

## NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Friday 12 September 1997

*The meeting was called to order at 10.04 am (Mr J R Gorman in the Chair).*

*Members observed two minutes' silence.*

**The Chairman:** I was delighted to learn from the Chairman of the Agriculture and Fisheries Committee, Mr David Campbell, that Lord Dubs and the Permanent Secretary met a deputation from that Committee on Monday.

I had a courteous note of apology from Mrs McWilliams and Mrs Sagar explaining that, owing to long-standing and unavoidable commitments elsewhere, there will be no one from their group present today.

I do not wish to say anything about the current very serious situation. No doubt, others will be talking about it in some detail today.

### GOVERNANCE OF NORTHERN IRELAND

**Mr Trimble:** It is with considerable pleasure that I move the following motion on behalf of the Ulster Unionist Party:

The future governance of Northern Ireland should be determined by the people of Northern Ireland alone.

This is a very appropriate motion, particularly in view of yesterday's developments, and the Business Committee is to be congratulated on its prescience in choosing it. It is also very appropriate because it gives us an opportunity — one that we do not take often enough — to demonstrate that, in spite of particular differences between Unionists over tactics and other matters, there is a fundamental unity of purpose that binds together all those who support the Union, as will be clearly demonstrated in this debate and in the adoption of the motion.

It is, of course, entirely right that it should be the people of Northern Ireland alone who determine their constitutional destiny and governance. This is a simple statement of basic fact which is enshrined in international law and practice, and by presenting this motion today we are repudiating, in the clearest possible terms, the suggestion by some Irish Nationalists that the relevant unit is the island of Ireland. We saw that ridiculous idea being propagated yesterday in some of the statements of Sinn Féin/IRA.



The suggestion that the relevant unit is the island of Ireland is clearly and quite simply wrong, no matter which way you look at it. It is wrong as a matter of international law and practice. In international law the right to self-determination does not adhere to any specific piece of territory; it adheres to a people. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and various United Nations covenants make this quite clear. It is a basic point of international law that it is the people who determine the destiny of the territory and not vice versa. It is a question of peoples.

We have seen this demonstrated very clearly yesterday and today. A referendum was held yesterday on our sister island — the island of Albion, to give it its correct original title — but in only one part of the island. No one is suggesting that Albion must necessarily contain just one people because it is one island. Quite clearly, it does not. Everyone accepts that the island of Albion contains more than one nation. There are difficulties over just how many nations there are — whether two, three, four or five — because Albion is more than just Wales, Scotland and England. Wales consists of at least two different peoples, and within England there is a variety of peoples, not least in the Cornish peninsula.

The basic point is that the one island is not one people, and that is clearly acknowledged. There is no reason for saying that there must be only one people in the island of Ireland when every indicator clearly shows otherwise. This applies to any indicator used in any dispute concerning the determination of ethnicity.

Indeed, there is an argument better than the one which holds that Ireland is one unit. I refer to the case that the entire British Isles is the relevant unit because the entire British Isles speaks the same language and has a shared history going back thousands of years and a shared culture. And what is shared by the people of the British Isles in terms of their culture is greater than the differences indicated in certain regions. Yet Irish Republicans and Nationalists are a minority and have always been a minority within that unit.

The statement by Sinn Féin/IRA yesterday talked at some length about the minority in Ireland — namely, the Unionist people. But consider what happened in the 1920s. At that time the relevant unit was the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland — the British Isles — which had a small minority in the south and west of Ireland representing fewer than 10% of the people as a whole. Now, the majority in the British Isles could easily have argued that they were entitled to insist on the rule of law throughout the British Isles and on respect for the existing unit, like the majority in the United States in the 1860s. However, they conceded to Irish Republicans the right to secede but, of course, only in those parts of the territory where they formed a local majority — the 26 counties that became the Irish Free State and are now the Irish Republic. There was no basis on which they could claim more than that.

Incidentally, we have to repudiate the claim sometimes made by Irish Republicans that Northern Nationalists never agreed to partition. It is quite clear that Southern Nationalists agreed to partition. They agreed to the Treaty and adopted it in legislation, and they also adopted the 1925 Agreement. They cannot in law repudiate that Agreement.

But it is not so well known that Northern Nationalists also agreed to partition. They did so in a convention which drew representatives from every district of the six counties that



became Northern Ireland. They met on the same basis as all Nationalist conventions which took place then. In July 1916, in St Mary's Hall in Belfast, they voted by a majority of two to one to accept the exclusion of the six counties of Northern Ireland from the proposal for home rule that was then being debated. There is no doubt about that, and the next time Mr Martin McGuinness makes his claim we shall remind him of the convention. It does not feature very much in most Nationalist history books, for the obvious reason that Nationalists would prefer to forget it.

With regard to the basic point of national self-determination, we can reach the same conclusion by looking at it in a different way. There are now two states within the British Isles, and between those two states there is a dispute about some territory — namely, Northern Ireland, which is a part of the United Kingdom but is claimed by the Republic of Ireland. In all analogous situations the decision as to what should be done about the disputed territory is made by reference to the views of the people of that territory alone. Normally, if there is to be a plebiscite or a referendum, it is the people of the disputed territory only who decide. This practice was clearly followed by the League of Nations in all such situations in Europe in the 1920s. One could go through them all, but time does not permit. All the examples would show that the proposition enshrined in this motion is absolutely correct as a matter of international law and practice.

We say that the governance of Northern Ireland must be determined by the people of Northern Ireland alone. Does that mean that we are repudiating the rest of the United Kingdom? No, it does not. The people of Northern Ireland must determine the constitutional destiny of the province. It is clear that they desire to be part of the United Kingdom, and that carries with it acceptance of everything that flows from membership of the kingdom. Therefore, we accept the normal standards of British democracy and practice and, of course, the procedures that apply.

It is here that some people make a fundamental mistake. That fundamental mistake was enshrined most clearly in some Labour Party proposals adopted in opposition in the 1980s. In a recent publication, a Member who has now withdrawn from this body — mistakenly withdrawn — quotes extensively from this M88 paper. But in those proposals there was a clear mistake. They were drawn up by non-lawyers, who perhaps attached too much significance to the concept of parliamentary sovereignty. That is a purely legal concept, not a political concept, and its main significance relates to the regard given to statutes by the courts.

*10.15 am*

The reality is that the British Parliament is not in a position to do anything it likes with all the people of the United Kingdom. It is bound by the accepted norms which have been demonstrated through centuries of practice. By consenting to being part of the United Kingdom we consent to being treated in accordance with the normal principles of British democracy. Anything that departs from those principles — that seeks to impose on Northern Ireland special features outside normal practice — therefore requires the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. Thus we argued about the Sunningdale Agreement in the 1970s, and we should argue so again if any attempt were ever made to impose upon the people of Northern Ireland institutions such as are mentioned in the framework document, particularly



institutions of a dynamic character designed to bring about an all-Ireland state — the particular North-South impetus. Such bodies can come into existence only with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. That is absolutely crucial and must not be forgotten.

When we say that the governance of Northern Ireland should be determined by the people of Northern Ireland we mean, of course, that it should be determined by democratic methods, dialogue and agreement. Now, this clearly excludes any determination that flows from the exercise of violence or the threat of violence. Here one returns to key principles that were stated in paragraph 10 of the Downing Street declaration. These were merely a restatement of the obvious: people who seek to be involved in democratic dialogue must demonstrate a commitment to exclusively peaceful means and show a willingness to abide by the democratic process.

Those basic tenets of peace and democracy are reflected in what are called the six Mitchell principles. However, they are not stated there as fully as we would like. Consequently, we must treat as an extremely serious matter yesterday's repudiation of the Mitchell principles by a part of the Republican movement. Here I must say that the response from Her Majesty's Government, so far, has been inadequate. I am thinking particularly of the comment made by Mr Paul Murphy, Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office. The strongest thing he said was that if Sinn Féin dishonour their commitment to the Mitchell principles, either through their own actions or by way of a return to IRA violence, they will be out of the negotiations.

That is not enough. The Government know that Sinn Féin and the IRA are one and the same. They are inextricably linked — to use the language of the Government. Therefore, the very least that should be said is that any breach of the Mitchell principles by the IRA will be treated as a breach by Sinn Féin. The bodies are inextricably linked, so if one part of the organization breaches the principles, the other breaches them also. Maybe that is what Mr Murphy intended to say, but his language did not go far enough.

But even the point that I have made does not go far enough. The Republican movement purported to sign up to the Mitchell principles on Tuesday but repudiated them on Thursday. We have to take stock of that very serious development, and the Government must go further than just saying that any breach of Mitchell will mean exclusion. They will have to consider whether they did the right thing by inviting into the process people who immediately turned round and repudiated the basic principles on which it is based.

Mr Murphy says that some questions will have to be asked of Sinn Féin on Monday. There will have to be more than just questions. We shall be looking very closely at what the Government say and do on this matter in the course of the coming days.

Other matters at which we have to look very closely include the need to clear up the ambiguity that still surrounds what is called the Mitchell compromise on decommissioning. That too was referred to in the IRA statement yesterday. That ambiguity has to be cleared up, and in the process we have to remind ourselves that the second Mitchell principle is the total disarmament of all paramilitary organizations. Total disarmament is a Mitchell principle. People who sign up to the Mitchell principles are signing up to disarmament. The pretence by some people that that commitment has no content because it is not time-specific is not



defensible. If the parties to the process decide that the Mitchell principle of disarmament should be fulfilled in a particular way, any party that fails to do that will be in breach of the principle.

The Mitchell report proposed that the principle of disarmament should be fulfilled in a particular way. It was called the Mitchell compromise on decommissioning — not decommissioning before the talks, as we would have preferred, and not decommissioning after the talks, which, of course, is completely unacceptable, but decommissioning during the talks. Mitchell said that actual decommissioning should take place during the talks as part of the process towards the total disarmament of all paramilitary organizations. A serious flaw in the Government's proposals on decommissioning is the failure to be clear on this issue. It is essential that it be made clear that the Mitchell compromise means actual decommissioning during the talks. That has to be spelt out clearly and in such a way that it will happen. Here the Government have weakened their position by not clearly spelling out a sanction.

Not only that, but they are also proceeding to give a false impression of the situation by indicating that decommissioning is a voluntary process. In a certain sense, of course, it is voluntary. The weapons will not be seized by the police, although we would like that to happen as a result of searches of the properties where they are concealed. It is anticipated that the possessors of illegal weapons will come and surrender them for destruction, or whatever. But that will not be voluntary; it will come about only as a result of pressure being applied and the existence of sanctions were it not to happen. The Government must indicate that they intend to apply pressure and sanctions.

In a sense, there is a sanction in the Government's proposals. I refer to the reference to review progress made in the discussions. But that review is to take place at two-month intervals, which is clearly inadequate in the light of what has happened. This is a matter to which the Government must return. They must make it clear that there will have to be actual decommissioning during talks, that pressure will be applied and that there will be sanctions.

I return to the basic principle contained in the motion: that it is for the people of Northern Ireland to determine their constitutional destiny. People may say what they like, but some of the things that others have been saying are very silly. I am thinking here of a recent comment made by the Secretary of State in the 'Belfast Telegraph' on the issue of decommissioning — a very silly comment if it was considered, and even sillier if it was not. People may say what they like — one thinks of comments a fortnight ago in the 'Belfast Telegraph' and nine years ago in Labour Party documents adopted in opposition — what they say cannot obscure the reality. We must not be mesmerized by what some people say. We must keep our eyes clearly on the legal reality of the constitutional guarantee contained in statute and, more important, on the political reality, which will be borne out by events, however much people may like it or dislike it. It has been borne out by events in the past and has been vindicated.

The political reality is that any institutions of governance affecting Northern Ireland cannot work, and will not work, without the wholehearted consent and participation of the people of Northern Ireland. Any attempt to bypass that principle will end in failure. I hope that the Government will not be carried away by the silly vapouring of the present Secretary



of State. I hope they will keep an eye on that reality and will not bring constitutional turmoil to this part of the United Kingdom, the consequences of which might be unpredictable.

**Mr McBride:** I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all the words after “future” and add

“development of peaceful and democratic politics in Northern Ireland depends on recognition of the fundamental reality that there can be no change in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. This Forum endorses that principle and welcomes the continued support for it by both Governments, as reaffirmed this week by the Minister of State for political development and the Irish Republic’s Minister for Foreign Affairs.”

I will endeavour to be brief, but only because I am suffering from a head cold.

It is appropriate to open our contribution on this debate with a reference to the very important vote yesterday in favour of devolution in Scotland. That is a historic milestone in the revitalization of the British constitution, and I welcome it very much. It was a very confident and clear-cut vote. I think that we are moving in the direction of a United Kingdom in which greater powers are devolved to the regions and power comes closer to the people. That is a very important principle and one that we in the Alliance Party have always supported. We have always believed that the people of Northern Ireland must indeed decide their own future as best they can and must have a large share in governing themselves. That is our basic principle.

The Scottish vote is very relevant today in this Chamber, where, I must note, there seem to be fewer and fewer people. Mr McCartney has very kindly sent his thoughts on paper — a very positive development in many ways. This body could be the model for a Northern Ireland Assembly of some form. Most people here want to see that happen. We must look on ourselves as being, in some sense, the forerunners of a devolved Assembly. In that context it behoves everybody to act with a degree of responsibility so that those outside — the public in Northern Ireland and those at Westminster who hold the power — can say “These are responsible people. These are people who are capable of filling this role if we give them greater powers.”

