

# Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)

## FORUM BULLETIN

The Forum resumed its meetings today after the summer break. There was an excellent turnout of Ulster Unionist delegates from across the Province, reflecting both the good level of co-ordination within the Party group and the level of interest in the matter for debate, the ongoing boycott of Protestant shops organised by republican elements.

Before debate could begin, however, there had to be resolved the matter of the flying of the Union Flag at the Forum building. The Secretary of State, who was required to endorse the Rules agreed, refused to accept that the flying of the Union Flag was in order as a Rule of the Forum, contrary to the accepted practice that the national flag should fly over any body elected on a Province-wide basis. The matter was resolved by the Business Committee agreeing that the Flag be flown inside the chamber. This was then voted upon. The Alliance absented themselves at this point and the Women's Coalition delegate was the only member to vote against.

The motion that was selected for debate was presented by the UUP Chief Whip, Robert Coulter. It deplored the practice of sectarian economic boycotts regardless of which section of the community initiates them and noted the serious economic consequences to inward investment, growth and employment in Northern Ireland.

A great number of UUP delegates took the opportunity to speak and while delegates from the western constituencies explained the seriousness of the situation, delegates from the eastern constituencies noted the likely effect if the boycott were to be reciprocated. There was considerable criticism of the business organisations and the trade unions for their relative silence on the issue. Following discussions between the parties, an amendment to the motion was agreed which resulted in the setting up of a committee to investigate the problem further and offer any assistance possible to those affected. The amendment also called on the Secretary of State and the Chief Constable of the RUC to take immediate action.

The UUP has renewed its calls for the SDLP to review their own boycott of the only Northern Ireland institution elected by all the people of the Province. Mindful of the fact that an economic boycott is an instrument deliberately aimed at the destruction of dialogue and mutual understanding, the issue is one of special significance to the Forum. A good day's debate would have been enhanced if the SDLP, as the largest nationalist party at the Forum election, had been present to give their view and explain their less than emphatic condemnation of the boycott.

6 September 1996.