

NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Friday 25 July 1997

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

FORUM: EXPLOSIVE DEVICE (POST)

The Chairman: You will know by now that yesterday morning a package was delivered here which contained a crude device designed to cause injury, if not death, to a Member. Thanks to the vigilance of the security staff, the device was made safe and no one was injured.

I want to express the Forum's thanks both to those who intercepted the package and to those who rendered it harmless. Indeed, I have been asked by Mr McCartney just now to express his personal gratitude to both the staff, whose vigilance prevented a serious incident, and the Army for their actions.

It is clear from this incident that we cannot afford to let our guard down. Please make sure that you remain vigilant at your places of work, here, and at home. The enemies of democracy have not gone away.

10.06 am

Mr Peter Robinson: It is important for us, Mr Chairman, to give very strong support to your remarks about the very evil attempt potentially to assassinate the Leader of the United Kingdom Unionist Party or to cause serious injury to him or any member of staff who might have come into contact with that device.

Mr McCartney is a Member of the Forum, and any attack on one of us is an attack on us all. He is a part of the democratic process in which we are all engaged, and an attack on any one of us is an attack on that process. I strongly concur with the remarks that you have made and would like to associate myself with your comments about the vigilance of the Forum staff and the skill of the security services who dealt with the package.

I was somewhat disturbed when I learned of the attitude of one Member of the Forum to this incident. It appears that at yesterday's Economy Committee meeting a Member from the Alliance Party thought that this was a matter that was worthy of his comment. We had a device which came into this building with the potential to kill, and when the Committee was

informed that this was not a hoax, but the genuine article, this Member suggested that it should be redirected to Mr McCartney because he was on holiday.

That kind of remark is an indication that there are those within the Chamber whose hatred of Unionists is such that they are prepared to concur with the acts of terrorists. It is a clear breach of the Mitchell principles, and I look to the leadership of the Alliance Party to deprecate that Member's remarks and to indicate that some disciplinary action will be taken against him.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr Robinson. I am glad that you endorsed what I said earlier. I must say that I have no knowledge of this alleged remark, though if somebody made such a comment it certainly sounds extremely improper. Have you got anything to say about this, Mr Neeson?

Mr Neeson: I was not at the Economy Committee, but, like yourself, Mr Chairman, and Mr Robinson, I deplore the attempt not only on the life of Mr McCartney but on the lives of the Forum staff and those Members who were in the building yesterday. I put this on public record yesterday because it is a very serious issue, especially as one had hoped that the days of such activities were over. While I share the scepticism of Members about the cease-fire, one hopes that it will in fact be the unequivocal cease-fire that the IRA has said it is.

It is important, in spite of the so-called cease-fires, that we remain very vigilant. That is the clear message contained in the paper given to us this morning. In spite of our differences on many issues, I have to say that Mr McCartney took a very principled stand on violence and on all paramilitary groups, and so I would like to take this opportunity to condemn what happened yesterday.

I also concur with you and Mr Robinson about the vigilance of the staff. There is no doubt that their vigilance helped prevent serious injury or even death, and I would certainly like it to go on record that the Alliance Party fully supports their vigilance and appreciates the work which they did yesterday on behalf of us all.

Mr Coulter: I am grateful for the opportunity to express the Ulster Unionist Party's support for what you, Mr Chairman, and other Members have said. Indeed, we are deeply indebted to the Forum staff for their vigilance. We appreciate all that they have done to ensure our safety.

May I add that we sincerely appreciate the very pleasant way in which they help us on so many different occasions and in so many different ways. Their professionalism is tremendous. We on the Ulster Unionist side sincerely thank them for all their help throughout our time here. I ask you, Sir, to convey our gratitude to them all.

This attack on the Forum, as Mr Robinson has said, is an attack on us all, and, indeed, it is symptomatic of the difficulties that we all face in attempting to bring about a truly democratic society and government in Northern Ireland. Surely at a time like this not only our own Government but those of the Irish Republic, the United States of America and other countries will see the difficulties that we face in dealing with those who speak of peace but at

the same time practise violence. It behoves us all, as you have said, to look after our own safety so that these people will not achieve their end in seeing the damage done.

Thank you, Sir, for your words, which we on this side of the Chamber support entirely.

Mr McMichael: Mr Chairman, may I endorse the sentiments and comments of those who have already spoken, including yourself. Over the past couple of months similar hoax devices have been sent to the DUP, the Unionist Party and the UDP, and now a device — whether from the same quarter I do not know — with the capacity to kill or maim has been sent to Mr McCartney. We have to deplore that, and we have to remind ourselves that we must remain on our guard, regardless of what is happening around us. It is very easy to drop your guard from time to time, but it is clear that there are people out there who, regardless of what else is happening, insist upon attempting to kill democrats. We should all be wary at this time because, I am quite sure, we have not seen the last of it.

PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

10.05 am

The Chairman: On a more positive note, I am delighted to say that Tony Worthington has agreed to meet a small delegation from Standing Committee B to discuss its report on pre-school education. This is a most welcome recognition of the kind of useful work that the Forum can do in its Committees, and I am very pleased to see signs that the new Administration are prepared to talk to us about issues such as education.

NORTHERN IRELAND ECONOMY

10.12 am

Mr Nesbitt: I beg to move the following motion:

That this Forum notes the report on evidence about the performance of the Northern Ireland economy given to Standing Committee E.

Perhaps, when the report goes out, the word “performance”, which has crept in, will not be in its title since this is not so much about the performance of the Northern Ireland economy as about evidence on aspects of the economy given to Standing Committee E. Certainly performance was considered to a certain degree, but the report is more about aspects of the economy than about its performance.

I would like to thank all the members of the Committee, including the Vice-Chairman, who is not here today, for their dedication and commitment during all the meetings that we had with the various representatives who came to give evidence on economic matters relevant to Northern Ireland. I also want to thank the secretariat for its support during our deliberations.

Let me draw particular attention at the outset to one aspect of this report. On page 5 it says

"This summary does not represent the position of the Committee but that of the evidence submitted by the various organizations."

So this is not our view as such but a distillation of the views of the various representatives who came to the Committee. And it is that evidence and those submissions that, for the remainder of the Forum — however long that may be — we plan to look at in greater detail, and it is on that that we will bring forward our thoughts and recommendations. Members will note that the first issue is long-term unemployment. We are currently looking at that.

Three of the themes that ran through the various submissions are political stability, consensual and co-ordinated economic management and the number of administrative and executive layers. These summarize a certain dimension that kept cropping up in the evidence given by representatives of the business community — the lack of stability and the lack of a democratic institution here that could co-ordinate and drive forward the economic dimension in Northern Ireland. And that is extremely relevant and topical with devolution for Wales being considered some days ago and with the launching yesterday of the White Paper on devolution for Scotland.

10.15 am

Let me look at that for a moment in the context of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland was — was, not is — viewed as unique, for many and varied reasons. Certainly it was viewed as unique because it needed a separate form of government, and it was the only part of the United Kingdom that had devolution of a substantive kind. Before I look at the economic matters, it is interesting to note in that context that yesterday, for the Conservative Opposition, Michael Ancram, a former Minister of State in Northern Ireland, in response to Labour's introduction of the White Paper said that this was a very dangerous document because it gave Nationalism incentive and encouragement to seek independence or to seek total separation from the United Kingdom. That was the Conservative perspective as indicated yesterday. One wonders how Conservatives can make that sort of statement in opposition and a totally different type of statement when they are in Government. However, that is by the way.

What are we actually talking about from an economic perspective? These business people were talking about devolution. There is, as they perceive it, a democratic deficit in Northern Ireland. They wish to see devolution — government devolved to the regions. Any form of government subordinate to Westminster is a form of devolved government whether it includes legislative powers or not. The basic difference between that and a federal system is that the powers devolved within a federal system cannot be taken back to the centre. In the United Kingdom context any power that is devolved can be taken back to the centre, at any time, as was seen in 1972. In one fell swoop, devolution was removed from Northern Ireland.

What did devolved institutions mean to Northern Ireland's economy? Certainly one could say that there was a co-ordinated effort at economic development. The decision-makers were close to the people whose economic well-being was affected. The

Minister of Commerce, as he was called — they were all “hes” then (we have to get our gender language correct) — could decide where an advance factory should be located. He could make an immediate decision on whether a particular grant should be given. There was co-ordination through one person, who was accountable to the electorate.

One of the problems with devolution which is very topical at the moment is whether or not from an economic point of view — and this is addressing the business community — we should have power to legislate. In the case of Scotland, a great amount of legislative power is envisaged. Legislative power is not envisaged for Wales. In addressing this dimension that permeates much of what the business community says, one must ask whether we should have the power to legislate in a subordinate situation. I do not answer the question — the jury is out. The Welsh Development Agency has created many thousands of jobs through a co-ordinated approach. It is not the power to legislate that brings jobs to a region of the United Kingdom. If we could legislate for employment we would never have an employment problem. So it is not so much the ability to legislate, as matters more central to that that we need from an economic point of view. This makes one wonder about the legislative aspect.

Should we be able to tax? In the Scottish situation, it will be possible to raise or lower tax by 3p. It is highly unlikely that it would be lowered by 3p, because that would probably mean less of a service. But a rise too would pose a problem. Any increase would be in the basic rate, and that could be detrimental to the less-well-off rather than to the better-off.

In Northern Ireland there is one thing that is very clear from an economic point of view, and devolution has to be very careful about it. When the Parliament at Stormont was set up, it was not assumed that it would have money transferred from the central Exchequer. It was assumed that people would live within their means and therefore for many years Northern Ireland was in a deficit situation. It was not until the 1960s — indeed, into the 1970s — that it overcame that problem. Northern Ireland, like Scotland at present, gets money based on need. “Based on need” means that there is more money spent per head of population in Northern Ireland and in Scotland than in England and Wales.

Would it be good, from an economic point of view, to eliminate the democratic deficit? It would be much better if decisions about whether or not to close hospitals or schools were made by politicians. They could opt to close a school and keep a hospital open, or vice-versa, or they could keep both open by raising taxes. This would certainly be a good thing from an economic point of view, if not from the total overall point of view in that it would remove the politics of opposition.

Here there are some lessons from the business community’s point of view. Yes, there is a democratic deficit, but dealing with it involves addressing technical factors, such as the power to raise tax or to have separate legislation. It is interesting that it was the commercial and industrial sectors which took the view that Scotland should not have tax-raising powers. Michael Forsyth, the former Secretary of State for Scotland, championed the argument about the “tartan tax”, and there was a very good publicity campaign. Indeed, so good was it that it caused the Labour Party in opposition to have a bit of a hiccup over the matter of the referendum question or questions. They did a volte-face on some things. It was unusual for

Mr Blair and his cohorts to make such a quick turn about on something that they believed they had thought through. So this is not as easy as it is made out to be.

As I have said, expansion of the economy may be affected by the power to legislate than by other matters. Northern Ireland has the highest growth rate in the United Kingdom. We have the lowest unemployment rate — 8.1% — but the highest rate of long-term unemployment, and this is highly localized. These issues need to be addressed, but I wonder if that would be facilitated by the power to legislate.

It is argued that we should talk about an economic region. This fits in with a certain dimension. Too often people say that we must expand economically within this island — the North/South dimension. Certainly Northern Ireland is extremely small, with a population of 1.5 million, and is driven to external markets. The markets beyond the province are much more expansive to say the least — 60 million people in the United Kingdom, never mind the European Union and further afield. The island of Ireland has only 5 million. Again, I go to the Welsh economy. Wales have had this debate. Economists and people in the business community point out that there is not a unique Welsh economy. The economic linkages are east/west, not north/south. In other words, the Welsh are expanding eastwards towards the rest of the United Kingdom, Europe and elsewhere, rather than being myopic and looking just at the unit called Wales. We should avoid the myopia of looking just at this island.

At a meeting of the Group of Seven that I attended, the great and the good of the business community said that growth and competitiveness were the two central ingredients for any growing economy. They pointed out where these are to be found — Singapore, which has the highest growth and competitiveness rates. Yesterday we heard on the news about what might be called the most dynamic economic group in the world — the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), which includes Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and the rest of that area. Those countries have been trying to build competitiveness, growth and co-operation — the things that we need for the economy of Northern Ireland.

But I must come back to the point that it is very difficult to distance politics from economics. The members of ASEAN recognize each other's integrity. That recognition is the basis of the co-operation which is so necessary to the economies of that part of the world. Exactly the same thing is needed for our economy. Without stability, which means recognition of the territorial integrity of the state and the formation of structures of government within the state, we cannot start to build the stable and confident society upon which co-operation across borders and worldwide can be built.

So I say that we need political stability. To the business community I say that we need a consensual and well-managed economy and that perhaps there are indeed too many layers of administration and bureaucracy, with a lack of co-ordination. But the changes we need can come about only through political dialogue. Stability would bring more improvement to the economy. We should be positive. Our economy is doing well, but it does have problems, as this report points out.

The Chairman: This is an interim report. Are we to have another one?

Mr Nesbitt: No, Mr Chairman, this is not an interim report. It is a final report dealing with issues that were raised by the business community and the trade unions. One Member — he knows who I mean, and he will not take exception — said “We have been in existence for a year and we haven’t yet produced any report.” It has to be remembered that the Committee was not set up until the end of November and that, with various breaks, we have had only several months of deliberation. We looked at the various issues in the light of the submissions made to us. This report is a summary of those. The next stage will be to examine certain matters further. We are already looking at long-term unemployment.

10.30 am

The Chairman: So we can look forward to a series of reports?

Mr Nesbitt: As we look forward to life.

The Chairman: There was nothing pejorative in what I said, though I may have used the word “interim” rather carelessly. This is a report of the evidence given to the Committee to date. The Committee’s conclusions will appear in due course.

Mr Sammy Wilson: I welcome this opportunity to look at the economy, and I congratulate the Committee on its work. Though no final report has yet been produced, a lot of very useful work has been done. I regret that because of work commitments I have not been able to participate more fully in it. It is important, if the Forum is to gain credibility, that we deal with issues such as the economy. After all, the economy is the engine of society, and we are going to have difficulties if it is not working properly. The issues that have been raised in this report should be of interest to everyone because they affect everyday lives.

I congratulate the members of the Committee on the thoroughness of their work. I have found some of its results personally useful. Teaching aids that I used with my A-level economics classes were based on statistics and other information set out by the Committee. Let them keep it up — I will need some new material in September!

A study of the economy can become complicated when you start to look at the specifics, as the Committee sought to do. There is a need for expert back-up and advice. I thought the Chairman would say something about that, but perhaps he was not in a position to do so. I should like to endorse the view of Committee members that they need expert advice as they work their way through these very complex issues. This would enable the Forum to produce a report which had credibility, which carried weight and could not be ignored. It is important that we should be seen not as a lightweight appendix to everything else that is going on but as central and main players.

When we talked yesterday about who might be a likely adviser, I suggested in all innocence someone whom I had met in a professional capacity as a teacher and as a member of an examining board. I knew nothing of his background but was highly impressed by the quality of his work and by his ability to communicate. The Committee Chairman quite rightly pointed out that the person was affiliated to his party — something of which I had not been aware. Now, that may be a misjudgement on his part, but nothing else. What surprised me was the reaction of the Alliance Party representative, who held up his hands in horror and

said "We could not possibly have this person because of his political affiliation." I am sorry that he is not here to respond. Less than two weeks ago the Forum debated fair employment. These are words that the Leader of the Alliance Party used on that occasion:

"This issue — not just fair employment but fair treatment for everyone — is one in which we should all be interested."

I agree with that, as, I am sure, does everybody else in the Forum. However, when it comes to putting it into practice we find that the grand rhetoric of members of the Alliance Party is divorced from their action.

I do not care about the political affiliation of any adviser. If he could do the job, we should take him on. And if we are not sure, we should at least investigate. However, according to the Alliance Party, if there is a perception of any political bent or affiliation — those were the exact words — we should probably steer clear. It is a pity the Alliance Party did not apply the same criterion when Bob Cooper was appointed as Chairman of the Fair Employment Commission, or when David Cooke was appointed as Chairman of the Police Authority, or when Sir Oliver Napier — I see that he is gone — was appointed to the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights. Only if you are a Unionist, are you treated in this way.

Mr Taylor: Double standards.

Mr Sammy Wilson: Yes, double standards.

