

NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Friday 21 November 1997

The meeting was called to order at 10.03 am (Mr J R Gorman in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

FIFTIETH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY OF THE QUEEN AND PRINCE PHILIP

The Chairman: I have written on behalf of the Forum and those we represent to the Queen's Private Secretary asking him to convey to Her Majesty and to Prince Philip our congratulations and best wishes on the occasion of their 50th wedding anniversary yesterday.

SARACEN LTD

The Chairman: I wrote to Mr Ingram last Friday to tell him how strongly the Forum feels about the Saracen matter, and we have been in touch with his office daily to see what is happening. I hope to be able before close of business today to confirm a date for a meeting with the Minister.

DELEGATION FROM MOLDOVA AND TRANSNISTRIA

The Chairman: I want to confirm today's arrangements to accommodate the meeting between Standing Committee A and the delegation from Moldova and Transdniestria. We will break at about 11.45 am to allow the Committee and the delegation to lunch together. From approximately 12.45, in the Chamber, a presentation will be made by some of the visiting delegation to the Committee. Other Members will be very welcome to observe. We will have simultaneous translation, and headsets are available.

This is an important delegation. Lord Hylton is the Chairman, and the Ambassadors of the United States and Russia are members. There are some similarities between the situation in Ireland and that in Moldova and Transdniestria, and it is worth remembering that our own Farset group is at the back of this peace-making effort.

Mr Nesbitt: It is unfortunate that the entire Forum is not meeting with this delegation from Moldova, which you, Mr Chairman, rightly describe as important. There are important lessons to be learnt, not just by the Forum but also by the Northern Ireland community and other divided societies, about the requirements for stability. Does the

observer status of non-Committee members at this meeting preclude their asking questions? If it does, could a means be found of allowing them to do so?

The Chairman: It might be difficult, though we could think about it. You can blame me for being over-cautious in not wanting to turn a whole sitting of the Forum over to the delegation. If we had the decision to make again we might think otherwise. We will have the opportunity today to hear from these people, but it would hardly be practical for all Members to ask questions.

Mr Dodds: As a member of the Committee — I do not see the Chairman or the Deputy Chairman in the Chamber — and as one who took part in the very useful exchange on Wednesday last, I strongly sympathize with Mr Nesbitt's point. There may be a technical or logistical problem, but if that can be overcome the members of Standing Committee A — I am sure I speak for all of them — would be more than delighted to facilitate as many Forum Members as possible.

The Chairman: We will think about this. Maybe it can be done.

QUANGOS: CONSULTATION PAPER

Motion made and Question proposed:

This Forum takes note of the Consultation Paper 'Opening up Quangos'. — [*The Chairman*]

Mr Foster: I have nothing against the individuals who are chosen to serve on quangos. I do not cast any doubt upon their integrity, their responsibility and their willingness to serve the community with dedication and sincerity. It is the system that I dislike and oppose because of its selectivity, its lack of democracy and its uncontrolled power. In my opinion, the power needs to be harnessed.

The document talks about opening up quangos — quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations, or non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs). These bodies operate at arm's length from Ministers. I understand "quasi" to mean "to a certain extent, but not really". A degree of falsity is suggested from the beginning.

The numbers quoted in the booklet seem to be excessive: 309 NDPBs, 674 advisory bodies, 75 tribunals and 136 boards of visitors. I am not sure if these figures include Northern Ireland, if they are for the United Kingdom as a whole. We have many bodies here: health-care trusts, education boards, the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, the Police Authority, the Fire Authority and the executive members of health boards — a plethora of agencies, all selected rather than elected, and maybe by class too.

I dislike such stratification, whether on the basis of class, social standing or anything else. Yet I accept that there are situations where some people are more appropriate than others. However, I must emphasize that, as an elected representative, I am opposed to quangos. In my opinion, they are a negation of democracy. Nowadays, when we so much

want to be democratic, yet are almost static, such bodies are a short circuit to influence. Power, of course, is what it is all about.

The imposition of quangos discourages the most able from putting their names forward for election. Democracy, they say, is that sort of society where, no matter what his political classification, every person knows that he has a chance. With quangos, you do not have a chance; it is more like a lottery than a selection process.

The system of democracy was born of man's capacity for justice. But man's inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary, which is why I fear that it could be stifled — indeed, stilled — by quangos. Elected representatives are accountable to the electorate. Quangos are unelected and unaccountable. They are, as is stated in this document, secretive. There are question marks all over them. Of course, some of the people who serve on quangos will definitely not rock the boat. They are open to patronage, up to a point. They say they are autonomous — self-government with all powers and rights. Is that acceptable in an alleged democracy?

With their great power, quangos spend billions of pounds each year. The paper states that the 1995-96 figure was £18 billion — almost 6% of Government expenditure. And their power — power, I emphasize — is growing. Recently, partnership boards have sprung up in the province. In spite of the fact that elected members make up a third of these bodies, I consider them just another type of quango, which, if not harnessed, will become more important than district, borough or city councils. Let me not be misunderstood: I am not against co-operation with community groups or agencies — that is very important — but I am opposed to the relegation of elected representatives and the promotion of non-elected people.

The document states that quangos bring a large number of ordinary people into public life. I do not dispute that, but I am concerned that they are used by some as a short circuit into public life, maybe by way of a nod or a wink. We all have a role to play in society, but I am convinced that the role of elected representatives is being relegated to a level which is inconsistent with proper democracy.

Whatever merit quangos have, there are far too many of them, hence the reference to their being wound up where possible. I wholeheartedly agree that those which are entirely unnecessary should go. Perhaps some are necessary, but such bodies have become too numerous and too powerful. There is the question of whether quangos are cost-effective. I do not know. Anyway, do we really need them?

These bodies are not good for society. They are not accountable to those they are supposed to serve. The document asks whether some of them should be abolished. I say "Yes." Their role should be transferred to local authorities to redress the long-standing democratic deficit here.

If some people do have to be appointed, let the appointments be made on the basis of merit alone. Suitability for the role in question should be the only criterion. I strongly disagree with quotas or percentages, which are artificial and superficial.

I am concerned about the power of these bodies. Power is the big issue here. It can be dangerous if those holding it are selected, not elected and therefore not really accountable to the community. That point must be made over and over again. Power, they say, breeds isolation, and isolation leads to the capricious use of power. This, in turn, breaks down the normal channels of communication between a leader and his people. Ultimately, this means deterioration and reduced capacity to sustain unity in society. In fact, there is great resentment because of it.

Power may be compared to a great river: while kept within its bounds it is both beautiful and useful, but when it overflows its banks it is too impetuous to be stemmed. It bears down on all before it and can bring destruction and desolation. Power undirected or uncontrolled by high purpose spells calamity, and high purpose by itself is utterly useless if the power to put it into effect is unharnessed.

10.15 am

Members will have gathered that quangos are not my flavour of the month. We should beware of the person who is given such power. I say "Reduce quangos and give us real democracy now."

Mr Dodds: This is a very appropriate subject for debate in the Forum. I welcome the opportunity to have a look at the consultation paper 'Opening up Quangos' — a national document but one of particular importance to Northern Ireland given the plethora of quangos here.

I agree with many of the points that Mr Foster made in his opening remarks. I shall develop some of those and perhaps go into more detail, but first I want to mention an important aspect which Mr Foster did not have time to raise — the role of the Dublin Government and its input into the composition and function of quangos in Northern Ireland. This role makes the quango situation here far worse than that in the rest of the United Kingdom. We have all the disadvantages that apply there but also the problem of another Government making recommendations about appointments and nominations. We are not told who the people are or what they are supposed to do.

The 'Belfast Telegraph' ran an interesting series on this subject. On 10 December 1996 Martina Purdy related a true story:

"Some time ago a woman was appointed to sit on a quango which dispenses millions of pounds of taxpayers' money. A fellow board member recalls meeting her for the first time. How, he asked, had she come to be appointed? Did she work in the field? Did she represent a group which did? Did she have any interest in the field? The answer was no, no, no. Then how, he asked, did she get the post? She replied 'I was at a dinner one night with the Minister, we got talking and he suggested it.'"

I imagine that the Minister in question may have been from the Irish Republic, given the recent leaks about conversations with certain members of the SDLP from the Mid-Ulster area — Mrs Brid Rodgers had particular cause for complaint. But the real purpose of the meeting between the emissary from the Irish Republic and Mrs Rodgers was to discuss the issue of vacancies on a number of public bodies. I can imagine a meeting such as this taking place

between Ministers and, for instance, members of the Alliance Party — they have certainly done very well out of quangos.

Mr Neeson: Rubbish.

Mr Dodds: Mr Neeson should not get too excited. He is very defensive about this issue. And he has every right to be.

The other issue that I want to deal with is one that Mr Foster quite rightly mentioned — the number of quangos in the United Kingdom as a whole. In Northern Ireland there are at least 76 executive bodies, 16 tribunals and 34 advisory bodies. These cover a vast range of subjects; they control £1.5 billion of public expenditure; and together they have more than 2,500 members. *[Interruption]*

The Chairman: Someone has that indecent machine the mobile phone. Will the culprit please take it away.

Mr Dodds: I was saying that the number of people involved in quangos is over 2,500 and that these bodies account for £1.5 billion of public expenditure. That is 10 times the amount in the control of local authorities. We do not have even 600 councillors. That indicates the enormous impact that quangos have on public policy and administration. Given that Northern Ireland Ministers are not elected here, given the vast powers in the hands of civil servants and given the role of a foreign Government, you can see the extent to which the people of the province are excluded from action on a vast range of subjects — from determining expenditure, policy, and so on. Take hospitals, education, training, employment and investment. Policy on these matters is decided, to a large extent, by people who are not elected, unaccountable and appointed by rather dubious means.

Some reforms have been made. The Nolan recommendations have been implemented to some extent, and I know that the Government are proposing that there should be further implementation of other aspects of that report. They may go even further in some respects. But the reality is that tinkering with the system in Northern Ireland is not going to deal with the issue; there has to be root-and-branch reform. That is why we believe that instead of bringing forward a consultation paper called 'Opening up Quangos', there should be one called 'Closing down Quangos'. Let us restore a little bit of democracy and accountability to the people of Northern Ireland where deciding public policy is concerned.

In this document, Ministers talk of a lack of openness in appointments to boards — they admit that — and in the conduct of their business. They admit that they should keep only those that are really necessary and that those which remain must be more open, accountable and effective. The problems with quangos have already been dealt with, to some extent, by Mr Foster. One of the main problems is that they are not accountable. We have only to look at some recent examples to see what happens when a large degree of responsibility is given to some of these bodies. Look at what happened with Positively Belfast. Look at what has happened to the efficiency and effectiveness of some of the education and library boards and some of the health and social services boards.

Quangos are unelected. Indeed, many of the people who serve on them are unelectable. They would not be chosen to decide policy if they had to submit themselves to the electorate. The secrecy of these bodies is another problem. In many cases they do not publish the agendas or minutes of their meetings. We do not know how and why decisions are made. Often we do not know who makes the decisions.

We are told that ultimately quangos are accountable to Parliament. The reality is that it is impossible for all this vast range of bodies to be properly scrutinized.

Of course, the public are denied access to information or to meetings. In Northern Ireland the already small input from elected representatives is being steadily eroded. Take the examples of the health and social services boards and the Fire Authority, where the number of elected representatives has been steadily reduced. Indeed, there are now no elected members of the health boards. Such people tended to ask awkward questions like "Why can we not have decent hospital provision in our area?" and "Why are you removing essential services from our area?" Those are the sorts of questions that bureaucrats and civil servants do not want to be bothered with when they are doing their accounts at the end of the year, so the elected representatives had to be got rid of — local accountability had to be removed — and in their place were appointed the yes-men and the yes-women acceptable to the Northern Ireland Office.

In Northern Ireland the purveyors of patronage, the distributors of Government largesse, have been very influential since the abolition of local democratically elected institutions, and we see the mess that has been created as a result of devolving so many powers to people who are neither known, recognized nor accountable to the people.

Look at the Police Authority for Northern Ireland, for instance. There are at least five Ulster Unionists on that authority, but not one member of the Democratic Unionist Party. During yesterday's meeting of the Select Committee my Colleague Mr Robinson raised this matter with the Chairman of the Police Authority, who admitted that, despite the ambiguity and the denials of the Secretary of State, it is indeed her responsibility to make decisions about these appointments.