In that context it is quite disappointing that such a motion should be being debated the very day after the Scottish vote. Whatever Mr Trimble says, the plain words of his motion amount to little less than a declaration of independence. It is an extremely ill-advised motion. *[Laughter]* Members may laugh, but let them read the words:

“The future governance of Northern Ireland should be determined by the people of Northern Ireland alone.”

The future governance of Northern Ireland is going to be determined not least by the Parliament and the Government of the United Kingdom. That is what being part of the Union means. We are not an independent people, and we do not aspire to being an independent people. We are a part of the United Kingdom, and that means that other people are involved in shaping the broad outline of our destiny. That is an important principle.



But what is really important is the principle of consent — the principle that there can be no change in the constitutional position against the wishes of the people of Northern Ireland. That is the key principle, and we need to hold it. But the motion tries to broaden it. The word “governance” means the totality, and not just the constitutional position. Unionists have very seriously overstated their case today. That is unwise and regrettable, particularly at this time.

The motion goes against the principles of the Union. The Union means that we are part of a wider body and subject to its laws and governance — fundamentally, to the authority of the British Government, and particularly the British Parliament. That is a fundamental principle, and it ought to be a fundamental principle of the Unionists. Certainly we stand committed to it.

The motion also goes against the basis of the talks in which we are all currently — at least some of us (I am not quite sure just who). But the basis of this process goes back to the three relationships set out at the start of the talks in 1991 by the Ulster Unionists, the DUP, ourselves and the SDLP. That process recognized wider relationships, and it recognized a role for the Irish Government in discussing certain aspects of them. It is the basis on which we are now talking. It is the only way in which we can proceed, and anyone who tries to renegotiate it now will just back himself into a corner and into irrelevance.

As I have said, the fundamental principle is not a demand for sovereignty for Northern Ireland or assertion of our right to decide everything without regard to anybody else, particularly the British Parliament. The fundamental principle is consent: the constitutional status of Northern Ireland cannot be changed against the will of the people of Northern Ireland. This very important principle is the guarantee, and for that reason Unionists should take it very seriously.

*10.30 am*

As Mr Trimble said, the Secretary of State rather muddled the waters a couple of weeks ago before going on what appears to be an extremely well-deserved holiday. However, the fact is that in recent years the British and Irish Governments have repeatedly asserted their commitment to the principle of consent — not least in the Downing Street declaration — and they reasserted it last week. Unionists should note with satisfaction the comments of the British Government and with even more satisfaction the comments of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Irish Republic because they are important. If Unionists would recognize the strong points in their own case, if they would stop snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, they would see how strong their position is. So long as the principle of consent is maintained, they will be in a strong position.

Mr Trimble has spoken at length about yesterday's IRA statement. That statement is deeply and profoundly unacceptable. When we were in the talks on Tuesday we raised this broad issue in advance, obviously without speaking with Sinn Féin. I want to make it completely clear that we are going to be there on Monday. We will not be running away. We will be tackling Sinn Féin on these issues, and I hope that other people will have the guts to do the same.



**Rev Dr Ian Paisley:** I am not going to agree with Mr McBride. Anyone who in this grave hour of Ulster's peril says that this motion advocates an independent Ulster has obviously taken leave of his political horse sense — if he ever had any political horse sense.

It is a serious matter that we are discussing. It is the gravest of all issues. On many occasions we have heard certain political spokesmen telling us that the Union is safe and secure. One of them is prominent by his absence today. It is because the Union is not secure, is not safe, that we are in this very serious situation. We need to be aware of that. I opened the 'Daily Telegraph' this morning and read this in its editorial:

"What is taking place here is not a 'peace process': rather, it is a blackmail process. That is why this newspaper — which more than any other has supported the Unionist cause — thinks that it would be a madness for the Ulster Unionists to enter the talks. In so doing, they would be sacrificing the principle of not negotiating with the IRA/Sinn Féin for minimal practical gain. Why should they trust this Government? Even the principle of their consent to constitutional change has been messed with by Mo Mowlam; nor has the efficacy of the 'triple lock' — the doctrine that any important innovations require the agreement of Ulster's parties, as well as people and Parliament — been adequately restated by Mr Blair. Indeed, Miss Mowlam is prepared only to guarantee that, in the future, Ulster would have a 'relationship' to Britain — but not this particular relationship, namely the Union. After all, the Irish Republic has a 'relationship' with Britain!"

That, of course, fully answers the speech that we have heard from the Alliance Party.

The seriousness of the situation is simply that the traditional enemies of this province as a part of the United Kingdom — and Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom — have been enabled, through the Anglo-Irish process, allied with successive British Governments who have been prepared to surrender to them, to bring into being a talks process in which no Unionist can have any trust. I have not met any Unionist who sees anything in these talks for Unionists. There is nothing in them for Unionists because the playing-field has been skilfully structured. So far as Unionism is concerned, the agenda is a Republican one. And it is buttressed by both Governments. Neither Government have had the respect, in the process of these talks, of the representatives of the Unionist community. The Unionist community was able to defeat their proposals for decommissioning. What happened? The next day the Secretary of State said "We are pressing on regardless." Therefore, no one can have any confidence in this talks process.

I am interested in the Alliance Party's comment that they are going to raise the matter. Will they refer it to both Governments? Let Alliance Members stand up and tell us that that is what they are going to do. Are they going to call on the two Governments to deal with this matter and remove those who have publicly, through one part of their mouth, totally repudiated what was said through the other part of their mouth in the past week when they signed up to the Mitchell principles? There is no difference between the IRA who made the statement in the 'Republican News' and the IRA who signed up. Let us make that perfectly clear.

Mr Murphy says that he is going to question carefully what this means. Everybody knows what it means — even the 'Irish News', as indicated in its editorial today. That editorial says that Sinn Féin are proving Ian Paisley and Bob McCartney right and that they should not be doing that. I think Mr McBride, if he gives this some proper contemplation, will also know what it means. The IRA have declared that they are not giving up.



The Leader of the Official Unionist Party is quite right when he says that it is time the Government said how far they accept the Mitchell compromise. At the moment they have not accepted it, in that they have not declared that those who refuse to decommission during the process cannot remain in the talks. And we need to have a sanction. In this grave hour we must forge a common Unionist position so that all who wish to defend the Union, who want to remain within the United Kingdom, can read from the same hymn sheet and sing the same tune.

My party has had a series of talks with the Official Unionist Party. In a press release that was issued a week ago, we stated that the two parties are totally agreed that consent — the right of the people of Northern Ireland alone to determine their own future — is a fundamental governing principle which must apply in all circumstances. This principle must be accepted by the Government and all parties.

The two parties are also agreed that the issue of decommissioning — the handing over of illegal, terrorist weaponry — must be resolved to their satisfaction before there can be substantive political negotiation.

Recognizing the need for greater Unionist unity of approach at this critical time, the parties agreed to meet again. We met again yesterday and reaffirmed what we had done the week before. These are principles on which Unionist people can unite. I trust that we will have a pan-Unionist front based on these simple tenets so that the Governments and the world will know where Ulster Unionists really stand. That needs to be established as quickly as possible because the hour is grave. There is no doubt that there are forces at work trying to speed up the dissolution of the Union between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

How can people tell us, as Mr McBride has told us, to rely on the pledge of Burke? This is a man who already has a question mark hanging over his morality in political dealings. Now we are to say "This is the man to put your faith in." As for the Secretary of State, what does she say? She says that it is not a matter of numbers, a matter of geography or even a matter of function. The matter of consent has now become the question "Do you wish to have an accommodation and live in peace?" Everyone would vote for that.

I am told that yesterday 76% of my party voted for negotiation. That is absolutely relevant — I believe in negotiation. But the question was not whether they wanted me to sit at a table and negotiate with Gerry Adams. My party took part in an opinion poll — it was called a general election — and voted 100% against my sitting down with IRA/Sinn Féin. That is the election mandate we got. As for these people doctoring opinion polls, I laughed last night when the Nationalist and Republican leaders did not like parts. They said that there was a movement. The majority of Ulster people, including many Roman Catholics, remain firm: we are not leaving the United Kingdom.

**The Chairman:** Do you want to say anything, Mr Smyth?

**Mr Hugh Smyth:** Well, as you have coaxed me, Mr Chairman, yes. But I will be very brief, having heard Mr Trimble outside and Dr Paisley inside.



I too am bitterly disappointed by the statement of the IRA. This is not something that we can solve; it is something which the Irish and British Governments, and in particular George Mitchell, are going to have to solve.

Sometimes I am not quite sure what Dr Paisley means. He has said that everything is designed. Anyone really listening to him would believe that we are practically in a united Ireland. But I heard him, not too long ago, before he walked out of the talks, telling Burke — and rightly so — that neither he nor his children nor their children would see a united Ireland. That is a good, confident statement, and one which I support, though perhaps for different reasons. As I have stated here many times, no matter what way you disguise it, no matter whether you have a simple referendum on the border, or whatever, the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland will never accept a united Ireland. I have no right to speak for them, but I have no doubt that a big percentage of that majority come from the Catholic community or the Republican community.

It is fine to stand here, but we still need to find a way forward. I am not going to say to the Official Unionists or the DUP how to do it, but we must make sure that we do not run away from these talks. At the moment they are the only show in town. However we go about it, it is our duty to be there and to fight for what Scotland has now got. I know the argument that Scotland and Wales are getting their parliaments for different reasons — we know that argument. One could even chastise the Leader of the Conservative Party, who stated that this could cause the break-up of the Union but does not seem to worry too much about Northern Ireland. I do not believe it.

For historical reasons Northern Ireland is entitled to an Assembly. I wish that we had the opportunity that Scotland had yesterday to say whether we want our own parliament. I have no doubt that between 75% and 80% of people would vote in favour of a Northern Ireland Assembly. And that is still within our grasp. I know that there are many people, particularly on the DUP Benches, who want a Northern Ireland Assembly. They are people who believe in devolution, and they believe in it for all the right reasons. We have continuously hammered Tory and Labour Governments for interfering in our affairs. We hammered them for spending money in ways with which we did not agree.

The situation in Northern Ireland will be put right only when we as a people decide how we want the cake cut up. If we want to spend money on education, so be it. If we want to spend it on housing or health care, so be it. We will have to go to the electorate every four or five years, and they can comment on any mistakes we make.

*10.45 am*

At the moment we are paying a very heavy price for something that we have no control over. While I accept many of the arguments, and while I accept the disappointment felt by people, I believe that it is up to the party Leaders to try to salvage something from this. They must be in there fighting. We must be in there to ensure that Northern Ireland gets what the vast majority of people want for it — control over its own affairs.



I believe that the opportunity is here. People have mentioned the possibility of proximity talks. Yes, that could happen, but how long would the Government be prepared to allow it to continue? Three weeks? Four weeks? My fear — and there is no point in anybody saying that they will not do it, or cannot do it, for they have done it in the past — is that if we, as elected representatives, cannot come together and find a way forward, they will be prepared to fold this Forum. They would be quite happy to do that.

Incidentally, I am disappointed and saddened that so many parties have chosen not to come here on such an important day and for such an important debate. We all know that the Tory Government would have been quite happy to let the Forum and the talks fold, to continue negotiating when it suited them and then to go to the people to try to impose a solution. Well, I believe that the Labour Administration would do so even more quickly.

Maybe yesterday's statement by the IRA was designed to keep Unionists out. We have to examine the timing very carefully. As I have stated here on many occasions (it is in the Record of Debates if anybody wants to read it) the real difficulty for Sinn Féin is not decommissioning but consent — the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. My fear is that once again we will be seen as the bad boys. Sinn Féin are in the talks. They go over to America and tell the world "Here we are. Nobody is being killed. We have a cease-fire. We want to talk. We have signed the Mitchell principles, but the Unionists will not talk to us." That is the way the situation is seen by the powerful American Administration. It is also the way it could be seen by the British public, whom we cannot ignore.

There are very difficult times ahead, and I appeal to the Unionist Leaders not to run away but to find a way of getting in and hammering these people. They must make sure that the consent that is talked about is the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. And we know, without a shadow of doubt, what that means. It means, as it has always meant and always will mean, that we shall remain a part of the United Kingdom. Equally, I believe, it will allow us to take back control of our own affairs. Hasten the day.

**Mr Donaldson:** In supporting the motion moved by the Ulster Unionist Party, I want to look briefly at the whole issue of the principle of consent. It is our clear understanding that it is underlined by the constitutional guarantee set out in the Northern Ireland Constitution Act 1973 — the guarantee that there will be no change in the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom without the freely expressed wish of a majority of the people in the province.

But the principle of consent, in our view, goes beyond the very narrow issue, important though it is to Unionists, of our constitutional position within the United Kingdom. The principle of consent relates not only to our constitutional status but also to the institutions of government in Northern Ireland and to any political agreement that establishes such institutions.

Mr McBride has told us that our Government and the Irish Government respect the principle of consent. Our concern is over their definition of consent. We have seen over the years an evolution of their definition, and this has caused us concern. I refer to the definition contained in paragraph 4 of the Downing Street declaration:



"The British Government agree that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent freely and concurrently given North and South to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish."

