

NORTHERN IRELAND FORUM FOR POLITICAL DIALOGUE

Friday 12 December 1997

The meeting was called to order at 10.03 am (Mr S Gardiner in the Chair).

Members observed two minutes' silence.

FORUM CHAIRMAN

The Deputy Chairperson (Mr Gardiner): It will not have escaped Members' notice that Mr Gorman is not with us today. Unfortunately, he has had a recurrence of a heart problem and has been undergoing tests. Much as he would like to be here for the last meeting before Christmas and for the function this afternoon, he had to ask me to deputize. On your behalf I have sent a note wishing him a speedy return to better health and to the Forum. This is a particularly heavy blow as he was looking forward to seeing his family in South Africa at Christmas.

FORUM: STANDING COMMITTEE B

The Deputy Chairperson: Standing Committee B wants to examine special-needs education, and its terms of reference will have to be changed to allow it to do so. As the simple addition of this specific item would make those terms cumbersome and unnecessarily detailed, the Business Committee agreed yesterday that the Forum should broaden the terms of reference so that the Standing Committee may consider any matter to do with education provision.

Resolved:

That the terms of reference agreed on 4 July 1997 for Standing Committee B shall be deleted and replaced by the following:

"To examine issues relating to education provision in Northern Ireland and report to the Forum." — *[The Deputy Chairperson]*

**FORUM:
'BELFAST TELEGRAPH' ARTICLE**

Mr David Campbell: I share your sentiments, Sir, about the Chairman, and I want to place on record the Forum's thanks for his comments, published in the 'Belfast Telegraph' this week, in reply to the scurrilous attack that was made in that paper some weeks ago. The Chairman's remarks were highly appropriate.

The Deputy Chairperson: Thank you for your comments and your concern. Mr McAlister, whose Committee drew the article to the Chairman's attention, wants to speak about it.

Mr McAlister: A few weeks back I raised the scurrilous attack on the Forum that was published in the 'Belfast Telegraph'. The Economy Committee discussed the matter, and it was referred to the Business Committee. As a result Mr Gorman replied on the Forum's behalf. Anyone who has seen the reply will appreciate its statesmanlike character. All points were covered very well. I would like to thank everyone concerned. Let us hope that the matter has now been put right and that in future the Forum will be given fairer and more balanced press coverage.

The Deputy Chairperson: I am sure that Members concur with the Chairman's sentiments. He put the record right, and I thank the 'Belfast Telegraph' for printing his response. Perhaps we will get more favourable reporting in future.

AGRICULTURE INDUSTRY

Mr Poots: I too wish Mr Gorman a speedy return to good health and strength. We are very sorry that he cannot be with us today.

Mr Trimble, Mr Nicholson, Mr Hume, Dr Paisley and I met the Prime Minister this week to raise the problems affecting agriculture. During the 15-minute meeting the Prime Minister listened well as we explained the difficulties, but unfortunately he did not give any positive signs other than that the Government were pushing hard to have intervention reintroduced. We will see the result of that pressure today.

We would like something more positive on the compensation package that was put to Mr Blair. The Government are looking at it, but nothing has been promised. We are just hoping for the best.

The Deputy Chairperson: I am sure the Forum endorses those sentiments. We want the best for farmers — particularly for those in Northern Ireland. They have had a troublesome time, and we ask the Government to take the situation more seriously and do something more positive.

SPECIAL DEBATE (RULE 10(5))

Motion made and Question proposed:

That this Forum at its rising today do adjourn until Friday 9 January 1998. — [*The Deputy Chairperson*]

Mr Browne: I wish to speak about road safety in North Belfast and the discrimination that is perceived by the Unionist community, particularly in North Queen Street. Mr Dodds and Mr Hugh Smyth, who represent North Belfast and West Belfast respectively, will know exactly what I am talking about.

North Queen Street is just 100 yards from this building. It is approximately one mile long, with three fifths of it on the Unionist side of the fence and two fifths on the Nationalist side. On the Unionist section are the Grove leisure centre, four churches, Grove Primary School, two public houses, a sheltered dwelling, a health centre, a playground and 15 or 16 businesses.

For a number of years I have been trying to get a zebra or other pedestrian crossing for that section. Residents too have made numerous requests, usually after accidents involving children, several of whom were killed. In contrast, the Nationalist part of the street has only a church hall, a school and a playground — there are no businesses — yet it has two crossings, 300 yards apart. Members will agree that the people there are well catered for.

Two weeks ago the Roads Service, instead of trying to redress the imbalance by providing a crossing on the Tiger's Bay side of Duncairn Gardens, spent another £10,000 on what it calls excellent remedial measures. It was cute about how these were introduced. Previously such measures were regarded as traffic-control or traffic-calming schemes; this time they were accident-remedial. It seems to me that slowing traffic down to prevent accidents is a traffic-calming device, but it was decided to use different wording.

It is time North Belfast's public representatives came together and told the Roads Service that the area in general, and Unionists in particular, will not be treated like this. I am not saying that there should not be traffic-control measures in Nationalist areas, but there should be parity of provision — the expression for which Nelson McCausland is famous. I will leave it to the Forum to conclude whether Unionists in North Belfast are being discriminated against. I have all the details for any Members who wish to look at them.

The Deputy Chairperson: I hope you have made representations to the Department of the Environment.

Mr Browne: I have.

Rev William McCrea: My Colleagues and I would like to express our good wishes to Mr Gorman. We trust that he will make a speedy recovery and that the Lord will bless him with health and strength and bring him back among us. We all feel that a message should be sent to him.

The Deputy Chairperson: I will see that those thoughts are conveyed to him.

10.15 am

Rev William McCrea: Thank you very much indeed.

I am sure that all decent, law-abiding citizens were outraged at the parading of known terrorists into 10 Downing Street yesterday. That Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, whose history the people of Ulster know only too well, were taken into the arms of the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom was despicable.

Adams and McGuinness, who are well known as the mouthpieces for terrorist violence, were paraded into 10 Downing Street, welcomed by Tony Blair, albeit behind closed doors, and given tea or coffee. By his actions, Tony Blair has tramped over the graves of Ulster's innocent. As a member of a family that has suffered grievously from IRA terrorism, I know that any decent person would turn sick at the sight of the Prime Minister clasping these vipers to his bosom.

He may pretend that it is in the interests of peace. Gerry Adams and Sinn Fein have signed up to the Mitchell principles, but when did they renounce violence? Maybe I was not listening to the news. They have not condemned violence, yet Sinn Fein has been accepted as a democratic party. We have heard no renunciation of violence, no apology, no genuine repentance for the years of terrorism inflicted on the people of Ulster by that organization, yet the Prime Minister stated that it must be treated in the same way as every other political party.

No one can suggest that IRA/Sinn Fein is the same as any other political party. Democratic politics cannot walk hand in hand with the murder and violence perpetrated by that organization. It is interesting that before walking into the arms of Marjorie Mowlam or Tony Blair, Mr Adams, when asked about the escape of Liam Averill from the Maze — Averill comes from Maghera, just down the road from where I live — said "Good luck to him." He congratulated Averill on getting out as a prisoner of war. That is an insult from a so-called political party — an insult not only to the memory of Alan Smith and John McCloy but to every other family that has endured heartache at the hands of the murder gangs roaming the roads of Ulster.

Many people in my area are now living in fear knowing that Liam Averill has nothing to lose by going back on the rampage of murder and violence, yet the Prime Minister did not find that sufficient reason to refuse Adams entry to Downing Street.

It seems that many issues were raised yesterday, including a united Ireland and an inquiry about bloody Sunday. If the question of a united Ireland was raised I wonder what the Prime Minister told Gerry Adams. When he was interviewed afterwards he skirted round some of the questions. In the answers that I heard he did not make it abundantly clear that Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom and that as Prime Minister he wants it to remain so. He did not come out fighting for the United Kingdom, of whose Government he is the head.

As for a bloody Sunday inquiry, I wonder if he mentioned the bloody Monday, bloody Tuesday, bloody Wednesday, bloody Thursday, bloody Friday and bloody Saturday that the IRA, under the direction of Martin McGuinness and army council members, gave the people of Ulster. It was laughable that the subject of prisoners' release should be raised on the day after Liam Averill walked out of prison.

We do not recognize Sinn Fein/IRA as a democratic party. It was a sad day when the Prime Minister tramped over the graves of the innocent to hold to his breast a viper that will come back to destroy him.

