

Dáil Éireann debate - Tuesday, 21 Apr 1998

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An Bille um an Naoú Leasú Déag ar an mBunreacht, 1998: An Dara Céim. Nineteenth Amendment of the Constitution Bill, 1998: Second Stage.

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The Taoiseach

Tairgím: "Go léifear an Bille an Dara hUair."

I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

I am laying before the House a settlement for peace in Northern Ireland. The political Agreement concluded between all the participating parties on Good Friday, 10 April, represents a major breakthrough in terms of consolidating peace and ending 30 years of conflict. The Agreement is historic in the true sense of the word. It not only supersedes previous initiatives but replaces the legislation and settlement of 1920 and 1921. In its place is an Agreement capable for the first time of winning the support of both traditions in the North, and the support of North and South, as well as enhancing co-operation throughout these islands. It is the culmination of many years of effort devoted to the peace process,

the three stranded talks which began in 1991 and, more recently, the many meetings I held, before and during my attendance at the talks. All these have come together in one Agreement.

Many people have contributed to this achievement and shown real statesmanship. I salute the political courage and leadership shown by John Hume and Gerry Adams and their close colleagues, also the priests who brought parties together. The Ulster Unionist leadership under David Trimble has made an indispensable and courageous contribution by its participation in negotiating and concluding this agreement. Dr. John Alderdice of Alliance, loyalist leaders, the Women's Coalition and Labour also played a valuable role in supporting accommodation and in bridging difference. The commitment of the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, who put his full weight behind the negotiations, was, obviously, of huge importance, as was the courage and perseverance of his Secretary of State, Dr. Mo Mowlam, and her Deputy, Mr. Paul Murphy. I also pay tribute to the essential groundwork of his predecessor, Mr. John Major.

I pay tribute to my predecessors, Mr. Charles Haughey, who was Taoiseach when the process started, Deputy Albert Reynolds, who concluded the Downing Street Declaration and made the first historic breakthrough towards ending violence, and Deputy John Bruton, who helped set the parameters and ground rules that started the talks in their most recent phase since June 1996, as well as to Deputy Dick Spring, who under successive Governments oversaw the preparation of the immensely valuable Framework Document, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Andrews, and the Minister of State at that Department, Deputy Liz O'Donnell, who deserve our warmest thanks for the leadership they gave the Irish Government team in the talks, as do the other Ministers and Ministers of State of various parties who attended on a regular basis since 1996.

The Attorney General, Mr. David Byrne, provided a vital input into key

parts of the Agreement. The interdepartmental team of officials and advisers also deserve our gratitude for helping to pull the strands of the agreement together, as do the officials attached to the British side and the different party teams, as well as the staff working with the talks chairmen. I congratulate Senator George Mitchell and his colleagues, former Prime Minister Harri Holkeri and General John de Chastelain, on their great achievement and thank them for their wisdom and patience.

I would particularly like to thank the Opposition party leaders who over many months have been extremely helpful to me and to my colleagues involved in these discussions. I thank Deputies Bruton, Quinn, De Rossa, Sargent and other Members of the Dáil who have contributed during debates. I wish to thank in particular the party leaders who on many occasions were helpful in that they did not ask questions. I appreciate that fact. Their help was much appreciated over the past number of weeks.

I have already conveyed in telephone conversations my warm thanks to President Bill Clinton, whose support and encouragement for all the participants was a key element in this process. The US Ambassador, Mrs. Jean Kennedy Smith, has also played a quite special and historic role. I also want to thank EU Commission President Santer and EU Regional Commissioner Wulf-Mathies for the generous material support they have given to peace and reconstruction in Northern Ireland and the Border areas.

Our immediate task is to have the agreement approved on both sides of the Border. This will represent a concurrent act of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole for the first time since 1918. Such a vote will remove any false vestige of democratic self-justification for further acts of violence from any quarter, republican or loyalist. All remaining paramilitary groups should cease armed activity forthwith.

Deputies

Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach

The whole basis of the settlement is the recognition that we have to live together on this island and for that we need peace, stability and reconciliation. Neither tradition has the means to impose its will on the other. An accommodation is essential for the well-being and prosperity of all. Inevitably, this will involve for everyone changes in our ways of thinking, greater tolerance and generosity and a more sympathetic understanding of the needs of others. We have to foster confidence in all sections of the community.

This Agreement is first and foremost a balanced constitutional settlement that provides a peaceful method of resolving fundamental differences in the future while creating a basis for practical partnership and co-operation now. Real balance, which we have sought since 1992, has been achieved, with fundamental and important changes in both British and Irish constitutional law. We are reformulating Articles 2 and 3, not abolishing them.

If the Government had declined to enter into these discussions on our constitutional position there would have been no multi-party negotiations and nobody should fail to understand that. There would have been no agreement and, I am afraid, no peace. We took the same view as the Secretary of State, Dr. Mowlam, that the status quo is not acceptable and, therefore, some movement was required on all sides, including ourselves.

The purpose of the changes is to reinforce the principle that in Ireland, North and South, it is the people who are sovereign and who have shared ownership of the territory of Ireland. Any British territorial claim of

sovereignty, made without reference to consent, going back to the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, the Act of Union or, for that matter, to 1170, will be superseded in the British Act and becomes irrelevant for the future. The principle of consent is paramount. From now on everything will hinge on that. This represents a substantial change. Moreover, consent is now, for the first time, formally recognised to be a two way process. The importance of this cannot be emphasised enough.

The foundation stone of this State, as well as of the peace process, the right to national self-determination in its full political, social and cultural meaning, remains untouched in Article 1, to which de Valera attached most importance and which he would not let go even in the context of a united Ireland.

The reformulation of Articles 2, 3 and 29 reflects modern, progressive republican thought that is truly pluralist and keeps faith with the inclusive tradition of Irish nationalism stemming from Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen. The nation is defined in terms of people, but people related to a specific territory, the island of Ireland. Henceforth, we do not insist on press-ganging those who are determined that they are not a part of the nation. As a consequence of that, we no longer say, or appear to say, that the territory is ours, not theirs, but rather that it is shared by all of us.

For the first time, we firmly anchor in the Constitution and, very importantly, in international law, the Irish nationality and citizenship rights of everyone born on the island who wants to avail of them. There is no question of anyone being made an alien in their own country. The nation is not territorially disembodied. It is defined in clear terms as a 32-county entity. The State remains as it was interpreted to be in the McGimpsey judgment in 1990, a 26-county one. On a different level, we also recognise for the first time the Irish diaspora which played its own notable part in the peace process.

A nation normally has, other things being equal, a right to statehood. Our position, as reiterated in the proposed Articles 2 and 3, is that the 32 county Irish nation has a right to statehood, but we recognise that for that to come about the consent principle must first be satisfied. The firm will of the Irish nation to unity is expressed in the language of the 1967 Constitutional Review Committee but it can only be achieved by consent, North and South. The words "in harmony and friendship" apply to the process of seeking unity. Whereas under the present Articles 2, 3 and 29, Northern Ireland and the unity of Ireland are treated as issues to be settled between the British and Irish Governments on their own, without necessarily any reference to the wishes of the people in Northern Ireland and, therefore, demonstrably lack effectiveness, the new Articles provide a realistic mechanism for bringing about Irish unity by agreement between the people of Ireland, North and South.

The consent principle reflects the political reality that we have long accepted for all practical purposes. As far back as August 1921, de Valera declared that "we do not contemplate the use of force", and in 1957 he told the Fianna Fáil Ard-Fheis that a forced unity would ruin national life for generations. What is contained at present in the Constitution was inserted in 1937 as a protest against the Boundary Agreement of 1925 and as a reassertion of the essential unity of Ireland in circumstances where Northern Nationalists had been entirely abandoned to the mercy of an unsympathetic and often hostile Stormont Government. In the opinion of many lawyers, it is questionable whether Articles 2 and 3 ever had much standing in international law, given that the 1925 agreement was registered at the League of Nations, but they were certainly a challenge to the legitimacy of Northern Ireland.

In the present negotiations it would have been illogical to seek fundamental changes in order to secure a new, fair and equitable political dispensation if we were still determined to deny the result of any democratic legitimacy. If we want civilised relations on this island, and the ultimate coming together of the people of Ireland, we do not

need, nor is there benefit from, any claim of right to include the people of Northern Ireland in a united Ireland against the will of a majority there. Equally, however, Unionists now increasingly accept that the consent of Nationalists is needed for stable government in Northern Ireland.

The first Hume-Adams statement of April 1993 stated that while the Irish people have the right to self-determination, they are divided on its exercise. Article 1 of the new British-Irish Agreement, which will be binding internationally, recognises that it is for the people of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts but without external impediment, to exercise that right of self-determination. In the context of a new and fair dispensation, where jurisdiction is to be founded in rigorous equality, as stated in Article 1 of the new British-Irish Agreement, we are prepared to recognise the legitimacy of the right of the people of Northern Ireland to choose whether to belong to the United Kingdom or a united Ireland. As the late Mr. Paddy McGrory, the Belfast solicitor in the Gibraltar Three case, wrote to Gerry Adams in May 1994, there is a crucial difference between consent imposed by the British and consent freely accepted as a condition for unity by the Irish people themselves, as expressed in an act of collective and concurrent self-determination.

The new position is more in keeping with our dignity as a people and, if the people of Northern Ireland have the freedom to choose, a majority may some time in the future decide to become part of a united Ireland. None of us can pre-empt what decisions will be taken by people in the future and it is they, not us, who will decide if the present Agreement is to be a transition to a united Ireland or the basis for a continuation of the Union. For our part, we can work to make such unity as attractive a proposition as possible by developing our economy and improving our society in every way, including its pluralism and its respect for the diversity of identities and traditions on the island.

Article 3.2 of the Agreement provides for the establishment of North

South bodies, which Article 3 of the Constitution as worded at present does not allow. The extraterritorial clause belongs more appropriately to Article 29 as it is of general, not specific, Northern Ireland application. Neither the Agreement nor the proposed constitutional amendment has any implications for our jurisdiction over fisheries or offshore exploration, which are governed by other international codes of law and which, in any case, mostly take place beyond territorial waters. We have never attempted to apply Article 2 in practical terms to the seas around Northern Ireland, so there will be no change in the situation. In the future, even if oil or gas were found, no selfish economic interest in defiance of Articles 2 and 4 of the British-Irish Agreement could be invoked by Britain to remain in the North in the absence of the consent of the people there.

There is a transitional clause written into Article 29, which ensures that the changes to Articles 2 and 3 will not come into effect, until the Agreement as a whole is ready to come into effect following the passage of constitutional legislation at Westminster and the various institutions are ready to be established and begin operating with their full powers and functions. This represents some significant safeguard against default by others.

The Irish Government did not participate directly in the negotiations on Strand One, about structures within Northern Ireland, but we were kept informed. The outcome on Strand One represents a remarkable negotiating achievement for the parties principally involved, the SDLP and the UUP, although I also pay tribute to the other parties that were actively involved in those discussions, particularly the Alliance Party and the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.

The institutional arrangements agreed for the internal government of Northern Ireland are light years away from the old Stormont. The new arrangements ensure that never again can one community in the North dominate another. This is ensured by a very extensive yet carefully

structured system of safeguards, checks and balances and by the inclusive nature of the assembly and the pervasive operation of a rule of proportionality in regard to positions of authority and influence. Deputies will recall my emphasis in recent months that, for strong and effective North-South structures we needed a strong and effective administration in Northern Ireland.

While there will be an important role for assembly committees, the discharge of executive responsibilities will be through a cabinet-type executive committee composed of departmental Ministers, led by a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister, drawn respectively from the Unionist and Nationalist communities. Provisions agreed in regard to this executive committee's role, responsibilities and operation, including a pledge of office and code of conduct for Ministers, the duties of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister and an annual programme, with an agreed budget, should ensure the Ministers will operate with a high degree of cohesion and collective responsibility including in regard to external relationships with Ministers here in the North-South Ministerial Council.

The assembly and the executive committee will operate on a fair and cross-community basis. All posts as Ministers and the membership and chairmanship of assembly committees will be allocated in proportion to party strengths emerging from the assembly elections due to take place on 25 June. This means the parties representing the Nationalist tradition could, if they so decide, hold up to 40 per cent of all these positions. In the case of Sinn Féin, participation would call for an amendment of the party's constitution. Its members have been persistent advocates of fundamental change and have demonstrated their ability to effect such change through peaceful, democratic methods. I very much hope they will make the internal changes necessary to enable them to contribute constructively to effecting the radical change foreshadowed in the Good Friday Agreement.

I also look forward, with deep satisfaction and with high hopes and expectations, to seeing the remarkable vision and abilities of John Hume, Seamus Mallon and their SDLP colleagues, who have honourably and very effectively upheld the standard of democratic politics for 30 years now, at last applied to the betterment of the lives of all who live in Northern Ireland. I know I speak for the whole House when I salute those extraordinary men and women, not least for their negotiating achievement in the early hours of Good Friday, but also for the stamp put on this settlement by the concepts and principles they have unflinchingly promoted since their party's foundation.

The agreed pledge of office for Ministers includes a commitment to the Mitchell principles of non-violence and exclusively peaceful and democratic means, and the Multi-Party Agreement provides that those who hold executive office should use only those means and those who do not should be excluded or removed from office, following an assembly decision, taken on a cross-community basis.

Reverting to the safeguards to ensure fairness, all key decisions will be taken on a cross-community basis. That means either parallel consent, that is, a majority of those members present and voting, including a majority of the Unionists and of the Nationalists present and voting; or a weighted majority of 60 per cent of members present and voting, including at least 40 per cent of each of the Nationalist and Unionist groups.

Key decisions requiring cross-community support will be designated in advance, but in other cases this requirement could be triggered by a petition of concern brought by 30 members of the assembly.

Key decisions and legislation will be proofed to ensure they do not infringe the European Convention on Human Rights or a supplemental Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. There will also be a statutory Equality Commission to monitor a new statutory obligation to promote equality

of opportunity in specified areas and parity of esteem between the two main communities.

Overall, the agreed Strand One arrangements represent, in many respects, a considerable improvement on those negotiated at Sunningdale 25 years ago. They should command our full support and co-operation.