Such a definition of consent is totally unacceptable to Unionists. It is our view that consent, in respect of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom, is a matter for the people of Northern Ireland alone, just as yesterday it was for the people of Scotland alone to determine their constitutional position and their government.

Did Mr McBride have a vote in the referendum in Scotland yesterday? Of course not. Only the people of Scotland voted — the people of Scotland alone. What has the people of Scotland alone exercising their democratic right to decide their constitutional position got to do with independence? The same applies to Northern Ireland as a part of the United Kingdom. The people of Northern Ireland alone have the right to determine the governance of their province, just as the people of Scotland alone have the right to determine the governance of Scotland.

**Mr McBride:** Does the Member accept that the basis of the referendum in Scotland was legislation laid down by the British Parliament and that the process will now be taken forward by the British Parliament?

**Mr Donaldson:** Of course. It is the Parliament of the United Kingdom. But the issue of governance has been determined by the people of Scotland. If the people of Scotland had voted no, Parliament could not have imposed institutions of governance against their will. That is precisely what we are talking about. The governance of Northern Ireland is a matter for the people of Northern Ireland alone. Of course Parliament is sovereign in terms of legislating for the will of the people, but it is the will of the people that is the issue in terms of our future governance and in terms of our constitutional position.

The framework documents addressed the issue of consent, and once again we saw a very convoluted interpretation of the principle. My party made it clear at the time, and reiterates, that the framework documents actually undermine the principle of consent. They propose the harmonization of functions, which will mean making our systems of government here more like those in the Irish Republic and less like those in the rest of the United Kingdom, leading eventually to joint authority and ultimately to a united Ireland — and all in the context of denying people consent. Therefore, the framework documents, in terms of proposing institutions, completely failed to adhere to the principle of consent. Consent must apply to the institutions of government and not just to the narrower constitutional status of Northern Ireland.

Let me state for the record once again, since I know that Mr McCartney has cast doubt on our position, that the framework documents do not in any way represent the basis for negotiation so far as the Ulster Unionist Party is concerned. We have rejected the framework documents, and we are not going to negotiate upon that basis.

More recently we had the Secretary of State further muddying the waters on consent with her very confused definition: that it is not about geography or about numbers. We know that that is nonsense. Consent has to be measured, and the only way of measuring it is



through geography and through numbers. That is precisely how consent was measured in Scotland yesterday, and it is the only means of measuring it, both in respect of constitutional position and in respect of institutions of government, in Northern Ireland.

So why have the Government adopted this position? The statement from the IRA yesterday may help us to clarify it:

"For Republicans any political-consent requirements must have a straightforward 32-county context. It must recognize the properly defined parameters of nationhood and self-determination as understood in international law. Any consent requirement must be defined within the context of British withdrawal and encompass all the people of Ireland."

The IRA do not accept the reality of consent. That is what this statement says. They are not prepared to accept the principle of consent. Nor are Sinn Féin, who are part and parcel of the IRA. The principle of consent has to be faced up to by Republicans. I believe that they are not prepared to do so, and I believe that the Government have been trying to confuse the principle in order to help Republicans out of their difficulty.

Well, on this issue, Unionists are totally united. There can be no tinkering with the principle of consent. There can be no confusion of it by the Government. In the light of all the confusion that has been created and of the statement by the IRA yesterday, it is incumbent upon the Prime Minister to make absolutely clear where they stand. The people of Northern Ireland want to hear clearly and definitively what their Government's position is. They want a clear definition and a commitment from the Government that the principle of consent will apply in all circumstances.

The motion before us is important at this time because it enables us to reaffirm our commitment to the principle of consent, our commitment to the idea that it is the people of Northern Ireland, and no one else, who will determine their future constitutional position and structures and institutions of government. That is the fundamental basis of our Unionism. The Government must get the message loud and clear that we will not negotiate away our rights as a part of the United Kingdom and that those rights are underpinned by the principle of consent. Any attempt by the Government to tinker with that principle will not be supported in any way whatsoever by the Unionist family.

**Mr Peter Robinson:** This issue is fundamental in any constitutional arrangement. The principle of consent is a matter of common sense. It is a recognized fact that you cannot govern without the consent of the people. There are lessons in our history which show that that is the case. Anybody who wants to do so can cast his mind back to the Sunningdale Agreement. There was an election before the Sunningdale Agreement. Commitments were given by the then Leader of the Ulster Unionists as to the stand that his party would take. He breached those commitments and entered into an agreement which did not have the consent of the people. It ran for a time, as any proposal that does not have the consent of the people can, but ultimately the people brought it down because they were not being governed with their consent.

It is a principle of common sense, and those who ignore it or attempt to get round it will do so at their peril and will be brought to realize that you cannot govern without the consent of the people.



*11.00 am*

What are the statutory bases of the principle of consent? In the days of Stormont it was underpinned by the 1949 Act, which indicated that there could be no change in the position of Northern Ireland as part of His Majesty's Dominions and of the United Kingdom without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland. It was recognized that Parliament represented the people and, therefore, that the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland was required. The 1973 Act wiped out that provision and all the other provisions of the 1949 Act. Only one person — the Leader of this party — moved an amendment in the House of Commons to have incorporated in the 1973 Act a provision requiring the consent of the people of Northern Ireland.

That is the statutory basis: the 1973 Act's commitment to the principle of consent. All Unionists now know — at least they should have learnt it in 1985 — that the 1973 provision on the principle of consent was in reality very limited. It dealt only with the final act of severance. Only the question of the legal hand-over of Northern Ireland was covered by the 1973 provision. The agreement of 1985 — a most fundamental agreement — gave a country outside the United Kingdom a direct say in the future of Northern Ireland, allowed that country to be part of the governance of Northern Ireland, and the people of Northern Ireland were not allowed to give or withhold their consent. So the 1973 principle of consent applied only to the final act of severance; it did not give us the right to give or withhold consent to anything that could lead to a united Ireland. And that is the issue at stake.

Mr McBride says that this motion is tantamount to a declaration of independence. It comes ill that in his amendment he suggests that we model our thinking on that of Mr Burke. Mr Burke has no commitment to the principle that the people of Northern Ireland alone should consent to their future. Nowhere does he ever indicate that. Nowhere have the Government of the Irish Republic ever indicated that. Their commitment is the one in the joint declaration — the Downing Street declaration — and it is a principle of consent of the most curious kind:

"The British Government agree that it is for the people of the island of Ireland alone by agreement between the two parts respectively to exercise the right of self-determination on the basis of consent freely and concurrently given North and South to bring about a united Ireland."

So you have the right, as part of the island of Ireland, North or South, to give or withhold your consent.

It is indeed interesting that the mandarins who penned the framework document took as a guiding tenet for co-operation in search of this agreement the principle of self-determination as set out in the joint declaration. If the principle of consent as set out in the joint declaration were not different from the internationally accepted principle of consent, they would not have had to qualify it in this way. If there were only one principle of consent, there would be no requirement to say that it was a principle of self-determination as set out in the joint declaration. It was because it was expressly different that it was set up in a way that was not to the benefit of the Unionist community. Consent is sought only to the final hand-over of Northern Ireland into a united Ireland.



Therefore, when we were dealing with the Major Government we made it very clear that we saw it as necessary to get a proper definition of the word "consent". We entered into months of discussion. We told them that, first of all, we wanted the principle of consent to apply throughout any negotiations on matters which would alter Northern Ireland's constitutional position, on all changes to the means of governing of Northern Ireland and on the creation of any institution or structure impacting upon Northern Ireland.

After months of discussion, the Government said that they were prepared to indicate that the principle of consent should apply to any substantial constitutional matter, but when we got down to the question of determining what a substantial constitutional matter is, they said that there was no way they could legislate for that. Ultimately the Government would have to decide. That is not the case. It is quite possible to set up some body to determine whether any change that the Government are making merits the requirement to go to the people of Northern Ireland by way of a referendum. If the Government want to go down that road we are happy to talk to them, but it is essential that the people have their say not only before a final change in Northern Ireland's constitutional position but also at any point along the road.

There should have been referenda on the Downing Street declaration and on the Anglo-Irish Agreement, because those were fundamental to Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom. So far as this process is concerned, the Government are prepared to have a referendum on the outcome because they will allow only one outcome. But the only possible outcome is the one that they trailed in paragraph 4 of their ground-rules document, Command Paper 3232, which they made even stronger when they wrote to Mr McGuinness of IRA/Sinn Féin in that famous *aide-mémoire* — the framework document.

The framework document proposes a process which, bit by bit, would take us into a united Ireland through consultation on an all-Ireland basis, harmonization on an all-Ireland basis and executive power on an all-Ireland basis. It is an inevitable process which, once set in place, will not require any further steps to take us into a united Ireland. The Government are clearly quite happy with that as the only possible outcome. The people would have the right to a referendum at the very time when it would be least obvious what the Government were doing — a very clever trick. The referendum would take place not when the people of Northern Ireland were most aware of the trap into which they were falling, but when it was least plain when it would happen. That is why the Government want us to sign up to the talks process. This process has only one possible outcome, and that is why Unionists should not be a part of it.

Unionists should ensure from their position of strength that for the talks process — and talks are necessary — there is a level playing-field, which will allow a Unionist outcome.

**Mr Davis:** I want to quote from the House of Commons debate of 27 November 1985 on the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I am sure that Members will know whom I am quoting. We shall be told by the Government that there must be consent, that we will be listened to, but Members should be very wary. In Hansard of 27 November 1985 we read



"On three occasions in the week prior to the signing of the agreement, on the Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, I stood in the House, having been told in essence by foreign journals what the agreement contained, and it was denied to me that an agreement existed or had even been reached".

These were our Members of Parliament who had never been told about the Agreement. Indeed, Mrs Thatcher had denied such an agreement existed. The Member went on to say

"I stood outside Hillsborough, not waving a Union flag — I doubt whether I will ever wave one again — not singing hymns, saying prayers or protesting, but like a dog and asked the Government to put in my hand the document that sold my birthright. They told me that they would give it to me as soon as possible. Having never consulted me, never sought my opinion or asked my advice, they told the rest of the world what was in store for me.

I stood in the cold outside the gate of Hillsborough Castle and waited for them to come out and give me the Agreement second hand. It is even more despicable that they could not even send one of their servants to give it to me. I had been told three hours before that it would be brought out to me. At 2.45 pm, 15 minutes after the press conference had begun, I asked a policeman whether he would bring me the declaration that betrayed everything that I stood for. A senior police officer went into Hillsborough castle, asked for the document and brought it out to me.

I felt desolate because as I stood in the cold outside Hillsborough castle everything that I held dear turned to ashes in my mouth. Even in my most pessimistic moments, reading the precise detail in the Irish press on the Wednesday before, I never believed that the agreement would deliver me, in the context that it has, into the hands of those who for 15 years have murdered personal friends, political associates and hundreds of my constituents. I hope that no one else in the House ever has to stand outside the gates of anywhere and see his most cherished privileges and ideals turn to dust and ashes in his mouth".

That is what it was like for me and for the late Harold McCusker, and on that occasion our Members of Parliament from all the Unionist traditions spoke very well. I recommend Members to read the full Hansard report.

But in the same debate — and I think I have got the Gentleman right — a Mr Alfred Dubs (the present Minister, Lord Dubs) said

"I have visited Northern Ireland several times".

He went on to say — this is the interesting part for the members of the Democratic Unionist Party, and a part that I thought very amusing —

"On one of my visits, I was shown around Belfast by a woman who I felt sure was a very hard-line supporter of the Democratic Unionist Party. At the beginning of the day, I asked her what her attitude was to the border, and she more or less said that she would fight to retain the six counties' separation from the rest of Ireland. The hunger strikes were on and there was tension in the air. Indeed, a hunger striker's funeral was taking place on the Falls Road.

Later that day we were looking at a particularly desolate part of Belfast and I asked her whether she had ever been to Dublin. She said that she had, so I asked her what she thought of it. She said that Dublin was a fine place. I asked 'Are you really saying that coming under Dublin would be worse than all this?' I did not talk about Dublin having a consultative status, but referred merely to 'coming under Dublin'. She replied 'Put that way, I suppose we could work under Dublin'".

But this is the worrying part for me, as it came from a person now a Minister at the Northern Ireland Office:



"For long I have believed in a united Ireland. I hope that the agreement will enable a Labour Government committed to a united Ireland to make progress. That is for the future. That is for the day when there is a different Government. In the meantime we have the reality of a debate about an agreement and the reaction in Northern Ireland and the whole of Ireland to our decision this evening".

Mr Dubs went on to say that he believed in a united Ireland and that a future Labour Administration would work towards that end.

*11.15 am*

I do not believe that the present Government have any more intention than the previous Government had of keeping to the principle of consent. Indeed, as one Member has already said, they do not need Unionist consent, as has been seen with the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the declaration and the framework document. All they need is Unionist acquiescence.

**The Chairman:** The fact that I am calling Mrs Iris Robinson next is not to say that she was the friend of Lord Dubs.

**Mrs I Robinson:** I am not that woman.

As everyone saw yesterday in Scotland — and we will soon see the same in Wales — constitutional change requires the consent of the people. Would that the people in Northern Ireland could receive equal treatment, equality of esteem and equal access to the democratic process.

