is the taking of illicit drugs. In its pamphlet the society asks a simple question: "What is drug addiction?" Its answer:

"It is a developing dependence on any substance which has the capacity to artificially alter mood or feeling in an individual. Initially this dependence is psychological, but it progresses to being physiological in many cases."

The society goes on to say that it believes that drug addiction falls into three categories. The first is alcohol addiction, which is the biggest single drug-addiction problem in Western society and is the third-largest killer in the Western world. The second category is medical-drugs abuse, with an ever-increasing number of people taking medically prescribed drugs, such as tranquillizers, anti-depressants and sleeping tablets. Again, ease of availability has helped to make many people dependent on substances just to be able to cope with normal living. The third category is, of course, the use of illegal drugs. The pamphlet explains that substances such as heroin, cocaine, LSD, Ecstasy, amphetamines and cannabis are frightening drugs that cause havoc mentally, morally, emotionally and physically.

Setting aside the obvious medical use of certain drugs, it would be wrong to suggest that there are some which can be categorized as good or safe and can be used for enjoyment and that it is preferable for young people, if they take drugs, to concentrate on those that some call "safe". Any drug has the potential to kill. We have all read with sorrow of the plight of Leah Betts and other young people who died taking Ecstasy. Those who supply, peddle or push deadly drugs should know in advance that if caught by the forces of law and order they will be put behind bars for a very long time. Indeed, I believe that drug barons should be put away for life. We must demonstrate to these traders in death and misery that no mercy will be shown to them.

The Select Committee properly acknowledges that there has been a rapid escalation in drug abuse over the past few years and that, while there is a disturbing and growing number of adult users, the most significant problem lies with young people. It is horrifying to learn that one in four children between the ages of 11 and 15 claim to have been offered drugs. Indeed, only this week I was greatly dismayed at a 'Belfast Telegraph' report drawing attention to the findings of the project on alcohol awareness for youth, which showed that 61% of people between 12 and 17 surveyed in west Belfast had actually used drugs. But the age group in which drug abuse is most likely to be found is 18 to 21 years, with half of males and two in five females admitting to having used drugs.

It is frightening that the message of how drugs can destroy lives has not penetrated, particularly among those involved in the so-called rave culture. Perhaps adults have yet to recognize the extent to which peer pressure and pop and sports personalities can influence the habits and behaviour of young people. Sadly, many of them take their lead from what is trendy, popular, the in-thing to do.

That is why it is deplorable — almost criminally irresponsible — for people like Brian Harvey of East 17, looked up to by millions of young people, to attempt to sell drug abuse as a pleasurable experience that others should try. I hope that Harvey will get counselling for his own drug dependency and that he can live with the knowledge that young lives will be ruined, if not lost, because of his irresponsibility. Let me put on record that I welcome the fact that his group colleagues immediately sacked him and publicly disassociated themselves from his remarks. I trust that this is a genuine termination of their links with him, and not a PR damage-limitation exercise, to be reversed in a few weeks. Time alone will tell.

I was outraged by an article in the 'News Letter' yesterday morning, written by Suzanne Breen. The writer claims not to be a drug user but goes on to say that Ecstasy is not the worst thing in the world. Referring to people who abuse drugs, she says that they do so for the same reason others drink: it makes them feel good. The article goes on

"Ecstasy loosens the inhibitions, and users feel peaceful and loving. Fights rarely occur at rave parties, where the drug is usually consumed ... The parents of Leah Betts and other teenagers who have died taking Ecstasy condemn Brian Harvey of East 17. They are entitled to their views. The death of a child is dreadful, but it does not make anyone an expert. Rather, it could be argued, those close to a tragedy are less likely to hold balanced views than those more detached from it."

If Suzanne Breen considers her views balanced, may the good Lord preserve us all. Writers like her will have to realize that any hint of endorsing the use of killer drugs, whether intentionally or unintentionally, gives young people a wrong and dangerous message. I am shocked that the 'News Letter' should allow this journalist to propagate what amounts almost to a defence of modern-day drug culture. This is not what one expects from a responsible newspaper. I hope that, on reflection, the 'News Letter' will distance itself from this reporter's remarks, as East 17 did with Brian Harvey.

One glimmer of hope in the province is that up to now there has been no significant development of a needle culture as in the rest of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. However, we cannot but be concerned when the police indicate that on a scale of one to five — equating five to Manchester or London — Northern Ireland has moved from one to

three in a few years. The ready availability of drugs in every town and village across Northern Ireland serves to reinforce the first element of our motion and makes the case for an all-fronts, co-ordinated assault on this major problem.

The policy statement on drug misuse in Northern Ireland candidly points out that the authorities, up until 1986, adopted a low-profile approach. Thank goodness that has changed to reflect changing circumstances. It is imperative that health and social services boards, education and news services, law-enforcement agencies and voluntary and church-based organizations be more closely involved. Let us not hear any talk about cost. Money spent on reducing the drug problem is not wasted. In the United Kingdom, as in the United States of America, 70% of crime is drugs-related. Drugs are big business. A drug habit can cost many hundreds of pounds to support. Addicts, often in desperation, become full-time thieves in order to feed their dependency. Meanwhile, the drug barons grow richer on the broken lives of their victims.

Despite all the publicity campaigns, there is widespread ignorance in Northern Ireland, especially amongst parents, about how to detect drug abuse. The problem appears to be that the various agencies produce their information for the professionals instead of writing it for ordinary people like me. This requires further investigation. It is important, however, that any educational package should not merely inform but also seek to encourage everyone to take a robust stand against substance abuse and point out that it is not trendy, stylish or clever to take drugs.

While there is no room for complacency, the RUC appears to have recognized the importance of fulfilling a community education role, as well as discharging its more familiar detection and enforcement functions. It is heartening that the police have been welcomed into over 90% of schools in Northern Ireland to talk about drug issues. This is a very creditable performance in a divided society. The authorities should not underestimate the value of using sensible people from sport and entertainment — the people to whom youths look up — to sell the anti-drugs message.

Regrettably, the proportion of the community in which the family is the prime source of influence on young people's lives is diminishing. This, I suspect, is the cause of many problems. But if youngsters are looking up to individuals who might be termed celebrities we should not be slow to have those people selling the anti-drugs message.

I am sure that the Forum will want to send out a message of encouragement rather than of criticism of the agencies in the front line of the battle against the illicit use of drugs. If we can at least heighten awareness of the problem and add our voices to those of the people urging that no resource impediment be placed in the way of providing a robust, all-fronts co-ordinated anti-drugs strategy for the province, our time will have been well spent.

In closing, I reiterate the importance of education in primary schools and at the second and third levels and endorse the view of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that there should be a representative body for Northern Ireland voluntary groups which could provide the Government or relevant agencies with advice and information and be open to consultation on the effects of policy. All this will be possible only if the Government make the necessary funds available, if they provide a realistic financial package to enable the growing problem to

be tackled head-on. The voluntary organizations perform a vital role and need to be given every support, and their expertise needs to be harnessed by those in authority.

The Government can encourage the voluntary organizations by assisting them with funding. The Minister will find that these organizations provide him with the best value for money. In the words of the Select Committee's conclusion,

"Concerted action now can do much to delay or keep away the escalation of illicit drug use."

12.00

**Mr Foster:** There is no doubt whatsoever that this is a very important issue. We are indeed aware that drugs of various sorts are now part of everyday living. Many people cherish the belief that if they are unwell, there will be a tablet to cure them. Many who take drugs regularly suffer some degree of intoxication from time to time.

Four general groups of drugs are particularly important for their ability to produce habituation and addiction: hypnotic and tranquilizing substances, which include sleeping tablets, sedatives and calming agents; euphoric substances (pep pills); hallucinogens, which induce visions and produce marked alterations in sensory appreciation; and analgesic substances (the powerful pain-killers). It is impossible to predict who will become a drug addict, just as it is impossible to say which heavy drinker will eventually become an alcoholic. It would appear that the more disturbed the personality the easier it is to become addicted to any substance, and the individual who abuses both alcohol and drugs often presents an utterly intractable therapeutic problem.

The abuse of drugs has become a scourge of society. Watchfulness is essential if we are to ensure that drug abuse is eradicated, for otherwise society will go under. Our young people are at risk. This is not something which can be tolerated. The distressing news that children as young as 10 are being offered drugs and have been tempted to try them has prompted the Health Promotion Agency to launch a £185,000 public-information campaign aimed at children between 10 and 13. Following a survey of nearly 2,000 children in this age group, the agency discovered that 10% had been offered drugs or solvents, and 13% had been tempted to experiment with them. More worrying, however, was the fact that nearly half of the children interviewed said that they did not have enough information to fend off the threat.