The same is true in regard to the agreed North-South arrangements and structures. In the negotiations, we achieved all the objectives we had set out in recent years, while carrying with us not only the Nationalist parties but also all the participating pro-Union parties. There is agreement on a North-South Ministerial Council, with the repertoire of functions the Government has sought. The Ministerial Council is provided for in the British-Irish Agreement which will be internationally binding, and it will be established by legislation at Westminster and the Oireachtas, thus providing the assurance that we sought as to certainty of follow-up. An initial batch of associated implementation bodies will have clear operational remits and will implement on an all-island and cross-Border basis policies agreed in the North-South Council. These initial implementation bodies — at least six of them — will also be rooted in Westminster legislation. The two Governments will make necessary legislative and other preparations to ensure, as an absolute commitment, that the agreed initial batch of bodies will function at the time of the inception of the British-Irish Agreement.

Another assurance that these will proceed is the combined effect of paragraph 3 of the validation, implementation and review section of the Multi-Party Agreement and of Articles 2 and 4 of the British-Irish Agreement, with the result that the latter will not come into effect and the assembly will not receive its legislative and executive powers unless the Ministerial Council and implementation bodies have been established legislatively.

This is important because in the negotiations in Holy Week the Government responded positively to the proposal by the Ulster Unionists that the precise selection of domains for the initial batch of implementation bodies for areas where the Ministerial Council decisions on co-operation would be implemented through existing bodies in the separate jurisdictions, would be agreed by 31 October next through the work programme of the two Governments and the transitional administration in Northern Ireland. A list of 12 areas is set out in the Agreement and includes such significant areas as tourism, animal and plant health, strategic transport planning, environmental protection, urban and rural development, and inland fisheries. This list is not exhaustive and under the Agreement, other areas could also be identified and agreed for inclusion.

In the negotiations the Unionists and the loyalist parties have acknowledged that North-South bodies are needed, not only for their undoubted practical benefits in the economic and social spheres, but also because they present a vital institutional expression of the Irish identity of Northern Nationalists and of their associated identification with Ireland as a whole and with this State.

After the establishment of the bodies, every step to be taken by the North-South Council, that is as regards policy directions, funding and all other matters, must be by agreement between the two sides, North and South. If any change is needed in the original charters of bodies as set out in their founding legislation, this will have to be agreed between the representatives of North and South on the Ministerial Council and will have to be endorsed by the assembly and the Oireachtas.

Thus, what we have in regard to the outcome of Strand Two of the negotiations is a carefully balanced package that is clearly traceable to and inspired by the Joint Framework Document and the Propositions on Heads of Agreement, and that gives Nationalists the strong and meaningful North-South links they have legitimately sought in a manner

consistent with vital Unionist interests.

I will deal more fully with the agreed Strand Three arrangements in my speech in Seanad Éireann tomorrow. I merely draw attention to the fact that, first, we have a British-Irish Council, not a council of the isles, and the North-South Council is in no way subordinate to it; and, second, there is agreement to a British-Irish intergovernmental conference, with a standing joint secretariat, which will replace the conference and secretariat established under the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985. While these will deal with the totality of relationships, they will have a particular focus on Northern Ireland, specifically the areas that will not be devolved, such as policing, prisons and justice and rights, with a similar role for the Irish Government as at present.

I do not have time to expand at any length on other important sections of the Agreement, but other Ministers will do so. However, the Agreement contains major advances in regard to the equality and rights agenda – in the political, economic, social and linguistic spheres – the administration of justice and normalisation in a peaceful and stable society, including important provisions on prisoners and security de-escalation, as the level of threat reduces, and on decommissioning.

The provisions for policing involve a set of principles, endorsed by all the participants, which should govern policing in Northern Ireland and agreement to establish a broadly representative independent commission, with international representation, to report by the summer of 1999 with recommendations on future policing in the light of the agreed principles and on the basis of very tightly drawn terms of reference. The provisions agreed open the way to a transformation of policing in Northern Ireland, including its composition and ethos, so that the future police service can enjoy widespread support from the entire community.

I urge everyone to have the courage to embrace a new and peaceful

future. History is in the making, there are benefits for everyone. The settlement needs strong public support, North and South, to get off to a good start which will lead to a bright future. We cannot afford one response in the North and another in the South. I expect and I am calling for a united, not a partitionist, approach. Everyone must rise to the occasion if we are to obtain the full benefit of the Agreement.

Mr. J. Bruton

I congratulate the Government and the Taoiseach on the role they played in bringing about this Agreement. In addition, I thank the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, the leaders of all the parties in Northern Ireland and, in particular, the talks chairman, Senator George Mitchell.

History is what we make for ourselves. There is no inevitable march of history in any direction. The ideology that believed in the inevitability of historical processes died a discredited death when the Berlin Wall crumbled in 1989. A united Ireland is not demographically inevitable. The continuance of the Union is not inevitable. Peace is not inevitable, nor is conflict. Nothing is inevitable in history.

For the Good Friday Agreement to work, we must decide to replace the politics of aspiration, with the politics of accommodation. The parties to the Agreement acknowledge "the substantial difference between our continuing and equally legitimate political aspirations". They go on to say that their object is "reconciliation and rapprochement". These differing aspirations — a United Ireland on one side and unqualified membership of the United Kingdom on the other — are, as the Agreement states, equally legitimate, but they are opposite and not reconcilable terms. If the two communities continue to define themselves in ways that cannot be reconciled with one another, there will be difficulties in achieving the rapprochement sought by the Agreement between them. The Agreement itself contains a voting procedure that requires parties to

designate themselves as adherents of one of two opposite aspirations. As long as the two communities define their very existence in irreconcilable terms, arguments on almost any topic that appeal to one community will tend to create fear in the other community. This is a difficulty in selling the Agreement.

While it may be difficult for Unionists to restrain themselves from arguing for the Agreement on the basis that it has secured the union, it is equally difficult for Nationalists to restrain themselves from arguing for the Agreement as a stepping stone towards a united Ireland. One republican supporter of the agreement even went so far as to claim in an Irish American newspaper that the British Government endorsement of the Agreement "is a declaration of intent to leave, and that is all we were ever looking for".

These arguments on either side are self-defeating because Nationalists and Unionists can read one another's newspapers and see one another's spokespersons on television. In this context, aspirational arguments that appeal to one community frighten the other. That is why supporters in either community must be moderate in the claims they make for the Agreement. The other community will be listening too. An argument that excites one's own supporters may frighten the supporters of someone else and that someone else may be someone whose co-operation is vital if the Agreement is to work. It is time to stop talking about ultimate goals, aspirations and the like and start working for tomorrow, for this day week and for next year.

We must create new aspirations to which both communities can assent. Peace is, was and will continue to be an aspiration to which both communities can assent. The genius of the originators of the peace process was that they made peace the issue, and peace was something with which no one could really disagree, as Deputy Albert Reynolds pointed out here many times. Peace provided an emotional cement that bound together loyalists and republicans, Unionists and Nationalists in a

common endeavour.

The difficulty is that any aspiration, once achieved, ceases to provide the same emotional cement that it provided while it was being striven for. Peace is now achieved, in the sense of an absence of violence, so we must now go on to create a deeper and wider aspiration for both communities. We must create a new common aspiration binding together Unionists and Nationalists in their common work. Without the emotional cement of common aspirations there is a real risk that the new institutions will revert to negative factionalism fed by constant reminders that the defining aspirations of the two communities are contradictory.

There is a better way. The power of the European ideal, for example, of building a structure of co-dependence that would make war in Europe impossible sustained the world's greatest co-operative political achievement of the second half of this century — the creation of the European Union. People did not cease to be French or German but they created a new common aspiration that transcended their national aspirations.

Northern Ireland, Ireland as a whole and Britain now need a similar ideal, a similar common aspiration. That aspiration should be to build a structure of co-dependence between Unionists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland, within Ireland as a whole and between Britain and Ireland so that physical conflict between nationalism and unionism becomes impossible, just as the European Union made physical conflict between France and Germany impossible. Such a concept is difficult for both Nationalists and Unionists to accept.

The ideology of Irish nationalism has long been a separatist one. Separation from Britain has been the nationalist ideal. Closer co-operation with Britain now, in order to build a structure of peace between nationalism and unionism, goes against the grain of nationalist

history, but North-South bodies go against the grain of unionist history too. Since partition, the unionist ideology has stressed separation from the South as the touch-stone of belief. The very nature of unionism and nationalism will have to change if the Agreement is to lead to a lasting settlement. The new aspiration — building a structure of co-dependence that makes conflict impossible — must replace the traditional aspirations that made conflict inevitable up to now.

The Agreement itself, and the institutions it creates, must become the focus of a new loyalty. The Agreement is not the means to some other end. It must be seen as an end itself. Unless that happens, every ordinary proposal from one side will be seen by the other through a prism of suspicion. For example, unionist proposals to promote an internal Northern Ireland initiative on drugs, or to build a special Ulster-Scots co-operative venture with Scotland on tourism, would tend to be seen by Nationalists not on their merits but as a means of deepening the Union. Equally, a nationalist proposal for all-Ireland or cross-Border co-operation on hospitals would be seen by Unionists not on its merits but as a possible loosening of the Union and as accelerating a process towards a united Ireland. This game of suspicion would gradually corrode the new institutions.

That is why we must make the Agreement itself the new focus for allegiance on the island of Ireland. This will not be easy. Even within the Agreement itself, there is a requirement that all members of the assembly, once elected, designate themselves as "Nationalist", "Unionist" or "other", so as to measure cross-community support in assembly votes. This is necessary, but I hope it does not entrench division by defining parties on the basis of ultimate aspirations, which conflict with one another, rather than short-term aspirations which may coincide with one another. The rules may aggravate this by making it disadvantageous for a member to designate himself or herself in the "other" category, where his or her vote will only count in initial votes but not in determining a minimum level of support in either community. I am worried that this

new institutionalisation of two labels will also institutionalise old divisions.

These difficulties, which I believe can and will be overcome, show the need to go beyond procedural devices and build a new and genuine cross-community allegiance that transcends old categories. This will take time and may seem impossibly idealistic at the moment, but it is the logic of the peace process.

I strongly support the proposal to amend Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. The definition of the "nation" in this draft is much more modern than the one that was put into the Constitution in 1937. The nation is now defined in terms of its people rather than its territory. This new definition is in line with the maxim of James Connolly: "a nation, without its people, is nothing to me".

I welcome the fact that the Constitution explicitly recognises the diversity of identities that exist. The object of the Constitution in regard to unity now is to "unite all the people in the diversity of their identities". This recognises the exclusively Irish identity of Nationalists, but it also recognises the British and Irish identity of Unionists. This is a realistic, and honourable, constitutional provision. Constitutions should not contain material that is unrealistic. The new wording of the Constitution is realistic. On that basis I commend it to the people.

I would now like to make some reference to the detail of the Agreement. It is important that at this stage we identify areas of possible difficulty. If these are identified in good time, remedies can be found or satisfactory answers can be given to queries. If the assembly does not work, the North-South body will not work and vice versa. "Key decisions", so defined, are to be taken in the assembly on a cross-community basis. This means that a key decision requires either the consent of a majority of Nationalist members and a majority of Unionist members or a weighted majority of 60 per cent of all members, which must include

40 per cent of the Nationalist assembly members and 40 per cent of the Unionist assembly members. Such key decisions will be designated in advance and will include the election of the Chair of the assembly, the election of the First Minister, Ministers, standing orders and budget allocations. A matter can be determined to be a "key decision" on the basis of a petition brought by a significant minority of assembly members.

I have already indicated that this procedure, while necessary, institutionalises the existence of two conflicting aspirations by importing them into parliamentary procedures. A number of other questions arise. How many members will be required to constitute "a significant minority"? The Taoiseach has indicated that the figure will be 30, although it was not indicated in the Agreement. How will the issue of whether a decision was a "key decision" on foot of a petition be decided? Will the validity of the petition be decided on a majority decision in the assembly? If an item can be determined not to be a "key decision" by a majority vote then the petition procedure is of little value. On the other hand, there must be a petition procedure because it is not possible to foresee in advance all categories of decision that could have serious cross-community implications and prescribe them item by item in standing orders. There must be flexibility in the system. Is the drafting of the petition procedure adequate in this regard?

There is a review procedure in the Agreement. Each institution, including the assembly, is allowed to review at any time problems that may arise in its operation and " . to determine its own procedures for such a review." In other words, there is no requirement on the assembly in undertaking a review of its work to act on the basis of cross-community support. The Agreement does not indicate that decisions taken on foot of such a review are "key decisions" within the meaning of the safeguards clause in the Agreement. They should be. Is there not a risk that the carefully drafted and balanced procedures of the Agreement could be altered by the assembly as part of the review procedure on a basis of simple

majority decision? It should be provided that that cannot happen.

There is a provision for removing ministers of the assembly who do not do their jobs properly. Ministers can only be removed by a decision taken on a cross-community basis. In other words, it will only be possible to remove a minister from office, no matter what his or her misdemeanours, if either a majority of both Nationalists and Unionists want to remove him or her or if a weighted majority of 60 per cent wants to remove him or her, which majority includes 40 per cent of both communities. It will be very difficult in practice to remove a minister from office by this procedure. I understand fully and accept why it has been arranged thus. Otherwise ministers would be removed and the notion of proportionality would cease to apply. I accept the need for these provisions. However, there is a risk of stagnation if ministers have too tight a grip on their jobs and there is not an effective provision for reshuffling. Such a difficulty may arise after the initial five year period.

On taking office in the assembly ministers will be required to take a number of specific and exacting pledges. They will be required to maintain a commitment to non-violence, to treat all the people equally, to participate with colleagues in the preparation of a programme for government and to operate that programme. What will happen if a minister decides that he will not operate within the framework of the programme agreed within the executive committee and endorsed by the assembly? Obviously such a minister would have to be removed. My worry is that there could be difficulty because of the high threshold for removal of Ministers in getting the executive to work as a cohesive unit given the difficulty in enforcing discipline. The ultimate discipline is removal from office and unless that procedure is workable it will be difficult to have collective responsibility. This is probably an impossible conundrum, but it is better to identify its existence than pretend it does not exist.