In law, national and international, Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom and is entitled to remain so while that is the wish of the greater number of its citizens. We have a legal and moral right to a referendum on this single issue. Consent will be judged by a majority of the population expressing its willingness to remain within the United Kingdom. In the minds of most people, it is that simple — democracy in action, the will of the people finding democratic expression, the application of basic human rights. But we in Northern Ireland are asked to accept double standards.

When discussing Northern Ireland, our opponents — Sinn Féin/IRA, the SDLP, Fianna Fáil and Irish America — are always keen to make spurious comparisons with South Africa and Israel. But let us take the example of Alaska, bought from Russia, separated from the United States of America by Canada, yet a constituent state of the USA. In what circumstances could Alaska become politically a part of Canada? Should a poll be taken in Canada, or should the people of Alaska have the democratic right to decide whether to secede from the United States and to apply to join Canada? Of course the consent of the people of Alaska would have to be sought before any change could be considered. But when it comes to Northern Ireland, all we get are double standards. Solutions to all problems must be ones that will appease the terrorists. We even have the ridiculous situation of one group of paramilitaries being upset because the other group is able to wring concessions more readily from the Labour Government.



This week Madeleine Albright was in Israel. There she said that Mr Arafat must take comprehensive steps to combat terrorism and that those steps must be sustained, relentless and unrelenting. The same Madeleine Albright also, this very week, suspended the deportation proceedings against six men convicted of IRA crimes in order to support the involvement of Sinn Féin/IRA in the so-called peace process — double standards again. Send Timothy McVeigh to the electric chair for terrorism, but have Sinn Féin/IRA representatives to tea at the White House.

And what of Marjorie Mowlam? In 1988 Mo Mowlam was the co-author of the Labour Party document 'Towards a United Ireland'. That document was not a search for truth, equality, justice or democratic principles. On the contrary, it envisaged the coercion of Unionists into a united Ireland. Dr Mowlam is a hypocrite. She is a Secretary of State in a United Kingdom Government actively promoting the removal of Northern Ireland from the Union. That document, to which she put her hand, clearly states

"No Labour Administration will allow its commitment to consent to be transformed into a veto of political progress towards unification."

I am sorry that Mr Smyth has left the Chamber for this is something I would have liked him to take note of: the will of the Ulster people, democratically expressed, will be set aside. We are not to be permitted to oppose the process leading to a united Ireland.

I am also able to remind Members that, just as the IRA has not changed its attitude, neither has Mo Mowlam. In 1995 she said, in a paper called 'Northern Ireland Briefing',

"Our policy is to support the reunification of Ireland by consent."

She reiterated this view in the John Smith memorial lecture in June 1996, and in 1997, speaking to the so-called G7 group of business and union leaders, she described the basis of the joint approach of the British and Irish Governments as

"working to produce balanced constitutional change of a yet unspecified nature".

Unspecified, my foot. The deal is already done; the real negotiations to drive Unionists out of the Union and into the Irish Republic are well advanced — advanced behind Unionist backs.

What can we do? We can start by withholding our consent. We can refuse to be railroaded into talks that have one, and only one, predetermined outcome. We can ask for a referendum on the issue of the Union, the question being "Do you consent to have Northern Ireland remain within the United Kingdom?", and after the issue is settled we can enter into talks with representatives of all constitutional parties which agree to accept the outcome of that test of opinion.

So let the principle of consent apply to the whole process. First, seek consent to remain within the United Kingdom. Secondly, when the people have determined that Northern Ireland shall remain within the United Kingdom, negotiate the method of governance. Thirdly, submit to the people for their consent the form of government within



the United Kingdom negotiated in the talks. Fourthly, as democrats, seek the consent of the people to represent them in the new structure.

Now who is afraid of the people?

**Mr Weir:** This week we heard one of the least surprising announcements in the history of Northern Ireland — that the IRA was not committed to non-violence and, indeed, intended to hand in not a single weapon.

Perhaps the only less surprising announcement was the one we heard during the course of the summer when our Secretary of State declared that she believed the IRA cease-fire to be genuine — after six weeks. Neither statement should have surprised us, nor, indeed, should the attitude of Sinn Féin to consent. They have been clear and unambiguous in their rejection of it.

However, in considering the issue of consent, we should perhaps look at some people who have been a little bit more cunning in their attitude to it and have at times given the impression that they are fully behind it, whereas, in fact, they have been adopting a rather different approach.

With regard to the issue of consent, all Members will, of course, be aware of Robert McCartney's publication as it was sent to them. If Members are interested in reading more on the principle of consent, I refer them to a publication by the Friends of the Union which came out last year. Entitled 'Parity of Esteem and Consent: How Words Deceive', it was written by an Ulster Unionist officer, Arlene Foster. I commend it to Members.

First of all, look at the position of the British Government. Much has been said about the words of Mo Mowlam. She told us recently that consent was not to be defined in terms of geography or numbers. The only other time I heard that expression was when the great John Hume — that great statesman and, at one stage, possible Irish president — told us, in honeyed words to reassure us, that the strength of Unionists lay in their numbers and their geography. One wonders if Mo Mowlam's statement, which was clearly intentional — it was not a gaffe — was meant to assure John Hume and Nationalism that Unionists' strengths would be removed and they would not have an opportunity, in any meaningful sense, to give their consent to any solution.

So the question mark over the British Government's position, as has been pointed out by Mr Peter Robinson, comes down to the fact that Unionists' only opportunity to consent to something occurs at the very last instant. We can move to a *de facto* united Ireland but we can only really oppose a *de jure* united Ireland when, in fact, it is too late.

Turning again to that great statesman, John Hume, we see his true attitude to consent in some of the statements that he has made down the years. For example — and this has been quoted — he said

"The two greatest problems in Ireland are the British guarantee and the Unionist dependence on it"



This is the man who, in 1995 at the Dublin Forum, along with his party, signed the report which apparently committed the SDLP to consent. In fact, he sees consent itself as the principal problem in Northern Ireland.

There is also published an article by Vincent Browne on 2 June 1996. This was long after the Dublin reports, so it is not a matter of John Hume's gradually coming round to consent. The article was entitled 'A Familiar Deficiency in the Jumbled Thoughts of Hume', and in it there is a reference to John Hume's description of the British guarantee as

"undermining any hope of political negotiation between the two sides."

John Hume has shown clearly that he is not committed to the principle of consent. He defines consent as the double veto or the double consent which would come from an all-Ireland referendum. He has talked about consent being given by both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. John Hume sees things purely in an all-Ireland context, and that is clearly a long way from the Unionist — indeed, the right — understanding of consent as referred to in the motion.

But we should also look at the current Government party in the Republic of Ireland, Fianna Fáil, and at one of its main protagonists, Mr Martin Mansergh, who until recently was head of research for the party and is now a chief adviser to the Government on Northern Irish affairs. Writing in 'Fortnight' last year, he asked

"Are Unionists serious about consent, or are the wishes of the majority the only thing that is going to count?"

We seem to have a situation in which the will of the people of Northern Ireland, the will of the majority, is not defined as consent. Clearly, Mr Mansergh also sees things in a united-Ireland context. He also gave an interesting piece of advice to Unionists. He said that inability to accept the middle ground between integration with the United Kingdom and a united Ireland will ultimately be damaging to the Union. So Mr Mansergh's advice to Unionists is that we can strengthen the Union by giving it away. Unfortunately for Mr Mansergh, we are not quite that gullible.

He also indicated that the Unionist and British position and the matter of consent should be broadened to take account of international law. Obviously, as has been highlighted on a number of occasions, Mr Mansergh is not aware that international law is quite clearly on the side of the Union. For example, the Capo Torte reports and a number of other documents clearly indicate that the people have a right to self-determination. If these people are democrats, they have to accept the fundamental principle of consent as defined in the motion: it is for the people of Northern Ireland alone to determine their future. Apparently, Nationalists' understanding of consent runs like this: Unionists are being asked to step on to a boat which is heading towards a waterfall, but with the assurance that at the very last moment, before the boat goes over, we can step out of it. Some reassurance.

An alternative view is that while we have no right to decide whether or not to go towards a united Ireland, we have some say in the pace of the movement towards it. In effect, we can get into the boat, and maybe slow it down before it goes over the waterfall, but we will still end up on the other side. As Unionists, we want the opportunity to decide whether



to get into the boat in the first place and in what direction the boat will go. Consent must be the freely determined will of the people.

I strongly support the motion. I reject the Irish Nationalist analysis of consent, and I firmly believe that by passing the motion we will strike a blow for democracy.

*11.30 am*

**Mr Ian Paisley Jnr:** Most of us here today welcome the consensus between the two main parties in the Chamber on the issue of consent. This is a most welcome and appropriate debate. We are using the Forum as a platform to discuss an issue which is currently in the hearts and minds of the people of Northern Ireland.

Self-determination is a basic human right. It is a principle incorporated in the Charter of the United Nations and, as such, it should be upheld and protected. We should be proud to defend the principle of consent — in our case, the ability of the people of Northern Ireland to determine their own future.

Unfortunately, there are those who wish to flout that principle, to thumb their noses at it. Indeed, there are those who have demonstrated that they care very little for that fundamental human right. I am thinking in particular of statements that the British Government have made through the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I will not dwell on the comments of the Secretary of State as many Members have already touched on them, and others will wish to expound on them more fully. What I will say is that at a time when people have demonstrated quite clearly that if there is to be peace there must be decommissioning of those weapons that have created such havoc over the last 30 years, it is unfortunate that the British Government appear more interested in decommissioning the principle of consent, as is very clear from their own position.

Northern Ireland and its people must be unflinching in their determination to see that the principle of consent is upheld. The wishes of the people should be respected, upheld and implemented. Unfortunately, over a number of years none of those things has happened. In fact, instead of our position, as a community and as a people, being respected, it has been rejected. Instead of our rights being upheld, they have been undermined. Our rights, including our right to consent, have been ignored.

Self-determination rules out certain things. It rules out sitting down to negotiate with those who would like to see the principle of consent destroyed, who, indeed, have been fighting — literally, fighting — to destroy it. It rules out an imposed solution. Compromise with terrorists is, of course, morally unthinkable, but, equally, an imposed solution would have disastrous consequences for Northern Ireland. We have seen some of the disastrous consequences of the imposition of direct rule. We have seen some of the disastrous consequences of the imposition of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. If the Government have their way, next May, when they put to the people the framework document with knobs on — and that is what this talks process is leading to, quite directly — and try to impose that solution with the veneer of a democratic talks process, they will, of course, be imposing on us something which will also have disastrous consequences.



Over the last few days our minds have dwelt on some of the polls that have been published. It is very interesting that throughout this process, whenever an issue that concerns people greatly — the issue of decommissioning or the issue of consent — arises, a poll result is automatically produced. Instead of listening to what the people want, the magnates who run the newspapers and the mandarins in the Northern Ireland Office produce a survey which says something different from what the people said when they went to the polling booth and marked the ballot paper in accordance with what they really believed.

The polls are saying “You must talk. You must talk.” Of course the people of Northern Ireland must talk, but we must talk as equals. There must be a level playing-field. We must not be in a talks process that allows the Provisional IRA to put guns to the heads of negotiators and say “Agree with us or we will shoot more RUC officers. Agree with us or we will bomb more buildings in Northern Ireland. Agree with us or there will be more of the last 25 years.” That is not a recipe for a peaceful solution; it is a recipe for disaster.

My party has a mandate. It went to the poll — the real poll — of the people for this Forum, and 141,000 people said to us “You must not sit down and negotiate with Sinn Féin/IRA.” We will be standing by that mandate. We will not be moving away from that position, for there is a solemn undertaking between the party and the people who elected us. Our mandate has ruled out talks with the IRA. Indeed, the mandate that the Ulster Unionists received also ruled out talks with the Provisional IRA. Last night I read from cover to cover the manifesto on which their party stood to get them into the talks process. There is no mention of their ever sitting down to negotiate the Union. There is no mention of their ever sitting down to negotiate the Union with IRA murderers. No one has the right, in the talks process, to negotiate the Union or, indeed, to sit down with the Provisional IRA and put the Union on the table.

Mr Weir mentioned Martin Mansergh’s comment of some time ago that we would strengthen the Union by giving it away. I think the Member is right in his analysis. Those who argue that it would strengthen the Union to be in a talks process that is going in one very clear, framework-document-orientated direction would be fools to be there, for they would be giving away the Union.

Mr Trimble, in his opening remarks, raised a matter which other Members should try to elaborate upon. He said that he would like the Government to put certain sanctions in place. The Ulster Unionist Party should spell out what sanctions they want for those parties that refuse to decommission terrorist weapons through this process. It is important that we should know what they think the sanctions ought to be. Will they pull the plug on the talks process if the Government refuse to put sanctions in place? The words “pull the plug on the talks process” are ones that Mr Trimble uttered on 6 June 1996, the week-end before the process commenced.

It is important to be very clear about what sort of sanctions the Ulster Unionist Party has in mind. Then we could come to a shared understanding of what sanctions ought to be applied if the Government, instead of insisting on the decommissioning of terrorist weapons, including weapons of mass destruction, move to try to decommission the consent principle itself.