Why do young people first take drugs? They may experiment for the following reasons: just to try them, to look grown-up, to take a risk, because friends use them (the old peer-group issue), because friends offer them, because they have had a few drinks, or maybe just to show off. Many parents will remember why they first tried a cigarette or a drink in their teens. Well, the reasons are still the same, but they now apply to illegal drugs as well.

Why do some young people carry on taking drugs? There are many reasons, but some of the common ones are enjoyment, escapism, inability to cope with everyday life, lack of success and negative feelings about themselves. A few young people in Northern Ireland take illegal drugs regularly, and some will become dependent. All drug use involves danger. Various drugs have slang names. Here, I do not know whether I am preaching to the converted. Cannabis is called blow, dope, hash, pot and joint; LSD is known as acid, acid

tabs and trips; magic mushrooms are called mussies or mushies; Ecstasy is referred to as E, Adam or XTC; amphetamine sulphate is called speed, whiz and uppers; cocaine and crack are known as coke and snow; amyl and butyl nitrites are referred to as poppers; while heroin has the slang names smack and H.

Another scourge of society (maybe it is not so prevalent now, but it still needs to be watched) is solvent-sniffing or — to use the common term — glue-sniffing, which involves substances such as butane gas, aerosol sprays, solvent-based glues like Evo-stik, correcting fluid, dry-cleaning fluids, the contents of some fire extinguishers, thinners and petrol. There are more than 30 sniffable fluids in households, so “watchfulness” is indeed the operative word.

Growth in the use of hard drugs is not, I am told, a real problem in this part of the world at present, whereas heroin and cocaine are prevalent in Dublin and Scotland. But we cannot be complacent. As I understand it, our problem stems from what are called soft drugs — Ecstasy, cannabis, amphetamines and LSD. These are known as recreational drugs because of where they are taken. It is important for all to realize that they cause serious psychological and physical problems.

What can be done to eradicate this scourge? That the RUC now appreciates the danger more fully is indicated by the fact that the drug squad has been increased by 50%. There are about 52 personnel, as well as eight liaison officers at street level. This means that there are about 60 people in the field, which is good. I understand that 91% of schools have been visited — a notable achievement.

Furthermore, the Central Co-ordinating Group for Action Against Drugs came into being in June 1995. In October 1996 four liaison groups — one in each health-board area — were set up to combat the misuse of drugs. It is comforting to know that there is such interest and that it is now reflected in Government policy. Instruction in schools is compulsory. This is another way in which the young can be made aware of the terrible dangers.

I attended a drug-abuse conference in the Hague in 1986. At breakfast one morning a Belgian policeman told me that Far Eastern countries would flood Western Europe with drugs and that terrorist groups would exploit the situation. I referred to this when I reported back to Fermanagh District Council but was scoffed at. Regrettably, the policeman's forecast has been borne out. The peddlers must be dealt with very firmly.

What can we do? Parents can certainly play a vital part in prevention. Their unique relationship with their children can complement the work done in schools, clubs, colleges and training schemes. As parents, or just as responsible adults, we can provide the strong support that helps young people to develop the self-confidence they need to resist pressures from friends and others. We do not need to be drugs experts, but we should have accurate information to support our views. An informal chat is usually the best approach. People often talk down to their children.

Parents must be alert to signs of drug-taking. They must also try to understand and be prepared to discuss the reasons. At the same time they must be firm. They should get to know their sons or daughters and their friends, especially new friends.

Drug dependence is a serious problem. It seems incredible that anyone should take this path when he knows where it leads. It is sad that there is increasing tolerance of drugs. Some young people regard drug-taking as normal behaviour. We need close co-operation between addiction units, social workers and various bodies, including the police, who play a vital role. The Chief Constable stated recently that there would be no reduction in drug-squad personnel.

Addiction is the dreadful price of excessive permissiveness in social attitudes.

I support the motion.

**Lord Alderdice:** My Colleagues and I are grateful to the Democratic Unionist Party — Mrs Robinson in particular — for bringing this serious question to the attention of the Forum.

I began to appreciate the gravity of the situation when I worked at Shaftesbury Square Hospital in the early 1980s. At that stage there were very few young people in Northern Ireland with serious addiction problems. I went to live in a drug-free therapeutic community and worked in other places to develop schemes that would help the small number of addicts, and I still take an interest.

There were some bad reasons for the smallness of the problem here. The paramilitaries realized at a very early stage that those who used or peddled drugs were a danger to them, as they were often unreliable and susceptible to pressure from the security forces. And we know the thoroughly barbaric fashion in which anyone breaking the rules was treated.

But there were also some very good reasons for the smallness of our drugs problem. One of these was that people on all sides were not very susceptible to the view that drugs — even the so-called recreational drugs — should be allowed. The attitude of many of my psychiatrist colleagues, particularly Dr Noel Moorehead, the consultant in charge of the regional alcohol addiction unit at Shaftesbury Square, was very important. Despite extraordinary pressure from the Department of Health in London to introduce maintenance clinics where young people with a heroin problem would be provided with free methadone — a scheme that has operated in the rest of the United Kingdom for a long time — psychiatrists in Northern Ireland would not give way. Their view was that it would be absurd to provide free narcotics to young abusers. It would be like giving health-service whiskey to alcoholics. The idea was to persuade people to come off drugs — not encourage the habit.

But the problem has become much more serious, partly because, for various reasons, the paramilitaries have changed their attitude. Some now see this as a way of getting money. Certainly it is a way to gain control. There is little doubt in the mind of anyone who knows what is happening that during and just after the ceasefire, when military activity was less overt, people turned their nefarious skills to this area of organized crime. And if we are fortunate enough to find a way through to a longer-lasting peace, the dividend may include the negative experience of sharing problems known in other parts of these islands and elsewhere in Western Europe.

As others have indicated, the organized-crime aspect is not just local but also international. Because of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's report the subject is very topical. I have had time to read only the conclusions and recommendations, but I would like to see things going a little further than has been suggested. There are several specific things that the Government and the community should do. We saw yesterday the excellent result of the long programme of co-operation between the parties here and the SDLP on the question of the education and library boards. If we can work together on an issue of that kind perhaps we could persuade the Government in respect of this matter too.

First, we need to know the exact extent of the problem. In this regard, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee refers to the need for research. We need a data base that consists of more than anecdotal accounts. Social workers, police, voluntary organizations — indeed, anyone involved with young people — must be able to feed information in, but in such a way that it cannot be used against a particular person. When I brought this matter to the attention of Mr Wheeler about 18 months ago he said that the Government were looking at it. Well, they must still be looking at it, for we have not got what we need.

*12.15 pm*

The second thing we need is a major education campaign. We raised this matter with Sir John Wheeler in September 1995, and he said that he was considering it. I welcome the recent announcement of a major campaign. It will have to be sensitive, of course, if young people are not to be turned off. Role-models in fashion and music could be used to good effect.

The third important consideration — and I very much hope that this will not be seen in a political light — is the phenomenal problem of drug abuse in the Republic of Ireland. About 60% of all crime in the Republic is drugs-related. Leading politicians there have told me "Do almost anything you can to make sure Northern Ireland does not end up in the situation we are in, because it is an absolute disaster." I hope that everyone here, like people in continental Europe, realize that police forces need to co-operate. Borders stop legitimate travellers and restrict legitimate trade, but people who deal in illegal substances happily cross them. Continental Europe has the Schengen Agreement. More co-operation between the RUC and the Garda Síochána would be in the interests of us all.

It is a matter of continuing disappointment to me that the provision for the care and treatment of drug users should be so sparse and unco-ordinated. Sir John Wheeler, who chairs the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, recently obtained Home Office funds to enable voluntary organizations to be brought together. But there was no proper co-ordination with the work of statutory organizations and those providing treatment.

But the most astonishing thing of all is that there is no specific budget to deal with the drug problems in this city, never mind in other parts of Northern Ireland. There is a small amount — not nearly enough — for alcohol problems, but every time you ask about drugs you are told "We are still looking at alcohol." We all agree that there is a problem. We will not solve it by throwing money at it, but neither is it helpful that there are not adequate

resources to provide for young people who have begun to learn their lesson and desperately want to come off drugs.

I am sure that it is a matter on which we can all work together.

**Mr Poots:** As someone who works with young people, I am very concerned about the scourge of drugs. They destroy youngsters and drive them into crime. The problem is growing and will get worse still if action is not taken.

In 1993 the drugs squad seized 44.5 kg of cannabis. In 1994 and 1995 the quantities were 81.9 kg and 106.7 kg. Fewer than 3,000 Ecstasy tablets were seized in 1993, but the number increased to 26,000 in 1994 and to 136,860 last year, and members of the drugs squad have told me that it is still rising. I commend the RUC, though it has to be said that seizure increases are the outcome not just of good police work but also of the larger quantities circulating in the community. For instance, 25.9% of fifth formers have used drugs, 84% of which have been supplied by a friend. Having spoken to members of the drugs squad and to people who run drop-in centres, I know that drugs are readily available throughout the province, but it is at rave parties that they are most easily obtainable. On Friday and Saturday nights young people get high at discos.