Consideration should be given to having some provision for objective

outside assessment of whether a Minister is abiding by the pledge of office and code of conduct. Is the enforcement of these pledges to be left to the assembly, or is there any other procedure for objective reporting on whether the commitments contained in the pledge of office are being adhered to? An objective independent system of assessment of threats, would be helpful to the assembly. I have suggested in the past that an independent body should be created to report to the talks on the practical commitment of the participant parties to the Mitchell principles.

The new assembly and executive require commitments similar to the Mitchell principles for Ministers. There would be merit in having an independent body that would consider complaints that Ministers were not complying with the pledge of office or the code of conduct. That independent body would have no power, other than the power to publish a report, but it would ensure transparency and that the code of conduct and pledge of office meant something. Will the Government consider proposing such a provision?

On Strand One, the North-South Ministerial Council, I have a query about paragraph five of this part of the Agreement. The Ministerial Council is obliged to "use its best endeavours to reach agreement on the adoption of common policies in areas where there is a mutual cross-border and all Ireland benefit". I am troubled by the fact that this seems to require the Ministerial Council to reach agreement on issues only where there is both a cross-Border and an all-Ireland benefit. I can envisage situations where there might be a cross-Border benefit – for counties like Donegal and Derry – but where there would not really be much all Ireland benefit apart from that. It would have been better if this section had been drafted as follows: "use best endeavours to reach agreement on the adoption of common policies in areas where there is mutual cross-border or all Ireland benefit".

Strand Three deals with the establishment of a British-Irish Council. I

welcome this council and believe it will do good work. Strand Three also deals with the issue of reconciliation and victims of violence. This section of the Agreement is weak. Given that there are very strong commitments to the release of prisoners, the commitments to victims are comparatively unspecific. There is a great deal of talk about community initiatives for victims and the like, but no hard commitment to do anything in particular for victims. There is no proposal for a truth and reconciliation commission. We have seen in the case of Bloody Sunday in Derry how victims and their families want the truth. It is not just the victims of Bloody Sunday that want the truth. The relatives of all victims of 25 years of violence want the truth. They want to know where their loved ones have been buried, if their bodies have not yet been located. They want to know why, and by whom, they were killed. They want an acknowledgement of responsibility and an apology. That feeling is true of all victims and all relatives of victims. Protestant and Catholic victims of violence, and their families, have the same feelings. We must empathise with the demand of all victims and their families for the truth. The Agreement could have been more specific in that regard. A role for a truth and reconciliation commission would go a good distance to creating a fully accepting atmosphere for the early release of prisoners, and I accept the early release of prisoners must be part of the Agreement.

On decommissioning, I note that all the participants reaffirm their commitment to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. I take it this applies to all participants in the talks and not just to those who have so far endorsed the outcome the talks. As yet, Sinn Féin has not endorsed the outcome of the talks, but I take it that it is committed to paragraph three of the passage in the Agreement on decommissioning and has given its commitment, as a participant, to the disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. We need to take guns out of Northern Ireland and Irish life for good. I refer to all privately held weapons, licensed and unlicensed. We have seen in the United States the terrible consequences of too free an availability of guns in society.

The Governments must have a pro-active policy of reducing the number of licensed weapons held in the community, as well as decommissioning illegally held weapons.

I note the British Government will continue its consultation on firearms' regulation and control on the basis of the document published on 2 April 1998. I would like the Government to give us more details on what this will mean in practice. Is there a pro-active commitment to remove both paramilitary weapons and licensed weapons from the community? Is there a timescale for this? How soon will it happen? This is an urgent matter. We may have seen the end of political violence, but as long as there are guns lying around, we may not have seen the end of widespread casual violence for other motives. I hope this issue will be taken seriously. We need to take the gun out of daily life as well as out of politics.

Unionist critics express concern about decommissioning. It should be a practical objective, not a totem pole. Voluntary decommissioning will happen only when the people who have the arms accept they will not have occasion to use them. The Agreement is the only available way to achieve voluntary decommissioning. Opposition to the Agreement is, in practice, opposition to decommissioning.

I will now deal with some of the other Unionist objections to the Agreement, as set out by some of their spokespersons. Some fear that a power-sharing executive, which had lost the original Unionist part of its base might seem a convenient and internationally acceptable way of running Northern Ireland. This scenario is impossible under the terms of the Agreement. The executive can function only if it is supported by both communities. That is clear.

Other Unionists argue that this will mean the executive will be paralysed and ineffective because its decision-making procedures are so complicated. The procedures are complicated. Decision-making could

be paralysed. That is why we need moderate thinking people, determined to make the Agreement work, elected to the assembly on 25 June.

The assembly elections are crucial to the operation of the Agreement. The Agreement will work only if people are elected from the various parties who are determined to make it work. Any mechanism, however well designed, can be frustrated by those intent on frustrating it. Other Unionist critics claim the Agreement creates a free-standing North-South body. This is not true. The Agreement states that the North-South Ministerial Council and the Northern Ireland Assembly "cannot successfully function without one another". The detailed decision-making arrangements for both bodies makes this a certainty.

There can be no successful North-South body without a successful assembly and executive, and there can be no successful assembly and executive without a successful North-South body. That is written into the Agreement. There must be Unionist and Nationalist consent for anything to work. That has always been, and will always be, the political reality of Northern Ireland. For the first time in history the majority of the leadership of both communities has come to accept this. Of course the process of turning that acceptance into smoothly working political institutions is only beginning. The most critical test will be the assembly election on 25 June. Unless it gives us a moderate majority in both communities, there will be trouble.

I appeal to all Members to come out unambiguously for this Agreement in all its aspects – constitutional and institutional. The Agreement is a package. The principle has always been that nothing is agreed until everything is agreed, but that means if everything is not agreed, nothing is agreed. That has been the basis of the peace process from the beginning and everybody knows that.

It is not open to a political party to support parts of the Agreement and

not others. Any party which assents to a Bill in the House and campaigns against it outside the House would be accused of hypocrisy, and rightly so. Now is the time of decision. This is not a time for each way bets, or taking out a reinsurance policy. Now is the time to say "yes" to the Agreement, to peace and to the future.

Mr. Quinn

I congratulate all the participating parties who successfully negotiated this Agreement. It is by any standard of measurement a monumental achievement. We, the Irish people North and South and the British people on both islands, are indebted to their tenacity, generosity and courage. I have no doubt the people will vindicate that courage in the plebiscite and referendum on May 22 here and in Northern Ireland.

This Agreement is an historic achievement and many people have over time contributed to its creation. As an architect, I am reminded of the task of constructing the great gothic cathedrals of Europe, which projects spanned generations and whose design evolved in detail over time. This Agreement is undoubtedly a complex edifice accommodating many components, all of which have been carefully put in place and arranged in a balanced manner. The entire edifice is an integral entity and cannot be selectively or partially approved.

Many people have helped to shape it over a number of years and I wish to acknowledge their contribution. Time and diplomacy prevent me from naming all, but I feel obliged to name some. Charles Haughey, Deputy Albert Reynolds and, in particular, the Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, have played a major role representing the Fianna Fáil Party. Dr. Garrett FitzGerald and Peter Barry helped to lay the foundations in the New Ireland Forum and the negotiation subsequently of the Anglo-Irish Agreement on behalf of the Fine Gael Party. Following in that tradition Deputy John Bruton, as Taoiseach in the previous Administration, built on their work and advanced the process, particularly with Prime Minister

Major in the final days of the doomed Conservative Party administration.

However, throughout this period from 1982 to June 1997, Deputy Dick Spring on behalf of my party was centrally involved in the entire process. As the Leader of the Labour Party, I am immensely proud of the contribution which we, as a party, have made to this process through him. His role as Tánaiste between 1982 and 1987 and his subsequent contribution as Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs from 1993 until 1997 represent a consistent and substantial contribution to the position in which we find ourselves today. Labour's role in articulating a third way between the opposing tenets of unionism and nationalism and our efforts to provide a forum within which compromise and dialogue can take place has never been properly reported or adequately understood. I know the reasons why but today is not a time for recrimination in regard to the partiality of some commentators and others in this respect. It is a role which includes the contribution of the broader labour movement through the Irish Congress of Trade Unions to the development of peace and tolerance in the work-places of Northern Ireland.

This Agreement is not the beginning of the end of the conflict on this island, it is the end of the beginning. The components of the Agreement in their entirety must have a significant degree of party political support and subsequent endorsement by the people in a referendum and plebiscite in both jurisdictions. Only then will the duties and obligations which fall from the Agreement impact upon all of us, North and South, and on both these islands off the west coast of Europe.

I wish to concentrate specifically upon the response which we in the South must make on this Agreement. That is not to say I do not have views as to what should be the response in Northern Ireland or Britain. However, I am not accountable to the electorate in either jurisdiction. Therefore, I will confine my remarks to this jurisdiction and to my party's beliefs and aspirations. This Agreement asks us to engage in an historic compromise. It demands that all of us postpone, rephrase or restate

certain fundamental aspirations and declarations about who and what we are. This is not an easy thing to do and I enter it carefully and with caution. However, I am guided by the wonderfully prescient observation of my party founder, James Connolly. He has also inspired the Leader of the Fine Gael Party today.

Mr. J. Bruton

I was probably reading his words before the Deputy.

Mr. Quinn

He stated:

Ireland without its people means nothing to me, and the man that is bubbling over with enthusiasm for 'Ireland' and can yet pass unmoved through our streets and witness all the wrong and suffering, the shame and degradation wrought on the people of Ireland, aye, wrought by Irishmen upon Irishmen and Irishwomen, without burning to end it is, in my opinion, a fraud and a liar in his heart, no matter how he loves that combination of chemical elements that he is pleased to call Ireland.

In the Labour Party's contribution to the deliberations of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in 1994 we made the following assertion, based upon the values set out in Connolly's observation and the development of the Labour Party over time.

For many years the Labour Party saw itself as straddling and transcending the traditions of unionism and nationalism. We set out to improve the standard of living for all our people and to give as many people as possible a say in institutions which decide their lifestyles and those of their children. Our philosophy is by definition an internationalist one. Many in our party and many of our supporters are not comfortable with traditional nationalism and unionism, particularly in their most

jingoistic manifestation. There are many who would argue that national identity should be secondary to questions of social and economic interest and self interest. In this we are but one part of a third strand in Irish society, a section of our people which does not see itself as exclusively informed by the ethos of either of the two primary traditions.

Today, much of what Labour has consistently argued for is contained within the text of the Agreement before the House. I carefully read the 35 pages of text examining the balance in the Agreement between the three Strands, the role of the two sovereign Governments, the specific tasks of the commissions on policing in Northern Ireland, the review of the criminal justice system, the arrangements regarding prisoners and the complex issue of decommissioning.

Given the nature of the problem and the intense difficulties surrounding the very commencement of the talks process, the form and content of this Agreement in its entirety is the best outcome that could have reasonably been expected by anyone with any sense of the difficulties involved in this historical conflict. Accordingly, I salute the tenacity and the vision of all the participants in the talks and, in particular, the role played by some of the smaller parties and groups. The Women's Coalition brought a new voice to politics in Northern Ireland, one which is commonplace here and throughout the rest of Europe but sadly missing in Northern Ireland until now. The full incorporation of that voice into political, business and social life in the North remains one of the tasks ahead.

I welcome the proposed establishment of the Civic Forum. All of us have benefited from the analysis of some of our problems provided by groups like the National Economic and Social Forum. I have long been convinced of the need for similar institutions north of the Border which will facilitate direct access to the political process of groups and individuals active in business and the broader community. The Civic Forum has the potential to accelerate the normalisation of politics in the

North and I applaud those, particularly the Women's Coalition, who argued strongly for its establishment.

David Ervine and Gary McMichael, representing the PUP and the UDP respectively, have in many ways been the bright lights in this dialogue. They and those they represent have travelled a long road since the days of the Ulster Workers Council strike which destroyed the Sunningdale power sharing executive in 1974. The political advice which they have given to loyalist paramilitary groups and the clear influence which they have exercised over them have been immeasurably important in arriving at this Agreement and may prove even more so in securing broad based consent to it. Their support for David Trimble has been crucial. Had they aligned themselves with the more reactionary brand of unionism we might not be here today and the prospects of a successful outcome would have been smaller.

The Alliance Party has also played a consistent and significant role throughout the entire process. While it does not have the level of electoral support enjoyed by the UUP or the SDLP, it has never departed from its message of reason and tolerance. Northern Ireland Labour which is a small ad hoc organisation has also contributed to the process. The role of the SDLP has been hugely important. That party emerged from the civil rights movement and has been the most consistent advocate of compromise and accommodation since its foundation. The design of the talks process was the product and vision of its leader, Mr. John Hume. His focus on the three sets of relationships, the principle of consent, the need to provide a mechanism for the self determination by all the people on this island and on the future of Ireland is the foundation upon which this Agreement stands. We sometimes forget that the SDLP is more than John Hume. The role played in the talks by all the SDLP representatives must not be overlooked and augurs well for the development of real politics in Northern Ireland. Specifically I mention the Deputy party leader and chief negotiator, Seamus Mallon, whose attention to detail throughout these talks has been a wonder to

behold.

On the principle of consent, in recent weeks distinguished commentators such as Joe Lee have questioned the validity of the concept. While I appreciate some of these reservations his analysis is flawed. In his column last Sunday, former Senator Lee speculated that the Agreement contained potential hostages to fortune – a hornets nest he called it. I firmly believe the principle of consent has been central in allowing us to get to where we are today. It has enabled us to rule out the nightmare scenario of coercion on either side. When I met David Trimble prior to the signing of the Agreement I said we were signing an agreement for today and that it was not our job or our right to put constraints on how that consent would be exercised by future generations. I hope the practice of real politics in Northern Ireland involving co-operation between the communities and the closer integration of Europe including greater links between Ireland and Britain will break down much of the hostility between the two communities in Northern Ireland and the spirit of compromise which embodies this Agreement will deepen and grow.