The list of appointments to the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, dated 7 November 1997, is interesting. It should be remembered that this comes after all the talk about Nolan and public advertisements. Among the new appointees there are at least three prominent members of the Alliance Party. Mrs Bell, for instance, is one of the privileged few. Mrs Clark-Glass, that well known European candidate for the Alliance Party, is there too, as is Mr Crozier, whose claim to fame, apart from getting £250 for every meeting of the Planning Service, is that he was an Alliance Party candidate at the 1996 Forum and 1997 Westminster elections. Of course, his real qualification is that he failed to get elected to either. If he had been elected, he would have been out altogether. He would have been totally unsuitable. The way to get ahead in quangos is to join the Alliance Party and fail to get elected to anything. Lord Alderdice has made a lifelong career of that.

Then, of course, we have the Parades Commission, the latest quango to be set up. Among the luminaries on it is a vice-chairman of the SDLP in Mr Hume's constituency. And

another person known for his bias against Loyalist and Orange parades has been appointed. Where are the openness, transparency and accountability there?

Also, there are many people holding more than one post. We have people who are collecting positions on quangos. The new vice-chairman of the aforementioned Probation Board also happens to be the chairman of Laganside, at a substantial remuneration. We have other favourites of the Government who are on so many quangos and hold so many appointments that they are only able to devote three days a week to their real jobs. It is a terrible pity they have to sacrifice so much.

Finally, I want to deal with the input of the Irish Republic into the composition and role of quangos in Northern Ireland. One of the main provisions of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which we debated last week, is that it gives the Dublin Government the right to nominate people for public bodies here. The document 'Guidance in Public Appointments in Northern Ireland', which was published by the Northern Ireland Office, sets out the precise rules and procedures which have to be followed, and the emissary from Dublin whom I mentioned earlier was following them when she met with Mrs Rodgers in Upper Bann recently. Details of all politically sensitive posts, of those carrying a salary of more than £5,000 and of those with a salary of up to £5,000 that have to be approved by a Minister are sent to the Anglo-Irish secretariat at Maryfield.

10.30 am

The Irish Government tout for nominees and put them forward, and the Northern Ireland Office is under a duty to consider them for appointment. We are not told who the nominees are. Questions have been asked, but no replies have been forthcoming. However, we do know that up until the end of 1996, at least 284 such people had been nominated by the Dublin Government. At least 55 of these were appointed to public bodies in Northern Ireland — a part of the United Kingdom — and they hold at least 80 posts (some having two or three positions).

In the same guidelines we are told about the need for openness, transparency and accountability, yet we are not given the names of the people who represent the Dublin Government. I have no doubt that they are sitting on the Fair Employment Commission, the Police Authority, the Independent Commission for Police Complaints, the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, the Parades Commission and the Industrial Development Board. Let us have their names. What have the Government got to hide? We have a right to know.

This is a crucial issue. The people of Northern Ireland have an absolute right to the ultimate say with regard to decisions on all these matters. And one thing about which we are equally certain is that the Dublin Government have no right whatsoever to a say.

Standing Committee A intends to look further at this important question, and I hope that the Forum will debate it again and at greater length.

Mr Neeson: I should inform Members, particularly those in the DUP, that it was my suggestion at the Business Committee that this important report be debated. It deals with an

issue that needs to be discussed openly and publicly. Mr Dodds referred to articles in the 'Belfast Telegraph'. I contributed to those articles. It was an important issue then, and it is an important issue now. I suggest that Mr Dodds get a full list of all the quangos in Northern Ireland because that would explode the myth in the DUP that there is a preference for Alliance members. However, I do agree with what the Member said about the lack of DUP members.

Mr Dodds talked about the lack of DUP members on the Police Authority. My understanding is that a person from his party who had already served two terms — the maximum service — went for a third, thus creating the problem.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: Does the Member accept that an Ulster Unionist Member of the Forum has served more than two terms? Five members of my party were shortlisted and passed all the interviews but were deliberately passed over by the Secretary of State. It was deliberate exclusion.

Mr Neeson: That person from the Ulster Unionist Party has not served two full terms. I am concerned if members from the DUP have been passed over, but I shall deal with the Police Authority later.

One of the reasons for this problem with regard to quangos in Northern Ireland is the democratic deficit. We have no Assembly to deal with many of the issues that quangos have taken on board. But I shall return to that issue too.

I am deeply concerned about a number of quangos here. For instance, councils are deeply involved in local economic development. Tourism is a major issue, yet the number of public representatives on the Northern Ireland Tourist Board is disgraceful. Mr Dodds referred to the fact that public representatives have been excluded altogether from the health boards. Would we have had all the hospital closures around the province without the unelected yes-men and yes-women, who took it upon themselves undemocratically to close many local and community facilities. There is an accountability problem.

Mr Nesbitt: Does Mr Neeson agree that one of the reasons for the democratic deficit in Northern Ireland is that the way the province is treated is unique in western Europe? There will be no devolution for this part of the United Kingdom unless we agree to some form of executive structure involving the Government of the South of Ireland and bridging the border. No democrats elsewhere in Europe have ever been asked to do that.

Mr Neeson: I will deal with that later, but Mr Nesbitt must concede that Northern Ireland is a special case.

It is easy to castigate and undermine people who have served on quangos such as the Police Authority. Well, I was on that body for two terms — six years — and I know that many of its members served at great risk to their lives. They put their heads above the parapet. People from the voluntary sector, from business and from agriculture were prepared to put their names into the public arena. Some elected members were not. Several gave their lives by putting themselves forward. Many people of the greatest integrity have served not only on the Police Authority but also on other quangos. It is wrong to tar everyone with the

same brush. Over the years people of courage have come forward to serve on very sensitive bodies.

Mr Empey: I do not doubt for a moment the validity of the point Mr Neeson is making, but the wider question is the exclusion from the Police Authority of any member of the Democratic Unionist Party. There was simply no case for that. The names put forward included those of people who are perfectly capable of doing the job. Indeed, the previous DUP representative had two distinguished terms. The minute the announcements were made I brought the matter to the attention of the Chair, as did my colleague and other members. There was just no reason for the exclusion..

Mr Neeson: Mr Empey is repeating what I have said: that there was no excuse whatsoever.

But change is taking place. There is a greater openness on the part of the Police Authority. All quango meetings should be open to the public. Agendas and minutes should be published, and proceedings should be reported by the media. These are important issues. I believe that we are now making progress. The Nolan report has had an impact in that people now have to apply for membership of quangos. That is also an important step forward.

Devolution would not necessarily mean the end of all quangos. The Alliance Party certainly wants to see a great reduction in the number of such bodies in all parts of the United Kingdom. It believes very strongly that there would be a case for establishing a Department of Justice as part of a system of devolution. That would not necessarily mean the end of the Police Authority. I would like to see more public representatives on that body. But change is coming, and we should welcome it. The Labour Government, who, unlike the Conservatives, have a substantial majority in the House of Commons, will not have to depend on other parties to keep them in power. I hope that they will therefore bring about the change that is necessary.

I say to the DUP in particular that if we really want to end the "quangoland" in Northern Ireland we must all accept responsibility. Change can come about only if all of us get involved in meaningful dialogue to try to reach a settlement. Devolution is coming to Scotland and Wales, and it will come to parts of England. It is important that Northern Ireland too should have devolved government. But that will not happen if the parties do not get round the table and put forward constructive proposals for an honourable and just settlement. That would deal with many of the problems that we have been debating today.

Mr Casey: The Labour Party too is concerned about quangos and about how people are appointed to them. We are opposed to a system that appears to make appointments largely on a grace-and-favour basis, and some instances of this, which I am not going to reiterate, have been given by Members from the Democratic Unionist Party. It seems that some faceless persons are consulted and have quite a say about the suitability of individuals for membership of these quangos. It is regrettable that any individual or group should be given such power on a grace-and-favour basis. No matter who grants it, it is totally undemocratic.

Representation has been made on behalf of district-council nominees for positions on other quangos. At times this has been done on the basis of political grace and favour. Entirely suitable people have been rejected because they belong to the “wrong” political party. While pointing the finger at individuals and at other Governments, politicians should think about their own attitudes. I could give Members instances of where this has happened on district councils, but I am not here to indulge in recrimination, although I will say that the political parties are not entirely blameless.

Blanket condemnation would be a great injustice to many individuals who serve on these bodies. There are members who act in good faith, who are not there on a grace-and-favour basis but because they want to serve the community. In the past, political parties could nominate people, but, as Mr Neeson has said, a Nolan recommendation is that vacancies on certain bodies will have to be advertised. That will go a small way towards rectifying some faults.

10.45 am

Rev Trevor Kirkland: No amount of tinkering with the system will address the fundamental issue. Does the Member accept that the best solution is not to tinker with it — that would only entrench it — but to abolish it?

Mr Casey: I will come to that.

Secondly, we are very concerned about the way in which some quangos discharge their functions. In fact, I do not know whether they discharge their functions at all. I am thinking in particular of the health and social services trusts. Since these bodies were set up, there has been a marked deterioration in services. This has created a very serious situation. These groups of people seem to accept the dictates of the Government with regard to running down services. If this continues we will soon have no personal social services. Then some acute hospitals may start making noises to the effect that they can deal only with accidents and emergencies. Very serious questions must be asked about the functions of these bodies.

Another phenomenon is the recent emergence of the Next Steps Agencies by which various Government Departments have hived off certain functions to what can only be described as another type of quango. I do not even know whether people are appointed to these quangos or not or whether it is just left to staff within the Government Departments to run them.

We are talking about the democratic deficit, and right now we have a wonderful opportunity to create a local form of government which would do away with the need for quangos. Northern Ireland could be run by an Assembly, and it is sad that we are failing to grasp this opportunity with open arms. We can gripe all we want about systems of government and quangos, but if we are not prepared to take the opportunity to change all this, people will justifiably gripe at politicians — you have only to read the report.

There is always a question mark over anything that is quasi. According to the document, quangos are unelected, unaccountable and secretive. The number and power of quangos keep growing. Quangos are unresponsive and appointments to them are unfair and

secret. You do not have to be an expert to work up a resistance to the idea of quangos, yet the document seems to attempt to justify quangos to some extent. The document highlights the position, but I would like to impress on Members the need for local governance. That would be better than being governed from a long distance.

Several Members: Hear, hear.

Mr Casey: If Members are not prepared to take the opportunity to deal with the issue, there is not much point in their saying "Hear, hear" — and I hope we will have a "Hear, hear" to that.

Ms McWilliams: This is a useful debate, and it is appropriate to discuss this matter.

There is a favourite Northern Ireland pastime known as "quango-bashing", but there are questions that need to be asked. What is worth preserving? What needs to be reformed? And what should be eliminated altogether? Part of the problem revolves around the issue of values. Do quangos actually foster civic participation? Do they make good use of expertise in society, or are they undemocratic? Are they unrepresentative? Do they encourage patronage, indeed, to some extent, corruption? Is their relative autonomy a matter of prudent, hands-off management and protection from the winds of partisanship which Northern Ireland knows all about? Or is it an opportunity for political and financial unaccountability and an opportunity to influence some kind of peddling? Those are the kinds of questions that ought to be addressed by parties making responses to this consultation document.

There is no magic formula that solves all the problems with democracy that Northern Ireland is facing. Should that democracy simply be based on electoral representation or can we build on the wonderful civic society that we have? I have said often in the Forum that we have one of the most buoyant civic societies anywhere in Europe. We have over 300 very vibrant women's organizations working day and daily across the divide. We have hundreds of unpaid volunteers who give up their time to work in voluntary organizations, so we should never knock that form of civic participation. But how can we build on it? How can we create the potential leadership that comes from that civic participation?

For me, the questions surrounding quangos are as much about values as about the structures. And the values that I would like to see addressed are the values of equality, inclusion, pluralism, representativeness, accountability, transparency, subsidiarity and efficiency — all to bring power as close to the people as possible. These values should be nurtured in Northern Ireland regardless of the structure of any organization and regardless of any division between elected bodies and the quangos themselves. Indeed, those values should also underpin elected bodies, and it was because they did not underpin elected bodies that we were faced with the problems that we had in Northern Ireland. We too, like other Members, look forward to the time when people have control over local affairs, and our negotiations are about addressing that very issue.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: I appreciate the point Ms McWilliams is making about values, but does she share my dismay that the current system is valueless, non-accountable and staffed by very highly-paid, non-accountable bureaucrats? I am thinking in particular of a further appointment just this week for a Mr Hopkins who already receives remuneration of

approximately £23,000 from one quango, £18,000 from another and £5,000 from another. This latest appointment will earn him a further £7,000. He earns considerably more for doing four days' work per month than any Member of this body or Member of Parliament could ever dream of.

