NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Friday 24 October 1997

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

Members observed two minutes' silence.

FORUM COMMITTEES (MEETINGS)

The Chairman: Before moving to the main business today I have one important matter to mention. At the beginning of our meeting on 3 October Mr Neeson questioned the legality of holding Forum Committee meetings on those days which the Secretary of State notifies me that negotiations are intended to take place — generally the first three days of the week. I undertook to look into the matter and come back to it, and I can now do so.

During the debate on the Northern Ireland (Entry to Negotiations, etc) Bill on 23 April last year the then Secretary of State said quite clearly that the relevant paragraph in the Bill applied only to plenary meetings of the Forum and not to Committees. This opinion is consistent with my recollection of the view that he later expressed to me which I mentioned on 3 October and recent legal advice has confirmed this original opinion. My conclusion is therefore that there is no legal impediment to the holding of Committee meetings on notified days.

But, to be absolutely fair to Mr Neeson, I must point out that the then Secretary of State also said during the debate that it would be generally undesirable for there to be significant negotiations and Forum business taking place concurrently and that this would be no less undesirable in the case of a Forum Committee. While we must therefore sympathize with those parties who are stretched to cover all the business in which they are involved, it is nevertheless the case that Committee meetings on the first three days of the week should still very much be the exception. I will be calling Mr Neeson as I know that he wants to say something, but before doing that I would like to mention another matter which I think is of interest to Members.

GALLIPOLI

The Chairman: Seven prominent Members were absent last Friday. I heard with pleasure that the reason was that they had gone to Gallipoli. It was a commendable thing to do. The people concerned attended a service of remembrance at the Greenhill cemetery at Suvla Bay on the Gallipoli peninsula, Turkey. Interestingly, it is hoped that the memorial to be raised there will have a Celtic cross, which on Turkish land would be quite unusual. A wreath was laid on behalf of the Forum in memory of the 10th Irish Division, which served there during 1915 and suffered terrible loss — 4,000 casualties. These were men so eager to

join the 1914 War, which they feared would be over quickly, that they raced from all parts of Ireland to the recruiting offices. They met their fate at Gallipoli.

I congratulate those Members who took that step last week. It is very appropriate that the Forum should give them some credit for having done this off their own bat.

FORUM COMMITTEES (MEETINGS)

Mr Neeson: Thank you, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to respond to your remarks about Committee meetings.

I agree that there is some ambiguity in the legislation, which is very much the case with a lot of legislation. However, I welcome your statement that it would be generally undesirable for there to be significant negotiations and Forum business taking place concurrently, and that this would be no less undesirable in the case of a Forum Committee.

I would just draw your attention to an exchange of pleasantries that took place yesterday in the Education Committee between Rev Eric Smyth and Ms Bell on the question of that Committee's meetings. It is important to stress in the Forum the primacy of the talks at Castle Buildings, and I am delighted to inform members of the Democratic Unionist Party that next week we are moving on to agenda item number three, which deals with the structures. This undoubtedly shows that significant progress is now being made at the talks in Castle Buildings. It is important that that is recognized and that Committees and their Chairmen do all they can to ensure that there are no meetings on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

Mr Gregory Campbell: Mr Chairman, will you please correct the remarks by Mr Neeson which attributed to you words which were clearly said by the former Secretary of State.

The Chairman: Well, that is what he did say to me. Sorry: I was simply repeating what Sir Patrick had told me.

Mr Neeson: Mr Chairman, I just read directly from your statement.

Mr Gregory Campbell: No. The Member said that the Chairman had said that, and he had not.

Mr Peter Robinson: The Member put into the mouth of the Chairman the words of the Secretary of State, very uncomfortable, I am sure, at times for the Chairman.

The Chairman: I assure you that it was a slight slip of the tongue by Mr Neeson.

Mr Peter Robinson: The Forum Member from the Alliance Party tells us that significant progress has been made at the talks. I have the talks' minutes — the ones we are not supposed to get. I have scoured them to see where this progress is. Perhaps, as I cannot

see progress in the minutes, some secret deal is being done. Maybe the Member from the Alliance Party will tell us what has been agreed that constitutes significant progress.

Mr Neeson: If the DUP were taking part in the talks they would know what has been agreed and what has not.

The Chairman: We have all had a little airing here with some illuminating statements, particularly the one which you have just heard from Mr Robinson about his minutes. We should now move on to today's motion.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL PROGRAMMES (LOCAL PARTICIPATION)

Mr Coulter: I am in a somewhat awkward position because the person who was to move the motion is in the Sudetenland. However, I beg to move the following motion:

This Forum, while recognizing the merits of local participation in economic development/redevelopment and in social programmes which make use of various public funding sources, is concerned by the apparent lack of accountability of some community-based bodies and the sustainability of some initiatives, and calls on the Northern Ireland Office to set up a regular reporting system and to periodically make public the progress of such community-based initiatives.

May I say before dealing with the motion that it was right and proper for you, Mr Chairman, to mention the sacrifice of so many Ulstermen at Gallipoli. It is also heartening to hear the news today that a commission is being set up to look at ways of establishing a fitting memorial for those who have been killed by terrorists during the last 26-odd years. The Forum should take note of that with gratitude.

Mr Davis: Does the Member agree, in view of what the Chairman has said — and we all concur with his remarks — that it is disgraceful that we can go to a foreign land to remember the men who fell in the First World War, yet it seems we cannot do the same thing in parts of this province?

Mr Coulter: I thank my Colleague for his intervention. It is long past time for the names of the deceased members of our security forces — those who have made the supreme sacrifice — to be added to the war memorials in our own country.

There are a number of major points in the motion. First of all, local authorities and local people should have the power to look at economic development in their own area — it is a good few years since they were given the opportunity to spend money on local development. For too long too much power has been in the hands of those who are not accountable, and local economic development or re-development, social programmes and commercial ventures ought to have been in the hands of those who know the situation in their own area. Accountability, or the lack of it, is what lies at the very heart of the democratic deficit in this country, and the battle that we had over the money coming from Europe for peace and reconciliation highlighted this very point. How can these bodies which are locally established be accountable for the spending of the money given to them? Local authorities,

on the other hand, have in-built accountability through the Government auditor who makes sure that all their accounts are examined each year.

Another important point is sustainability. Not enough has been done by the local committees to look at ventures which have been accepted but which are non-sustainable.

But perhaps one of the most important aspects comes at the end of the motion — and that is the question of open Government. The motion calls for the Northern Ireland Office

"to set up a regular reporting system and to periodically make public the progress of such community-based initiatives."

We have heard a lot about open Government, but let us have more of it in the hands of the elected representatives. With elected representatives making sure that bodies are accountable and projects sustainable, the interests of local areas, and their development, will be very much enhanced.

I have pleasure in moving the motion.

10.15 am

Mr McAlister: I have had some firsts in both my business career and my political career, and here is another one this morning. If Mr Coulter is embarrassed, I am somewhat confused: the motion before us is of such burning importance to the party concerned that the person who was to have moved it is not available. While I applaud all the efforts that were made in Gallipoli last week — and I back it 100% — I wonder where the Members from the Ulster Unionist Party are this morning. What burning business keeps them away? Maybe next week we will hear about where they are.

But it is astounding that a motion has been moved — and one would have hoped it would be thought out, as the DUP would certainly have thought it out — yet no one was here from the UUP to explain it in detail. If someone had been here to do so, we could have replied properly to it. So, the only thing that I can do — to best serve the community, the Forum and this party — is dissect the motion and make some assumptions about it, and neither I nor my party can be criticized for making such assumptions as no one from the UUP was here to explain their thinking behind the motion in detail. Nevertheless, I will try to dissect it in a constructive way — although I may be critical of it — and I will leave it to others to add their comments.

The motion says

"This Forum, while recognizing the merits of local participation in economic development/redevelopment and in social programmes".

The DUP supports local participation in economic development. As Vice-Chairman of the Forum's Economy Committee, and also a committed businessman, I believe that it is very important to have local participation, whether it be from a council or from groups — and I use the word "groups" in its general sense, although I will refer to it more specifically later

on. Local people feel that the economy is part of what they are involved in, part of what they own, and part of how they want to develop their area — that is, their infrastructure, their schooling and their education — and it is vital that there be local participation.

The sad thing is that over many years the Government have not allowed for locally elected participation in many of these schemes. Of course, we have seen quangos and other bodies set up which have excluded local politicians and those who are interested in developing the economy. So, we certainly support local participation, but it must be the right type of local participation and it must extend broadly across the local communities, taking on board the various people who have an important and vital input to make.

The motion goes on to refer to

"social programmes which make use of various public funding sources".

Obviously, one always looks for funding from these sources, and we have certainly seen funding come from various bodies. But one sometimes wonders about the reasoning behind it. Is funding being given fully and openly and without any conditions — might it be a pay-off to certain people? Has it perhaps been given to uphold a process that is flawed, but which is, in a sense, buying off people? But no matter where the funding is coming from, there are questions to be answered. Nevertheless, funding is important, and I have no problem with that so long as it is done correctly.

Then there is a reference to

"the apparent lack of accountability of some community-based bodies".

This is where we enter a very grey area. What does "some community-based bodies" mean? Did the person who was to have moved the motion have particular bodies in mind? It is a pity that that person is not here to name those bodies. Does this indicate that there are some community-based bodies which are accountable while others are not? It seems to me that that is what it does indicate. Or does it mean that some should be accountable and some should not be? It is a totally confusing motion.

Nobody doubts that there has to be accountability in everything we do, whether in the business world, in the political world or in the family. But does the motion imply that there are community-based bodies that are misusing money? Does the motion imply that money is being filtered into less-than-favourable economic situations?

Mr Carrick: Does the Member accept that in some cases there has been an artificially engineered programme, that some community bodies have been set up for the sole purpose of drawing on external funding, without there being any realistic expectation of sustainability or viability?

Mr McAlister: I thank my Colleague for that. I could not have put it any better myself. These are the very things that we are talking about — that, in fact, the whole thing is a sham and a fraud. I would love to have had the person who was to move the Ulster Unionist Party's motion here to enlighten us on it a bit, and then I could have responded to it

properly. But, perhaps, during the course of the day they will get their act together and somebody will enlighten us. We are totally confused — there is an accountability problem with the Ulster Unionist Party.

The motion refers to

"the sustainability of some initiatives".

My Colleague Mr Carrick has already said that some of these things are not sustainable. It does not augur well for those funding bodies, and those responsible for doling out the money, that they have not ensured that these different schemes and projects can be sustained. That is an important point which must be taken on board.

Recent reports have also concluded that many bodies of a pro-Unionist persuasion have not sought funding because the process is so tainted and so slanted that they would feel a little dirty if they were to apply for it. The Government, while looking at these other points, must address that situation very quickly, and do it in a very fair and open way.

That brings me to my last point about openness. Certainly, there should be regular reports about how things are progressing. No matter what the situation, regular updating is necessary — whether it is in the Forum, in the political realm or in business, you must know where you are, where you have been and where you intend going.

This party has always been for openness of government. We have always wanted to bring things into the public arena — not like some people who want to enter processes where everything is kept quiet. In fact, this morning we had a perfect example from the Alliance Party of how they like to talk behind closed doors and keep people from knowing the truth. Well, this party has never been ashamed of the truth. This party has always been for openness, whether in economic development or right through the whole political structure. We are for openness of government. But even if there were openness of government, I wonder whether there would still be closed areas. This week we have heard all about the leaks coming from the Department of Foreign Affairs in Southern Ireland — very interesting. We can also think of Maryfield and all the secret deals, chats and other things that go on there. We may never have openness of government when there is that sort of involvement in Northern Ireland's affairs.

It is pathetic that the Ulster Unionists are not here this morning to explain their motion in greater detail. We cannot reply to it because of their absence. During the course of the day they will, perhaps, give us something that we can really get our teeth into. I ask them to take it a bit more seriously and address this problem. They could, perhaps, rustle up a few more Members or, at least, let us know what the important business is that they all have to attend to, and which prevents them from being here on a Friday. We certainly take the Forum very seriously, and we hope that others will do the same.

I would love to be able to say more, but they have not given us very much to work on this morning. I rest my case.

Mr David Campbell: Many of us recognize the valuable work that has been done by many local groups and the intermediary-funding bodies — as they are known — which are responsible for distributing millions of pounds from the peace and reconciliation funds. I do not decry the work that is done. I have, however, remained silent in the Forum when on previous occasions we have applauded the European Union for granting substantial sums of money, and, indeed, when we have applauded our MEPs for securing funding. I congratulate them for making that effort.

Nevertheless, I am concerned. I have personal knowledge of substantial numbers of applications being made for funding which have gone to many intermediary-funding bodies from either Unionist sponsors or predominantly Protestant groups and organizations, and those applications have been rejected wholesale.

I also have information about two particular applications for project funding: one was from a Nationalist area and one was from a Protestant area. The applications were almost identical, yet the one in the Nationalist area was accepted while the one in the Protestant area was rejected. These are matters that are being brought to the attention of our MEPs. I hope they will be progressed and that appropriate action will be taken against those bodies.

I support this motion and, in particular, its call for a regular reporting system to be set up by the Northern Ireland Office. The Northern Ireland Office must act decisively and quickly as we move into next year — a time for a new phase of funding from Europe.

I would like to turn the Forum's attention to the apparent lack of accountability of some community-based bodies — and those which I have in mind, and wish to address this morning, are known as concerned residents' associations. Their link with this motion is quite specific because many of them have received funding under the various initiatives that are sponsored by the Government and intermediary-funding bodies. Many of their organizers are themselves funded directly under these programmes.

10.30 am

Last night I heard Mr Jim Hasson of the Bellaghy Concerned Residents' Association on the radio — my Colleague referred to the matter in his earlier intervention. When I heard Mr Hasson speaking my heart sank and my anger rose. My heart sank because, as Members are aware, I have spent the past 10 years attempting to educate everyone in society about the cross-community effort that was made during the two World Wars, particularly during the First World War. Indeed, I am sure that many of us who were present at Gallipoli last week wept silently at the graves of both Irish Catholics and Ulster Protestants who died some 1,500 miles from their homes. They died to ensure that we, as democrats, have the freedom to express our democracy. They died that we might live in a free society.

The actions of Bellaghy Residents' Association cannot be underestimated. But Mr Hasson has done us a service because, for the first time, the mask of these residents' associations has completely slipped. They are not concerned with Unionism or Nationalism, Protestantism or Catholicism. They are concerned with the destruction of all things British and the denial to British citizens of their culture and identity. What I heard yesterday from Mr Hasson was the sort of thing I expected to hear from an evil bigot or a National Socialist.

The Royal British Legion, the Red Cross, the Fire and Ambulance Services, the Boys' Brigade, the Girls' Brigade, the Scouts and the Guides are all organizations which have remained resolutely above the political turmoil that has engulfed the province for 30 years. But the Bellaghy Concerned Residents' Association has directly challenged all these groups. It has directly challenged every honest, decent man and woman in Northern Ireland as we approach Remembrance Sunday this year. Republicanism has now directly challenged us all. Remembrance Sunday does not commemorate Protestantism or Catholicism, Unionism or Republicanism — it commemorates the struggle for freedom; it commemorates the sacrifice that was made to ensure the freedom of mankind.

In Germany in the 1930s evil pervaded because good men did nothing. For 50 years evil pervaded in the Irish Free State against the British-Irish/Unionist identity because good men — Protestants and Catholics — did nothing. We are facing a clear choice this autumn: do we do nothing or do we act?

Mr Bolton: Does the Member agree with me that the Forum should specifically commend the Castledawson branch of the Royal British Legion and its spokesman, Mr Ronnie Curry, a man whom I know personally, and who is unaccustomed to the public scrutiny which he had to face yesterday? He spoke well for the Legion and for the cause.

Mr Campbell: I do commend him, but I would go further and say that if the Government do not act decisively and quickly on the matter of the Remembrance Sunday parade in Bellaghy, all Northern Ireland must remember its war-dead in Bellaghy on Remembrance Sunday.

Members may feel that what I have said was not strictly relevant to the motion, but the funding for these groups comes from these bodies. They are attempting to pervade anti-Britishness by means of the funding that comes from Europe and from many Government programmes. They must be brought to account, and their actions must be dealt with.

I support the motion.

Mr Neeson: I want to associate myself with the remarks of Mr Davis — they were very relevant. However, I also want to call a spade a spade and say that Mr David Campbell made little or no effort to address the motion before us. That may have been in part because as Mr McAlister said, the motion is very unclear, and I only wish that the Ulster Unionists had been more specific when they drew it up. In reality, there is very little to discuss about the motion that is before us. However, I want to make some comments.

First, I welcome the fact that in recent years local government has been given the power to become involved in economic development. That was a very worthwhile move, and, in my area, we have invested the money very prudently and in some important, local projects. As far as economic development is concerned, it performs a very useful role, creating and developing local initiatives throughout Northern Ireland. In many ways, local economic development has helped to create partnerships which benefit the whole community.

In any system — and I am thinking mainly of the peace and reconciliation money — there are doubts about the way money is spent on some projects. Some of the money, I believe, as do other Members, has gone to politically orientated organizations. That is wrong. Any such funding must go to projects which are entirely cross-community in nature because of the divided society that we have in Northern Ireland. So, I do have some reservations about how some of that money has been distributed.

I would like more information about

"the apparent lack of accountability of some community-based bodies".

Mr David Campbell mentioned concerned residents, but I do not believe that the author of this motion was thinking specifically about concerned residents. It is important that a motion that comes before the Forum is specific. I am also disappointed that the author of the motion is not here this morning to present it because it would have been of assistance to Members if he had been.