As leader of a southern party it is important to acknowledge the role played by the Ulster Unionists throughout this long process. David Trimble has led them magnificently in these talks. His has been the most difficult task. Faced by significant internal opposition within his own party and the exclusion of Dr. Paisley's DUP and Bob McCartney's UK Unionists, these realities created real and serious problems for him. Mr. Trimble's party was the only party participating in the talks while a substantial section of his broader community remained outside.

While I salute and take comfort from the significant victory he has obtained, both with the executive of his Ulster Unionist Party and, more significantly, with the Ulster Unionist Council last Saturday, I am realistic enough to realise that his problems have not entirely gone away. That Mr. John Taylor, Mr. Ken Maginnis and Mr. Reg Empey have remained

solidly behind him is both welcome and significant. All of them are fully aware of the fate of the late Mr. Brian Faulkner and I am sure none of them want to repeat that experience. However, there are significant differences between now and 1974. The Northern Ireland plebiscite coupled with the referendum in the Republic of Ireland will democratically underpin the Agreement. Of equal significance is that the world is a very different place now than it was in 1974. The Irish people, North and South, were more insular then and, perhaps, less war weary than today.

During the course of these troubles more than 3,600 people have been killed, approximately 30,000 have been wounded and incalculable emotional and psychological damage has been done to untold thousands of people in Northern Ireland. The economic and physical damage to the economy and infrastructure of Northern Ireland and to Britain and the Republic is of the order of between £20 billion and £30 billion. That anyone, Unionist or Nationalist, Northerner or Southerner, should wish to return to these deeply unhappy times is frankly inconceivable. That is the logic which will carry the day on 22 May, North and South.

Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and Mitchel McLoughlin of Sinn Féin have been the media stars of this political process. I do not begrudge them their success because they are engaged upon a most important political voyage. They have made both an historical and psychological shift from the physical force tradition to that of democratic politics. While their conversion is welcome it should be remembered that while they are not the first to have made that voyage their arrival is, arguably, the most significant as it appears they have arrived with their political base intact. There remains an enormous task ahead of them within their own party and among their supporters.

They cannot be absolved of their responsibility for the many atrocities committed by the IRA with their explicit endorsement and support.

Nevertheless this Agreement would not have been possible without their presence at the table. I recognise they have decided to take the next four weeks in which to engage in a dialogue of consultation and persuasion with their members and that their Ard-Fheis will reconvene within a month to formulate and decide upon a definite position. I welcome that process and I salute the political courage of the Sinn Féin leadership in engaging upon an open and comprehensive democratic debate within their party.

It would be remiss of us not to mention the constructive role played by the European Union and the European Commission who have made substantial resources available to Northern Ireland through the Delors peace package and related measures.

The two Governments and particularly the two heads of Governments, Mr. Tony Blair and Deputy Bertie Ahern, along with their colleagues Dr. Mo Mowlam, Deputy David Andrews and Deputy Liz O'Donnell, have played a central role in facilitating agreement. We owe a debt of gratitude to Senator George Mitchell and his fellow co-chairmen General John De Chastelain and Mr. Harri Holkeri. The high praise bestowed on all three by all of the parties at the final session of the talks process on Good Friday is a testament to the regard in which they are held. I add my appreciation and that of my party to that already expressed.

I will focus on the issues which the electorate in the Republic will have to face on 22 May. In addition to giving our assent to the contents of this document the citizens of the Republic are asked to agree to changes in the texts of Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. In so doing, and as part and parcel of the historic compromise that characterises this document, the people are giving up a territorial claim to the integrity of the island. That is a big step to take and one which causes concern among many people, North and South. The rephrasing of Articles 2 and 3 which refer to the entitlement to belong to the Irish nation and its ultimate aspiration to physical unity, reflect more accurately and adequately what

many people believe is the real import of the existing articles.

Most people in the Republic have been aware for some time that changes in Articles 2 and 3 would probably be necessary to secure a settlement. Possibly because they were sceptical about the prospect of an agreement emerging or because they were engrossed in other aspects of the Agreement, they did not really focus on what change actually means for them. Those changes go beyond the mere restating of a national aspiration. Successful North-South bodies for instance will mean the transfer to these new bodies of certain powers we in the South have in the past exercised absolutely. The exact nature of these powers has yet to be fully determined. When they are transferred we must be prepared for a scenario which will give the Northern assembly a role in determining how money raised from our taxpayers is spent North and South of the Border.

For too long too many people in the Republic have felt that the problem of Northern Ireland was an internal one, unique to the conflicting parties and one which could and should, and perhaps only, be solved by them. However, John Hume's analysis of the interconnection of the three sets of relationships was correct and because it was correct it was always going to have an impact on attitudes and prejudices in the Republic of Ireland. However, the ceding of these powers and the restating of our national identity to recognise a de facto position are small prices to pay for the potential peace and economic prosperity which are embodied in this Agreement.

The Agreement has proved acceptable to the majority of those who represent northern Nationalists. It would be nothing short of criminal for us in this jurisdiction to second guess them as to what is or is not acceptable on an issue that affects them more directly than it ever has affected us. I reject in particular the attitude to changes in Articles 2 and 3 which has informed the editorial line in some of our national newspapers. The idea that every concession by the nationalist side

should be counted and a corresponding concession sought from the other side in a mechanistic fashion merely repeats the tortuous "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" logic which has dominated the last 100 years. Putting the negotiation process aside, many aspects of this Agreement have been arrived at because they are right both politically and ethically, regardless of when a particular concession was first mooted or given away.

The installation of the "trigger mechanism" within the proposals to change our Constitution should be sufficient to allay the suspicion that these changes will not be met by firm action on the North-South bodies. As such they are indicative of the lack of trust which still exists between both sides of the community. Ms Monica McWilliams of the Women's Coalition stated last night that Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society. Trust can only be built over time and I am confident that this process represents a first step down that road.

The next area I want to focus on is the question of prisoners and the confidence building measures that will be needed to ensure the consolidation of this Agreement and the coming into operation of a new Northern Ireland Assembly and the North-South Ministerial Council. The issue of prisoners was always going to be difficult and delicate. The Government in the Republic has been releasing prisoners on a piecemeal basis since the first IRA ceasefire. My party welcomed the latest release of nine republican prisoners last week but we are aware of the concerns that surround this issue, particularly from those who have suffered at first hand the violence of the last 30 years. One problem is that the vast majority of releases thus far have been of republican prisoners. The loyalist parties, for whom prisoner releases is as crucial an issue as it is for Sinn Féin, have little to show on this score for their commitment to the talks process.

This Agreement would never have been signed were it not for the determination of both Governments to act in concert over the past four

years. Nowhere is this more important than on the prisoners issue. I welcome the commitments in the Agreement in this regard and I would urge the Governments to press ahead jointly to ensure balance. All parties in this House have recognised that a successful resolution of the prisoners issue is critical if we are to secure widespread consent to the Agreement and a peaceful future. In South Africa the release of political prisoners was a key element in getting discussions on the future of that country started. Ultimately it will prove no less significant in Ireland.

However, the sensitivities involved are important. The reaction last week to the call by a Sinn Féin negotiator for the release of the those charged with the killing of Garda Jerry McCabe is understandable. There is a trap in this also because there is concern amongst Unionists about how this issue is being handled in the Republic. We cannot allow the message to go out that we tolerate the release of prisoners whose atrocities have been committed in the North while seeking to detain those who have offended against our institutions. Again, a consistency of approach north and south of the Border is an absolute necessity if we are to avoid the development of tensions which could undermine the Agreement.

My comments on prisoners lead me naturally to the question of how decommissioning will be implemented in the context of this Agreement. I genuinely believe this is a matter for another day. The fact that the mechanisms to deal with the issue of decommissioning have been contained within the Agreement is a significant and important step in itself. The Ulster Unionist Party Leader, Mr. David Trimble, MP has received what has been described as a letter of comfort from the British Prime Minister on the implementation of the decommissioning proposals and this is important from the point of view of the UUP's political constituency in Northern Ireland.

It is important for every democratic party on this island and for all citizens who engage in political dialogue through discourse and debate that they do so without the threat or possibility of coercion. None of us

can allow the prospect or the possibility of an armed force being behind the persuasive powers of any political party. The use of thugs, vigilantes or active units of the IRA or the UDA/UVF to reinforce political projects or to intimidate opponents is utterly and totally unacceptable and if the parties which speak for or represent those organisations wish to complete their journey into democratic politics, they must embrace without reservation the necessity for comprehensive decommissioning in the context of the implementation and achievement of the objectives of this Agreement.

I have paid tribute to those who brought about the negotiations which have led to the satisfactory and successful conclusion of the production of this Agreement. I repeat those congratulations because we are at a truly historic moment and our appreciation of the generosity of those who successfully negotiated this Agreement should not go unaccounted or unreported.

As I stated earlier, we have arrived at the beginning of a process, not its end. The three commissions established under the Agreement will give rise to contentious issues ahead, which can only be resolved by give and take on both sides. We have got this far despite the enormous differences between all sides at the beginning of the process. By harnessing the spirit which has informed the Agreement before us today, we can resolve the difficulties which lie ahead.

The Labour Party in the Republic of Ireland will be campaigning for a "yes" vote in the referendum to change our Constitution and to give Ireland's assent to the contents of this Agreement on the 22 May. However, we recognise this is merely the end of the beginning and an enormous amount of work has yet to be done. That work will not be easy and we will have many crises and political impasses which will test the skills and commitment of all political parties in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

The assembly elections, which will take place before the end of June, will be critically important. It is essential that Sinn Féin is an active participant in those elections and is committed, if successful, to taking its seats in the new assembly. That may be a difficult mountain for them to climb. When Sinn Féin agreed to take seats in Dáil Éireann for the first time, it led among other things to the formation of Republican Sinn Féin. Further back in history, we know how difficult it was for Fianna Fáil, which broke away from Sinn Féin in the 1920s, to make the similar decision to take its seats here in this Parliament. No Fianna Fáil party member today regrets the decision made by the party at that time to participate in the democratic assembly of Dáil Éireann. In time, I believe the adherents, supporters and members of Sinn Féin will come to a similar conclusion about their participation in an assembly in Northern Ireland.

It will then be for Leinster House and Stormont to develop new ways of working together and new political formulas of dialogue and discussion which will give life to the institutions which have been sketched out in this Agreement and for which much detailed work in terms of design and operation has yet to be done, as Deputy Bruton said. We will have much time to return in due course to those particular tasks but today we are discussing our response to this historic Agreement and indicating what our attitude is to its enactment by way of referendum. I welcome the Agreement and congratulate all those mentioned already and also the civil servants in this jurisdiction, in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain who have played a key role.

Proinsias De Rossa

I join in congratulating the parties who reached the historic peace Agreement on what was truly a Good Friday for Ireland. I hope all these parties will sign up to the Agreement and campaign vigorously on behalf of the people of this island for a true and lasting peace. This is not a time for procrastination, picking and choosing, or mischievous patriot

games. It is time to bring an end to one of the darkest chapters in our history, time for a new beginning. This new beginning must be made. We must put past divisions and political violence behind us. We should never forget that 3,249 people died because of ancient quarrels that locked us in the past, freezing Northern Ireland in bitterness and hatred.

It is sad that while we can quote the figure of those who died, we can remember very few of them. We remember the appalling atrocities of Enniskillen and Bloody Friday 28 years ago. We remember Canary Wharf and times when large numbers of people were murdered. It is difficult for us to remember the names, places and times when one or two were killed, when we turned on our radios and heard the wearying news that another hooded body was found on the side of the road. We must ensure this Agreement is not only implemented but that it works effectively if we are to end that appalling scenario.

The bitterness and hatred has not gone away. Northern Ireland is a more divided society than it was 30 years ago and the process of reconciliation will take generations to accomplish. However, there is a common desire for peace. This is what made the Agreement possible and is what must be emphasised by all parties in campaigning for its acceptance in the referendum next month.

It is almost certain that extremists on both sides will attempt to wreck this Agreement by violence. Due to the good work of the Garda a number of such attempts have already been thwarted and I wish the Garda every success in the trying days ahead. The RUC will also have its work cut out in keeping the peace as fanatics endeavour to resume the so-called war. The political campaign in Northern Ireland will be bitter and hard fought. There are many supporters of the Agreement who find elements of it unpalatable — in particular the release of prisoners and the lack of clarity about the requirements of decommissioning paramilitary weapons.

All those involved in the negotiations deserve credit for the manner in which they worked until the very end to secure acceptable compromise and ultimate agreement. Senator Mitchell and his two colleagues showed enormous skill and endless patience in their work. Nobody will begrudge the Taoiseach his extraordinarily high ratings in the opinion polls, which is a reflection of the genuine respect he won, all round, for the manner in which he applied himself to the final stages of the negotiations against the background of his own family bereavement.

Previous Governments and leaders are also entitled to recognition for their role in advancing the project, especially Deputy Albert Reynolds, Deputy John Bruton and Deputy Spring who not only kept the process alive, but managed to make significant advances during very difficult times. John Hume and Seamus Mallon also deserve great credit. Gerry Adams deserves credit. Having decided ten or 12 years ago that violence was not the way to proceed, he set about, with others in the leadership of the republican movement, to take it away from violence. David Ervine, Billy Hutchinson and Gary McMichael also deserve great credit. The public in the Republic do not understand how difficult it is for men like Adams, Ervine, McMichael, Hutchinson and Maginnis who live in communities where violence is the norm, to move away from the position where people expect to be defended by their paramilitary leaders on whom they depend for a sense of security.

The Agreement was not a victory for any one party. It was a victory for reason, dialogue and, most of all, the countless people who have yearned for an end to the terrible cycle of violence that has blighted Northern Ireland for so long. It was, a compromise as all agreements between diametrically opposed objectives must be. Everyone gave something and everyone got something. Inevitably, there are supporters of parties who believe that their side gave too much or did not win sufficient concessions from the other side.

This is where real political leadership is required. The quality of the

political leadership of those involved in the negotiations will now be measured by their ability and determination to actively convince their supporters of the merits of the package that was agreed. There is no room for equivocation or sitting on the fence.