Ms McWilliams: Remuneration is a serious issue. We also need to address seriously the multiple-jobbing that goes on in quangos. I, too, checked some of the incomes that chairpersons of quangos are receiving, and one of the highest figures was £25,000 — and many of the people working for these organizations are not even getting a minimum wage.

These are very serious issues that need to be addressed and, as Mr Paisley pointed out, the same individuals are sitting on other quangos. I understand that the Northern Ireland Tourist Board offers some of the most highly remunerative posts. For me — and I will come to this later — it is a matter of who gets this money and who does not. This is also relevant to the unemployed because there are many quangos in which there is no remuneration — people serve out of a sense of civic duty.

I am not suggesting that there should be no remuneration because if you are going to get very highly qualified people to chair these bodies and it is going to take up their time — they may be self-employed — they are going to have to be remunerated. Some may be employees of other organizations, which will not release them unless the organization is financially compensated. That is a real issue, but we have not addressed the question which arises when some of these posts become salaries in themselves and actually replace full-time, paid jobs.

Let me return to the unemployed. Can they sit on quangos without that being taken into consideration with regard to their availability for work? This is another important question that has a bearing on inclusiveness.

Mr Paisley made a point about accountability. The Northern Ireland Office say that 86% of their public bodies publish annual accounts. I want to know about the other 14% that do not. But more importantly, only 58% have annual reports. In the organization that I work in, and, indeed, in any other organization the publication of an annual report is a priority. In it you say what you have done in the past year for purposes of transparency and, what is even more important, for accountability.

There is also the issue of representativeness, which Members have pointed out. We are pleased that the Secretary of State has, in her memorandum to the consultation paper, drawn attention to the need to attract more applications from under-represented groups such as women and young people. In Northern Ireland we constantly try to ensure a fair representation of the two communities. However, there are many people in this society who would like to be represented, but not because they come from one of those two communities. Indeed, the policy appraisal and fair treatment guidelines suggest that we should not just look at religion but also at race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability. If we are to create a democracy that is truly inclusive, there are other issues to be considered than just the Catholic/Protestant one.

Like other Members, I believe that we should have names published, and not just because we want to know who got the jobs. Some have almost become full-time jobs, and if applicants were rejected we want to know who they were. When you are giving out money, it is always important to publish the names of those who did not get that money as well as those who did. That is what true accountability is about.

The regular membership audit is useful, but a chill factor has been created in public appointments. The Central Appointments Unit has a database, but we do not know to what extent it is used. Many people, particularly women, have been hesitant to put their names forward for appointment, so a more proactive means needed to be found. One of the ways they did this was to produce a nomination form but that form is very off-putting. I have asked about any monitoring or evaluation that has been carried out.

This system of self-nomination is a result of newspaper advertisements which allow people to nominate themselves to boards. They fill in these forms and are interviewed. The forms are particularly off-putting to people who feel that they may not make it all the way through an interview. For example, women who have taken time out of the labour market to raise children may feel that they have little to offer when they may have a great deal of expertise but do not want to fill in that form because they cannot see themselves being attached to any particular box on it. It is a start, but we have to make it much more consumer-friendly.

From the evaluations that have come in — and they have not been statistically based — it seems that even fewer women are coming forward now than there were under the previous system. And that poses an interesting question: does this formalization of the process create a chill-factor that was not there before? We welcome the new system, although there is a need for a great deal of improvement, and since that is the case, we need to address it again. However, it is much better than the old system of, as some have suggested, the tap on the shoulder.

11.00 am

Public bodies are also an important source of influence. They are a training-ground for public office and, in the long run, it would be good to see those people who have engaged in civic representation being encouraged to go on into electoral politics. I would like to see a situation in Northern Ireland where many people were jumping up to become members of political parties, no matter what political party, simply because they were so enthused by politics, but that is not the case. Maybe one day it will be, but by putting themselves forward for consideration to sit on particular bodies, people may find that that is one way in which they can engage in some form of civic representation.

A freedom of information act would help, but quangos can be open without that, and the public would not feel that they have to seek constantly some kind of legislation, such as a freedom of information act, to find out exactly what is going on. I made the point earlier about publishing reports that state exactly what is being done.

Timetables for tasks should also be published and, indeed, organizations should be wound up if they have come to the end of their days. A written bill of rights — and this

seems to be something that all parties are agreed on — would also help as, indeed, would a code of conduct.

We do have serious problems in addressing this either/or issue. As long as we do not end up with a system which consists entirely of elected bodies, or quangos, we have to look at ways of improving what we have at present. One of the things that we should look at — and I have constantly made this point about representation — is who gets to be the chairpersons of these organizations. It is interesting that only 27 out of 144 bodies are currently chaired by women and, of course, these positions are the ones that are financially remunerated — people who serve as ordinary members are often not remunerated. There has been a very slow rate of improvement in the number of women appointed to quangos in the last year — they accounted for only 1.2% of new appointments.

Targets are important. I am encouraged that Northern Ireland has set itself a target of 40% of gender representation as a minimum. That, of course, will take us a long way from where we were 20 years ago when the figure was only 10% and will also improve the current figure of 33%.

Tasks and targets are something we should be looking at. If we are going to create a new form of democracy, let us make it a shared project, and if it is to be a shared project, I ask that those who are not in the negotiations give some thought to the fact that a devolved administration and the way we run any such body is of such importance that they should return to the talks.

Mr Davis: According to this document people say that quangos are “unelected and unaccountable”. That is true. What are the other criticisms? “Quangos are secretive” — true. “The number and power of quangos keep growing” — true. “Quangos are unresponsive” — true. “Appointments are unfair” — true.

Chapter 2 is entitled “Quangos — Do we need them?” The answer is no. I have been a public representative for some 23 years. I am not a member of a quango, and it is with all due respect to those who do serve on them that I say that it really annoys me when those who are appointed take decisions to please the various Ministers. That is what it amounts to.

In her memorandum the Secretary of State says

“The proper and effective operation of quangos is all the more important because of the continued absence of a tier of regional Government in Northern Ireland. When agreed new local political institutions are established it will of course be a matter for them as to what structures and procedures they consider appropriate for such bodies.”

Ms McWilliams referred to quango-bashing, but since 1972 what has been happening is Unionist-bashing. Despite all the attempts by the Unionist family to try to get some kind of agreement, we have never had a response from the Nationalist SDLP. We see it here today: empty SDLP chairs, and their chairs were empty in the last Assembly too. Yet people from the minor parties, people like Mr Casey, from time to time, and Ms McWilliams, when she comes to the Forum, continue to bash the Unionists for not getting a settlement, when all the time it is the minority, Nationalist SDLP who have not played their part in bringing one about. It is time that that was addressed and, having read what the Secretary of State has to

say, it is time that she started to put some kind of pressure on the SDLP. We are all playing our part here for the betterment of the people of Northern Ireland, but the SDLP seem to pull all the strings and get all the responses.

I fully agree with Mr Dodds — and I have covered this before — that back in 1983, over 30 topics covering the whole ambit of Ulster life, including political quangos and everything else, were chosen by the British Government for discussion and negotiation with Dublin, and towards this end, every senior civil servant in London was commissioned to oversee the preparation of the British Government's negotiating position on all the topics.

As Mr Dodds rightly said — and this was made clear by Ms Rodgers in Portadown a few weeks ago — no appointment is made in Northern Ireland unless it has the OK from the Republic of Ireland's Government. Every Northern Ireland Department is affected by this process, and local civil servants at the highest level have been called upon to participate in it.

However, some of the items for negotiation are so sensitive that their details have been withheld from the civil servants in the Northern Ireland Departments, and it is quite possible that a lot of civil servants here do not even know what is going on.

Abraham Lincoln, in his inaugural address in 1861, said

"Whenever the people shall grow weary of the existing government" —

this can be said of our situation with the quangos —

"they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it."

But that principle does not apply in Northern Ireland, which is supposed to be a democracy. This is a complete and utter sham, and this is my honest opinion: there is no in between, you either support quangos or you do not sit on them. I am surprised at the Opposition wanting places on these quangos because your mind is made up on quangos — whether right or wrong, you have to take a stand. If the Minister wants to run the country by way of appointed quangos, let him go ahead, but no democratic politicians — this is my honest opinion, and I am speaking personally — should be shoring up any shams. We should not be shoring up any shams. If we believe in true democracy, we should not be helping the Minister to make these appointments.

Mr Dodds: I take it that the Member will be calling on the five members of his party who are on the Police Authority — a body on which there are no members of the DUP — or at least on some of them, to give way and allow somebody from the DUP to go on. I share a lot of the sentiments that Mr Davis has expressed, but the way to deal with these quangos is to close them down, not open them up. In the short term, however, before they do anything else, before there is devolved government, the Government could take steps to democratize these bodies by appointing more elected representatives — a majority of elected representatives — to each of them. That would be a very positive step to take before anything to do with talks, devolved government or anything, and surely that would meet Mr Davis's concern.

I agree with his long-term objective.

Mr Davis: In response to Mr Dodds I want to say that those who are appointed to the Police Authority or any other quango have, I assume, been nominated by district councils.
[Interruption]

I am talking about the public representatives, and that is entirely a matter for those district councils. Five years ago, there were 2,219 appointees to quangos, and they were responsible for billions, not millions, billions of pounds which even the district councils do not have.

It is time for the entire Unionist family to stop being blackmailed by the Nationalist SDLP — that is what it has come to. We cannot have proper institutions here because we are being held to ransom by the Nationalist SDLP, and the sooner the Unionist family and the Government face up to that fact, the sooner we will make progress.

Mr Poots: I might be thought to have developed a stutter if I were to pronounce “quangos” as if it contained five “u”s because they are quasi, undemocratic, unrepresentative, unaccountable, unelected and unresponsive autonomous non-governmental organizations. I want to mention one body, the Livestock Marketing Commission. Only one of its members is a farmer; in the past, only one of its members was a butcher. Here is a body that is responsible for the distribution of meat, and yet the people who are producing it, cutting it up and who know about it are not there. There are accountants, solicitors and all sorts of business people, but none of those who actually know the job.

The same applies to the fishing industry and many other industries here. There is the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights, a body which is completely unrepresentative of the views of the people of Northern Ireland and one which, over the years, has produced report after report which are contrary to those views. They are yes-men and nodding dogs.

Quangos have greater responsibility, greater powers and greater budgets than the local councils. Local councillors have to work very hard, and they are at the people’s beck and call at all hours of the day and night. I was called to deal with a constituency problem at 11.30 the other Saturday night. I do not think that happens to too many quango members.

Councillors are currently fighting for extra money. Many of them are only earning £700 or £800 a year for the work they do, and that is probably for attending meetings. Let us look at the earnings of some of these people on quangos. This document dates from 1996 so it may be slightly out of date, but it is, nonetheless, relevant. Dr Lucinda Blakiston-Houston, chairperson of the Northern Ireland Blood Transfusion Service for three years, had an annual entitlement of around £6,000. Her membership of the Lagside Corporation during the period 1992-98 attracted an annual salary of £7,500, and as a non-executive director of the Ulster, North Down and Ards Hospitals Trust she has an annual entitlement of £5,000. So here is a lady getting £18,500 for doing three or four days’ work in a month.

Sir Kenneth Bloomfield, as a non-executive director of the Green Park Healthcare Trust, has an annual entitlement of £5,000. As chairman of the Northern Ireland Higher

Education Council in 1993, he received £8,700. He was a member of the Law Reform Advisory Committee from 1992 to 1997 and received £2,300 annually. As a governor of the BBC in Northern Ireland he has a salary of about £16,000, and, of course, he was recently appointed to look after the memorial to the victims. It is estimated that for doing that he will get a salary of around £70,000 a year.

We are told that a lot of these people are experts in certain fields. One of them — a Mr Robert Hanna — is an expert in a whole lot of fields. He was chairman of the Northern Health and Social Services Board and got £14,835 for that. Then he was chairman of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside, and he got £7,000 for that. He was also deputy chairman of the same body. He has been with the Northern Ireland Economic Council, and he was a planning appeals commissioner. So here is a man who is an expert in four different fields. I wonder if, over the years, these people are simply appointed to one quango after another when their term of office runs out. Really, they are just yes-men and nodding dogs.

11.15 am

We talk about openness and accountability. Paragraph 8 of chapter 3 states

“The Government’s proposals for devolution in Scotland and Wales, for an elected authority for London and to extend democratic accountability in England’s regions will help to bring regional quangos under the proper level of scrutiny that a modern democracy demands. The Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament will have their own wide-ranging reform powers in respect of many of the NDPBs and health bodies for which they will become directly responsible. The new bodies will, in due course, establish their own arrangements to bring their NDPBs to account, set their strategic direction and subject their operations to public scrutiny by holding hearings, seeing papers and persons, and considering reports.”