Lord Alderdice: First, my Colleagues and I want to convey our best wishes to the Chairman, Mr Gorman. We look forward to his full return to health and activity. If you are speaking to him, Sir, perhaps you will convey that message.

The Deputy Chairperson: I will certainly do that.

Lord Alderdice: This is a Forum for Political Dialogue, and it has become traditional for Members to use the opportunity afforded by an Adjournment debate to refer to social and economic issues. It is absolutely right that, as elected representatives, we should tackle these important matters as best we can, but it should always be remembered that we were not elected specifically to deal with them. Many Members may look upon the Forum as a training ground for a devolved Assembly which would take some control of such matters. That is a valid position to take, and I very much hope that devolution will happen here, as in Scotland and, to a lesser extent, Wales. That would be most appropriate. But we should remember that the main purpose of the Forum is to facilitate political dialogue.

Mr McCrea has expressed his wrath at the Prime Minister's meeting yesterday with Gerry Adams. While I understand his sentiments, I think that the Unionists' refusal to meet Gerry Adams is perhaps unwise. I would love to be able to say that in the considerable number of meetings that my colleagues and I have had with the Republican leadership during the cease-fires I have found a genuine preparedness to compromise, to end violence for good and to commit the Republican movement entirely to the democratic process. I wish I could say with conviction that there was real preparedness to meet the Unionist representatives, or at least the Alliance Party, even half-way, but I cannot.

I have not seen any movement or preparedness to compromise. Sinn Fein's public statements have been entirely reflected in the private meetings. There is flexibility in the language of Sinn Fein members, but inflexibility in what it really means. They relentlessly pursue their own political agenda by whatever means they feel will be most effective. I believe that at this juncture they feel that the campaign of violence does not serve that purpose and that it is for that reason that it has been set aside. I do not think that there has been any moral change, any change of heart. The decision to put violence to the side was taken not because it is wrong but because it has been unsuccessful and inconvenient.

That is precisely why, though some may think this a paradox, it is important to meet with the Republican movement. Mr Trimble says that these people are not living in the real world, that they are not prepared to talk about an honourable compromise. Many Nationalists wonder how he can be so sure when he is not prepared to talk to Republicans. I can say that

they are not prepared to move at all, to show any flexibility. I have met them and put them to the test. I am glad that the Prime Minister too has met Sinn Féin. Indeed, on the last two occasions I talked to him I urged him to do so. Real dialogue is the last thing many Republicans want. When the IRA broke the last cease-fire it was all too easy for Republicans to say "It is all the British Government's fault. We had a cease-fire, but the Prime Minister would not meet us."

I am reminded of the old fable of Brer Rabbit. The rabbit pleaded not to be thrown into the briar patch though that was exactly what he wanted. It is what we sometimes call a paradoxical injunction.

The most difficult thing for the Republican movement would be to try to persuade Unionists face to face. In the absence of such contact, there can be no doubt whom the Republicans will blame if they go back to violence. They will not blame the IRA, or themselves for their own refusal to move; they will blame those who refused to meet them.

Meeting opponents does not mean changing your principles; it means arguing for your principles. I do not share the Secretary of State's confidence that the Republican movement is prepared to get involved in this process in a committed way. I have seen no evidence of that. But I will not give the Republican movement the opportunity for warped justification of a return to violence, the opportunity to say that other people did not meet them, did not put them to the test, did not press the case, did not confront them with the logical outcome of the way they are going. That is why I say to Ulster Unionists in general and to Mr Trimble in particular, but also to the Democratic Unionist Party and the Loyalist parties, that it is best to use the opportunity to put people to the test. They should leave no stone unturned to ensure that no excuse, however tenuous, can be offered if the Republican movement deserts democracy. Of course, we all hope that it will not.

Mr Casey: The Labour Party wishes to join in the expression of good wishes to the Chairman. We regret that he cannot be here for today's debate and to share in the festivities later.

While conducting research into the state of the Northern Ireland economy we obtained a copy of the report of Sir George Quigley's committee of 1976, and it is clear that we have not made a great deal of progress in the intervening 21 years. The report said

"Northern Ireland's economy is in serious difficulty."

That is still the case. In 1976 the rate of unemployment was 10%, and it has not changed. It is supposed to be about 8%, but we believe that the figure has been massaged. There is a great gap between the average gross domestic product in Northern Ireland and that in Great Britain, and it is likely to widen. That is another prediction which has come true.

Against the background of the prediction that the characteristics of a dual economy would persist, the Forum recently debated the closure of the Saracen plant in Lurgan and the fear that other plants owned by the same company would suffer the same fate. The Quigley report said

"The possibility of removing inequalities of employment and income between the two sections of the community will become academic."

Again, we have not moved from that prediction: there are still two sections — the well-off and the less well-off. Emigration will stay high. On the conditions for development, the main conclusion was that political and economic stability are prerequisites for growth. That is the point that I want to deal with, for we do not have political and economic stability.

10.30 am

Today we have heard praise of the Chairman for his letter to the 'Belfast Telegraph' expressing his regret at the tone of its report. I would like to talk about the purpose of the Forum. This body was set up for political discussion aimed at achieving peace and reconciliation. While we would be the first to admit that the Forum, especially its Committees, has made a very worthwhile contribution, we question whether the purpose for which it was set up is being served.

Three of the parties which were elected are not here. One never came, and two — one from the Nationalist side and one from the Unionist side — have left. And the Democratic Unionists and the United Kingdom Unionists are no longer participating in the talks. This is all counter to the purpose for which the Forum was set up. It is one thing to debate and exchange rhetoric; it is another thing to fulfil the real purpose of the Forum.

This body has been in existence for 18 months, and its remit is likely to end in May. The people involved in the talks are supposed to reach a settlement by then. Maybe in the new year there will be greater efforts to achieve some sort of political rapport.

Mr Hugh Smyth: May I join others in wishing the Chairman, Mr Gorman, a speedy recovery.

I want to look at the position of the Forum. As Chairman of the Health Committee, I have written to the Social Democratic and Labour Party about health issues but have not received a reply. That saddens me. I promised the Committee that I would mention that. It saddens me too that Mr McCartney's party has left the Forum. I know that some people here do not agree with the talks at Stormont, but at the moment they are the only show in town. We do not know if they will succeed, but we are going to be there and we are going to try.

Leaving the talks aside, the Forum could do more to encourage the Government. The vast majority of people in the House agree that a Northern Ireland Assembly is desirable, but sometimes the behaviour of Members makes me wonder what purpose it would serve. I can take all the slagging, all the backchat that goes with political debate — politicians should be big enough for that — but it saddens me when people bring sectarianism in, as Mr Sammy Wilson did in last week's debate on hospital services, which are essential to us all.

Mr Gregory Campbell: Come on.

Mr Hugh Smyth: It is in the Record of Debates.

And it was not the first time. Mr Wilson uses headlines against people, as he has done against me, knowing full well that the story is vastly different. We have never mentioned the ones that haunt him. We could all use headlines, but I do not want to do that. I want the Forum to fulfil its purpose of promoting political dialogue.

We can have our differences, but we do not have to stick knives into each other. We should be able to differ but remain friends. We should agree to differ. And we should show some honesty, both inside and outside the House. I was saddened recently when Dr Paisley or Mr Ian Paisley Jnr — I am not sure which — commented on the shooting of Mr Devlin, which we all deplore. The 'Irish News' and the 'News Letter' carried stories about people connected with the Progressive Unionist Party and the Ulster Democratic Party passing information to the security forces. That is deplorable, but it is also very dangerous.

Mr Morrow: Were the stories true?

Mr Hugh Smyth: To my knowledge, no. *[Interruption]* If Mr McCrea has any information he should give it to the RUC.

Rev William McCrea: I would like an apology. I did not speak. That remark shows the Member's personal bitterness.

The Deputy Chairperson: In all fairness, I have to say that Mr McCrea did not speak.

Mr Hugh Smyth: In that case I apologize. But someone very near him spoke. He is brave and good at speaking.

Rev William McCrea: Personalizing is very dangerous.

Mr Hugh Smyth: That is exactly the point I was making. What the Leader of the DUP or his son said to the newspapers was very dangerous. I hope they are thinking of that danger also.

Rev William McCrea: Does the Member want me to bring in the article?