The Agreement must be sold to the people for what it is, and not for what some people would like it to be. It is not an automatic escalator to a united Ireland and neither does it copperfasten the union for all time. It neither rules in or rules out either option. It creates unique political structures to cater for the unique political difficulties in Northern Ireland and the conflicting national allegiances of Unionists and Nationalists. More than ever before it puts the destiny of Northern Ireland in the hands of its people with both Governments spelling out in explicit detail that there will be no change in the constitutional position without the consent of the people there, and that they will facilitate whatever choice the people make about their futures.

The Agreement is a painstakingly constructed accommodation between Nationalism and Unionism, which is in itself a great achievement. However, as the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, said:

What we put together was a design for the architecture of peace. We haven't yet constructed the building. The design I think is a good one but it is based very much on the supposition that if one part of the building collapses then the rest of the building collapses. It's either mutually assured success or mutually assured destruction and that's the choice the people have to make.

All of those who negotiated this Agreement must now sell it with commitment and enthusiasm. The opening paragraphs of the Agreement, from which no party dissented, commits the participants to working in good faith "to ensure the success of each and every one of the arrangements to be established under this agreement". The final paragraph of the opening section, from which no party dissented, states,

"Accordingly, in a spirit of concord, we strongly commend this agreement to the people, North and South, for their approval".

Against this background there must be some concern at the position the Sinn Féin leadership is adopting. Having shown commendable political courage and tactical skill in negotiating the document, it cannot adopt a semi-detached or neutral position on it. Neither can it cherry pick, choosing to support some elements but not others. I am concerned that Sinn Féin will take up to a month to decide its position when the referendum campaign will be in its final days.

While the principle of allowing the membership to make a final decision on the party's position is fine, those who negotiated the agreement have an obligation to sell it to their own members and supporters. We heard Mr. Gerry Adams at the weekend, after news of the vote at the Unionist Council came through, saying "well done David". I look forward to the day when David Trimble can say "well done Gerry".

David Trimble is entitled to enormous credit, not just for his courage in negotiating the Agreement, but for the manner in which he has since set about convincing his own party members and the people of Northern Ireland of the merits of this deal. In the Republic, there was no real appreciation of the difficult tactical position in which he found himself in the final months of the talks. The DUP and the UK Unionists, which account for around half of the Unionist vote in Northern Ireland, were outside the talks process, shouting "sell-out", and David Trimble faced considerable internal opposition from those within his party who were opposed to the direction of the talks.

Despite this, he not only signed up for an Agreement that included elements that were clearly unpalatable for him and members of his party, but promoted it with vigour and enthusiasm. I hope the Sinn Féin leadership will show similar vigour and enthusiasm in promoting it among its members and supporters.

Sinn Féin should take note of the words of Mr. Blair which I quoted. It negotiated the Agreement but has yet to sign up to it. It fudged the issue at the Ard-Fheis with Mr. Adams and Mr. McGuinness opting for a double comedy act in place of politics. In contrast to this levity the vice-president of Sinn Féin, Mr. Pat Doherty, in a series of interviews and at the Ard-Fheis, played the hard man, claiming the SDLP had "bottled out" on every strand of the talks except Strand One. Mr. Doherty went on to recommend that Sinn Féin should take a "devious" approach to the referendum, boasting that "we have the ability to smash British rule in Ireland". Mr. Doherty's advocacy of a devious approach by Sinn Féin to the referendum is not what the people want to hear. Honesty with its own members and supporters is what is required, not deviousness.

Nobody should be surprised that part of this package is a commitment to amend Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. There were always going to be three crucial elements of any settlement — an elected assembly for Northern Ireland, meaningful cross-Border bodies and amendments to Articles 2 and 3. A commitment to amend them was implied in the Downing Street Declaration. That commitment was spelled out explicitly in the Framework Document and was crucial to securing the support of non-Nationalist parties for the Agreement. There can be no going back on that commitment.

Given the conflict of national allegiance that is at the heart of the Northern Ireland conflict, compromise is required on all sides if this is to be a lasting settlement. We cannot demand concessions from the British Government and Northern Unionists and offer nothing in return. Compromise, not conquest, is what was needed and what has been

achieved.

Unfortunately, the existing Articles 2 and 3 are framed in the language of conquest. Irrespective of what the authors intended them to mean, the harsh reality is that the Articles assert the right of the people of the Republic to impose their will on the citizens of Northern Ireland without any reference to their democratic rights. The two Articles are a relic of another era, reflecting the language and attitude of the 1930s. They were drafted within 15 years of the end of the Civil War and at a time when many people thought that partition would be a temporary phenomenon. If we were now, at the end of the 20th century, producing a written constitution for the first time for this State, it is unthinkable that Articles couched in such aggressive and intemperate terms would be included.

The attempt in Article 2 to define "the national territory" was particularly unwise. Contrary to what has been said by some people, it is relatively rare to find such a definition in a constitution. For instance, one of the oldest and most respected constitutions, that of the United States, contains no such definition. We should by now have learned the lesson that nations and states rarely coincide and attempts to make them do so have inevitably led to disaster.

A rag-bag of reactionaries have come together to oppose any change to Articles 2 and 3. They are supported by a section of Irish-America whose Stone Age politics have nothing to offer Ireland today. Their indigenous counterparts are no better. Their campaign of scaremongering is designed to confuse and mislead and, in the name of patriotism, to preserve a concept of nationalism that excludes and divides. I agree with Deputy Quinn's remarks that the editorial in one Sunday newspaper was quite appalling and backward looking in terms of the views expressed. Clearly, having much money in one's back pocket from the sale of one's shares in a newspaper does not provide one with wisdom or common sense. Their lies and half truths should not go unchallenged. The

proposed amendments to the Constitution will not make any Irish citizen less Irish. They will not take our country away from us, nor will they undermine Irish nationality. The proposed amendments reflect a more confident Ireland which does not feel the need for territorial claims to express itself. They reflect the fact that the vast majority of Irish people do not need flags or emblems to tell them they are Irish.

There are elements of this Agreement that will prove unpalatable to different groups of people. One of the most difficult and emotive of these, without doubt, is the planned release from prisons of those convicted of horrific offences of violence. One can only begin to imagine how the widow of a murdered RUC man, the child who saw a parent murdered by a sectarian gunman, the man or woman whose partner was blown to pieces by a bomb must feel at the prospect of those responsible being freed to walk the streets. One can only imagine how those who were injured or maimed and continue to suffer day in, day out from the effects of violent acts must feel at the prospect of the mass release of prisoners. For those convicted, the slate will be wiped clean; the victims will continue to suffer. I only hope that these victims can find in themselves the courage and generosity to put their terrible suffering to one side and tolerate the release of prisoners in pursuit of the common interests of all the people of Northern Ireland that there should be no more victims of politically motivated violence and that the prisons should never again be filled with young men and women sucked into paramilitary violence.

The early release of prisoners has been part of the settlement of virtually every political conflict throughout the world and it can be no different here. There is evidence from previous decades and more recent experiences that people can and do change in prison. Prisoners from all sides appear to have been a positive force for good in recent developments and it was striking to see the number of former paramilitary prisoners involved in the talks at Castle Buildings who were determined to ensure their children would not suffer the same drift into

paramilitarism, violent crime and long jail sentences. Nothing will wipe out the sense of pain the victims of violence and the families of the dead will feel at the release of prisoners but some public expression of remorse on the part of those responsible might ease it somewhat. While nothing can ever be done to bring back to life those who died, the paramilitary organisations could demonstrate their bona fides by revealing the location of the bodies of those who were kidnapped and murdered and whose families were never allowed to give them a decent burial. What possible cause or interest can be served by continuing to make these families suffer?

Neither should anyone underestimate the potential of the decommissioning issue to cause problems further along the line. Through a series of skilful manoeuvres on the part of George Mitchell, the decommissioning issue was successfully redefined as a necessary outcome of negotiations and agreement rather than as a precondition to negotiations but it is an issue that will have to be confronted and dealt with. It will be just as difficult for paramilitaries to accept the decommissioning of weapons as it will for the victims of the paramilitaries to accept the release of prisoners but both are essential components of this Agreement.

Commentators have remarked that there is no precedent for paramilitary organisations, especially the IRA, decommissioning weapons but neither is there any precedent for members of the political parties associated with paramilitary groups being involved with Governments and other political parties in intensive negotiations for a political settlement. Neither is there any precedent for a political system in Northern Ireland which offers elected representatives of Sinn Féin not just the possibility but the likelihood of ministerial office.

The purpose of arms decommissioning is to remove the threat of violence from the political equation. Progress on this issue is essential to build trust and confidence. As long as paramilitaries insist on holding on

to their weapons, many people will retain doubts as to the true intentions of these organisations. Decommissioning would be a declaration of confidence in the political process, a statement of commitment to use exclusively peaceful and democratic methods to deliver political objectives and a willingness to accept the expression of will by the people at the ballot box.

I remind the House that the Agreement places obligations on this State to take certain actions. There is a commitment by the Government to establish a human rights commission and to continue to take further active steps to demonstrate its respect for the different traditions on the island of Ireland. There is also a commitment to review the Offences Against the State Act. I hope these will be acted on promptly. We have not always been diligent about honouring similar commitments made in previous agreements. For instance, there was a commitment in the Anglo-Irish Agreement to look at the possibility of a common bill of rights for the entire island but it was never pursued because the then Irish Government went cold on it. The Downing Street Declaration included a commitment to have the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation "make recommendations on ways in which agreement and trust between both traditions in Ireland can be promoted and established". The Obstacles to Reconciliation Committee proved to be one of the forum's most difficult areas of work and its report was never published.

If there is one area of concern I would have about the Good Friday Agreement it would be the arrangements for the Assembly set out under Strand One where elected members will be required to register as Nationalist, Unionist or other. This, clearly, carries the danger of institutionalising sectarianism to which Deputy Bruton referred. As the Agreement stands, only those designated as Nationalist or Unionist can be counted to influence key decisions. There is a provision under which people will designate themselves as Nationalist, Unionist or other but when it comes to the decision making process in the Assembly only those who have designated themselves as Nationalist or Unionist will be

counted as part of a weighted majority of one side or the other. This may have been an oversight. If so, I hope it will be rectified and that in time it will become unnecessary to use it. There are many people in Northern Ireland who do not define themselves exclusively as Nationalist or Unionist. I would count myself among the third strand. Members of my party, Democratic Left, in Northern Ireland would classify themselves as "other". Indeed, there are very many other people to whom we also need to give space and a share in the power which is being given to the assembly.

I am also concerned there is no commitment in the Agreement by the British Government to reform its Constitution in relation to its own citizens. I refer to the continued requirement to make an oath of allegiance to the monarch for entry to Westminster. It is unreasonable in a modern, pluralist, democratic society to expect Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalists to swear an oath of allegiance to a monarch. As a republican in the tradition of Thomas Paine and Wolfe Tone I am surprised that the pluperfect Sinn Féin republicans failed even to raise this issue in the recent negotiations.

Sectarianism based on religion has existed in Northern Ireland for well over 300 years. Religious division and sectarianism continue to define politics there. The aim must be to eradicate religious sectarianism and create new structures and institutions which are secular and democratic while protecting the right of every citizen to pursue the religion of their choice without fear or favour.

The accommodation must enable politics to be defined in new ways and allow for the development of a modern pluralist society where the church in which a child is baptised does not define their politics for the rest of their lives.

There is, and ought to be, a very clear distinction between the religion bequeathed to children at birth by their parents and any future political

choices made by those same individuals acting as citizens in a civil political society.

Whatever reservations might be expressed about elements of the Agreement, the most compelling argument in its favour is that there is no alternative. Those who argue for a rejection of the Agreement should be honest with the public and admit that what they are offering is another generation of conflict and hatred.

I believe that the people in both jurisdictions will endorse the Agreement, but there is no room for complacency. The people need the facts put before them clearly and concisely. No time should be lost in getting a copy of the Agreement to every household and it should be reproduced in a readable and more user-friendly form than the version circulated last week.

Mr. Quinn

Yes.

Proinsias De Rossa

The parties who support the Agreement will have to actively campaign for it, leaving nothing to chance and losing no opportunity of putting the considerable merits of the document to the electorate.

The Agreement offers the chance of an Ireland whose people are united in peace, partnership and democracy. It offers our children and their children the prospect of a life without fear of political violence. It offers the people of this island the opportunity to realise the full economic potential that exists, but which thus far has not been realised. It is a good and fair agreement and deserves the support of all the people in this State and in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Sargent

An féidir liom cuid am a roinnt leis an Teachta Joe Higgins?

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Sargent

Ba mhaith liom, ar dtús, comhghairdeas a ghabháil leis na hocht bpairtí polaitiúil agus leis an dá rialtas a bhain an comhaontas seo amach leis na moltaí atá i gcáipéis Aoine an Chéasta agus ba mhaith liom obair agus dúthracht na dtrí chathaoirleach idirnáisiúnta amholadh go hard.

I congratulate the eight political parties and both Governments. In particular, I commend the commitment of the Taoiseach, Deputy Ahern, during what I know was a difficult week for him, and the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, for reaching agreement between themselves and with all the parties for the proposals contained within the Good Friday document. I also commend the work of the three international chairmen.

The Agreement is a development of deep historical significance. The Governments of the two nation States contesting the territory of Northern Ireland, with most of the political parties of the region, have agreed a set of proposals which transcend the narrow confines of nationalism, whether of the British or Irish variety. A post-nationalist settlement is emerging which has great potential not alone for the people of the North, Ireland as a whole and for all who live on these islands, but which has potential to give a lead to the wider world, within the EU and beyond it, as we approach the 21st century.

It is to be hoped that in so doing it will be possible for an evolutionary

dynamic to develop so that in time the remnants of the old conflict which distort the democratic structures outlined in the Agreement can fall away and the potential for developing a truly post-modern set of political arrangements where identity and territory are no longer the defining ideas of State building can begin.

Aspects of the Agreement, including proposals for police reform, prisoner release, victim support – although I support those who say it should be stronger, more clearly stated and more effective – human rights in general, equality legislation and the Irish language, if acted upon with generosity and imagination will greatly enhance the opportunities presented.

Balanced constitutional change was always a requirement of a just settlement in Northern Ireland. The Green Party, An Comhaontas Glás, has been calling for changes to Articles 2 and 3 in tandem with changes to UK legislation since our party's foundation in 1981, when it was called the Ecology Party. It was not as popular then as the mainstream parties called either for unilateral deletion or no change under any circumstances.