The Chairman: I think we are getting a little bit away from the economy.

Mr Sammy Wilson: Has this nothing to do with employment? I thought that was what we were talking about. However, I have made my point. It is just a great pity that Mr McBride is not here. I hope he will read what I have said and take an opportunity to respond, though I suspect that he will sit silent in embarrassment, as he did earlier when Mr Robinson raised some issues, because his is an indefensible position.

I am glad the Chairman pointed out that the report does not represent the position of the Committee but is simply the evidence of the various organizations that appeared before it. That is not to say that we are in disagreement on all the issues. In fact, many of the matters that were rightly raised by witnesses are ones about which we should be concerned. Time does not permit me to discuss them all, but I want to mention three.

The first of these is the high percentage of employment in the public sector. There are those who denigrate public-sector employment. Some people give the impression that it is not important, that it is not real work and therefore should be disregarded. However, it is important in any society that certain functions be fulfilled by the public sector, and that requires employment.

The problem with a high percentage of public-sector employment is that it provides a poor foundation for the whole employment market. It creates vulnerability to political decisions and to outside pressure on the Government. I shall comment later on the fact that

we are being tied more and more to Europe. If this Government decides to join a single currency, public-sector employment will be decided not at Westminster but in Europe. Europe will determine fiscal policy for the United Kingdom as a whole and will dictate our public-sector borrowing requirement and what we can spend money on.

Therefore the size of the public sector should be of great concern to us. Many of the recessions that have hit the United Kingdom as a result of cuts in public-sector spending have hit Northern Ireland hardest because of our dependence on that sector. So it is important that we look for ways of reducing the level of public-sector employment and moving towards greater reliance on the private sector.

The second matter to which I want to refer is the warning about political stability. All of us would welcome, and are working towards, political stability. The report quite rightly emphasizes the advantages of increased political stability, of the cease-fires and the ending of disturbances in Northern Ireland. There are many positive things, but, as has been found all over the world, restructuring an economy does not come easily. We ought to be aware that if we are to have an era of peace and stability, the transition will not be easy. There will be economic implications, and it is important that the Committee has highlighted these. There will be disadvantages as well as advantages.

I wanted to say something about the European dimension, but my time is up.

I commend this report and look forward to future reports by the Economy Committee.

Mr Neeson: I am very disappointed at the remarks of Mr Sammy Wilson. If he had been a regular attender of the Committee's meetings he would have realized that there is a great deal of co-operation. This is the first case of such dissent that I have heard of. My only recommendation to the Member is "Stick to your day job, Sammy."

This is an important report in that it outlines the work which has been carried out by the Committee since its formation. A number of important issues have been raised. Mr Sammy Wilson was going to deal with Europe, and it is my intention to do so. What has become very clear is the disadvantage that Northern Ireland finds itself at because of its position on the periphery of Europe, and one of the issues that was highlighted by the Confederation of British Industry in particular was the matter of transport costs resulting from our peripheral location.

The situation is made even worse by the fact that the cost of diesel in Northern Ireland is much higher than in the Republic of Ireland and therefore Northern Ireland road hauliers are at a disadvantage compared to their competitors in the Republic. I hope the Committee will address this issue. The Chairman has received a letter from the Road Hauliers Association. I hope we will have an opportunity to speak to that organization about the problems facing the industry.

One of the main sources of income from Europe are the structural funds. A review of the structural funds is currently being carried out. As representatives of Northern Ireland on the Committee of the Regions, Mr Empey and I have been outlining the need for the structural funds to be directed towards transport and communications and to the urban areas

in Northern Ireland. That review will have a major impact on our economy, and in tandem with it, of course, is 1999 and the extension of the European Union. The President has already mentioned six countries which will be considered as part of the enlarged Union. The expansion will probably have a negative impact in Northern Ireland, with the real danger that we will lose Objective 1 status. This is something about which we must start lobbying right away.

10.45 am

When we are talking about Europe we must look to our nearest partner in the European Union — the Republic of Ireland. The gap in trade between the two countries needs to be addressed. Closer economic co-operation on a whole host of issues would result in major job potential in Northern Ireland and in the Republic. The opportunity should be grasped.

The cease-fire, which we all hope is unequivocal, provides major opportunities by making Northern Ireland a more attractive place not only for inward investment but also for a whole range of tourist development, which could result in the creation of perhaps 7,500 jobs. This is obviously tied to the whole process of trying to reach a political settlement and create political stability. We have the skills, the environment, the work ethic and the educational standards to develop our economy to the full.

During the talks of 1991 to 1992, one of the major issues on which all of the political parties that were involved could agree was that Northern Ireland needs a more direct input into decisions that are made in Brussels. I welcome the work being done by the Northern Ireland Centre in Europe. People here should realize the importance of its role in assisting Northern Ireland to get through the door. This is highlighted on page 18 of the report:

"It is important that Northern Ireland as a region is represented and puts forward its own ideas for future funding."

In the past I have been critical of the Government because of the lack of consultation on the development and distribution of European funds.

One of the good things that have come out of the peace and reconciliation funding is that the partnerships formed by district councils have helped increase an awareness of Europe. I know that there are people here today who do not, perhaps, share my enthusiasm for Europe as an entity and have been sceptical in the past, but we must be pragmatic about the situation. The European Union is there, and other areas of Europe have made more of their membership than we have. Obviously, as an integral part of the United Kingdom, many of our issues are dealt with through Westminster and London, but there are opportunities there: Northern Ireland is a special case, and that special case must be recognized in Europe.

The report forms the basis for further investigation and further study. I hope that there will be not just one report emanating from the Committee but a series of reports dealing with specific European issues. We have already dealt with the long-term unemployed, but there are several other matters. I agree with Mr Sammy Wilson that there are complicated issues

here, and I look forward to reports that will be of assistance not only to the Forum but to the Northern Ireland economy as well.

The Chairman: I have written to M Jacques Santer, as I was asked to do following the debate last Friday on Prof Alcock's motion on the peace and reconciliation fund. I look forward to his reply.

Mrs Steele: As a member of the Economy Committee I want to commend the work done by the Committee's Chairman, Mr Nesbitt, its Vice-Chairman, Mr McAlister, the Secretary, Mr Clements, and indeed all the other members. Gathering this evidence and compiling the report on long-term unemployment has been a very interesting experience, and the Committee has been largely in agreement on its findings. Full employment is the ideal for everyone and for the country as a whole, but we do not live in an ideal world, and so we must face reality.

I want to draw the Forum's attention to a very important aspect of the unemployment situation. This is covered on page 6, paragraph 6, of the report and needs a lot of thought, planning and effort on the part of us all. I refer to the so-called benefit trap — modern jargon for the situation of individuals and families who are said to be better off claiming benefits than earning a wage. This is not fair to such people, nor is it fair to those who are working and paying taxes and national insurance to support the unemployed. In the report presented last week we identified the many problems that this causes to society in general, as well as to the individuals and families who are caught in this trap.

Over the years of the welfare state, three generations of some families have grown up in a culture of not working but claiming benefits. They know no other way of life. It would be a huge task to get these people to realize that a good day's work should be their goal, being very preferable to idleness. Most people who are long-term unemployed understand this very well, and only the work-shy still avoid work at all costs. This is a challenge for us all and the Government, employers, unions and everyone else must work to help this. Benefits must also be refocused, as the report says, so that taking a job does not mean that the main wage-earner of the family loses out financially.

We must support the Government's proposed welfare-to-work programme which is designed to offer new hope to the unemployed and should also sort out the few work-shy in the process. Paragraph 6 finishes by stating

"The longer unemployed, the less chance there is of getting back into work, and the more chance there is that that will cause health problems, political problems and social problems in local communities."

I venture to suggest that in recent weeks certain concerned residents might not have had so much time to be offended if they had all had a full day's work to go to, so each new job can be of benefit to us all in many ways.

I commend this report and the work done by the Committee to the Forum.

Mr Carrick: I would like to make some observations about the evidence presented to Committee E and to highlight some of the issues. First, however, may I assure Mr Neeson

that my Colleague Mr Sammy Wilson is quite capable of holding down his day job and at the same time exposing the inconsistencies and hypocrisy of the Alliance Party.

As has been said an economy, in general terms, is a complex matter. It is complicated for many reasons: competing social interests, various political dogmas and, of course, global business competitiveness. The volatility of markets and the vagaries of constantly changing world fiscal policies dictate that a vibrant growth economy must be flexible enough to cope with the demands for change, yet stable enough to produce sustainable growth and prosperity.

The Northern Ireland economy should be structured in a way that will enable it to — here I use three Rs — respond to the changing economic global scene, react to the opportunities within what is commonly called the European dimension, and refocus on a regional basis within the British Isles, as deemed necessary by changing circumstances. If we are going to have a successful economy there must be that degree of flexibility to enable us to respond to change quickly.

Undue rigidity and failure to recognize the impact of change in the economy culture has, in the past, dictated periods of economic wilderness for sectors of the Northern Ireland industry. The textile industry and heavy engineering are just two examples of sectors which are now in an economic wilderness owing to failure to be aware soon enough of impending change.

There is no room for complacency, no matter how successful we are. We must always be alert to change and be prepared for continual reflection and introspection. So, while there must be durability in the economy, there must also be the ability to adjust and adapt quickly to change.

Within an overall economic strategy, which, of course, is a pre-requisite to economic growth, whether that strategy be long-term, medium-term or short-term, it is evident from the evidence furnished to the Committee that there must be political stability. And there must also be a reduction in the uncertainty that pervades our community if there is going to be a restoration of business confidence. Subject to the elimination of violence and instability, the recognition that the performance of the Northern Ireland economy could be enhanced by a co-ordinated and integrated approach, as defined by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) in their evidence, was striking. The CBI recognized the value of a local democratic institution with a vital, catalytic role.

11.00 am

The whole matter of the co-ordination and integration of policy-making must also be followed through by what is described in the report as consensual and co-ordinated economic management. Not only must there be co-ordination and integration with policy-making, but the economy must be managed with such a co-ordinated and integrated approach as well. In my opinion, co-ordinated management starts with recognition that the education system cannot be regarded as a purely academic matter. Young people are being prepared for adulthood and working life. There must be harmonization between the source of the labour supply, starting at that early stage in the schools and the colleges of further education, and the demand for special and specific skills.

There must be a continuous, meaningful working relationship between schools, further education training centres and employers. There should be much more emphasis on vocational schooling and technical training to stimulate enterprise. This initial co-operation between education and training on one hand and business and employers on the other hand must be copper-fastened by a social partnership in which employers, employer organizations, trade unions and the Government all work together to achieve common goals as defined in the overall strategy.

Only if such a cohesive, dynamic partnership is successful, will the Northern Ireland Growth Challenge vision be realized. It is a vision that we all share:

"Northern Ireland should be the fastest growing region in Western Europe, with a strong and effective commitment to job creation, social solidarity, the elimination of disadvantage and a good quality of life."

I commend the report.

The Chairman: I am glad that you quoted those words.

Mr Nesbitt: I will make just a few points. One point which was mentioned was the aspect of the European region and direct representation. Again, that fits in with what has been said about the complicated nature of the issue. I note that even yesterday the fishing community of Scotland were questioning whether or not devolution would be beneficial or detrimental to their representation in Europe. Where precisely will the power reside? We want and could have more direct representation. Indeed, my party's view is that if there were an Assembly in Northern Ireland it should have a European Committee that would have direct representation like the Länder regional governments in Germany, which can sit beside the national Government when matters concerning their part of the world are being discussed. One has to be careful about where the power resides, but better representation of this type would be beneficial.

One other aspect is that of closer economic co-operation. Mr Neeson mentioned the North/South aspect and the number of jobs created. I do not deny that, but what we must be very clear about is that the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) along with the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC) their Southern counterpart, have looked at other aspects of closer economic co-operation. They brought together a world example from Cascadia in the western part of the United States which involves co-operation between Vancouver and Seattle. They have a geographical and cohesive unit there which comprises, by nationality, two different states. The representatives from both Vancouver and Seattle made very clear how they viewed themselves. One said "I am a Canadian first.", and the other said "I am an American first." Their co-operation is between business people doing what business people do best — engaging in business ventures. It was not the politicians in Cascadia who were co-operating; it was the business communities.

I could point also to Denmark and Sweden, where there is co-operation between business communities.

Mr Neeson: Will the Member give way?

Mr Nesbitt: Yes, of course. I always give way when winding up, though I am never sure that I should.

Mr Neeson: Does the Member agree that the CBI and the IBEC represent the business community and that therefore there was no political connotation on either my part or theirs?

Mr Nesbitt: I am glad to take that point. It is excellent to note that the Alliance Party is now saying this morning that there is no political connotation. I read into that that there is no necessity for a political dimension — politicians having a cohesive political unit working within the island of Ireland — to bring forward business development.

Let us be very clear. I take the point that the IBEC and the CBI are the business communities working together. We should leave business people to do what they do best. But I genuinely ask the Alliance Party to reflect. One can look at where there is co-operation across borders throughout Europe, through INTERREG, with regional dimensions and elsewhere in the world, and all evidence points to three necessary criteria for that co-operation to operate. First, that those who co-operate do so as equals and do not feel subservient to the other; second, not only must they feel equal, but both sides must also see a need for that co-operation; third — and the most important element of all — before any co-operation takes place there must already exist political structures, on either side of the political divide, upon which they have confidence and which can act as a base from which co-operation comes. That is unlike what is proposed for the resolution of the conflict here.

We do not have structures like that in existence here. We do not have stability and we do not have a belief in the structures. Co-operation, if and when it comes, will come naturally, progressively, by a recognition of the need for it. It cannot be driven by a political imperative to reflect some other agenda which has nothing to do with the natural economic development that should take place. So I ask the Alliance Party to reflect on that. Yes, as Unionists, we wish for co-operation, but let us get the correct rationale for that co-operation. It is economic. It is not political.

We do intend to have a series of reports on this. Finally, I have just one point. I should have said at the beginning that this report is like the other one which we brought forward last week in that the full transcribed evidence that was submitted by the various institutes and bodies is available for Members in booklet form. The Committee decided not to publish a great lengthy booklet for all but undertook the work of distilling and disseminating it into summary fashion so that Members would find it easier to read.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Forum notes the report on evidence about the performance of the Northern Ireland economy given to Standing Committee E.

FORUM BUSINESS

Mr Peter Robinson: Mr Chairman, there is a matter that you might consider. Speeches in the Adjournment debate are subject to Rule 10(5), which imposes a limit of five minutes. I understand that fewer than 20 Members wish to speak in that debate. Could the time therefore be extended somewhat, even to 10 minutes? We would still get home early.

The Chairman: Is there any objection to that?

It was so decided.

The meeting was suspended at 11.11 am and resumed at 11.31 am.

The Chairman: Ulster Unionist Members say that they did not agree to 10 minutes — that I either was not looking at them or did not hear them. So I have a little problem. If I made a ruling about 10 minutes, I must stick by it. I have no idea what the subjects of the 20 Members who have given me their names will be, but I shall be very strong on not allowing any repetition.

Mr. Ervine: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. The Rules of Procedure state clearly

“The Business Committee may provide time for special debates during which no Member may speak for more than five minutes unless by leave of the Forum.”

That was a Business Committee decision. At no time did the Committee decide that Members could speak for up to 10 minutes. So unless, Mr Chairman, you are overruling the Forum, I expect the matter to be dealt with by leave of the Forum.

The Chairman: My problem is that I was aware of no good reason — other than perhaps that they had not got together about it, or something of that sort — for dissent to my ruling that Members could have 10 minutes.

A Member: Absolutely not so.

The Chairman: Well, I am sorry. My recollection is that there was no word to that effect. So let us see how we get on as I cannot believe that 20 Members are each going to speak for 10 minutes.

Mr Hugh Smyth: On a further point of order, Mr Chairman. With all due respect, I do not think that you have the authority to say that you are changing the Rules. It is obvious that if one person objects, you do not have the authority. This has been tried before. Mr McCartney sought permission to speak beyond the usual time limit, and we allowed it. On another occasion Dr Paisley tried to do the same thing and we said no. If one person objects, you cannot allow 10 minutes to each Member wishing to speak.

The Chairman: The Member has a point. The difficulty is that when I make a ruling I really have to stick by it. If people do not agree with what is going on, they should get up and say so. And I am sorry, but the Unionist Party did not get up and say that.