Mr David Campbell: I cannot defend the author of this motion, but he would not have heard the remarks of Mr Hasson last night. That is why I brought them to the attention of the Forum through this motion. Perhaps Mr Neeson might comment on Mr Hasson's remarks.

Mr Neeson: I have already identified myself with the remarks of Mr Davis. That also reflects my feelings about what is happening in Bellaghy, and I believe that the majority of Members will share those feelings. I do not want to get involved in the Bellaghy issue; I want to stick to the motion that is before us.

The motion also calls for accountability. Of course, accountability is very important. The various district partnerships in Northern Ireland take a responsible approach towards the funds which they are investing in and distributing to the various projects that are being established.

As for the proposition that the Northern Ireland Office should set up a regular reporting system, I do not quite understand what is meant by this. Is the reporting system to be addressed towards the local district partnerships, or is it to be addressed towards bodies like Making Belfast Work? Once again, the motion is not clear. There is certainly a role for the Northern Ireland Office to monitor closely organizations like Making Belfast Work, but as far as the local district partnerships are concerned, they are monitored by the local district councils. Once again, there is a need for more clarity.

Mr McAlister, as a businessman, referred to sustainability, but as a businessman he must also realize that any investment always carries a risk. It is very difficult to be absolutely certain when an investment is being made. When the Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU) was distributing grants for the setting up of small businesses in Northern Ireland, quite a number of those businesses were not sustainable, and that created problems for LEDU in many ways. Sustainability is important, but it is not something that can be guaranteed.

There is little else that can be said about the motion. I believe in accountability, sustainability and monitoring — we all believe in those things — and I hope that while some things about the motion are unclear, we will support it on the grounds that I have just outlined.

Mr Casey: I am as confused as everyone else about this motion — if one can call it a motion at all.

I am not sure what motivated this debate or which community-based bodies are being referred to. I was chairman of the Economic Development Committee of Craigavon Council. We had quite a lot of contact with voluntary organizations and made quite substantial sums of money available to them. I think that Mr Carrick would agree that this money was not handed out on a plate without the strictest of scrutiny and guarantees that the money would be used in a proper manner. We also insisted that the money had to be repaid if it was not used in the proper manner.

From what I have heard this morning, the whole emphasis seems be on the district partnerships. I want to remind the Forum that within the district partnerships are seven councillors — some from the DUP, some from the Official Unionist Party, some from the SDLP and some from the Alliance Party — who are involved in these partnerships. If we have blanket condemnation of the district partnerships, we are condemning members of the parties in this Chamber for gross inefficiency. There are some representatives from the community sector, and the other seven representatives are from the statutory, business and trade union sectors. How anybody can point a finger at such a body is totally beyond me.

Mr Hunter: If you have seven community-based leaders and seven representing business interests and seven councillors, you immediately have a pan-Nationalist majority of two to one. It is hardly representative.

Mr Casey: If all trade unionists, business people and representatives of statutory bodies are pan-Nationalist, that is a new one on me.

10.45 am

Mr Hunter: The sort of stooges that represent the business community tend to be of the pan-Nationalist front — or certainly leaning strongly in that direction.

Mr Casey: I find this debate unbelievable. I refer particularly to Mr David Campbell's contribution, which said absolutely nothing about the subject that we are supposed to be debating today. However, I will go on with my own observations.

Ms Bell: May I ask Mr Hunter —

The Chairman: Are you giving way, Mr Casey?

Mr Casey: Yes.

Ms Bell: Mr Casey nodded to me, Mr Chairman.

As a member of a district partnership — and, as Mr Casey has said, we are being maligned this morning — I would like to know what partnerships specifically Mr Hunter is talking about. Quite often statements are made here that are not backed up by facts.

Mr Hunter: I am talking specifically about the sort of people —

The Chairman: Mr Hunter, would you be kind enough to sit down please. Let us try to get on with the business we are addressing.

Mr Casey: I am beginning to feel like a jack-in-the-box. I am not giving way again.

Just as an aside, I am involved with a totally cross-community organization which made an application to the Craigavon district partnership for funding. We were turned down. We were neither Nationalists nor pan-Nationalists, nor were we Unionists. We were both Catholic and Protestant, and we were turned down. Again, I am in dispute with the local body over the rejection of the application. I would be very disappointed if this motion were being moved in an effort to restrict funding to the voluntary sector, which, in the main, has used funding to good effect and has been accountable for its spending. It would be totally wrong to denigrate the community sector. This motion does that because it is not specific. It is almost a blanket condemnation of the community sector.

As someone who has been very much involved in the voluntary sector in a managerial and supervisory capacity, I have to disagree with the sentiments expressed in the motion about accountability. I do not dispute the claim that there have been malpractices within some voluntary organizations and some community organizations, but these are the exception rather than the rule. Speaking from personal experience, in my own project, Shankill Community Project in Lurgan, over the last 10 years I have signed cheques for something like £3 million of public money — money that came from the Department of Economic Development to create employment and community development. Our project was subject to internal audit by the Department on an annual basis, when every penny had to be accounted for. Indeed, I can recall being questioned and badgered on one occasion for daring to spend £3 out of petty cash on a box of biscuits for hospitality purposes. I was actually going to offer the biscuits to the auditors, but I changed my mind after they censured me for spending the money on them.

In addition to the internal audit, we were required under company law, as a corporate body, to provide audited annual accounts. We are talking about accountability. I know that there has been criticism of bodies such as Making Belfast Work, which was severely criticized by the Northern Ireland Select Committee not so long ago. But in fairness to that body, it was given *carte blanche* to get money out into the voluntary sector. It was really more of a political decision than an economic decision. I do not think you can hold the voluntary sector responsible for that.

Mr Neeson mentioned the Industrial Development Board (IDB) and the Local Enterprise Development Unit (LEDU). They are doing an excellent job in Northern Ireland, promoting economic development through the creation of large and small industries. Not all of these ventures are a success, as Mr Neeson said. Millions of pounds have been lost in

ventures that went down the drain along with the money. There is De Lorean, for one — something like £43 million — and there are numerous others. If you read the annual reports of bodies like LEDU, you will discover that while they may have created 1,600 jobs, 600 ventures have actually closed down in the interim. Again, if you are talking about sustainability, it is not only in the voluntary sector that you cannot or guarantee sustainability; it is in every aspect of trade and business. People will fail and people will go out of business whether they are in the voluntary sector or in any other sector. I do not think that anyone in this Chamber would advocate the scrapping of IDB or LEDU or seek to restrict their funding.

Mr Carrick: Will Mr Casey give way on that point?

Mr Casey: No, I am not giving way anymore.

Another factor we have to take into account when talking about the community sector, are the businesses and the enterprise it has created, which provide much-needed employment and services. Many community organizations have used this funding to good effect and used it as a basis for starting up community businesses, some of which have been very successful and have helped to sustain those organizations. Again, we have to give credit to the community sector for that.

In conclusion, I urge Members not to knock unjustly or denigrate the community and voluntary sectors' efforts in community economic development. I cannot support the motion: it is too vague, not very well thought out and not very well presented.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: It is rather unusual when debating a motion like this to find myself in agreement with some of the sentiments expressed by Mr Casey. For the first time in the Forum, my party can recognize some of the things he said as being quite accurate.

This is one of the most unfocused motions that we have had before us in a very long time. To use Mr Casey's phrase, it really does take the biscuit. It is one of those catch-all motions. When I read it I thought there might be some substance when they got up to speak. But when the Ulster Unionist Members got up to move the motion and to speak on it, they compounded the fact that it is very much a catch-all, unfocused motion. I am reminded of a little saying from school:

"I come before you to stand behind you to tell you something I know nothing about."

Some speeches from the Ulster Unionist Party are full of sound and fury but signify very little.

The motion is riddled with "nudge, nudge; wink, wink" terminology which tries to say so much but imparts very little. It is filled with terms like "some community groups" and "some initiatives" and talks about wanting to see things like "accountability" and "sustainability", but it does not focus in on any particular initiative or on any particular group or even make a statement which people can get their teeth into.

Before coming to the terminology in any detail, it has got to be said that this motion does come as a surprise. When we look at the membership of some of the community-based

groups and some of the quangos in Northern Ireland we see that the Ulster Unionist Party does extremely well. I think the most recent appointment was to the Northern Ireland Policy Authority.

A Member: It comes through Maryfield.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: Yes, I am coming to that point.

The Northern Ireland Policy Authority has something like four or five Ulster Unionist Party members. One can only assume that this motion is a bit of a back-hand slight upon members of the party. Obviously their contribution to some of those community groups with which they are involved has not been recognized. I am rather pleased that my party has gone unrecognized in terms of appointments to those community groups if this is the sort of criticism they attract. Maybe if we were appointed to those groups they would function a lot better than they have done to date.

The terms of the motion is a vote of no confidence in the current membership of many community groups in Northern Ireland. Therefore one has to ask who the members of these community groups are and then ask them to stand up and be accountable for their actions. Someone made the point earlier that the Policy Authority's inviting Sinn Fein/IRA to come along to talk about policing structures is one very clear indication of just how unaccountable these groups are. It is totally incredible and unbelievable in these current days. My Colleague says that it is like asking Hitler to look after the Jews.

A Member mentioned the peace and reconciliation fund, or the Delors package as it was originally called. Everyone recognizes that the Delors package had some very fundamental failures, but at least those failures have been recognized. More importantly, the task force has been back in Northern Ireland to look at those failures and to draw up means and ways of addressing the imbalance that exists with that European funding. That is very important to my party. We were instrumental in securing that money, but more importantly we want to make sure that it is fairly distributed to all sections of the community which are deserving of that sort of assistance.

If we look at the terminology of this motion we will see that it is very unfocused. It talks about accountability. Everyone wants to see accountability in Northern Ireland. Certainly the lack of accountability in the quangos and community groups — indeed, in the way in which Northern Ireland is governed generally — concerns anyone who is interested in democratic accountability and responsibility.

Let us look at the logic of this motion, which calls for a greater say for the Northern Ireland Office. Surely the Ulster Unionists realize that this amounts to calling for a greater input from Maryfield. Essentially, that is what will happen if the Government act on the motion. We must be aware of this and highlight that failure and concern. To ignore it is to avoid the real issue: the lack of governance and the lack of accountability in Northern Ireland come from things like Maryfield which was set up under the Anglo-Irish Agreement and from other deliberate, quite offensive and intrusive measures by the Irish Government into our internal affairs. The issue of accountability is important, but, unfortunately, the way in which

this motion seeks to address it is woefully inadequate and does not serve the purpose that many of us on this side of the House would like to see.

We have heard calls for some community bodies to be examined. The Ulster Unionist Party, whether the author of the motion is here or not, has a duty to be specific and to name those bodies — a duty to call a spade a spade, as Mr Neeson said. Also, they have a duty to come up with the goods. They have not done that.

I appreciate the remarks of Mr David Campbell. While not trying to besmirch them in any way, I must say that they were not relevant to this debate. In fact, the Member ought to know that my party tabled a motion on 12 September 1997 on the very issue he wants addressed — long before the Bellaghy incident. At least we had the foresight to realize that these community groups, organizations, residents' and action groups have deliberately orchestrated attacks on the community. I draw his attention to motion No 16, which currently has only the support of my party. The Democratic Unionist Party is prepared to have it debated in the not-too-distant future. That would give us all the opportunity to talk about these very important issues.

I agree with the thrust of what he said but, in all honesty, his comments had absolutely nothing to do with the motion. To be honest, it says something that the Ulster Unionist Party cannot produce an argument to sustain this motion, which is what they ought to have been doing here today. They ought at least be able to sustain the motion by putting forward credible instead of incredible arguments.

The patriotism that was expressed earlier is fine, but this motion is not about patriotism. It is about accountability and recognition of these community-based organizations. Therefore it is up to Members of the Ulster Unionist Party to be more specific and to define what exactly they are talking about. There is no reason for their not bringing forward specific examples if they are truly concerned.

11.00 am

This motion shows that there are people in the Forum who are prepared to use it as some sort of dull dog Forum. There are those who say "Let us just calm things down. Let us not have the real interaction or dialogue or debate on substantive political issues that we ought to be having." We debate motions that would be thrown out of a sixth-form debating society as being unacceptable. Instead of having motions like this before us we should have much more credible motions — motions which go right to the heart of the peace and reconciliation we are supposed to be debating.

It is rather unfortunate that we have been inflicted with this motion this morning. If the Ulster Unionist Party wants our party's support for the motion, they should come up with the goods. They should deliver much more specific accusations and evidence for those accusations. Indeed, they should have someone now stand up and give us a statement on what this motion really means — to date, we have has absolutely nothing of substance from them.

Mr Chairman, I leave those points with you. If the Ulster Unionist Party intends to criticize certain organizations, I trust that those criticisms are valid. In addition, I hope that they will discipline their members who are on those organizations and in those bodies who have failed this community, because if they are being honest, they will not adopt a holistic approach but deal with the individuals rather than the actual bodies.

The Chairman: Mr Hunter, can you assist us by responding?

Mr Hunter: I do not know if I can assist or not. When Mr Paisley was speaking, I thought he was talking about himself and his many contributions to the Forum — but that is another point.

It is sad to see that Mr Casey has left us. He indicated that he was responsible for signing cheques totalling £3 million — I trust he never came across one Charles J Haughey, for a sum like that would, I am sure, bring a smile to his face. *[Interruption]*

Mr Hunter: Talk about dull dogs. We have a pretty dull dog over there. Sit there and keep quiet, child.

We may well support a motion like this. We may well put forward many worthy motions that get the support from all parties and which you, Mr Chairman, can then put forward for consideration by the Secretary of State. But we can be certain that, as the events of the last week have shown us, anything we do here will be ignored because we have absolutely no clout. On reading last weekend's and last Monday's southern Irish press, it was particularly interesting to see who really has clout in Northern Ireland, and when you consider the Public Processions (Northern Ireland) Bill which is going before Parliament at the moment, you will really see who has clout. You see the total lack of accountability in this state on the part of our own Government and, more specifically, on the part of the co-rulers — namely, the Government of the Irish Republic.

When this Bill was being considered the Ulster-British community in this state was assured that organizations such as the GAA were going to be included.

The Chairman: Mr Hunter, what has this to do with the motion?

Mr Hunter: Allegedly, the GAA is a community-based body — a body that does not come under the terms of the proposed Bill.

Furthermore, the reality is that when representatives of the Department of Foreign Affairs go along to speak to Forum Members such as Mrs Brid Rodgers about their views —

A Member: Bridget.

Mr Hunter: My Friend corrects me: Bridget Rodgers — Mrs Bridget Rodgers from Glenties in County Donegal in the Irish Free State.

Mr Gibson: Dunfanaghy.

Mr Hunter: Dunfanaghy, Mr Gibson says. Not according to the 'The Irish Times' — but it is not always reliable. Maybe she will come along sometime and tell us where she comes from. We will welcome her back.

I am sad to say that her views on a motion like this, via her friends in the Department of Foreign Affairs, have an awful lot more relevance to the central structures of this state at the moment than ours. Indeed, questions were asked of her dear friend, Mrs Mary McAleese. Mrs McAleese was asked what she was going to do in terms of Channel 4 for RTE. That is the sort of thing — a lack of accountability. We have absolutely no right to put forward our views, so, I am sad to say, when we put forward a motion or pass a motion of this nature, it is ignored, whereas the interests and the views of the pan-Nationalist front who do not bother to turn up to have dialogue with us in this House, but go to their friends in the Department of Foreign Affairs and, through the secretariat at Maryfield, directly to Mo Mowlam, have a much greater influence.

It would be useful if the Northern Ireland Office were to set up some form of reporting system to indicate to us precisely how some of the moneys are spent by some of these so-called community-based bodies and, in particular, by the sort of body we are looking at, the so-called residents' associations whose primary aim is to continue the campaign of Irish Republicanism. They have, for the moment, laid down their guns, but there is still an attempt to raise division in the community with, for example, the so-called community association in Bellaghy trying to stop the Royal British Legion having a parade. It is interesting to note that Francie Donnelly, a resident of that area, has even been able to indicate that these people may soon have a problem with people going shopping. And Mr Ken Maginnis MP made the point that they are also looking at maybe banning the Girls' Brigade.

There is a total lack of accountability, and that has to be addressed. Sadly, no matter what the Forum says or does on such an issue, our influence is minimal; our clout is minimal. The sad reality is that people like Bridget Rodgers who talk to the Department of Foreign Affairs through its officials have an awful lot more clout than we have here.

The Chairman: You have mentioned, several times, the reality that we have no clout. But we could have some clout if we could highlight how an economic case might be made for these community bodies.

Mr Brewster: Will the Member give way?

Mr Hunter: Yes.

The Chairman: Mr Brewster, are you going to answer the question I put to Mr Hunter?

Mr Brewster: No, Mr Chairman. He can answer for himself, thank goodness. I want Mr Hunter to address a very important point. In my area, Limavady, a factory was recently established — Seagate — which was brought in with a huge flourish. The Secretary of State was present, and the cameras, and all the rest of it. This is the second factory we have had on that site; the first closed down after a few months and lost £13 million. I was

concerned at that time, and I am more concerned now to hear that people from the Irish Republic have been targeted for jobs at our taxpayers' expense. In fact, I am told by some of the employees in that factory that it is a standing joke that with a good colour photocopier you can get fake certificates, fake qualifications and be working in Limavady, taking taxpayers' money, with only the most cursory of checks. Does my Friend agree that there must be much more careful monitoring, not just of the planning of a factory but of who is employed there?