On the opening day of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, I referred to the extent to which the political darkness in the North was in large part due to its standing in the long and dark shadows of both British and Irish nationalism. Only movement by both Governments on the key underlying constitutional issue could move that shadow and lift some of the darkness. The two external claims to the North had to be removed.

Balanced constitutional change between Ireland and the United Kingdom is difficult to measure since in our own case there is a written Constitution and we are a Republic, while in the case of the UK there is no written constitution and the country is a monarchy.

If the Agreement can be taken at face value, however, it can now be said

that both the external claims — that contained in the Constitution of this Republic and the one contained in British legislation — are gone. The centuries old conflict between two homogenising nationalisms seems to have ended in a compromise that transcends nationalism itself. No one is defeated and no one has victory. Irish nationalists may now assert that the Crown no longer claims, as of right, Ireland or any part thereof. At the same time Irish unionists may assert that, for the first time, their rights and their separate identity are acknowledged and guaranteed by the Republic.

For the first time people, not territory, define political structures. This is as fitting a gesture to the people-centred republican philosophy of 1798 as any I can think of in this bicentenary year.

The creation of a power-sharing assembly is a logical component of any agreement likely to gain the support of the people. The model on offer is a serious attempt to get beyond the politics of simple majoritarianism which, at all times and even in the most stable of states, is a crude form of democratic decision making. It does, however, suffer from a number of defects, some of which are due to a continuation of majoritarian thinking.

As currently structured the decision making systems of the assembly tend to reinforce and institutionalise the current divide. There is something distasteful about public representatives, who after all are intended to represent the whole of their constituencies, having to declare their ethnic origins and to follow rules rooted more in ethnic labelling rather than democracy.

I sincerely hope that over time these elements can be ironed out of the arrangements. As reconciliation builds trust grows and a true democratic consensus begins to develop. Imagine a future Northern assembly where the third strand has grown from its current 10 per cent to 30 per cent or more. Should the two ethnic blocks continue to hold

vetoos in that scenario? Two vetoos are not better than one.

Is it not ironic that, under the current rules for the assembly, if this agreement were to bear fruit so that reconciliation grew and politics began to grow away from parties based on identity, it would be those new parties — Greens, Women's Coalition, Alliance, Socialists, Conservatives or DL — who would be penalised and the old rearguard of British and Irish nationalism would gain advantage? A system based upon true proportionality, whereby the members elect their own executive by the use of such mechanisms as the matrix vote, and resolve contentious issues by use of multi-option voting — such as that proposed by the de Borda Preferendum — ought in time to replace the system proposed, whose cumbersome and difficult structures remain a monument to the distrust which continues to threaten stability.

The parties must also reflect on the role of democratic opposition in the new assembly. We welcome the idea of a fully inclusive government. Perhaps Dáil Éireann might consider that what is good for the Northern goose could also be good for the Southern gander. The model on offer for the North, however, has implications for how politics is organised. The strict party whip system will lead to an entirely unintended form of totalitarianism in the assembly which will have to be significantly relaxed if there is to be an effective opposition comprising backbenchers from the inclusive government partners. Clarification is still required on what constitutes a key decision. It is hoped these matters will be resolved before the assembly elections rather than being left as a time bomb to wreck it afterwards.

It is regrettable that the PRSTV topping up electoral system, first mooted by the Green Party in 1995, adopted by the Women's Coalition and supported by others, was dropped at the insistence of the larger parties in preference for simple PRSTV. The topping up electoral system provides for a more accurate election result, whereas the system chosen gives larger parties more than their due. It is ironic that parties which

have demanded a fairer distribution of power for their own constituencies have denied the same to others. I note that electoral systems will remain under review and I hope that the larger parties will in time have the confidence to allow a system that gives precedence to the choices the electorate makes rather than maintaining power for themselves.

Throughout the peace process, the Green Party argued that community groups should have a greater involvement in the consensus building exercise. We are delighted that provision has been made in the Agreement for a civic forum. It follows that such a forum should be established in this jurisdiction as well and we look forward to the Government introducing proposals to this effect. Should it forget to do so, I will be happy to remind it.

North-South bodies must not be looked upon as Trojan horses. At present, they represent two different things for the two larger communities in the North. For Nationalists, they are the practical expression of their Irish identity, while for Unionists they are merely structures intended to facilitate co-operation between two states. It is regrettable that the idea of North-South bodies has developed in this way. The Irish identity should have been expressed in institutional and symbolic changes to the state of Northern Ireland. Such ideas have been long-fingered in the Agreement and, as a result, the North-South bodies are invested with a significance for Nationalists which greatly disturbs Unionists.

When we speak about common standards in areas such as tourism and the environment, we should be careful not to choose the lower standard. The REP scheme, for example, is of a much higher standard in the North and we should emulate that rather than the standard in the South. The east-west dimension provides an opportunity to develop the post-nationalist ideas in the Agreement. The expression of that in the Islands of the North Atlantic, IONA, is an important reminder of the spiritual

affinity which exists between the two islands and which predates the divisive watersheds in history, such as the Reformation and other historical and political battles.

I welcome the human rights provisions and the terms of reference for the independent commission, but I decry the lack of progress on policing. There should be a link between prisoner releases and victims' rights. It is important that the truth commission is set up as quickly as possible so that we are given an opportunity to recognise the trauma experienced by victims.

The Good Friday Agreement provides an excellent opportunity to develop nationalism in these islands. If the referendum is passed, as I hope it will be, it will be the beginning of an important consensus building exercise. I am deeply disappointed, however, that the referendum must share the same polling day as the Amsterdam Treaty. As Deputy John Bruton said, this Agreement is a total package and should be seen as such. However, Amsterdam and Stormont are not a package. As the UK is reluctant to join EMU and to become involved in further European integration, the arguments on the Amsterdam Treaty will impede some aspects of co-operation between North and South. I appeal to the Government to hold the referendum on the Amsterdam Treaty in the autumn. On May 22 the Green Party will join with all the other parties in urging a "yes" vote for this good Good Friday Agreement.

Mr. Higgins

(Dublin West): The vast majority of people on this island, North and South, yearn for peace and for an end to the sectarianism and violence that have blighted the lives of so many over the past 30 years. They desperately hope that the Agreement reached between the political parties in Northern Ireland and the British and Irish Governments on Good Friday will bring that peace. For that reason, I expect the referenda to be passed in the North and South on 22 May.

Unfortunately, however, this Agreement will be found to be fatally flawed as a mechanism for permanently solving the deep-seated problems of Northern Ireland. Tragically, but inevitably, the terms drawn up are a reflection of the stunted politics that have dominated Northern Ireland for generations and the work of politicians and political parties, most of which are hopelessly sectarian-based, right wing or both. The terms of this Agreement are not an attack on sectarian divisions and sectarian politics. Instead, this Agreement institutionalises sectarianism in the structures proposed. It envisages the people of Northern Ireland as permanently divided into sectarian camps and labels them Nationalist and Unionist. Hence the first act of members elected to a new Northern Ireland assembly will be to declare whether they are Unionist, Nationalist or other. Only those designated as Unionist or Nationalist will be taken into account in the complex voting procedures and in the composition of the executive.

It appears inconceivable to those who have framed this Agreement that the people of Northern Ireland might want to elect individuals or parties which are not sectarian based but which represent working class people from Protestant and Catholic backgrounds equally and which have a vision different from the narrow sectarian politics that have dominated Northern Ireland for decades with disastrous consequences. The contradictions in the political life of Northern Ireland which this Agreement fails to overcome became evident while the ink was still drying on the signatures appended to it. The Ulster Unionist Party said the Agreement copperfastened the North as part of Britain, while Sinn

Féin said it was a transition to a united Ireland. Both sides are selling it to their supporters in these terms. What will happen when one party finds out that it was wrong, since both cannot be simultaneously correct?

A dismal prospect for people in Northern Ireland is that the parties of unionism and nationalism will each attempt in the different structures that are set up to cling to their present bases of support. This means that the sectarian card will continue to be played. The practical expression of this will be active opposition by powerful sections of both the Unionist and Nationalist political establishments so that each continues to have its voting fodder ring-fenced from the other. This could mean opposition to any constructive moves towards real integration of the communities.

In recent times we have heard some people speak of a so called demographic time bomb being primed in Northern Ireland, that is, that Catholics, having a higher birth rate than Protestants, will in time become a majority and that will result in a united Ireland on the basis of the current system. Those who push this line are, on the one hand, guilty of shameless sectarianism, but are also blind to the lessons of the history of Northern Ireland. The hope that a 51 per cent vote, should that ever come about, would lead to a smooth transition to a united Ireland would be demonstrated to be as futile as the loyalist insistence that a sizeable Catholic minority could have been coerced into accepting the bigoted Stormont regime brought down in 1972 or be permanently reconciled to rule from Britain.

The complex reality is that the Catholic people will never be reconciled with British rule while the Protestant people will never be pushed into a united capitalist Ireland. Any political parties which take their stand on one or other side of these contradictory standpoints, which is the case with all the major political parties in Northern Ireland, will always be repulsive to the other side. Those are the forces that presided over political life in Northern Ireland as the population was brought to the brink of open sectarian warfare in conflicts over parades.

Regarding the debate on changing Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution, it should be clearly stated that those articles as they stand are a fraud and amounted to a window dressing exercise by Mr. de Valera and his Government in 1937. In concrete terms, the suggestion that the State in the Irish Republic could exercise jurisdiction over Northern Ireland is a sham. With one million people, mainly of a Protestant background, adamantly opposed to such a proposal, it always represented, in their view, an arrogant encroachment on their rights. Moreover if there were ever any concrete moves to make this claim into more than words, they would result not in a united Ireland but in a catastrophic civil war, repartition and a sectarian nightmare reminiscent of Bosnia.

The words I wish to see in place of Articles 2 and 3 would envisage a democratic and socialist alternative to a narrow Nationalist claim on territory. They would enshrine an aspiration for ordinary working class people, North and South, to come together in a united approach to ridding this island of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, speculation, greed and sectarian division resulting in a socialist Ireland where sectarian politics could be consigned to the dustbin. That is far from what is proposed, but the proposed new Articles 2 and 3 are more acceptable and progressive than the old ones in that they recognise that a million Protestants cannot be coerced into a united Ireland against their will and that any progress towards unity should include consent, democracy and peaceful means only. At the same time all citizens in Northern Ireland have the right to recognise themselves as part of the

Irish nation and will enjoy the same rights as before to be Irish citizens and, if they wish, to hold an Irish passport. That is also crucially important.

In the referendum on 22 May the people, North and South, are faced, with a dismal choice: to reject this Agreement or allow it to pass while fully aware of its objectionable content. Rejection would mean that, because of the lack of any alternative from the parties that currently dominate Northern Ireland, the reactionary sectarians who oppose it on both sides would be emboldened to openly bring their sectarian politics on to the stage backed up by their paramilitary wings. Bitter sectarian polarisation in the communities would be the background to paramilitary outrages and open warfare on issues such as parades.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

I ask the Deputy to conclude now because an unprecedented number of Deputies are offering. As there is a limited timeframe for this debate which is due to conclude at 11.30 p.m, we must keep strict time.

Mr. Higgins

(Dublin West): I will conclude now. The other choice is to allow it to pass while not endorsing its content. This may at least see the main political parties carry on their strategies within the framework agreed even though they will stumble from one political crisis to the next. It would allow the continuation of the peace process and could provide a space for working class politics to emerge which could challenge the grip of the sectarian based politicians. This would be a more preferable scenario.

Minister for Foreign Affairs (Mr. Andrews)

I wish to share my time with my ministerial colleague, Deputy O'Rourke.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

That is agreed.

Mr. Andrews

I pay tribute to the memory of the great Eamon de Valera and to his great Constitution which has stood the test of time. It will always be a monument to his revered memory as far as my party is concerned. I am glad to support the motion before the House welcoming the Agreement reached in the multiparty negotiations. It was my privilege to participate with the Taoiseach and Government colleagues at the talks. I pay tribute to the Taoiseach for his contribution. His fortitude, particularly at the time of his bereavement, was universally recognised and he performed with immense valour in the most difficult of circumstances. This was generously acknowledged by all participants. He richly deserves the many tributes paid to him in the media and by the public, North and South. I pay a warm tribute also to the extremely valuable contribution made by the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell. Praise is also due to the other members of the Government delegation throughout the process, both at ministerial and official level, for their unstinting efforts and commitment. The achievement of this Agreement was the culmination of many months, and indeed years, of dedicated work by many people. I am sure the House will join me in thanking them and acknowledging the importance of their contribution.

In saying that I fully acknowledge the importance of the role played by previous Governments in bringing about the Belfast Agreement, now known as the Good Friday Agreement. It is an achievement for which all parties in this House can justly claim praise and credit, including my immediate predecessors, Deputy Spring and Ray Burke. In that regard, I add my tribute to the contribution made by the late Hugh Coveney, in

which his family can rightly take great pride today. May the Lord be good to his memory.

I also want to record my appreciation of the work of the British Government delegation, led in the final week by the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, and throughout by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mo Mowlam, and Paul Murphy. We are all agreed in this House that the close partnership of the two Governments has been at the heart of the development of the peace process. I can truly say that without that close working together at the different levels — the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, and myself with Mo Mowlam and Paul Murphy and the officials of both sides — a successful outcome would not have been achieved on Good Friday. It is essential in the critical period ahead that this partnership be continued in the closest way possible.

No praise is too high for the patience and wisdom of Senator Mitchell and his colleagues, Prime Minister Holkeri and General de Chastelain. Their involvement symbolised the tremendous encouragement and support offered throughout by our friends abroad, in particular by President Clinton and by our partners in the European Union. The European Union has not received sufficient credit for its immense contribution in terms of its support economically and otherwise. I record the Government's deep appreciation of its support to date and its continuing support.

History will be the ultimate judge of the significance of the Good Friday Agreement. There are many hurdles to be overcome before its ultimate success is guaranteed, but already it is clear its potential impact on the life of this island is on a profound scale. Before turning to a number of specific elements of the Agreement, I want to make some general observations about its nature and import.