That is grand. But what about Northern Ireland? Northern Ireland is the king of quangoland; there are more quangos here than there are in England, Scotland or Wales, yet this document makes no reference to Northern Ireland.

Mr Dodds said at the start of his speech that rather than opening up quangos, we should be closing them down. We have far too many quangos here. Far too many people are being paid large salaries for precious few hours’ work. We need to have more openness and more accountability. Council meetings are held in public, and the minutes of those meetings are given to the press. Everybody sees what is going on in our local councils, but with the quangos no one knows what is going on. I recently received a letter from the Southern Health and Social Services Board which said that some of their buildings could not fly the national flag on official days because they were not civic buildings, even though they were being used by the general public. This is just the sort of thing that goes on in quangos. I would like to see quangos closed down and an accountable form of democracy restored to Northern Ireland.

Mr Donaldson: I rise to endorse my Colleagues’ criticism of quangos.

While I welcome the publication of the Government’s consultation document on opening up quangos, we must go, as other Members have said, much deeper and wider than that. We must look at the fundamental basis of the Administration of Northern Ireland, and not just at how it can be made more open, but at how it can be radically reformed to make it

much more accountable to the electorate. This lack of accountability is the greatest deficit of all — it has become known as the democratic deficit. The electorate's representatives have an extremely limited role to play in the Administration of Northern Ireland. As we know, in local government we have far fewer powers here than councils have elsewhere in the United Kingdom. That is something which this Government must address. And I do not see why addressing the issue of local government is being deferred because of the talks at Stormont.

This issue must be addressed regardless of the political situation here because it is about democratic accountability. Rather than simply concentrate on quangos, the Government must look at a much wider ambit and include a reform of local government to provide greater powers for the district councils and, thus, a greater degree of democratic accountability here. It is unacceptable that these quangos are responsible for spending such a huge amount of public money in Northern Ireland; almost one third of public expenditure in local government is handled by quangos, and that is just not satisfactory.

Another aspect that we need to look at is the fact that these people are, in the main, unelected. Although councils are represented on some bodies, the trend, over the last few years, has been to reduce their representation. That has to be a matter of regret, and if, for example, we look at the manner in which the last Government reformed the health boards we can see that that was a retrograde step for the Health Service. The health and social services councils were created to represent the local community, take on board their views and voice their concerns, and they have failed miserably to do that.

That brings me to another concern about quangos — Mr Dodds referred to this earlier — and that is the degree of nepotism there is. It is clearly unacceptable to have, for example, a situation where a husband is the chairman of a health and social services trust and his wife is in the chair of the health and social services council that is the public watchdog over that trust. That is clearly unacceptable in a democratic society, and something that needs to be addressed.

There is also the question of representation, and I agree that the DUP, for example, are greatly under-represented on many of these bodies. That matter needs to be addressed in the short term while we address the wider issues. There are parties that, in spite of their small electoral strength, are grossly over-represented. For example, three leading Alliance Party members were recently appointed to the Probation Board for Northern Ireland without a single prominent Unionist also being appointed, and that is clearly unacceptable too.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: I am glad the Member raised the point about these unaccountable and unelectable leeches in our community. In particular, I think of Mrs Mary Clark-Glass, who has made an excellent self-perpetuating career out of sitting on such bodies. She has moved from the Equal Opportunities Commission to the Fair Employment Commission to the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights and now to the Probation Board. She really has a talent for getting her big nose into the trough, hasn't she?

Mr Donaldson: The Alliance Party's over-representation on quangos is grossly unfair. I am not against their having representation, but it must be at a fair level. One has to question why the Alliance Party are so grossly over-represented on these quangos. Why do the Government keep appointing the same people to them, the same old faces?

A Member: Are you able to give us the answer?

Mr Donaldson: We all know the answer — the political wing of the Northern Ireland Office.

Mr McCarthy: Perhaps they are more talented.

Mr Donaldson: That is wishful thinking.

This degree of nepotism must be addressed by the Government. If they are serious about opening these quangos up, they must look at the representation on a whole range of bodies which does not properly reflect the balance of the community in Northern Ireland.

Reference has already been made by my Friend Mr Davis to the role of the Anglo-Irish secretariat in the appointment of members to quangos. What other part of the United Kingdom would accept a foreign Government having a role in appointing people to its public bodies? Such a situation is clearly unacceptable. Twelve years on from the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, we make it clear that that, and indeed all aspects of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, is unacceptable to the vast majority of people here. The notion that these people in Maryfield can have more influence on appointments to public bodies than the political parties in Northern Ireland is quite clearly unacceptable in a democratic society.

We have heard much talk recently about confidence building. But the Government must address confidence-building issues for the whole community instead of just a train of concessions to the IRA. The Government could go a long way to building such confidence by opening up public appointments, restoring more powers to local government and scrapping many of these quangos. The granting of more powers to local government would go a long way towards confidence building.

Secondly, the closure of the Maryfield secretariat would bring a massive boost to building confidence in open government here, instead of the present, clearly unacceptable situation of people closeted in some bunker taking key decisions about our future, about public expenditure and about public appointments. So confidence building means more than just opening up; it requires the closure of the Maryfield secretariat and the introduction of proper democratic accountability for local-government and public expenditure.

The issue of quangos must be addressed as part of the search for a political settlement in Northern Ireland. But this is something that the Government must address regardless of the political situation. If we can have devolution in Scotland and Wales — and one of the main reasons the Government sought devolution for Wales was the growth of quangos there and the need to restore proper accountability — why can this part of the United Kingdom not have the same degree of accountable Government? That should not be dependent on the whim of any party or any section of the community; it is the right of the people here, as British citizens, and it is time that we were given those rights.

Mr Eric Smyth: We have heard a lot about these quangos, but what concerns me is the biggest quango of all — cross-border co-operation. In spite of being told by the Ulster

Unionist Leader that his party will not have anything to do with it, we have heard this morning that it is already happening. Dublin is interfering and telling the British Government whom they would like to see on these quangos. People are making decisions who have no right to do so because they do not represent the feelings of the people here.

If the Ulster Unionists firmly believe in what they have all been saying this morning they should pull out of the talks, bring them down and say to the Government "We want to negotiate on a level playing-field." These quangos must be quashed so that properly elected democratic parties can decide on what is best for Northern Ireland, as opposed to what Dublin or the British Government want. This is our future, not the British Government's. It is all right for them to make decisions since they do not have to answer to the people of Northern Ireland. For example, when we were fighting the education and library boards' cuts last year, all the faceless appointees voted in favour of the proposal to save money by scrapping the lollipopmen. Why? — because they did not have to answer to the public. They did not care about the feelings of parents for their children. It was all right for them to say "We will save £1.5 million in this way".

The only people who will have to face the public are elected representatives. The elected representatives who fought this case had to bring in a motion. We had to call special meetings to get it stopped, and it was only the pressure of the people outside that got it stopped. That is the type of thing that these people get up to — those who do not represent the people.

11.30 am

I agree that it should be done away with; it should not happen at all. But let me say this: if there are cross-border committees, I am sure that many politicians will break their necks to get on to them when the Government offer a salary of £20,000 or £30,000 a year. Some of them would sell their souls for 30 pieces of silver. Indeed, they are already doing it. Look at the quangos that some elected representatives are on — two, three, four or five of them. Some of them are earning over £20,000 a year on quangos. And they are appointed to quangos over the heads of the elected representatives. This is wrong, and if we were all honest and true to our convictions, we would demand that this be stopped. If there is going to be representation it should reflect all the parties and represent the people whom we represent. The present system is completely wrong. Look at the people who sit on these quangos, and you know whose pockets they are in — those of the Northern Ireland Office.

Mr Davis: Could Mr Eric Smyth tell us if a member of his party would accept a position on one of these quangos at £50,000 a year if he were offered it?

Mr Eric Smyth: That would depend on the position. I cannot answer for every individual party member; I can only answer for myself. I have never been offered such a position, but I would not accept one anyway because I want nothing to do with the quangos of the Northern Ireland Office. Nobody will pull my coat-tails. I am an individual. I am a party man, and I take instructions from my party, but I also have a conscience, and I would not sell my soul for 30 pieces of silver. I believe that all those who sell their principles and sell their nation out for 30 pieces of silver will be judged.

But people are beginning to see through this and are giving their answer. We saw this happening at the last election; some of the people who were involved in these quangos were not re-elected, and they were shocked, not just because they did not get elected but because they lost out on all their wee quangos. Look at all the money they lost. Some of them did so much turning around to see where they could fit in that they nearly had heart attacks. Some of them are here now. They were originally against the Forum; they were in favour of integration but now they are helping in the talks. Their principles have changed — they would do anything for a few pounds. I am completely opposed to them because I hate hypocrites.

It is wrong for people to use these positions. They do not speak for the people of Northern Ireland. Elected politicians are the only people who can do that. They would do a much better job than the faceless people who are currently sitting on quangos, and it is time the Government realized that.

The Chairman: Thank you, Mr Smyth. You were good enough to compress your remarks to five minutes, and I should be grateful if Mr Nesbitt were to copy your example and take five minutes rather than ten.

Mr Nesbitt: I had not intended to speak on this motion.

The Chairman: Your name is listed. If you do not want to speak, that is fine.

Mr Nesbitt: No, no. I said that I had not intended to speak, but the fact that three parties have said that the lack of democracy in Northern Ireland is due to the DUPs not participating and to Ulster Unionists not compromising and that if we would only do these things, we would have democracy in Northern Ireland and be rid of quangos prompted me to speak.

I regret that the Women's Coalition and the Labour Party are not in the Chamber. These parties referred to this important principle: unless or until the Governments apply the principles and practices that are applied elsewhere towards the resolution of the Northern Ireland conflict, we will not make progress. Let us look at one example. The Council of Europe has ratified a convention for the protection of minorities, which is to be introduced on 1 February 1998. The convention says

"Trans-frontier co-operation between local and regional authorities should take place without prejudice to the constitutional territorial integrity of the state."

The last part of that is not to be found anywhere in the framework document. The Council of Europe document also talks about the protection of national minorities and their right to freedom and adds

"within the rule of law, respecting the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of the state".

Those words are not to be found in the framework document. Article 21 of this convention talks about protecting national communities. It mentions all of the aspects of protection that we are looking for in Northern Ireland, and it adds

"But none of this is contrary to the fundamental principles of international law and, in particular, to the sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence of states."

We have heard much this morning about quangoland and about how appointees to such quangos get their positions. No one can dispute that there is, to a certain extent, political interference in these appointments, yet everywhere else the political independence of states is to be protected. It is not protected here.

We have representatives from Moldova with us today. That country is emerging from a period of great instability and has many problems, yet, believe it or not, it has more stability than we have in Northern Ireland. It is surrounded by countries that recognize its borders and are getting rid of border disputes. For example, Romania no longer lays claim to part of Ukraine, and the Russian Federation no longer lays claim to the Crimea, which is part of the Ukraine. The Moldovans themselves, I understand, no longer wish to be part of Romania, and that is part of the problem of that region.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: It must be remembered that in order to achieve those things, there was bloody revolution.

Mr Nesbitt: Political pragmatism is what is being used today. The Government wants to belong to the European Union and to NATO. Those two organizations have one fundamental principle: borders and the integrity of states are to be respected. Northern Ireland is being treated uniquely compared with other parts of Europe — the territorial integrity of the state is not protected.

Certain parties say that if only we would compromise, accommodate, and participate in the talks we would have devolution and the elimination of quangoland, but I refute that. We will not have devolution in Northern Ireland unless or until the Governments — both our Government and the Southern Government — apply the same principles and practices that apply elsewhere.

Mr Dodds: Two Governments?

Mr Nesbitt: No. I said "the Governments". One is the neighbouring Government, and the other is our Government. Does Mr Dodds wish me to clarify this —

The Chairman: No. I do not think he does.

Now I will call Mr Gibson. He will make all things clear to you.

Mr Gibson: I do not want to go over any of the ground that has been covered already. Words like "nepotism" and "unrepresentative" and phrases like "lack of clarity" and "lack of transparency" have all been used. There is no point in repeating them because they have already appeared in the cross-fire this morning.

The evidence from the last election suggests that the people of Northern Ireland — and they are the voters — are beginning to show their mistrust of democracy, which has been

bashed in Northern Ireland. The electorate can simply show disrespect in the first instance. But when democracy has been decried, bashed and battered as it has been in Northern Ireland, the electors stop voting and start to think differently.