Mr Hussey: I did say no to the suggestion made by Mr Robinson. It was when people were toing and froing, and making their way from the Chamber that you made your ruling. But I did say no at the time.

The Chairman: Was it a pianissimo no?

Mr Gardiner: May I suggest that you let the Forum decide.

A Member: He did.

The Chairman: That is my problem.

Mr Morrow: The sad thing about it is that most of the objections which are coming now are from Members who were not here. You did put it to the Members, it had been agreed, and I suggest we get on with it.

Mr Ervine: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. The Order Paper states clearly

“Motion on adjournment:-

That this Forum at its rising today do adjourn until 10.00 am, Friday 5 September 1997.

(Special debate under Rule 10(5). Members may speak for up to 5 minutes on a subject of their choice.)”

If an amendment was made to that motion, why has there been no vote on the amendment, and on the motion?

A Member: You were not here.

Mr Ervine: There was no vote.

The Chairman: There is quite a point to be made here. I am sorry if there are Members on my right who believe that they did all kinds of things which I did not see or hear. But the fact is that nothing was said when I put the Question to the Forum about the length of time. What we ought to do is get this thing going. If anybody has something worthwhile to say, he can surely say it in five minutes, and if he cannot say it in five minutes, I would like to know why. So let us please get on and see how we manage under the strict rule that no repetition will be allowed.

Mr Ken Maginnis: Would you make it clear. You said five minutes. Are you now reversing —

The Chairman: No, I have not said five minutes. I have said that we are going to have a rule which makes it possible for people to say their piece, provided there is no repetition. Now let us see how we get on.

Rev Trevor Kirkland: Mr Chairman, you need to define the word "repetition". Is it repetition of subject, or repetition of a word or a sentence? There may be many Members who want to speak on the same subject.

The Chairman: Leave it to me to say what I believe. I shall make it very clear what my views are.

Mr Ken Maginnis: With the greatest respect, I believe you are digging a hole for yourself and ultimately for the Forum. You and I, happily, have not disagreed on previous occasions, but the Order Paper states very clearly that this is to be a five-minute debate. If there are those who feel that the matter should have been handled differently, that could have been dealt with through the Business Committee or by a notice of motion so that those of us going about the various business that we are entitled to go about would have had time to contemplate it and discuss it with you, rather than having this matter arranged, virtually privately, in a way that is to the disadvantage of the Forum.

I am sorry — the Rules of the Forum were designed so that we should have order in the Forum. You have been held to account again and again and again about the interpretation of the Rules, and if you create a precedent here today, it will hang over your head like the sword of Damocles for as long as you are sitting in that Chair. Therefore, Mr Chairman, neither I nor the Members from this party are prepared to allow this summary change and the business Rules to be exploited in this way. If we do, we will create problems for ourselves in the future.

Mr Peter Robinson: This seems to have got really out of hand. Those Members, like Mr Ken Maginnis, who were not here when the matter came up — when it was publicly, not privately or secretly, dealt with — should know that we had lists from the various parties which indicated that there were going to be no more than 20 Members speaking.

Anybody who worked out the time that we then had available to us would have worked out that we had 210 minutes available. That allows 10 minutes for individuals rather than five minutes. There may be some Members who want a half-day instead, but 10 minutes are available for those individuals who want to speak. This is something which could not have been brought up at the Business Committee meeting as they could not have known how today's business would proceed. I asked whether there was leave; you asked whether there was leave; and you judged that no one had disagreed. So it was done perfectly according to the Forum's Rules of Procedure. It now transpires that there are some who felt that they should have said no, but did not say no sufficiently audibly for you to hear. That seems to be the problem.

The Chairman: I am sorry, but when I made that ruling I believed there was consent for the extension of time, and I so rule.

SPECIAL DEBATE (RULE 10(5))

Motion made and Question proposed:

That this Forum at its rising today do adjourn until Friday 5 September 1997. — [*The Chairman*]

Mr Hussey: I wish to take this opportunity to respond — [*Interruption*]. Mr Chairman, are you calling the Chamber to order?

The Chairman: Yes, indeed. Please let us hear him because I want to listen to the point he is going to make, and I want to hear no repetition.

Mr Hussey: And my five minutes start now. I wish to take this opportunity to respond to the communication from an elected Member of this body who has failed to take his seat yet — Mr Barry McElduff. I believe Mr Gibson has received the same communication, as has the MP for West Tyrone.

Mr Gibson: On a point of order. Unfortunately, Barry McElduff does not countenance my membership of the Forum and therefore I do not think the letter has come my way.

The Chairman: Very good. But he does countenance yours, Mr Hussey.

Mr Gibson: I will be quite capable of dealing with Barry McElduff when he does arrive.

Mr Hussey: Indeed, and I am sure that any Member of the Forum will be capable of dealing with Mr McElduff when he arrives. He has written a short paragraph which says

“Each and every individual who yearns for real peace is presented with a challenge to help build the peace, and each of us should respond actively and thoughtfully.”

Before I reply to this may I say to Mr Sammy Wilson, with reference to the earlier remarks that he should stick to his day job, that I hope that the same will not be said about me. In fact, I congratulate Mr Wilson on being able to manage his day job and represent the people who put him here.

My answer to Mr McElduff comes from my having worked with, lived with and socialized with the ordinary, working-class Unionist people of my area. And I hope respectfully that the Ulster Democratic Party and the PUP will note that they are not the only parties in Northern Ireland who speak for ordinary, working-class Protestants.

There is no doubt in my mind that the current IRA cessation of violence is a ploy in the on-going drive towards its aim of a united Ireland. Sinn Féin/IRA's gameplan has indeed received a major boost with the arrival of the Ahern Government in the Republic of Ireland and the election of a Labour Government in the United Kingdom. Bertie Ahern and Ray Burke are no friends of the Union — they have already declared that they share the aims of Sinn Féin/IRA in seeking a united Ireland — while our smiling Tony Blair seems more

intent on gaining Nationalist favour than on protecting the rights of his own citizens in this part of the kingdom.

Any relief expressed at the present IRA cease-fire is tempered by the memory of the treacherous nature of the previous cease-fire which proved to be a cover for the reassessment of Sinn Fein/IRA's way forward towards their goal of a united Ireland. In addition, it proved to be a refurbishment parade for the military wing in pursuit of that same aim. Our scepticism of the present cessation stems from Unionist experience of the previous cease-fire. It is not unreasonable for Unionists now to seek positive proof of Sinn Fein/IRA's current position by insisting that actual decommissioning of the Republican arsenal be started on with their entry into any talks procedure. The intransigence of our own Government on this issue via the Prime Minister, Tony Blair and the Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam is criminal in the extreme, in that they have forced our Unionist representatives into the position of only being able to vote against the present proposals.

11.45 am

If the Sinn Fein/IRA cease-fire is unequivocal, permanent — whatever terminology you care to use — there should be no problem in their agreeing to the decommissioning of weaponry which, by definition of the terminology of the cease-fire, should now be unnecessary to them. If, however, Sinn Fein/IRA insist on keeping their military potential intact, it is obvious that it is their intention to return to violence in the event of their not getting their own way. Such a tactic is completely contrary to any recognized principle of democratic consent. My reply to Mr McElduff is that each and every individual who yearns for real peace is presented with a challenge to help build that peace, and each of us should respond actively and thoughtfully. I cast those words back to Mr McElduff and call on him to urge his leaders to accept decommissioning in order to seek a way forward for the future of all in Northern Ireland — a way forward within the United Kingdom until such time as the greater number seek to do otherwise.

Mr Peter Robinson: I am happy to follow Mr Hussey's remarks. I shall be dealing with a similar subject but I am quite content to leave his remarks standing and simply to nod assent in that direction.

First of all, I would like to look at the origins of the talks process. There is a common, Unionist analysis that that process came about as a result of violence. Because of bombings on mainland Britain the Government of the United Kingdom determined that they would come to terms with the Provisional IRA. As a result of the City of London bombing, which cost the British Exchequer more than did all the troubles in Northern Ireland, they determined that they would not put up with it, but they would find out what price the IRA was demanding for a cessation of their violence and pay it.

The process was set up, and the Downing Street declaration and the temptation of the framework document were set before Sinn Fein to bring about an IRA cease-fire. They would be engaged in the political process and a deal would be done with the IRA. The Provisional IRA, of course, eventually let the Government down because it was not prepared to make the least gesture in terms of a handover of weaponry. Not one bullet was the IRA's answer then. Not one bullet is its answer today. So, once again, the Government had to

move the process to fit the IRA/Sinn Féin agenda. If the IRA would not enter the process on the basis laid down in the Downing Street declaration, namely being exclusively committed to peaceful and democratic means, the terms of their entry would have to be changed, and over the last number of months the Government set out to do exactly that.

The document that the Government produced, first of all in private to the IRA and later publicly giving the details to the rest of us, indicated very clearly that they were not going to require the IRA to hand over any weaponry whatsoever during the whole process. They expressly indicated in this document that not only were the IRA not going to be required to hand over weaponry to get into the process, but that they could not be put out of the process unless the two Governments agreed. Anybody who looks at the stage in Dublin today will be under no misapprehension about what the Republic of Ireland's Government's role would be were such an issue to be brought before them. There is not the remotest chance of the IRA's being put out of this process once they are in. Dublin will never do that.

The process was set up with the object of getting the IRA in on the basis of a simple declaration of a cessation of violence — a declaration that is as phoney and bogus as the last one. And that is all that they did. They declared that they would have an unequivocal restoration of their failed cease-fire of 1994, and the doors of the process opened to them.

This is a process that was never set up for Unionists. Nor, indeed, was there ever any enthusiastic response from the Unionist community. Unionists declared — and this was a common analysis by the Unionist parties — that entry to that process was going to be based on changing certain things and redesigning it. The Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, the Leader of the Democratic Unionist Party and the Leader of the United Kingdom Unionist Party all identified what those issues were. Perhaps it was best set out by Mr Trimble in the 'Belfast Telegraph' of Friday, 7 June, when he indicated that the matters at issue were to do with the chairmanship of the talks, decommissioning and the agenda. He referred to those as being the three matters that were essential, that were at the core of what needed to be changed in this process.

The Chairman, George Mitchell, as everybody recognizes — especially the Member for Strangford who has left us — was put there as a mover and shaker, as somebody who was very much the IRA's choice. In a monthly magazine Martin McGuinness made it clear that he was their man for the talks, that he was their choice, that he was the one they approved of, that he was Clinton's envoy, and that he was the one who was going to do the business.

On the agenda issue Mr Trimble, again rightly, said that the key to the agenda was that it was based on the ground-rules document, and that contains, in paragraph 4, a requirement to have the talks based on the framework document for a united Ireland. He also, quite rightly, identified the decommissioning issue as the one to determine Sinn Féin/IRA's entry into the process.

The chairmanship issue came up, and Ulster Unionists declared — and at this stage, we do not need to make any further judgement on this matter; we have dealt with it in this Chamber before — that that was not the main issue, that decommissioning was the main issue, and therefore the chairmanship thing went through.

The second matter, the agenda, came along, and that issue was fudged. The Rules of Procedure make it very clear that Command Paper 3232, published on 16 April, is the basis of the talks. That is the ground-rules document with its request that the framework document be the basis for the talks process.

But all Unionists agreed that the central issue was going to be decommissioning. Mr Trimble made their position clear. The 'Belfast Telegraph' heading says it all. Every Unionist knew what the bottom line was going to be:

"I'll stop talks if decommissioning of all arms doesn't start right away."

A clear statement, a statement which, from Mr Hussey's remarks, many, if not all, Ulster Unionist Party members agree with. The Government's document does not allow for that outcome, and Mr Trimble's disappointment is evident. He talked to the 'Belfast Telegraph' again last week:

"In relation to this document it will be changed. What is not yet clear is how far the changes will go."

My scepticism was also recorded:

"There is not the remotest prospect of the Government allowing the Blair/Ahern proposal to be amended."

We can now determine whose judgement was the more sound. It is with us, unamended, in terms that do not allow for the outcome that Mr Trimble and I and others would have wanted to see — namely that decommissioning would actually commence.

The letter that was sent by the British Government to Martin McGuinness makes it very clear that not only were they to get into the process but that that process would, according to this document, be based on the framework document. And it goes on to say

"We must create, through open discussion, new institutions which fairly represent the interests and aspirations of both communities."

In fact, we are being asked to create institutions which will represent a united Ireland. That is the aspiration of one of the communities. That is an unacceptable basis for any talks process as far as Unionists are concerned, and therefore it is essential that the process comes to an end and a new one created.

The reason the Government have very considerable difficulty is that they have entered into certain agreements with Sinn Fein/IRA and one of those agreements requires them to have IRA/Sinn Fein representatives in substantive talks on 15 September. That date is set in concrete as far as the IRA is concerned. Her Majesty's Government have given a commitment to it and all of the toing and froing that can be seen on the part of Her Majesty's Government is to ensure that they fulfil that obligation or else the IRA will recommence its campaign. Therefore whatever the Government do, they must see that substantive talks begin on 15 September.

What an opportunity for Unionists to have substantive talks on a basis that is satisfactory to them, a basis that allows a Unionist outcome! But a Unionist outcome is not

conceivable under the present ground rules, and there is no reason for Unionists to save this process.

I was profoundly depressed on reading the masterplan in this morning's 'News Letter' which really says that we have confounded our enemies because our enemies expected that we would do what we said we would do and we have not. That is the nitty-gritty of it.

The electorate support parties that give clear commitments such as that given by Mr Trimble:

"I'll stop talks if decommissioning of all arms doesn't start right away."

I hope that that pledge will be kept, a pledge which was given to the Ulster electorate, a pledge that goes to the very heart of the issues that are important to the Union, and a pledge to ensure that those who are murderers and terrorists are not allowed to sit down at the negotiating table, brandishing their arms, pointing them at the heads of Unionists and clearly saying "Unless you concede to me and give in to my demands, I am going to commence my violence again." That is the situation we will find ourselves in if it is accepted that this process can continue. It is essential that we have a new process — a process that permits a Unionist outcome.

Mr McCarthy: My contribution today will be short and is in the form of an appeal to all Members. This is the 40th meeting of the Northern Ireland Forum and during the course of those meetings most of our business has been carried out in a largely sensible and constructive fashion producing a fair consensus of opinion. The work of most of the Committees has been very valuable, and the reports brought forward have been very well received. Unfortunately, during some sittings of the Forum, statements have been made about people's religion. Such comments are uncalled for and can be hurtful, certainly to me.

In a decent society religion is a private matter. We all know the things that are hurtful and offensive to each other's communities and, as elected representatives who should be interested in creating a better understanding, we ought to avoid repeating over and over again those things which can raise temperatures and, instead, spend more of our time working together.

One of the foundation principles of the Alliance Party was that we should have a devolved administration in Northern Ireland involving all sections and parties. We all know that our new Government are anxious for devolution in Scotland and Wales. It would be a disaster if Scotland and Wales got devolution and we were left behind.

We all know what is required here, and over the past few weeks common sense has taken hold. Behind the scenes people have been working for peace, and now that peace has come to Northern Ireland let us, as elected representatives, seize the opportunity to play our part in cementing it. Let there be no more murder, no more hurt and no more tribal speeches, but a coming together.

My appeal today is simple. As we leave this building we should be determined to return in September committed to peace and to working for a better future for all.

12.00

Mr John White: The IRA cease-fire which was called last Sunday may just be another tactical cessation of violence. The Republican leadership itself sees it only as a reinstatement of the 1994 cease-fire, and I do not need to tell you that that cessation of violence was a cynical, tactical move during which the IRA continued to target, prepare, reorganize and rearm. I do not need to remind you that it was during that cease-fire that the bombing of Canary Wharf was carefully planned, and that was followed by the bombs in Manchester, Osnabrück and Thiepval Barracks and by the callous shootings of Stephen Restorick and the two RUC officers in Lurgan. Therefore it is not surprising that the people of Northern Ireland have reacted with suspicion and caution.