The first truth to be celebrated is the fact that it happened. Set against

the background of 30 years of conflict and of previous difficulties in forging a settlement, this is an immense achievement in itself. Just as many years of failure to achieve agreement had bred a sense of despair and hopelessness, so the outcome achieved by the parties on Good Friday carries the potential of an enormous empowerment. The joy and delight expressed by people all around the country, North and South, on Easter weekend and since then are testament to that. The messages are crystal clear. With goodwill, people can overcome differences and reach accommodation. The future can be different from the past. Change is possible and, above all, peaceful politics represents the only way forward. These are hugely important truths for us all to reflect on, and to be encouraged by, in the coming weeks and months.

This Agreement is about inclusiveness. A core element of the ambition of this process has been the fact that it has sought to be as broadly based as possible. This has been critical to the achievement of the Agreement and will be central to its ultimate success in practice.

Fundamentally, the Agreement is about change. Its founding assumption is that the status quo is not an option. It is a feature of conflict resolution everywhere that agreement is reached when the main protagonists, often for very different reasons, reach the conclusion that the benefits of a settlement outweigh those of the status quo. It is my belief this judgment has now been made by the parties in regard to our own process. My strong sense participating in the talks for the past several months was that people on all sides felt that we simply could not go on as we had been. Certainly there were very different views about the kind of change which was necessary, but nobody disputed the fact that it was needed. The challenge for the negotiators was to work out the nature and scale of that change. In reaching agreement, they have begun that process. The coming months and years will be filled with the task of working out what that change means in practice across a whole range of areas and issues.

The Agreement is above all about balance. What has been interesting about the media coverage of the Agreement is how little the focus has been on the concept of winners and losers. I find that hugely encouraging. The whole basis of a process seeking to settle 30 years of conflict must be that there can be no winners and losers, or if there are, all sides should be so in equal measure. Certainly, that was our goal as negotiators.

Any fair reading of the document will lead to the conclusion that — a target I set on one occasion — "parity of pain and gain" for all sides has been achieved. At this difficult time, as all sides seek to come to terms with the compromises that are necessary, it is not helpful to seek to represent the outcome in any other terms.

In the plenary session at the end of the talks, Senator Mitchell spoke again of the 61 children born in Northern Ireland on the same day last year as his own son, Andrew, and his hope that they all would have the same opportunities for a peaceful and normal life. Nobody under 30 on the island can remember an era of peace, but it is that generation, and those still younger, who stand to benefit most of all from this Agreement. In that context, I therefore would particularly ask our young people to support our efforts to achieve a fair, honourable and just balance between the aspirations of the two great traditions on this island.

However, as the history of the past 29 years makes all too clear, just to wish for, or even to demand, peace does not make it a reality. First, we must guard against the continuing violence perpetrated by extremist factions. I warmly congratulate the Garda on its recent successes in this regard, and indeed on the huge contribution made by it and by the Defence Forces over many years.

Second, successive Irish Governments have argued that lasting peace can only be achieved if underpinned by a balanced and comprehensive

political agreement. The fundamental values and objectives of this and previous Governments are squarely reflected in the Agreement. The interlinked principles of consent and self-determination form the basis of the section on constitutional issues. The concept of partnership and co-operation at all levels — between the communities in Northern Ireland, between North and South, and within these islands — is given institutional expression throughout strands one, two and three. What is meant in practice by the protection of human rights, equality of opportunity and treatment, and parity of esteem between the two communities is spelled out in considerable detail. Running through the Agreement as a whole, and made explicit in the opening Declaration of Support, is a commitment to exclusively peaceful and democratic means and a repudiation of the use of violence and coercion for any political purpose.

On 22 May, the people of Ireland, North and South, will for the first time in eighty years have the opportunity to vote simultaneously on an issue of fundamental national importance. In essence, they will be asked the same question: whether the settlement reached on 10 April is a fair, reasonable and honourable basis on which we can together chart the future of the island. If both North and South answer "yes", this will have been a profoundly significant exercise of national self-determination.

The difference in our respective constitutional and legislative provisions means that the wordings of the questions North and South, and their precise legal effects, are different, but in their broad political implications they are exactly the same. The Agreement was agreed as a totality, and it will stand or fall as a totality. If there is a "yes" vote in the South but a "no" vote in the North, the Agreement will fall and vice versa. Every party, and indeed every individual, may find in the Agreement elements they particularly like. They may also find elements with which they have difficulty. However, the judgment they are asked to make is on the Agreement in the round.

I deeply understand, as a consequence both of my own family history and of my long involvement in political life as a member of the Fianna Fáil Party, the difficulty many people have in contemplating changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. However, I am satisfied that the amendments now proposed, when set against matching change in British constitutional legislation and when seen as part of the Agreement as a whole, preserve essential principles. They represent a modernisation of our basic values, not a rejection of them. Indeed, in some respects they improve on what is now in the Constitution.

Furthermore, in any negotiation each side must make difficult compromises. All of us must take risks for peace and agreement. For example, there are many Unionists in Northern Ireland who remain hostile to the concept of a strong and structured North-South relationship. There are many people throughout the island who have great difficulty with the idea of accelerated prisoner releases. It is neither right nor feasible for us to expect others to make all the hard decisions. We cannot ask them to show courage if we fail to do so.

In the Joint Declaration and in the Framework Document the Government made clear that, as part of a comprehensive settlement, we would be prepared to introduce and support change to the Constitution, fully reflecting the principle of consent. What is now proposed honours that commitment.

In Article 2, we are replacing a description of the national territory with a generous and inclusive definition of the Irish nation. For the first time in the Constitution, it will be made clear that it is the entitlement and birthright of every person born in Ireland to be part of the Irish nation. We are also recognising the significance of the Irish diaspora. Furthermore, in the new British-Irish Agreement there is for the first time an explicit acceptance by the British Government of the right of people in Northern Ireland to hold Irish citizenship. The rights of Northern Nationalists are being copper-fastened, not diluted.

In the proposed new Article 3, there is a powerful statement of "the firm will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of the island of Ireland". The aspiration to unity remains undimmed.

It is also recognised that a united Ireland shall be brought about only by peaceful means and with consent. As I have said, this writes into our Constitution commitments we have already made in the Joint Declaration and the Framework Document. What is highly significant is that, taking the proposed new Article 3 and the proposed changes to British constitutional legislation together, there will be for the first time a clear mechanism through which a united Ireland may be achieved. The existing Article 3 is silent on this.

Moreover, the commitments in the British-Irish Agreement to equality of treatment and parity of esteem, and to the dual citizenship rights of the people of Northern Ireland, are to apply irrespective of the status of Northern Ireland. The two Governments are therefore making clear, as in the Framework Document, that key principles will apply in Northern Ireland no matter which Government has jurisdiction there. Reassurance is offered to both communities, allowing them to contemplate the possibility of change with greater certainty and confidence.

The new Article 3.2 allows for the establishment of North-South

institutions in which executive powers and functions are shared between the two jurisdictions. Again, this is a change aimed at allowing for and facilitating the practical coming together of the people of the island for our mutual benefit.

The amendments are framed in such a way that they are conditional on the successful completion of all the steps necessary to bring the Agreement into force. In other words, the new Articles will only replace the old ones if a referendum is successful in Northern Ireland, and at the same time as all the new institutions — including the North-South Ministerial Council and the initial implementation bodies — come into operation.

None of this is to say that in 1920 partition was right, or that a grave and tragic injustice was not done to the majority of the people of the island as a whole, and in particular to Northern Nationalists. As the then Taoiseach, Deputy Albert Reynolds, put it shortly after the Joint Declaration was agreed, "We need to separate in our minds two different issues. The first is our view that partition was wrong in 1920-21. The second is how, given that Ireland has been divided in two parts for 70 years, we can legitimately restore Irish unity in the future. Two wrongs do not make a right. The fact that partition was enforced back in 1920 does not make it right to enforce unity today." The existence of two separate jurisdictions on the island is a fact and there is no alternative, in terms of practical politics, morality, and international practice, to the achievement of unity through, and only through, the concurrent consent of North and South.

I conclude by again paying tribute to the Taoiseach and all those other architects in Opposition and out of power — people like Deputy Albert Reynolds whom I mentioned — for their immense contribution to what we are discussing today.

Minister for Public Enterprise (Mrs. O'Rourke)

I thank my colleague, the Minister, Deputy Andrews, for sharing his time with me. My time is very brief and therefore my remarks will also be brief. Everybody has paid tribute to all who worked in this process. I join in those tributes, particularly to the Minister, Deputy Andrews, and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, the Taoiseach and previous Taoisigh who worked over the years on the peace process. I think back to the late 1970s and early 1980s when Charlie Haughey and Brian Lenihan spoke about the totality of relationships. It appears they were way ahead of their time.

This whole process has been one of evolution whereby ideas were shared and the process moved on. From 1974 onwards there have been failures and successes, with enthusiastic encouragement by political parties of all hues in this Chamber, Northern Ireland and the UK. I join in the plaudits with a great sense of joy and enthusiasm for the Agreement reached in Northern Ireland on Good Friday.

It is interesting to note the level of enthusiasm in the various speeches this evening. People approached the issue from different points of view. The Good Friday Agreement is not an end in itself but the beginning of a whole new adventure. It gives to both parties rights, ambitions and aspirations. The idea that one should somehow cast them aside would be entirely incorrect. Everybody has the right to hold on to their ultimate goals and aspirations and for us the aspiration is a united Ireland, working through peaceful means with the democratic consent of the people expressed in a democratic fashion.

I think back to the many endeavours for peace in previous decades, which always seemed to concentrate on peace in itself, and while that was highly valuable and desirable, it is the follow-up that is important. We must now concentrate on the follow-up. We must work hard if there is to be a successful step by step movement forward. It is the wish of

everybody that the thrust and commitment which lit up Good Friday North and South and throughout the world continues. This event received huge headlines in every newspaper and on every radio and television station. I hope the optimism, confidence, enthusiasm and aspiration which gave rise to the successful conclusion will remain with the participants as we move to the next step, the vote on 22 May which, successfully implemented North and South, will lead to the next stage, the assembly in June and thereafter the other events that will unfold. That will require from every person in this and other lands a constant rekindling of the spirit and enthusiasm which inflamed — if that is not the incorrect word to use — the participants who decided on Good Friday to come together in the Agreement. That Agreement is in the preamble to the document which states that each participant gave it approval and will work towards its implementation.

When difficulties arise in the weeks ahead we should hold to that ideal. We should also hold on to our aspirations. David Trimble has provided fine leadership, as have the other parties. While many rush to talk about Sinn Féin's comments at its Árd Fheis, it was speaking to its constituency which had to be brought forward in the process and which had its aspirations and enthusiasm for its ideals.

We will all have to work hard on this matter. What is needed is a range of community-wide meetings, not only among our own parties but among the public, where the document will be explained and people will have an opportunity to express their concerns and enthusiasm and how they feel we can move forward.

I was particularly glad to see and hear the voices of women throughout this process, particularly the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, Bríd Rodgers and the Women's Coalition who participated in a part of Ireland which always appeared to be male dominated.

This is a fine Agreement which I fully support. I particularly praise the

Taoiseach without whom it would not have been reached.

Mr. Flanagan

I wish to share my time with my colleague and deputy leader of my party, Deputy Owen.

An Ceann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Flanagan

I join other speakers in paying tribute to all those involved in the talks, particularly the Taoiseach, Deputy Ahern, the Minister, Deputy Andrews, and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, as well as people from this side of the House who were involved some years ago, the former Minister, Deputy Owen, and the leader of my party, Deputy Bruton. I am privileged to have an opportunity to speak in this historic debate. There are people who, as Members of this House, participated in North-South relations over many years and who are not now involved but, I have no doubt, are listening to this debate and looking at events unfolding with the same interest and determination as they showed when in office.

I am pleased the Agreement has not been considered in terms of winners and losers. It is an attempt to shape what has been a deeply divided society and there are no winners or losers. Accommodation is the bottom line as compromise is always a fundamental feature of any settlement.

Previous speakers spoke in general terms about what is a very complex agreement. Some Members, particularly my party leader, Deputy Bruton, referred to specifics in terms of institutional arrangements that will no doubt form part and parcel of a very important public debate in weeks

to come. In my short contribution I will concentrate on three areas in the strand three part of the document which are part and parcel of the democratic process and fundamental to a lasting settlement. Those three areas are, first, the need for a massive economic regeneration in Northern Ireland; second, the question of voter fraud in Northern Ireland, which must be tackled; and, third, the continuing acts of violence, threats and intimidation, the so-called punishment beatings which, in spite of the ceasefires, unfortunately have not ceased and must be eradicated from Northern society if there is to be a democratic settlement.

In the area of economic regeneration it has been highlighted down the years by many people that a huge grievance has been perpetrated on sections of the community, and attempts to redress the imbalance have met with little success. The report in 1997 of the standing advisory commission on human rights proved to be a comprehensive analysis of lack of employment equality in Northern Ireland. That document made an extremely valuable contribution, leading to the publication some weeks ago of a British Government White Paper which, I hope, will be amplified, ventilated and acted upon in tandem with the constitutional and institutional measures that will be brought forward in the coming weeks.

Since direct rule was established in Northern Ireland 26 years ago sufficient emphasis has not been placed by successive Governments on the need to address widespread discrimination based on religious persuasion and political opinion. Everyone agrees that equality of opportunity is a fundamental human right. Unfortunately, that right appeared to be absent in many areas of life in Northern Ireland. Fair employment legislation and fair employment agencies, while working reasonably well, were never alone going to resolve deep seated grievances on the part of the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. I welcome the massive injection of international aid to Northern Ireland and Border areas in recent years, particularly that provided through the

International Fund for Ireland and European Union support. I welcome the most recent initiative in this area, namely, the new deal for the unemployed announced three weeks ago by the Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, wherein she committed £140 million to combat unemployment in Northern Ireland, albeit over a five year period.