Let us look at how we have arrived at this situation. We are almost at the point of reinventing the Star Chamber as we sit here today. It is, almost, a reflection on us as elected representatives that we are spending time discussing how this country is being governed by the non-elected. This is a denial of the very basic principles of democracy. It almost seems as if we have forgotten about Magna Carta, forgotten about all the great events of history that created democracy, about the efforts that were made to obtain citizenship and about the efforts that were made for the principle of one man, one vote. Yet those who have achieved those rights, those who rebelled on these very points continue to bash democracy.

The matter is very simple. If we want there to be a devolved Government in Northern Ireland, we do not need to have the charade at Castle Buildings. They did not have that in Scotland: they had legislation there. What you need is a referendum — let the people decide — then you can have your election.

Those are the people who sit down and decide on our future governance, so why keep talking about a quango system? If the quango system is held in such low esteem and regarded with such disrespect, why wait until the people of the country start to revolt against it? That is what happened in Moldova. That is what has happened in other countries, but why test the system to the point of destruction?

11.45 am

Surely it is time that the people of Northern Ireland put the pressure on in the right way. The Government, irrespective of which party is in power, cannot keep disregarding democracy. This is what quangos are all about. They are about governing and manipulating a doctrinaire system to suit the policy of the Government and defeat the will of the people. There is a contest here — is it democracy that works, or are we reverting to a system of indirect division?

Mr David Campbell: Before you put the Question, Mr Chairman, would the Forum agree to request from the Public Appointments Unit of the Northern Ireland Office a list of all bodies to which public appointments are made in Northern Ireland and a list of those individuals who serve on two or more such bodies, with the numbers of bodies on which they serve?

The Chairman: Everybody in the Chamber would have to agree to that.

Members indicated assent.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

This Forum takes note of the Consultation Paper 'Opening up Quangos'.

The Chairman: Mr Gary Ewing is the author of that document and of a letter to me. I shall send the transcript of today's debate to him.

DELEGATION FROM MOLDOVA AND TRANSDNIESTRIA

The Chairman: The Political Affairs Committee and the delegation from Moldova and Transdniestria will be lunching together in a separate room until approximately 12.45 pm. When they are about to start their discussion, an announcement will be made. Some headsets will be available at the door. Please try to get your lunch over and be available as soon as the meeting starts. In the meantime, I will see if it is possible for Forum Members to put questions to the group.

The meeting was suspended at 11.49 am and resumed at 2.29 pm.

“COMMUNITY ACTION” GROUPS

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: I beg to move the following motion:

This Forum expresses dismay at the recognition accorded by the Secretary of State to the so-called community action/residents' groups.

We call for an investigation and report into the make-up, character, activities, membership and agenda of these groups.

We further call on the Government to dismantle and stop all formal and informal contact with these groups and for the thorough exposure of the sinister and anti-British and anti-democratic activities.

I wish to draw Members' attention to the word “so-called” in the motion. There are very many genuine community and residents' associations and non-governmental organizations which operate widely across the entire community and are to be commended for their activities. This motion has nothing to do with those groups. Instead, I wish to deal with a number of very specific organizations and individuals who have polluted the very name “residents' association” and who are committed to a wholly destructive political, almost quasi-terrorist agenda.

2.30 pm

This motion seeks to expose those who are engaged in destroying this state, who take it upon themselves to use their every breathing moment to usurp authority and drive a political agenda that is against the express wishes of the entire community. They seek to create a dark inversion where fair is foul and foul is fair. Republican politics are shaped by three key ideas which can best be summarized by the letters “BSE” — blame, slander and effacement.

First, blame — they blame partition for causing the conflict in Ulster — they blame the British. They claim that if the British got out and there was no more partition, the conflict would be over. This, of course, is an inversion of reality. Partition was the result of division, not the cause. Britain cannot get out; the people are British.

The second key area is slander. With virtually complete success Nationalists and Republicans have focused attention on two ideas. One is that Northern Ireland is a failed entity, and the other is that there is widespread discrimination against the Nationalist community. As we all know, the truth is far removed from this simplistic slander. Northern Ireland has grown, expanded and survived, despite the most horrific terrorist campaign being waged against its people. The Government have foolishly sought to respond to the slander by conceding ground to the slanderers.

Third, effacement. Carried out by the IRA, effacement means terrorism and murder; carried out by the SDLP, it means a reduction of Unionism merely to a moral outlook. The so-called community and action groups are there to assist in driving this anti-Unionist agenda forward. They are the direct expression of terrorism by another means.

The arrival on the scene of these prominent groups has been deliberately choreographed to meet the tactical demands of the armed-struggle strategy. Before the first IRA hoax cease-fire these groups were unheard of, the reason being that some of their leaders were in gaol for IRA offences and some of them were actively engaged in what Francie Molloy would say they do best. Indeed, many of them were too busy either doing time or engaging in acts of terrorism to be involved in community work. Come the cease-fire, the tactics changed. IRA/Sinn Fein need to control their community. They do that by applying muscle, not only to their own community but also to the Government to ensure that they do not forget that the reason Sinn Fein/IRA are at the talks table is that the same muscle they use against their own community can also be used against the entire community in a horrific terrorist campaign.

I want to be very specific about these groups. We have witnessed their development in areas where the divided community interface. The activities of the action groups I have in mind have been designed to stir up communal tension by blaming, slandering and effacing the other community. The target of these community groups has been the marching season and anything associated with British culture, which, even through the darkest days of the troubles, remained largely unmolested.

This orchestrated campaign has been evident on the Ormeau Road, driven by a Mr Gerard Rice and his so-called Lower Ormeau Residents' Group. Gerard Rice is a convicted IRA terrorist. He demands that Protestants engage in negotiations with him or they will not get to walk along their traditional route. He has orchestrated a deliberate campaign to blockade the Ormeau Road illegally during the marching season. Then, when the inevitable happens and trouble breaks out, he has the audacity to blame everyone but himself and his so-called community group for the ensuing mayhem. I see that in the past weeks this group has also taken it upon itself to establish a "Brits out" political party. It is quite clearly a front for IRA/Sinn Fein.

In Portadown the campaign has been identical, and one of my party Colleagues will develop this theme with regard to the Garvaghy Road coalition. This group is under the leadership of a Mr Brendan McKenna who was sentenced to 14 years for IRA activities — although he served only six — for bombing Portadown, for firearms offences and for the deliberate and illegal imprisonment of another individual. This person, who attempted to destroy his own town, is now put about as the leader of a group that has targeted the Protestant community. It has stoked up communal tensions in order to keep the conflict going. The slander is happening apace. Everyone is to blame for the trouble. According to Mr McKenna the British Government, the Unionists, the Army and the RUC are all to blame. It is never the rioters, the petrol-bombers or the coalition which organizes the protests who are responsible for the violence and destruction that follow on our streets.

In Londonderry the pattern is identical. There, a Mr "Donna" MacNiallais — a strange name for a man — is fronting the Bogside Residents' Group. He has also got the cover of a Mr Mark Durkan of the SDLP, who is very quick to be pictured with him, and that keeps the flames of tension stoked in that city. MacNiallais is a current member of Sinn Féin/IRA, and he served a 16-year sentence for IRA activity.

Across Ulster this is being replicated by supporters of the blame-slander-and-effacement policy. In my constituency the tranquil village of Dunloy has been turned on its head by these very same people. There, a leading SDLP member — a Mr O'Kane — led a pitch invasion during a recent Gaelic Athletic Association match which resulted in an assault on the referee. Later he told the 'Sunday World' that he

"wanted to get a slap at the referee."

If that is the sort of person who leads campaigns and speaks on behalf of community groups, it is no wonder there is so little tolerance shown towards the Orange and Protestant community there.

In Dunloy a spurious coalition called the Dunloy Residents' Group has for three years prevented freedom of religious worship in a local church. By the deliberate and illegal blockading of the village, it has prevented a 100-year-old tradition from being celebrated. So intolerant has the Nationalist community been that Orangemen cannot even use their Orange hall for traditional purposes.

In Ballycastle, during the summer months, another such group came into operation, calling itself Concerned Residents, Ballycastle — or CRB. This is a very sinister development because there is no one front man associated with the group. It has never made a public statement or made itself identifiable so that people can see who is involved in it. In a sinister development this group organized attacks during the summer months. One woman remains partially-sighted after this organization organized a riot in the town during the last Black Saturday in August, and it organized a leaflet drop claiming to have the support of local residents for their activities. It has injected an atmosphere of fear, hatred and suspicion into that town which was not there previously.

Last week we witnessed just how low these groups are prepared to sink. The Bellaghy Residents' Group deliberately set itself the task of attacking the dignified

remembrance of the fallen of two world wars. I am glad to see that some things do remain sacred and that they were embarrassed enough to reduce that protest considerably. These residents' groups have not only organized anti-parades demonstrations, they are also behind the continuing economic boycott of many shops and villages across Northern Ireland.

The vile thing in all of this — and this is what our motion is intended to get at — is that the Government have, foolishly, encouraged and inflated the expectations of these groups by meeting with them and according them a place in the decision-making process. This motion expresses dismay at the recognition accorded to them by the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has been engaged in feeding a beast. That beast is now turning into a monster. It is receiving world-wide recognition, and the Government have encouraged it quite shamefully.

When the Secretary of State first arrived in Northern Ireland she visited these groups and threw her arms around them. When she first came to North Antrim, not only did she refuse to inform public representatives of her visit, but she made it a priority to meet with these groups. She has accorded them far more recognition and respect than they deserve. She has given them an inside track on Government policy. She has boosted their prestige by putting the Government's imprimatur on them, and they are fêted at special meetings. Yet, when the Government do not give in to every single demand they make, they are rewarded by rioting on the streets.

These groups must be investigated, they must be exposed and they must be shunned for what they are. The Government cannot appease them because they are unappeasable. The motion seeks to expose them for what they are. It calls for a thorough investigation of their membership, funding and activities so that we can make an informed judgement about their true nature. They have already been exposed in the mind of the Forum. When they had the opportunity to come here to give evidence to the Parades Committee, they refused because they had no case to make. They are trouble-makers.

Today we call on all who have contact with these groups, whether it be formal or informal, to cut that contact off. This is our country. We have to make a choice. Are we going to allow ourselves to be hijacked by those who engage in what is essentially paramilitary activity, or are we going to make it very clear that we will marginalize those groups, expose them and allow democracy to reign?

I look forward to the comments of other Members.

The Chairman: You said that you were not criticizing all groups.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: I emphasized "so-called".

The Chairman: Is that an omnibus description?

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: I have identified six groups — Bellaghy, Ballycastle, Bogside, Dunloy, Garvaghy and the lower Ormeau — but there are many others.

The Chairman: Is there any common word you could use?

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: I think that they are actually terrorist groups, but many people would not agree. I have talked about so-called community action/residents' groups because that is what they call themselves. I do not want to pollute the name of the very good, worthwhile and credible community groups who have been working for decades.

Mr Junkin: The motion expresses dismay at the recognition accorded by the Secretary of State to these so-called action groups, or concerned residents' groups. The recognition has been demonstrated by the current Secretary of State's personal quest for what she would call a transparent image — it is certainly not a translucent image that she has gained from it. When the Secretary of State was in Opposition, she told 120 of us in Garvagh one night about two years ago that she did not feel British and that, in fact, she never felt British. So in her publicly declared lack of feeling for the land that she lives in, moves in and has her being in, she has opted to forsake any British-coloured path in favour of a dark, Irish alleyway.

For nearly 60% of my life Irish Republicans have blown up and shot British citizens all over the United Kingdom but especially in Northern Ireland. Those brave people in the British Army and our own kith and kin in the police and the Ulster Defence Regiment seem to be an embarrassment to the same Dr Mowlam. She appears to think that her admitted lack of Britishness is an attribute worth developing, perhaps to make the "Mo and Tony show" acceptable in Republican enclaves, especially in Bellaghy, where she has encouraged the Concerned Residents' Group to develop and regroup under the leadership of one James Hasson. For the information of those who do not know James Hasson, he is a very big, strong fellow who has not been spotted doing any actual work for about 20 years. Although he is the chairman, I suspect that he is not the real leader of the group. I suspect the real leader of the Bellaghy group is a Sinn Fein/IRA man who finds it better to hang loose in Donegal in the meantime and only allows himself a fleeting visit to Bellaghy, normally just before a band parade.