We would all like to see a sincere cessation of violence without targeting, surveillance and preparation, but the onus is on the IRA to prove that this cease-fire is different. While we all welcome the cessation of violence and the opportunity to move the political process forward, we cannot be expected to trust Sinn Féin/IRA. By calling the cease-fire last Sunday, the Republicans cunningly exploited differences within the Unionist community over the issue of decommissioning, and it is the perception of many that the IRA has bombed and threatened its way to the negotiating table. Whether or not this is true, we should not be intimidated or deterred from battling Republicanism at the talks.

We now have to deal with the possibility of Sinn Féin's being a participant in the negotiations when we reconvene in September. My party is not frightened of facing Sinn Féin across the negotiating table and challenging them through the democratic process. We believe that the best way forward is to put them and their false claims to the test by placing the principle of consent at the top of the agenda.

The Republican analysis of the situation is as flawed as the 1994 cease-fire. Republicans still have no grasp of the inevitable outcome of democratic negotiations. That is not surprising since they have no grasp of democracy either. It is clear to the rest of us that a united Ireland is no more than wishful thinking and self-delusion, no matter what Gerry Adams says.

Sinn Féin will, no doubt, try to put a united Ireland on the talks agenda. The SDLP will, no doubt, support them. But that does not mean that unification is any closer or more realistic. They have been unable to bomb us into a united Ireland, and they will not be able to talk us into one. Let us be clear: the Union is not and never will be negotiable. The Union is safe as long as the future of Northern Ireland is to be decided by its people. This has been embodied in and is guaranteed by the principle of consent, and the people will not consent to anything less than a constitutionally secure, British Northern Ireland.

Mr Foster: Peace is very satisfying, but it only seems to be on offer on Sinn Féin's terms. Because of such disappointment Unionist unity is vitally important. It is a sad reflection on Her Majesty's Government that policies made for Northern Ireland are geared to placate terrorist organizations which, if their demands are not satisfied, threaten further violence. The Prime Minister said on 24 June that there can be no question of trading guns for political concessions.

John Hume said before the general election that a vote for Sinn Fein was a vote for murder, and now he calls for all-inclusive talks. Such crass hypocrisy from an allegedly flexible individual who flatly refuses to participate in all-inclusive talks in this very Forum. I do not understand how he escapes this issue. How can he square the statement which he made before the election with his present appeal? It manifests his deceit and duplicity, and that of the Government too.

We are very aware that the pan-Nationalist front is meeting in Dublin today. It is essential for us, as pro-British people, to expose Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness who now seem to be squeaky clean. It is they, and their colleagues in Sinn Fein and the IRA, who have held this state to ransom for over 30 years and are continuing to do so. They turned the misery on, and now they turn it off *pro tempore*. Who is in control here — the terrorists or Her Majesty's Government?

We also hear the parrot cry for justice and equality. What is meant by this phraseology, this rhetoric of Nationalism and Republicanism? We must be aware — we are very aware here — that it is the decent, constitutional citizen who is not getting justice and equality at this time.

Lord Alderdice and his party should stop castigating Unionism, which is what they invariably do. They seem to have a compulsive, obsessive neurosis about us. If they were entirely objective, they would realize that, but for Unionists, there would be no Northern Ireland. We have been the constructive people in this state from its very inception.

Currently the situation is against us, but I emphasize that the present set-back that has been caused by the Government's acceding to Republican pressure should not deter us from being in the talks and furthering our case. It is true that we have been disappointed by the talks process, but it will be worse if we are not there at all. This is not because we see Sinn Fein as bosom pals, but because we must not let them set our agenda or cause us to run away when we see the whites of their eyes. Let us not be so predictable, dancing to the Sinn Fein agenda all the time. Gerry Adams must have a great sense of satisfaction seeing Unionists squirm continuously. His smile, of course, is as ghastly as a laugh in hell and his words are oilier than a kerosene lamp. Sickening though their possible presence will be, we must not be tossed about by a Sinn Fein agenda. We must not stagger away from our duty as a defeated man staggers away from the field of battle.

The present cease-fire — another name for a re-grouping process — is dubious. It is a fraud, and frauds deceive. We do not want deception. We want honesty, and we are the honest brokers. Let us test Sinn Fein's tactics. Let us expose their subtle, deceitful methods. We cannot run away from them. Harry S Truman once said

"I never gave them hell. I just tell the truth, and they think that it is hell."

Over the years our security forces have had to face Republican terrorists' guns. Let us not shirk from our duty as politicians when the Republicans present us with their forked tongues. Unionist unity is essential, is vital, and in spite of the insult, is of the essence. We need each other. Together we can capably and honestly uphold a just and honourable cause

— the cause of maintaining our right to remain within the British family. Let us not falter now: when the going gets tough, let the tough get going.

I support the Ulster Unionist Party at this time as it seeks to further the Unionist cause for the benefit of all the people of the province.

Mr Gregory Campbell: I also want to dwell on the present process, but I hope that my comments will not be repetitive in any way.

The Chairman: Good.

Mr Gregory Campbell: The past 14 months have been spent with many of us in the Forum trying to ensure that the talks process, in spite of all of the difficulties that were inherent from the outset, was to some degree successful.

This week it became apparent to all that it is incapable of delivering what we were told it could deliver — stability and reconciliation and progress towards a system of government that would command acceptance across the communities in Northern Ireland. It is now apparent to all that that cannot be achieved under the present system. My colleagues and I find it annoying that when we say that and then say that we are not prepared to remain in the vacuum that Wednesday created — we want to establish a new process that will have the possibility of success — we are regarded as intransigent, as walking out and running away. I will deal with that in a moment, in a way that has not been used before. It is difficult for us to accept that we should be regarded in that light when we are saying what the world and his dog seems to accept: the present process has hit the buffers, and we have to decide what we are going to do. There seem to be many who want to remain in limbo-land, to remain grid-locked, and yet they are regarded as being positive. Those of us who wish to start afresh with a blank sheet of paper and begin a process that is likely — more likely than the present process — to gain some form of consensus are regarded as being negative. I hope that we can move from this present position into a new one.

I want to deal with some of the comments made by Members over the past few days and by those who are not Members of the Forum but who are members of a political party that is represented here.

The Democratic Unionist Party, at the Forum election and at the two elections since, made it very clear in its manifesto that we would not be sitting down to talk with Sinn Féin before, during or after the election. We made that clear 14 months ago, two months ago and six weeks ago. Nobody challenged us on that and we received a mandate for that. This week, in spite of no comments being made by any leading members of our party about either the UDP or the PUP, outlandish and outrageous attacks were made on us by Mr David Adams of the UDP and by Mr David Ervine of the PUP. There was an even worse attack by the Leader of the UDP on Tuesday morning when he accused members of my party of being gutless street fighters because we said that we meant what we put in our election manifesto.

When we say something, we mean it. We said that we would not sit, and we will not sit, with the IRA. That is telling the truth. That might be foreign to some members of the UDP and the PUP, but it is not to the people out there. No member of our party made any

comments about any member of the UDP or the PUP last week. Nevertheless, we were the victims of these unprovoked attacks. Mr David Adams made a completely untruthful statement when he said that every single day for the past 14 months the DUP and the United Kingdom Unionists have attacked the UDP, the PUP and the Ulster Unionists. That was a lie, an absolute lie, by that member of the Ulster Democratic Party. Then we had Mr Ervine's comment that we were running away. So outrageous was that that I shall not deal with it.

I spent 12 years on a council with many Sinn Fein/IRA men. No communication has ever gone from my party to them because we treat them with utter contempt, and we will always do that, but we will not run away. I have never run away from a fight yet. They may try to bomb us, and they have done so; they may try to murder us, they may try to undermine us, but we will not run away from a fight. So Mr McMichael had better get it straight and get it plain. We are not gutless and we are not street fighters either. We will stand by our principles. We will fight the enemy eyeball to eyeball, in any Forum, whether it be an elected assembly or in any new process. We will not give any credibility or credence to gunmen, murderers or bombers, but we will fight the fight of this country as we have been doing for the 25 and a half years since this party came about.

12.15 pm

Mr McMichael: I feel somewhat ambushed by all this talk.

A lot of the debate about decommissioning, particularly in the last few days, has been about the credibility or otherwise of the IRA cease-fire and whether it is genuine or tactical. From a Unionist point of view, as my Colleague, John White, has already pointed out, we cannot look at the IRA cease-fire as anything but tactical because it is the restoration of the 1994 cease-fire which was tactical and cynical. But neither can we run away from the reality of what — *[Interruption]*

Mr Sammy Wilson: Are you saying then that you disagree with the comment made earlier this week by Mr Ervine that we have to trust the IRA cease-fire?

Mr Hugh Smyth: This is typical of Sammy Wilson. I was going to call him something else there, but I will refer to him for the moment as Sammy Wilson. Mr Ervine did not make those remarks, and the 'News Letter' retracted its record of that statement the next morning. I hope he read that too.

Mr Dodds: I only read the bit about trusting the IRA, not the cease-fires. Be accurate. He trusted the cease-fire, not the IRA, and that is the crucial difference.

Mr McMichael: So the question is how a Unionist strategy — which one hopes would be a common Unionist strategy — can deal with the reality of the Republican strategy. We have been pointing out from day one that decommissioning is the wrong issue to try to hang Sinn Fein on because it is a paramilitary issue and it is not something which can be tested as it should be. If the IRA is able to call a tactical cease-fire, if it is able to end 25 years of what it terms armed struggle for a tactical reason, surely it is able to decommission tactically. In no way would this prove that they are genuine or sincere or that their cease-fire was credible. Nor would it in any way reduce their capacity to engage in

further confrontation and conflict. What do we ask the IRA to do — produce 10 tonnes of fertilizer and empty propane gas cylinders? How is that going to take away their ability to engage in conflict?

But where Republicanism can be nailed to the wall, where Republicanism can be tested, and where the IRA cease-fire can be put to the test is on the democratic principle of consent, because you cannot tactically adhere to consent. Republicanism is quite willing to give the impression that it wants to move through this process and build a peace with all the people of Ireland. But that is something which is going to be achieved, in its mind, by putting off issues like consent, by running away from the reality of the inevitability of movement in the democratic process in which we are engaged. Why do we have to run away from that now? Why do we leave the IRA to be untested? Why do we allow Unionists to portray themselves in the light that Republicans want us to be portrayed in?

It is unhelpful that we are now talking about dealing with the process in a different format, although I am quite willing to meet with the DUP to explore their suggested alternative process and formats, because my party is not closing its mind to anything. We can understand the argument that an alternative process has already been engaged in between the Government and the IRA that added something which we have been kept in the dark about. However, if we are talking about giving in to another process of institutionalized bilaterals, or trilaterals within negotiations, what we are actually doing is making sure that that continues. That will only ensure that there is no transparency within the negotiating process, and, quite frankly, that will be detrimental to Unionism in the long-term. This is really a mechanism for trying to appease the sensitivities of people who would otherwise have to sit in the same room as Sinn Féin. To be perfectly frank, the objective of the UDP is not to sit down, as Nigel Dodds said earlier in the week, to socialize and work with Sinn Féin.

Mr Dodds: I was not specifically referring to your party in that context, but to other individuals and parties in the various council chambers over the years. Indeed, I take the point that your party has not been represented on the Belfast council on which I serve. However, if you are in a position to do so, I would be glad of your reassurance now that your party will not engage in any such socializing with IRA/Sinn Féin.

Mr McMichael: We do not relish the prospect of a process that involves Sinn Féin, or having to negotiate with Sinn Féin, directly or in isolation, but we have said from day one that we are prepared to engage in such a process regardless of who is there. We will argue the Unionist case to ensure the position does not go by default, and to ensure transparency. We want to challenge Republicans head-on to ensure that their argument, which is not credible, is exposed for what it is. Republicans, by engaging in the democratic process, must learn that the inevitable outcome will not be a united Ireland, or a British withdrawal, and the reason for that is that it is not within the bounds of democracy.

We have fought very hard for mechanisms to ensure that the outcome of the negotiations can achieve sufficient consensus — and the Republican outcome would not command this — among the people of Northern Ireland. At every turn Republicanism will find itself on the wrong side of that, and it will very quickly — particularly if we put consent at the top of the agenda — be exposed for what it is. If the IRA is going to walk away from this process, as we expect it will, let it be on the democratic principle of consent, and let it be

seen for what it is — let it be seen that it is Republicanism which cannot come to terms with the implications of peace.

Our party fears no one and it does not believe that by engaging in a process with our opponents, somehow, it will catch Republicanism or that Unionists cannot engage without giving something up. If we come to a point in that process where the principle of consent — the very basic foundation of those entire negotiations — is overruled by the British and Irish Governments, we will find ourselves in a very different scenario. Under no circumstances will we let the democratic rights and will of the people being overruled go unchallenged. At that point the process would be dead in the water. It is not dead in the water yet because there is unfinished business. We have the strength of our convictions, and I hope other parties have the strength of theirs to go in and show people up for what they really are.

I welcome the strength of Mr Oliver Gibson's words when he said that if Barry McElduff were in this room, he would not stand down against him. I hope to see that same strength in the negotiating process and that the DUP will come back in and fight the corner along with the rest of us and to expose Republicans. We will find out whether the alternative process which the DUP says it has to strengthen the Unionist position and make a more credible process is genuine or viable, and I hope that it will be.

Within the wider community, what we are hearing on the ground — though others will say that we are naïve and will dispute this — is that the people do not believe that the IRA cease-fire is genuine or credible. They think the IRA has been bought off into this process. That may be so, but what people are also saying is that our politicians have to go in there and do their job because that is what they were elected to do.

Mr Hugh Smyth: Knowing me, Mr Chairman, I will probably not even use my five minutes.

I am particularly pleased to have an opportunity to speak on the Erne and Tyrone County Hospitals. The Health Committee had the opportunity to visit the Sperrin Lakeland Trust on Wednesday, and it was most impressed by what it found. It recognized the great value of these hospitals to the community and it wants to ensure that decision-makers take full account of this in the future.

These hospitals serve widely-scattered rural communities, and the Committee was struck by the great distance people have to travel to get to them. They are vital to the population not only in health terms but also in employment terms. The trust, which is also a community trust, employs no fewer than 3,000 people. I am glad to report that there is no threat that we are aware of to these hospitals, but the Forum can be sure that the Health Committee will watch developments carefully and look for opportunities to consult with and act in the best interests of the people.

I am also glad to report that Mr Worthington, the Minister responsible, has agreed to meet a delegation from the Health Committee. The Committee is a bit disappointed about the numbers suggested, and it hopes to be able to increase the size of the delegation, but at least it is a step in the right direction.

In many ways my statement has been a sad one. We say that we want to be sure that the decision-makers take full account of the value of these hospitals in the future and that we have to consult Ministers. I am so sick and tired. We have had wonderful reports from the Forum, none more so than the first one from the Education Committee. We had the one last week on long-term unemployment, and we had the Parades Committee's report. We have had five or six excellent reports, but all of these reports depend on someone being generous to us.

The reason for my party and the UDP being in these talks is to try to achieve a situation where we do not have to go to the decision-makers because we will be the decision-makers, and now is the appropriate time. Just this week we heard the Government say that they are prepared to take steps to set up a Welsh Assembly and a Scottish Assembly. I still believe that the best way forward for all of the people of Northern Ireland is to have an assembly here where we could make the decisions and share the responsibility for running Northern Ireland. We could decide whether the biggest amount of the budget went to housing, health or to education, and if we made mistakes, fine. We have to go to the electorate every four or five years whereas, at the moment, the people who are making the mistakes do not have to go to the electorate of the people of Northern Ireland.

12.30 pm

There is only one way that we are going to get that Northern Ireland assembly and that is by sitting down to talk. Like Mr McMichael, I cannot understand the difficulty. The DUP have repeatedly stated that if Sinn Féin comes in here, they will not run away from them — they will stand up, debate and argue with them in the Forum.

Several Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I am glad of the "Hear, hear." Maybe those who have been at the talks can tell me what the difference is. When you are in plenary session at the talks, it is exactly like sitting here — there is the same shaped table. The only difference is that we remain seated on most occasions when we are speaking. What is the difference in entering into debate there? We do that anyway because the chairman, as you do, Mr Chairman, simply goes round the table and everyone makes his points. So I do not see a great deal of difference between that and, if Sinn Féin were to walk in here, which they are entitled to do, people staying, as they have admitted they would do, to debate with them here.