What can be done to reduce drug abuse? Profits from dealing are massive. Ecstasy tablets can be bought in Holland for as little as 50p, but they wholesale in the United Kingdom at £4 and are sold on the streets for between £8 and £15, depending on supply and demand.

People caught supplying drugs must get custodial sentences and have their ill-gotten gains confiscated. The proceeds should be used to educate children about the risks. The courts must be ruthless. A slap-on-the-wrist policy will only encourage. Drugs are associated with rave music and dance, as the clubs concerned know. These establishments must be monitored closely. If there is evidence that owners are not doing everything in their power to keep drugs out they must be held responsible, and if they do not get their act together they must be forced to close. I welcome the Banbridge Council's closure of the Circus Circus, which was just a place for peddling drugs, and encourage other councils to do likewise.

Resources must be provided for an all-out offensive in schools. I am particularly concerned about young people who take alcohol when they are on drugs. Such a cocktail is extremely dangerous, as are the people who take it. LSD can now be bought on the street for £5, and Ecstasy tablets for as little as £8. Thus these substances are accessible to children as young as 10, as Mr Foster said. I fear for the future of young people if the authorities cannot get the upper hand with regard to this problem.

I support the motion.

**Mr McCartney:** I wholeheartedly support the motion, and, not for the first time, I have cause to offer congratulations to other Members. I congratulate Mrs Robinson for the very comprehensive way in which she introduced the motion, and I commend the powerful and valuable contributions, from bases of expertise and knowledge, that were made by Mr

Foster and Lord Alderdice, both of whom serve the community in drug prevention and drug treatment. As is always the case for one speaking when a debate has developed fully, many of the significant points have already been made. However, it may be useful to make some overview points.

Mr Foster spoke about the importance of the family in drug prevention. The breakdown of the nuclear family — perhaps more evident on the mainland — has enabled teenagers to escape the parental supervision that was given in the past. Parents no longer have the closeness and understanding that would have alerted them to the dangers. Too often teenagers are left to watch a video or go about their own business while parents are in clubs, pubs or other places of entertainment. As Mr Foster has said, it is of the utmost importance that parents be aware of their responsibilities and of the signs of drug abuse.

The second major factor that I want to mention is the effect of the media and the so-called image makers. Mrs Robinson referred to the pop group member who advocated the use of Ecstasy. The only thing that affects some record companies and media manipulators is the possibility of danger to their profits. Obviously, it was the thought of a poor image that gave rise to this public response. And we must not ignore the commercial interests that were mentioned by Mr Poots. Ecstasy tablets and other drugs are exchanged at rave parties. Knowing that some substances make people very thirsty, club owners turn the water off and charge more for a pint of water than for a pint of lager. This cynical exploitation of young people should be dealt with in the most Draconian way. Such places should be shut down. You have to hurt people in their pocket if you are to change their ways.

In Northern Ireland there is the added element of political and social instability. Lord Alderdice mentioned the variable attitude of terrorist and paramilitary groups to the drug problem. At one time it was censorious indignation on the part of people who portrayed themselves as defenders of ethics and morals. Later, when the media had made the use of soft drugs, such as Ecstasy, half socially acceptable, it became a matter of profit-making and profit-taking. There is no doubt that terrorist groups of all descriptions have used the drug scene to enforce their authority and extend their influence. They have appeared as defenders of the public weal: "The police are no help, but we can sort these boys out with a few studded clubs and Black and Decker drills. We have sanctions that are not available to the forces of law and order." At another level, many of them get a rake-off from being soft on drug peddlers, or participate directly in profit-making. The Select Committee states

"The actions of the paramilitaries policing the drug problem are, of course, self-serving, whether to preserve their monopoly of supply or to further their own ends in terrorist terms by establishing themselves in particular parts of the community. There is little hard evidence that terrorist gangs may be involved in policing to develop their own capacity in the drugs field, but there is a possible — some may say likely — mixture of motives in acting in that particular area. A number of members of paramilitary organizations have been arrested in connection with drugs. No research has been commissioned by the Northern Ireland Office specifically into the role of paramilitary groups in the drugs trade. There is an important gap in knowledge here which should be filled."

12.30 pm

Can it be that the Northern Ireland Office has learned something from Nelson, with his blind eye and his telescope? It seems to know that it is sometimes politically helpful to

turn the proverbial blind eye to the activities of terrorist groups whose support is required for some far-reaching policy, some item on an agenda that is not available to the rest of us. There is certainly strong suspicion, and not without evidence.

I congratulate other Members on their valuable contributions to this very important debate. The quality of the speeches would do justice to another place, and that emphasizes the value of the Forum, limited though its functions may be. I hope that the media, who would light like clegs on a cow-pat if there were any type of spat between us and make it a headline, will give this body the coverage that it deserves for a debate of this kind.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** May I, first of all, congratulate Mrs Robinson for raising this subject. Like Mr McCartney, I appreciate the effort that she evidently put in.

I have no hesitation in supporting the motion. No one should have any difficulty in doing so. In making this point I speak on behalf of my party, despite some of the things that have been said. We believe that drugs are evil and that no one should be involved in them. I agree with what Mrs Robinson said about what the courts should have been doing for the past five or six years — maybe longer. Some people convicted of drug-related offences get a smack on the hand and are sent home.

I do not say that no paramilitaries are involved in drug-taking, drug abuse or drug-punting, but I know that any such activity does not have the blessing of the paramilitary leadership. There are rogue elements in every organization. Members of the Democratic Unionist Party would be alarmed at some of the things that happen within their own ranks, and I have no doubt that Mr McCartney does not agree with all the views of some of his colleagues. It is ridiculous to assume that if there were no paramilitaries the problem would go away.

Let us not turn a blind eye to our difficulties. The extent to which the situation here has worsened in five years is annoying. Things here are not as bad as in Dublin, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow or Liverpool, but that does not mean that we can relax. Anyone who wants to see what can happen should take a trip to Holland. I and several other members of Belfast City Council went to a planning conference there.

**A Member:** A junket.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** No — just a trip.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** Hard work.

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** It was very hard work.

We saw kids as young as 14 stoned out of their minds. That taught me a lesson. I certainly do not want to see the city that I represent or any other part of Northern Ireland turning into a mini-Holland.

There is evidence that the vast majority of our difficulties are caused by the so-called fun drugs, the party drugs. It is a mistake to give the impression that drug-taking is fun. It is

like joy-riding. Who coined the expression "joy-riding"? Where is the joy for the people whose cars have been taken and wrecked?

Mrs Robinson talked about the problems caused by drinking. Many people start with a shandy, move on to a bottle or pint of beer and, before they know it, are into hard liquor. My worry is that the so-called fun drugs will become acceptable and that people will get so used to them that it takes something stronger to have any effect. They move up the scale to heroin and cocaine, and that is when the real difficulties start. By all means let people criticize paramilitaries for any part they may have played, but no one should imagine that dealing with the paramilitaries would make the problem go away.

Some people may be surprised to hear that drug-taking is less of a problem in working-class areas than in middle-class areas. In the vast majority of middle-class areas the paramilitaries do not have much influence. The problem started in areas where people were able to give their children £25 or £30 for a night out. After a time the young people needed something stronger than beer. Where did the drug seizures of 15 years ago take place? In the Queen's University area. Substances were brought in by overseas students who had already experimented in other cities.

The RUC needs more money to tackle this problem. It is good that the police have been able to visit so many schools, but they do not have the necessary expertise. Additional officers are required, and they must be highly trained. They should go to places like Edinburgh, Manchester, Birmingham and Holland for training and should then be sent to schools and clubs, including those in the university area. Only through education will we succeed.

I appeal to everyone, but in particular to the press, not to refer to what are called the light substances as fun or party drugs. Let someone try to tell the parents of the 16-year-old girl in England who died that she was killed by a fun drug.

**Mrs Parkes:** Terrorism — bombings, punishment beatings, intimidation, and so on — is the greatest evil that Northern Ireland people have to face, and the next is drugs. Northern Ireland was once a comparative backwater on the drugs scene, but there has been enormous acceleration in the past five years, which have seen the province catching up with the rest of the world. This should alarm us. The fact that one in four fifth-formers have been exposed to this evil emphasizes the depths of the problem.

A recent survey — the first of its kind — showed that children as young as 10 are being offered drugs. This prompted the Health Promotion Agency to launch a special campaign aimed at young people between 10 and 13. The findings of the survey make grim reading. Of the 2,000-plus children questioned, 15% had been offered drugs or solvents, 13% had been tempted to experiment with them, and 47% did not know a lot about drugs and their effects. Children need to be educated about the dangers. This campaign and the one aimed at people between the ages of 14 and 17 — a very vulnerable group — are steps in the right direction. Parents have a vital role to play.