Mr Hasson has the Secretary of State's encouragement to carry on in street-protest form the strife that was initially instigated in Bellaghy and its environs by the now dead terrorist criminals like Dominic McGlinchey, Francie Hughes and Thomas Millen — though their strife took a more death-and-violence form. Secretary of State Mowlam does not care for the efforts that British security made for over 80 years to hold the line when Sinn Fein/IRA were hell-bent on hounding Unionists and Protestants out of Bellaghy. She appears to see no difference between those whose sons and daughters were sacrificed for the safety of the British in Ulster and Great Britain — and, indeed, the Irish in Ulster and Great Britain — and those who continue to carry on the Sinn Fein/IRA cause with or without its destruction of life.

2.45 pm

Bellaghy, which is in the area that I represent as a councillor and Forum Member, has never had a trawl or a democratic election for positions on the concerned residents' committee. The ringleaders used to be Paul Smith and Paul Henry, and now we have James Hasson. Paul Smith denied, on Radio Ulster, that he was a member of Sinn Fein, but the Bellaghy people know differently. Paul Henry also denied that he was a member of Sinn

Fein, in spite of the fact that he was Sinn Féin's candidate in the 1989, 1993 and 1997 local-government elections, when he was at last successful in becoming a Sinn Féin councillor. Similarly, James Hasson has disassociated himself from Sinn Féin, yet he was a counting agent for them at the local-government elections in May. His group has targeted the activities of the local Lodges, the local Royal Black Preceptory, the local accordion band, and lately, as has already been mentioned, the Royal British Legion.

But the Bellaghy Concerned Residents' Group has not said a single word about the illegal activities of the Francie Hughes's Memorial Flute Band; it has not been concerned about the Sinn Féin fly-posters, which have remained since the last two elections and litter Bellaghy's streets; it has not been concerned about the vandalism and hooliganism at Springfield Park, a small Republican ghetto just off William Street; it has recorded no interest in the intimidation of Unionists and Protestants from William Street, Gregg Gardens and Beatrice Villas; it has also recorded no interest in the intimidation of Mr Overend's youngsters at their home outside the gaelic club; and it has taken no steps to stop the intimidation of Roman Catholic pub and shop owners who served Unionists at parade events.

One wonders about the *raison d'être* of the Bellaghy's Concerned Residents Group, yet the Secretary of State feels at one with them. The group does not deserve the patronage of high-ranking Government representatives, never mind that of the Secretary of State. These committees need to be investigated thoroughly to find out who finances them, who pulls the strings and exactly what their mission statement is. Perhaps then the world's press — which alights occasionally in places like Bellaghy — will have a clear picture of the sort of people they are dealing with.

I support the motion — the last paragraph in particular. Ministers have no business consorting with people who unashamedly support the Provisional IRA — the most evil organization that this kingdom has ever seen. Concerned residents' groups should only be allowed to lobby their local councillors and MPs; they should not have a call on Government representatives which is over and beyond the limited call that we have as local representatives. Dr Mowlam has cheerfully succeeded in making a proper nonsense of the residue that passes for democracy here.

I support the motion.

Mr McCarthy: Mr Chairman, I am glad that you questioned the proposer about the wording of the motion. As usual, the Member tried to claw back some credibility, but to no avail.

The Alliance Party cannot support this motion in any shape or form. In fact, we fully support not only the Secretary of State, but all Government Ministers and every officer, whether senior or junior, in their co-operating with genuine community and residents' groups.

My career in public life started in 1973 when I and others in the small village of Kircubbin felt that residents were being denied amenities and facilities. A number of local people came together to try to bring our plight to the attention of the authorities. We held a public meeting and elected officers to a committee. We set out to obtain some improvements for that village and the district. Since then we have seen many improvements and not only in

facilities — the work of that association and its committee has brought the community together and has cemented working relationships between local people. It has brought us through a quarter of a century of horrible carnage caused by sectarian hatred and violence.

I venture to say that there are other Members of the Forum who probably started out by simply supporting local people in seeking better amenities for their areas. I fully appreciate those people who come together to help and work with their council representatives and MPs in an effort to meet the needs of their local communities.

My experience of community associations is that they have the residents' needs at heart, and they work for the good of their communities. For many years we have had a very hard-working community association in Kircubbin and, indeed, in the upper Ards area. The benefits are there for all to see. I am glad to say that other villages in our borough have got off their backsides, and we now have very active community associations in Carrowdore, Greyabbey, Ballyhalbert, Ballywalter, Portavogie and Cloughy — these areas are beginning to see improvements where before they felt neglected. This is in spite of the fact that the Deputy Leader of the Ulster Unionist Party, Mr Taylor, has been their Member of Parliament for years and was, at one time, a Member of the European Parliament. Those people are no longer prepared to sit back and do nothing. They all have a very positive and valuable contribution to make.

Mr McAlister: The Member is not addressing the issue. No one is talking about very worthwhile groups like the one in Kircubbin. Mr Shannon and I have supported that group for many years. We are talking about the "so-called" residents' groups, and everyone here knows what is meant by "so-called". I appreciate the history lesson about Kircubbin — it was wonderful — but the member knows that he has and always will have our one hundred and one per cent support for such groups. He should address the motion.

The Chairman: The last thing I want to do is interrupt this debate, but I happen to be the chairman of a community association, and I do not spend my time harassing the public. I am having difficulty with the use of the phrase "so-called".

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: Since the Alliance Party has already turned its face against this, I am prepared to replace the words "so-called community action/residents' groups" with "Republican community action groups" if that is of any assistance.

The Chairman: Does the Forum agree with that?

Mr McCarthy: It is a pity that that suggestion was not made at the beginning of the meeting.

The Chairman: I have done my best.

Mr McCarthy: People are no longer prepared to sit back and do nothing. They have a very positive and valuable contribution to make, and they are doing that. I am quite sure they would not support the DUP's motion.

There may well be incidences where associations have abused the confidence placed in them by the people they represent. The same concern could apply to organizations like 'Positively Belfast' which has also made mistakes. Where such abuse is evident, it must be stopped. But the Government and the councils must not stop supporting the very genuine efforts that are being made by local associations.

We spent this morning criticizing quangos, and here we are this afternoon criticizing community groups. Are Unionist Members really saying that ordinary people should have no say whatsoever in the running of their local communities? Many might say that if it were left to elected politicians, the status quo would remain, and very little or no progress would be made.

Ms McWilliams: The DUP have well and truly walked into this one. First of all, they put up the word "so-called", and just now they have tried to remove it. They have been in the Forum long enough to know that they cannot do that.

Rev William McCrea: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. Mr Paisley made it clear at the very beginning exactly what groups he was talking about. Unfortunately, Ms McWilliams was not near the Chamber to hear his speech.

The Chairman: But I was. I asked the question, and I got an answer which I do not find satisfactory. Let me make it quite clear that I am not prepared to use a word like "so-called" to condemn the hundreds of small organizations in this country. If that is what the motion means, Members may take it that I will need a lot of persuading not to use my powers under Rule 13(1).

Ms McWilliams: Thank you, Mr Chairman. That is exactly the point I was making. I do not think that Mr McCrea was clarifying the issue, and it was not a point of order that he was raising.

The Chairman: I do have to agree with him that it is for me to decide whether it is a point of order.

Ms McWilliams: It is for you to decide, Mr Chairman, but I also have a view on it. It is a tactic that you know is often abused in the Forum.

There is an old adage: politicians fear the empowerment of ordinary people. It somehow represents a threat to their own power and privilege. It seems to me that what we have before us is a motion on community development. Community development aims to encourage ordinary people to participate, to ask difficult questions of their representatives and to hold those representatives to account. For politicians, such as those who have produced this rather destructive motion and who are cosseted in a rather comfortable world, this is indeed something they may fear. Democracy is increasingly a matter of people deciding to take action on the problems that they see around them, and, as the Member from the Alliance Party has clearly pointed out, that is exactly what community groups, residents' groups and voluntary groups do.

For example, a member of my community came to my door last night. He had a campaign folder with him, which was to do with a very serious traffic issue, and I supported him. He and others were attempting to set up a residents' action group to bring this issue forward. If that is not about community empowerment and community development, what is? Under this motion, that particular group could end up being labelled "so-called".

The Women's Coalition is very pleased to be one of those parties which can honestly say that it is only here today as a result of the community development and community action that started almost 27 years ago in Northern Ireland. *[Interruption]* May I have some order?

The Chairman: Yes. Let us have order, please.

Ms McWilliams: Twenty-seven years ago there were many groups in this society who wanted to walk across the sectarian divide and meet each other to discuss issues of mutual interest and benefit. So, community and development have become very important words in this society, and they should not be rubbished in this way. People who are involved in local community development should expect respect and not derision as a result of that involvement. They have increased their confidence; they have increased their assertiveness; and they have got a voice in the community. But those volunteers also pay a very heavy price in terms of the demands which are placed on their time and on their energy, and I have seen that.

3.00 pm

One thing is clear: decisions are increasingly made as a result of what happens on the ground, and that is good for democracy. If Northern Ireland's traditional politicians do not see a place for themselves in this changing political climate as we move into the next century, if they feel threatened by that, they need to put more work into understanding why it is happening. While we have been busy constantly debating single-issue politics in Northern Ireland, community groups have been involved in much anti-sectarian work, highlighting issues of deprivation and social exclusion in their areas. People are now beginning to feel empowered to do that, and those who have failed in their responsibilities have no right to cry foul as a result.

Unlike the DUP, who have proposed this motion, we welcome the recognition of these groups. We were astonished at the wording of this motion. It sounds like something out of the McCarthy era in America or a bad spy novel. It cannot be taken seriously. Does the DUP expect our visitors here today and Forum Members to believe that they are serious about peace and reconciliation when they are clearly only interested in censoring — and even banning — those who do not share their views?

This motion is about putting down the ordinary people — Nationalist, Unionist, Loyalist and Republican alike — who work hard and believe that they have a right to expect of this community the things that they demand. This motion is not designed to promote dialogue and understanding, and it could not be deemed to command cross-community support. We ask you, therefore, Mr Chairman, to apply Rule 13(1).

The Chairman: The Member must be very careful not to suggest whether I should or should not accept a point of order or what decision I should come to under Rule 13(1) because I have to maintain my position of being persuadable.

One thing that would make me slightly persuadable is a change in the wording, from "so-called" to "some".

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: Mr Chairman, if it would help you the motion could be reworded so that the Forum was expressing its dismay at the recognition accorded by the Secretary of State to the Lower Ormeau Road Residents' Group, the Garvaghy Residents' Coalition, the Dunloy Residents' Group, the Bogside Residents' Group, the Bellaghy Residents' Group and the Ballycastle Residents' Group.

The Chairman: Would that be acceptable?

Several Members: No.

The Chairman: I am doing my best.

Mr Carrick: I preface my remarks by reminding the Forum that the representatives of the Democratic Unionist Party have been actively involved in community development in their various constituencies for many years — long before the representatives of the Women's Coalition ever appeared on a public platform. We have made a valuable contribution to community development, as a close examination of the various areas that we come from will reveal.

I agree that the motion's reference to community action/residents' groups relates solely to those groups who actively pursue a policy of agitation and confrontation to achieve their political objectives. I want to reiterate the point that Mr Paisley and others have tried to make today that there are many democratically elected local groups in Northern Ireland who, through a positive and responsible process, lobby and campaign for better social and economic conditions for people in their areas. These bona fide community groups have a vital role in society and provide a platform for locally focused initiatives to address local problems. These groups deserve our support and encouragement.

There is, however, another crop of residents' groups whose activities are of a dubious nature, and I do not say that without substantial circumstantial evidence. We have all witnessed, either at first hand or on television, scenes of unruly behaviour and indeed downright unlawful activity, all in the name of community action/residents' groups. The hallmark of such groups is their strategy of open rebellion. They employ tactics of agitation and confrontation and are actively led and controlled by Sinn Féin/IRA.

The chairman of the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition, Brendan McKenna, has been described as a professional agitator. There is a reasonable basis for concluding that this assessment is correct. McKenna's record of confrontational street politics stretches back a long time, having served the Republican terrorist cause for the past 20 years, interrupted, I may say, by a gaol term for his part in a bombing in Portadown, firearms offences, false

imprisonment and hijacking. How can Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition have any credibility whatsoever, given the track record of its chairman?