I could understand it if the talks in any way tied us to having to have bi-lateral talks with Sinn Féin, to having to talk face to face with Sinn Féin. But that is far from the truth. Each and every Member of the talks team here knows perfectly well that that is not the case, that you can do what you are doing in here — only you do it at the talks. I have said it repeatedly — you can go back through the Records of Debates — from the day and hour I entered this place that decommissioning is not the issue to tie anyone down to.

What I am looking forward to, if the day comes, if it comes on 15 September, is Sinn Féin signing up to the Mitchell principles. I know there are Members who will be looking at the decommissioning aspect, but the one that I will be looking at is whether they also sign up to the part that says that any outcome will be by the consent of the people of

Northern Ireland, that any agreement reached, will go to the people of Northern Ireland. What have people to fear in debating with Sinn Fein when they can do so quite comfortably in councils? Mr Dodds and Mr Sammy Wilson are both chairmen of council committees.

Mr Dodds was chairman of the health committee which had six or seven Sinn Fein members. That was no fault of his. Mr Sammy Wilson is in the same position with the planning committee. They have no great difficulty in calling the Sinn Fein members to speak. It is their duty and they cannot get out of it. May I also remind Mr Dodds, when he talks about socializing with people, that I have been at dinners in the city hall at which members of Sinn Fein have been present. I have been at dinners when Sinn Fein members have been there, and quite often DUP members have been there too.

Mr Dodds: In the same city as well.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I was trying to make the point that the Member was trying to imply that we would sit down and socialize with them.

Mr Dodds: Some of Mr Smyth's party members do.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I do not know where that would be. There is no way that I would knowingly sit down with Sinn Fein. I am only pointing out that Mr Dodds's party does it. They have done it in the city hall.

Mr Dodds: No.

Mr Hugh Smyth: Oh, yes. *[Interruption]*

I have seen both these people — imagine this — having to rule me out of order to call a Sinn Fein speaker.

Mr Dodds: That is a lie.

Mr Hugh Smyth: It is not a lie. Ask Mr Sammy Wilson — he is the one who did it.

I fail to see the difference between people debating with Sinn Fein in council chambers and in the Forum and sitting down and debating with them at the talks table. What is the difference? They are not being forced to go into a room and sit with them on a one-to-one basis.

Mr Chairman, my time is not up yet, is it? Are you only giving me five minutes?

I hope that when Mr Dodds rises to speak he will tell me the difference between a debate in the council chambers — *[Interruption]*

A Member: I will tell you.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I do not want you to tell me. I want somebody who will make a wee bit of sense out of it to tell me. I would want somebody to tell me the difference between

debating with Sinn Fein in here, between being a chairman and calling Sinn Fein speakers, between going to dinners with Sinn Fein and sitting at the talks where they are not forced to mix with them.

Mr Nesbitt: Will Mr Smyth give way?

The Chairman: He has no more time. Thank you very much Mr Smyth.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I am not finished yet, Mr Chairman. Did you include my time for the Health Committee statement?

The Chairman: You have had your 10 minutes.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I conclude by making one statement that we can all agree on: the best way forward for this country is to get control of it in our own hands through a Northern Ireland assembly, and it should be the desire of each and every one of us to achieve that.

Mr David Campbell: I wish to move the Forum's attention to another matter. However, before I do so, I would like to comment briefly on Mr Smyth's remarks. While the issue of consent is obviously paramount when one is dealing with proven liars, it is easy to lie over consent. The issue of disarmament, of disbandment of a military machine, is one that cannot be overcome and one on which Sinn Fein must be hung out to dry.

Mr Hugh Smyth: Will the Member give way?

Mr David Campbell: On the Agenda 2000 proposals outlined —

Mr Hugh Smyth: Would the Member give way?

Mr David Campbell: — by the European Commission President, Jacques Santer.

Mr Hugh Smyth: Would the Member give way?

A Member: He is not giving way.

The Chairman: Let us have some order, please.

Mr Hugh Smyth: If the Member is not giving way, I would appreciate his telling me so.

Mr David Campbell: I am not giving way.

Mr Hugh Smyth: Thank you very much. Could the Member not have done that in the first place?

Mr David Campbell: I think the continuation of speech is an indication that one is not giving way.

The Chairman: I had better rule on this because it does happen quite often. It is important that a Member who is speaking should indicate positively yes or no when there is a request to give way, otherwise we can get two people making simultaneous speeches which nobody can hear.

Mr David Campbell: I wish to speak briefly on the Agenda 2000 proposals which were outlined a fortnight ago by the European President, Jacques Santer. The document extends to some 1300 pages so I propose to deal with it and comment very briefly, in the broadest terms only, on the proposed reforms to the common agricultural policy and their relevance to the work of Standing Committee D of the Forum. *[Interruption]*

The Chairman: Please, please, come on now. Let us listen to what Mr Campbell has to say.

Mr David Campbell: The reforms being proposed are for three main reasons. The first is the proposed expansion of the European Union to include third country states, or states that previously were members of the Warsaw Pact and part of Eastern Europe, whose agriculture in general is much more poorly developed than European Union agriculture. The cost of support to those countries would completely bankrupt not only the common agricultural policy but the European Union as a whole.

The second reason is the general recognition for change that is required to the common agricultural policy. One only has to look at the unpopular perception of wine lakes, barley mountains and beef mountains and of vast sums of money paid to large landowners merely not to produce, to see that the policy has been held up to ridicule for many years.

Thirdly, the reforms are necessary because of the world trade negotiations which resume in a few years' time. Top of the agenda for those negotiations will be the need for European Union farm-commodity prices to move to a position closer to world prices.

The objectives of the policy document, which is out for consultation at the moment, are numerous, but the principle ones are: to increase competitiveness internally and externally in order to ensure that Union producers take full advantage of positive world market developments; to promote food safety and food quality which are both fundamental obligations towards consumers; to ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community and to contribute to the stability of farm incomes; to integrate environmental goals into the common agricultural policy; to promote sustainable agriculture; to create alternative job and income opportunities for farmers and their families; and, finally, to simplify European Union legislation.

These reform proposals are wide-ranging. As I have said, they are designed to start a process of bringing European Union prices into line with world prices. The impact on farmers, particularly in agriculturally dependent regions such as Northern Ireland, should not be underestimated. For example, the Commission is proposing that the intervention price for cereals will reduce by some 15% and that the intervention price and the market-support price for beef will decrease by over 30%. The dairy regime, on the surface, is perhaps not being so severely affected in that the quota regime is committed to remaining up until 2005. Prices are to reduce by an average of just 10%. Nevertheless, the Commission does state that farmers

should not be given the impression that the present system can last for ever. Bear in mind that a dairy farmer, as opposed to other farmers, has a much greater capital investment both in plant and quota than probably any other sector in agriculture. It is important that a longer-term view is taken of their interests.

The significance of this report to the Forum can be summed up by the fact that Standing Committee D, at the resumption of business in September, will be advertising for submissions from all interest groups in the province. It is the intention of the Forum and of its Committee to formulate a Northern Ireland response to these proposals in association, I stress, with the Department of Agriculture. Already the Committee has taken steps to ensure that we will be working closely, if not as one, with the Department. I am pleased to say, for example, that the Agriculture Minister, Lord Dubs, has agreed to meet a deputation from this Committee on 8 September. Again, as Mr Hugh Smyth mentioned with reference to his Health Committee, it is an important step of further recognition of the Forum and its worth.

12.45 pm

It is the Committee's intention to produce a response by early in the New Year and to bring it to the Forum. I hope to have a united response to those proposals from across Northern Ireland — one which will act in the best interests of our farmers. The priority is to ensure that the small, family farm — which is such an important part of rural society in the province — remains, and remains a viable entity for future generations of young farmers.

Mr Dodds: I thank my Friend Mr Hugh Smyth for having the courtesy to stay for a few minutes. I know he is always anxious to get away to other things at this time of the day, and not to have to face others in eyeball-to-eyeball debate for the rest of the day. But I hope this marks a new departure, a new beginning, and a progressive way forward in his attitude to the Forum. Those of us who do stay find that the afternoon can produce some fruitful debate and argument — there is life after lunch.

I welcome the announcement that was made this week about devolution for Scotland and Wales, and I join with Mr Hugh Smyth in agreeing with what he said about the Government's plans for devolution. Oh, that Northern Ireland were being treated like other regions of the United Kingdom and that announcements were being made for it along the lines of those for Scotland and Wales — and preferably that for Scotland, I have to say. I noticed the criticism of the Welsh model because some people consider that it does not go far enough. Looking at the powers which are to be given to a Welsh assembly though, I think we in Northern Ireland would be delighted to have some democratic accountability restored to politicians here, and to have control over such a range of quangos and over such a range of powers which are currently vested in the Secretary of State for Wales, and over the spending of the Northern Ireland Office as they may have over the spending of the Welsh Office. Oh, that we were being offered the same in Northern Ireland.

Mr Peter Robinson: Mr Ancram said it was a talking-shop.

Mr Dodds: Yes. My Friend, Mr Robinson, reminds me of Mr Ancram's comments. I listened to him at Westminster saying that this proposal was bad for Wales, bad for its people, and bad for the United Kingdom after he spent nearly three years here advocating

precisely that for Northern Ireland, saying it would be good for the people of Northern Ireland. That shows the extent to which politicians at Westminster do actually try to deceive people.

There are some people in the House who will say "Well, you know, let us take these politicians at their word." And we were berated for picking holes in Mr Blair's speech recently. It was said "I know there are no negotiations going on with the IRA. Trust Mr Blair." And the reality was, of course, that he was negotiating with them. It was a bit like the declaration that said "We accept the unconditional surrender of the IRA that was made in September 1994." That was very quickly scrubbed out when it was suddenly realized that the IRA was busy planning its resumption of violence, and when those who had been taken in by this Total Un-armed Strategy document suddenly realized that it did not mean that at all. TUAS actually stood for the Tactical Use of Armed Struggle.

There are some of us who do not try to get conned by the Government, and who are willing to examine and analyse the facts. Since we have been proved correct about many of those events — especially about the Downing Street declaration and the framework documents — we have some right to have our judgement respected, and our analysis examined in some detail, especially by those who claim to be Unionists but are prepared now to accept an IRA cease-fire which has only been in existence for a matter of days. And they are now rushing to urge us to sit down with the IRA and negotiate the future of Northern Ireland with them.

The negotiations on offer at Castle Buildings, Stormont, are about the future of Northern Ireland. Anyone who has been there and who does not realize that should stay after lunch and find out what is happening. That is exactly what is going on. In fact, the Secretary of State made it clear to us that, as far as she was concerned, Sinn Féin/IRA could raise the matter of the renegotiation of the Union.

Let us not have any more con jobs — this is not what it is really about. The people of Northern Ireland know what these negotiations are all about. But what most Unionists in Northern Ireland, and those who believe in the Union, are appalled at, is this notion that somehow it is right to sit down and negotiate the future of this province with the IRA and their front men in Sinn Féin. We stand by our election commitment and by our pledge to the Ulster people that we will not do that.

Of course, people say that we are running away. But it takes courage in the present political climate to stand up to the barrage of press and international coercion. It is easy to run with the press and try to get a nice headline and the congratulations of the churchmen and the Bill Toshes of this world — those who have been proved so wrong every time in the past and have been revealed as having done things which were detrimental to the Unionist cause. It would be easy to do that. But we in the DUP are not driven along by whether people speak well of us, or whatever. We do what is right in our view. We stand by our election commitments, and we are saying to the people of Northern Ireland that, within the space of a few days of an IRA cease-fire declaration, it is obnoxious and obscene to expect democratic politicians to enter into negotiations with the IRA and Sinn Féin. That is the reality.

The position, of course, is that the IRA and Sinn Fein called that cease-fire because they had been given everything that they desired. They asked for a fixed time-frame and they got that; they asked to be included immediately in talks and they got that; they asked for confidence-building measures and they were promised a whole host of them in the memorandum that was sent to Sinn Fein/IRA; and, of course, they demanded the removal of any requirement that they should hand over a single bullet, or an ounce of Semtex, and they got that — with the agreement of those who say that they are going to fight them.

This is what amazes me when we hear talk about fighting IRA/Sinn Fein. How does anyone fight IRA/Sinn Fein who actually agrees with them in many substantive areas of policy? How does anyone go to America to put the Unionist case when that case is the same one that Sinn Fein/IRA were putting the week before on the decommissioning of weapons? That is not putting the Unionist case. That is putting the IRA's case. How can anyone fight the enemy — IRA/Sinn Fein — stand up for Ulster and argue the Unionist cause who spends most of his time voting with Dublin and the Northern Ireland Office, as the UDP and the PUP have done in the talks, against the broad mass of the Unionist family? How is that fighting the Unionist case? We could go on and on dealing with the nonsense that has been spoken by certain people in the wake of the IRA cease-fire.

I will now deal with some of the points that Mr Hugh Smyth raised earlier in his speech. When a person cannot condemn the IRA; when he cannot condemn a murderous attack on a fellow Member of the Forum; when fellow Unionists at the talks table cannot bring themselves — despite the condemnation of others such as even the Dublin Government and the SDLP — to condemn an IRA attack on a fellow democratic politician, because to do so might mean that they have to condemn other terrorism, I say that that is not fighting the IRA. That is siding with the IRA. That is the reality, and Mr Hugh Smyth knows it.

Mr Peter Robinson: In the minute that the Member has left, I wonder if he would respond to Mr Hugh Smyth's question, which was: what is the difference between sitting in Belfast City Council with Sinn Fein talking about emptying bins and being in a negotiating process at Stormont?

Mr Dodds: Yes. I am grateful to my Friend, and I am grateful to him for reminding me that I only have a minute left.

Mr Hugh Smyth: We in Belfast City Council very rarely talk about emptying bins. We leave that to the Castlereaghs of this world. Sometimes we get into very political debates.

Mr Dodds: Having been Chairman of the Health and Environmental Services Committee which Mr Hugh Smyth has referred to, I can say that we fulfil our obligations and statutory duties exceptionally well. *[Interruption]*

The Chairman: Perhaps you would let Mr Dodds get on with his speech.

Mr Dodds: We have spent an enormous amount of time debating those issues, as well as political issues. The difference, of course, between debating in a democratic forum

like a council or the European Parliament or this Forum and sitting down to negotiate voluntarily —

Mr Hugh Smyth: Debate.

Mr Dodds: No: negotiate. You asked about the difference between debate and negotiation.

Mr Hugh Smyth: You are debating in the talks.

The Chairman: Let us not have a discussion between two Members.

Mr Dodds: The Member has asked a question, and he deserves an answer — if he is willing to listen. He has asked about the difference between debate and negotiation.

Mr Hugh Smyth: When the answer suits me.

Mr Dodds: We are used to that sort of tactic. It does not matter about the meaning of the language, it is how you interpret it.

But the difference is obvious to everybody except to those who will not see the difference, which is the case with Mr Hugh Smyth and the UDP on this one. Nobody can say that people elected to a democratic forum such as the House of Commons, as my Friend, Mr Peter Robinson, and others are, should, were Gerry Adams to take up his seat, all leave the House of Commons — the Labour Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Democrats — and leave Gerry Adams sitting there on his own. We go to a democratically elected forum in order to state our position, to put our case and to ensure that, when it comes to the vote, we cast our vote.

When they stand up and put their position, that is a matter for them entirely. We do not interact or engage with them, try to meet them, or try to reach agreement with them — certainly, as far as my party is concerned. That is the fundamental difference between debate in a democratic council or parliament, and sitting down voluntarily to negotiate the future of your country with IRA/Sinn Fein.

I want to deal with the slur that was put upon me — that I, personally, sit down and socialize with IRA/Sinn Fein. I do not. I have never, on any occasion, ruled Mr Hugh Smyth or any other member out of order so as to call a member of IRA/Sinn Fein. Indeed, I challenge Mr Hugh Smyth on that, and he knows this to be the case: on no occasion have I ever called an IRA/Sinn Fein person by name in the council chamber, either as Lord Mayor or as chairman of a committee. That is the reality. I have never socialized with them. There is a difference between being in the same city hall, being, indeed, in the same city, in the same country, as somebody and deciding to go over and engage him in conversation, or share a cup of tea, or something stronger, with him, as has happened with members of Mr Hugh Smyth's party and others.