The Deputy Chairperson: Please proceed, Mr Smyth. Your time is running out.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I am fighting here for the future, for I am a firm believer in the Forum. I have mentioned the sterling work of the Committees, in which all the parties co-operate to produce many good reports. But somehow the good working relationships get lost when we come into the Chamber. We cannot even agree to differ. You can see the hatred. I consider Mr McCrea a friend. *[Interruption]* He was kind enough to say the same thing.

The Deputy Chairperson: Mr Smyth, your time is up. Please take your seat.

Mr Weir: May I start by expressing my best wishes to the Chairman.

I want to speak about the disgraceful meeting at Downing Street yesterday. Here I find myself at one with Rev William McCrea. But we should not be surprised at the attitude of the Government. As Mr Empey said yesterday, it seems that the Government's attitude is that a concession a day keeps the bomber away. There has been a constant stream of concessions to Republicanism over the past few months — demilitarization ("demilitarization" is a Provo word, but in this case it is accurate); the transfer or release of prisoners and the slackening of prison security, which led to the escape this week; the Police Bill; the parades legislation; the acceptance of the one-sided SACHR report on fair employment; and talk of inquiries into the events of bloody Sunday. The list of concessions and surrender to the IRA is endless. I could spend my entire time talking about them, but I want to move on to some related matters.

The concessions to the IRA have accelerated lately. If one were cynical one might feel that the Government are trying to prop up a cease-fire which is on the verge of collapse, but I am sure that that is not what is motivating them.

Ministers need to realize that confidence must be built in the whole community, but particularly among Unionists, who are sick and tired of seeing concession after concession to Republicanism. The patience of the Unionist community is not inexhaustible, and there are many things that the Government could do for us. I am particularly concerned, for example, about the fate of border farmers who were forced to leave their land because of the sectarian campaign waged by Sinn Féin/IRA. The Government could give more support to groups like the Fermanagh-based FEAR, which is helping farmers to go back to the land that they still own — land which they did not abandon but were forced by the IRA to leave. That is just one of many things that the Government could do.

Secondly, they need to learn the lessons of history. Appeasement of terrorism has never worked. Unionists are sometimes accused of being trapped by history. People should not be trapped by history, but the Government have gone to the other extreme and forgotten history altogether. Here I am thinking not just of the appeasement of the 1930s. One could go back a full millennium, to the end of the tenth century, when the forerunners of the British Government found themselves under constant attack by invading Danes. The remedy then, as now, was appeasement — Danegeld. If the Danes came raiding and pillaging, there were attempts to buy them off. But Danegeld never got rid of the Danes; it only gave them the incentive to come back, time and time again. Students of history will know that in the eleventh century three kings of England were of Danish origin — King Canute and two of his sons.

Appeasement of the Danes led eventually to the Danish take-over. The Government will never get rid of today's Danes until they stop paying Danegeld. They should learn that lesson.

Mr Dodds: First, may I join others in wishing Mr Gorman a speedy recovery.

I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Browne's comments about North Belfast.

I also agree with what Mr Weir had to say about concessions to the IRA, but, as a BBC commentator asked yesterday, why on earth are the Ulster Unionists sitting with them and giving them credibility?

I have come into possession of internal Sinn Fein documentation which proves IRA/Sinn Fein involvement in groups lobbying for concessions on a wide range of issues. The report, which was produced in October and has been distributed throughout the organization by its head office, proves what Unionists have been saying about IRA/Sinn Fein's instigation and exploitation of issue-based activist groups. While ostensibly independent of IRA/Sinn Fein, these groups form part of an elaborate network designed to exert maximum pressure on the authorities to achieve the organization's political objectives. Their work is carefully co-ordinated by a campaign directorate which must have Sinn Fein representation, including a member of the organization's negotiating team at Stormont.

10.45 am

Seamus Mallon and others in the SDLP are allowing themselves to be used by these groups organized by Sinn Fein. The recent rally in south Armagh, at which Mallon shared a platform with Martin McGuinness, was clearly part of the IRA/Sinn Fein game plan, as revealed in this documentation. The papers, which I shall make public today, show that many of the current Nationalist/Republican campaigns for concessions are carefully orchestrated by IRA/Sinn Fein. They are not a true reflection of grass-roots Nationalist opinion; they portray what IRA/Sinn Fein wants the world to believe are grass-roots, Nationalist/Republican concerns.

The documents talk about a network of groups set up for a three-pronged campaign on what the IRA calls demilitarization, what Sinn Fein describes as the liberation of prisoners of war, and so-called equality for Nationalists. The purpose of all this organization is

"maximizing popular support for the Republican analysis; exerting as much pressure as possible on the two Governments; influencing the other political parties and restricting their room for manoeuvre; and generating international support leading to pressure for a British withdrawal".

We are told

"The objective is to create a series of networks that can, like gear cogs, shift a force upwards and develop momentum behind an issue".

It is said that the three groups have support networks. The three issue groups are demilitarization, anti-fortification — we have already seen these in action — and equality action, which

"will be established from groups already confronting equality issues"

and will be

"exposing resistance to their plan as political discrimination."

They are to

“relate to the issue of ‘parity of esteem’, or ‘political equality’, for Nationalists.”

According to the report

“This network’s objective is to politicize the issue of inequality so that it can be used as a lever for constitutional change in negotiations.”

A campaign network has been set up to support these issue groups. Its purpose is to launch public-pressure campaigns based on ‘Republican News’ and

“to create a communications swarm directed at the relevant agencies”

to whip up public concern. This is to be followed by a protest-action network, set up and run by Sinn Fein councillors in every electoral area where the organization has representation.

Then there is a lobby network. This is where the negotiating team at Stormont comes into play. All the groups and activities are to be co-ordinated to tie in with the direction of Sinn Fein’s head office. The lobbyists are

“to take maximum advantage of the negotiating opportunities that arise.”

They have even set out a typical sequence of events. They say that they will identify issues, raise awareness and organize protests; increase public pressure through their network; introduce the issue to the negotiating agenda; organize mass protests to mobilize the Republican vote via the Sinn Fein campaign directorate; and put the focus on the issue in the negotiations. Then, they say, a policy shift will emerge. We are told that

“sequences would be run in tandem” —

we are going to have anti-fortification, Irish language groups and all the rest —

“but co-ordinated to peak into the public arena at different times so as to allow lobbyists to focus on a given issue.”

These papers reveal that, far from being spontaneous and locally driven, these issue-based groups that are springing up all round the country are being organized, directed, exploited and manipulated by IRA/Sinn Fein, just as we on the Unionist side have been maintaining. It is in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland that this should be made public. I hope that in their dealings with Sinn Fein/IRA the Government will take note of the manipulation and exploitation.

Ms Bell: It will come as no surprise to Members that I will not be using my time to make political comments. Others are more able to do that. I want to make a few general comments about social and economic issues.

The Forum has had many debates about the last Government’s proposals for education, health care and social and economic matters. We hoped that the new Labour

Government would be more understanding and considerate towards people who had been excluded from full participation because of economic disadvantage. Those on a restricted income because of poor health, unemployment or social circumstances felt the direct effect of Tory measures, as did the young and the elderly. It seems that they can expect no improvement in their situation. The last few months have seen the launch of a number of proposals for changes in unemployment benefit, disability living allowance and attendance allowance, and this week there was the cut in one-parent benefit, which will have a grievous effect on some of the most vulnerable members of society.

It is a sad fact that those who are already experiencing hardship and who should be the beneficiaries of a Labour Government are the main targets. Students who wish to realize their potential in third-level education will find it difficult to do so if the proposals for fees and a loan scheme are implemented. The elderly have been given a small increase for Christmas, but they do not have great expectations for the new year. The Government should think again about implementing these measures so rapidly.

It does not seem that the Labour Government have given any more thought to the repercussions of their attempts to overhaul the welfare system and education than did the Conservatives. They have a large majority, and they have four years in which to make changes. We accept that there must be changes, but I would like them to be made with more sensitivity and with more regard for the people who need the welfare system.

Mr Robert John White: First, may I too express good wishes to Mr Gorman.

I have received from a constituent a letter about the imminent closure of 25 Fold day centres, which will affect 600 people. This person has an interest, in that he lives with and cares for his elderly mother. I am told that the service provided by these day centres has been excellent. People are collected and given stimuli of various types — reading, sewing, discussion. They are even taken to the shops. Lunch is served, and they are taken home in the afternoon. For some people, that may be the only outing of the week. The cost is a mere £2 per person, and I am sure that this constituent would be willing to pay more. The total cost is derisory.