We have all read about the tragic death of teenagers as a result of taking Ecstasy tablets at rave parties. Children need to be warned about the danger, especially as so-called

pop stars make foolish statements about how safe these are. Just this week one such person caused unbelievable hurt, and I, like Mrs Robinson, was angered by Suzanne Breen's article. As a mother, I regard it as particularly irresponsible for a journalist to minimize the evil of drugs.

The Chief Constable's annual report for 1995 highlighted the problem:

"Since 1990 there has been a significant increase in the availability of illicit drugs within Northern Ireland, and the principal drugs being abused are cannabis, amphetamine sulphate, LSD and Ecstasy, this last being the most popular and prevalent at present."

Significant factors in the continuing development of a drug culture in Northern Ireland are the rave music scene, the profits available from drugs, the increased mobility of the population, affecting both young people and drug traffickers, and the convenience of direct travel to the continent. During 1995 there were a number of significant drug seizures in Northern Ireland. I will not go over these, as somebody else has already done so. From this we can see the extent of the problem, which is increasing every day.

12.45 pm

The Government need to develop a comprehensive strategy — one which will bring together all the groups who specialize in drug-related areas so that a co-ordinated, pro-active response can be developed. This strategy must be underpinned by an education-awareness programme to make children and young people wise to the dangers of drugs and the consequences of drug abuse. Teachers, youth groups, community leaders and groups, parents, reformed addicts, doctors, police, churches and statutory agencies have all a major role to play in the battle to win hearts and minds.

Drugs have ruined the lives of too many of the finest young people in Northern Ireland, and the focus for all of us must be on achieving a drugs-free society. Traffickers must be rigorously pursued, and appropriate sentences imposed. The RUC drugs squad, along with customs officials, has played a major role and deserves praise for its efforts.

I support the motion.

**Mr McMichael:** I want to make a preliminary comment as I know how the media in this country work. In the light of some of the comments made earlier, I have no doubt that newspapers will put it out that paramilitaries are involved in drugs and stuff like that. As a representative of a party that is associated with Loyalist paramilitary organizations involved in the peace process, I want to make it clear that using and dealing in drugs are always reprehensible. Those who are involved and those who give cover should suffer the full rigour of the law. Any member of a paramilitary organization who sells drugs is a parasite inflicting misery and despair on his own community. He has no belief, loyalty or patriotism.

It is acknowledged that the drug problem is less serious in Northern Ireland than in other areas of the United Kingdom, though there is conjecture about the reasons. Some claim that this is due partly to police activity and the difficulty of access. Most of the substances used in Northern Ireland are soft drugs, but let us make no mistake about the fact that the

practice is widespread. It occurs in every town, regardless of religious, political or social barriers.

Talk of soft drugs almost gives the impression that these substances are less dangerous than the so-called hard drugs. There are differences. In Northern Ireland the most widely used substances are cannabis and Ecstasy. Cannabis is a class B drug. It produces psychological but not physical dependence. It is harmful, and it encourages people to move on to the next stage — Ecstasy, which is a class A drug. Ecstasy too produces psychological but not physical dependence, and there are greater health dangers — overdosing and toxins.

The next stage, of course, is the hard drugs — cocaine, heroin, crack, and so on. I suppose we should be thankful that Northern Ireland has not reached that stage, though these substances can be found on the streets, as police seizures have shown.

Several Members have referred to the rave culture. I too condemn the entirely irresponsible remarks of Brian Harvey of East 17. How many thousands of young people went out after hearing those comments and bought Ecstasy? There is a feeling that Ecstasy may be on the way out. But what is on the way in? That is the danger. It is addiction — in the case of crack, instant addiction — that we should be afraid of. The problem could become uncontrollable.

This is the time for action. If the use of crack, cocaine and heroin becomes widespread it will be a question of managing the problem, rather than eradicating it. One has only to look at inner-city areas in the Irish Republic, Great Britain and especially the United States, which has the greatest drugs problem in the world, though it has almost been overtaken by the Russian Federation.

The problem in Northern Ireland is minuscule in comparison with what is happening in other regions of the United Kingdom and internationally. Even so, the resources that are being provided are entirely inadequate. How could we deal with a really serious situation? What thought has been given to this by the people who control the purse strings and those who will be expected to deal with it? Shaftesbury Square Hospital — the only treatment facility in Northern Ireland — is entirely inadequate. Two years ago there was talk of its being closed. Where would we be without it? How many facilities will we need in 10 years' time?

Enforcement of the law depends on detection. For several years the police have been doing a very good prevention job in schools and other places.

The police and other enforcement agencies must target those who supply or encourage the use of drugs. Some people think that locking up the users would solve the problem. That is not the case. The dealers will always find new customers. Those at the top of the tree must be taken out of society.

We need a wider and better police network involving the RUC, the Garda in the Irish Republic and other forces in the United Kingdom, Europe and further afield. More resources are required for this purpose. Mr Foster referred to the increase in the size of the drugs squad. That body's activities are still centred in Donegall Pass. In Lisburn there were eight officers;

now there are two liaison personnel to deal with a population of about 100,000. That is entirely inadequate. The operation should be decentralized.

The Health Promotion Agency is now concentrating on education, with facilities like the Dunlewey Substance Advice Centre. Groups like PANDA offer counselling to people who are dependent, and there are other bodies in the voluntary sector. The youth service is trying to provide information through the YMCA and other youth organizations, and schools are doing their bit.

Some local authorities are doing very little. I tried to push an initiative through the Lisburn Council a couple of years ago, and that authority, in association with Lisburn Safer Towns, made a limited effort. But there is a lack of understanding among councillors. Many of them would not know an E from aspirin.

We need a co-ordinated strategy and more Government money. But most important to the victims is support in their own community. There is a gap. Community groups that understand what is going on have drug issues very high on their agenda. That should be the case at all levels.

Drugs are a problem that must be addressed seriously but not in panic. It should be recommended that 99% of all substance-related deaths can be traced to alcohol and tobacco.

*The meeting was suspended at 12.58 pm and resumed at 2.05 pm.*

**Ms Sagar:** This subject has been covered exhaustively today, but I have a few comments to make.

We must be realistic. Youth is youth, and that is part of the problem. Like most children, I tried smoking when I was young. Unfortunately, I did not stop. My reasons for trying cigarettes were similar to those of today's youth for trying drugs. The only information young people are given is that drugs are not good for them. With more knowledge, they might behave differently.

The courts must take a stronger line. Pushers should be imprisoned. The police, schools and various agencies have done a marvellous job, but more co-operation is needed. Today we heard Dr Hayes talking about prevention, and McMichael has just said that we need to stop certain things before they get out of hand. The drugs situation is not as bad here as in the rest of the United Kingdom, so we have a golden opportunity. We should not just wait around for a solution.

But we have a problem — the Government, who have cut the education and health budgets. The RUC has been given more funds, but only to deal with terrorism. One wonders where those resources are coming from. We need preventive measures. Children must be shown that this is not the way forward. There are better ways of getting a "buzz". Some people make light of the situation by using words like "fix" and "trip". I would hate to be the parent or wife of a drug user. It is not much fun watching somebody kill himself slowly.

Sometimes, indeed, it happens rather quickly. Education is the only way to solve this problem.

The youth of today like to try all kinds of things, but I am sure that most of them would avoid drugs if they were better informed. The police, schools and various agencies must be given more funds for prevention. We do not want Northern Ireland to end up like the South of Ireland, parts of Great Britain or Holland. Young people cannot be blamed for experimenting. We must, however, find ways of getting them to go in another direction. There are lots of evil things in life, but they are more tempting when somebody says "Don't do it" without giving any reasons.

We welcome the motion and its broad approach. Drugs give rise to school problems, broken relationships, crime and even death. We need funds for proper education. The problem could get out of hand.

**Mr Hussey:** For a long time people have been abusing drugs, as a great deal of literature indicates or implies. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle hints at the "brilliant" Holmes, and there are the less covert references in Jekyll and Hyde, which may say something about our fear of the horrific changes that can result from drug abuse.

Let us make no mistake about the fact that the so-called drug culture permeates every community — urban or rural, large or small. Many Members have come across it in the course of constituency work. Mr Gibson and I know very well how serious the problem can be in a rural community. In my area, the Giles family has been affected most tragically.

The statistics produced by those who compile the register of drug addicts, by the RUC drugs squad and by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise indicate growing abuse. Children in primary schools are being offered drugs, and the problem can increase as they enter the sometimes-rebellious teenage years. Perhaps as many as 50% of children in secondary schools have been approached at some time.

Mr Hugh Smyth referred to the illusion of soft drugs. Those who make such claims should know that the drugs squad say that as the use of Ecstasy increases, so does the use of other drugs, particularly LSD and speed. As others have said, if Ecstasy and other drugs were to disappear they would probably be replaced.