Mr Hunter: Yes, indeed. Economic development and redevelopment are certainly important, but even if our public representatives are on some of these bodies they are outnumbered by the business community and by the quango nomenclatura who at all times tend to support the views of the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Foreign Affairs — the sort of people who put forward nominations for these groups.

My Friend Mr David Campbell is involved in a community-based body — namely, the Somme Association. That organization has put in grant applications for around £500,000 but has only been given £36,000. I suggest that had they not been a truly cross-community venture, but more closely aligned with elements of the pan-Nationalist front, they would have got an awful lot more funding under the current system.

We need to have accountability — that is important. Mr Brewster highlighted the example of Seagate. We do not know where these funds go or where they end up in terms of promoting people from the Irish Republic in our country. Perhaps it is time for the Government to look much more closely at economic development and redevelopment for the people of Northern Ireland rather than let people from a foreign state have such an influence.

I support the motion.

Mr Gibson: I was very pleased to be part of the group that went to Gallipoli and, representing my home town, laid a wreath on behalf of two regiments, the 5th and 6th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. I identified the names of 22 people from my area who made the supreme sacrifice. It was also a very great honour to be invited to lay a wreath on behalf of the Forum at Greenhill cemetery overlooking Suvla Bay.

I do not wish to destroy the good harmony that exists in the Education Committee while dealing with the pettiness that is a part of someone's imagination. We have always enjoyed good working relationships, and we have generally kept fairly focused on the production of our next report. Indeed, it was because we wanted to get the report on the private finance initiative put to bed fairly quickly that we suggested that we might need to have an extra meeting or two during the next month, and it was this suggestion that has caused one or two people to protest. I want to leave it at that because the Committee is quite capable of dealing with the matter itself.

I now come to the motion, and, like everyone else, I am confused. I belong to three community groups that are striving. I am confused because I know that some groups are diligent in their efforts but there are others in my area that I would seriously question. Until I have specifics, my suggestion is that consultants should be made responsible. Consultants all over Northern Ireland draw large sums of money to produce feasibility studies and, having

completed those feasibility studies, do not have to supervise the implementation of their predictions — they are not accountable. There has been very little real community responsibility. In other words, how much commitment has there been in financial terms from the local community? This is avoided in many ways when councils have an input. In some cases they have also avoided taking complete responsibility for operations within their council areas. Indeed, community organizations have, as has already been indicated, gone off at a tangent and often avoided economic development or the social development of the aims and objectives of their own associations. They have slanted themselves, particularly in my part of the world, more towards political outcomes.

We heard Mr Brewster make reference to private companies like Seagate at Londonderry. Communities in my part of the world tend to be totally Catholic, although one or two are mixed, but they are few and far between. My village of Beragh has a community that is totally mixed, but I also know of another where above the saloon bar they advertise their national lottery as the Lotto. There has to be investigation into accountability. I have seen my own council being asked to hand out £20,000 to support an organization which has had millions poured into it and yet is not a sustainable operation. There are places where we could be very practical and make constructive suggestions, but my recommendation is that the motion be withdrawn and resubmitted.

11.15 am

Mr Gregory Campbell: Sometimes on occasions like this Members refer to a wide-ranging debate. As we have gone from Bellaghy to Gallipoli and from the Police Authority of Northern Ireland to Mary McAleese, today's debate could well fit into that category.

I will try to relate to the substance of the motion. Like some of my Colleagues, I am somewhat confused about its precise nature, but I will try to lift out the issues of importance and relevance.

From my experience in local government and in the community there are a number of local-community activists who are very diligent, very imaginative and who can produce schemes which are of benefit to the entire community. They ought to be supported and helped to get funding to try to repeat their past successes in the future. There are also, unfortunately, groups — which I assume the mover of the motion is aiming at — the same of which cannot be said. There are some groups which quite clearly have a political agenda, apply for funding to create some short-term employment and then fold within a year or two.

The Forum should call upon the Secretary of State and the Northern Ireland Office not only to set up a regular reporting system but to try to identify those in the local community — and I can think of people in the greater Belfast area, in the Londonderry area and throughout the rural areas — who have endeavoured to bring employment into their local areas. They should not only be identified, they should be supported. When it comes to the dissemination of grants, those groups which have a track record of producing the goods ought to be given continuing support for the future. Those groups, however, who appear to be adopting a political profile and who are using grant support to pursue a political agenda should quite clearly not be given support.

A number of Members have spoken, and I am somewhat surprised that in addressing local economic regeneration initiatives nobody, so far, has given any recognition to my Colleague Mr Peter Robinson for yesterday's announcement of the local government initiative in Dundonald. This is the type of announcement that the Forum should be welcoming and asking central Government to support. If there are local activists in our areas who can show imagination and flair, they ought to be supported. They ought to be given sufficient funding to make their propositions worthwhile and sustainable. Those are the types of groups that everyone in the Forum should identify with and support. We should be asking Marjorie Mowlam, if and when she does come to the Forum — and I hope that will be sooner rather than later — and the Government to give clear support to these people.

I do not wish to go any further into the somewhat mixed-up wording of the motion which leaves me, as it has others, more than a little confused. I have endeavoured to deal with the important issues — those community activists that I feel should be supported, and there are many of them. There are also very many initiatives that the Government ought to be clearly identifying as not worthy of support, and if the motion is referring to the monitoring of the progress of initiatives such as that, I would welcome it. But we need clarification on what this motion is actually aimed at and who the groups are.

Mr Foster: I had not intended to speak on this motion but on reading it, despite the cynicism shown towards it, I reckon that it is a very responsible motion. Any motion that refers to public moneys and finances cannot be taken very lightly. Some sources have pointed out that we should be pin-pointing those groups undeserving of support, but you cannot do things like that unless you have proof, and we have not got Parliamentary privilege in the Forum. One has to be careful.

The content of the motion is good, and it is very worthy. It recognizes the merits of local participation but it is also concerned about the apparent lack of accountability of some community-based bodies and the sustainability of some initiatives. That has to merit acknowledgement by the people and the Forum as we all want to ensure that moneys which are distributed to the communities right across Northern Ireland are being spent responsibly and on projects that are sustainable. I do not at any time doubt the merits of local participation. People who do participate have to be acknowledged, and we must pay tribute to them for the interest and dedication they show.

Economic development is of vital importance for the fertilization of an area and for the well-being of its people. Therefore we seek such regeneration throughout the province, especially as the Republican terrorists have created a scorched-earth policy over so very many years.

We are aware that moneys are available from different sources, but equally we know that some groups are better than others at tapping such sources. Councils too are at present entitled to give five pence of the rates towards economic development. They are really the catalysts for development and they do it very well — and I can speak from Fermanagh District Council's point of view. I am always concerned, however, by the sustainability of various projects put forward, and the accountability of public finances is of vital importance.

While this motion may seem a little generalized, the problem is very difficult to pin-point because, as I said earlier, we do not have Parliamentary privilege. I am aware of a degree of monitoring of the moneys given to different groups as I am involved with one myself and have been asked to forward a report for the past year's activities. I refer to FEAR, the Fermanagh group which is concerned with people who have had to leave their homes around the Fermanagh border. Fear stands for "Fear encouraged abandoning roots" and I was the initiator of that group. We are trying to get some money for those farmers who have had to leave their homes and come inland, and I have been asked to account for the moneys which I have spent so far in that regard. In no way do I doubt the integrity or the responsibility of so many dedicated people, but I concur that continual supervision is very necessary. These are public moneys and it is right and proper that they should be monitored closely to ensure that they are spent as was intended.

I support the motion.

Mr Empey: There are three basic elements here.

First of all, the Forum is asked to recognize the merits of local participation in economic development. Since the local authorities have had some powers in this area, it has been, very largely, a success story. It has involved people from all sections of the community: elected representatives operating within a very stringent and well-established system of accountability for finances have been asked to take on local economic development in a more structured way than was the position before 1991. Many councils have done this with great gusto, enthusiasm and with considerable success.

So we are for that type of development where the locally elected representatives, answerable to the people and answerable for the money that they spend, are permitted to lead partnerships — in many cases with the private sector, other statutory bodies and community groups — and take initiatives in their areas where they identify a need. This has been done throughout the province and I congratulate colleagues in local government for the contributions they have made. My own city has been one of the areas where we have found great opportunities after the initial scepticism and, indeed, hostility with which parts of the Government structure greeted our arrival on the scene. From the moment we were permitted to do so, we raised the maximum money we could — at that stage it was two pence in the pound in the rates. The hostility and scepticism, I am pleased to say, has very largely dissipated over the last few years.

There are still reservations, but most of the statutory bodies like The Local Enterprise Development Unit, the Industrial Development Board, the Department of Economic Development and others now recognize that local authorities can play a meaningful role in local economic development, and do so very effectively. So we want to make it clear that we are for local initiatives, development and redevelopment, and we also welcome the announcement in the last few weeks that there are to be minor changes to local authority legislation to permit a greater involvement on the parts of local authorities in developing and managing their land.

We had the ridiculous situation in Belfast where we were developing the gas-works site — an area of contaminated land which we are developing at very considerable expense,

with £9 million of infrastructure moneys. We had to enter a partnership with the Laganside Corporation and lease our own land to them so that they could attract European funding to develop the land and when it is developed the local authority will not have the full statutory powers to manage it, though I am happy to say that that particular glitch in the system is being removed.

The next part of the motion states that we are

"concerned by the apparent lack of accountability of some community-based bodies and the sustainability of some initiatives".

I agree with Mr Foster that one has to be circumspect in what one says and whom one names. But anybody in Belfast who is not concerned about the lack of accountability, and is not concerned at some of the initiatives, has his head buried in the sand. Millions upon millions, upon millions of pounds are being pumped into organizations — but to whom are they answerable?

Terms such as "residents' groups" and "concerned residents" are used. There are certainly many valid, effective and worthwhile community-based organizations in the province. They are doing a good job and providing a focus for local people. They respect the wishes of local people. They are trying to get funding to improve their local communities, and I fully support that. But we all know — and let us not beat about the bush — that there are paramilitary organizations who are muscling in on these organizations. In many cases the people who work for them are clearly — if they are not absolutely in-house — sympathetic to the paramilitaries.

We are talking about very large sums of public money, not nickel-and-dime stuff, not the £36,000 that Mr David Campbell referred to. We are talking about millions of pounds being pumped into areas. What is happening to that money? Most of it goes to pay the salaries of particular individuals in these places.

In local government we are subject to very stringent controls, with the whole emphasis on the measurement of outcomes and returns on those funds. I understand that over the last few years the Government have introduced a policy of analysing any public expenditure in advance. You have to carry out a feasibility study to look at the possible outcomes and then there has to be a process afterwards to measure what has been achieved by the expenditure.

That same process is, however, not being applied to a very large number of groups or bodies where the money is pumped in for salaries and wages — it just disappears into a black hole. Where does it go? What are the outcomes? How do we measure these outcomes? I believe that a number of organizations are subverting the community-based initiatives where many of the valuable contributions are being made, particularly in rural areas where village associations can do an excellent job, and we have good examples of that. But there are many others that are subject to pressure — political pressure — from local organizations which move in and use a lot of them as front organizations. That is the allegation I am making. It is difficult to name names in the situation, as Mr Foster —

11.30 am

Mr Davis: Does Mr Empey agree that when the former Secretary of State banned certain organizations from receiving grants in 1986, and then lifted that ban, no reason for the lifting of that ban was given?

Mr Empey: Mr Davis is correct, and I recall now that that issue arose, but, unfortunately, the Government at that time collapsed on its position and did not follow it through. This is why there must be a regular and structured system. Organizations which have received this money must be required to report regularly, not just at their annual general meetings, but to the funding body, and it must be done in a way that is open to the general public.

I know that Members of Parliament do attempt to ask questions from time to time, but that is not the way it should be. It should not be done on a haphazard basis. There should be a regular and fixed way of reporting, in much the same way as local government has to report. We have to open our accounts for inspection on a certain date so that the general public are able to come and challenge, in the presence of the local government auditor, something which they do not agree with. How can we go and challenge some of these regeneration trusts or residents' groups? How do we do that? The fact remains that we need a regular, proper and structured means of reporting that is open to the public. On a fixed date every year — which is notified in the paper in advance — people must be able to go along and say "I want to see the accounts of this organization. I want to see their report."

And Mr Gibson made a very valuable point about the involvement of consultancies: up to 10% of the money that has been going into many projects has been swallowed up by consultants — up to 10%. When we then take the administration costs of many of these projects into account — which can range from anywhere between 5% and 20% of the total funding — we see that the actual amount of deployed expenditure is a lot less than it appears to be on the surface.

There is a crying need for a proper reporting system, particularly as many areas of this province have the most highly-developed and structured community-based organizations anywhere in the United Kingdom and, I suspect, further afield. For instance, when one of the organizations visited Charleroi in Belgium to look at what was happening there, they found that their structure of community-based organizations was not a patch on what we have, even though they were only a few miles from the centre of the European Union at Brussels.

Do you realize, Mr Chairman, that 5% of the available work-force in Northern Ireland is working for voluntary organizations, many of them in a community-based capacity? It is a massive industry that is entirely sustained by public funds. When these organizations receive funds they are supposed to become self-sustainable after a number of years. Can anybody give me examples of organizations that have done this? We can count them on the fingers of one hand.

The reality is that substantial sums of money — £25 million to £28 million per annum — have been received by these organizations from the likes of Making Belfast Work, to quote a local example. I am not against the principle of public expenditure being used in

that direction, but I want to know what is left behind after that money has been spent. Yes, some of it could well be spent on training, but why can we not measure that? We have to measure it in the councils — we have the lists in the minutes and we have the reports for the public and the press. But here we have an enormous black hole into which huge sums of money are poured.

We need to know whether that money could be spent in other ways. Could the community benefit more from it? Could we improve the terrible situation whereby thousands of children are leaving school after many years of education, yet cannot read and write. That is the reality. There are huge amounts of money involved, and we need to ensure that we get the best possible value from it.

So there are three elements to this: we recognize and support local economic development; we are concerned about the lack of accountability which exists in many of the community-based organizations, although we are not hostile to the principle of funding — but we do believe that questions need to be asked and answered; and we are asking for a system to be established so that the people of this province can be confident that money spent is being properly accounted for.

I commend the motion to the House.

Question put.

The Forum divided: Ayes 23; Abstentions 20.

Ayes: *Eileen Bell, Thomas Benson, David Brewster, David Campbell, James Clarke, Robert Coulter, Ivan Davis, Reg Empey, Sam Foster, Sam Gardiner, Joseph Gaston, John Hunter, Peter King, Kieran McCarthy, Alan McFarland, Ken Maginnis, Sean Neeson, Thomas Robinson, James Speers, May Steele, Robert Stoker, David Trimble, Peter Weir.*

Abstentions: *May Beattie, Robert Bolton, Cecil Calvert, Gregory Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, Hugh Casey, Wilson Clyde, Malachi Curran, Oliver Gibson, St Clair McAlister, William McCrea, Jack McKee, Maurice Morrow, Ian Paisley Jnr, Joan Parkes, Edwin Poots, Iris Robinson, Peter Robinson, James Shannon, William Snoddy.*

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

This Forum, while recognizing the merits of local participation in economic development/redevelopment and in social programmes which make use of various public funding sources, is concerned by the apparent lack of accountability of some community-based bodies and the sustainability of some initiatives, and calls on the Northern Ireland Office to set up a regular reporting system and to periodically make public the progress of such community-based initiatives.

11.45 am

WHITEABBEY HOSPITAL

The Chairman: Mrs Beattie has asked if she may make a statement on behalf of the Health Committee.

Members indicated assent.

Mrs Beattie: First, may I say that I was privileged to represent the borough of Carrickfergus at Gallipoli last week and to lay a wreath on its behalf. It was a very moving experience and one I will never forget.

I have been asked by members of the Health Committee to say something about the plight of Whiteabbey Hospital. The Health Committee took evidence yesterday from prominent members of the campaign to save the hospital. We were all impressed with the evidence given, and I know that everyone felt great sympathy for those who live in the affected area. I am happy to be able to tell Members that the Committee has decided to write to the Minister pointing out the iniquity of the political decision to build the Antrim Hospital for it is partly, if not wholly, because of that decision and that hospital that other hospitals in its shadow, as it were, have become vulnerable.

It is not morally right to ask the citizens served by Whiteabbey to pay the price of such folly, and we believe that this is at the root of many of our troubles in east and south Antrim. I hope that the entire Forum will join me in supporting the Committee's actions.

The Chairman: Does the Committee have the Forum's support?

Members indicated assent.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL PROGRAMMES (LOCAL PARTICIPATION)

Mr Peter Robinson: Mr Chairman, when the vote was taken on the Ulster Unionist Party's motion, you declared that it was passed, which, of course, is accurate. Having made such a declaration, you are supposed to look into the soul of the nation to determine whether the resolution would have cross-community support. You did not do that. Maybe you would like to do it now.

The Chairman: Yes. The thrust of the motion was towards greater accountability and greater openness so that there would be less danger of moneys leaking away into bodies and towards individuals who are not worthy. I strongly believe that that sort of situation would be deprecated by all sides of the community, so I am happy to endorse the resolution, bearing in mind my responsibility under Rule 13(1).

The meeting was suspended at 11.50 am and resumed at 12.09 pm.

SPECIAL DEBATE (RULE 10(5))

Mr Foster: The subject to which I refer is something that is very topical these days — that is, Northern Ireland and the peace talks. What I will be saying has probably been said often before, but I think it needs to be reiterated.