I wish to turn very briefly to some comments of the Alliance Party. People know that I very seldom have sympathy for Mr Trimble, but I think the attack launched on him today by Mr McBride, who said that the Ulster Unionist Leader's comments were a move to get independence, was outrageous and atrocious. Mr McBride, who has left the Chamber, said he had a head cold. He should go to the doctor. Maybe he should see Dr Alderdice and check that it is not more than just a head cold.

In the last sentence of the Alliance amendment Mr McBride tells us to throw ourselves on the integrity of a crook. He wants us to throw ourselves on the integrity of Mr Burke — a man who is very well named. The amendment says

"This Forum endorses that principle and welcomes the continued support for it by both Governments".

Whom do the Alliance Party think they are kidding if they expect us to accept that the Irish Government believe in the consent principle for the people of Northern Ireland? They do not believe in that principle. If they did, they would unilaterally remove articles 2 and 3. They would not seek a negotiating process; they would do it because they wanted to be our best neighbours, because they wanted to be our best friends. Instead, they seek to uphold their illegal and criminal claim to our territory.

There is need for clarification on the issue of consent. Indeed, there is a need for that principle to be upheld. It must be applied not only to the constitutional issue, not only to what Mr Weir referred to as the final act of severance, but also to how we are governed and administered. Throughout this process — indeed, any process — as this democracy develops over the years, the people of Northern Ireland should have real and meaningful self-determination in respect of their own affairs.

I support the motion.

**Mr Ken Maginnis:** Anyone considering this motion from outside the Chamber might wonder why the obvious has to be restated at this time. But anyone wondering that should examine the actions and the words of political leaders, not just within the United Kingdom but elsewhere, concerning Northern Ireland. He would discover that those who put their hands up to and lend their voices to the principles of democracy are very often the first to repudiate those principles when it suits their own political interests.

We had a very good example of that this week, in terms of the activities of the United States Administration. Members will recall that when President Clinton came to Northern Ireland amidst the euphoria of the first IRA cease-fire — a cease-fire which we cautioned was a fraud — he stated here in Belfast to the people of Northern Ireland "You must stand fast against terror. You must say to those who would still use violence for political objectives 'You are the past. Your day is over. Violence has no place at the table of democracy and no role in the future of this land.'" Yet, within two or three years his Administration is making a decision that six illegal immigrants should not be deported back to Ireland.

One might say that that is very much a domestic matter, one for the United States Administration and no concern whatsoever of ours. One might see some justification for that until the reason is given for the refusal to deport: to influence the IRA to remain at the table



of democracy — a position into which they have been levered in the most dishonest way. The idea that if these were six wetbacks who had crossed the Rio Grande they would not be sent back is quite ridiculous. We know that they ship Mexicans back day after day after day. But six illegal immigrants from Northern Ireland (I do not know whether this happens on a monthly, weekly or even daily basis) are used as part of the bribe to the IRA to come to the table of democracy — the very place where President Clinton said they had no part to play.

Let us look at the Prime Minister's statement at Balmoral. It is not long ago that he looked across the room to me and said "I do not know what you are worried about, Ken. Have you not read the speech that I made at Balmoral?" Well, I had read his speech and was very conscious of what he had said. I suggested to him that he had very securely double-locked the front door but had made the mistake of leaving the kitchen window open and putting Mo Mowlam in there as the cook. She has become little more than the cheer-leader for the IRA. She used to use quite frequently the language of John Hume, but now she uses the language of the IRA in order to justify those things that cannot be justified. She told us, when the second cease-fire was announced, that the IRA would be judged in the round. I never quite understood what "judged in the round" meant, but she went on to say that she would judge them by words and by deeds.

*11.45 am*

She heard the words of the IRA. She heard the words of Martin McGuinness, the godfather of godfathers, when he said no to consent and to the verdict of the ballot-box; no to disarmament; and no to local administrative participation in our own affairs, even through a responsibility-sharing Assembly. Basically, he said no to any democratic process, and when, before going on holiday, I phoned the Northern Ireland Office, pointed this out and asked what the Secretary of State was going to do, I was told by a senior official that those words did not matter and that all would be fine after the IRA had signed up to the Mitchell principles and been admitted to the talks. That happened, but less than one week after signing up to the principles the IRA looked at its position and said "There is a little bit of confusion in our ranks; there is a little bit of concern."

It is interesting to look for a moment at how the IRA has been conducting negotiations. In case Gerry Adams, who everybody knows is not number one, should get too liberal, the rank and file decided to have Martin McGuinness as part of the team. As they continued their process of infiltration into the democratic system, anxiety began to creep up again, and the next person we saw being introduced was Gerry Kelly. There must be a great deal of doubt in the lower echelons of the IRA, for after a little while they appeared to become disquieted again, and they had to have Martin Ferris. Some people do not know who Martin Ferris is. He is the quartermaster of the IRA. He is the man who, more than anyone else, has control of the Gadaffi weaponry. He knows where the bunkers are. He is the key man, in quartermastering terms, of the organization.

Yesterday's statement was saying to the rank and file "Do not forget that this is an infiltration process. We have infiltrated the media; we have infiltrated community groups; we have infiltrated housing associations; we have infiltrated the Civil Service; we have infiltrated everywhere, as good terrorists should do. Now we are infiltrating the highest echelons of the democratic process." Despite that, I expect that in another week or two, or



maybe a month or so, Slab Murphy will arrive on the delegation — the Chief of Staff of the IRA.

Against that background, democratically elected politicians have a responsibility on a par with that which we place at the feet of soldiers and policemen. We say that the IRA must be confronted militarily, and we rightly complain bitterly when the ability to confront the IRA is eroded by bad decisions.

One of the decisions that worry me is the decision to reduce the number of policemen in some of the marginal stations, the little stations. Over several months some stations which previously had four policemen on a shift — four appears to me to be the minimum complement in any police station, as you, Mr Chairman, will appreciate — have reduced the number to two. That is totally inadequate.

We have this expectation of our soldiers and policemen, but the public have a right to expect elected politicians too to confront the IRA wherever they turn up. It is through no fault of anyone in this Chamber that the IRA are turning up at the negotiating table. Well, negotiating with the IRA is deplorable because the IRA, as we have heard from their own mouth, do not accept the democratic process. They do not accept the principle that consent must come from the people of Northern Ireland. And “consent” is word which has been used again and again today.

I want to draw attention to an interesting point made by Mr Ervine yesterday. The Member said that when he came to the talks process the Chairman, Senator Mitchell, demanded to know if he and Gary McMichael represented the Loyalist paramilitaries. That is something that I was not aware of, but it is a matter of great significance. The same demand must be made of those who call themselves Sinn Féin when they wear their best hats — when they take the Balaclavas off and put on more presentable garb.

I do not believe that our Government, certainly not under Mo Mowlam’s leadership in the Northern Ireland Office, are going to put that challenge, so the elected politicians in Northern Ireland — those who represent the people who, we believe, should have the final say in the governance of the province — will have to carry out the responsibility. And here is the great folly of Prime Minister Blair, whom we were beseeched to put into power and by whom we were criticized.

What a pity Mr McCartney is not here today. It was Mr McCartney who told us that for the first two and a half years in government Mr Blair would be so busy with the economics of the United Kingdom that he would not have time to do anything about Northern Ireland. It was Mr McCartney who said that this would give us time to retrench and build up our case. Instead, Mr Blair has said “I am giving you until May 1998 and then I will impose a solution.”

I have no doubt that that solution is based on what Mo Mowlam has told us — that the constitutional *status quo* is not an option. What a promise to the IRA when you bring them to the table: “Do not worry. You can delay things by repudiating everything that smacks of democracy until May, and then we will put in place an agreement that will please you.” That is the option we face. If we are serious — and I believe that everyone in this Chamber is



serious — about the motion we are debating today, then we must as elected representatives confront and face down the enemies of Northern Ireland.

*The meeting was suspended at 11.55 am and resumed at 2.02 pm.*

**The Chairman:** Quite a number of Members — mostly from the DUP — have still to speak. Please avoid repetition so that we can finish by about 4 o'clock.

**Rev Trevor Kirkland:** I have found this debate fascinating and very informative. We have had a very reasoned explanation and analysis of consent. I was particularly struck by one or two comments made by Mr Trimble, especially his reference to the convention of Northern Nationalists — something I had never come across. I hope that he will publish that more widely so we can use it whenever we need to.

As I listened to the debate on consent I was thinking of the different circumstances in which this issue arises. Let me take an illustration from courtship. Suppose that a man goes out on a date and, in the course of the evening, acts in an ungentlemanly fashion towards the lady. She refuses consent. If he proceeds, he is committing a criminal offence.

In 1985 a criminal offence was visited upon the people of Northern Ireland. As Mr Davis pointed out, the late Harold McCusker made it explicitly clear that a criminal offence had taken place, as the consent of the people of Northern Ireland had not been given. That itself, of course, has been defended by dilution of the meaning of consent and what it applies to, as Mr Peter Robinson ably set out in his analysis of the Downing Street declaration and the framework documents. Clarifications that were subsequently given to Sinn Féin, and reiterated by Albert Reynolds, also made it explicitly clear that the only consent required from the people of Northern Ireland will be the answer to the ultimate question "Do you want to remain within the United Kingdom or to join a united Ireland?" Between now and then no consent is required of the people of Northern Ireland with regard to its governance and administration, so it does not matter what they want. It is totally irrelevant. They are politically superfluous.

"Consent", of course, is a dirty word to some. Nationalists referred to it as the Unionist veto. The Unionist veto, as we have learned, is not on. Let me go back to the illustration that I used a moment ago. In court, lawyers base their attack on the issue of consent. Was consent given or not? The one thing they want to do is prove that consent is irrelevant. They even try to redefine it.

On 28 August Marjorie Mowlam redefined consent for us. In other words, she obliterated it. She made it totally irrelevant to the political process. Of course, the next day she retracted, telling us that she had only been trying to clarify the issue. We know what her clarification was. Roy Bradford, writing in that crypto-Unionist newspaper the Belfast 'News Letter', said that if Sinn Féin were in talks tomorrow there would be no agreement without acceptance of the principle of consent that Sinn Féin has sworn to oppose. That was on 21 July of this year. Even before they signed up, there were those who were well aware of their tactics, plans and policies. Sinn Féin will never accept the principle of consent.



Some might say "Maybe the Unionists are making too much of this question of consent. They are trying to create a barrier to the peace process." From time to time, we have had bright sparks telling us that the Union is copper-fastened, that we have a triple-lock mechanism which guarantees the Union. The first lock is that there must be agreement between the parties. But what if there is no agreement? We are told that the framework document provides for the Government to proceed without it.

A number of Ulster Unionist Members have made it abundantly clear that they will not accept the framework document, that they have never accepted it. They have set out for the rest of us very reasonably, very clearly, the political direction in which the framework document leads. We agree with them on that. So the first lock that is supposed to copper-fasten the Union is meaningless.

The third lock is that there must be parliamentary approval. With Tony Blair's majority and a Parliament that passed the Anglo-Irish Agreement, that should be no difficulty either. Therefore, the third lock too is irrelevant.

The second and central part of the triple-lock mechanism is that the consent of the people of Northern Ireland is essential. But in the light of all the developments which have taken place it is clear that that has been blown apart. It means absolutely nothing, and it guarantees nothing.

Roy Bradford, writing in the 'News Letter' in March 1996, said

"Consent is the bottom-line issue. That vital principle of consent, recognized by both Governments concerned, is the bottom line in any negotiations. It must be strictly adhered to in the spirit and in the letter."

But he went on to remind us that

"the Dublin Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, which has been sitting for some months, has now concluded without any tangible results. Its acceptance of the principle of consent, you will recall, was rejected by Sinn Féin."

Sinn Féin could not even sign up to the Southern interpretation of consent.

The Leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, writing on 13 September 1994 in the 'Belfast Telegraph', said

"When the consent of the majority is replaced by a counterfeit, that is our death warrant."

Today our death warrant is being signed, sealed and delivered. We know this, and a number of Members opposite have made it abundantly clear today that they too are well aware of it. The question is: where does it all lead? Should we rationalize it away and say "We know where it is all going, we know the end result, but we still have to talk to them"?

I say to all Unionists that the only honourable course, the only possible course for any person with integrity, is have nothing whatever to do with the whole process. It is totally corrupt. Those who run it are as corrupt as the people who have perpetrated violence in this



province for the last 25 years. The only honourable thing to do is pull the plug on them. The Prime Minister has used the great analogy of a peace train. Well, it is time to derail that train and tear it apart. At the end of the day, the elected representatives of the Unionist people will be bypassed and ignored. It has already been established that the consent of the people of Northern Ireland does not matter. This issue is much too serious for us to be concerned about popular opinion. What will the world think of us if we do not engage? Is popularity more important than principle? Mr Peter Robinson made a statement a number of weeks ago. It was carried in the 'News Letter'. He asked

"What happens to principle should the sky fall in?"

That is the position we are in. Consent is too important to allow these people to reinterpret it according to their own desires.

I support the motion.