I do not want to make a big issue of that, but what I am saying is that these are the facts. These are the differences. I do not go out of my way, indeed, do not engage in

socializing or wining and dining with these people, not just because I disagree with their political views — I share many a conversation with members of parties that do not share my views — but I do not, and I will not, engage with those who believe in murder and violence against innocent members of this community, whether they be civilians, members of the security forces, or, indeed, democratically elected politicians. And anyone who is prepared to say that that is the right thing to do and, indeed, urges people to do it, is someone who has abdicated his position and is running away from his Unionism, and not only that, but from his democratic responsibilities also.

We say yes to a talks process. We say yes to talking about the future to try to get devolution. Where we draw the line is on talking to the IRA about our future. I hope that all of us who represent the broad mass of Unionism will say a firm no to engaging with IRA/Sinn Féin and a firm yes to dialogue among constitutional political parties about a way forward. We will certainly be energetic, vigorous and determined in pursuing that latter path.

The meeting was suspended at 1.00pm and resumed at 2.03 pm.

Ms Bell: I take this opportunity to make a few very basic, but personal, comments.

The Forum rises today after a very serious and significant period in our history. Violence and sectarian activity have increased, and the Northern Ireland people have once more had to steel themselves against total anarchy and chaos with all its dreadful repercussions. This feeling of despair has been lightened to a certain extent by the courageous decision of the Orange Order over the Twelfth of July and the cease-fire announcement, no matter how cynical we may be about their bona fides. I ask that Colleagues, during this recess, reflect on their actions and give consideration to progress from September onwards. I am fully aware that we will have contentious constitutional, economic and security issues to discuss and negotiate, but if we work together we can be, as Mr Hugh Smyth said this morning, the decision-makers, and mould the future governance of Northern Ireland for the benefit of us all.

However, I ask also that we look directly at the situation on the ground, at the people whom we represent. We must take their views on board. They want to see the end of murders, bombings, bullets and economic devastation. They want to see the beginning of moves that will herald a stable, just and fear-free future for all of us. We owe it to the children. We should remember them before we look at our own agendas.

I conclude by echoing my party Colleagues' appeal to all Unionists here: grasp the nettle; take the chance for the future of us all. Remember the words of the hymn:

"Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."

Mr McKee: This is a very important debate for the future of Northern Ireland. I have listened to the last speech and I certainly could not go down the road that was suggested by the Member. I came to the Forum with a mandate from the people of East Antrim. I submitted myself to the electorate and came away with 10,000 votes from the people of East

Antrim. The message that we put to the people of East Antrim was clear and precise: we would not negotiate in any talks with the IRA; and we would not give an inch to Dublin as far as their having a say in the running of the affairs of Northern Ireland is concerned. We have not changed our attitude. Although we have been called gutless and many other things because of the attitude that we have adopted, we are determined to stand by our principles.

We have had murder, death and destruction in Northern Ireland for the past 25 to 30 years. Many good people have been laid below mother earth — done to death as a result of the IRA bombing and murder campaign. I want to know what have those people died for? What was the sacrifice made for? Why were so many good men and women laid below the earth, if now we are going to change our attitude and sit down and talk and negotiate with the enemies of this province? For us to do that now would be to dance on the graves of those who have sacrificed life, limb and property in the cause of Loyal Ulster.

Ms Bell: Will the Member give way?

Mr McKee: No.

Ms Bell: May I ask the Member if it would not be a lasting tribute to those people?

Mr McKee: That would be all right if the Member would take her head out of the sand and look at what is going on around her. Is it not a fact that the IRA are going to keep their war machine intact? Is it not a fact that they are going to come to the conference table with their guns above the table, under the table and outside the door, the phrase that Dr Paisley coined. They are. And if they do not get what they want, they will go back to their murder, death and destruction. They will be back, and the only agenda they will submit themselves to is an all-Ireland agenda. If the Unionists say no, if they stand by their principles and stand by the Union, then the IRA will obviously go back to murder. What is the point? What is the point of surrendering now to the IRA? I reject those remarks.

I do not believe that it is a time for Unionists to embark on a gutting process against each other. I do not believe that it is the time to lose our nerve. I have many good friends in the Ulster Unionist Party. I have many good friends in the PUP and in the UDP — I can think of Andy Tyrie and Gusty Spence. I have had the pleasure of knowing many people down through the years. We have stood together in many a campaign and in many a battle. We have walked the streets of Northern Ireland together, we have shared platforms together, and we have lain down outside Crumlin Road gaol together to demand rights for Loyalist prisoners. What did those men go to gaol for? What did they spend 20-odd years in gaol for, if now we say that the time and the climate are right to sit down and negotiate the future of Northern Ireland with these people? I do not feel that I can do this. Even if I am never again elected as a Unionist politician, I will never, never sit down with the enemies of this country to negotiate or to talk away the future of Northern Ireland with them because their only aspiration is an all-Ireland Republic.

It is a time to keep a cool head. It is not a time to lose our nerve. It is a time to stand back and watch what is going on. I do not think that that can be done by sitting round the conference table with those who would do this country down. One can get very passionate, one can say many things and one can get really emotional about this subject because it is

something which we, in the Unionist camp, all hold dear — our beloved province, the Union, our tradition and our way of life. I fail to see how that could be strengthened if, at this time, we were to sit down around the table with gunmen, murderers and bombers — those whose only aspiration is a united Ireland.

It was very interesting to note that last night on the news everyone was out to try to persuade the Unionist community to accept the arrangements presently on offer and to sit down around the table to negotiate with the IRA. We saw those who, last year, tried to persuade us to surrender and not walk down the Garvaghy Road. The same old motley crew was trying to persuade us. I believe that those people have done more harm to the Union because on any given occasion they have sided with and worked along with the enemy. How many of them came out after the Garvaghy Road this year? Very, very few. They were all strangely conspicuous by their silence. We should, at this time, dig in our heels. We should be determined in our resolve to stand by Ulster.

With the Dublin and British Governments it is a case of “Come into my parlour said the spider to the fly”. They want us in, and when they get us in there will be no way out. We must resist that at all costs. We should not get on the Dublin Express for that is what it is — the Dublin Express. I would rather work to see the Dublin Express derailed somewhere about Dundalk. I would like to see the hierarchy of the IRA on the Dublin Express and never coming back to tell the tale. If that did happen, we would have peace and prosperity in this country. There would be no problem with the Unionist and the Roman Catholic people of Northern Ireland working and living together in peace.

However, there will always be a problem while the agitation continues, while Dublin is encouraged and while the British Government encourage them. I ask those people and those who snigger from the opposite benches: what is your alternative? Are you going to sit down with the IRA and exchange views with them? Are you going to work out Mr Molyneaux's plan for the totality of relations? Is that what we are about? Mr Trimble has sat in small halls with me down through the years to work out how to defend and protect the Union. What is he going to do now? Is he going to reject the call to sit down with Sinn Féin/IRA and negotiate the future of this country or is he going to stand by his promise and pledge to the electorate before the Forum election and, indeed, before the Westminster election? We predicted during the Westminster election that when the election was out of the road there would be many a dirty deal done. With no elections for a few years maybe many feel that they can do a dirty deal behind the backs of the Unionist community. However, at some time they will have to face the electorate.

I have no doubt in my mind that the Unionist community are in no mood at this time to surrender their beloved province to the likes of Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and those who have murdered their kith and kin. We can all tell tales of members of our family, friends and loved ones who have been murdered, bombed, mutilated and left crippled. How can we say to those people on sticks or with artificial legs, to the grieving widow, to a fatherless son or daughter that this is the time to sit down with the murderer, the terrorist and the bomber? We would be betraying those good, honourable, decent people who have stood for Ulster, and I do not care who calls me gutless or yellow. I do not care because I have taken my stand at the barricades. I have taken my stand and faced the IRA on many occasions which cannot be talked about in this Chamber. I have taken my stand over the

years. We do not care what label is pinned upon us. We do not care if we have never any support. We will not surrender the future of Northern Ireland, nor will we sit down with the murderers of the IRA, nor will we toe the line to Dublin — the greedy, green aggressor.

That is all that I have to say. I wish I had more within my gut to tell, but I can only give my feelings: No surrender.

Mr Weir: After hearing many fine speeches on the way forward for Northern Ireland from both sides of the Chamber, I have no desire to be repetitious. Therefore, I am going to look at the subject of the Dearing Report which came out this week.

2.15 pm

Mr David Campbell referred to a report from Europe which has been published and has about 1,300 pages. The Dearing Report, I understand, has slightly less than that — about 1,100 pages. I have, however, a little confession to make. I am not quite as conscientious as Mr Campbell in that I have not actually read the Dearing Report, but I have never let any lack of factual knowledge stop me expressing an opinion in the past, and I am not going to start today.

Although I have not had the opportunity to read the report, as a member of the senate at Queen's I have read the extensive press reports about it and it quite clearly deals with three significant areas of concern to Northern Ireland.

First, and perhaps most importantly, it outlines the need for extra university places in Northern Ireland. We are in a position whereby 40% of the Ulster pupils who go to university each year leave Northern Ireland, and of those 40% it is estimated that 40% do so not by choice. We all know that some students do want to go further afield. They want to have a wider experience and, perhaps, go to somewhere on the mainland, or wherever. But 40% are leaving Northern Ireland because they have no choice, and that is a vast number. The education system in Northern Ireland is a particularly successful one, but the one problem that we have as a result of that is that the number of university places is not sufficient to cater for the demand. The Dearing Report indicates that if we were to have parity with Scotland, we would need an extra 12,000 places. As an initial step it identifies a need for at least 5,000 extra places. I welcome that, and I welcome those recommendations.

The Government have a range of options and I have to express my concern at one of them — the Springvale campus — which, as I have said before, is a white elephant. The local people do not want it, and the Government would have to provide a high level of capital funding, money which could be much better spent on capital funding for our schools. There are, however, other options such as making greater use of the existing facilities. Anybody who has studied the figures either for Queen's or for the University of Ulster can see that much better use could be made of their lecture rooms. That would be very welcome and should be given strong consideration by the Government.

Mr Taylor: Does the honourable Member agree that under the proposed grants system 3,000 vacancies could be created without any additional cost in that 3,000 Southern

Irish students would not then come up to Northern Ireland and those places would be available there for Northern Ireland students without another penny's being spent?

Mr Weir: I would like to correct the Member. He referred to me as honourable. I am not honourable in any way. *[Laughter]*

I thought I would beat Sammy Wilson to the punch before he pointed that out.

I concur completely with the Member's remarks. For too long Northern Ireland students have been denied places in Northern Ireland universities, and that is a shame.

The point I was going to come to is the proposal for tuition fees of £1,000 per year. This is an interesting suggestion that, I think, originated about 20 years ago from Keith Joseph, and the Labour Government of that day absolutely gutted him because of the very thought of tuition fees in any form. In many ways it does go against the grain, however, we have to realize that universities are in a rapidly changing society. Twenty years ago — and some people here were at university more than 20 years ago — a very small percentage of people went to university, even with the full grants and adequate provision that existed for students then.

But in recent years we have seen the university populations expanding massively, and we have been left in a position where the universities are not able to cope financially and need extra resources. Given the many demands that are placed on the economy and on the taxation system, there is not a limitless amount of money, but there has to be some way in which the Government can provide funding. Sad though it is, this is a realistic suggestion. We have to try to avoid making the university system in Northern Ireland dysfunctional.

Mr Sammy Wilson: Does the Member also accept that according to all the estimates that have been worked out, graduates can expect to earn substantially more than other people and therefore that there is some rationale in this?

Mr Weir: Absolutely. There is a rationale in this because it is to be done on the same basis as the student-loan scheme. Students will not be asked for £1,000 up front. Paying the money back will only kick in when they start earning above a certain percentage. I am also glad to see in the Dearing Report that there will be an allocation, I think, for some of the people at the lower end of the socio-economic scale to ensure that they do not suffer.

The third point is that the report acknowledges that funding for research in Northern Ireland should be assessed in the context of a strategy for economic development for the region as a whole. Many good things have emerged from our two universities. As a Queen's man I sometimes find it difficult to acknowledge the University of Ulster as a university, but I think we have to congratulate Queen's University and the University of Ulster on the extent to which their research has made a contribution. To take one example, Northern Ireland universities do something like 64% of all the civil research in Northern Ireland, whereas the comparative figure for the rest of the United Kingdom is only 23%. We have seen much valuable research being done by the universities down the years, but we are in the position now that research in the universities is being underfunded, and any report which places the

importance of the university research that is carried out in Northern Ireland high up or near the top of the agenda is to be welcomed.

Mr Benson: On the point that the Member made earlier, instead of having two universities competing with each other in Northern Ireland — and one thinks of the size of the area here — would it not be much better to have the universities under one management and specializing instead of competing?

Mr Weir: There is a certain amount of co-operation between the two at the moment anyway. For example, there are some courses which are not offered by one but are by the other. If you have any involvement with university management, for example, at Queen's, you will see that the vast scale of the budget and economies are already being achieved there anyway. Given the size of Northern Ireland and demand that there is, it is not unnatural to have two universities here.

This report has been attacked by the National Union of Students who, to be perfectly honest, will attack anything to do with education. Not surprisingly, the SDLP have also attacked it, but they too tend to attack anything progressive in relation to education. However, the Forum should give it a guarded welcome. As the full details of this report become available to us, we shall all have to give it a greater degree of consideration.

It is a welcome, timely and common-sense report.

The Chairman: Well done, Mr Weir. Having made two confessions about being neither honourable nor a reader of the Dearing Report, you have done remarkably well.

Mrs Parkes: The present situation that we find ourselves in has been caused by a devious Government whose only objective is to get Sinn Fein/IRA into talks at any price and to keep them there by giving them further concessions, having already met all their previous demands for entry into those talks.

After the brutal murder of the two police officers in Lurgan, the Secretary of State informed the House of Commons that the Government had broken off all discussions with Sinn Fein/IRA. Then it was disclosed that Government officials had held discussions with Sinn Fein/IRA on three occasions for clarification purposes. This was nothing more than deliberate deception. The ordinary person in the street is not taken in by this clarification guise and knows that the Government have given much more to Sinn Fein/IRA than they are disclosing.

This talks process is intended to have one outcome, and one outcome only — a united Ireland by stages. To bring in political parties who have links with terrorist organizations is a devaluation of the democratic process. To say that after a phoney six-week cease-fire they will be given a seat at the negotiating table after 28 years of killing and bombing is total capitulation and surrender.

No Unionist of principle would sit down to discuss the future of Northern Ireland with people who are determined to use the ballot-box and the bomb to obtain their objective of a

united Ireland. John Hume stated that a vote for Sinn Fein was a vote for murder, and he was right. How sad that he seems to have forgotten this now.

I am fed up with other parties saying that we talk to Sinn Fein in councils and asking what the difference is. The difference is — and this was pointed out earlier — that at council level you are dealing with every-day issues, but at the talks table you are discussing and negotiating the future and foundation of this country. It would be a catastrophe to let Sinn Fein, with its arsenal of weapons intact, have a place at that table.

Look at the outcome of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin. The only party that rejected the consent issue was Sinn Fein/IRA. The question of consent rests ultimately with the people of Northern Ireland — something Sinn Fein cannot accept unless it meets their demand for unification. Sinn Fein talk about the Unionist veto, but it is they who use the veto when they say “Unless you agree with us, we will continue the war.”

Decommissioning is something which must be undertaken now. I know that people can hand in guns today and buy more tomorrow, but the handing over of some weapons would be a gesture of good faith and show a commitment to the democratic process. Yet Martin McGuinness said that not a single bullet would be handed over. What we want is total decommissioning of the terrorist organizations, and that includes all their weapons.

When the former President of South Africa, Mr de Klerk, visited Eire he was asked what he would change if he had to do it all over again. He said that he would ensure an active policy of decommissioning at the outset.

Finally, I appeal for a united front, with all constitutional Unionists standing together. It is pleasing to see the example that has been set by the Belfast County Grand Lodge with its clear message to all Unionist parties to withdraw from this Republican agenda. The Government should scrap the existing talks immediately and establish a new framework — one that has a proper programme.

Mrs Beattie: The so-called restoration of the IRA cease-fire on Sunday last is not the only restoration that Ulster people are calling for today. We demand the restoration of democracy. The Government have been attempting to sell the talks process at Stormont as a democratic process, but these talks are nothing but a sham and an insult to all Unionists. They offer Unionists nothing but a sell out of all we possess and cherish.