We are, of course, a British people, and none of us should ever forget that. We are British as of right. Our loyalty arises spontaneously from the hearts of a people who love their country and respect it for its welfare. The question which then arises from that is: where do Sinn Fein and the SDLP fit in? Do they love this country and respect their Government? It is obvious where they stand — they do not. And they have shown over the years that they do not. On the other hand, we have proved where we stand over the many years — for consent, as evidenced by the ballot-box.

I ask once again: what is really the purpose of the talks process? Is it a mechanism of pretence and humbug or a means to further weaken the Union of which we British are a part? The intent of Sinn Fein Nationalism is blatantly obvious: they are seeking an all-Ireland state. Such intent must be opposed and our position defended with vigour. It is therefore right and absolutely essential that our politicians are in the thick of things defending the rights of the British people of all traditions in Northern Ireland.

It is also essential that all who call themselves Unionists should be there, united to defend our position. If we are not in the arena our cause will go by default, and we will be failing in our duty to defend our right to be British. We must not run away from what is our responsibility. If we are not in there, in the rucks, who will defend or uphold our most vital and essential way of life?

I can understand the hurt and the fear of so many of our people. To have to sit with Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and their lackeys is most foul and monstrously offensive. We have experience of that, of course, in councils: they lie, they deceive, they circumvent, they sneer, they snarl and they lead so many people up a cul-de-sac, and that is very sad.

John Hume talked — and I heard him last night on television, with all his honeyed words and flowery rhetoric — about coming together and having dialogue. But he cannot even come to the Forum to have dialogue. His humbug is as ghastly as the amiabilities of a college reunion. The people in the community are surely not naïve enough to allow themselves to be conned and led in foolish directions by Adams, Hume and Co.

There is a decent way of life for all people here, so I say to Republicans and Nationalists "Enough of the whingeing about discrimination because it is a parrot cry which has no real foundation." If the truth is accepted, it is that Republicanism and Nationalism have openly and blatantly discriminated against Northern Ireland. They never tried to make it work. They are still trying to make it unworkable. Hume was so patronizing last evening when he praised the Labour Government for how well they were doing compared to the last Conservative Government, not because he loves them, but because he sees them as a weak link in our British family — and we have quite a few people here who, not so long ago, also wanted the Labour Government in power. His Irish blarney was very evident.

I have to maintain that grim reality is present. We cannot pretend that it is not there. Unsavoury situations and people are in our midst, but we do not let these people call the agenda, nor do we play from their score-sheet.

Mr Peter Robinson: That is exactly what you are doing with the framework document.

Mr Foster: I am not so sure about that, Mr Robinson. We all thirst for peace.

Mr Calvert: Will the Member give way?

Mr Foster: No. I am not giving way because I am running out of time. We as a British people pray for peace. The traditions crave peace. Please therefore do not let Adams and Co. pretend that they are the peacemakers because it is evident that Adams and his henchmen are the people who have been associated with the strife, the murder, the destruction and hence the distrust in Northern Ireland over these years.

Martin McGuinness, the other day, stated that the arrest of an IRA man who was on the run for murdering an RUC reserve constable was a threat to peace. In other words, he was saying "Do things our way, or as we demand, or strife will arise again." That is a veiled threat in itself.

We are fast approaching the tenth anniversary of the murders at the Enniskillen Cenotaph on 8 November 1987 — one of the many atrocities inflicted upon innocent people by terrorists which Adams and Co. never condemned. Indeed, there was evidence that he condoned such terror when he was the pallbearer of an IRA person who blew himself into another world on the Shankill Road. These sorts of things show an unremitting hatred by Republicanism which is a sin before Almighty God, and if the law of the land does not catch up with them, He will, I am sure. As the Good Book explains,

"Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

We cannot therefore run away from what is within our midst. We must face them — not because we love them but to prevent their evil ways being uncontested.

A Member: They are doing a good job of it.

Mr Foster: Furthermore, the Government must remember that they are our Government. We are their people to defend, and they must not barter our civil and religious liberties and our right to remain British. The important thing which must be recognized is that our citizenship must not be diluted in these talks. There must not be any concession on that issue. We are not to be made hybrids for John Hume or Gerry Adams.

British we are, and British we will remain. I commend the courage and the convictions of the leaders of my party who are there to defend the Union. I trust others will follow.

12.15 pm

Mrs I Robinson: I would like to use my five minutes to make a sincere and honest plea to the Prime Minister regarding his Government's plans for the future of Northern Ireland:

"Mr Blair, your concern for the future of the children in Northern Ireland, as you expressed on your recent visit to Londonderry, would be touching if anyone here believed that you were sincere.

The future for the children of Northern Ireland will have much in common with that of their contemporaries in the rest of the United Kingdom. Beyond 2000 the present trends of lawlessness will continue. Every major city in the United Kingdom will have an area with clear physical boundaries that is not subject to the agencies of law and order. Gangsters and drug barons will rule these areas. They will be judge, jury and executioner within the area which they control. The advantaged classes, who will not be living in the world of dependence on benefits, will insulate themselves and their children from the ill-effects of this social and cultural division in society. They will choose safe areas in which to live, they will increase security mechanisms in their homes, and they will locate industrial and commercial premises in specific areas of their towns and cities.

In Northern Ireland, where we have a terrorist onslaught on democracy, these trends are already well advanced and are compounded by an education system that reinforces religious, social, economic and cultural divisions. One would have thought, Mr Blair, that your concern as a Socialist for an egalitarian, parity-of-esteem society would have manifested itself in Mr Worthington's approach to education in Northern Ireland. Not so, it seems. Mr Blair, in every estate in Northern Ireland the paramilitaries are at work recruiting children to their point of view. This is aided by the Government's policy of elevating thugs, murderers and terrorists to the level of statesmen within the so-called peace process.

The minds that guided the bombing of La Mon, Enniskillen and the murders in Darkley Mission Hall, Greysteel and a hundred other locations are now being applied to the corruption of our children. If you want to create an environment which will empower young people and provide them with a chance to live in an integrated and supportive community environment that is based on sound, moral values, then you must start by building that society on a sound, philosophical foundation. A society that is not based on basic principles of democracy, law and justice is like a house built on sand. Peace bought at the expense of principle is of no value whatsoever — it is a recipe for continuing political and social instability. The DUP are not asking for any particular advantage for our children. We want the same democratic rights for all children — Roman Catholic and Protestant. We want them to live in a society free from the gun and the terrorist. That is the basis of all DUP policies and suggestions for the future.

The pace and extent of all civil disorder and strife in Northern Ireland is dictated by the IRA. They want to remove the British presence from Northern Ireland. What they forget is that we are the British presence, and our right to self-determination is every bit as justified as the right of those in the Republic of Ireland to live separately from the United Kingdom. There cannot be real peace until there is an acceptance of this right of the greater majority of

the Ulster people. Until we have a form of local government that enshrines this basic democratic right and which empowers the people of Northern Ireland to form relationships based on real equality, there will never be real peace.

So what we need, Mr Blair, to create a real future for our children is a Government in Westminster that supports a democratic future for this province. *[Interruption]* The IRA has discovered that it cannot break the spirit of the Unionist people, so now its strategy — willingly aided and abetted by President Clinton, Irish America, Dublin, Hume and Adams — is to break the will of the British Government to support the democratic wishes of the people of Ulster. Mr Blair, we perceive that your policy, as made manifest by every action of Ms Mowlam and the Northern Ireland Office, is to challenge Loyalists and push us to the very limits of peaceful politics. It is to leave us with no way out and no one to confront but Westminster, and, in so doing, to put at risk our cherished membership of the Union. We believe that it is your policy to divide and demoralize Unionism and to break our will in a way that the IRA could not do.

So, Mr Blair, do not sicken us with pious platitudes about your concern for the future of our children. The schools cannot survive if the bullies control the classroom and the playgrounds; the schools cannot survive if the staff are held to ransom by the thugs; and the schools cannot survive if the pace at which the curriculum proceeds is dictated by the level of violence of a small number of disruptive pupils. You know this to be true, so let us have a process in Northern Ireland that can have the support of the decent children and the law-abiding people.

Let us have democracy; let our future be determined by the people who have a genuine, moral and legal mandate to speak on our behalf; let us face down the bullies; let us set an example to everyone; let us build a society based on law, justice and equality — that is the legacy our children deserve. Several generations of kids in this society have never known real peace — my children included. Let us take the necessary steps to bring the cycle of violence to an end, but most of all, Mr Blair, let us look into our hearts and be true to our beliefs and principles; let us be true to ourselves. That is what I ask of my children. Is it too much to ask the same of the Prime Minister of the oldest democracy in the world? I think not."

The Chairman: I am going to call Ms Bell next, and I hope that we can avoid disparaging remarks across the Floor. I am quite ready to accept reasonable barracking, but please let us listen to what people have come here to say.

Ms Bell: I doubt if anyone will barrack me, given the issues that I will be speaking about. I believe that most people will be in agreement with me.

There are two issues that have been in the public arena this week. The first one is the question of the education of children with special needs. In other words children who are either mobility impaired or suffering from illnesses like Down's syndrome and asthma. They may even be children like a nephew of mine who is seven years of age and who has, from birth, suffered with an artificial leg, only one kidney and other associated problems.

Traditionally, children like that were sent, indeed, are sent to special schools. These schools are specially designed and have facilities to assist children with special educational needs. While this may be a rational move, it does not always allow the full development of the potential of some of these children. I fully accept the commitment of the staff of special schools, and I applaud the good work that they do to ensure that their pupils get the best quality of education for their level of ability. But it is now recognized that many of these children might be just as well provided for in mainstream schools. That is why I welcomed the Government's announcement earlier this week that the position of children with special educational needs will be reviewed to determine whether or not these needs can be addressed in mainstream schools.

As a member of the board of governors of three schools I have direct experience of the difficulties that are involved at present in placing and maintaining children with, for example, Down's syndrome, hyperactivity, physical disabilities and other problems, in mainstream schools. So, while welcoming an improvement of these procedures, I must ask those who carry out this review to seriously consider the issues that go hand in hand with any such review — those such as transport and the employment of more staff at special schools to assist teachers who are having to manage large classes where every child has a special behaviour characteristic.

The review must also look into the question of assistance for parents of those children who require special attention. My nephew needs a classroom assistant with him for the entire school day and special attention outside school. But with that help he is progressing well — but this costs money, and it also means time. These considerations must be properly resourced, and I note with regret that there was no mention of much-needed additional resources which are vital for any improvements. I take this opportunity now to ask the Department of Education to ensure that this money will be made available if necessary.

On the second issue I will be briefer because it was announced today that a commission is to be set up to find a suitable way of acknowledging those who have died at the hands of terrorists during the troubles. I applaud this initiative and the thinking behind it, but I would like to see its full remit before I could welcome it completely. It is fitting, nonetheless, that this announcement was made the day after the fourth anniversary of the Shankill Road bombing and coming up to the tenth anniversary of the Enniskillen bombing. While a memorial may be appropriate, I think that practical consideration must also be given to the relatives and friends of those members of the security forces killed, and also to the thousands who were not killed but who have to endure pain, hardship and unbelievable experiences in their everyday life due to the injuries that they received. Acknowledgments must be public and practical and should be supported by all; they must also give consideration to all the victims of terrorist violence and their relatives.

It is a large remit, but if it is going to be done it must be done fairly, and it must be properly carried out. These are important issues in which I am personally involved, and so I have taken today's opportunity to air my views in the hope that the Government will take them on board in both their reviews and commissions.

Mr Davis: Coming along to the Forum each Friday it continually reminds me of the latter days of the old Assembly when everything seemed to be doom and gloom. However,

when I turned on my television last night and saw Mr Peter Robinson, tennis racket in hand, announcing so much new investment in Castlereagh, I said to myself "Well, that is the good news because Lisburn and Castlereagh" — I am putting Lisburn first — "are the foremost boroughs in the province."

The good news this week is that three Lisburn companies have announced new investment and major expansions worth £16·3 million. The projects will create 107 new jobs in the borough over the next three years. So all is not doom and gloom in the province. It is gratifying that these are local companies and I congratulate Barbour Campbell Threads, Bemac Engineering and Unitrunk on their initiative.

The Housing Executive is also set to spend a few million pounds on a number of schemes, as well as the borough council's ongoing capital development programme, which includes major projects representing a total investment of around £40 million. The Lisburn regeneration project will include our new civic centre at a cost of £15 million, and you can appreciate the work that that will create. So Lisburn Borough Council is leading by example, and, as you know, we have the only Irish linen centre in Ireland. The new cinema has now been opened, and we are now going to embark on the new swimming pool. Lisburn is going from strength to strength. More and more people are coming to live in Lisburn, so if any Members are a bit disgruntled about where they live now I would invite them to move to Lisburn.

The Chairman: I have a feeling that the Member was giving a bit of a plug for Lisburn.

Rev William McCrea: I can appreciate what Mr Davis has said since these are certainly matters that will lift the hearts of the people of Lisburn. And my Friend Mr Robinson has encouraging news for his area of Castlereagh.

But I think that everyone in Lisburn or Castlereagh is realistic enough to know that a dark cloud hangs over him. I refer to the constitutional future of Northern Ireland.

12.30 pm

I have to say in the midst of this that it is not helpful for anyone to suggest that either I or my Colleagues are cowards in the face of IRA thugs or terrorists. I can assure you that Mr Ken Maginnis's in-laws, who are my friends too, do not accept that William McCrea is a coward in the face of any terrorist thug or any terrorist murderer, and if Mr Maginnis suggests that when he comes to Moneymore, he will certainly get a good shift up the road because it is not true — and well he knows it. And I can assure you that the people in my family circle who were murdered by the IRA, and the families that are left with broken hearts, are not cowards in the face of the IRA either.

Mr Maginnis may well sit back with his arms folded and find that that, somehow, is funny. I will tell Mr Maginnis what he has done today: he has demeaned those who have been murdered and those, in his constituency as well as mine, who have suffered, and he has done nothing for himself. He raises his hands and washes his hands. His leaders should tell him to keep quiet because he is making his party look foolish. I am reminded of another

person who also did that hands act — a man called Pilate. He was the one who tried to wash his hands of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ but had to admit that it was he who betrayed the innocent blood. Therefore I suggest to Mr Maginnis that he take heed of his conscience.

It is all very well for Mr Foster to say "When we are in there, we will win." I remind the Ulster Unionists that they were in when the decommissioning issue came up, but they did not win. I remember Mr Trimble, their Leader, saying that he would bring the talks to an end, but he did not. I also remind Mr Maginnis that Ulster Unionists said they would not talk to IRA/Sinn Fein. But was it not three Ulster Unionist Party members, including their Whip here, who voted in the Police Authority to invite Sinn Fein/IRA to talk to them?

It is interesting that the only one of its members who did not vote was from Mid Ulster — a councillor from Cookstown. He knows the heart and the feelings of the Mid Ulster people; he knows what they have suffered; he knows that they are not going to crawl to any Provos, be they called Sinn Fein or anything else. We are sickened by people crawling around criticizing us for not going into a talks process which has a predetermined outcome within the framework document. The Secretary of State and Mr Murphy have told us that time and time again, and we are certainly not going on the Dublin road. They said that the train was leaving the station for those who were on it. Well, I am proud that I am not on a train that is going in a Dublin direction.

We have also suffered in our area because of the despicable, blatant and sectarian remarks of Mr Hasson, from the concerned residents' association — so-called — about the Remembrance Sunday parade in Bellaghy. Mr Hasson is not an original Bellaghy resident; he is what is known as a drop-in — *[Interruption]*

The Chairman: We are beginning to have a small problem. We cannot hear you properly, Mr McCrea, and some of your Colleagues are not helping.

Rev William McCrea: Mr Hunter and his Colleagues try to talk me down because they do not want to hear the truth. The truth might do what the Scripture says: free them from the shackles of the unholy alliance in the so-called talks process.

Mr Hasson is what is known in the area as a drop-in. He is little-known for a history of hard work or any contribution to the well-being of the Bellaghy district. *[Interruption]* There is Mr Hunter again with his smart remarks. But we will be listening for his contribution very shortly.

Mr Hasson has been a long-term beneficiary of British citizenship. The British Exchequer has been very good to him, but, like the old sow, he knocks over the bucket from which he feeds. The law-abiding citizens of Bellaghy are sickened at the Government crawling to the likes of Hasson and his clique, and for them to suggest that the men who fought to keep society free from tyranny should be asked to talk to these useless, spineless members of society and seek permission to walk down the streets of Bellaghy on Remembrance Sunday is diabolical. It is just as well that Britain and its allies won the war, for if Hitler had won, Hasson would not be out on the streets with his placards. He would have been driven into some gas chamber.

I call upon the ordinary, decent, Roman Catholic people in Bellaghy to stand up and be counted on this issue. Now is the time for Hasson to be told that he does not speak for the Bellaghy residents. I trust that the members of the Royal British Legion will take their stand for they will certainly have the support of the good, law-abiding people of that community.

Mr McCarthy: As the Alliance Party spokesman on disability, I would like to inform the Forum about and give a cautious welcome to the new developments for disabled people which were announced during the week. Unfortunately, very little publicity was given to this.

Members may recall that some time ago the Forum discussed the legislation to outlaw discrimination against people with a disability. Contributions came from all parties, and we were all agreed that there was not sufficient provision in the then Government's Disability Discrimination Act. At that time we all supported the resolution calling for better protection for the disabled. Today we should note three very important initiatives which the new Minister, Tony Worthington, announced during the week.