**Mr Eric Smyth:** We must ask "Can we trust those in authority, those in government, and the Chairman of the talks?" When I — an ordinary, working-class politician and minister of the Gospel — and the people that I represent and talk to each day see and hear the deceit and the lies, it really turns our stomachs. On television, you see American politicians taking people in after six weeks of a so-called cease-fire and treating them like gentlemen. In contrast, honourable constitutional parties that do not use guns or any sort of violence are ignored. They are told that their views are being taken on board, but I see only one side being listened to. We see Sinn Féin raising money right, left and centre to help the IRA in its campaign to destroy this province.

America, Dublin, the British Government and all those whom I class as enemies of Northern Ireland have no interest in the feelings of the vast majority of the people so far as consent is concerned. We have seen, over many years, how the representatives of those people have been ignored. They have gone to Westminster and to 10 Downing Street to meet the Prime Minister and his predecessor. They have put documents forward to the Governments, but many of these have never been discussed. My Party's document was never brought forward for open debate by the British Government or anyone else. They do not want to listen.

How can the people trust those who participate in the talks process? My understanding from listening to the different spokesmen is that the framework document is going to be pushed by the Government. They want us all on board for that. But how can we, as Unionists, go in and talk about that document when we all know where it will lead us? The planned cross-border committees would be only the start — the start of the slippery slope into a united Ireland. The playing-field is not level.

We hear talk about polls, but we all know how polls are twisted by the questions that are asked. It is amazing how so many are willing to jump onto the polls bandwagon. Polls have been wrong. We have heard it all before. I believe that a party must give leadership. People listen to news and propaganda, and they sometimes get frightened. However, my party has a leadership that will make a decision which the members will stand by and will present to the people of Northern Ireland.



Yesterday's IRA statement proved us right in the stand we have taken. No doubt tonight's 'Belfast Telegraph' will tell us that this is why we must go into the talks. So it does not matter how many people the terrorists murder. The more they do, the more people seem to be willing to put up their hands in surrender and say "We will go in and see what you want." I know, as I am sure the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland know, that the Unionists will not get what they want from these talks because conditions are not equal for all parties. The Secretary of State has shown her true colours.

2.15 pm

**A Member:** Green.

**Mr Eric Smyth:** Yes, green.

When you listen to these people you realize what way they lean. They do not play fair with Northern Ireland. In fact, the Forum was rigged to bring in people, including myself, who were not elected in the ordinary democratic way. Really, many of us should not be here. The normal voting system would give a true reflection of each party's strength. But we know why the system was rigged. Look at the voting pattern in the talks. If all the other parties voted together against the Unionist family, we could find ourselves in a minority and overthrown. That is what the British Government are up to. They will do what they always do. They say that they have no interest in Northern Ireland. We should admit that they cannot get out of here quickly enough.

But it does not matter what they think. What really matters is what the people of Northern Ireland think. The people of Scotland got their democratic right to vote, and they showed yesterday what they want. We in Northern Ireland have a right to express our desire to remain within the United Kingdom. And it is only the people of Northern Ireland who have that right. I do not accept the argument that the whole United Kingdom should vote to keep us in or put us out. As has been said by several Members, we did not have a right to vote on what should happen in Scotland or Wales. The people in each of those places have a right to make their own decisions, and the same should apply to us. We are told that we will have the final say on whether to stay within the United Kingdom. But there are many other decisions that we as political parties have a right to make.

We stand by our manifestos, like any other party in the United Kingdom. We must be true to the undertakings on the basis of which we were elected, but we are being denied that civil right. That is why we saw the kickback by the Unionist people in the last council election. They are sick and tired of voting for principles that parties are not allowed to put into action. The Government deny our right to represent our people in the councils and at Stormont and Westminster. They deny our right to decide the future of this land. I and the people to whom I have talked fear that the British Government will betray us at the end of this process. We worry that the rights of the people will be overridden through a wild referendum worded in such a way that many will not know what they are voting for. That concerns many working-class people.



I must express my doubts and fears and my lack of any trust in those in the peace talks in Stormont. I fear that the outcome is already sealed and delivered. Attempts are being made to get us into the parlour so that, in the face of closed ranks, we may be persuaded to compromise our position. I support the decision of our leaders to stay outside until we get a level playing-field and the right to represent our people properly. We want to talk. We want peace in our land. I want to see my grandchildren brought up in a peaceful atmosphere — something that my own children have never known. But we do not want peace at any price. We do not want it in the face of an enemy that has bombed and killed.

It is obvious that the Governments have given in to violence. I am very pleased that in a recent poll the vast majority of Unionist people said no to letting murderers out of gaol early. That clarifies our stand. It is wrong for people who have committed crimes to be released early. Families who have lost loved ones, who mourn each year as they come up to birthdays and Christmas, will always feel the hurt. Their loved ones will never be at their side again. I am glad that the Unionist people have spoken on this matter.

**Mr Gibson:** Many analogies have been used in this debate, and there have been some interesting contributions. Several were very reasoned; others were perhaps more swashbuckling and forthright.

People have referred to boats and trains. Like trains, boats have destinations. If you have no intention of making a journey, why would you take either a train or a boat?

When a farmer who lives close to my home reached the age of 70 he came under tremendous pressure from neighbouring farmers. They told him that he could not manage his farm, that as he did not have an economic operation and would not be successful, he should sell. He was visited by auctioneers and friends of those who were trying to persuade him to sell. About six months after this whirlwind of enthusiasm I met him and said "James, I see you are still farming." "Yes" he replied. I said "You resisted all the persuasion." He replied "Well, it is very simple. This farm was left to me. I have had a very successful life on it, and I cannot at 72 years of age become a coal-miner or a gold-digger or anything else. I enjoy farming and I love my farm. I own the title deeds, and I am not going to an auctioneer unless I intend to sell. The only time I have gone to an auctioneer in my life was not to sell my own land but to buy a neighbouring farm."

If the title deeds of Ulster are not for sale, why are we considering the auctioneer's room? The truth, of which, over a lifetime, most people in this Chamber have become aware, is that the Nationalist people have never accepted Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom. They have attacked that position in various ways. The principle of consent was never recognized. From the day De Valéra launched his all-Ireland Constitution the assumption has been that for Nationalists the principle of consent is based on the whole of Ireland. That is when he laid his claim. Nothing has changed, and the Unionist people have been vilified for holding to their position over the decades.

Now we are told that we have mismanaged the Union. The same pressure is being exerted on the Unionist community as was exerted on the farmer to whom I referred: "You are old. You have mismanaged your farm. You cannot make money. Your farm is not economically successful; it is a failed entity." How often have we heard similar expressions?



The same story comes, of course, from those who were glad to flee De Valéra's new Ireland and its Constitution. They travelled three and four thousands miles to America. That Diaspora and its sons also have a mythical belief that the Union has failed. Certainly the united Ireland that they wanted failed them. That is why they are in America. It is ironic that the freedoms they enjoy there were laid down by the Presbyterians of this province who departed some centuries earlier.

There is another reason for our not being in this process which is going to do nothing for the Union. I have journeyed behind unfortunate people who lost kith and kin. I know their tragedies. I represent the west Sperrins, where people have endured the carnage of bomb and bullet for many years. Does any reasonable person expect me as a Unionist representative to sit down in Castle Buildings and negotiate the title deeds of the Union with those who shot not just me but my kith and kin and my comrades?

Let us have a little reality here. We can all get carried away by the manipulative tentacles of the media and the plethora of pseudo-political parasites who advise us to work for political peace. All these parasites who live on the word "peace" are people who could not keep down a day job. They are hired by some community group or quango. Some people do not live in a real or practical world. Just as Jimmy told me that the deeds of his farm were in his safe and he had no intention of taking them out, I say that I sincerely hope that, not just next Monday or next Tuesday but every day in the year ahead, no one will think of walking into the auctioneer's room to rape, pillage and tear up the title deeds of our province.

**Mr Shannon:** I concur with the sentiments expressed by most Members so far.

As many Members have said, the Unionist majority have stated very clearly, in every election of the last 28 years, that they wish to maintain their position within the United Kingdom and that they will settle for nothing less. Looking back over the years since Stormont was dissolved, during which Westminster, against the wishes of the people of the province, denied democracy here, we see a number of similar things. The Sunningdale Agreement is one example. At that time the British and Irish Governments issued a joint statement saying that they would like the process to go further. But the people of the province were not happy with it. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets, and the Sunningdale Agreement fell.

The process has continued. It has been gradual. In 1985 we had the Anglo-Irish Agreement, again brought in behind the backs of the people of the province — an agreement drawn up in dark and dingy rooms by civil servants and by a liberal British Government once again prepared to give in to terrorism. Then there was the joint declaration of December 1993, which presented a further dilution of the principle of consent.

Since 1971 the principle of consent has been undermined. In 1993 and 1997 Governments proved again their disinterest in the Union and, I believe, showed a desire for disengagement. They stated that they had no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Northern Ireland. That is one of the most worrying statements I have ever heard from a British Government. What it meant was that the two Governments accepted that Irish unity would be achieved only by those who favoured that outcome. Their task was to persuade



those who did not believe in it, and that is what they have tried to accomplish over the last few years. What we have seen is a process of watering down our constitutional position within the United Kingdom. They took away Stormont, and now they are trying to take away our rights. They have defied the democratic process and are trying to create, behind our backs, institutions which give sovereignty to the Republic against the will of the majority of people in the province.

*2.30 pm*

Let us come forward to 1997 — indeed, to the last few weeks. Consider the statement by Mo Mowlam as reported in the ‘Belfast Telegraph’ of 28 August. She said that geographical terms or numbers are not necessarily the final factor in relation to consent. That was quite at odds with the democratic process and definitely at odds with the viewpoint of the majority here. Quite simply, it was another sop to Republicans. The Secretary of State would consider any agreement not on a six-county basis supported by the Unionist majority but on an all-Ireland basis. She and the rest of the British Government know that the majority in Northern Ireland will not under any circumstances accept cross-border bodies with executive powers. We want to be good neighbours but not to be governed under legally binding executive powers by a foreign Government, a Government who have harboured IRA murderers, from whose country that terrorist organization has planned death missions, and in whose territory it has stored weapons for future operations.

The Northern Ireland Office Ministers are committed to a united Ireland. As Mr Davis has said, when Lord Dubs was an ordinary Labour Member of Parliament, that was his position. Now Mo Mowlam is committed to a united Ireland. She is for ever telling us that the majority, the Unionist majority, must be prepared to change their opinion. They must be prepared to give. I have yet to hear any Minister saying that it is time for Republicans and Nationalists to give or to bend.

We, as Unionists, should not be giving any more. Indeed, we should be trying to retrieve something of what we have lost. The principle of consent is paramount to any progress. Consent means that the democratic process must be adhered to. It means that the people of the province alone should decide. Let us put a marker down now, clearly and honestly, that the majority of people in this province will not consent to cross-border bodies with executive powers. We will not consent to having our affairs influenced by a country whose Constitution enshrines jurisdiction over our province. We will not consent to a process that would implement a united Ireland. We will not consent to being removed from the United Kingdom of which we are an integral part. We will not consent to having the tricolour as our national flag. We will not consent to having ‘The Soldier’s Song’ as our national anthem. We will not consent to being Irish because, quite simply, we are Irish neither by birth nor by design, and certainly not by choice.

We will consent to having the Union flag flying over Northern Ireland. We will consent to our own National Anthem — ‘God Save the Queen’. We will consent to having our Members of Parliament represent us at Westminster. We will consent to a referendum, just like the one Scotland had yesterday and the one Wales will have shortly. We will consent to an Assembly at Stormont. We will consent to the people of the province alone deciding their destiny. Our mandate cannot be ignored. There will be a resounding vote in



favour of maintaining our position within the United Kingdom, and many Roman Catholics too will vote for that. If the British and Irish Governments ignore that mandate, they will do so at their peril. The large Unionist majority, with its courage, tenacity and willpower, will not be coerced, cajoled or bullied into a united Ireland under any guise. If necessary, we will fight to maintain our liberty, our democracy and our way of life.

**Mr Calvert:** I rise to support the motion, which is very timely. It is short, simple and to the point.

If you were to take seriously the propaganda which has been pushed out in recent days and weeks by the pan-Nationalist front, you would think we were in a united Ireland already. To support that comment, I refer to a letter that Dr Paisley received last week. I refer to a letter on British Government paper and signed jointly by a Dublin Minister. The DUP wants the Prime Minister, Mr Blair, to explain why the signature of Ray Burke, the Irish Foreign Affairs Minister, appeared alongside that of Stormont Minister, Paul Murphy, on British Government notepaper. What a disgrace. This open demonstration of joint sovereignty is unacceptable to the Unionist community. We do not accept the right of any Minister from the Irish Republic to inform Northern Ireland's elected representatives of his activities in the province, using stationery of the Government of this part of the United Kingdom. This breach of protocol has serious constitutional implications and must be immediately repudiated by the Prime Minister. I have not heard if Mr Blair has yet repudiated it, but, as he himself is such a traitor, it will not surprise me if he does not.

The editorial in today's 'Daily Telegraph' says

"What the Unionists require now is unity, ideological and organizational, in order to defeat the Anglo-Irish proposals that will inevitably go before the province's voters in next year's referendum. To rely on Mr Blair's or Miss Mowlam's word would be suicidal."

How true.