The problem arises from the running down of the ACE scheme, which provided the helpers. My constituent says that the Government obviously want to create real jobs, and that is laudable. But niggling cuts irritate people like him, especially when they see how much is wasted elsewhere. He says that if such support is discontinued many elderly people may have to go into a home, and the very much higher cost will be borne by the state, immediately or when savings run out. It is outrageous that one of the weakest groups in the community should be subjected to these cuts. The rest of us are fairly affluent.

I want to refer to two areas of Government misspending. I came upon this first by accident — the way in which the Government help public servants with certain expenses. A Mr Swann, who lives in Harrogate, decided that a change of job required a move of four and a half miles. He obtained from the bank a £100,000 bridging loan, which — surprise, surprise — was serviced by his employer, the health authority in Leeds. I consider that fiddling.

My second example concerns a conglomeration of hospitals in the south of England that built an incinerator to cope with all the hospital waste from a vast area south of London and Bristol. They spent £4.5 million on the project. That sum would have kept the people in those Fold day centres entertained for a long time.

Those are just two examples of waste. I have 33 more.

Mr Morrow: I would like to refer to the shenanigans that took place in Downing Street yesterday. One of this morning's papers says

"The door opened behind Adams. The door nearly rattled off its hinges when the IRA mortar went in. Adams moved into the dim hallway. Blair waited for him and had his next moves worked out. There would be no promises. But it was definitely the start of the sell-out of Ulster. ...

Then there was Blair in his office waiting for the handshake that would never be talked about or pictured. He certainly had a sense of history in him. He saw himself shining in the misty future, the man who would be talked of for ever as the one who solved Ireland."

I believe that that is an accurate picture. For Unionists, yesterday was the blackest of black days. Real support was given for the sell-out of Ulster.

11.00 am

The Secretary of State said in an interview yesterday

"The way to peace is to talk."

Is that what Margaret Thatcher said about the Falklands? Did she say "Let us talk to the Argentinians and see what they really want"? Is that what happened in Kuwait? Did the Government say "Let us go and talk to Saddam"? I do not think so. They rooted the Argentinians and the Iraqis out by force. That is what must be done with the terrorists in this country. It will be a painful exercise, and those who think that it will be too hot should get out of the kitchen. But there is no other way to bring peace to this province.

The talks at Stormont are supposed to bring peace. I am certain that they will not, but if they do, it will be peace on the IRA's terms.

Mr Shannon: And that will not be peace.

Mr Morrow: Indeed. It will be the destruction of this country.

Let those who are participating in the talks understand clearly that when the war breaks out again — as it surely will — they will have played a significant part in the next stage. Nobody, whether in the Alliance Party, the Ulster Unionist Party or any other party, who is talking to the IRA need tell me or the people of Northern Ireland that he is not negotiating. If he is not negotiating, what is he doing there? Defending the Union? If so, he is not doing a good job.

Mr Blair showed categorically yesterday by his handshake, albeit away from the cameras, that his loyalties and those of his Government lie with the terrorist. They have taken the terrorist's hand, and any solution hammered out at Stormont will have to satisfy Gerry and Martin. The Alliance Party and the others will acquiesce. They will nod and say "There was no other way." We can hear it before it is said. These people should catch themselves on. They are big enough and old enough to realize that the IRA is not a figment of the imagination.

It has been said that there must be confidence-building measures. What confidence-building measures are envisaged for the victims of terrorism? What will they be given? Perhaps a little memorial somewhere. Perhaps a forest planted. That would be little consolation. The security forces are being told to go back to barracks and put away their guns because they do not need weapons. Is that what the IRA was told? It has its guns and ammunition strategically placed around the country and across the border, ready for when it feels that it has got the last concession and must go back to the war.

The sooner talks are brought to a halt the better. I am very pleased that the Democratic Unionist Party is not there. The day the DUP goes to the talks will be the day I leave the party.

Mr Foster: First, I want to be associated with the remarks about the Chairman, Mr Gorman. I am sorry that he is ill. He is a fine gentleman, and we all wish him well.

I want to thank Mr Weir for his reference to the FEAR group in Fermanagh, of which I am a member, and to remind the Government of a forgotten people who need assistance.

In these days fact is stranger than fiction. I refer to the IRA/Sinn Fein delegation to Downing Street. To the many who yearn for the loved ones taken from them by the inextricably linked IRA and Sinn Fein such events must be very melancholy indeed. The weeping of so many solitary, deserted human hearts has produced no remorse whatsoever in Adams and company. Today, 12 December, is the anniversary of the murder of two RUC officers in Fivemiletown four short years ago — Const Beacom and Const Smith. What memories for their families. What memories for so many people throughout the province.

People of my vintage may know that today is also the anniversary of the commencement of the 1956-62 IRA campaign. I was in the Ulster Special Constabulary, and I remember being on the streets of Enniskillen on six of the next eight nights.

This province is under continuous assault from its enemies — the traditional enemies of Northern Ireland. Some use armed rebellion, some allegedly constitutional means, sneaking and fawning. In saying that, I think of the SDLP. Yesterday I heard John Hume say on the radio that dialogue is the way. If that is so, what is wrong with dialogue in the Forum? He and his party are not here. How blatantly hypocritical for a person who is seen by some as reasonable, flexible and understanding.

In 1986 John Hume said that the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a challenge to cut out the rhetoric. It was a challenge to stop talking about Irish unity and start working for it, and that is what he is doing today. He was addressing a meeting of his party's Bogside branch on

that occasion, and he went on to say that they should continue building until final stability was achieved. One can guess what he meant by "final stability". Gerry Adams is saying the same thing today — peace, agreement and political settlement, but on his terms.

Mr Bolton: Will Mr Foster give way?

Mr Foster: I do not have time.

Pro-British people have gone out of their way to befriend all decent, responsible folk. They want to be constructive. For the well-being of the people of Northern Ireland we seek real politics. Republican and Nationalist aims are not in keeping with real politics. These people are now engaged in a cold war to make Her Majesty's Government secede part of their territory to another state. Extreme Republicans want Irish unity and are prepared to kill for it, as they have done in the past. The SDLP wants a united Ireland and will connive and deceive to achieve it. In spite of the tension between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of the Republic, they are reasonably friendly towards each other.

Yesterday Gerry Adams said that a settlement would bring about more friendly relations between the Republic and Britain. It seems that he sees himself as the head of a state within two states. He pretends a political front, but his illegal army is in the background. The British Prime Minister can call on his legal army when necessary, as can the Republic's Prime Minister. But there is a big difference between a legal army under a constitutional Government and an illegal army operating behind a so-called political front. We should not forget the glory words of one of the so-called political activists, Francie Molloy:

"We can return to what we do best."

And, of course, we heard Gerry Adams's taunt:

"They have not gone away, you know."

A black, ominous cloud hangs over all our people. The threat is that if we do not succumb to Republican demands, peace will be gone again — a threat if ever there was one. The Government seem to be frightened by Adams and company. But perhaps Adams and company only appear to be going places; perhaps they are not really getting anywhere. That would be a shock to their system.

In this time of crisis, when the future of Northern Ireland is at stake, I appeal to the pro-British people to unite in defence of their right. All Unionists must stand together in defending their position. They must not try to score political points. The constitutional position is more important than point-scoring. The argument must not go by default. Sadly, the Republican aim — divide and conquer — is gradually being achieved. Pro-British people are doing Republicans' dirty work, as we have seen during the last few days.

In conclusion, I appeal to our people to waken up before the situation is beyond us, to get in there and fight. The important thing is to be together politically, not playing from the

touchline. We cannot influence the result if we are not in there. Now is the time. For God's sake let us take the opportunity. Otherwise we will never be forgiven by our people.

Mr McAlister: I am sorry that Mr Casey has gone, for I wanted to put him right on something. This is not a Forum for peace and reconciliation; it is the Forum for Political Dialogue. If we talk about or even achieve peace and reconciliation that will be something else. Mr Casey and his small party rightly slam the SDLP for not being here, but often — as now — they themselves are not here when they should be.

Concessions have been mentioned. This week's entry into Downing Street was just one item on the IRA/Sinn Fein shopping list. It is a list with no end: as one item is stroked off, another is added.

The prison escape this week was not by chance; it was well planned. The escapee was wearing a dress or some other female garment, and ordinarily he would not have had such clothes unless he was a transvestite. And unless he had very long hair he needed a wig. He also required a ready supply of make-up. Having seen the mug shot on television, I think he must have needed a lot of make-up. Or perhaps we are employing very short-sighted people as prison officers.