Indeed, the Secretary of State, Dr Mowlam, in her naïvety — or was it political expediency? — embraced members of the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition and cosied up to them in a nauseating manner lending credibility to the overt criticism of all things British by these bigoted, sectarian, Nationalist Republicans. However, Dr Mowlam soon found out that the Irish Republican passive lamb soon became the devouring lion. Within two weeks McKenna, who had received a telephone call from Dr Mowlam telling him that she was browned off with what he was saying to the media, was trotting out the old Republican call for the resignation of the Secretary of State. He was saying

"We were always wary of the smile of an Englishman. Now add to that the smile of an Englishwoman."

Dr Mowlam's honeymoon period with the Garvaghy Road Residents' Coalition was brought to a swift close because she was not prepared to dance the Irish Republican tune in the final analysis. It looked for a time that she was going to do it, but she did not do so on that occasion.

The democracy underlying these residents' groups is questionable: the dynamic that brings them together in Nationalist areas is often based on intimidation, coercion, threat and fear. And these groups are bonded by the threat "Do what I tell you, or else. Get out on to the streets and protest. If you do not appear, it will be noted. You are expected to provide accommodation this weekend for some visitors to our area." Not only does the democracy underlying these belligerent residents' groups need to be examined, but the promotional material emanating from them is nothing short of black propaganda containing inaccuracies and exaggerations.

The constitution of these dubious groups also requires close examination by the Government because, clearly, their objective is to undermine stability. That is evidenced by their orchestrated attacks on democracy, constitutional Government and civil liberties. It therefore follows that the source of funding of such dubious residents' groups should be vigorously investigated by the RUC and, indeed, strict controls and criteria should be imposed by legitimate funding bodies, such as local authorities, before awards are made to them. The Government must recognize the insurrectional nature of these residents' groups and, instead of fraternizing with these Republicans, must expose their rebellion. The Government must govern effectively, uphold the rights of law-abiding citizens and bring to book the law-breakers, many of whom are in these dubious residents' groups.

Mr Brewster: I have only a few comments to make.

Republicans' use of the terms "residents's groups" and "community action groups" is not their first abuse of the English language. What type of community action are we talking about? I can think of one community action group which was very prominent during the last cease-fire — Direct Action Against Drugs, a body which, in the most brutal fashion, killed, at the last count, something like 10 people without trial or any opportunity to present their case. Astonishingly, when the IRA cease-fire ended, Direct Action Against Drugs disappeared, only to re-emerge, I am convinced, shortly thereafter as the Provisional IRA.

And when we talk about residents' groups I wonder who the residents are. My understanding was that until relatively recently Mr Gerard Rice, who is a member of one of the residents' groups — the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community — did not live in the lower Ormeau area at all.

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: Is it not also amazing that something like 75% of those arrested on the lower Ormeau Road because of the riots instigated by Mr Rice did not live in the south Belfast area either?

Mr Brewster: I totally disagree. It is not amazing at all — it is absolutely predictable. People were bussed in, and, indeed, journalists will tell one that several leading members of the Provisional IRA were seen on the lower Ormeau Road during the cease-fire, freshly spruced up in their new garb as community activists. I recall a very interesting article by Malachi O'Doherty — who, I imagine, is not unduly pro-DUP — on a meeting of the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community group that he attended. He described feeling intimidated by those who came along and said that they were very anxious to speak for the community, but only for as long as the community agreed with what they wanted to do. Indeed, Mr O'Doherty referred to the fact that several members of the community had been intimidated, and that at least one of them, who, I think, is now an SDLP councillor, had his car attacked. So it is quite clear that these organizations are not genuine residents' groups, and the community action that they talk about is, in fact, another form of political action.

Lest there be any doubt, let it be said that the Ulster Unionist Party — like the Forum as a whole, I am sure — has every sympathy for citizens who show the initiative to come together to better themselves, and we deprecate any attempt to deprive them of funding, for whatever purpose. But the plain fact of the matter is that these residents' groups, in the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland, came together spontaneously, or so we are told, to deal with one specific issue — to attack the Orange Institution. I find it astonishing that Mr McKenna and Mr Rice were not more concerned about the problems of unemployment, urban neglect and all the many evils that Forum Members would like to see addressed.

It is quite clear that it was never their intention to be community groups. They are political action groups, and they should be recognized as such. We listen to some of their language, and it sounds very Fascist indeed. We hear comments about host communities for parades. I do not know what a host community is, but Northern Ireland could be said to be a host community for these people.

3.15 pm

We have all had to tolerate disruption to our lives when militant Republicanism decides to go on the rampage as it did last week in Lurgan, Armagh and places like that, and while we deplore that behaviour and hope that the RUC will take all vigorous steps to prevent its repetition, if we were to turn round and say that these people had to ask our permission even to live in Northern Ireland, surely we would be accused — rightly — of being Fascists.

There has, undoubtedly, been a *de facto* recognition of these groups by the Secretary of State. I talked to a senior police officer earlier this year, and he told me that the RUC was

having considerable difficulties in one of the areas where there were disputes about parades. They were trying to talk to the members of a coalition, and a member of that coalition said "Why should we bother talking to you? We have a direct private line to the Secretary of State, and we have been told that if we have any problems, we can ring her." And this senior police officer told me that that man, who was a convicted terrorist, had more access to the Secretary of State and to the wheels of Government than he had; nobody in the Secretary of State's office was prepared to talk to him — the poor man who was expected to administer and police the Secretary of State's decision. It is quite clear that some of these people were glorying in the fact that they had that direct line. They never had any intention of coming to an agreement, and the Secretary of State's ill-advised decision was merely preventing common sense from prevailing.

The present Government's approach is reminiscent of that of the last Labour Administration when, in an effort to wean Republicanism away from violence and towards genuine politics, Merlyn Rees decided that welfare offices would be set up in Republican areas, and money was handed over with gay abandon to various groups for advice centres. To this day, we do not know whether that money was used to buy telephones or buy guns, but we know how successful it was in persuading Sinn Féin to go down the path of democratic politics.

It is unfortunate that anyone should seek to interpret — or misinterpret — this motion as sectarian. Mr Chairman, I am well aware of your responsibilities under the Rules, and I urge you to think very clearly about the import of this motion. As I understand it, it is simply a request for the Government to be more prudent in its recognition of various groups in our society and to be more stringent in handing out public finances — both laudable requests with which, I should think, everybody could agree.

I support the motion.

Mr Shannon: Over the last few years we have witnessed the formation of many Republican residents' groups or action groups. They all have one purpose: to thwart the law-abiding activities of those who wish to walk along routes that they have taken for many years. Mr McCarthy mentioned the residents' groups in the Ards Peninsula. They are very laudable. They do a great job, and we are all glad to see them there, but they are not concerned action groups. They are there for the good of the people. They work hard in their areas to make the community stronger. Every one of us can support that sort of community group, but this motion is trying to address the problem of those Republican groups that have only one notion in their heads: to object to any Orange, Unionist or religious parade that happens to walk through an area in which they live.

Perhaps the most blatant recognition of Republican residents' groups was when the Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, visited the Garvaghy Road Residents' Group on the day of the local elections. Many of us felt absolutely gutted at that.

Mr Calvert: Does Mr Shannon agree that if the Secretary of State had spent less time running backwards and forwards between the Garvaghy Road residents and the residents of the Ormeau Road and had come to the Forum much earlier than she did, that would have been appreciated by all law-abiding people? What she did was disgraceful.

Mr Shannon: It was widely condemned at the time as the act of one who was thought to be canvassing for a certain group of people, and the fact that she decided to go on the day of the local elections fully illustrated that point. I wonder what would have happened if the same Mo Mowlam had gone to a Unionist area. Can you believe the uproar there would have been on election day if she had arrived in Newtownards, Coleraine or some other area that was predominantly Unionist?

I have no disrespect for the lady, but I would not like her to come and give me a big hug and a kiss.

Mr Speers: I would like to remind Members of the activities of the media at that time. Those who were candidates for elections — local or otherwise — were keen to be interviewed by the media. The Prime Minister happened to pay a visit when I was Mayor of Armagh, and I did an interview for radio and television. By virtue of the fact that I was a candidate at the election some days later, it was deemed that my interview could be political and advantageous to me as a candidate, so it was not broadcast. The same thinking was not applied to those interviewed in the town of Portadown on that occasion.

Mr Shannon: That fully illustrates the point that I am trying to make. The fact that the visit was made to a certain area and that no visit was made to any Unionist area very aptly puts into perspective the current situation here. Some Republican groups have a direct line to the Secretary of State and are very likely to use it, and that calls Mo Mowlam's position into question — either she is politically naïve, or civil servants are advising her incorrectly, or perhaps she just does not care what happens as long as there is an appeasement policy for Republicans.

May I suggest that instead of pandering to Republicans and their spokespeople from these so-called Republican community groups, Mo Mowlam should be spending her time and effort on those who are committed entirely to democracy and the ballot-box. Some of these so-called Republican groups were created with one goal in mind: to object in the strongest terms to any parade, be it Unionist, Orange or religious. From where do they draw their membership? Are these groups truly representative of their areas? Many people living in these areas have been intimidated by these groups and do not want to be involved in their activities; many people have no objections to parades going through their areas, but they have no chance to speak. Why is that? — because these so-called Republican activists come in, rule the roost and dictate the policy. Quite simply, some of these people are scared away from expressing their opinion.

What is the agenda of some of these so-called Republican, community-action residents' groups? Are they involved in bread-and-butter issues? Are they really interested in the everyday facts of life that concern the people in those areas — jobs, education, health? All we ever hear from these Republican groups is "We are objecting to that parade going down the road because we are not happy with it.", and so on. They give no thought whatsoever to the real role of a community group which should be to address local issues that might improve the quality of people's lives. Their purpose should not be to cause strife, confrontation or aggression, but to help the area, but that has fallen by the wayside.

It seems to me that their only purpose is to object to traditional parades and do their utmost to stop law-abiding citizens from going about their lawful pursuits. These so-called Republican groups pretend to be looking for a compromise, when all they really want to do is stop a parade or a walk that has been traditional for hundreds of years. They ask for a discussion knowing right well that it will go nowhere. In the past, the Loyal Orders were willing to discuss these matters only to find that the spirit of compromise that they were prepared to show was not reciprocated by militant Republican and Nationalist groups.

The Government, when they look at the so-called Republican groups, cannot fail to appreciate that their motives have nothing to do with compromise but everything to do with confrontation. These groups do not deserve the publicity that they seek and receive. Their anti-British and anti-democratic activities have been well illustrated and exposed; the Government should ignore them and spend their time and effort on those committed to peaceful reconciliation.

All formal and informal contact with Republican groups should be discontinued. Up until now, dialogue with them has been meaningless and has not offered anything towards a better future; their actions have spoken volumes. Have they anything constructive to offer? I say no. The fact that the Northern Ireland Office has given credence to them has caused their numbers to increase, and as they do so, my worry is that they will be there for one purpose, and one purpose only, and that is to cause strife, bother and trouble in communities where there has been none previously. I question their motives, and that is what this motion is all about.

I urge Members to support the motion.

Mr Jim Rodgers: I support the motion. Bearing in mind the suggested amendment, I think that several points need to be clarified.

Many people today have zoomed in on the fact that these residents' and community groups are preventing parades. It is important to note that some of these groups have applied for funding from the councils and from the peace and reconciliation budget. Members may or may not be aware that there are more community and residents' groups in Belfast than in the rest of Northern Ireland as a whole. In Roman Catholic west Belfast, Sinn Féin/IRA has, over the last number of years — particularly the last two — formed groups on virtually every street corner; they have taken control, and that has helped their electoral base considerably. It is time the funding bodies realized what is taking place — and I would question where the moneys are actually going.

Reference has been made today to the fact that these people have access to the Secretary of State and other Government Ministers. Wearing my Deputy Lord Mayor of Belfast hat, I sought a meeting last June with Mo Mowlam to talk about parades, and I was fobbed off. I threatened to go public about this, and it was then that her secretary rang me from London. People who have been named here today have a direct line to Mo Mowlam's office and can get a meeting within about 48 hours, and yet elected representatives, whether the Lord Mayor or the Deputy Lord Mayor, a mayor or a deputy mayor, or a chairman or vice-chairman of a council, have to fight tooth and nail to try to get through to Government Ministers. And behind all of this is the veiled threat these people make that if the

Government do not see them, there is a possibility that IRA/Sinn Fein will resume the violence.

Many of us have had concerns for some considerable time about what today's motion is saying, and the number of organizations that have sprung up worries us. It is unfortunate that Kieran McCarthy has left the Chamber, because I want to address his naïvety and that of the Alliance team on Belfast City Council who, on a number of occasions, have discussed their concerns at the groups that have sprung up in the west of the city and have approached the council looking for finance.