The first is the establishment of a disability rights commission, the second is the introduction of further rights of access to goods and services and the third is the setting up of a Ministerial task force to conduct wide-ranging consultation on how best to achieve comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people. These are three very important, almost vital, improvements to what we presently have.

When we debated this subject in September of last year I recall the great anxiety which Members expressed. We were all concerned that even though the Tory Government were going ahead with the Bill, we suspected that it was a half-hearted exercise, bearing in mind what happened when Nicholas Scott was dealing with the subject. At that time we all expressed our views forcefully and, judging by the Minister's speech this week, it appears that someone in authority was listening. I am sure that all Members will particularly welcome the creation of the commission which should mean that any disabled person who feels discriminated against will have a body, with teeth, to fight for his basic rights. The implementation of the further rights to access to goods and services will also be of enormous help to disabled people.

It is of the utmost importance that disabled people will be a part of the new task force that the Minister is proposing to establish because it is they, and only they, who can tell the powers that be what they need to enjoy as good a life as every able-bodied person.

This must be good news for the disabled, and we give credit to Tony Worthington and his Department. Let us hope that he will deliver what he has promised. We assure the Minister of our support and, indeed, our expectation that results will follow in due course, as we regard the rights of disabled people as paramount.

Mr Morrow: I would like to bring to Members' attention a matter that is concerning many people across the province today — the erection of so-called telephone masts. There is a proliferation of these right across the country. My information is that 400 are to be erected in Northern Ireland by a firm called Orange — as long it is the right orange, it is not so bad. I understand that 700 are either planned for or have already been erected in Scotland. The

disturbing aspect of this is that the erection of these masts does not require full planning approval if their height is less than 50 feet. So what is happening across the country is that you go to bed at night, you wake up in the morning, look out through your window and — lo and behold — the firm is on site erecting a mast right beside your home. You have no say in whether it should be there or not. And how does the firm get there? They pay a lucrative sum of money to a landowner and then an annual rent to ensure that the mast stays there.

There is much concern from a health point of view and, although it has not been proved conclusively, there is a high risk of cancer developing in those who are close to these radiation masts. I would like to refer to a report by Microshield which looks at a special health report regarding mobile phones and your health. It says

"About 50 studies have now reported statistically significant increased risks for several types of cancer in occupational groups with elevated exposure to electromagnetic radiation. In microwave and radar personnel they have noted sharp increases in lymphomas, melanomas, leukemias and brain tumors, high blood pressure, headaches, memory loss and brain damage. Immune system abnormalities were also noted: first an over stimulation, then later immune suppression after continued exposure to low levels of microwave radiation."

That is enough to cause concern, and it is causing great concern right across the province. In my area, within a six-mile radius of Dungannon, six of these are to be erected over the next two months as well as one master mast to service these six. That is just within a radius of something like six or seven miles of Dungannon, and if that is planned for Dungannon, it is reasonable to assume that the same, or similar, is planned for our other major towns.

We need legislation to cover this situation so that these people cannot just arrive in the early hours of the morning, start to erect these masts and — lo and behold — they are there and that is that. We need to have planning regulations to ensure that, at the very least, those who are concerned about these things have an opportunity to make their views known and make representation to the powers that be. At the moment no such facility is available.

Another thing which is also significant about these masts is whether we really want a proliferation of them. They are harming our beautiful countryside, from east to west, and from north to south. Everywhere you drive you see these unsightly masts which do nothing for our country's scenic beauty. I hope that the powers that be take this matter into consideration and that there will be proper legislation, a proper report and an in-depth study to ensure that the fears and concerns of the general public are put to rest.

Mrs Steele: I make no apology for raising the matter which Mrs Beattie talked about this morning. It affects all sections of the community and already has the support of members from all the parties in the House. I am again asking the Forum to give its backing to Whiteabbey Hospital, the closure of which is very much on the cards.

Yesterday at the Health Committee meeting, we heard an excellent presentation from the support group which has recently been set up to fight this closure. Forum Members, like myself, are involved with this group.

The Forum should be aware that if Whiteabbey Hospital is closed, a population of some 150,000 people in the Larne, Carrickfergus and Newtownabbey areas of south and east

Antrim will be left with no accident-and-emergency or hospital services nearer than the Antrim Hospital or the Royal or City Hospitals in Belfast, and that would be between 20 and 35 miles for some of those 150,000 people.

12.45 pm

It is a disgraceful indictment of both the present Labour Government and the previous Tory Government that the balance sheets are more important than hospital services and the needs of the large numbers of the population who are spread over a wide area. The area served by the South Tyrone and Mid-Ulster Hospitals are facing the same situation as well. I commend the people of Dungannon who gave a marvellous show of support this week — I think there were over 4,000 people at their meeting — for their local hospital. That is what we need: people to support their local hospitals.

It is obvious that the province is facing a complete decimation of hospital services and we as elected representatives must make every effort to support people who have very real concerns about health services in Northern Ireland. We are facing a situation in which paramedic ambulances could be travelling at high speeds to parts of the province in order to bring the seriously ill to the six main hospitals proposed. It will be a nightmare if people have to be transported over many miles on busy roads or country roads. And it could be dangerous for patients who have to be carried on these roads, and even for other road users.

We should also think of the difficulties that will be faced by families trying to visit these patients. Are we not being encouraged to reduce our number of road journeys, rather than increase them? This proposal will lead to an increase in road journeys for ill people and their visitors and families.

I am grateful to the Forum Members for the support they have already shown, and I ask for their continued support in an effort to retain and, indeed, improve hospital services. I am particularly talking about Whiteabbey Hospital at this time.

Mr Carrick: Mr Morrow has already drawn attention to a weakness, or a deficiency, in the planning process. I also wish to draw Members' attention to an inherent weakness in the planning process. It concerns development alongside waterways. I understand that there are examples across Northern Ireland of residential developments that have been permitted, literally, on the banks of rivers and waterways. These developments give rise to health, safety, drainage, pollution and subsidence problems.

The matter was brought forcibly to my attention during the week when I organized and attended a site meeting at the Inglewood development on the Armagh Road in Portadown, a development with which the MP for that area, Mr Trimble, will be very familiar. Representatives of the Rivers Agency and the council's environmental health department met with the residential property owners to address the serious issues that had arisen. The residents had experienced rats invading their homes and property, and there was concern about children having access to the open river just to the rear of their properties. You can literally step from their back gardens into the open river.

Of course, further down the road, land-owners were experiencing problems with the river, in that it was polluted with all sorts of things that had been thrown into it — that is something which should be socially unacceptable. We expect people to have more respect for the environment, but we do not live in an ideal world, and these problems occur.

Land-owners are also experiencing drainage problems with the land. At that meeting the Rivers Agency's representative stated quite clearly that they had no statutory authority to insist on the provision of the five-metre strip alongside either bank of the river that would facilitate the drainage and the cleaning works that are necessary on a periodic basis.

Stranger still, the Department of the Environment's Planning Service apparently does not have the statutory authority to take the recommendation of the Rivers Agency and to make it a condition of a planning permission. This is what I am now led to believe. On further investigation it appears that no Government body has the statutory authority to control this type of riverside development. Such control would forestall serious problems arising, such as those experienced by the residents of the Inglewood development.

This weakness and deficiency in the planning legislation, and the problems associated with it, ought to be addressed. Therefore I call upon Her Majesty's Government to introduce legislation to ensure that the environs of a housing development are secure, safe and healthy insofar as waterways are concerned, and to ensure the protection of natural resources such as rivers. I expect the residents of the Inglewood development to engage the services of Mr Trimble to try to progress this matter. I hope he does not mind my volunteering his services.

Mr Brewster: I do not know if Members watched the television series 'Our Friends in the North', about a bizarre and improbable series of events going back over 30-odd years. I thought at the time — and it certainly came home to me this week — that we could do with a series called 'Our Enemies in the South' because it would be very hard to imagine anything more bizarre and improbable than what we saw last week. I also think it very important that we mark what happened last week. The idea that either the SDLP or the Irish Government ever had any commitment to equality of opportunity or to the merit principle has been blown out of the water. What we saw in last week's events was the most shameless attempt to manipulate and appoint people in a way which I am sure all of us in the House deplore.

I watched Mrs Rodgers on the television bristling with indignation as she complained about the treachery of the individuals who had blown the gaffe by leaking what had happened. But I did not hear a denial of the bald facts that she was sitting in her house with a representative from the "Department of Foreign Interference" drawing up a list of placemen. If they did not know it already — and, of course, the Members of this House did — the people of Northern Ireland are now very clear about the way in which they can get preferment. They go along to Mrs Rodgers, or to a friendly neighbourhood SDLP representative, kowtow to them, maybe make a donation — heaven forfend that it would be £30,000 in a brown envelope — and they are put on to the little list. And I do not know which Government Minister would be prepared to stand up to such a persuasive influence as that of the Maryfield secretariat. Certainly not Mr Murphy, our lugubrious Minister, who seems to operate on the basis that hard work never hurt anyone, but why take the risk.

What is being exercised in Northern Ireland at present, by Mrs Rodgers and others, is power without responsibility, and I am far too gallant to remind Mrs Rodgers who exercises power without responsibility. I am sure she will find out whose prerogative that is if she looks up some of the quotation manuals. And by the way, like the Mikado, I am sure none of the people on her little list would be missed.

It is vital that two things be done as a result of this. First, the man who sits in the Stranger's Gallery (poor Mr Johnston — the loneliest man in the Forum — who takes notes for the Government) should report to the Government that there must be more openness about the Maryfield secretariat. Nobody in the House, certainly on this side, will ever accept that secretariat, but it is the right of the people of Northern Ireland to know just how it is endeavouring to manipulate this country. In the new spirit of open Government the front gates have been opened at Maryfield, and now we can see another set of gates. But that is all we know about what goes on there. Perhaps we can be told just how many people who were on the Maryfield secretariat lists have been preferred, and how they were preferred, because I know that in private employment, canvassing results in an applicant's being disqualified.

The other thing we should do as a Forum — and I hope we will — is ask for some response from Mr Cooper. The Fair Employment Commission are usually very quick to come back when they hear of terrible things like trawling. I have always noticed that Mr Cooper is never too far away from a telephone to be able to pick it up and answer any allegations on 'Talk Back' or any other programme. But his silence on this occasion has been deafening.

I do think it a pity that the Forum's Business Committee appears to feel that it would be inappropriate to have a plenary meeting about this. I urge the Forum to consider inviting Mr Cooper to a plenary meeting to give a general account of himself. But, in particular, I call on him today to comment on this scandalous attempt to manipulate public appointments.

The meeting was suspended at 12.58 pm and resumed at 2.03 pm.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: This morning, in your opening comments, Mr Chairman, you made some very timely remarks about the situation that affected the Forum last week when some Members were absent because they were in Gallipoli to pay their respects to some of Ulster's finest sons. This week we are reminded of the values of those soldiers which led them to perish in the trenches — those of patriotism, for King and country, and for freedom. But we have also been reminded in the last 24 hours of the evil, contemptible and loathsome people who would today stand against what they fought for. I am referring, of course, to the statements of the chairman of the so-called residents' group in the village of Bellaghy.

This afternoon's debate is a timely opportunity, following your comments, Mr Chairman, for the Forum to pay tribute to the people who have fallen. There are certain people in this community to whom nothing is sacred and who are prepared to attack anything that stands for decency, honour and respectability — just in the same way as their forefathers were prepared to stab their brothers in the back in Dublin in 1916. And we see again in 1997 that when there is an opportunity to pay respect to the dead there is a deliberate attempt to

undermine it. It is important that the Forum send a message of condolence and that it be prepared to honour the victims from the past.

In terms of honouring the victims, the Secretary of State made a statement today and appointed a commissioner to examine the issue of recognition for those victims who have suffered in the troubles. This is even more timely when we start to consider what the Secretary of State has proposed. My party of course have given it an optimistic welcome. It is about time that the people who have suffered in the troubles — the people who have paid the ultimate sacrifice, the people who carry horrific scars and injuries from the violence — were honoured and given due recognition for the suffering they have had to go through. I am glad that there is at last an opportunity. I am sure that the Government are a little red-faced that it has taken them so long — not only this Government but successive Governments — to put something meaningful in place which draws attention to the needs of the victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland.

People are disgusted that recognition-and-support networks have been established to help other sections — namely, those who perpetrated violence and terrorism. I must admit that I am sick of hearing of victim-support groups when you consider that the victims they are talking about are the very people who perpetrated the violence; they are talking about the people who have been involved in orchestrated violence for many years. Therefore I am glad that, at last, for once, we have the chance to consider the needs of people who have really suffered — the innocent victims of violence.

My party has made some recommendations to the Secretary of State and will be meeting with Sir Kenneth Bloomfield in his new post. We recommended trying to categorize the fallen or injured victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland. I am thinking, in particular, of the first category: the members of the security services — namely the police, the Army, the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Royal Irish Regiment, the Ulster Special Constabulary and the other services which have been affected.

Some time ago my party proposed an amendment to the War Memorial Act to extend the role of honour on each war memorial to include the names of those officers and security personnel who had fallen in that locality, or to have their name put on a war memorial close to where their family live. I am glad that this will be given consideration by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield. And it is important that we categorize victims because, unfortunately, there is a sense of loathing that some people will try to twist round this victim-support network and use it for political purposes. It is essential that we try to steer it away from that, and the best way to do that is to categorize those who have suffered. That does not mean that we want to differentiate between those people who have suffered in particular ways; their suffering is, of course, very much the same.

There will be an attempt to contaminate this process and this memorial, and I am thinking in particular, as we approach its anniversary, of that awful and callous multiple murder on the Shankill Road. There will be people who will think that it is appropriate that not only should the victims of that bomb be given due recognition, but that the name of the person who perpetrated that bombing, Mr Begley, should also be on that memorial. That would be a gross insult to the people who have suffered. Was Hitler's name put on war memorials throughout the United Kingdom after the war? No, it was not. It would be an

atrocious and gross insult which would contaminate the whole process of recognition if the people who deliberately perpetrated cowardly, terrorist acts across Northern Ireland were given the same sort of recognition as their innocent victims. We have got to make sure that the Government do not allow this process to be hijacked by people who will run away with it and turn it into something other than a memorial which we can respect and salute and say "We are prepared to see our dead and the people who have been injured honoured in this way."

Mr Hugh Smyth: Mr Chairman, I will be brief — I have to be, as you gave me only five minutes.

Mr Ian Paisley sits beside me, and he must have been reading my mind because my speech is on the same subject, having just been to the city hall this morning. I too welcome the Secretary of State's White Paper on this fine proposal. It would be wrong — and I am sure Mr Paisley did not mean it — to criticize the Labour Government for delaying on this matter. They have only been in power for five months and it is to their credit that inside that five months they have decided to do something. We had a Tory Administration for 15 or 16 years who failed to do anything, so I want to put on record my support for the proposal.

Of course, in many ways it is tinged with a little sadness for me — and I am sure for Eric Smyth also, to mention but two in the Forum — that it comes the day after the fourth anniversary of the Shankill bombing. That is to the date of course — tomorrow would have been the day, but the actual date would have been yesterday. I am certain that those people who lost loved ones on the Shankill Road — personal friends of mine, the Bairds and the wee Murrays — would simply love to have a memorial where they could go to make their peace or say their prayers. We already have one in the Shankill but it does not serve the full purpose, much as we appreciate the effort that went into getting it, and its usefulness was demonstrated yesterday. But we cannot simply confine the memorial to the Shankill Road — it must be for all those innocent people who lost their lives during the troubles.

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield will have a great responsibility placed upon him, and I hope that he does not do what an awful lot of other people have done when they had the opportunity. I hope that he will consult very closely with all the political parties for a start and that he will seek out the views of those relatives who have lost loved ones. I have already read this morning about some talk of a similar tribute to the one in Washington — which I am sure many Members have seen — which commemorates the victims of the Vietnam war. it is a massive memorial with all their names on it. I am not sure that Northern Ireland would want that.

Mr Sammy Wilson: When you talk about consulting all the parties do you include in that Sinn Fein?

Mr Hugh Smyth: I am talking about political parties, democratic parties. Therefore I do not believe for one moment that a Washington-type memorial would be suitable for Northern Ireland, for the very reason that Mr Paisley mentioned; I am not so sure that the Bairds or the Murrays of this world could sit comfortably with the names next to them of the people who so tragically took their lives. So it will have to be very finely tuned.

In many ways I started off by saying it is sad. This is a sad occasion for us on the Shankill Road, and I would have much preferred the Secretary of State to be announcing that there was a factory coming to west Belfast with 1,500 or 2,000 jobs. That would also have been a good memorial to the people of those areas who have lost loved ones because — I have said it before and I repeat it again — we continually hear of all the benefits of the peace that we have. Well, I will remind the Secretary of State and the Labour Administration that the people I represent do not see any sign of that — no sign whatsoever of it in the part of west Belfast that I represent. We could all learn a lesson here.

It is worth reminding ourselves that in the two-week period immediately after the Shankill bomb something like 27 people lost their lives. Our memorial could be to ensure that events such as the Shankills and the Greysteels of this world are no more. Rightly or wrongly, I believe — along with the Unionist Party and the UDP — that we may well have taken the first steps to ensure that there are no more Shankills or Greysteels. I cannot guarantee that. I hear people laughing and I am surprised that people would even consider laughing at a time when we are debating such a subject.

I cannot put my hand on my heart and say that it will never happen again. But one thing that I can do is to stand up and say that I took the opportunity to try to make it work.

"'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

So far as I am concerned, it is far better to have tried and failed than not to have tried at all.