This escape was planned and carried out with the help of people using a children's party. The party had been planned a long time previously — by IRA/Sinn Fein, of course. It was the old IRA trick — the children's "last hit" principle. It was important to give democracy and the British Government a slap on the face on the day they were going to the very seat of government and democracy — 10 Downing Street. That falls in with everything else that Sinn Fein does — the last bomb, the last killing, the last stroke before it talks peace. The situation was contrived, and many people were involved in the complicity. In the light of last week's BBC programme, which confirmed yet again what we all know about the positions that Adams and McGuinness hold on the army council, it is strange that they got that access.

I want to refer to the Prime Minister's comments. We would be more convinced if he had said "When I had Adams and McGuinness here I told them that this was their last chance, that if they did not immediately disarm, or if they went back to war, the Government would pursue them relentlessly, using whatever means and whatever money were necessary, until they were utterly destroyed." The message that we want the Government to give IRA/Sinn Fein is that they will be hunted down without fear or favour and, if necessary, shot like dogs. My Colleague who said that we cannot fiddle and run around was quite right. In the final analysis, these people must either comply with democracy or be taken out by democracy.

11.15 am

Mr Hume was very quick to pick up Mrs Restorick's comment. I have every sympathy for Mrs Restorick, who suffered the tragedy of losing her son to an IRA sniper, but there are many mothers who are not saying what she is saying. What about the lady whose son was shot down along with his friend? She is not saying that Gerry Adams should be invited to Downing Street; she is totally against such a meeting. Mr Hume is very one-sided

— he picks out what suits him. I believe that there are more mothers and widows against the Downing Street meeting and these talks than there are in favour of them.

I want to ask a question — and this is not point-scoring — of the Ulster Unionist Party. Adams has said that now that he has this meeting under his belt, his next objective is to have direct talks with Mr Trimble. The Ulster Unionists have said that that will not happen, but as they have gone back on so many other things, how can we be convinced? We would be more convinced by their withdrawal from these sham talks.

I believe that, in his own way, Lord Alderdice was being sincere when he said that we should be talking. But nothing that he said changed our minds. If anything, he convinced us even more that we should not be at the talks. No matter what happens, IRA/Sinn Féin will blame someone or something — whether the DUP for not talking or the fact that someone could not get a job as a mechanic in Londonderry and became an IRA man. They will always blame someone else. But that does not take away from the fact that what we have now is a sham. It is time to withdraw completely from this dishonest process.

Mr Speers: The matter that I wish to raise is the current situation in the Health Service.

Like many other folk, I was led to believe, if not convinced, that a Labour Government would be the panacea for the problems in health care, education and other public services. Certainly we were led to believe that things would be substantially different, that money would be made available from various sources, and that we would see the dawning of a new era. Unfortunately, that does not appear to be the case. Indeed, I contend that people were substantially misled. An Opposition can promise anything.

The Democratic Unionists always want to be the Opposition. They constantly criticize the Ulster Unionists and others, but they have manifestly failed to come up with anything different or helpful. It is OK to criticize others, but you must put forward something constructive. When Labour was in opposition it constantly criticized the then Government and were supported by the DUP.

Mr McAlister rose in his place and claimed that fewer than 22 Members were present. Forum counted, and 22 Members being then present —

Mr Speers: I have recently heard about the proposed closure of the two remaining state residential homes in the Armagh area — Lisnally House in Armagh and Annvale House in Keady. Late on Tuesday afternoon I was led to believe that this matter was to come before the health board. We all like to get a Christmas box. The Christmas box that is being offered to the folk in Lisnally House and Annvale House is the prospect of being put out of their home. The average age of these people is 81, and they may have to move in the new year.

I spoke privately to the Chairman of the Health Committee. It is imperative that we visit the city and district of Armagh to investigate the proposed removal of much-needed services. The day before the proposed closure of Annvale House was announced, the Health Minister, Mr Worthington, presented the Keady home with an award for the best-kept health facility in the Southern Board area. I implore the Health Committee of the Forum —

The Deputy Chairperson: Mr Speers, your time is up.

Mr Speers: There was a slight interruption.

The Deputy Chairperson: I gave you extra time.

Mr Hugh Smyth: I assure the Member that the Health Committee will investigate fully the proposed closure of the two homes he has mentioned.

Mr Bolton: Having listened to Mr Foster, I want to comment briefly on the interview given by John Hume yesterday, in which he replied to another Ulster Unionist, Mr William Ross, who may not be as enthusiastic about the talks process as some who have spoken today.

Mr Hume told us two or three times "Listen to what Mrs Restorick has to say. Take your cue from Mrs Restorick." I do not want to take anything away from Mrs Restorick — I know how she feels — but I want to tell Mr Hume to listen to a woman whose son was murdered a few weeks before the peace process began. Mrs Frances Smith is a constituent of mine. Indeed, she nominated me for election to the Forum. She says "It is ridiculous. They should never have been invited to meet Tony Blair. It is all a sham."

When all the talk was about the peace process I said to the press that what was about to come in a week or two would not be a peace process, that it would be a process to weaken the Union and to destroy the Unionist case.

The Forum must listen to Mrs Smith.

Mr Empey: Members will forgive me if I raise issues that are pertinent to my own district — East Belfast.

It seems to me that in the welter of interest in social and economic matters, with all the emphasis on bringing funds to Northern Ireland, particularly money from the special fund for peace and reconciliation in Europe, the outstanding feature is the very poor deal that East Belfast is getting.

For example, in spite of the fact that the constituency represents 25% of Belfast, it has received less than 8% of the city's peace and reconciliation money. One cannot dismiss that by saying that the area is awash with wealth. Certainly, there are districts where people have money, but a significant number of wards have been included in Making Belfast Work and identified under every index of social deprivation as being in urgent need of assistance.

In addition, the housing situation in East Belfast is the worst in the city. We need at least 1,000 new public-sector dwellings to balance what has been provided in other areas, but in the current financial year the Housing Executive's contribution has been 25 out of 372 for the entire city. The prognosis for next year is similar. Of course, the Housing Executive is gradually moving construction to housing associations. I am worried not about that but about the fact that, as was announced yesterday, funds for housing are being reduced. The Housing Executive has said that the amount it has been offered is far less than it needs.

Three years ago the Training and Employment Agency said that it would open an office on the Newtownards Road. We understand that it is going back on that promise. There has been a series of such things. Take the Planning Service. Some of its decisions have been very detrimental.

Anybody can whinge and girm about his own district — we are all pretty well qualified to do that — but the raw statistics, particularly on the European issue, are incontrovertible. There is no balance in public expenditure. There is certainly no balance in the allocation of European funds. If people are to have confidence in the political process, if people are to have opportunities, the imbalance needs to be redressed. We hear about the great equality agenda. Equality applies to everybody — not just to Republicans. If the people of East Belfast are to have confidence in the political process it must be balanced so that they get a fair share of what is going.

11.30 am

Mr Shannon: My subject might be described as country sports for everyone — a rural activity.

Members are well aware of the recent hunting Bill in Parliament. That was an attack on liberty. Country sports are among Northern Ireland's — indeed, the United Kingdom's — most popular leisure activities. At least seven million people hunt, shoot or fish. There has been much concern that the Labour Government will introduce legislation to outlaw fox-hunting and, ultimately, other country sports.

With the prospect of activities that have been the hobby, and indeed the work, of many people since the beginning of time being banned, the country-sports organizations held a rally in Hyde Park on 10 July to say "Enough is enough." One hundred thousand folk from the countryside attended to demonstrate their support for country sports, and they were addressed by notable people from the media and other walks of public life. I want to highlight the broad spectrum of society that follows country sports.

The issue of hunting was debated in a recent UTV programme. A man who was asked why he opposed hunting said that he did not like those people. Is it valid to oppose hunting just because one does not like the people who hunt? Is it a question of affluence? Anyone who takes time to study hunting will know that its followers include minors and people from all walks of life.

The thrust of the campaign against the countryside comes from people of a city culture. The rural community has helped to preserve woods, hedgerows, lakes and ponds, and it is wrong that people who are unfortunate enough to live in towns should say "No country sports." Everyone deserves to have his lifestyle protected. Many town dwellers look forward to relaxing and enjoying leisure activities in the country.

One of the reasons for the great success of the Hyde Park rally was the high profile of the speakers — for example, Jeremy Irons, Paula Hamilton, Lord Steel, Michael Heseltine and Baroness Mallalieu.