The causes of drug abuse are many, varied and interrelated, and the approach to the problem must take account of that fact. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, in its conclusions and recommendations, highlights the need for co-ordination and more delegation. The danger, I believe, is that some aspects of the problem would not be correctly addressed. However, specialization would lead to increased professionalism.

When the Central Co-ordinating Group for Action against Drugs was set up in 1995 someone said

"To bring together our own thoughts would we, perhaps, like a co-ordinated approach to tackling drugs by our Government Departments in Northern Ireland and the agencies, boards, voluntary and other organizations which relate to them? Would we like to raise the profile of central-government machinery to combat drug abuse and to improve the research and information base available to it? Would we like consideration of the

need for resources for the specific purpose of tackling the drugs problem? Would we like to drive forward and build upon the proposed action emerging from the policy statement of the Northern Ireland Committee on Drug Abuse?"

This body is chaired by the Minister of State and comprises senior officials from Northern Ireland Departments, with consultancy support and advice provided by the medical profession, the RUC and others as necessary. There is a mechanism for co-ordination. Sir John Wheeler is sitting on his hands. Let him come to the Forum and tell us why he is not doing what he was asked to do.

I support the motion.

**Mr Casey:** I support the motion and whole-heartedly congratulate Mrs Robinson on the excellence of her presentation. I also agree with Mr McCartney — probably for the first time. Others have provided a good deal of statistical information, for which they are to be congratulated. There is no point in trying to reinvent the wheel, so I will confine myself to a few observations.

As Mrs Robinson pointed out, the consumption of alcohol, especially by young people, is no less serious than drug abuse. In this respect, I regard the sale of alcopops as a reprehensible way of making a profit. I agree that the penalties for drug dealing should be severe — long sentences of imprisonment and the sequestration of moneys and property. Some of the cash could be used to tackle the problems that arise from alcohol and drug abuse.

2.15 pm

I am concerned about the deterioration in the moral fabric of society as a result of substance abuse. Experimentation leads to addiction, and addiction leads to violent crime and to indiscipline in schools — to say nothing of gang wars involving drug dealers and their henchmen.

The report says that Northern Ireland is a success story, in that it has prevented drug abuse from reaching the same proportions as elsewhere, but that there is no room for self-congratulation. I agree that there is no room for complacency. The report says

"There should be more closely targeted research defining the extent of the illicit drugs problem, supported by reliable intelligence. The means of evaluating policy should be more directly linked to the discernible effect on the rate of use of drugs".

And it makes this most important point:

"A key element in the action to halt the dangerous trends in illicit drug use in Northern Ireland should be the more extensive involvement of local communities in the Government's anti-drug strategies".

I have been trying to get funding for drug and alcohol counselling in my community, but it is very difficult. There are only a few organizations in Northern Ireland that deal with the problem, and they are hampered by lack of resources. This is something to which the Government will have to pay attention if we are to contain the difficulties, never mind resolve them.

**Mr Tom Robinson:** I support the motion and agree with the points that have been made during the debate. There is probably not a single town or village in Northern Ireland that has escaped the scourge of drug peddlers.

I agree with the Member who said that this problem is no respecter of class or creed, though it appears that poor housing, lack of education and unemployment make people more vulnerable. Nobody can be sure that a member of his family could never become a victim.

In spite of additional police resources, the number of drug addicts and the quantities of drugs available continue to rise. An increasing number of young people are prepared to risk their lives. This is undoubtedly the most serious social problem of the past 10 to 15 years.

I talk to young people regularly. They say quite openly that drugs are available in many pubs and clubs. They will even name establishments where pushers operate.

This is a social problem that shows no sign of going away. Recent figures suggest that 2.5 million people in Britain take cannabis. That is alarming. The situation may be worse in other parts of the United Kingdom and in other European countries, but we have no room for complacency. What is happening elsewhere will inevitably come to Northern Ireland unless there is a drastic change in sentencing. The godfathers are deliberately wrecking the lives of young people. They are the scum of the earth, and no sentence is too severe for them.

Some countries take a much tougher line: pushers simply get a bullet in the back of the head. I do not advocate that, but I believe that penalties should be much more severe. Life in gaol is too easy. I am in favour of capital punishment for crimes of this sort.

International co-operation is vital, particularly with regard to cultivation. Publicity and education are also important. The community at large has a moral obligation to tackle the problem. Whatever resources are required must be made available. One thinks of the billions of pounds of lottery money being spent on fanciful schemes.

I am not convinced that everything possible is being done or that the courts are taking a hard enough line.

**Mr Shannon:** I too support the motion, which deals with a serious problem that affects young people and their parents.

Ask the adults of tomorrow what they consider to be their biggest worries and they will tell you that drugs rank with education and job prospects. Easy availability is one of the great problems. Other Members have referred to the substances that are used.

All parents are aware of the need to talk to their children. I sometimes wonder what dangers my boys will have to face in the future. Education is one means of protection. Some time ago I attended a seminar in Newtownards. The participants included former drug users, community representatives and members of the police force. It is important that all these

groups be involved. It is all very well for us to say that drugs are not glamorous, but to people on a high, they are. It is afterwards that depression sets in.

At the Newtownards seminar two former addicts told their stories. One of them went with a friend to his first rave or disco. The friend said "Give me a fiver and we will buy a joint and share it." He replied "No way. I would not get involved in that." But the next time he tried a joint, and it was all downhill after that. He ended up stealing from his parents, brother, sisters and friends. He was in the gutter before he realized what was happening.

It is not enough for a police officer or some official to give talks in school assembly halls; the drugs culture can be more effectively de-glamorized by former addicts.

2.30 pm

Young people are very concerned about their image. They must do what their peers are doing. Several Members have mentioned the East 17 star. People who have lost children are very angry with him. Despite his statement, youngsters die.

It is estimated that about a million Ecstasy tablets are consumed in Northern Ireland each year. Parents must look out for the tell-tale signs of drug use — mood swings, affected speech, the appearance of the eyes, eating or sleeping habits, a new circle of friends. Shortage of money or certain objects in clothes can also be a sign.

In the borough of Newtownards, there have been 18 arrests, 34 seizures and 32 house searches in the past 12 months. Substantial quantities of drugs have been seized, and a number of people are on remand. A drugs unit has been set up. Its activities include undercover operations. The dealers in death are motivated by greed. They must be caught, for they do not give a damn about the consequences for the consumers.

I quote one parent who lost a child to drugs:

"We both expect her to walk in the door. It is impossible to understand what it is like to lose a child unless it happens to you. It feels like a part of yourself is missing. There is an emptiness that nothing will fill. We would give all we own just to hear her laugh again, to talk to her even for an hour. I did not know it was possible to suffer so much pain and grief. We will never get over losing our daughter, but we have to live with it. We have no worries about our other girls."

There are two other daughters.

"They have learned of the horrors in a way other children in Northern Ireland never will — by having watched their sister die, because she was in a coma for three days."

The Government and the courts must use all their powers to make the pushers amenable. We need long sentences and an effective advertising campaign. Former addicts should be used to warn of the dangers, and the police must adopt a pro-active approach. I congratulate the RUC on its efforts and wish it further success.

The parent to whom I referred a moment ago said

"There is an emptiness that nothing will fill."

Let the message go out loud and clear from this Forum that drugs have no place in society. It will take a concerted effort from parents, children and the police to deal with this serious problem. Drugs kill, maim and destroy.

**Mr Robert John White:** I am glad to be able to report that our baby is 32. I will say nothing about the age of our eldest! I do have grandchildren, however, so I cannot just sign off.

Mr McCartney talked about profit. Profit makes the world go round, but it also makes the drugs go round.

Mr Foster took up the theme of the family. With regard to the motion, it might be a good idea to insert "parents and schools" before "the Government". And the inclusion of the word "abuse" may suggest that some types of drugs are respectable. Parents must be more vigilant and more ready to give advice and to show pleasure and, when necessary, displeasure.

There is no record of any young person being forced to take unwanted drugs. Children must be prepared to refuse. Both parents have a duty in this respect. The excellent little book 'Drugs' says

"What can I do as a parent?"

This is mainly a home problem. Parents must make it plain that they will not tolerate drugs. When that happens, statistics will be unnecessary.

**The Chairman:** Mrs Robinson made the point that alcohol is a drug. Last week Mr Calvert pointed out that do-it-yourself booze kits can produce up to 1.5 litres of alcohol for less than £1.

**Mrs Beattie:** Following a major survey last week, the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland has revealed that Ulster schoolchildren as young as 10 are being offered drugs. The survey found that 15% of children have been offered drugs or solvents and that 13% have been tempted to experiment. Young people are most at risk, but adults are a significant and increasing group. No community can regard itself as isolated from the problem.