2.15 pm

Mr Eric Smyth: I would like to support those Members who have spoken about the issue of a memorial to those people who have died.

I have always spoken up for the people who have been badly done by over the years and I have taken some stick for it. I have always drawn a strict line between the people who need support and the men of violence. Certainly I would support anything that makes it easier for those in need of comfort, especially coming up to the anniversaries of the deaths of their loved ones whom they will never forget and who died needlessly. Let us remember that they did not have to die. If the Government had done what was right, had dealt with the men of violence, had put them down where they should be — six foot under — and had wiped them out of existence, all this would have been over years ago. Many people would be alive today, enjoying life with their families and their grandchildren.

I do not agree with what Mr Smyth said about the talks. I appreciate what he is saying and it is probably said sincerely. But we do not believe that these talks will give us anything. No Unionist can give way on the Union. No Unionist can talk about cross-border committees. Once you do that you have already decided to give up the Union and in time the Union will go. Perhaps a half-way house will be set up and we will be told that it is only to talk about economics or tourism or whatever for the whole of the island of Ireland, but that will only be the start of it. If you look at history you will see that we have been told in the past that many things were being set up for a trial period but they have never gone away. If Unionists allow them to get a foot in the door that foot will never be taken out again. I am

warning Unionists not to go down that road. They tell us that they will not. We will wait and see what happens.

We will certainly take a strong line. We have warned people of the dangers of talks in which the Union is up for negotiation. The Union should not be up for negotiation. The vast majority of people have made it clear where they stand on the Union. The Union should not even be an issue. The vast majority of people know what they want for their children. It is wrong for anyone to say that the Union is on the table.

In articles 2 and 3 we are told what the Dublin Government wants to do. People need to be warned about these sleeked and deceptive politicians and the corrupt country that they are part of. Stormont was done away with and we were told that it was because of wrongdoings. By the same token, they should be done away with because of corruption and evil. I look forward to hearing more good news of their corruption. I hope that the good people of the South will get rid of those corrupt politicians — those people who try to tell us that we should come and join with them and that all will be well. Those are the type of people they want you and I to live with — men who have been corrupt for many, many decades. It does not go back just a few years, it goes back a very long time. At the moment a lid has been put on it but, like anything else, when it suits them they will release more details of what has been going on behind the scenes. It is good to know that people will learn what is really going on.

As I said, I welcome the announcement from the Government if they do what they say they are going to do and remember those members of the police force, the UDR and the B Specials who have died and all those people who have fought through the generations to keep this country British and to keep it from the evil men who would seek to destroy this province and our way of life.

Mr Empey: I wish to refer to the events of "bloody Sunday", but before doing so may I say with regard to the matter which has been raised by three other Members — namely, the announcement today of a commission to examine memorials and related issues — that this is not something which has come out of the hat but something which has been worked upon for months. The Ulster Unionist Party raised the matter directly with the Prime Minister at the end of August and at the beginning of September. We have been insisting upon this as one of the essential confidence-building measures necessary for our community. We will have to study very closely the terms of reference. The point has been made that there are people who could contaminate it.

Mr Trimble: I can assure Mr Empey on that point that there is an express reference in the terms of reference to those who lost their lives in the service of the community. I hope that Sir Kenneth Bloomfield will respond to that particular aspect of it as well, but that is an express reference that we insisted on.

Mr Empey: I am pleased to hear that.

We will obviously watch this closely and it is up to all of us to participate, to make our representations to Sir Kenneth and his commission to ensure that justice is done to these people. There was the television programme during the past week reminding us of the

tragedy at Enniskillen. To see one of my Colleagues on the television and to see other members there who we know so well have suffered, is a salutary reminder of the necessity of today's announcement.

During the week the Irish Prime Minister indicated that he was pressing once again for a new inquiry into what has been termed the "bloody Sunday" events in Londonderry. Not coming from that city, I do not proclaim any specific knowledge of the events of that day. It is very regrettable that there was a loss of life — I believe that there are a wide range of people who have responsibility for that. That was a terrible day but, as one of my colleagues pointed out to me, there were five bloody Mondays, two bloody Tuesdays, three bloody Wednesdays, one bloody Thursday and about four bloody Fridays and two bloody Saturdays that he could recall without a great deal of research having been undertaken. But what has annoyed a lot of people has been the focus on this particular event and where that pressure for a new inquiry is coming from. The last Irish Government prepared a dossier on it and an enormous amount of effort has gone into trying to reason and undermine the results of the tribunal that examined that particular event.

Setting aside the details, the point that I want to make today is this: how is it that the Irish Government can be exhorting our own Government to open an inquiry into events in the early 1970s when no attempt has been made by the Irish Government to look into their own doings in the late 1960s and 1970s? I refer specifically to the case that came up at the arms trial in 1970 when Charles J Haughey and two other Cabinet Ministers were charged in connection with the importation of weapons into the Irish Republic for the specific purpose of arming what is now the Provisional IRA. If Mr Haughey could overlook the appearance in his bank account of £1·3 million, is it possible that it could have escaped his attention that a few rifles had arrived into his country?

It is intolerable that the Fianna Fáil Government should be exhorting our Government to reopen an inquiry, when in their own backyard there is evidence that the Irish Government, as an act of policy, deliberately and wilfully imported weapons which were handed to what became the Provisional IRA and who were responsible subsequently for the death of over 2,200 people here. Do I hear calls from that quarter for a tribunal to be set up, for the case to be reopened? The defence that Haughey and his colleagues used was that he was acting in accordance with Government policy. That was his defence. He did not deny, as I understand it, the importation, but he said that he did it because it was Government policy. The then Prime Minister, Jack Lynch, and Defence Minister, Jim Gibbons, challenged that, but the court accepted the Haughey line.

If we are going to look at "bloody Sunday" or any other day, why do we not also look at the genesis of the Provisional IRA in the very country which is asking us to have a particular relationship? I can assure you that we raised this point with the Prime Minister in August. We have asked him to press the Irish Government, seeing as it seems to be free-for-all tribunals down there at the moment — another one is not going to hurt them. Let us have a tribunal and let us get down to the facts: was it a policy of a neighbouring state, which is now a partner in the European Union, to import weapons and hand them to a guerrilla organization which evolved into the Provisional IRA and which has wreaked havoc not only in this country but in mainland Europe as well? The Irish Prime Minister would be

better served if, instead of posturing at Bodenstown, he announced the setting up of an inquiry to find out where the truth lies.

Mrs Parkes: I wish to speak on a subject which is of major concern to me and which I know is of equal concern to other Members.

The Health Service in Northern Ireland has come a very long way since its inception, and its work is recognized across the world. But it is now in a state of disintegration because of chronic underfunding. The Health Service can no longer provide a comprehensive service capable of meeting all its patients' needs. I, along with other party representatives on the Health Committee, had the opportunity recently to let the Minister know at first hand our concerns about this and other health matters. We await his response.

The previous Administration introduced a community-care policy which created for individual patients a package of care to meet their needs. If this programme of community care is to be properly implemented across the province, substantial funding needs to be given to the providers before the system collapses. This shortfall in funding is resulting in bed blocking, with people having to stay in hospital because there is nowhere else for them to go. Indeed, I read recently in the newspaper about one senior citizen who entered hospital in early July for a hip operation which was successfully completed, only to be told that her local community trust had no money to provide the necessary support so that she could be looked after in her own home. This lady, still in hospital after three months, is costing the acute trust vital resources which could be deployed in other priority areas, and, furthermore, this is blocking a bed which could be used for someone else.

The present increase in waiting lists is totally unacceptable. It is especially deplorable when we hear that cancer patients are having to join a waiting list for treatment. We hear that patients in need of hip and knee replacements are facing waiting times of up to 18 months. Also, I await with interest the outcome of the option appraisal on the future of providing cancer services at Belvoir Park Hospital.

There has been much debate concerning the charging of patients for key services they receive, from domiciliary care to day care. There is a suggestion that people who visit their GP should perhaps pay a £10 charge and that those who go into hospital should pay perhaps £80. This proposition goes against everything that the Health Service was set up to do. It would prevent those people most in need of help coming forward. I find this proposal disgraceful and uncaring and one which must be totally rejected.

This new Labour Government pledged during the election campaign that health was one of its core priorities. The Minister for Health and Social Services has been able to identify extra funding in the past weeks, which is welcomed. However, this is only a drop in the ocean compared to what is urgently required in order to prevent the Health Service from collapsing. There is no point in saying that from 1 April 1998 we will receive extra funding; it is now that the cash is needed.

2.30 pm

Mr Ken Maginnis: I am grateful to the Member for giving way because she touches on a most urgent and important point insofar as the Southern Board is being told that it is to lose £6·1 million in funding this year, and the Western Board is also to lose money. This suggests that the Government have no perception of the importance of access to hospital services for the most vulnerable element in the community — those who live in rural areas and who do not have easy access to such services.

Mrs Parkes: We have found that particular point about access to hospitals for those living in rural areas coming up time and time again.

I am not optimistic about the future of the Health Service under this new Administration. I sincerely hope that the vital facilities across the country will not be reduced but expanded.

The previous Government led the way in reducing facilities. I trust that the new Minister will not follow the same policy. We have a Health Service which makes first-rate provision for all, and we want to retain and significantly improve it.

Mr Neeson: As some Members will be aware, I have a very deep interest in maritime heritage in Northern Ireland which I have been trying to develop and promote here for some years. It is such a crucial part of our history: the very fact that Belfast has been the centre of shipbuilding for many years; the fact that so many people have depended on the sea for their livelihood for many years; and the fact that we are part of an island nation and have come to depend very much on the sea.

A number of major artefacts of great maritime importance that are associated with Belfast are now found in other parts of the world — for example, the Polly Woodside, which was a large sailing bark built in Belfast, is now in Melbourne, Australia. Another example is the HMS Belfast, which is moored on the river Thames.

I suppose it should come as a surprise to nobody that in the very near future the Royal Yacht Britannia is to be decommissioned. When I met the Prime Minister just over a week ago I suggested that Belfast would be a suitable permanent home for it. I notice in today's paper a report that when the Royal Yacht is doing its farewell tour round the United Kingdom it will spend only about five hours in Belfast. I believe that this city could well provide a permanent home for such an important vessel. The ship itself, apart from its association with the Royal family over so many years, is beautiful. It has been maintained in pristine condition, and that gives it an advantage over other ship conservation projects throughout the world.

I am making a non-political appeal for the ship to come to Belfast, but in doing so I would be grateful for the support of all the parties in the Forum because I believe that it could become a centre-piece maritime tourist attraction in Belfast. A good deal of money is now being expended on the waterfront, and I believe that we could moor the Britannia, along with HMS Caroline, at the Abercorn Basin, which is to be developed over the next couple of years, and have our own maritime museum.

Mr Stewart: Does the Member agree that if this ship came to Belfast it would be a burden on the ratepayers? I would very much welcome the proposal, but surely you have to consider the extra burden that this would be to the ratepayers of Belfast on top of the Waterfront Hall.

Mr Neeson: I was going to address the matter of funding later on. But it would be a very important and major attraction which would enhance Belfast and create in Northern Ireland a major maritime heritage development.

When you look at the past, a number of our ships which could have been saved were allowed to rust and were eventually scrapped. I am thinking, particularly, of the Clydevalley which was brought to Carrickfergus and, despite the fact that it has political connotations, I believe that it should have been preserved. It was a splendid example of a coastal steamer which had been built in Belfast. The schooner Result, which is now in the Ulster Folk Museum in Cultra, was the last ship built in Carrickfergus. I believe that a great deal more money should have been expended on it when it was brought back to Northern Ireland for conservation.

The funding issue is important, and I believe that the best way to approach it would be through the development of a trust which would involve financial contributions from a wide variety of sources, including a large voluntary element as well. A prime example of this type of trust is that set up for one of the last liberty ships built in America — the Jeremiah O'Brien which is berthed in San Francisco Maritime Museum. That trust has maintained her, and the Jeremiah O'Brien still is an ocean-going ship.

If the will is there — and I believe that it is out there among the vast majority of people — to try to bring the Royal Yacht Britannia to Belfast, then I believe that you can make a success of it. But it is important that it is seen as a non-political issue, unlike in the past, particularly when the Clydevalley was brought to Northern Ireland. She was, unfortunately, turned into a political issue.

I believe that every effort should be made, and I would welcome the support of the other political parties in the Forum.

The Chairman: That is an interesting idea. I obviously know the Royal Yacht Britannia, and I would love my children and grandchildren to be able to see over her.

Mr Bolton: As a member of Standing Committee B, which deals with education issues, I simply want to draw the Forum's attention to a consultative document on pre-school education, which is very timely in view of the fact that we have just produced a report on that very subject. Submissions are sought not later than 31 October, and as we have already sent our report to the Department of Education we could send them a reminder letter and bring to their notice that some of the points in this consultative document are in accordance with the Committee's findings.

One important point for me in this document was that the body should be guided by the needs and aspirations of children locally, and of their parents. That was one thing that the

Committee felt very strongly about. The document also suggested that we should have an involved debate between all the providers and others. As well as that, the debate must be based on the constraints of the education and library boards, both financial and other, and must pay regard to the concept of value for money, taking both quality and cost into account.

A time-scale is set out which is also in line with the Committee's thinking: by November 1997 groups would be established in the five board areas; December 1997 was the deadline for the issuing of guidance; by March and April 1998 plans would have to be submitted to the Department of Education; the Department would approve the plans in May 1998; and then implementation would begin in September 1998.

The target for Northern Ireland is to provide additional good-quality places for children in their final pre-school years, which is also one of our recommendations. A particular concern of mine is that particular attention be paid to the provision of pre-school education in rural areas.

The question of funding is also dealt with in the document and — after the appeal made by Mrs Parkes — Members will be glad to hear that the resources required to fund pre-school education in Northern Ireland will be identified following the comprehensive spending review. My concern is that such resources should be additional to the money which we get for education at present. In that regard I feel that the statement in this report does not fit very well with the present proposals for the sector funding of education which indicate that money will be taken from primary and pre-school education and transferred to grammar schools. I want to be sure that any funding for pre-school education will be additional to existing funding and not part of it.

The issue of staffing is also in line with the Committee's thinking. Parents should be involved in early education and childcare so that parenting skills can be improved. In the light of what I have said the Forum should welcome the document and we should remind the Department of the Education Committee's report, which it could consider as a basis for its conclusion.

Mr Hunter: I wish to raise the subject of the media — in particular, interference in Channel 4 by representatives of the Republic of Ireland's Government.

I am referring in particular to an Irish Government representative's very interesting memorandum of a meeting held with Mary McAleese, an academic at Queen's. The author of this document notes that on the subject of RTE broadcasting into Northern Ireland

"I asked Ms McAleese, in her capacity as board member of Channel 4, if the issue of RTE broadcasts in Northern Ireland had ever been raised."

She replied in the negative. She said she was unaware of any proposals to boost the RTE signal from Clermont Carn and said that she could not recall any instance where the subject of the availability of RTE in Northern Ireland, even on cable television, had ever been discussed formally or in the margins of Channel 4 board meetings.

One has to consider the fact that, in particular, Channel 4's political analysis follows broadly Nationalist lines. From journalists such as Mr McKittrick and Mr Eamon Mallie — the main analysts of the Northern Ireland situation for Channel 4's news bulletins — one gets the impression that they would not necessarily express the views of the majority here, namely the Unionists.

Dr McAleese would appear to be the only board member of Channel 4 representing Northern Ireland. From reading the press it would appear that this lady also follows the particular Nationalist agenda. Indeed, I understand that she is currently seeking a new job in the country to the south and west, backed by the "Soldiers of Destiny" party — the main Government party in that country.

Why can we not have parity of esteem? Is there anyone to represent the majority opinion in Northern Ireland on the board of Channel 4 television? This, after all, is the second commercial channel. The station referred to in this particular document — RTE — is the state broadcasting system of another European country. Can one imagine, for example, someone from the Belgian Government asking a French commercial channel for better facilities for broadcasting Belgian state television in France, and asking that the possibility of a booster satellite be considered? RTE is not only the state broadcasting channel for that country, but also a station which relies on commercial advertisements.

We have one nationally owned commercial channel in Northern Ireland — Ulster Television — and it relies almost exclusively on the revenue from commercial advertisements to keep going and to make a profit for its shareholders. Were this foreign state's television channel to gain access to a booster station in Northern Ireland it might encourage more people from Northern Ireland to buy advertising on that channel rather than on Ulster Television. There must surely be a question here about whether that would amount to interference in the internal market of another European state. It is indeed regrettable that persons from Northern Ireland, who are on state or public bodies (like the board of Channel 4), are to be used in this despicable and disgraceful manner, as the servants or agents of the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin.

2.45 pm

We see further interference by the Irish Government in the internal academic affairs of Northern Ireland's principle university — Queen's University of Belfast. There is also reference in this document to Dr McAleese's views on the Vice-Chancellorship of the university. It is my understanding that the senate at Queen's and, indeed, the academic council are not made aware of the names of the persons who are seeking the post of Vice-Chancellor and that Dr McAleese should not have been aware of those details. Yet it appears from this document that she was. Indeed, she refers to one gentleman, Mr Vincent McBrierty, who appears to be teaching at Trinity College, Dublin. She also refers to an Australian on the list who she believes is named Fell. With references like that, it certainly appears that someone in academic or administrative circles at Queen's University was giving this confidential information to Dr McAleese. She then saw fit to divulge this information to the representatives of a foreign Government.