Mr Martin McGuinness, a Sinn Fein/IRA leader, responded to calls from the British and Irish Governments for a permanent cease-fire by stating that no guns would be handed in before or during the talks process, and, in a recent interview, another Sinn Fein/IRA leader stated that not even one bullet would be decommissioned by them.

We know that the IRA has committed itself to this position of no disarmament until the British presence is removed from this province so why, I ask myself, do some people think that sitting down with these gunmen is going to achieve anything? Surely no right-thinking Unionist with an ounce of sense or principle will be hoodwinked into sitting down with these men who for over 25 years have killed, tortured and terrorized the decent, law-abiding people of Northern Ireland. This is the moment for all Unionists to forget their

differences and unite to defend our civil and religious liberties and our British way of life in order to save our province for our children, and our children's children.

I ask every Unionist to examine his conscience and ask himself if he can any longer afford to sit down in a process which is so rotten and one-sided that Unionism can never defend itself properly. All Unionists must establish a new talks process which can deliver a real and lasting peace in Northern Ireland. We wish to see peace, but it has to be a real and meaningful peace based on the wishes and aspirations of the people of Northern Ireland and not on the threats and demands of the IRA and the pan-Nationalist front.

2.30 pm

Mr Gardiner: To use a phrase coined by Mr Hugh Smyth, I shall be brief.

The Government, as they consider which projects to fund for the millennium celebrations, should concentrate solely on planting trees throughout Northern Ireland. We are all aware that Northern Ireland is one of the countries in the United Kingdom with the fewest trees. Trees should be provided for education — let the children of today plant trees for the future.

Trees could be planted in industrial estates which so often become eyesores, and the trees would hide industrial waste. Trees should also be planted in the areas around harbours and railway lines which are often seen by tourists. The railway embankments are appalling with litter, and I hope that the railway authority in Northern Ireland will do something positive and get the banks cleaned. We should also make hospitals much more pleasant for both patients and visitors by planting shrubs and trees there.

Councils will be making much preparation for the celebration of the new millennium, and many of them may arrange firework displays, roadshows and nights of entertainment with lots of literature to publicize the events. All these things will be over far too quickly. The firework displays will cost thousands of pounds for something which will last a matter of hours. However, the various Government Departments, together with the local councils, could draw up a plan of tree planting that would leave a legacy lasting into the next century and beyond. It would also enhance the air that we breathe because trees provide oxygen, and if Northern Ireland needs anything, it needs oxygen and fresh air for us to breathe.

May I ask the Northern Ireland Tourist Board to be involved in this too, and also the Roads Service. Driving down the motorway this morning, I could not help noticing the weeds that are growing along the sides of the motorway. A weed is a plant growing in the wrong place, and it becomes a nuisance after a while. Many of them would not be growing if the motorway verges were heavily planted with trees. It would enhance the environment in which people have to travel, particularly those who are coming to the province because of the so-called cease-fire. We hope more people will visit Northern Ireland, but we have much more to do to clean up our countryside. We have a responsibility to put something back into the land because it is God's earth — so often we take so much out of it and put nothing back. I hope that every Government Department and local council, when considering the millennium celebrations, will decide to put something back into the earth.

The Chairman: That is a very interesting comment. When I visited the Isle of Man last week with Mr David Campbell and Mr Desmond Smyth, I was very impressed by their Minister, a lady, whose title is Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. We were taken on a tour of the island, and it was astonishing to see how much of the island has been planted out in trees — a great example. I agree with you. I am not supposed to have an opinion, but I have an opinion on this.

Mr Gardiner: Thank you for your support. I have one supporter.

The Chairman: For what it is worth.

Mr Shannon: Before today, there were several issues that I should have liked to speak about in this debate. However, the big issue for most people in Northern Ireland is the way forward given the declaration of the so-called IRA cease-fire. While I realize that other issues are also very important, this is the burning issue in Northern Ireland today, and it is the issue that we should direct our thoughts towards.

With regard to decommissioning and the decision of the IRA to retain their weapons, many of us wonder why they need to keep the Semtex, the other explosives, the surface-to-air missiles and the belt-fed machine guns. What do they need this arsenal for if they are committed to the democratic process? If the IRA honestly mean that there is a cease-fire, if they honestly mean that they are committed to letting the people of Northern Ireland decide their future, they do not need these weapons.

In the past week we have heard a number of Republican spokesmen putting forward their views on radio and television. When Mr McLaughlin was asked what he sought to achieve through the talks he said "I am there to achieve a united Ireland." The commentator asked him "Well, if you are there to achieve a united Ireland, you must realize that that is not going to happen. What concessions are you prepared to make? Are you prepared to look at a half-way house?" Mr McLaughlin said "I am prepared to look at a time-scale for a united Ireland." When Sinn Féin go to those talks they want a united Ireland either tomorrow or in five or 10 years' time. That is the way they are looking at it. That is the only goal they have. That is the process as far as they are concerned.

We must ask ourselves if we want to join that process with the IRA holding on to all their weapons and having one goal in mind. They do not want to accept the democratic decision of the people of Northern Ireland which is, quite simply, that the people want to remain within the United Kingdom.

Martin McGuinness made an interesting statement at the beginning of this week. When he was asked what he thought of the process he said "Unionists want to negotiate." I am in no mood for negotiating my position within the United Kingdom and I do not believe that the people of this province are either. The Union is not negotiable. We hold fast to our place within the United Kingdom. Our British citizenship is not up for grabs.

This process will probably try to create cross-border bodies with powers to make laws and regulations. That is not up for negotiation either as far as I and the Unionist people are

concerned. We want to remain totally within the United Kingdom. We want to have control over our own affairs similar to that which Scotland and Wales will have.

One Member today talked about having a devolved Government within Northern Ireland similar to that which we used to have. It might not have all the powers it had then, but it is something that I should like to see. However, it must be the people of Northern Ireland who decide these things, not the Government of the Irish Republic or other countries which have Republican or Nationalist sympathies and who would like to ignore us.

Many people say we have to give a wee bit. I do not want to dwell on this because I do not want to repeat what other Members have said. However, let us look at the number of things that we have given over the past 28 years. They took Stormont — where we had our own democratic process — away from us. Direct rule from Westminster was imposed. At Westminster even our MPs — until recent changes were made — did not have much input into legislation proposed for Northern Ireland. The B-Specials were disbanded. Many people will recollect that the B-Specials were the one deterrent that the IRA were afraid of. They knew the country, they knew the people and they knew where they lived. In the early 1970s the RUC was disarmed. It was later rearmed, but why was it disarmed in the first place? It was disarmed because that is what the IRA wanted. This has been a process of wearing us down, a process in which we have been doing the giving.

We had a debate in the Forum about the process of Irish harmonization throughout Northern Ireland. Again we have given. We have given all the time. There have been changes in the judiciary brought about by the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I am not getting into the old issue of parades — we all know how important they are to our tradition and how much we want to maintain them — but here too we have given. In many cases it was involuntary — we were coerced, or persuaded by lack of security in some cases, not to parade along certain routes.

The Ulster Defence Regiment was integrated into the Royal Irish Regiment which was another concession to the IRA, another sop to Republicanism. The Maryfield secretariat was established. We did not want it, we were against it, but it happened. We have given through the Anglo-Irish Agreement. We have given through the Downing Street declaration. Again and again we have given. Everyone of us can recollect many other different things that have happened where we have given, but people are telling us to give more. They want us to give everything. They want us to give our life-blood itself, but we are not going to give that.

These are the things that the Unionists have given, but if you look at the other side to see what the Nationalists have given you will find a big empty space. It is like a blank piece of paper — there is nothing on it because they have given nothing.

However, we must look at the positive aspects too. The people of Northern Ireland want a process in which we can go forward, in which peace can be brought to Northern Ireland. They want a democratic process that they can get involved in and that can honestly and positively try to achieve peace in the province. That can only happen if those who are not committed to the democratic process are not involved. We want a process in which the ordinary, law-abiding citizen can be involved. The majority of people who are democratic, ordinary, law-abiding citizens of this province want to see the IRA handing over their large

illegal arsenal. That is what this issue hinges on, and I am quite concerned about the process and the way forward.

There is one thing that we need now more than ever, and Mrs Parkes referred to it earlier. Forgive me for repeating it, but it is important. The thing we need is Unionist unity. It is so important that the Unionist parties stand together on this issue. There are things that we cannot always agree on — that is why we belong to different Unionist parties. Nevertheless, there are so many things that we have in common which can draw us together to fight this issue. If we fight it together we shall be unstoppable. Unity of purpose is our strongest point and if we can fight together, nobody will defeat us.

Mr Eric Smyth: I feel sorry for the people of Northern Ireland today who are, once again, being fooled by those who try to deceive them. Those deceivers tell us that if we negotiate with the IRA all will be well; we will come out as strong Unionists; we will retain the Union — I have heard it all before. At the last talks there was supposed to be an agreement, but the SDLP came out against it, and it all fell through. Does anyone believe for one minute that the British and Irish Governments would countenance an agreement which did not suit Republicanism? I say no. The British Government have no concern for, or any interest in, Northern Ireland. They could not get rid of us fast enough. They have demonstrated that by the very fact that they have gone behind the backs of the people of Northern Ireland.

How can you trust someone who says to you after the murders of two policemen, “No more talks with the IRA”, and yet who talks to the IRA behind closed doors? How can you have confidence in a woman who talks like that and who deceives the people of Northern Ireland? How can you sit down with men and women who have bombed, shot and destroyed across this province for 28 years but who, in six weeks, are accepted into the process? The democratic people here who have fought election after election are not listened to. The majority, represented by the Ulster Unionists and the Democratic Unionists — the second largest Unionist party — are not listened to when they go to represent their people and express their views. Our Government fail to listen to their views, but will listen to the views of Nationalists.

Let nobody be under any illusions — they are taking on board the Nationalist point of view, not the Unionist point of view. Do not be under any illusions that you are going to go in there and talk and that the Unionist cause will triumph.

2.45 pm

The Government have already pointed the way in which the talks must go, and that is under the Anglo-Irish Agreement. My reading of that agreement is that Dublin will have a say, no matter what structure is in Stormont. They are going to have an input and they could veto anything that we may agree on which they do not agree with, and, to me, that is a half-way-house to a united Ireland. They are establishing the way for a united Ireland.

Remember when Mr Wilson told us about the 15-year plan that he made away back. It has taken a wee bit longer, but that is the plan that they are working to, and they have achieved it up to now.

The next thing will be — and make no mistake about it — that the name Royal Ulster Constabulary will be done away with. The word Royal will be dropped and it will be the police service. I have already heard certain Members using the term police service. I have even heard some Unionists coming off with this term, so there is a move to condition the people and brainwash them into accepting the changes which will take place over the next year.

Make no mistake about it, the people of Northern Ireland will not be fooled by listening to those people who tell us to stick in there and talk. I can never forget the murder and mayhem of the terrorists in this province. I think of the people today who are sitting in their homes without their fathers, sons or daughters who were murdered by those who are now allowed to come into the democratic process.

My party will stand by its manifesto and, like the Member from Larne, it is not afraid to face the electorate. If the electorate decides that I should not be here or in the council any longer, so be it. But I know that I will be able to walk away with a clear conscience because I will have stood for principle, honesty and truth. I will not have welcomed the murderers into the talks.

We have also seen the Northern Ireland Office at work this week with its little teams telling us to stick in there. Let me remind our so-called religious leaders, if they know their Bible at all, that God does not forgive anyone until he repents. God says that men ought to repent before He forgives. God will forgive a person if he confesses his sin, but people should not come off with this nonsense about loving neighbours and all that — God does not receive anybody until he repents of his evil and does a somersault.

I remember a little illustration from many years ago. We were having an open-air meeting in Belfast when this man came across and stood and listened. Afterwards, he had a conversation with us and said "You know, I am a thief and a robber, and tonight I have broken into eight homes and stolen many things. I came past this open-air meeting and something stopped me and I stood and listened, and I want to give my heart to the Lord Jesus Christ." And there, at the Bank Buildings, we knelt and led that man to the Lord Jesus Christ. He got up from his knees and said "I am going straight to the police station to give myself up", and that is what he did, and he served a year in gaol. That was true repentance and sorrow for the crimes that he had committed.

If the IRA, or anyone else, are sincere about their arms and their bullets, they should give them up. It is not a matter of giving up all the arms. We know that they could give them up tomorrow and buy more next week. That is not the argument. The reason the IRA do not want to give up their weapons is that once they gave up one gun or one bullet, they would have finished fighting, and the IRA and the soldiers on the ground would not accept that. We all know that arguments are going on among the Provos even today. Many disagree with the cease-fire because they see it as giving in when they believe that they are winning. The British Government have thrown them a lifeline and have given them victory, and that is why they are going ahead.

How can we as honest Unionists go in there knowing that the playing field is not level? Men have been promised certain agreements by the British Government and I wonder how many other agreements there are that we know nothing about. Even on the Loyalist paramilitary side, I wonder what agreements have been made there. But time will tell. These things always come out. They do not escape. Evil is always revealed. Evil will never defeat truth. Truth will always prevail though it may be hard to take at times when we look back and see what has happened. I never thought that I would see the Government yielding to the men of violence by saying "You have bombed and killed your way to the negotiating table", yet the democrats who have fought through the ballot-boxes for years are ignored. That is a sad reflection on the British way of life.

We were told earlier that we have democracy. We do not have democracy in this country. If we had, we as politicians would have a right to be involved in our country's economic affairs and in the everyday running of our city.

Mr Ervine told us this week that the Union is safe. If the Union is safe, why negotiate it? If something is safe, we do not talk about it; it is all right; it is in the pocket; we forget about it. Why do the British Government not say to the IRA "Look, the majority of the people of Northern Ireland want to stay within the United Kingdom, so it is not up for negotiation"? They tell us that, and yet our Leaders have been told that Sinn Féin/IRA will be allowed to bring up the constitution of our country. If the Government were honest they would say that it is not up for negotiation. Many other issues can be up for talking: how we work together, how we get on with everyday life, yes — but not the structure and the constitution of our country which it is our right as British citizens in this province to have. It is wrong for the British Government to do this.

I could never sit with the IRA and murderers, and I say that even if it means that I lose my seat as a politician — I could not care less. I am not one of those people who grab for power and seek to be in the process for their own gain. I have enough to do in my church and with many other things. I could find plenty to do without worrying about this. But I am here because of the love I have for my country, and if the Ulster people do not listen to us, that will be on their heads. It will not be on our heads. My party can walk away and say that it told you but you did not listen. If you listen to these ecumenical traitors, who even betray their own faith, then that is up to you and not us. We have warned you what will happen.

Mr Brewster: We have heard a great deal in recent times about confidence-building measures.

Like so many phrases, this one has a sub-text. It has been widely taken as meaning concessions to Nationalists. I think I speak for everybody in the Chamber today when I say that confidence certainly needs to be built up — but not in the Nationalist community. Their expectations could hardly be higher, and the only thing I remember from my 'O' level history course is that revolutions occur when expectations are high.

Listening to the very passionate speeches of Mr Eric Smyth and Mr Shannon merely reinforces my impression that the only community which needs its confidence built is the Unionist community. That need not wait for any talks process, if indeed there is still to be a talks process. That is simply a matter of good government, and there are various measures

that our Government could and should implement without delay, not only for the benefit of all the citizens of this community, but also for the short-term political gain of improving the confidence of the Unionist community. Of course, the first and most obvious thing that they could do is stop lying. It would be a refreshing change if Unionists could say that a Government Minister's word was his or her bond.

The other thing that they could do is behave more openly in the way they govern this province. I wrote to the Secretary of State some time ago asking her to make the Anglo-Irish Agreement secretariat in Maryfield more open so that those of us who were totally opposed to it could at least see what that body is doing — there is a great deal of mischief worked around the Maryfield secretariat, and many things are attributed to it by the SDLP and Dublin which may well not be right. The only response I got was, I regret to say, that she intends to put quarterly reports into the House of Commons library, which is hardly the way that the ordinary man in the street will see how the civil servants in the bunker are making decisions that affect us.