I am concerned about how a ban on country sports would affect the community and the economy. Many packs of hounds would have to be destroyed — tens of thousands of dogs put down because there was no longer a role for them or because they would be too expensive to keep. Is that what the anti-hunt supporters want?

Revenue from tourism would go — millions of pounds lost for ever. Thousands of jobs are created by country sports. Let me list the vocations of some of the signatories to the petition that went to Downing Street on 10 July: veterinary surgeon, professional huntsman, falconer, gunsmith, blacksmith, shepherd, tailor, publican, caterer, racing correspondent, greyhound trainer, farmer, student, ferreter, forester, feed merchant, bootmaker, farm worker, pigeon fancier, National Hunt jockey, flat-race jockey, angler, gamekeeper, groom, fisherman, saddler, hedge-layer, horse-box manufacturer. Those are only some of the people who will be directly affected if the anti-hunting Bill gets through.

Let me give Members a flavour of the type of comments made at the rally. A huntsman said

"I am here because my job is on the line and 84 dogs in our pack will have to be destroyed. Is that morally acceptable? That is the question I ask those in the anti-hunts."

Lord Tebbit, a man well known for shooting from the hip, said

"It is another example of lynch-mob politics. The Islington set are completely ignorant. Stop pushing city culture upon the countryside."

Another huntsman:

"This countryside is not just there — we put it there. We have maintained it for generations, and now we are seeing it being stripped away from us. My entire pack will have to be killed."

David Bellamy — we all know who he is — said

"Farming practices and country sports benefit and protect animal and plant life. I do not participate, but I am glad that all of you do."

Many people have a fuddy-duddy, cuddly view of the countryside. Were they ever to witness the chaos in a hen-house after a fox — portrayed on television and in stories as a lovely wee animal that talks to children and never eats meat — has had his pleasure they might not have quite the same sympathy for him. A fox will kill every bird in a hen-house — not because he needs to eat but because that is his nature. And he will take one or two home.

The Labour Party Bill is a vicious attack on the tradition of rural life. Its prejudice against country people owes more to Walt Disney than to the real world. The media U-turn following the rally is due largely to the arguments of sportsmen and sportswomen and the efforts of heavyweight speakers, many of whom do not hunt. Farming practice and country sports benefit and protect animal and plant life. The mood of the people at the rally was to keep the countryside as it is. Tony Blair has often stated that he will listen to the voice of the people. Let him show that he does.

Mr Tom Robinson: My topic is relevant to the whole of Northern Ireland and appropriately follows Mr Shannon's speech about the attack on country pursuits. Rural life in Northern Ireland is very much under attack.

The attitude of the Department of the Environment to road gritting in rural areas has cropped up in the past and, no doubt, will be raised in the future. My area has experienced tremendous problems because of the criteria that the Department applies.

I refer Members to a letter which I received from St MacNissi's College, Garron Tower — a school in my area — a number of whose pupils recently avoided a very serious accident only by the grace of God. Members will be aware of the incident, as it was reported in the media. A few weeks ago 65 children travelling by bus on a mountain road to school almost met with disaster when the vehicle nearly went over the cliff because of black frost. But for the grace of God and the skill of the driver, those children could have been killed. There was a 40-foot drop.

It is scandalous that one of the criteria for gritting a country road is that it must carry at least 1,000 vehicles. What rural road in Northern Ireland carries that volume of traffic? This policy must be re-examined. Larne Borough Council has taken the issue up with the Roads Service, with previous Conservative Ministers and everyone else possible, including the Ombudsman. Unfortunately, the Ombudsman's hands are tied. To the best of my knowledge, the Department of the Environment has no legal responsibility to grit the roads. However, I would still encourage people to write.

Proper consideration is not being given to topography. Parents are very worried about the extreme difficulties for their children in getting to school. The Department's policy is very silly. I flag it up again because it is only a matter of time before another accident occurs. And next time children may not be so lucky. The very fabric of rural life is under attack.

We have the support of Ulsterbus, the local councils, the education and library boards and the Farmers' Union. I am not suggesting that every rural road should be gritted, but school-bus routes ought to be treated so that lives are not put in danger. What would be the cost? We are not asking the Department to grit three times a day. Recently it could hand out prize money for a golf tournament. It is very odd that it cannot pay for the gritting of rural roads. Are golf prizes more important than the lives of country people?

I will continue to raise this matter in the hope that the new Minister, Lord Dubs, will get out and see the problems that country folk have to face.

Mr Gibson: First, I want to express my good wishes to the Chairman for a speedy recovery. He was brought up in Omagh, where his father served in the Royal Irish Constabulary. Naturally, as an Omagh person, I wish him well.

I welcome yesterday's announcement of additional money for education, especially pre-school education. The Minister is honouring his commitment to support, in principle, the Education Committee's report on pre-school provision.

I also welcome the extra £8 million for the rebuilding and refurbishment programme. But this is not new money; it simply restores the original provision. We need deliberate, positive discrimination in favour of the controlled sector. Capital spending has favoured the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and the integrated group, at the expense of the controlled schools. Over the next three years the Minister should divert all possible funds to tackle the dangerous conditions in school buildings. A backlog has built up over the past 10 years.

I want to draw attention to another matter, which I hope the Business Committee will take up. Most Members, having attended the launch at the Balmoral Conference Centre and read the glossy magazine, will be aware of the ideas for shaping our future. Forum Members contributed to the debate when they discussed the question of an integrated transport policy; discussion papers on the future of education are on the way; and a few days ago in Newcastle the Secretary of State launched the document 'Well into 2000'. The Forum has Committees working independently in these areas. We need a co-ordinated approach. Every role impinges on all the others. There is not much point in having a road system that relieves traffic congestion but takes no account of health, education and major industries like agriculture.

11.45 am

The Business Committee should consider how the Forum might adopt an integrated approach to shaping the future of Northern Ireland, especially as the Forum has little time left. Outsiders like Bertie Ahern, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair want to get in on the act. Our future is being discussed by everyone except the elected representatives. For instance, we have 168 quangos. If elected representatives abandon their responsibility the bureaucrats and the quangos will have the field to themselves.

There is a great deal of talk about confidence-building measures. The best builders of confidence are the elected representatives. As the Forum is the only elected body for the whole of Northern Ireland its Members should take the lead. Things should not be left to Bill Clinton, Gerry Adams and every other Tom, Dick or Harry whose only interest is to deprive Northern Ireland of its status within the Union. Let us put our heads together and shape our own future.

In the meantime I wish all Members a good Christmas and a better 1998.

Mr Nesbitt: Wednesday of this week was International Human Rights Day. It commemorated the adoption by the United Nations on 10 December 1948 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which is the foundation of all human rights. It is therefore timely to ask whether the Government of the United Kingdom are living up to their human-rights commitments, and especially pertinent as we now have a Labour Government committed to the protection of human rights throughout the foreign domain. The Labour Party is committed to the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights, but more so for foreigners than for citizens of the United Kingdom, especially those who live in Northern Ireland. There could be no more appropriate time to repeat something that I have often said in the Forum: the purpose of the framework document is to impose upon the

majority in Northern Ireland something that would not be tolerated anywhere else in the democratic world.

The United Kingdom will take over the presidency of the European Union in January. Mr Blair and his party are great advocates of the European Union and all that it means. Well, that Community has laid down principles and practices for the resolution of conflicts such as the one in Northern Ireland. Though great Europeans, Mr Blair and Mr Ahern turn a blind eye to what is happening here. They say that borders should be respected and that states should not interfere in each other's affairs. They say that where there is dissension in a region about the state to which it belongs, the solution should be devolved government capable of building trust. The point is that cross-border co-operation must be built slowly by communities that are participating well.

Those principles and practices are laid down not just by the European Union but also by the Council of Europe, the United Nations and every other body whose purpose is to protect rights and freedoms, yet the British Government and the Government of the Republic turn a blind eye to every one of them as it affects Northern Ireland. For example, we will not have devolved government unless we are prepared to accept all-Ireland executive bodies. That is political blackmail, and it is totally unacceptable. Every principle that applies in Europe is denied in the framework document, which would be anathema to every other democratic country in the Western World.

The Ulster Unionist Party's position is very clear, and its message very simple. Our clarion call is for nothing more and nothing less than the rights and principles that provide stability for all other citizens of the European Union. The universality of human rights means that the rights of a person in Belgium or Germany are no lesser or greater than those of a citizen of Northern Ireland.