Some young people in Northern Ireland are coming to regard the use of party drugs, such as cannabis, as normal, and there is convincing evidence of acceptance of drugs as a feature of everyday life. It is not that most people take them, but they are there to tempt the weak.

I call for a more co-ordinated approach from the Government and their agencies, and I hope that the RUC will continue to extend its community education programmes and that an urgent review of sentencing will be undertaken.

I support this motion.

**Mr McFarland:** The subject of drugs is indeed complex. Are we talking about alcohol and cigarettes, or are we discussing “mothers’ little helpers”? Are we talking about the large number of people who take addictive sleeping pills and sedatives such as Valium, Mogadon and Diazepam, or are we addressing illegal drugs such as cannabis, cocaine, heroin and their derivatives?

More than a million people in the United Kingdom are addicted to sedatives. Each year approximately 100,000 die from nicotine-related illness, about 10,000 die as a result of alcohol abuse, but fewer than 300 are killed by illegal drugs. Nicotine and alcohol have been with us for hundreds of years, so, despite the evidence, they are seen as less of a threat. Because of media attention and the fact that illegal drugs are attractive to young people, these substances are perceived as a major danger. It is unlikely that anyone under 50 does not know somebody who uses or has used drugs.

The consumption of drugs used to be confined to the adventurous few. However, recent years have seen two trends. First, criminal gangs across the world have discovered that vast fortunes can be made from dealing in drugs, and these are now well organized. Secondly, and more seriously, large numbers of young people have embraced a culture which sees little danger and a good deal of pleasure in taking drugs. The culture is now endemic in many schools in Great Britain and will spread here.

Peer pressure is an important factor in the spread of this culture. I am thinking, for instances, of magazines and of the pop and fashion scenes. Members with school-age children should look at the record bags in which the youngsters carry school-books — these are very popular at the moment — and at the motifs on their jackets. These may include innocuous names — Eclipse, Spliffy, Herbie — and pictures of men with spiked hair wandering along with what look like cigarettes in their hands. Parents may not be aware, but children know, that these are advertisements for drugs. Such bags are banned in schools throughout England.

More and more young people are taking drugs. There is a direct link between this and the increase in crime. A recent ‘Panorama’ programme described how young people may need up to £100 a day to sustain the habit. This necessitates stealing from shops and houses. North Down has an increasing problem with drugs and burglary. Apart from the efforts of international enforcement agencies and the excellent work of the RUC drug squad under Supt Sheehy, what can be done to reduce the trend? Mr Hugh Smyth suggested training and liaison abroad. I can assure him that there is a good deal of that already. I do not know how many Members have seen the publication ‘Solvents: A Guide to Parents’ or the booklet about how pub and club licensees can identify pushers. The difficulty is that people tend not to get involved unless they encounter the problem directly.

We are currently concentrating on people between 11 and 16 — the age group in which most glue-sniffing and experimenting with so-called soft drugs occur. But I am afraid we are too late. Recent studies have shown that, through pop culture and fashion, these youngsters are already infused with the drug culture. We need to target between six and 10 with the message about the dangers.

The Select Committee identified the need to co-ordinate the drive against drugs. I support this move. In addition, the police must be given more resources to deal with the pushers, and the schools have a part to play.

I support the motion.

2.45 pm

**Mr Eric Smyth:** I have listened patiently to many views. I belong to one of those families who have been through it and therefore know what it is all about. It is wrong to say that we should get at children when they are young. Obviously youngsters must be taught right and wrong, but that is what they are — youngsters. We were all told not to smoke, but we smoked. We were warned what not to do when we were out with girls, but many fell into the trap and ended up with babies, human nature being what it is. Drug-taking is not necessarily an indication of failure on the part of parents. My children were brought up properly. Some people say "He is always on about the paramilitaries." There is a reason. I hate them because they are liars and deceivers. They say that they are not involved, but they are.

Let me tell the true story about my sons. They were led astray by the paramilitaries. One of them was lifted when he was in a car with three of these people. The police were more than gracious and helpful to my family. They had been tipped off by the paramilitaries. When they stopped the car they were very surprised to find my son with three members of a paramilitary organization. He was not a member, but the car was registered in his name. What a foolish young man.

I completely support the law in dealing with drugs-related and other crime. I have always made it clear where I stand on these issues. The paramilitaries hate me so much that they are trying to damage my home.

In the case of my third son, I received a phone call when I was Lord Mayor. The police came to the city hall and named the boys concerned. These young men had suddenly come on the scene and would go out for a few drinks. When I told my son that the police were able to tell me where they had been and what they had been doing he did not believe me. Only when I took him to the police station did he waken up to what was happening.

I do not believe those who tell us that the paramilitaries are not involved. I know for a fact that the top dealer was threatened because he was not sending them enough money. It is about time Forum Members stopped being hypocrites. They should waken up and stop nursing these people. If we are serious when we say that we want to deal with this problem let us name the people concerned.

I no longer go to meetings of committees whose purpose is liaison with the police, for the very people who are making big money from drugs are there. The police know who they are but do not lift them. Let us have less hypocrisy. Let the RUC lift the top people. The police confirmed the names I had, but those people are still walking the streets. Until the dealers are taken out of society, the problem will continue to grow.

It was heartbreaking to see my sons in court. Nobody knows what my wife and I went through. And we watched other good parents of good children going the same way. Those youngsters too were trapped and did time in gaol. My son was told to shut his mouth. He was told that if he talked, his family outside would be seen to. I am not frightened for my life. I could not care less. They can shoot me tomorrow — maybe one day they will — but my trust is in the Lord and I will not stand by.

I want honesty from this Forum. Let the Government stop pussy-footing and nail these people. Ministers do not want to upset the peace process. But we all know that the peace process will fall on its face. There is no way we can have peace on the backs of the violence of evil and corrupt men. It will not happen. There will be peace only when honest, upright politicians get together and talk.

Someone said that drug dealers should face the death sentence. If that were the case my two sons would be dead. In fact, they are now reformed and working, having learned a bitter lesson. Some people learn from their mistakes. People can change. My sons now feel guilty about putting the lives of young children in danger. That is what concerned me.

Certain people are just using the Forum; they are not interested in society at all. Every day, worried parents come to my home on the Shankill Road. I say to them "Unless you are willing to name names — and I will stand by you — there is nothing we can do." But they are too frightened to speak out. I would love the police to do a survey to find out how many businesses on the Shankill Road go by names other than those of their owners. Businesses that were bought with illegal money — money from drugs and other forms of racketeering — are being made legal.

We must stop debating and get to grips with this serious problem. We demand that the Government take action. If the police can confirm what I have said today why are the Prime Minister, Sir Patrick Mayhew and others in the Northern Ireland Office not prepared to take action? They are as guilty as others when a child dies or becomes seriously ill.

Apparently a survey indicated that between 80% and 90% of the money wasted in the health service is accounted for by injuries that are caused by assaults or traffic accidents due to the abuse of drink.

Licensed premises are going to open seven days a week and have extra opening hours. It is said that this will help to solve the problem, but we all know that it will only increase drinking and cause more poverty among mothers and children such as I deal with every day as a pastor. I often wonder why the Government will not have a referendum. I reckon that many people who take a drink want these places to be kept closed on Sunday and curtailed during the week.

**Mr Tom Robinson:** I want to make it clear that my reference to the death penalty was in the context of remarks about the godfathers behind the scenes who import drugs. I realize that people get caught up, but those I was referring to deserve the death penalty.

**Mr Eric Smyth:** I accept that.

**Mr Jim Rodgers:** As one who works with young people in one of the most socially deprived parts of Belfast, if not Northern Ireland, I support this motion. In 1990 the managers of several training schemes across the religious divide in North and West Belfast came together to express concern at the behaviour of many people between 16 and 18 and about absenteeism. Having come to the conclusion that the problem was to do with drugs and solvent abuse, we went to the local Belfast action team and explained our dilemma. We needed money to tackle the problem. But local police chiefs said that there was no real evidence of drug-taking amongst teenagers. We tried to tell them that aggressive and threatening behaviour indicated otherwise.

*3.00 pm*

The BAT organization agreed to fund a pilot project, which became known as Opportunity Youth. It was funded for three years, but, regrettably, that ended last March. Since then we have been attempting to get someone to keep the programme going. The Training and Employment Agency was told that it was needed throughout the province. It was not only making people aware of drug and solvent abuse but also targeting kids who were sampling drink, gambling, sex and smoking — and we all know how smoking can damage health. The results were amazing.

Some of the young people in my training organization and others still take drugs. When we try to find out why, they give various reasons: just to try them, to look grown-up, to take a risk, because friends use them, because they are offered by friends, because they have had a few drinks, just to show off.

Up to a third of all young people in Northern Ireland are believed to have tried drugs. We understand that the situation here is entirely different from that in Great Britain or the Republic of Ireland. In this province the most commonly used illegal drugs are cannabis, LSD, solvents, Ecstasy and magic mushrooms. I know of two brilliant young people who lost their lives in the past few years. One of them was found hanging from his bedroom door; the other was found on waste ground close to his home.