I have here a letter:

"How can anyone have confidence in Mowlam? What on earth did our Secretary of State mean when she said, after signing an agreement for an international commission to oversee the handover of terrorist weapons in parallel with the forthcoming talks, 'Everybody knows that we cannot force people to hand in weapons, but what we have here is a structure to facilitate that from day one of the talks'? She is actually stating that this Government, of which she is a Minister, is unable to enforce the law of the land upon the so-called military wings of the terrorist organizations, whose political and propaganda wings are to enter into talks on the future governance of this part of the United Kingdom with normal constitutional parties, which have no similar illegal private armies with illegal arms. How can anyone have any confidence whatsoever in such a Minister? If the terrorists do not agree to consent to whatever may be the outcome of such talks, what is to stop them from using their arms and explosives in new acts of terrorism? What is the point of talks with the people whose so-called military wings are a continual threat, especially when any confidence-building seems to be confined to these law-breakers."

How true those words are. The article in the 'Daily Telegraph' goes on to say

"only by their own efforts will they be saved from the long, slow process of transfer into the Irish Republic."



I disagree. I believe that if we rely entirely on our own efforts we will fail. We must seek the help of Almighty God. Then we will not fail because

"If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us?"

I want to consider Mr McBride's amendment. The only thing about which I agreed with him was his welcome for the news that the people of Scotland would be given the opportunity to rule themselves. The people of Northern Ireland should have had the same satisfaction, instead of having to endure direct rule for so many years.

The Alliance Party says

"This Forum endorses that principle and welcomes the continued support of that principle by both Governments."

Can Alliance tell me what principle either the British or the Irish Government has? They have no principle at all. Last week we saw Gerry Adams signing up to the Mitchell principles, witnessed by deceiving Ministers of the Crown. The next day IRA/Sinn Fein retracted what he had signed. What hypocrisy. Then we had the Minister of State for Political Development saying "I will be looking into this very closely." Is it any wonder the Labour Government are in such a muddle? Instead of using their power to remove Sinn Fein from the talks, they are lying down under them. Shame on them.

I have no respect for Tony Blair, Mo Mowlam, Paul Murphy or any other Minister. They do not deserve any respect. They are a bunch of traitors. Thank God the DUP will not be sitting down with them. We will be true to the mandate given to us by the people who elected us.

Though supporting the motion moved by the Ulster Unionists, I call on their party, and particularly on the MP for Lagan Valley, Mr Donaldson — I am sorry he is not in the Chamber this afternoon — to stand firm and not sit down with Sinn Fein at the so-called talks table. The people of Lagan Valley and Ulster will not forgive them if they do.

Look at Scotland, where the people have been given the opportunity to rule themselves. Even as a Christian, I am maddened by the interference of successive foreign, Free State Ministers in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland. They should not be dabbling in the affairs of Northern Ireland. The reason the people of Northern Ireland do not get the opportunity to govern themselves is that Dublin will not allow it. That is the sad state of affairs.

Many people in Northern Ireland deplore the fact that the Free State Government have any input into how their province is run. I have said this before, and I say again, that the people of Northern Ireland, through the democratic parties that represent them, could work together. However, I, as a DUP member, will never sit round a table at which a Dublin Minister has an input into the running of Northern Ireland. I call on the British Government to act like a Government and not like the bunch of traitors they are. They have no principles, and the people of Northern Ireland will never support such a Government.



**Mr McKee:** I am heartened by the level of support for this motion and by the extent of agreement in the Unionist family about it. I do not want to repeat what has been said. There have been many fine speeches, and some very good points have been made. The speeches of Mr Gibson, Mr Peter Robinson and others fired me up and impressed me.

*2.45 pm*

In my opinion, there is still uncertainty about whether Unionists will sit round the table and talk to Sinn Féin. All round this Chamber today many people have condemned the IRA. Very few have had anything good to say about them. All recognize them as a bunch of murdering thugs. That is indeed what they are. But we come back to whether Unionists will sit round the table and talk to them. I think of how many people in Northern Ireland have died over the past 27 years, of those that have been laid below mother earth as a result of the murderous campaign. I also think of how the Unionist community has resisted that murderous campaign, which has been aided and abetted on many occasions — and I say this without fear of contradiction — by the SDLP. The IRA has also been egged on by the Dublin Government, who have given them sanctuary following their vile and dastardly deeds.

Those people now say that we must negotiate. What is there to negotiate? The only thing that we have left to negotiate is the Union and whether Dublin should have a say in this country's affairs. The Unionists can give nothing more, and the Nationalists have everything to gain. That is it. We hear "There is consensus" and "We are taking a cross-section of opinion throughout the country. We are going to [this or that person] to see whether we should sit round the table and talk to the gunmen, the murderers and the bombers." The dead of Ulster speak out. Surely those murders tell the tale. Surely the dead have said no. They are below mother earth because they were not prepared to surrender their God-given heritage in this wee corner of the world which is our beloved Ulster. We are not prepared to surrender it. What is going to happen? Are we now going to sit round the table with the armed thugs and gangsters who murdered our kith and kin? Each and every one of us could give testimony to the hurt that has been inflicted upon people here.

It saddens me to see a leading politician like Mr Maginnis — a person with whom I have not always agreed, although I have respected his position as an MP and his service for his country and am aware of the fact that he himself has been the target of the gunman and the bomber — sitting with a person whom he described as the godfather of terrorism. It made my stomach churn to see him sitting with Martin McGuinness, who sneered and laughed at him. In my opinion, there were no points scored for Ulster in that debate.

Did those who have died for Ulster die for nothing? I say that the IRA, the Republican movement and those who espouse a united Ireland are my enemy. When those Unionists who would think of sitting down with the enemies of Ulster talk about confronting them eyeball to eyeball, that is only flannel. These are negotiations about Ulster. The future of our beloved province is on the table. That is what it is all about, and I do not want to hear about anyone confronting these people eyeball to eyeball. When they have been there a week or two, certain politicians will be sitting powwowing with them, just as in the city hall. It is a shame and a disgrace.



We cannot afford to sit down with those Unionists. The IRA and the Republicans are my enemy, and those Unionists who sit down with them will become my enemy. They will be the enemy of the Loyalist people of Ulster, who will rise up to curse their name, not only in this generation but in generations to come. Just as Brian Faulkner, who went down the slippery slope and tried to force the Irish dimension upon us, did not survive, they will not survive. The people of Ulster will rise up against them.

Those who say that they speak for the paramilitaries and who think that they are going to sit down and talk to others of that sort should go into the work-place. They should talk to their members on the ground. They should go to east Antrim and talk to the Loyalist men with whom I have served, and with whom I have fought, shoulder to shoulder, down through the years. They should ask whether those people think we ought to sit round the table. Is that what they served their time for? Did they engage on the streets so as to sit round this table? Their answer would certainly be no.

Ulster Unionists may want to play that game. They may say that they will not talk to these people eyeball to eyeball. They may go into another wee room and have messenger-boy diplomacy, with someone running backwards and forwards doing their dirty work, but that will amount to the same thing. They will be negotiating Ulster's future with the enemies of Ulster.

In the interests of Unionist unity, in the interests of the land that we love, the country that many have served, and for which many have seen family members die, let us catch ourselves on. Let us take our stand. Let us say no to the greedy, green aggressor which is Dublin, whose foot is too far into the door and should go no further. And to my Colleagues who have said today "I suppose we will hear 'No surrender' from Larne" I reply that there will certainly be no surrender in Larne.

**Rev William McCrea:** In winding up for the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party, I wish to indicate our support for the motion. The future governance of Northern Ireland should be determined by the people of Northern Ireland alone.

In his opening remarks the Leader of the Ulster Unionists, Mr Trimble, said that there was fundamental unity of purpose that binds together those who support the Union. I trust that that will be clearly manifested not only today when we vote together in support of the motion but also in our actions in the coming days. In my opinion, this is one of the most critical periods in the history of Northern Ireland. Our traditional enemies are beavering away to destroy Unionism, even as we gather in this Forum. We are aware that every decision taken carefully by the pan-Nationalist front — whether the SDLP, Sinn Féin/IRA, the Dublin Government, United States senators, Members of the House, or even some Roman Catholic Church leaders — will have the destruction of Northern Ireland's position within the United Kingdom as its aim.

But, tragically, aiding and abetting that process is our own British Government and the Northern Ireland Office's nest of vipers, who have skilfully structured the present talks to ensure that there can only be an Irish Republican agenda. Anyone who suggests that they will be going in to defend and secure the Union is certainly deceived. Defence of the Union is not on the talks agenda.



Throughout the years we have been assured that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom is guaranteed, primarily because no change in the status of the province will take place without the consent of a majority of its people. However, a process of gradualism has been going on, and it is still in operation. It was deviously devised to destroy the Union and was dosed out little by little with the purpose of bringing about a united Ireland. Anyone who does not see that that is the purpose of the talks process is either blinkered or blind.

The principle of consent has been modified and diluted to the point where it has no meaning. Therefore, it is important that I should spell out that the Ulster Democratic Unionist Party is solemnly resolved to destroy this vile conspiracy of treachery and deceit against Ulster and the Union. What of the deceitful voices — that is all I can call them — of political and religious ecumenists? No matter what they tell us, our province is in greater constitutional danger now than at any time during 30 years of Republican terror. The Union is not safer, the Union is not stronger, and the present talks are not designed to make it either safer or stronger. In fact, the opposite is the case. The Union of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is being gradually eroded.

To add to the confusion, we have the SDLP and Sinn Féin/IRA, the Dublin Government, senators of the United States and others who interfere. But there are also political figures within Loyalism and Unionism who ought to know better. I believe that they have been singled out for bribery and blackmail to facilitate the eventual sell-out, progress towards which is continuing at this very time. Sleepers or moles — some for personal gain, to fill their own pockets; some out of fear — have been planted in the Loyalist community and its infrastructure. They will be activated, when necessary, to sow the seeds of defeatism, to sow division, to sow confusion in the ranks of Unionism and Loyalism. They will fulfil the purpose for which they have been singled out by both Dublin and the Government.

It amazes me that some who claim to have fought the Provisional IRA — Republicanism at its vilest — are now being used by the London and Dublin Governments to ensure that the guns of the Provos are kept safely in the Republican armoury, ready at a moment's notice to murder the next Loyalist and Protestant person, whether in Fermanagh, in the mid-Ulster area or in the Loyalist enclave of north or west Belfast.

Sad to say, that is exactly what has happened. Republicans are keeping their guns with the full intention that one day they will be used again. This is because they can never get a settlement that the IRA would wear. Let no one ever suggest that he can. No one — not even the British Government — has the power. Nor does any so-called Loyalist who agrees to be a part of this deception. The people of Northern Ireland will not allow their birthright to be given away. Sadly, the weapons will be used again against innocent people, whether Loyalist, Protestant or Roman Catholic — anyone who is not willing to bow to the dictates of Republican terror. The process is designed to sap the morale of the British people of Ulster, lest they remain vigilant and resolve to fight on to victory over this evil enemy.

Those who sought to undermine the successful efforts to defeat the terrorism of Germany during the last War were looked upon as enemies of the Crown. Today, alas, they are hailed as statesmen and people of vision. Unfortunately, the treacherous acts of



successive British Governments have allowed Dublin to get a foothold in the door of Ulster. No Unionist can act in any way that would give credence to such undemocratic activity. In an article in the 'Belfast Telegraph', quoted in Mr Robinson's book, Robert McCartney QC said this:

*3.00 pm*

"In an age of materialism, the British Government may believe that every man, perhaps even an entire people, have their price. In coming days, it will seek to persuade the pro-Union majority of Northern Ireland that the claimed benefits of the ceasefire is a fair price for the sacrifice of its national and political identity — a ceasefire with the terrorists retaining their weaponry is not peace.

The Government, having failed by default or design, to protect its citizens from terror or to guarantee the most basic of human rights, that of life itself, is now engaged in a process, not of peace, but of surrender. Peace on these terms could have been had at any time over the past twenty-five years. In the meantime, the dead have died in vain and the maimed have been mutilated for nothing."

Let no one ever say that he is selling Ulster in the name of those brave people who died for Ulster. That would not be true. No one can ever make such a claim. The article continues

"The British Government may wish to appease the terrorist for the protection of its own interests, but it is infamous that it should attempt to persuade those who have suffered the most to do likewise for that purpose."

My own people, like many others, have been butchered by a cold-blooded, blood-curdling campaign of IRA terror, but the terrorists have failed to break us. Now we are being blackmailed and bribed into putting the noose of a united Ireland around our own necks, and if we refuse to do so we will be blamed for the failure of the so-called peace process. Have we gone so soft that we are afraid to be blamed for pulling down a peace process which is destroying the Union? I will take the charge any day, but I will never take the charge of being a traitor. I am sick, sore and tired of those who try to use the suffering of the people of Ulster to make the point that we must sell out by confronting the terrorists eyeball to eyeball. I challenge any Member to tell me that by meeting the Provos eyeball to eyeball in the talks we will save our country and save the Union.

The DUP negotiators will not put their hand to any sordid deal that would aid the present corrupt process. I believe that no self-respecting Unionist could be part of a process so blatantly biased against Unionists.