Mr Gregory Campbell: I concur with the remarks of other Members regarding the health and welfare of the Forum's Chairman. We wish him a speedy recovery.

I want to refer to the question of what kind of new Northern Ireland we can expect from what is described as new Labour, bearing in mind what happened at Downing Street yesterday and what has been going on in the talks at Castle Buildings for the past 18 months.

In Northern Ireland, unfortunately, the perception and the reality differ significantly. Unionists are supposed to be defenders of the *status quo*, whereas the SDLP and Sinn Féin especially are campaigning for change. That is the perception; as in most situations, the reality is quite different. The fad that currently passes for government is utterly unacceptable to me as a Unionist, so I do not want to be regarded as one of the defenders of the *status quo*. If there are people who are against change I am not on their side, as what passes for government in Northern Ireland at the moment is unacceptable to me. The "quangoland" in which we are ruled has often been referred to in the Forum. There are scores of quangos made up of self-appointed personnel. People happen to bump into Ministers at wine-and-cheese parties, and three weeks later they get letters requesting them to serve on various bodies.

Quangos have a significant say in many areas of life. I am against that. I want change. I want democracy. At present we are disenfranchised. Why? Because the hoods and gangsters who turned up at Downing Street manipulated thousands of votes to get elected, as in Mid Ulster. The facts are bent, and the picture that emerges is far from the truth. I want an electoral system that accurately reflects the wishes of the people.

With regard to investment, the Industrial Development Board and the Local Enterprise Development Unit seem to believe that the programme for targeting social need should favour certain areas, almost to the exclusion of others. I want that changed. I want democracy.

If a supporter of the Irish language applies for a grant the only matter in question is the number of noughts on the cheque. The figure could be £10,000 or £100,000. I want that changed. Unionists have an ethos and a culture that must be recognized and supported.

We have a fair employment system that is a charade. The person who is chairman of the Fair Employment Commission has been in post for more than 20 years. In other cases the occupant of the chair is changed every two or three years. The Fair Employment Commission's chairmanship seems to be held in perpetuity. I want that changed. Here too I want democracy.

Our Ulster-Scots identity has been ignored or treated with contempt. I want change. Our identity must be fully recognized. The culture and religious beliefs of the Unionist community are under threat. I want the Government to recognize that and do something about it.

In the new Northern Ireland that I want, my community's outlook on life would be seen as having some degree of credibility at the Northern Ireland Office. At present it has none. Having been involved in politics for 20 years, I am no latter-day convert to the idea that we ought to talk. I believe in talk. I am not a johnny-come-lately to the idea of dialogue. I have always believed that we must talk to those with whom we disagree, but I will never give credibility to gunmen, bombers, gangsters, hoodlums and terrorists, and I will not sit with them. We must devise a system whereby we can achieve a new Northern Ireland without giving credibility to hoods and terrorists.

12.00

Rev Trevor Kirkland: First, I want to comment on Lord Alderdice's reference to Brer Rabbit and the paradoxical injunction. His analogy was absurd. Does his assertion that he wants the Unionists to talk with Sinn Féin mean that he really does not want them to talk? And Sinn Féin's demand for a united Ireland, according to his principle of the paradoxical injunction, means that actually it does not want that. Likewise, when people say that they want peace they really do not. The Brer Rabbit theory may be fine for psychiatry, but once you get off the couch and come into the real world, the paradoxical injunction becomes an absurdity and will lead to anarchy.

Mr Gibson: Will the Member give way?

Rev Trevor Kirkland: I do not have time.

I want to talk about private property. No doubt every Member subscribes to the principle of private property, but in reality it is being constantly eroded. A farmer has two sons. One of them is to be married and is given the low meadow to build a house. Anyone who says he believes in private property jettisons the idea if he accepts that that man must apply for planning permission, which could be refused. The principle of private property is that the owner controls it.

In this society, that principle is being eroded. For example, the Ramblers' Association says that every person has a right to free access to the countryside, and if that means walking over someone's farm or property, that is fine. Again, I repeat the principle: if you own property you control it and decide who can or cannot be on it. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said

"We have a tendency to empty terms of their meaning."

He gave an illustration: "If I gave you a tree but told you that you could not climb it, eat the fruit of it or chop it down, where then your private property? I would be overturning the whole principle."

One thing that interferes with private property is vesting. It is ludicrous that the Government can go to a person and say "We need this property, so we are taking it from you." Mr Benson referred to a school near Scrabo. I think the family of Blair Mayne had that land taken from them. It is ridiculous that when a property owner says "I do not want to sell" the Government can say "Tough — we are going to take it from you". It is Government theft.

But the height of barbarism is that the Government can say "You may own property, but we are going to tax it." Taxing something is an assertion of ownership. Anyone who has studied the history of taxation knows that in Britain and America there was widespread resistance to the introduction of property tax for that reason.

When those Members who are also councillors are presented with a planning schedule and decide what a person can or cannot do with his property, they are asserting ownership of that property. But it is not theirs. Indeed, they are guilty of overturning the principle of private property. If someone owns a piece of land and wants to do something with it, no one should have the right to prevent him.

In 'The Times' of today there is a classic example. An elderly couple bought a piece of ground that was originally a tip and turned it into a garden. However, the council has said "Sorry, but you must plough up that garden because you did not have planning permission." That overthrows the principle of private property.

Here in Belfast a committee was set up to decide the future of Cave Hill. The amazing thing is that the owners of Cave Hill were not asked to join the committee. All kinds of plans were made, but the owners were never consulted. In other words, they were regarded as irrelevant.

I challenge Members about their attitude to the principle of private property. When they say that they believe in private ownership what precisely do they mean? If we hand sovereignty to others we overturn the principle.

Mrs Parkes: May I join other Members in wishing Mr Gorman a speedy recovery.

I want to speak briefly about a couple of matters which come under the heading of social security. Members will be aware of the current review of the social-security system. According to reports, the whole system and the number of benefits currently available are being looked at. It is reported that several types of disability allowance will be abolished. The disability living and attendance allowances are to be replaced by a means-tested allowance that will cause more misery and hardship.

More than 150,000 people in Northern Ireland receive these allowances. The Government's attack on these vulnerable members of society is deplorable and disgraceful and must be resisted tooth and nail by all groups and public representatives. I am amazed that it is a Labour Government which is behind these proposals. There is considerable opposition in the country to the proposed reductions. We must say no.

This week we have also seen an attack on lone-parent benefits. These cuts are unfair and totally unacceptable. Where will it all end?

Let us look at the issue of cold-weather payments. With the onset of winter, most of us will spend considerably more on electricity, coal, oil and food. We try to budget, not for extras but for necessities. This can be very difficult even for those families with a member working. How much more difficult must it be for those who depend on social-security benefits, particularly pensions, for survival? Senior citizens find it extremely difficult to make ends meet throughout the year, but in winter it is virtually impossible. Some have to dip into their small life savings — money put aside, perhaps for funeral arrangements. Many have to choose between eating and heating their homes. What a choice.

Many senior citizens are fiercely independent and would not accept handouts. These people worked all their lives and paid national insurance contributions, and many served their country in wars. It is appalling that the Government cannot provide adequately for people who gave so much and withstood so much for the benefit of future generations. The present levels of state pensions are totally inadequate to provide basic necessities. In south Belfast we have a vast number of elderly people. The Government need to do much more. The recent announcement by the Chancellor of extra help for pensioners is to be welcomed, but it is not nearly enough.

Northern Ireland's senior citizens face higher food and fuel costs, particularly electricity charges, than those in the rest of the United Kingdom. The Government operate a system of exceptionally-severe-weather payments, which is triggered when the temperature falls below a certain level. The wind-chill factor, which has a significant effect, should be taken into account. I call on the Government to give senior citizens a better deal.

Mr McKee: I want to join other Members in paying tribute to the Forum's Chairman and to wish him a speedy recovery. As Mr Foster said, Mr Gorman is a decent man. I have known him for many years, and he has always been a real gentleman. I hope that he will be back with us very shortly.

Many Members have talked about Gerry Adams and the IRA delegation to Downing Street yesterday. As a Loyalist and an Ulster Unionist I was disgusted to see those murderous thugs going to the very heart of government and being treated as democrats. They are the people who have bombed, murdered and mutilated in Northern Ireland. I went to work last night and found that many people there were disgusted that these murderers could be elevated to such a position — a meeting with the head of the Government.