So not only do we have the interests of the state broadcasting system from another country being raised with someone from this country — someone who sits on the board of a British commercial television channel — but we also have that same Government asking who might get the job, or who might be in for the job, as Vice-Chancellor at Queen's University of Belfast. Could this again be an attempt by the authorities in the Irish Republic to influence such bodies as Queen's University? It is a matter of major concern, and these interferences in our internal affairs are something that I trust the Government will raise with the Government of the Irish Republic.

Mr McKee: Mr Chairman, I support what you said this morning about the Gallipoli campaign, and the tribute you paid to those who had gone to Gallipoli. As one who went to Gallipoli, as a representative of Larne Borough Council, I was proud and honoured to have been there, and to have shared in that pilgrimage.

I would like to thank the Somme Association for its efforts through the years, particularly in respect of Gallipoli and the Somme. I think the last time I was at the Somme, Mr Chairman, you were there yourself. I pay tribute to the Somme Association for its efforts to honour Ulster's war dead — those who laid down their lives and who made the supreme sacrifice in their defence of democracy and their opposition to Fascism. It is only right that we who are left should always attempt to keep this to the fore. We must continue to pay tribute to those who made that supreme sacrifice, and we must continue to give support and encouragement to the families who are left behind.

I support what has been said by the previous Members about having a memorial to Ulster's dead. It is only right that some sort of memorial should be erected to honour those who have fallen at the hands of brutal and Fascist people in Northern Ireland. I concur with the remarks made by Mr Hugh Smyth, Mr Eric Smyth and Mr Ian Paisley Jnr.

I deprecate Mr Hugh Smyth's attempt to couple that with the talks at Stormont. Here we are, trying to do good for Ulster, trying to get a peaceful solution to the problem in Northern Ireland, and these people are laughing and sneering. Nothing could be further from the truth. I think that we all want to be associated with those who made that supreme sacrifice in defence of this province, and who refused to bow the knee to terrorism in Northern Ireland. It is a shame that Mr Smyth is willing to sit around a table to negotiate with those who have killed so many good people in Northern Ireland.

This morning Mr Ken Maginnis jeered, saying that the DUP was running away — and he jeers and smiles again. I can tell Mr Maginnis that we in the DUP have not lost the commitment that we gave to the people at the Forum election. I came to the Forum with a mandate from the people of East Antrim. That mandate was given to me not by a small group of people but by 10,000 — only 400 behind the number who voted for the Ulster Unionist Party's candidate — we having said that we would not sit round the table with the gunmen and bombers. We said that we would refuse to negotiate away Northern Ireland's future with a hostile foreign Government. We are standing by that election commitment. The Ulster Unionist Party may feel that they want to do their thing, but I am saying that we in the DUP are going to honour our commitment to the people who voted for us.

I can remember that the buzz-phrase from the Forum election was that there could be no talks with the IRA while their guns and their ammunition were still intact, and that there would have to be disarmament before talks. We even heard about a quarantine period being required for the IRA. At one stage Mr Molyneaux talked about five years' quarantine being required before the IRA could come to the negotiating table. But where are Mr Maginnis and the Ulster Unionist Party today? They are sitting at the negotiating table with the men who still have their guns under the table and outside the door, and who are still threatening the Union.

Mr Ken Maginnis *rose.*

Mr McKee: The Member can have his say later. I am going to have mine now, and he is not going to put me off.

One thing that I was told from a very early age is that Dublin cannot be trusted because they claim jurisdiction over the country that I love — that is loyal Ulster. Where are we today? We have members from a main Unionist party sitting around the table negotiating the future of Northern Ireland with the Dublin Government. Shame on the mighty Unionist Party that wants to — *[Interruption]*

The Chairman: Mr McKee, your time is up.

Mr McKee: Mr Chairman, I do not think so. After some of the speeches that have been made I feel that I must have this opportunity.

Mr Maginnis and the Ulster Unionist Party can go down whatever road they like, but not with the blessing of the DUP. They may think that they can cobble a deal and ignore the DUP, but our voice is too strong in East Antrim. No more, Mr Maginnis.

The Chairman: Mr McKee, your time really is up.

Mr McKee: Mr Maginnis went to the enthronement of the Cardinal. Was that defending Unionism? He went to the President of the Irish Republic. Was that in defence of the Union?

The Chairman: Mr McKee, your time is up.

Mr McKee: Now he is at the negotiating table. Is that in defence of the Union? But we cannot cobble a deal, and we cannot go without the Unionist Party either because we are married to each, whether we like it or not. We are all part of the Unionism of this island. It would be far better talking to those who have a common interest — and that is in the Union — rather than talking to those who have murdered our kith and kin. The stench of the traitor is in our presence, and it needs to be cleansed.

Mr Chairman: Mr McKee, please sit down.

Mr Jim Rodgers: I was wondering what I should talk about today, and one possibility was the dismissal of Northern Ireland's soccer team manager, Bryan Hamilton. But I have decided against that.

The Chairman: You are absolutely at liberty to do so.

Mr Jim Rodgers: Then I considered talking about the Maryfield secretariat. But I have decided to zoom in on the first ever visit this morning by a Northern Ireland Secretary of State to Belfast City Council's chamber. She was asked some questions about the proposed university campus at the Springvale site in West Belfast, and she said that she has been a strong supporter of having it in this area. She said that she would continue to back it, and now that the scheme has been scaled down considerably, she thought that it could possibly be a runner. She said that it would be good for symbolic reasons.

As one who represents East Belfast, I am concerned at the way the Government are treating my area. All of the moneys seem to be getting pumped into this part of the west of the city. At a time when education is again going to suffer massive cut-backs, it looks as if both the Secretary of State and her Education Minister, Mr Tony Worthington, may eventually give the green light to this university campus. I am most certainly not against universities, but I certainly do not think that it is the appropriate place to put it. The Ulster Unionist Party have made their views crystal clear on this, and I reiterate them in this Forum: we are against the university campus being sited on the Springfield Road in Belfast, not for religious or political reasons, but because there is plenty of room for expansion on the other two sites at Jordanstown and Coleraine.

I would also like to know where the moneys are going to come from. It is all very well people saying "Let us get finance from the Lotteries Commission. Let us go to the Peace and Reconciliation budget", but we all know that the running costs are the key. The number of organizations which have received finance from some of these bodies, yet are already wondering where the next pound is going to come from in order to keep their premises opened, is particularly disturbing.

So, Mr Chairman, I want to herald a word of warning to the Secretary of State. We want to see finance being put into education right across the board. It is vitally important that young people are properly educated at primary level and secondary level before they ever reach third-level education.

Mr Shannon: There is an issue that has been in the press over the last couple of days, and it is one that probably interests all of us who have a sweet tooth, and it interests all of us who perhaps have a special longing for Mars chocolate, or Cadbury's chocolate, or whatever else. It is the so-called chocolate war, pushed by Belgium and France specifically, and it strikes at the very heart of an industry worth £3·2 billion. That, quite simply, is an insult to business.

3.00 pm

Over the last few days the headlines in the press, both national and provincial, have spoken volumes. Sometimes, of course, the papers use headlines to grab attention. Here are some of today's:

"We'll block your choc, say the Euro-milk monitors",

"Chocs away",

"Britain bites back in the bar wars",

"Chocolate lunacy".

Earlier this year, in a Forum debate on European Union regulations many of us highlighted the issue of the demands, indeed, the rulings of Europe on everything at that time, from cucumbers to strawberries and the very flavour and taste of potato crisps. One of the issues that I highlighted then was the number of Directives that were coming through on chocolate; there have been a large number of them — almost too numerous to mention. However, it has all led to what I am talking about today and what has been reported in the press over the last few days and that is this demand by Europe to try to do away with the present description of British chocolate.

Everyone realizes that this gobbledegook from Europe, this final onslaught, is meant to try to swallow up the chocolate business in the British Isles. This spiteful ban on British chocolate was finally unwrapped when Strasbourg changed the traditional wording on confectionery. Instead of describing it as "milk chocolate" we will have to use the words "chocolate containing vegetable fats other than cocoa butter". That, in itself, is quite a mouthful for anyone, and whether it is particularly tasty to the mouth, only time will tell. We have all seen the advertisement on television for Milk Tray. Imagine the scene: a man jumps out of a helicopter, slides down a rope —

Mr Sammy Wilson: Jim Rodgers.

Mr Shannon: Jim Rodgers. But he hurt his leg.

Mr Jim Rodgers: Will the Member please explain what he is getting at?

Mr Shannon: The Member must not eat into my five minutes.

The man in the advert goes down a rope, takes off in a speedboat, climbs inside a house and leaves a box of Milk Tray, and a voice in the background says "All because the lady loves Milk Tray." That will have to be changed to "All because the lady loves chocolate containing vegetable fats other than cocoa butter." Let us be honest: does anybody really think that that has a ring to it? This man has jumped out of a helicopter, run along a road, jumped into a speedboat, climbed up the side of a house and left the Milk Tray, but what will tire him out more than all of that will be saying those words "chocolate containing vegetable fats other than cocoa butter". I do not believe it. It is absolutely ludicrous.

What about the other phrases used in television advertising? There are those here who can, maybe, cast their minds back further than others and remember the phrase that was first heard in 1959, I think — I was only a boy — "A Mars a day helps you work, rest and play." Under the new European Union Directive that will be "Mars chocolate containing vegetable fats other than cocoa butter a day helps you work, rest and play." That is quite a mouthful for anybody. A Mars bar is a lovely bar of chocolate to eat — if I may quickly endorse it — but that does not really have the same ring to it, does it?

What about Cadbury's chocolate bars, which boast of having a glass and a half of full-cream milk in every half pound? In European terms, they will no longer constitute real milk chocolate. Can you believe that? I find it hard to believe. What will happen to the new range of chocolates being brought out by Cadbury's? These chocolates, by the way, for those who do not know about them yet, will feature the Spice Girls. Everybody knows the Spice Girls. Thank God Europe cannot touch the Spice Girls. The five bars of chocolate featuring the Spice Girls are going to be: fudge for Baby Spice; truffle for Posh Spice; nougat for Scary Spice; hazel delight for Ginger Spice; and caramel for Sporty Spice. I like to see Cadbury's chocolate, and I especially want to see the Spice Girls there as well. Europe might be able to try to change chocolate — at least in terms of its description — but it cannot change the Spice Girls, and thank goodness for that.

This European Union Directive is ludicrous. It is rampant European bureaucracy. I suggest that if it tastes the same, then, by and large, it is the same. People are flabbergasted by this latest European Union diktat. Perhaps the only thing to be thankful for is that the word they were intending to use before the "chocolate containing vegetable fats other than cocoa butter" was "vegelate". Thank goodness we have not got the word "vegelate" in there, for it conjures up all sorts of ideas in people's minds — and I am sure they are not very complimentary. This is another illustration of how the European Union has gone over the top with legislation and Directives.

I eat chocolate regularly. We have a flourishing chocolate trade which adds great value to the economy, and the economists have declared that the Directive is clearly intended to be derogatory to British chocolate. But that is nothing new. It has been going on since 1973 when Britain joined the Common Market.

There is another interesting point. To enforce this new Directive, the European Union will bring into existence a "choc squad". What is a "choc squad"? According to these new regulations, it will be a European Union testing centre set up at taxpayers' expense. Chocolate policemen will tell us that what we are buying is not up to the so-called standard of the rest of Europe.

This lunacy makes Willy Wonka and his chocolate factory look positively sane. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, and we in the United Kingdom do that to the tune of £3·2 billion every year. This is all the proof that is needed.

The Chairman: I hope you will not mind my mentioning something that might interest you. An Ulsterman invented chocolate. Sir Hans Sloane of Killyleagh went, as a young man, to Jamaica. He discovered that the slaves, many of whom had come from

Nigeria, drank a concoction made from milk and the nut of the cacao tree and they fed it to their children. He brought this invention back, and last month the Sloane followers in Sloane Square — which is named after him — had an exhibition on the chocolate which he had invented. They had chocolate bars made to that original recipe which was later bought by Cadbury's. So, there was an Ulster start to chocolate and your point was remarkably relevant, Mr Shannon. I congratulate you.

Mr Shannon: Mr Chairman, you mentioned the cacao tree. As you probably know, "cacao" means "food of the gods".

The Chairman: I did not know that.

Mr Calvert: I want to speak about telecommunication masts but, first of all, may I say what a great pleasure it was for me to go on the pilgrimage to the Gallipoli battlefields. It was a very humbling experience. Looking around the graves of the young 17- and 19-year-old soldiers as well as those of people at the level of wing commanders and squadron leaders brought home to me the heroism of those young men who went to fight on the battlefields of Gallipoli. Perhaps we should fly Mo Mowlam out there to give her a little knowledge of the culture and heroism of the Ulster people who fought in that battle — that would be a great education.

I would also like to congratulate the three companies from Lisburn — Barbour Campbell Threads, Bemac Engineering and Unitrunk — on their investment of £16·3 million, which should give rise to 107 new jobs in the borough of Lisburn over the next three years. As a representative for the Lagan Valley area, it is, indeed, a great pleasure for me to welcome that investment.

I am one of the Forum Members who will not be sitting down with Sinn Fein in any talks about the future of Northern Ireland.

May I also say that I welcome the Industrial Development Board's planned development of 75 acres of land at Knockmore. This project will cost a further £900,000, and Mr Ingram has said that the land will be available in late 1998 for both inward investment and fast-growing, local companies. This, indeed, is very welcome to the borough of Lisburn.

I welcome the Government commission that has been set up, but, in doing so, I hope that this memorial will only be for those who have fought against terrorism in Ulster — members of the Ulster Special Constabulary, the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Army. The only names that should be on that memorial are the names of those who have fought for this country. Further to that, the only memorial, I believe, that would be acceptable to mothers and fathers who have lost their sons and daughters fighting for this country is an Ulster, stronger than it ever was, with its own democratically elected Government and no terrorists having anything to do with it. The people who I represent are saying "No" to IRA terrorists having anything to do with the running of this country. Terrorists should be dealt with by a strong Government, and I hope that that will be the case. That is the way in which people want to remember their loved ones.

One matter which is causing great concern to residents in the Lisburn area — and, I am sure, right across the province — is the erection of the telecommunication masts. Recently, there was a planning application for a 25-metre telecommunication mast which, I understand, is meant to assist mobile telephone users. This mast will have four large microwave dishes attached and a two-metre palisade fence around the base.

Many residents of the borough are against the erection of these masts. Last night I had a telephone call from the son of a 95-year-old woman who lives in the Culcavey area of Lisburn borough. About six weeks ago a 45-foot high mast was erected 30 feet from this dear lady's back door. There was no warning. It simply went up. When her son made enquiries, he was told that planning permission was not necessary. I understand from the planning office that, provided these masts are not over 15 metres in height, they are classed as permitted development under the Planning (General Development) Order (Northern Ireland) 1993, unless the application is for a mast in a conservation area of outstanding natural beauty when a planning application is required. Not only do they spoil the look of the countryside, there is great concern from a health point of view about the radiation that comes from the microwave dishes.

3.15 pm

Much concern has been expressed by residents and councillors about the risk to health from radiation coming from the Northern Ireland Electricity high voltage lines which run all over the province. And there are an ever-increasing number of planning applications to councils for more high voltage lines. Not enough information is forthcoming about the risk to health and the possible link to certain types of cancer from the radiation from all this electrical equipment. We should be concerned about that.

An inquiry needs to be set up to look at not only the unsightly erection of these lines over our lovely countryside but also at the health risk and the chance of people developing cancer or leukemia from such permitted developments.

Mr Poots: There have been some very interesting contributions this afternoon. I do not know whether Mr Shannon, who is the great promoter of Ulster-Scots, is going to turn into an Ulster-choc. I want to raise a subject which may be more boring but which is very important nevertheless — the public expenditure proposals by the Government.

Many people had high hopes that the Labour Government would not be as tight-fisted as the previous Government. However, in Northern Ireland terms, we are going to be much worse off over the next two years. I would like to draw Members' attention to the proposals. In the current year £8,851 million will be spent in Northern Ireland. It is proposed over the next two years to increase that by 2% to £9,042 million. But when we look at it more closely we discover that the biggest part of this increase will be in social security benefits — some £261 million. I find this a strange decision. Unemployment has been falling steadily for the past 13 months and is now sitting at under 8%, whereas it was at 11% and 12% not that long ago. Why are they increasing the social security budget by £260 million if unemployment is falling? The reason, I believe, is that the money which is not spent from the social security budget goes straight back to London. On paper it looks as if they are increasing the money that is coming to Northern Ireland, but, in essence, we will never see it.

Mr Blair, before the election, told us that education, education, education was his number one priority. Over the next year we will get a 1·5% increase in education spending while inflation is 3%. I believe Mr Blair is bluffing, bluffing, bluffing when he says that his first interest is education.

The Health Service gets a 2·5% rise which is going to mean another fall because inflation goes on and costs go up. If costs rise to meet inflation then hospitals will have to make more cuts. Hospitals are having to cut their nursing staff. People needing operations are having to wait for beds. A recent report highlighted how people's lives were being endangered because vital cancer treatment could not be carried out. What are the Government doing about it? They are, in essence, cutting the health budget.

Agriculture, which is the largest sector of employment in the province, employing some 12%, is facing a massive 7% cut.

The housing budget is remaining static.

Trade and industry is being reduced from £507 million to £490 million. That brings me to the Welfare-to-Work scheme. The Government are introducing a scheme to encourage young people to take up jobs. They are being offered six months' training, but where are the jobs going to be if the support is not there for the Industrial Development Board and for the Local Enterprise Development Unit to help industry create these jobs? All they are doing is taking young people off the dole and putting them into a training scheme. I support the idea of the windfall levy — perhaps I might suffer from it, but I support the idea. However, I want to see it properly utilized. There is no point in taking young people off the dole for six months only to put them back on to it again. Industry should be given proper support.