The other essential confidence-building measure is for the Secretary of State to treat this body with more respect and come to speak to us. She could also insist that all Members take their seats, because the SDLP's being in here and debating with us is long overdue. I find it nauseating when John Hume says that he will talk to anybody, anywhere, yet look over there — at empty seats.

There are other matters that could be dealt with quite easily. At the time of the Garvaghy Road crisis there were stories in the paper about a package that the Government had on offer containing much of common sense.

First is the proposal that where there are purely sectarian attacks on Orange halls, for instance, Chief Constable's certificates be issued for criminal damage claims. Members may be aware that 109 Orange halls have been attacked in recent times as part of a campaign to blood members of the IRA. As a solicitor who has had to try to get compensation in some of those cases, it is very frustrating that the process takes months, and indeed years, because the legislation, as presently crafted, is exploited by the IRA. Many lodges which use those halls and which are the centre of community life are left in dire straits for a considerable time.

There was also talk at that time of replacing the Public Order Order and those Dublin-inspired clauses which could be regarded as a protestor's blueprint — or greenprint. It would certainly help the confidence of the Unionist community if we got clear, firm guidelines that would protect traditional parades. And indeed, on that point, even the present law, poor as it is, could inspire a great deal more confidence in our community if it were enforced. It is my understanding that up until the beginning of this year, fewer than 50 people were charged in 10 years for the offence of preventing or obstructing lawful parades. As someone who works in the law, I find it astonishing that last year in Londonderry, when there were riots that were described as the most serious in the troubles, to my knowledge not one person was charged. But Orangemen who took part in peaceful protests were charged, and, indeed, I think 60 of them were convicted. Reinstatement of the Unionist community's confidence in the impartiality of the law is surely long overdue. And perhaps we could hope that Mr McKenna, Mr Rice and the rest of those people who deliberately attempted to bring about anarchy in the past few weeks will be prosecuted.

It would also be a confidence-building measure if the Parades Commission were to be, if not replaced — because, like it or not, we seem to be going down the road of conditional rights now in this country — amended and given a wider range of problems to deal with. It would, for instance, be a comfort to those of us who attended Queen's University to know that the very successful hi-jacking of the Students' Union could be referred to somebody who, unlike the university senate, would take some action, and the chill factor which I experienced at Queen's University is nothing to what it is now.

Mr Weir: Does the Member agree with me about one thing which would help eliminate the chill factor at Queen's. I understand that a consultant's report has been prepared which recommends, for example, the ending of the bilingual signs in Queen's and recognizes that there is a very strong chill factor, particularly associated with the Students' Union. Unfortunately, it is the Students' Union which is the recipient of that report and so far it has suppressed it. Does he also agree with me that the release of that report for action would be a confidence-building measure, at least at Queen's, and we could then start to move away from the chill factor there?

Mr Brewster: Yes. I am happy to endorse the Member's remarks.

Following on from that, it would indeed be helpful if the Fair Employment Commission were prepared to take on board some of the legitimate complaints that they are not seriously interested in addressing the chill-factor problems for the Unionist community in various parts of the province.

3.00 pm

Perhaps the most obvious, but the most difficult, way of improving the confidence of the Unionist community would be to take the civil servants in Northern Ireland by the scruff of the neck, shake them up and make them become the servants and not the masters — and I say that with due deference to the hard-working staff of the Forum.

Last week I was talking to the late and much missed Vincent Hanna, and we were discussing a conference that he had chaired some time ago in County Antrim at which you may have been present, Mr Chairman. He told me that many of the decision-makers of the province, the businessmen and administrators, were present and they were discussing how to improve Northern Ireland plc, to use a hated phrase. He said that he asked for practical suggestions on how the administration of the province could be improved. Within 10 minutes the people in that body had agreed on many areas in which accountability could, and, indeed, needed to, be improved. He looked around the meeting and thought it incredible that there was such a wide range of agreement until he lighted on the front row where were seated Sir David Fell and some of the other permanent secretaries with faces like thunder. It was then that he realized that there were empire builders who would never voluntarily give up their power.

Vincent Hanna's solution was a practical one, and it is one that this Government, uniquely, has the temperament to implement, and that is to bring in someone from another branch of the Civil Service — perhaps a senior man who has chaired a Department — to stir

up the complacency, the type of arrogant, smug, self-assuredness that was so demonstrated in the case of Baroness Denton, the type of self-seeking empire builder who allows civil servants to leak documents to the detriment of their Ministers and to conceal policy decisions and such from those Ministers. This is a Government that has not blinched for one minute from parachuting some of its own people into the highest levels of the Civil Service in London. While we may not be happy at the idea of a Peter Mandelson type over here, it would certainly be a welcome change if the Government were to take on board some of these Sir Humphreys *par excellence* and say "Your time has come."

Mr McFarland: I wonder if the Member was struck, when watching 'The Last Emperor', by sinologists such as Sir Percy Craddock and the comparisons that can be made between the mandarins of the Northern Ireland Office and the dealings that went on with Chris Patten and those who were friends of China during his period as governor.

Mr Brewster: I have to confess that the only television programme that I have been watching lately is 'Men Behaving Badly', but I think the title itself is probably quite appropriate for the Civil Service.

The Chairman: I would just like to make a small correction. It is actually 'The Last Governor', not 'The Last Emperor'. However, I am sure Chris Patten would be very honoured to hear about his promotion.

Mr Brewster: Confidence-building measures have long since been perceived to be concessions to Republicans, and they are supposed to be tied into the talks process. This talks process has many faults. There were those of us who looked with some contempt at the ill-disguised glee which was manifest in the talks building on Wednesday when the DUP walked out. The very idea that the third largest party in Northern Ireland could be so easily disposed of by some of these people is disgusting. The idea that confidence-building measures are not good government and that we have to have any delay is nonsense. I hope that the Government, tarnished and all though they are, will somehow re-discover their crusading spirit and put in place some measures which really are for the peace, stability and good government of all of the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr Poole: I come here today as a somewhat disillusioned person. Democracy has been rejected by the Government and violent Republicanism has been embraced. We opposed the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 — it was voted against by many of us, and that was rejected. Yet, today, we have terrorist organizations being represented at the highest levels in Northern Ireland. I find it rather strange that at a time when the Army is arresting and shooting on sight suspected terrorists in Bosnia, terrorists in Northern Ireland are being entertained by the Northern Ireland Office and, indeed, that 25 years after "bloody Friday" the person who master-minded that will be negotiating in the same room as legitimate politicians. I am glad to say that my party will not be negotiating with terrorists.

This country means a lot to me. I believe that the Union is not negotiable, especially not with thugs such as Martin McGuinness, Gerry Adams and Gerry Kelly. The IRA has called a cease-fire for one reason and one reason only — to gain more by not using their violent means than they can by using them.

We Unionists are stubborn people. When our forefathers came here back in the 17th century, they came to a very harsh land, a land that had very little in it. They took it, cultivated it and made it what it is today. Our people did it against all odds. The IRA have tried to bomb and shoot us out of it, but we dug in our heels and have not moved. Now they are trying a different tactic. Are we going to give in this time? We are not going to give in. We are not gutless. We are not running away. Just because our party Leader has not got a beer belly does not mean he is gutless. Refusing to be part of a process which will destroy the Union as we know it is not running away from the fight. I do not want to be part of a process that is selling this country out. The Loyalist parties are nothing more than performing poodles jumping through the Northern Ireland Office hoops to receive their biscuits and crumbs. They need to catch themselves on and realize that they are taking part in the Hume/Adams process rather than anything else, that they are only being made fools of, that they are only bit players and that the time has come for them to waken up to the fact that they are only in this process to tag along with IRA/Sinn Féin.

The IRA are playing a long game. Mr Trimble says that they will have to accept a partitionist settlement. I tend to agree with him in the short term, but that will only be a temporary settlement. What Hume and Adams are after is an agreed Ireland. They are going for the long term. They are looking down the road to 10, 15 or 20 years' time and saying "Yes, we will achieve our goal — our goal of a united Ireland. It is not achievable now, but we will achieve it at the earliest opportunity." That is what this talks process is about, and we have to ask ourselves whether we want to be part of it.

The Unionist people on the ground are saying one thing and one thing only: they can understand that there needs to be diversity in Unionism and they accept that there needs to be more than one Unionist party, but, on the fundamentals of the Union, all the parties need to pull together, stand for the same thing and stop squabbling with each other. Hume and Adams are standing together along with Bertie Ahern today. That is why they are successful. We as Unionists must all stand together at this time and operate tactically against these people. Our Leaders need to be discussing their tactics together, discussing the way forward. We do not need to be fighting with each other. The enemy is out there. The enemy is IRA/Sinn Féin. The enemy is the SDLP. The enemy is the Irish Government.

The Irish Government have no right whatsoever to interfere in Northern Ireland affairs. Bertie Ahern was elected to serve in Dublin South or in some constituency down there. He was not elected in Newry, Armagh or East Londonderry or in any constituency up here. He has no right to force his opinion upon us. The people who are elected up here to speak on behalf of the Nationalist community are the SDLP and, sad to say, a large number of Nationalists decided to vote for terrorists as well. That is to their shame and I do not believe that that should be taken into account when it comes to these talks.

This process is dead in the water, and we have to look at a new way of moving forward. I do not believe that the Ulster Unionists can go into negotiations with Sinn Féin and hold their heads up high. They are not going to gain anything out of it. The best way forward is for us all to work together.

Rev Trevor Kirkland: Having listened to some of the Members who have spoken, I note that one watches 'Men Behaving Badly' while others appear to be slightly depressed —

perhaps that is too strong a word. I do not subscribe to either philosophy, but I did spend last evening looking through the newspapers that I have collected since 1968. A number of phrases struck me as I went through those newspapers to which I want to draw attention. The first occurred just after the Abercorn bombing. It was the phrase "terrorist hoods". It is an unusual phrase, peculiar, I think, in many respects to society in Northern Ireland. But then a parallel phrase started to occur in the newspapers just after the Anglo-Irish Agreement — "political hoods". I looked a bit further to see if any journalist at any time had tried to give some definition of these peculiar phrases, and it seems that there are two characteristics of a hood. The first is that a hood inflicts as much damage as possible without suffering any loss to himself, and the second characteristic is that he blames circumstances which give rise to such behaviour.

As I look at how events, as portrayed in the newspapers, have developed over the last 20 or 30 years, what journalists point out to us is that instead of punishing the criminal, he is subsidized. Instead of civil order we get civil disorder and instead of political integrity we get political corruption. Some journalists have also pointed out the marked changes that have taken place within what is euphemistically known as the Protestant community. Whether the absent Mr Hugh Smyth is aware of it or not, there has been a loss of the Protestant work ethic, to name but one of the things that has gone over the last number of decades.

Another sentence that has occurred frequently in the newspapers is one that is used by successive Secretaries of State and Prime Ministers after an atrocity has taken place which goes "We will pursue them relentlessly." This is one that has been trotted out. I did not take time to count how often it was said, but it was often enough to see that it is an important sentence. Now we know what that "relentless pursuit" really was — it was the pursuit not of justice but of incorporation into the rest of society. When people who, because of their deeds, have brought havoc, destruction and death are relentlessly pursued by our political masters, it is to incorporate them into the rest of society.

The question that struck me was "Who speaks for the victims?" In all of this process which politician stands up and says "Where is the justice? Who speaks for the dead? Who speaks for those innocents who have been murdered, bombed and maimed?" All voices are strangely silent on behalf of the victims because it is not a proper subject in the corrupt society in which we live.

John Hume said in February 1997

"A vote for Sinn Fein is a vote for the IRA."

As one journalist pointed out, to sit at the table with Sinn Fein is to sit with the IRA. That is the material point which is missing from the logic of some of those who are telling us "We will defend Ulster eyeball to eyeball with Sinn Fein." Even journalists point out that to sit with them following that statement of John Hume is to sit with the IRA. These people ought not to be at any table as part of the democratic process. They should be arrested for being part and parcel of all the destruction that they have brought upon this society.

3.15 pm

Our political masters have, of course, long since rejected the basic principle that the state has an obligation to be a terror to evil. They have reversed that, so that rewarding evil seems to be much more peace-loving. The other material point is that of the agenda which has been set. According to the 'Irish News'

"IRA terms for peace must not be rejected."

And they set out four conditions which have cropped up time and time again, and have been repeated by various journalists. They are: immediate or speedy entry to talks (that has been agreed); no requirement for prior decommissioning (that has been agreed); that a timetable of six to nine months be set for the Stormont talks (that has been agreed); and other confidence-building measures, (Mr Brewster has kindly told us something about those.)

As recently as last night, Mr Hume and his party were able to tell us that devolution in the rest of the United Kingdom is not relevant to Northern Ireland. He said

"We look forward to entering into substantive negotiations in September to negotiate a form of agreed Ireland which will include systems of government to which both communities can offer their allegiance."

That statement may have been given to the 'Belfast Telegraph' last evening, but that is a policy which can be traced back over decades. It is a united Ireland or nothing. Where now Dick Spring's six democratic principles which he set out on 27 October 1993? They have long since been forgotten. Where now the Washington three which we heard about on 7 March 1995? Where now Mr Mayhew's statements of 14 March, 20 June and 28 June 1995 that there would have to be decommissioning prior to talks? Even John Bruton, as he was leaving the airport on one occasion to go to the United States of America, said that there was no prospect of Ian Paisley and Jim Molyneaux — Jim Molyneaux was Leader then — sitting down at the table to talk with Sinn Féin without prior decommissioning.

How much has changed in Northern Ireland over the months and years : Who would have thought that 25 years ago elected politicians would have been saying "Well, we must accommodate these hooligans, these terrorists, and all these bombers." How much has changed. We have lost a lot. A perusal of the newspapers demonstrates in itself how much has been lost in Northern Ireland. Mr John White asked "Who is in control, the terrorists or the Government?" The Prime Minister gave us his answer when he said in December 1993 "Peace is in the hands of the terrorist, not the Government." That is who is in control.

Mr McMichael talked about consent, this wonderful principle of consent that has been enshrined for us. What does it really mean? One academic, looking at the various documents which have enshrined this principle of consent, points out that

"the key point about any authentic consent principle is that it would involve a recognition of the legitimacy of Unionism and the validity of a Unionist refusal to agree to the ending of partition."

That is precisely what the Downing Street declaration does not recognize. Any person grasping this straw of consent has grasped nothing. An authentic consent principle would

recognize the right of the Unionist electorate to say no. It would be genuinely protective of the Union. That is precisely what has not been given. So much for consent.

We have been told that this whole process is designed to take the gun out of Irish politics. That is a very important statement that means that if there is no proper settlement, the gun will still be around. George Mitchell himself recognized that — “a political settlement is what is ultimately required to take the gun out.” So we have a choice: either roll over or, as much as we may dislike it or otherwise, say “No, we will not roll over. We will not subscribe to a process that requires a settlement to be reached before the gun is taken from our head.” Mr McCartney used the analogy of the armed robber holding up the bank teller. Well, we may be in the bank teller’s position in that we have a choice: death or stand for principle. I am glad to be associated with people who are quite prepared to stand for principle, no matter what the cost. I am not a pessimist. I am very optimistic, and I am glad that we do have leaders.

Mr Peter Robinson quoted Mr Trimble as saying that he would stop the talks if decommissioning of all arms did not start right away — that was on 7 June 1996. And he asked whether he would stand by that. If he does not mind my giving him the answer, it is this: on 7 June 1997 — exactly one year later — he put the arms issue aside. That is the change. If principle matters for anything, if the dead matter for anything, we cannot just roll over. We must stand firm.

Mr Robert John White: I have only one question. Today we have had a description of the annihilation that is facing us. “Black hole” and “roll-over” are the latest buzz-words.

This terrible day that is coming has been described in lucid terms by several Members. I want to ask a simple question in the light of what we have heard from across the Floor on a number of occasions. Are we seriously being told that we should ignore the doomsday scenario that has been painted — that we should run away and let the Government do as they please?

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Forum at its rising today do adjourn until Friday 5 September 1997.

The Chairman: We have come to the end of this session of the Forum. We will return for a plenary meeting on Friday 5 September 1997, and the Business Committee will meet on 4 September 1997. I would like to wish you all a very happy and peaceful recess.

Mr Coulter: Mr Chairman, may I on behalf of our Members wish you and the Forum’s staff a very peaceful and happy month.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

The Forum was adjourned at 3.25 pm.