I am not sure that the Government are doing enough to tackle the problem. The Health Committee of the Forum should invite those who are trying to prevent young people from taking drugs to give evidence. Mr Hussey referred to the local co-ordination network. The £250,000 per annum allocated to that project is chicken-feed. I am not sure whether it is the answer. We, as public representatives, need to know more about it.

Some children bring substances home, but their parents do not know. When young people are on the dance-floor their drinks are laced with drugs. As Mr McFarland said, we need to try to tackle the problem at a much earlier age.

Seven years ago, when we expressed concern as managers of community-based training organizations, we were laughed at. Some weeks ago I referred to the problem of AIDS, which, I understand, is on the increase in Northern Ireland. This trend is worrying health chiefs, but it too is being brushed under the carpet. We all have a major responsibility. It is not just children in working-class districts or areas of high unemployment or places where there has been a lot of paramilitary activity who are at risk; the problem affects all

classes and creeds. Shame, disgrace and anger have been in many homes when the police have arrived to say that a son or daughter is being questioned about drug-pushing.

All of us have this major responsibility. It is not easy, and it will not go away, but the Forum should do more. Again I ask the Health Committee to seek the views of all those who are trying to prevent the use of drugs.

**The Chairman:** I am not sure if the Chairman of the Health Committee is here, but Mrs Parkes, as Vice-Chairperson, will no doubt take note of that suggestion.

**Mr Calvert:** I am grateful, Mr Chairman, for your comment about my remarks during last week's debate, in which I said more about alcoholism than about drugs.

Drink and drugs are two of the greatest curses young people have to face. I believe that alcohol is just as much a drug as are other substances, and a mixture is even worse.

A number of years ago, during my annual trip to the Tourist Trophy races in the Isle of Man in June, I saw a young man sniffing glue. Watching him staggering on the beach and then being taken away by a policeman, I thought "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

I commend the man who recently challenged drug dealers in the Currynierin housing estate in Londonderry. He was given a warning to leave the area within 48 hours, but his neighbours held a protest, and he has said that he will not be intimidated out. We need many more brave men like that.

What drugs can do to young lives must be highlighted by every possible means. We need more officers in the RUC drug squad, more public meetings and especially more visits to schools, both primary and secondary. A recent survey of the health behaviour of schoolchildren shows that, although 86.1% of first-, third- and fifth-form pupils claim never to have used drugs or solvents, 9% were current users in 1994 and about 5% had stopped. Of the 9%, 5% said that they used substances most days, 20% reported weekly use, and 25% monthly at least. According to a crime survey, 20% of adults — 23% of men; 16% of women — admit having taken at least one type of drug. There are more males than females among the 96 registered drug addicts in Northern Ireland. Drug misuse cuts across all age, sex and social barriers. Some of it is related to unemployment and deprivation, but problems are to be found even where there is considerable prosperity. No community can regard itself as immune.

The survey shows that the police believe that people linked to the paramilitaries are trafficking in drugs or are organizing protection at raves. This is contrary to what Mr Hugh Smyth and Mr McMichael have said. Peddlers and drug-pushers are ruining the lives of young people. The godfathers of both drugs and terrorism must be put behind bars. But there is scope for active co-operation in areas other than law enforcement. I commend Lisburn Safer Towns for its drive against drugs, and Lisburn Borough Council for the part that it has played.

Some doctors prescribe far too many anti-depressants. We all sometimes feel a bit low, but dependence on drugs is a bad example to young people.

I support the motion.

**Mr Maginnis:** I apologize for my late arrival. My activities today have been dominated by the visit to Northern Ireland of the Chairman of the Millennium Commission.

I am not going to go over ground that I am sure has been very adequately covered by others who have spoken about this difficult problem that faces society as we approach the new millennium. There is little doubt, as several of us discovered at the Select Committee of the House of Commons, that we are in a threatening situation. Strangely, one of the reasons the drugs problem here has not reached the epidemic proportions that are known in major conurbations in Great Britain and in places like Dublin, Limerick and Galway is the fear of the paramilitary organizations over the last 25 years, or thereabouts, that if drugs or alcohol were allowed to dominate those on whom they depended, their terrorist activities would be put at risk. That is little comfort to us, but with the awareness that terrorism must come to an end, people who are involved peripherally will want to exploit a new and very profitable area of illegal activity.

Terrorism has created logistics. It has established routes, not just within Northern Ireland but in Great Britain; on the continent and in north Africa. These can be exploited for trafficking in drugs as easily as for trafficking in arms and explosives. It is therefore important that the Royal Ulster Constabulary have adequate resources for drugs prevention, including education. It is necessary to get to the root of the problem.

In Supt Kevin Sheehey we have an officer particularly adept at handling this problem. He has thought deeply about it and is dedicated to ensuring that Northern Ireland does not sink deeper into the quagmire. It is incumbent upon the Police Authority and every other relevant body and, of course, upon the Chief Constable as an individual to ensure that the necessary resources and support are available. Resources, whether for policing or for hospital services, are finite.

3.15 pm

I am sure that the Chief Constable will get the message that the elected representatives of the people of Northern Ireland will support whatever action is necessary to tackle the problem at source and to co-operate with other European police forces. There is European money to be bid for. We think about funds for industrial development and for community development. Well, this is a community problem. If we can get that message across today we will, I believe, have the support of society in general.

It is important that we should not just lick our wounds and lament social deterioration but tackle the problem with single-mindedness.

**The Chairman:** I call on Mrs Robinson to wind up.

**Mrs I Robinson:** Mr McAlister —

**The Chairman:** Is Mr McAlister still here? I am sorry.

**Mr McAlister:** Yes, I am still here, along with my DUP Colleagues and a majority of the Ulster Unionist Members. However, despite the importance of this debate, the representatives of certain parties, although they spoke, are now absent. The smaller parties may have difficulties, but it is incredible that something comes up every Friday afternoon — something so important that they must leave the Forum. Members should be present to hear their comments being supported or kicked into touch. I do not know whether you, Mr Chairman, have any power to address this matter. We all know which parties are absent week after week. They should either be here or be able to give a very good excuse. It is deplorable.

**The Chairman:** Something that occurs to me after eight months or so is that Members — some more than others; I do not count myself, I am afraid, as being in the same league as those who were elected properly — represent a constituency and not just a party. In all constituencies there may be people who voted for other parties, such as the SDLP and Sinn Féin. You are entitled, as their representatives, to speak for them. Those who come here, in my view — it is a personal view since, as you all know, I do not have much authority — represent the areas in which they stood and won. A Member is entitled to speak for the whole constituency, and not just for people representative of his or her party.

So, to the extent that I follow your train of thought, Mr McAlister, I have to say that as Members represent all their constituents they should be here and should participate.

**Mr McCartney:** Mr Chairman, may I, in the light of what you have said, which I fully endorse, make the point that your remarks are subject to this qualification: that the three parties concerned did not achieve the election of a single Member.

**A Member:** Alliance as well.

**Mr McCartney:** I have to say that Alliance does not normally fall into this category, though I am not noted as a rabid defender of that party. The representatives of the three parties to which I think Mr McAlister was specifically referring are here not by reason of having been elected but by reason of the top-up system, which, for particular purposes, was designed to get at least two parties into the Forum — a bizarre and Caliban form of election.

**Mr Hussey:** I find fault with the media too. Reporters come here in the morning, get their sound-bite and go. Some Members try to attract media attention in that way.

**Mr McAlister:** I want to thank my Colleague Mrs Robinson for the sterling job she did in introducing the motion, whose wording is very acceptable, and in outlining the problem. Her speech was graced by those of other Members throughout the day. While I do not intend to go over many of the interesting points that they made, there are a few items which must be touched upon.

I agree with what others have said about the irresponsible media coverage of this week. Let us hope that the newspapers concerned will take our comments to heart. Journalists have a certain amount of freedom, but when they run rampant the community suffers.

During the week I discussed this very problem with the public relations officer of Ards Borough Council because quite soon — God willing — Cllr Shannon and I will be bringing forward some proposals on drugs. The PR officer and I talked about how to get the message across to the widest possible range of people. With regard to the generation gap — and she is only 28 — she said “I have a problem with my 18-year-old sister. I am only 10 years older, yet I do not understand what she is doing.” How much harder is it for us, who are generally middle-aged, to understand? *[Laughter]* I generalize, Mr Chairman.

**The Chairman:** Yes, be careful.

**Mr McAlister:** Some will be very happy about that description; some will not. I use it loosely.

To understand the mind of a teenager I try honestly to put myself in his shoes. My Colleague Mr Eric Smyth, who — perhaps more than most — has met this problem face on, said a very true thing: “We have a situation that is so different from when I was a teenager.” Most people here came from a loving home — perhaps very simple or very poor, but normal: mother, father, brothers and sisters. There was love and there was care.