Environment is facing a 4% cut. We have heard how interested the Labour Party is in the environment. It wants to see a better environment. And yet the Government are cutting the money that is going to be spent on it. These are all cuts, and it must be borne in mind that that is over two years, and that there will be a 6% increase in inflation in that time, so when you talk about a 4% cut in the environment, you are actually talking about a 10% cut. When you talk about a 7% cut in agriculture, you are talking about a 13% cut. These are most significant.

I would like to ask whether Mo Mowlam is up to her job. Patrick Mayhew, for all his other faults, was very good at squeezing money out of the Exchequer in London. Mo Mowlam is just not up to the job of going into the Chief Secretary of the Treasury and demanding the extra money that Northern Ireland needs in order to continue in the way that it has. If Mo Mowlam cannot get the money that is necessary then we are going to face serious problems over the next number of years. She has been very kind and has consulted the local councils this time round about how best to spend the money that is coming in, but what she is really doing is asking the councils where they think the cuts would be best made. Northern Ireland should get a rise at least in line with inflation and that extra money should stay in the province.

May I also put down a marker as regards the security budget and say that the money saved by a cease-fire being in place — however long that might be — should stay in Northern Ireland and not be removed to other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr McAlister: I missed my earlier slot because I was concluding an important committee meeting. I had intended to speak mainly on the subject of the memorial for those who have died in Northern Ireland, but it has been quite well covered, so I am going to highlight a couple of other matters as well.

First, Mr Chairman, I want to thank you for the natural history and geography lesson about chocolate and also my Colleague Mr Shannon for, as it were, taking the wraps off the chocolate bar. I believe Cadbury's are bringing out a new bar — the Ulster Unionist bar. It is hard on the outside and soft on the inside. It is easily broken up into pieces and it can be chewed up and spat out easily by the pan-Nationalist front. It has a low melting point and, best of all, it can be bought very cheaply.

I wanted to get an insider's view on the memorial idea so last night I rang a dear lady who I know. I want to be very serious at this point against the background of the scurrilous, vindictive and snide remarks and sneering from Mr Ken Maginnis today. I am ashamed that he, as an ex-UDR man, like myself, would stoop so low. The lady I telephoned last night is a victim, in the sense that she is the widowed mother of a UDR son. I had the task, along with others, of carrying his coffin. I served with him and he was a dear friend. I asked her what kind of a memorial she wanted.

I hope that the commission will take account primarily of those who are the victims, those who are left behind, those who have a real input to this. I hope that it is a memorial for the innocent and for those members of the armed forces who have died in Northern Ireland. The lady said "The only thing that worries me is why is it coming so late in the day. Against this false premise of peace at the moment, is it being offered as a sop to me and people like me? Do the Government think that this is some sort of pay-off for the Protestant and Loyalist people of Northern Ireland? If it is done with that kind of a heart, I want nothing to do with it."

The Government have a lot of soul-searching to do. They have a lot of things to think about before placing any memorial in Northern Ireland. I as much as anybody want this. The DUP has been forthright about wanting this memorial for a long time — that is on record. But this lady said that if it was being done against the background of a pay-off or a buy-off she wanted nothing to do with it. She said "You will let me know how it goes tomorrow." Sadly, I am going to have to phone her tonight and tell her that Mr Ken Maginnis has cast a slur upon this party, upon people like me and other Members who have served in the UDR and therefore upon her son who was a DUP supporter. Mr Maginnis should be ashamed of himself. It is a pity that these proceedings are not shown live. If they were I wonder would he be so smart and so smug sitting over there today. It is absolutely disgraceful. I believe in righteous indignation. We are entitled to be angry about those silly, stupid and vindictive remarks. I hope the memorial will be a proper and a fitting one, befitting this lady and her son.

Finally, I want to raise a health issue. I know that the Health Committee has looked at prescription charges from the point of view of cost-effectiveness, but I want to look at the matter on purely medical grounds. There needs to be a new thinking on this. The Government have promised that there will be, but I want this to happen sooner rather than later.

Until you are involved in something yourself it does not become real to you. During my recent illness when I had to have prescribed drugs, which I will possibly have to take for the rest of my life, it became apparent to me that all was not equal on the prescription playing field. There are people with very serious complaints who have to pay for their prescriptions. I cite the case of a couple I know. The gentleman has a heart condition because of which he is entitled to get his prescriptions free of charge. His dear wife is a chronic asthmatic and the doctor feels that she is more at risk of dying than he is, yet she has to pay for her prescriptions.

There seems to be an inequality in the prescription charges. I would like the Government to do something about that. They have promised that they will. I want them to do it sooner rather than later.

Mr Ken Maginnis: I am rather flattered to be made such a centre of attention by one or two Members from the opposite side of the House. It makes me wonder if there is a feeling of guilt on that side of the House, in terms of the behaviour of the Democratic Unionist Party, about the way in which it has met its obligation over the years to the people of Northern Ireland. I find that you seldom get this sort of attention unless people are worried — worried for themselves. I doubt very much whether they are worried for me, and their inactivity over the past few months makes me wonder whether they are really worried for the people of Northern Ireland. The people of Northern Ireland need a party that is willing to face up to the dangers inherent in the current situation.

You will recall, Mr Chairman, that during the latter days of the Tory Government we were constantly being berated by the same Democratic Unionist Party for our inability — nobody seemed to take any account of the mathematics — to bring that Government down and to expedite the arrival on the scene of the new Labour Party. The new Labour Party has only been in power for about six months, and the Democratic Unionist Party and the greatest ally of new Labour, Mr McCartney — no longer with us — of the UKUP, are now berating that party. Mr McCartney is a sort of associate member, as I understand it, of the Labour Party. Now they are berating us for the fact that new Labour has come with new ideas, some of them quite nonsensical and some of them quite offensive. Not least, they bring to the table of democracy the IRA in the persons of those unreconstructed terrorists Adams and McGuinness.

The DUP would like me to run away and leave the only political show in town to the machinations of new Labour, Sinn Fein, the SDLP and the Irish Government. That is not something the Ulster Unionist Party can easily do. We believe that whatever the situation may be, and particularly in those situations that were engineered neither by the DUP nor by ourselves, we have a responsibility to ensure that the voice of Ulster Unionism is heard. We have had the IRA in the past having free access to the media, and being able to churn out their lies and their misinformation without anyone to challenge them.

3.30 pm

What disturbs Ulster Unionists is that for want of a little courage, the attack by the Democratic Unionist Party — and I did not intend to make a speech today, but I feel obliged to say this — on the Ulster Unionist Party is now carried out in the most scurrilous and derogatory terms. We can all refer to people as fools; we can all refer to people as traitors; and we can all refer to people as simpletons. But by doing so, we devalue the justifiable Unionist case that should not just be put by one of us talking across this virtually empty Chamber to another. Rather we should be looking upwards and outwards to our real place, to our destiny within the Union, the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland which we are pledged to defend.

In this day and age of television, where the world at large has access to the media, we have a responsibility to show that Ulster Unionism, indeed Unionism at large, does not devalue its own case to the extent that it runs away from its obligations and indulges for petty political gain in internecine strife rather than confronting the real enemy. I will ignore what a Member had to say of a derogatory nature about myself, because he devalued his assessment of the IRA by resorting to such trivialities.

If the Forum is going to be the forerunner of some sort of democratic Assembly that will look after the affairs of Northern Ireland by taking responsibility for all the Departments, the Forum has got to talk in sensible terms that do not appeal to people's petty prejudices. It has to create an understanding throughout the community that we have the capability, the desire and the sense of responsibility to do that task on the community's behalf.

Mr Peter Robinson: I did not intend to speak during the course of this debate either, but it is important that some issues should be put on the record. I shall attempt to do this in a way that does not inflame passions and does not raise the temperature in the Chamber, but I think it essential that the authoritative analysis of the Democratic Unionist Party, insofar as the talks process is concerned, is put clearly on the record.

Mr Ken Maginnis first of all conflicts with his own principles. He said that it is in everybody's gift to make scurrilous comments during a speech in which he makes them himself. He says that people are running away. It is fairly evident that Mr Maginnis and his Colleagues have been running into the arms of the IRA and, indeed, into the trap set by them. He talks about running away from obligations. I will tell you what my obligation is: it is to fulfil the electoral mandate that I have been given. In three elections, one after the other, the electoral mandate that I sought and I got was not to sit down with Sinn Fein/IRA until the IRA had been dismantled and the weaponry handed over. That was the mandate. That was the obligation. If I were to go into talks with Sinn Fein/IRA, that would be running away from my obligation.

I rather suspect that those candidates who went round the country with little sheets of paper which told them how to answer the various questions they would be asked when they were canvassing during the election answered in exactly the way I did: they would not be sitting down. *[Interruption]*

The Chairman: Are you permitting an intervention?

Mr Peter Robinson: No. I have five minutes in which to speak. If the Member made an incomplete statement when he had the opportunity to speak —

The Chairman: Is the Member giving way?

Mr Peter Robinson: I do not want anybody to take away my time.

Mr Ken Maginnis: I am sure, Mr Chairman, that you will be generous with what is virtually a point of order.

Mr Peter Robinson: If the Chairman wishes to guarantee that he will not take it off my time, I will give way.

The Chairman: I will give you 10 seconds.

Mr Ken Maginnis: Mr Robinson makes the serious point that Unionists gave a guarantee that they would not sit down with Sinn Fein/IRA, but have we not, in obligation to our constituents, been doing just that for years in the council chambers? That was not the real obligation, and Mr Robinson knows it. The real obligation was not to negotiate with the IRA, and we have not done that, nor will we.

Mr Peter Robinson: I will deal fairly quickly with that smelly old red herring that gets thrown in every now and again. The Member must be able to see the distinction between an elected Forum where people are entitled to make their views known and a situation where no distinction is made by this Government, regrettably, about the kind of person who can stand for election. I have made it clear on a number of occasions that if Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were to take an oath to Her Majesty the Queen, and were to enter the House of Commons, I would not leave the House of Commons. I am elected to be there and to represent my people, just as I am elected not to be at the talks if Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness are there.

Let me also say that the commitment given by the Ulster Unionist Party was to "stop talks if the decommissioning of all arms does not start right away." It is abundantly clear who has run away from that obligation.

Mr Trimble: Those are the sub-editor's words. You do not know anything.

Mr Peter Robinson: I certainly do. I will read the whole thing if the Member wants. That was a perfectly accurate reading of the comments made by the Member for Upper Bann.

I want to make it clear that I do not believe, even if the Ulster Unionist Party does, that new Labour has new ideas. They are still after a united Ireland, and they have the process to lead to that. It is the framework document, and that is the predetermined outcome of the talks. It will not be changed because the Ulster Unionist Party is there. Does anybody really believe the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and Her Majesty's Government

when they say that they are going to have all of these issues resolved in the talks process in six months' time? Not a bit of it. Not one of them believes it.

But they want to have Mr Maginnis's thumb prints, Mr Trimble's thumb prints, Mr Empey's thumb prints and Mr Taylor's thumb prints all over the one or two elements of any agreement that there may be. When it comes to a referendum they want to confuse the extent to which Unionists agree with the process — that is, agree with the outcome of the process, agree with the outcome that the two Governments will take down from the shelf. Of course, they will not call it the framework document, but it will contain elements of the framework document, renamed and repackaged. Maybe they will even put red, white and blue ribbons on it for Mr Trimble. Maybe they will even have it singing Rule Britannia. But it will still be the framework document. That is what they are intending to do. They hope they will have compromised the Ulster Unionist Party to the extent that they will be able to hold a referendum and not get a vote against it because the Ulster Unionist Party's thumb prints will be over the package.

Mr Ken Maginnis: Do you think they would refloat the Clydevalley for us?

Mr Peter Robinson: Well, the Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone is the one who is best capable of scuttling any ship, even when he is standing on the deck himself. He is the very person who told us that he was going to confront Sinn Fein in the talks, and now today he tells us that they are not going to have anything to do with them. So much for the great confrontation. He was beating his chest about how he was going to go in and sock it to the IRA. Nothing of the sort happened.

The Ulster Unionist Party is contaminating itself by being in a process which has a predetermined outcome. It is a process that will stick to them, even when the day comes that they have to leave it, or when the day comes that it closes down.

I regret very much that the Ulster Unionist Party is associating itself with the Provisional IRA in this process. This is something which those who have lost so many loved ones find very difficult to accept. The people that the Ulster Unionist Party is sitting with in the talks process are being rewarded for the violence they have committed, and the people who are rewarding them are the ones whom they expected to speak for them.

Rev Trevor Kirkland: Only a person with suicidal tendencies would want to take part in Russian roulette.

In response to Mr McAlister's remarks about a memorial, I would say that the best and most fitting memorial any Government, and this Government, could give Northern Ireland would be to execute all the murderers who are walking the streets and are now part of the peace process.

I want to talk about abortion in the time I have left. The Einstein of agony aunts, Claire Rayner, has issued a statement this week backing calls to legalize abortion in Northern Ireland. She says that she hates it, that it is painful, distressing, messy and bad news. Well, I can think of no better argument for saying "Do not do it." Yet according to this woman's logic — irrationality would be a better description — it is necessary. How is it necessary?

When is it necessary? She tells us that it is to help those who get pregnant when they do not want to. In other words, this woman wants the 1967 Act introduced into Northern Ireland on social grounds. What she is advocating — and what all pro-abortionists advocate — is social abortion. Indeed, one writer, someone who has actually had an abortion, is quoted in this crypto-Unionist newspaper, the 'News Letter', as saying that "A termination is equivalent to contraception".

This is as disgraceful and despicable an Act as ever was passed. It is a fundamental assault upon the family. It is a murdering of the family as an institution. According to Claire Rayner, if there is a choice between legal abortions and backstreet abortions, or between legal abortions and no abortions, naturally enough women will go for no abortions. But since 1967 we have been told that they have had this choice between legal abortions and no abortions, and yet they still go for abortions.

It is argued that women must have a choice between legal abortions and backstreet abortions, yet the fact remains that no one has ever been found doing backstreet abortions in Northern Ireland. Another argument is that numerous deaths result from backstreet abortions, yet no deaths have been recorded in Northern Ireland from this supposed event. However, there have been over 100 deaths in Great Britain, which has had abortion on demand since 1967. There have been 52 deaths from illegal abortions and 52 deaths from legal abortions. What is more, police records show that 968 illegal abortions have taken place, with 293 prosecutions. So, even if this law were brought into Northern Ireland, it would not stop these terrible and tragic things.

3.45 pm

We are told that the current situation is one of confusion and inconsistency in Northern Ireland. This red herring of a confused situation and an inconsistent law was raised by Simon Lee in his Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights report. Nothing could be further from the truth, because when these people are challenged to show these inconsistencies what we get are inconsistent and confused answers. The current legislation is not confused. Abortion can still be carried out in Northern Ireland under a number of circumstances, but what cannot happen is social abortion. Since 1967 the statistics have not only shown a vast increase in the number of abortions, they have also shown that fewer than 1% are for medical reasons and 99% are for social reasons.

Mr McAlister: The distressing news just released over the last 24 hours is that most foetuses feel pain during an abortion. The medical response is "Do not worry. We can give it some drugs to anesthetize it." Does my Colleague agree that that is disgraceful in a so-called modern and caring society?

Rev Trevor Kirkland: I thank the Member for that contribution, which pre-empts something I was going to come to.

Those who oppose abortion argue that they do so on moral grounds, but that ignores the fact that those who support abortion also do so on what they term "moral grounds". First, you dehumanize. You no longer speak of the child in the womb. You call it plasma, or a mass, or a foetus or something. You must first dehumanize the thing by calling it anything

but a child, and then you can do what you like. You can treat it as if you were paring your fingernails — end of story.

That is the beginning of a thinking process that can culminate in very serious consequences, one which is infanticide. There is absolutely no difference between killing a child in the womb and killing a one-week-old child — in fact, some of the some important advocates of abortion have publicly stated that. There is no philosophical difference once you accept abortion.

Ultimately, of course, euthanasia also becomes acceptable. If you kill an unborn child, why not all the elderly people too? They are a nuisance. They cost society too much. So, no longer do we think of families caring for their elderly relatives, but we hand them over to the state. Then along come these people who say "We cannot afford to keep them. Let us annihilate them. Let us wipe them out."

This is a very important moral issue which has been brought to our attention again, and I encourage our Members of Parliament to maintain the stance that we have always taken. We are constantly told by Claire Rayner, and all the Einsteins like her, that people in Northern Ireland want abortion. But eighteen of the nineteen councils that have voted on this issue have all voted against it. The vast bulk of institutions and people in Northern Ireland are against it. Why are they against it? They are against it, rightly, on moral grounds.

I will close by simply stating that legalizing abortion is just one method of killing. Such is the corruption of society that we have legalized killing in other ways. When we elevate criminals and put them at the talks table in Northern Ireland we are elevating murder. There is no difference between that and your saying to your child "If the school does not give you what you want, go down and burn the school to the ground." "If you are walking along the footpath and there is an elderly person in front of you who does not get out of your way, kick him into the middle of the road." There is absolutely no difference.

We are living in a totally corrupt society, and this is but one issue. How a society protects and looks after the unborn as well as those who are alive shows the depth of corruption or the depth of principle in that society.

The Forum was adjourned at 3.51 pm.