Scotland decided yesterday on devolution, and that democratic decision has been respected. Let Ulster decide now. Let it be known that a rigged and undemocratic system of Government will not be acceptable. And that is what we would be offered. Oh, we are not to get what Scotland will get. Let no one lie to the people of Ulster. Scotland will get a democratic Government. It will have a Parliament of the people and for the people. But that is not what is on offer for Northern Ireland.

Let me make it abundantly clear that no rigged or undemocratic system of government will gain the consent of the people of Northern Ireland, and if any such system is forced upon us, we will have the opportunity, and the job before God, to bring it down to the dust. Now is the time for clear and determined leadership. Let us therefore go forward with clear vision to crush any attempt to destroy the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and



let every person in this place resolve before God to play the man and the woman for Ulster and to do it proudly.

**Mr Empey:** I begin by referring to Mr McBride's amendment to the motion and his speech in which he accused my party of, in fact, advocating independence. Apart from being a contradiction in terms — independence is the very opposite of Unionism — I fail utterly to see how the motion can be remotely described as a move towards independence. What, in fact, we are doing in using this form of words is making the distinction between governance that is the constitutional position of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom and governance which refers to the way in which authority is exercised, what institutions you have, their powers, and how they work.

I think — particularly in the light of what happened last night in Scotland and what is happening in Wales next week — that we should be in exactly the same position as Scotland and Wales on the matter of self-determination and our future governance. In other words, if it is to be decided that we should have an Assembly or a Parliament, the people here should have a right to say whether that is what they want or not. That distinguishes the position from what is called the constitutional status, and this is where the big trick is still being played, and the reason we chose the word governance in this motion is to distinguish that from what is commonly trotted out as the constitutional guarantee.

Let me make it clear — and I think we are in danger as a community of using very dangerous language — that nobody in the Chamber or out of it has any right whatsoever to negotiate the Union. The position of the Union is part of the law of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Nobody here has any mandate to negotiate that Union. There is a legal framework which establishes and maintains it, and there is a mechanism to test it. I have never supported the border-poll legislation because I believe that it distinguishes Northern Ireland from every other part of the United Kingdom. Stipulating that a border poll can be taken every 10 years begs the question of whether we are a fully integrated part of our own country when there is a law which allows the Union to be so reviewed. It does not smack of permanence. In fact, it smacks of the opposite. But it is there, and I am making the point that nobody has any mandate to negotiate the Union.

With respect to the status of Northern Ireland — and, as was said by somebody opposite, Mallon was at this last night — the whole point, of course, is that its status is not defined. I view Northern Ireland's status, as do most of us here, as a fully integrated part of the United Kingdom, but a Nationalist does not share this view. Different people can therefore readily use the word "status", but they mean totally different things, and that is why there is such deception in this. Simply to say that consent applies purely to the status of Northern Ireland means that anything that happens within this territory with regard to institutions is therefore not something that we would have to consent to, and that distinction is being made. Nationalists are using that distinction, and that particular matter needs to be resolved.

I would not wish to see this or any other part of the United Kingdom governed purely on the basis that each time you get 50% plus one of the community to agree to something, it does not matter what the other 49% believe. That is not necessarily the best way of doing things, and if such clashes can be avoided, that is fine and good. We would all like to see as



many people as possible content with whatever institutions we have here. That is only common sense, as Mr Peter Robinson said earlier. It is perfectly sensible to try to get the maximum amount of support you can for every step you take and for every institution you agree to create. Indeed, we recognize this because we have all accepted that the concept of sufficient consensus was one that it was possible to use within the current talks process or, perhaps, in other talks processes.

I will turn this round because people have argued that the majority can therefore exercise its right to squash a minority, however that minority is formed, and we do not wish to see that happen. But I will turn it round the other way. Do people seriously believe that if Nationalists got 50% plus one vote in any election we would be having an argument like this? You cannot have your cake and eat it. If you commit yourself to genuine consent, that consent must mean that you have to get a widespread degree of support for institutions within Northern Ireland. If, for whatever reason, whether by abstaining or by a quirk in the electoral system, Republicans achieved a vote of 50% plus one, do you mean to tell me that they would not say "It is all over?" Of course they would, and that, to some extent, exposes the dishonesty that underpins a lot of the criticisms that we are getting on this issue.

Basically, all we are saying is — and this is something that comes back to rights and which Iris Robinson mentioned — that it is correct to say that if you look at what is happening throughout Europe, even outside the European Union, there are many examples of problems not dissimilar to our own in those countries where you have nations and many borders drawn all over the globe. In an arbitrary way they were drawn by the ebb and flow of war and by all sorts of things from commercial transactions to banditry, but the abiding principle that runs through all of these things — and Mr Nesbitt made reference to this in a previous debate — is that the international institutions start off from the point that you accept borders.

That was the fundamental starting point, for instance, for the European Union, and, even in recent years, when Eastern Germany was being integrated into the greater Germany the first thing Chancellor Kohl had to do was accept the Oder-Neisse Line, the western borders of Poland, even though members of his own party were very unhappy with it, and he had great internal struggle. But the entire world community, represented by the European Union, NATO, the Americans and various other organizations, compelled him to accept the western borders of Poland.

If you look outside the European Union — Romania, for example — you find different countries where there are minorities that find themselves on the wrong side of a line. Many people found themselves on the wrong side of our own border — the Unionists who were left in the Republic. Now their problems were dealt with in an entirely different way, I have to say, but there have been people in such circumstances all over the world. There are people in such circumstances today all over Europe, and when the European Union expands, many similar problems will be imported into it. Former Soviet Republics are in the same position with minorities from different backgrounds finding themselves within a border that they would prefer not to be within. And if we found ourselves within a border that we preferred not to be in, we would be uncomfortable, so we can see that this is something that people are concerned about and have a right to be concerned about.



It is perfectly possible to create circumstances — indeed, I believe that circumstances already exist — whereby people in Northern Ireland who do not feel that they belong to the United Kingdom have the absolute right to pursue their political aspirations by peaceful and democratic means. None of us has any right to deny anybody that. None of us in the Chamber has ever attempted to deny anybody that. Therefore, if the individual human rights of a person or a group are required to be incorporated into law, that is fine.

In 1992 we agreed to force the British Government, who were the reluctant partner, to agree to introduce the European Convention into domestic law. In fact, the parties had to wait for weeks until the United Kingdom Government would even agree to it. We were ahead of them. We are still ahead of them today because, even though this Government has agreed to do that, we are prepared to go further. We could aim to have the finest human and group and community rights anywhere in the world. There is not a single person in the Chamber who would object to that. Equal rights for all, special privileges for none. None of us is going to object to that. So, on the question of rights, I believe that a genuine accommodation already exists, and if it is not quite there yet, it can be achieved.

*3.15 pm*

Republicans talk about an equality agenda. I can assure you, Mr Chairman, that there is nobody in the House who wishes to see any member of this community discriminated against because of his religion, his cultural background or anything else. We want to see everybody given an equal opportunity; we want everybody to have the chance to better himself, to provide for his family in an atmosphere of peace and to get on with life and enjoy it. There is no objection to that. On social and economic matters, we co-operate with people with whom we disagree very vigorously. Why not? There is nothing wrong with that. We work closely together at council level and, unlike Cllr McKee, some of us happen to be knee-deep in Provos, but that is the way the system works and the councils are, nevertheless, able to continue. We do good work, and that happens all over the province.

**Mr McKee:** The point that I was trying to make was that I appreciate Belfast City Council's position, but is there any excuse for those who socialize with them in the tea-rooms?

**Mr Empey:** I understand what the Member means.

I am saying that on rights issues, we can get agreement. On the equality agenda, I have to say that I represent an area of Belfast where the people are not getting equality. If you look at the distribution of funding, if you look at how community organizations are operating and funded, if you look at how targeting social need (TSN) and policy appraisal and fair treatment (PAFT) and all these other things are operating, you will see that they are not operating to the betterment of the people I represent, and I am sure that goes for others in here. So we agree with the principle, even though it is not in operation in the city today. On those issues none of us is going to disagree. Nobody is going to stand in the way — and I want to repudiate this clearly. There is no Unionist who is going to support any law or any institution or do anything that is going to put down any legitimate section of this community, even people with whom we violently disagree. That lie has been promoted all over the world.



When one looks around Europe and further afield and considers the way so-called minorities have been treated here compared to how they have been treated in other places in the world, one can see that there was never anything so badly wrong in this country that it justified the death of a single, solitary person. Remedies were available; the law was in place; people had the franchise; facilities were available and nothing was sufficiently wrong that it necessitated 30 years of the worst terrorism in western Europe. I do not doubt that things could have been done better, and we all know that; I do not doubt that mistakes were made, and we all know that — but nothing that was done justified what has happened in the last 30 years.

Because we have been under a tidal wave of Republican triumphalism in recent years I am somewhat concerned that there appears to be a tendency to be defeatist in here. We know that successive Governments have not been trustworthy; we know that successive Secretaries of State have not been trustworthy; we know where the Irish Government is coming from; we know what the Provos are. We know all of this, but in spite of everything that has been thrown at our community over the last 30 years — in spite of the murder, mayhem and treachery — we have not been defeated. We do not intend to be defeated, and I want to get us lifted away from the idea that the fact that international propaganda, American senators and their henchmen, the Provos, and the Irish Government are ranged against us does not mean that we are defeated.

Does anybody believe that if they thought they could win their battles by stepping over us they would not have done it by now? The only reason they are where they are now is that they have still not been able to achieve their objectives. Although the Provos have fought hard, have fought viciously and have still got an enormous capacity to kill and destroy, they have not won, and, therefore, we have to stop getting ourselves into a defeatist mode. We know of and must be alert to the dangers, but we must not talk ourselves to defeat.

I believe very strongly that the issue of consent has within it both a risk for us but also a salvation for our entire community. If it is exercised in the way in which we are attempting to ensure it is, that is that there is the maximum amount of support from those in Northern Ireland for what happens here, that would be a very legitimate exercise of what is a basic human right and a basic right of our community and is entirely in keeping with current trends in Europe as demonstrated by the OSCE and the United Nations, for instance. All of these international agreements have been moving steadily in our favour over the last 10 years, and world opinion on the exercise of consent has been moving our way. Even since the 1992 talks there have been many developments that have assisted our argument, and I firmly believe that if the Government are as genuine about openness and democracy as they say they are, that too will help.

The Secretary of State's comments about geography and numbers were really the antithesis of consent. How can you say there is consent if, at the end of the day, it is not measurable? How are you going to measure it if there is not a defined area and a defined number of people within that area? One hopes that one does not have to force things through on that sort of basis. I fully accept that but, if you are to measure anything, if you are to measure who represents the people, you have to have a geographically-defined area and you have to have numbers. Last night in Scotland there was a geographical area and there were numbers. Without those two elements consent is an utterly meaningless concept.



If this motion is successful today, Mr Chairman, I sincerely hope that you will ensure that a copy is sent to the Secretary of State. I hope that she will read, mark, learn and inwardly digest it and, that when she comes to speak on the subject again, she will have a better understanding of what it means.

**The Chairman:** I wrote to her yesterday reminding her that she is supposed to be coming along.

Before putting the Question on the amendment may I ask whether Members intend to press it to a vote?

**Mr Neeson:** Alliance still believes very strongly in the amendment, partly because of the ambiguity in the motion. However, there is consensus on the principle of consent. That being the case, it is not necessary to put the Forum through the agony of a Division. We will not vote against the motion, and our amendment would, I think, be slightly defeated.

*Question That the amendment be made put and negatived.*

*Main question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved:*

The future governance of Northern Ireland should be determined by the people of Northern Ireland alone.

## FORUM: STANDING COMMITTEE B

**The Chairman:** Mr Gibson has some progress to report from the Education Committee.

**Mr Gibson:** I simply want to report that the Education Committee had a meeting with the Minister on Monday. It was a reasonably successful occasion, and we asked him to support the report. I have asked for a copy of the note of the meeting to be circulated to each Forum Member.

We have had one change in the Committee. Because of work commitments Mr Alan McFarland, Forum Member for North Down, has been forced to retire from the position of Vice-Chairman. Alan was an extremely hard-working, diligent and helpful individual. He always made a very valuable and valued contribution and was much respected by the other members. We regret that he has had to retire. Nevertheless, I welcome the new Vice-Chairman, Peter Weir. They have something in common — they both represent North Down — but Alan McFarland had that forgiving factor in that he came from County Tyrone. Peter Weir's father also came from that county so they must both be perfect.



## WELFARE TO WORK: TASK FORCE

**Mr Jim Rodgers:** I would like the Economy Committee to take careful note that last Monday the new Minister responsible for training and employment announced a 13-strong task force with regard to the Welfare to Work proposals that the Labour Government hope to implement next year. Not one member of that task force team is an elected representative, and that is a snub to the Economy Committee of the Forum as well as to the councils.

I am not criticizing any of those 13 people — some of them are of excellent calibre — but it is disgraceful that a Government which criticized quangos when it was in opposition did not take this opportunity to bring at least one public representative on board. There are people here who are actively interested in training, in employment, in job creation and economic development, and I would like the Committee to consider this carefully with a view to sending a letter to Tony Worthington.

Thank you, Mr Chairman, for allowing me to raise this matter.

**The Chairman:** I look forward to seeing you all again next week.

*The Forum was adjourned at 3.29 pm.*