Like many other Members I was involved in youth organizations. My teenage culture revolved around my church, the scouting movement and the cadets. We were looking for life, but we were looking for it in the right places. Rev Sammy Workman, who has dealt with many drug problems and many young people, said “This is the problem with young people today: they are looking for the right thing, but they are looking for it in the wrong place.” It is natural that young people want to expand their minds. They want to experiment. They want to know what life is about. They are going through that difficult, rebellious stage which, if we are honest, we will admit we all went through to some degree.

How much have things changed? We have single-parent families, and we have a drug culture. When I was a boy the only drugs in our house were Mrs Cullen’s powders, and we got those, with hot lemonade, only if we had flu or something like that. I remember my father coming home with a headache. Apart from the powders, my mother may have soaked a cloth in vinegar and put it on his brow — simple things. Today, the bathroom or kitchen cabinet in the average home is full of drugs. No one denies that these can be very useful, but we do live in a drug culture.

Recently, my daughter, who works with young offenders, told me about a young chap who, like many others, was incarcerated because of crime-related drug problems. At home, his mother popped pills continually. In fact, when social-services people and police went to search the house they found carrier bags full of all sorts of drugs. The mother had heard that there was to be an attempt to tighten up on the issue of ordinary drugs by physicians. Fearing that, she falsely used relatives’ names and, throughout the area, obtained enough drugs to keep her going for the next 20 years. The police carried out supermarket shopping bags full of drugs. That is the culture in which a young fellow was brought up. And such stories can be told again and again.

Young people are not responsible for what they are born into, and we must have an understanding of their culture. When they go to raves the clothes they wear, the music they listen to, the drugs they take and the drink they consume are all part of the scene, part of the process of identifying with others. We must do all that we can at an earlier age to channel all that enthusiasm positively. It would be simple to say that if young people had better homes and were more interested in their church or an organization these things would not happen, but the reality is that that culture is not there today. However, we have got to do what we can for the future. We must build a better culture for young people.

3.30 pm

Then there is the question of supply. A Member has said that links are made here and there throughout the world. I want to relate another story but to preface it by saying that you cannot judge a book by its cover. Two friends of mine — both RUC men — are in the same motorcycle club as myself. One of them is so keen that he is a motorcycle patrol man. Two years ago the pair went to continental Europe. Of course, they had the leather gear — which is why I talked about not judging a book by its cover. They pulled into a roadside cafe in Holland, and the waiter brought their coffee. The first question he asked was “Do you want any drugs?” Of course, being good police officers, they said “Well, what have you got for sale?” He replied “I can get you anything you like.” So they went through the list. No problem. He said “What about quantities?” No problem. Thinking that they were bikers of the usual type, he assumed that they would be into drugs. They reported the affair to the authorities. Whether anything happened I do not know, but I do know that it is easy to get drugs.

**Mr McFarland:** Drugs are, of course, legal in Holland. Cafés there and in parts of Belgium are full of them. We had a major problem of military people travelling from Germany to Holland at weekends to pick up drugs. So it is not surprising that the policemen came across in that way.

**Mr McAlister:** That is exactly the point I was coming to. We must do something on an international scale. It is not just a question of doing what is right here. Everyone agrees about tougher sentencing and increased resources for the police — whatever is required — but we must nip the problem in the bud. There must be more co-operation in Europe and throughout the world.

This week the head of the Drug Enforcement Agency of the United States said this of the problem in Northern Ireland:

“I hope you will move now to nip it in the bud before it becomes like America.”

He went on to relate the problems that increased substance abuse has brought about. Someone holding up a supermarket may be so full of drugs that seven rounds will not kill him. It is dreadful.

That is what is ahead of us if we do not do something now. There is no doubt that we will head into harder drugs. If it were not so, this would be the only such place in the world.

The problem came to light with our return to a normal society. The reduced police and Army presence has made it easier for those involved to do their dastardly work.

I must reinforce what many Members have said about paramilitary involvement. Here, I refer again to those who made certain comments but are not present to hear the facts. I quote from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee's 1996-97 report on drugs in Northern Ireland:

"Dunlewey substance advice centre noted that over the past five years the rapid growth and availability of illicit drugs in Northern Ireland coincided with the effects of a very successful RUC anti-racketeering programme, which were being felt by the paramilitary organizations, and that terrorist operations were now being supported by the drug trade."

This morning Mr Smyth talked, as he often does, about the common people, about the people of the Shankill Road — as if we were all middle-class and had never been there. I have here a report from a community group based in the Stadium — the very people that the Member so often talks about, saying that he knows how they feel. Here is what they say:

"The drugs trade is a thriving business in Northern Ireland, with anything up to 500% profit being made on any investment. Because of this it attracts all sorts of people as dealers. They would vary from petty criminals to respectable businessmen. However, the majority of all illicit drugs for sale in the province will, at some stage, attract the attention of the paramilitaries, who will put their own tax or levy — usually around 20% at least — on the dealer who makes the sale. This payment from the drug dealer will not only ensure that the paramilitary group in question turns a blind eye to their activities, but also guarantees them protection from rival drug gangs or dealers, or would-be robbers, who would see drug dealers as easy targets."

Of course, the paramilitaries themselves are all deeply involved in dealing.

"This is generally carried out in unlicensed drinking dens, such as the band hall on the Donegall Road, where Margaret Wright was brutally murdered on Easter Tuesday 1994. The band hall has since been demolished, but at this time it was reported that up to £7,500 a week was being made from the sale of illicit drugs, including cannabis and Ecstasy, from this particular den run by paramilitaries."

There is no question that paramilitaries are deeply involved. It is offensive to me and to many others that they are given such esteem by the Secretary of State. This underlines again the need for a rethink from those in power about the whole situation here.

This is a problem that we all — councillors, Forum Members, parents — share to some degree, though maybe not in the personal way of my Colleague Mr Smyth. It will be solved only if the Government, the police, the statutory authorities, every parent and every child work together.

I fully support this very worthwhile motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

This Forum expresses grave concern at the alarming rise of drug abuse in this community; calls for a more co-ordinated approach from the Government and its agencies, coupled with a more effective educational programme; and urges that greater resources be made available and that an urgent review of drug-related sentencing be undertaken.

### FORUM CHAMBER (SCHOOLS EVENT)

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** Members are aware that a young people's forum for peace and reconciliation will be held in this Chamber next Tuesday. The Forum is very happy to support the event, and I was glad to be identified with that attitude. May I remind Members that the aim is to promote peace and reconciliation by giving young people an opportunity to engage in dialogue for mutual understanding. I am sure that we all endorse that objective fully and wish the participants every success.

However, I find it alarming that those who are responsible for organizing the event and the schoolchildren taking part thought it fit and proper to invite Mr Gerry Adams as a special guest. And a number of other prominent paramilitary and Republican activists will be sitting in this Chamber. I have no condemnation for the schoolchildren — indeed, I wish them well in their deliberations — but I have every condemnation for the schoolmasters and other organizers for believing that people of the calibre of Mr Adams have anything to contribute to peace and understanding.

While we cannot prevent this activity, I believe that the Forum should charge the Business Committee to ensure that we have some say in the form that such events take. The Hole in the Wall Gang will set the scene. That will be an opportunity to lampoon many Forum Members for their approach to the peace process. This does not alarm me, but I have to say that what started out as a very good idea — one endorsed by every Member — appears to be turning into a circus.

**The Chairman:** We discussed this matter in some detail at the Business Committee. I myself was surprised.

**Mr Cedric Wilson:** The list of guests includes many people who will be alarmed. For instance, I cannot imagine that Lord Alderdice will sit beside Mr Adams on Tuesday. Many guests were not aware of the identity of the others being invited.

**The Chairman:** I understand that. Let me be quite clear: these are people who will come to the public gallery as any Sinn Féin person or other member of the public may. That is what they have been invited to do. I am going to be there myself and will make quite a point of ensuring that there is no question of the youth forum being addressed by invited guests. That will not be allowed.

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** Like Mr Wilson, I was shocked by this invitation. I too was invited to the youth forum and was alarmed this morning at the notification that the leader of

the organization which has murdered more children and young people in this country than any other was pretending to have something to contribute to the lives of young people and, indeed, to the democratic process. Like most others, I will refuse to share any platform with that person. I hope that those organizing similar events realize that by including the pariah they will exclude ordinary, decent people.

**The Chairman:** I have considerable sympathy with this point. Those who were at the Business Committee yesterday heard my reaction. We felt that the Forum probably would not want us to disallow these young people because they had invited a particular person — somebody who will not be allowed to speak. But the message is loud and clear: if this is to be done again, we shall want the situation to be absolutely plain.

*The Forum was adjourned at 3.45 pm.*