What must those who have lost loved ones at the hands of the IRA down through the years — policemen and UDR men — have felt when they saw the godfathers of terrorism walking through the door of Number 10 and being treated like democrats? They must have felt let down; they must have felt gutted. The Government danced on the graves of Ulster's dead yesterday by bringing the IRA to Downing Street.

There is only one way to treat a terrorist. There is only one way to treat Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness. There is only one way to talk to them — down the barrel of a gun. They are not going to accept democracy in Northern Ireland. They are not going to treat Northern Ireland as a democracy. They are going to continue their campaign of death and destruction until they achieve their goal of a 32-county Republic. They are prepared to tramp over the graves and the bodies of Ulster Loyalists.

This Government and the previous Government have never tried to win the war against terrorism; they have only tried to contain it. They have continually tied the hands of the security forces; they have not allowed them to rid Ulster of this cancer.

I want to return to a speech that Mr Tom Robinson made in the Forum a few weeks ago. He talked about the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and I agreed with much of what he had to say. He and I have taken our stand on Larne Borough Council for many years in opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. But he moved on to the talks process, saying that DUP members were running away and, like ostriches, sticking their heads in the sand. Imagine an ostrich trying to run with its head in the sand.

At least the ostrich had the sense to duck when it saw danger, unlike the headless chickens running hither and thither, not knowing which policy to adopt. One day Ulster Unionists are beating their chests and saying "We are going to take on the IRA. We are going to tell Dublin." The next day their message is "Having met Mr Ahern, we are reasonably reassured. Things have calmed down again, and the talks are back on track." That makes me wonder and worry.

There are good people in the Unionist Party — decent, honourable, Loyalist people who would defend Ulster just as I would and whom I would be pleased to have at my side. But let us not forget that they were surprised to see Gerry Adams at the talks and condemned his presence. How can they say that they condemn Gerry Adams's presence? The Government say that as Gerry Adams is in the talks he is entitled to be treated like any other

participant. That is exactly what is happening. The Ulster Unionists are propping up the talks and allowing people like Gerry Adams to be there. I say "No surrender."

12.15 pm

Mr Ian Paisley Jnr: I am loath to follow a real firebrand speech like that, but I want to bring two matters to the Forum's attention before we close for the Christmas recess. They are matters which concern the Forum, and I hope we will debate them further next year.

Motion number 7 on the Notice of Motion paper refers to our debate on Neil Latimer's incarceration. The Life Sentence Review Board met on Tuesday of this week to consider the case. That body has a very important function: it has to consider whether a prisoner is likely to re-offend and whether he should be given a release date. After Neil Latimer's appeal in 1992 the Life Sentence Review Board — criminally, I believe — decided that his case should be put back to December 1997.

Now that it is being considered, the greatest possible public pressure should be brought to bear on the civil servants and others involved. I do not believe that Neil Latimer committed any offence in 1983. There is sufficient doubt about his conviction, and I believe that he remains in prison largely for political reasons. Thus there is no likelihood of his re-offending, and the Review Board can do only one thing — immediately set a release date.

Neil Latimer has entered his fifteenth year of incarceration. Many people who admitted terrible acts, who committed multiple murders, served maybe 11 years. The Review Board determined that there was no likelihood of their re-offending. Neil Latimer has had overwhelming public support from both Nationalists and Unionists. Indeed, there is national interest in the case. More than 300 Members of Parliament signed an early-day motion calling for the release of the UDR four. In view of all this, the only action that the Life Sentence Review Board can take is to set a release date immediately.

I look forward to 1998 as the year of freedom for Neil Latimer. I look forward to seeing this man reunited with his family. I hope for a report from the Criminal Case Review Commission in the spring. I believe that that report will clearly demonstrate that there are sufficient grounds for doubt and that there should be a retrial, and I hope that the retrial will follow speedily.

There is one other matter that I want to bring before the Forum. The reason for my absence earlier was that I was at the launch of a document called 'Out of the Shadows' — a research report on families, racism and exclusion in Northern Ireland. It is an excellent document, and I recommend that the Forum debate it fully in the new year.

We now have legislation on racism and social exclusion. This document is very informative about the issues facing families from different racial backgrounds. The Forum should consider the needs of these people. I congratulate the authors. No doubt they would like the Forum to be interested in the needs not just of Unionists and Nationalists but of everyone else in Northern Ireland, regardless of background or objectives.

Mr Stewart: Along with other Members, I wish Mr Gorman a speedy recovery.

The issue that I want to talk about today is more funding for sports in Northern Ireland, particularly for the North West 200 and the Northern Ireland Milk Cup competition.

The Government should be putting money into local sporting events. The North West 200 has been going for over 50 years, and each year more than 100,000 people come to see it. But funding is very limited. More than 1,000 volunteers make sure that the course is safe for spectators from all over the world. People like Mr Billy Nutt and his team have been organizing the event for years, and they do a tremendous job.

The Milk Cup event has been going for 15 years. I could talk for hours about it and the pleasure that it brings to so many people. Footballers from all over the world take part. People who are now famous played in the competition as young men — Ryan Giggs, David Beckham, Steve Staunton, Lee Craig and our own Belfast man, Keith Gillespie. People travel many miles for the event, yet the funding is limited.

The British Seniors Open Golf Championship at Royal Portrush is an event badly in need of sponsorship. If the British Open were to be held there, the Government would have to provide funds.

Finally, my thanks go to one of the best golfers in the area, Mr Darren Clarke, for all the work that he has done. It took a Portrush man to come second in the British Open in July this year.

A Member: He comes from Dungannon.

Mr Stewart: Yes, but he moved to a better place.

The Government need to put more money into sporting events in Northern Ireland.

Mr Calvert: I too would like to express good wishes to Mr Gorman for a speedy recovery. I was very sorry to hear yesterday that he had gone into hospital. May I thank him for the excellent letter he sent to the 'Belfast Telegraph' on behalf of the Forum. We all appreciated it very much indeed. It nailed the colours of the Forum's excellent work to the mast.

My subject is the possible closure of RUC stations. A security source said that some could be closed in the coming months and that others would be closed later. The greatest changes could come with the final of three scenarios envisaged by senior officers: a return to terrorism; an uneasy peace where there are still paramilitaries (we all know that they will still be about); and a proper, lasting peace.

The Police Authority manages the entire police estate, which includes more than 200 buildings, of which 163 are police stations. The report is understood to target many stations that could close with the third scenario, and a smaller number that could go under the first two, but no decisions have yet been taken. As there is no stable peace in Northern Ireland such closures would be a backward step. During a recent meeting between the Police Liaison Committee and Lisburn Borough Council I emphasized that, rather than a reduction in the

number of police stations, we need more, especially in rural areas where there is high-density housing.

I would like to see the return of the old B Specials to support the RUC. The Ulster Special Constabulary was one of the best forces we ever had. If it were to be re-formed, the Loyalist people of Northern Ireland could help the RUC to stamp out vandalism and terrorism.

Crime is rising; vandalism is increasing. We are told by the RUC that they have more mobile patrols in rural areas. Where are they? I said to the superintendent "If there is a peace process, where are all the RUC officers who were manning road blocks and doing guard duties? Why are they not being sent into the villages and hamlets to do more community policing?" Perhaps that would cut down the lawlessness — not to mention rooting out the IRA.

It makes my blood boil to see terrorists like Gerry Adams and McGuinness arriving at 10 Downing Street. That was a disgrace. This Prime Minister has proved himself to be the greatest traitor ever in 10 Downing Street. He is another Lundy. He is good for nothing, and I hope the people of Northern Ireland will show him that when he comes here. If he makes a quick visit to Ulster, I hope he will be given a rough time.

I say to all those who manage the RUC that no police stations should be closed. Indeed, we need more.

I wish all Members a merry Christmas.

The Deputy Chairperson: May I thank all the Members who participated in the debate and express my gratitude for the good wishes to Mr Gorman. When he is feeling well, I am sure he will be delighted to read Members' comments in the Record of Debates, but your good wishes will be conveyed to him before then.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Forum at its rising today do adjourn until Friday 9 January 1998.

The Deputy Chairperson: I should like to wish all Members a merry and joyous Christmas, and I hope that peace will prevail amongst the people of Northern Ireland in the new year. I hope that many blessings will be showered upon Members and the support team who make the Forum work.

The Forum was adjourned at 12.30 pm.