3.30 pm

There are quite a number of community and residents' groups with good, honourable people who are genuinely trying to get the very best for their districts, but the sad thing about it is that they are now outnumbered by those with thugs and vagabonds in their ranks. They are only interested in two things: getting money and causing widespread disruption as part of Sinn Fein/IRA's unarmed strategy. They are the same people who went to Belfast city hall and climbed up onto the roof with banners. They did the same thing this week at the Waterfront Hall. These are the people who masquerade as residents and members of concerned community groups, and it is they who are getting the good groups a bad name.

We have to differentiate between groups that are genuine and those that are not. A message has to go out from the Chamber today to the Secretary of State demanding that her officials investigate groups who request meetings with her. So much has happened over the years, and this situation helps no one, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic. If we are going to see a real, genuine peace and the two communities working together, we have to address this problem.

Finally, these groups get far too much money from the funding bodies who seem to turn a blind eye to their activities and to the type of people involved with them.

Mr Stoker: I support the motion. I am glad that Mr Paisley has clarified the position by suggesting the inclusion of the word "Republican".

The Chairman: We did not get the consent of the House to that. The difficulty is that the people who disagreed with the suggested amendment are not present. Some of them found it unpalatable. I have to consider the motion that is before the Forum unless there is a grievance.

Mr Stoker: It is a pity that those who objected did not stay to clarify their position.

Members have highlighted various groups, but I will mention just one — the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community (LOCC). This group is not democratic in its make-up. Its officers were not elected but were selected for their anti-British, anti-Unionist viewpoint. Some residents were intimidated because they opposed the agenda of the LOCC. Two members of the SDLP had their cars wrecked for speaking out against the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community, and young people were beaten because they did not come out to protest at the behest of its members.

This group describes itself as the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community. Geographically, lower Ormeau is the area from the Ormeau Bridge to Ormeau Avenue, which takes in the Donegall Pass, Botanic and University areas. I can assure the Forum that Gerard Rice in no way represents the people of Donegall Pass.

Other Members have mentioned the groups in Portadown, Bellaghy and Londonderry. One talked about Donncha MacNiallais. If he were to look at his birth certificate he would find that his name is Donald Nellis, and he should not be called anything but that.

I support the motion.

Mr McAlister: This matter must be clarified. It is sad that the two Members who were so opposed to the amendment that my Colleague suggested, and which I support, did not stay in the Chamber to hear the arguments. Let us hope that they will return. Otherwise we cannot regard them as being serious or sincere. With the suggested amendment the motion would begin as follows:

"This Forum expresses dismay at the recognition accorded by the Secretary of State to the following groups: Lower Ormeau Residents' Group, Garvaghy Residents' Group, Dunloy Residents' Group, Bogside Residents' Group, Bellaghy Residents' Group and Concerned Residents Ballycastle."

It comes as no surprise to me that the Alliance Party and the Women's Coalition cannot support this. Are they saying that they cannot support the exposure of an anti-British and anti-democratic situation? Or are they saying that they want to sweep under the carpet all the vileness and all the stinking rottenness of Republicanism? That is what they are doing by not supporting this motion.

But they did not address that part of it. They addressed only the part that it suited them to address. They would have done better to study the wording of the motion and address that rather than go off into a history lesson about the Kircubbin area — an area which is very close to my heart and to Mr Shannon's. In common with other Members we are concerned and will continue to be concerned about those groups in our areas that are genuine.

We had a history lesson from Mr McCarthy and then we had you, Mr Chairman, being scolded by the Women's Coalition. I admire your patience. If I had the honour — or misfortune — to be in your position, I do not think I could have been so lenient. And it seems to be a recurring situation, not just a one-off. We all step over the line at times — I am probably as guilty as anyone — but this scolding and slapping of wrists really has to end.

Rev William McCrea: Does my Friend agree that any attempt by Mr McCarthy to equate the Kircubbin Community Association with the likes of the Bellaghy Residents' Association would be regarded by the people of Kircubbin as an insult?

Mr McAlister: Yes. I could not have put it better myself, and I am coming to this point.

Members may ask why I am summing up for the DUP. I live in the north Down area, and we do not have residents' groups of a Republican nature there. The reason I am summing up is that I have a direct interest in this. My wife comes from the Ormeau Road. Most of my in-laws live on the Ormeau Road, and some of them are of the Roman Catholic persuasion. The sad fact is that I cannot visit many of those people because my life would be at risk. That is the reality that I am talking about, and it is not a reality that Mr McCarthy or the Women's Coalition know anything about.

Let me read something that was said by someone who has to live in that kind of situation — and we have to consider the people who are living in these areas. This is what a person from the Garvaghy area said

"Only 25% of the street's inhabitants are Unionists, and those residing there are not having a happy time. One of them said to me 'Our lives are hell. That hell has been created by the associates of Brendan McKenna.' "

That is from someone at the coal-face. Are the Women's Coalition and the Alliance Party saying that the British Government should support that hell? I hope not.

Mr Brewster got it right. He said that these are not concerned residents' groups in the rightful sense. They are politically motivated, totally and absolutely, and their end is political. No matter what way you cut it, that is how it comes out. Also I have to endorse the comments from other Members of the Ulster Unionist Party.

My relatives and friends from the Ormeau Road — decent people from both sides of the community — would not touch the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community with a barge-pole. They would agree with Mr Rodgers when he said that tramps and thugs and terrorists make up these groups. How would the House, the Women's Coalition, the Alliance Party or the ordinary man in the street feel if the British Government started funding fundamentalist Islamic groups in the rest of the United Kingdom or groups like the National Front? If they were to support those groups or those who wanted to undermine British democracy, there would be an outcry across the country, and rightly so. We are only looking for a level playing-field. We want the same rules that apply to the rest of the United Kingdom to apply to Northern Ireland.

Then we come to the question of openness. What we are asking for in this motion is openness. We have always been in favour of openness in Government and in discussions. If people have something to hide, they fear openness. If you have nothing to hide, you need not worry about the police coming to your door to interview you. You need not worry about the tax inspectors looking into your affairs if you have been open and honest in your dealings. These residents' groups would hate a full investigation into who they are and what they are by the media, the press and the Government. They would hate that, because it would expose the rottenness that lies therein, yet there are Members here today who cannot support openness in any way, shape or form.

These residents' groups are wolves in sheep's clothing, and this is underlined by Mr Adams himself. If we needed any endorsement of these groups — who they are and what are their aims — we have only to look at Mr Adams's own words. What did he say? He said that what happened in Garvaghy and other areas did not happen by chance. It happened

because people were there orchestrating, organizing and bringing confrontation onto the streets. And what is more, he said that they were to be congratulated.

That statement alone surely should sway the Women's Coalition and the Alliance Party to support this motion, but no — there is no common sense there, no reality and no living in the real world. That is what we have come to expect from them. Of course, the Women's Coalition may see themselves as a residents' group — they have nearly as many supporters. I see that the Ladies have come back. That is good. These groups have a definite aim. That aim is the undermining of democracy and the undermining of anything that is remotely British or that smacks of supporting the Union.

Many will look back to the previous weekend when we commemorated the Glorious Dead of two world wars, and people will think that the residents' group did not get their way with regard to the British Legion. Why did they not get their way? It was not because the Government came out strongly and supported the Legion. It was not because the Government said that it was their right to parade and that they would use every means at their disposal to make sure they could do so. It was the ordinary man in the street, the ordinary people across the country who rose up against this and rightly supported the British Legion.

But let us imagine that the residents' group had got away with it. Does anyone think that would have been the end of the story? I think not. My Colleague rightly called the members of these groups monsters. And what does a monster do? It devours all in its path; it has an insatiable appetite. It just wants more and more, and if the situation had been like that in the north of the province and the British Legion had been stopped, that would have been only the tip of the iceberg. The next week it would have been a Boys' Brigade parade or boys and girls going to a church parade. It would never have stopped.

I hope it was a line in the sand, and I hope that they never have the audacity to raise this matter again. However, I have no doubt that even now they are scheming to find some way round it. They want some way to politicize it, some way to change it for next year. The British Legion's problem has not gone away, because these residents' groups have not gone away. Where have we heard that before? Where have we heard it said in recent days that they will return to doing what they do best? One of the things that they do best is agitating through these groups. They should not be supported in any way. They certainly should not be supported with money. In fact, they are not supported by a vast majority of the people who live in the area.

I have stated the facts. I know some people on the lower Ormeau Road, and I have a personal interest in this matter. I could bring witnesses to vouch for what I am saying. They would not touch this campaign with a barge-pole.

3.45 pm

I am sorry that the Women's Coalition and Alliance, who have still not appeared, cannot support the motion, but I appreciate all the comments that have been made by Ulster Unionist Members. I am glad that the Unionist parties are at one on this issue, and I urge that we all support the motion.

The Chairman: I take it that you would like a recorded vote, Ms McWilliams.

Ms McWilliams: Yes, Mr Chairman.

Mr Morrow: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. Is the motion still in its original form, or has it been amended as suggested by Mr Paisley?

The Chairman: In the absence of leave for a change, I am obliged to put to the Forum the motion that is on the Order Paper.

Mr Morrow: Has leave been given?

The Chairman: No.

Mr Morrow: Who objected?

Ms McWilliams: I leave it to you, Mr Chairman, to respond to that. You were here when leave was refused, so you should know which parties did not respond. Mr Morrow too was present.

Rev William McCrea: When an amendment was proposed and seconded by my Colleagues, Ms McWilliams was not present. It was seconded by Mr McAlister, and he read out the proposed version when he was winding up. The Women's Coalition were not present.

The Chairman: Is that correct?

Rev William McCrea: That is correct.

Ms McWilliams: I was referring to Mr Paisley's proposal that "so-called" be replaced with "Republican".

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: That was my first suggested change. Later I proposed that the names of the groups could be included, and my Colleague seconded that proposal. I am sorry that Ms McWilliams was not in the Chamber to hear that, but I hope that she does not object to it. The motion would be much clearer and easier to vote on if those words were included.

The Chairman: There is no doubt that that was suggested.

Ms McWilliams: Mr Chairman, the way you are dealing with this is shocking. A party cannot decide at the last minute to change its motion. It must give written notice to other parties, either in their offices or in the Chamber.

Rev William McCrea: That has often happened.

The Chairman: I do not think so. Anyway, this is what I am going to do.

Mr Jim Rodgers: On a point of order, Mr Chairman.

The Chairman: I will not be lectured any more. It can be taken that I understand what the words "so-called" mean. I am the one to decide, and my view is that the wording does not have to be changed for the purposes of Rule 13(1).

Question put.

The Forum divided: Ayes 36; No 1.

Ayes: Antony Alcock, May Beattie, Thomas Benson, David Brewster, David Browne, Cecil Calvert, David Campbell, Mervyn Carrick, James Clarke, Wilson Clyde, Robert Coulter, Reg Empey, Sam Gardiner, Joseph Gaston, Oliver Gibson, John Hunter, Derek Hussey, John Junkin, Rev Trevor Kirkland, St Clair McAlister, Rev William McCrea, Maurice Morrow, Dermot Nesbitt, Ian Paisley Jnr, Joan Parkes, Edwin Poots, Jim Rodgers, James Shannon, William Snoddy, James Speers, May Steele, Robert Stoker, David Trimble, Peter Weir, Robert John White, Sammy Wilson.

No: Monica McWilliams.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved:

This Forum expresses dismay at the recognition accorded by the Secretary of State to the so-called community action/residents' groups.

We call for an investigation and report into the make-up, character, activities, membership and agenda of these groups.

We further call on the Government to dismantle and stop all formal and informal contact with these groups and for the thorough exposure of the sinister and anti-British and anti-democratic activities.

Mr Jim Rodgers: On a point of order, Mr Chairman. When you were reading out the names you included those of Robert McCartney and Cedric Wilson. As they have both formally resigned from the Forum, surely their names should no longer be on the list?

The Chairman: You are right. I am sorry.

Ms McWilliams: On a further point of order, Mr Chairman. For the record, can you confirm whether or not you negatived this motion under Rule 13(1)?

The Chairman: I have ruled affirmatively on the basis that I understand what "so-called" means. It was explained to me in some detail.

DELEGATION FROM MOLDOVA AND TRANSNISTRIA

The Chairman: I want to congratulate Members on the way in which the Moldovan and Transdnistrian discussions were conducted. We brought much credit to the Forum, and I congratulate the Political Affairs Committee for its organization.

The logistics were also very well handled by those looking after the sound and the catering. Members presented their questions well and had them fully answered.

The Forum was adjourned at 3.58 pm.