Fair employment practices and non-discrimination are fundamental to any peace settlement and they are vital ingredients towards ensuring equality of opportunity in the divided community. Particular attention must be paid to the long-term unemployed and unemployment among young people in Northern Ireland, both of which have given rise to a sense of hopelessness and despair on the part of many people who have turned to crime, lawlessness and terrorism as a result. The unemployment differential remains in Northern Ireland, despite the existence of fair employment legislation and the efforts of the Fair Employment Agency. The stark fact remains that rates of unemployment among Catholic males are still more than double those among their Protestant counterparts.

The Government must specifically and with determination tackle unemployment and economic disadvantage in urban areas of west Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland. Economic disadvantage in urban areas of west Belfast has greatly contributed to the climate of terror and the absence of the rule of law for many years. I welcome the new statutory proposals requiring all public sector bodies in Northern Ireland to promote and practise equality of opportunity. I hope the new equality commission which will assume responsibility for the functions of the Fair Employment Commission operates adequately because it will have a major role to play in considering how the concept of parity of esteem can be advanced after the referendum. In that regard, much has been made of the new bodies and legislative proposals on pages 19 and 20 of the document. These have not been highlighted in the same way as other areas of the document but they are still significant.

It is totally unacceptable that any Government should remain neutral on the question of the unemployment differential. It is also unacceptable for any society to experience and tolerate a strong and positive link between the least advantaged sections of that society and a particular racial or religious group.

The second point to which I will refer involves electoral fraud which the authorities, particularly the British Government, will be obliged to act upon before the June elections, assuming that the referendum and plebiscite are carried. A recent Commons report clearly showed that vote packing and ballot rigging have taken place on a large scale in recent times. Multiple registration at the same address, widespread personation, the abuse of postal and proxy votes and undue influence and intimidation have influenced electoral results in Northern Ireland to an unfair extent. A recent report indicates that in west Belfast alone 18,000 names have appeared more than once on the electoral register. I hope the authorities will take action in this area as quickly as possible.

My third point relates to punishment beatings. Unfortunately and unacceptably, these are continuing, despite the ceasefire and the Mitchell Principles — point 6 of which clearly urges the stopping of these acts of violence. Despite the signing of those principles by Sinn Féin, the PUP and the UDP, their paramilitary wings continue to engage in these horrific acts of violence, almost on a daily basis. These attacks are concerned with territory, control and power and they have no basis in an ordered society. Sinn Féin justifies these attacks by stating that they are carried out in areas where the RUC has no writ and in areas with high levels of crime. Those who have reached agreement during the momentous week which culminated in the Good Friday Agreement must dissociate themselves from the beatings and ensure that they stop immediately.

There is an onus on every democratically elected representative of this Parliament to ensure that a campaign of information and persuasion

takes place in this jurisdiction to ensure that there is a high turnout in the referendum on 22 May. With the achievement of such a turnout, I hope there will be a massive endorsement of this historic Agreement. I again compliment those in this jurisdiction and in the British jurisdiction for their efforts in ensuring that agreement was reached in the negotiations. We have taken the biggest step towards peace in the past 50 years.

Mrs. Owen

Like thousands of people in this country and elsewhere, I watched television and listened to the radio throughout the afternoon on Good Friday. At approximately 5.30 p.m. on that day I watched Senator George Mitchell's rather low key announcement that agreement had been reached among those participating in the talks in Northern Ireland. I was powerfully struck by the manner of the delivery of that message and I was reminded, in contrast, of the debate which ensued following the return of Michael Collins and others from London in 1921 with the Treaty. A reconsideration of the debates of that time provides a graphic reminder of how far this State has come in terms of its maturity. We are debating the new Agreement struck on Good Friday last because of our understanding of its need.

When we contrast the agreement among Members in this House with the manner in which the debates were conducted in the Dáil in 1921, we must pay tribute to the many long forgotten people whose past endeavours have led us to the stage when we can exhort the public to vote in favour of the Agreement and also to vote in favour of changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. Many people have held these Articles dear and stated that they would not give them up under any circumstances. For example, in the past Fianna Fáil stated trenchantly that those Articles should not be relinquished but it has had to make changes. My party, Fine Gael, has also been obliged to make changes in terms of its hopes for this island.

In the debates which took place in 1921, Michael Collins referred to the principle of "Government by the consent of the governed" on a number of occasions. I am glad that principle underlies this Agreement, which will be put in place on foot of the votes cast by the "governed", namely, those living in Northern Ireland and the Republic. Only after they have cast their votes on 22 May will this Agreement rise from the pages of the published document to become a reality in the lives of the people of Ireland, North and South.

Tribute has been paid to many people but many steps taken along the way led us to the Agreement of Good Friday. Many people have been mentioned but there are others we should also remember at this time like Gordon Wilson and the mothers and fathers of those killed in so many bombings and other atrocities in Northern Ireland, whose names we have forgotten. They showed great courage when burying their dead by saying they did not want retaliation or to see other people suffer the way they had suffered through eye for an eye type killings.

All those people were instrumental in bringing about the Agreement on Good Friday because it was through their courage and resilience that those in leadership positions continued, despite setbacks, to make progress and reach the Agreement. I refer to people like John Hume,

Seamus Mallon and all the other members of the SDLP who continued to say that the only way to govern Northern Ireland was through democratic means and who eventually convinced those in the political wing of the IRA that there was no future in continuing along the road of violence. We pay tribute to those who had the courage to accept that violence was not the way to achieve their aims.

When we debate this Agreement today we should not forget the 3,000 lives that were taken and the hundreds of thousands of people whose lives have been devastated by the brutality and atrocities of the past 30 years in Northern Ireland. This Agreement is a tribute to all the people who suffered in Northern Ireland, and I am sure when people vote on the Agreement it will be for various reasons, not least the end of violence and the fact that they can now safely allow their children to go about their social lives and their education without having to worry about the threat of another bomb. The threat remains but I hope that as a result of the overwhelming support given to this Agreement in Northern Ireland and the South, the people of violence will be so marginalised that they will be unable to continue their brutal acts. As Deputy Flanagan said, I hope we will see an end to intimidation and punishment beatings, that the people who had to leave this country can return without fear of intimidation and that normal life will be restored to many families.

It will take a great deal more courage and generosity on the part of the "David Trimbles" of the Ulster Unionist Party and the "Gerry Adams" of Sinn Féin, as well as the continuing courage and generosity of people like John Hume and Seamus Mallon, to make this Agreement a reality. Much progress has already been made with regard to North-South co-operation. When these new institutions are established on a statutory basis, I hope the contacts that have been made through the years will come into their own to allow those institutions to work.

I was honoured, as Minister for Justice, to be part of the talks process for a year. I went to Northern Ireland in June 1996 and attended the talks

almost every week thereafter until the change of Government in June 1997. I want to pay tribute to the many people I met there, including the civil servants and staff of the different parties. I also want to remember today my colleague, the late Deputy Hugh Coveney, who travelled almost every week to Northern Ireland to participate in the talks. I pay tribute to Deputy Dick Spring, whose experience and knowledge well invaluable to somebody like myself who was new to that process. I want to remember also all the civil servants of the various Departments here. Minister O'Donoghue and Minister Ahern, who are in the Chamber, will know the great debt of gratitude we owe to all the people in the various Departments who participated in the Anglo-Irish Conference and assisted in whatever way they could through the years. Those names will never be inscribed in the speeches made in this House because they are very numerous but they know they have played their part in bringing about this Agreement. They can feel some sense of ownership of this Agreement when they are talking to their children and grandchildren and can say that they were there and played a small part.

As this Agreement is adopted tonight I urge the people of Ireland to recognise that this is a further step on the way to ensuring this island can be governed in peace, stability and harmony. The emphasis put by Michael Collins and others in their discussions on the Treaty, that they wanted to see an end to Irishmen killing Irishmen and Irish women and children being killed by other Irish people, led them to agree to the signing of the Treaty. That has been the guiding principle for all of us who were fortunate enough to have had some small part to play in reaching this Agreement.

I pay tribute to the Taoiseach, Deputy Ahern, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, and all those on this side of the House who also played a part. I hope future generations will be generous when they consider the job of work we have done.

Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Mr. O'Donoghue)

I wish to share my time with the Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs, Deputy Ahern.

An Ceann Comhairle

Agreed.

Mr. O'Donoghue

It gives me particular pleasure to support this motion on the Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations in Belfast on Good Friday. I have no hesitation in commending the Agreement to the people for acceptance.

The Agreement was the result of a long period of intensive and detailed work and negotiation involving all the participants. I am aware from personal experience how arduous those negotiations have been.

The Agreement can prove to be a turning point in the history of this island. It offers all sides a unique opportunity to put our past differences behind us and to work together for the future development of the island as a whole. The Agreement is predicated on a commitment to partnership, equality and mutual respect. It promises much if those principles continue to act as our watchword in securing its implementation. That is because the Agreement is truly comprehensive in its scope and establishes the basis, not only for new institutional and political arrangements capable of reflecting the identities and ethos of both communities on the island, but also scope for the resolution of a conflict which has festered since before the foundation of the State.

That has meant that everyone involved in the negotiations had to face hard choices. That was as true for the Governments as it was for the

other participants. The Agreement would not offer the basis for a new beginning if that had not been the case. I commend all the participants for facing up to those choices and for having the courage to compromise.

There are a number of aspects of the Agreement which have particular relevance for my Department on which I would like to comment.

Both I and my predecessor have been responsible for the issue of decommissioning in the negotiations and for taking the measures necessary to allow the agreements which have been reached to be given effect. The Government has long stressed the importance of securing the decommissioning of illegally held arms in both jurisdictions and wants to see decommissioning achieved as quickly as possible. I, therefore, welcome the fact that the Agreement recognises that a resolution of the decommissioning issue remains an indispensable part of the process and commits the participants to the total disarmament of paramilitary organisations. The participants have also confirmed their intention to work constructively and in good faith to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within a period of two years following endorsement of the Agreement in the context of the implementation of the overall settlement.

The Agreement also recognises the progress made by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and the Governments in developing schemes for decommissioning. I pay tribute to the dedicated and productive work of the commission and, in particular, to its three members, its chairperson, General John de Chastelain of Canada, Brigadier Tauno Nieminen of Finland and Ambassador Donald Johnson of the United States. Without their work we would not be able to point to the same degree of progress as we can.

Both Governments have given a commitment to take all necessary steps to facilitate the decommissioning process to include bringing the

relevant schemes into force by the end of June. In fulfilment of that commitment, I will make the necessary regulations and orders, as required under the Decommissioning Act, 1997, at the appropriate time. This will ensure that complementary schemes will be in place in both jurisdictions which will enable decommissioning to take place in both parts of Ireland. Both Governments will also ensure that the commission will continue to receive whatever resources it requires to fulfil its functions.

The decommissioning of illegally held arms would send a powerful signal that the Agreement represents the new beginning that we all hope it will be. Progress on decommissioning will also play a very important role in building up the trust which will be vital to making the institutions and arrangements provided for in the Agreement work effectively for the good of all the people of Ireland.

The manner in which the issue of prisoners has been dealt with in the Agreement has attracted much media comment already. It was one of those difficult issues which all participants had to address. It is widely recognised that both republican and loyalist prisoners have made important contributions to bringing about and maintaining the ceasefires already in place. This contribution has been recognised through tangible measures on prisoner issues. This Government, along with its predecessors, has sought to underpin the peace process and the Provisional IRA ceasefire by granting early release to prisoners. Thirty six prisoners were granted early release during the first ceasefire and 25 have been granted early release since July 1997.

The reality is that the Agreement would not provide a basis for a settlement of the Northern Ireland conflict and a fresh start unless the issue of prisoners was addressed. Let us also be clear about what the Agreement says in dealing with the issue of prisoners. What it provides is that both Governments will put in place mechanisms to provide for an accelerated programme for the release of prisoners convicted of

offences connected with the Northern Ireland problem in the context of implementation of the Agreement. That will be by way of a review process to be completed within a fixed timeframe for the purpose of setting prospective release dates for all qualifying prisoners. The review process will take account of the seriousness of the offences for which a person was convicted and the need to protect the community while advancing the release dates of all qualifying prisoners. The Agreement makes clear that the intention is that, should the circumstances allow it, qualifying prisoners who remained in custody two years after the commencement of the relevant schemes would be released at that point. The Agreement also makes clear that prisoners affiliated to organisations which have not established or are not maintaining a complete and unequivocal ceasefire will not benefit from the new arrangements.

It would not be helpful at this point to speculate on how the proposed review will impact on individual cases. That will be the task of the review itself. What has to be understood is that it will be necessary, as part of implementation of the Agreement, to facilitate the release of as many prisoners as possible who are affiliated to organisations which have established and are maintaining ceasefires in the period ahead.

While emphasising that I will not speculate about the implications of the Agreement for individual cases, it is right that I should comment on one case, that is the case of those facing charges arising from the murder of Detective Garda Jerry McCabe which has been the subject of certain recent media speculation. While obviously it would be inappropriate for me to comment in detail on any case pending before the courts, the Government has made clear in its contacts with all groups its view that persons who may be convicted in connection with this murder will not come within the ambit of the Agreement.

In speaking about prisoners, we cannot and should not forget the need to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence. I

have been heartened by the response of many such victims and their relatives to what is proposed in the Agreement. Their yearning for peace and their sense of compassion and forgiveness should be a lesson for us all. All participants to the negotiations were agreed on the need to address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation. My Department will do all it can to bring this work forward.

We are justly proud of the level of protection of human rights already afforded by our Constitution, which we believe is at least the equal of any other country. The Government is, nevertheless, committed to enhancing the protection of those rights and has made a number of important commitments in the Agreement in this regard. It has undertaken to bring forward measures to strengthen and underpin the constitutional protection of human rights, taking account of the work of the all-party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution and the report of the Constitution Review Group. The Government has also committed itself to the establishment of a human rights commission.

The Government has equally confirmed its intention to implement enhanced employment equality and equal status legislation.

As Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, I have an interest in the manner in which the Agreement addresses the issue of reform of policing and the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. We have been fortunate in having in the Garda Síochána, a police service which, although born at a time of conflict, was quickly successful in winning widespread community acceptance and support. The same, unfortunately, has never been true of the RUC. I therefore welcome the decision to establish a commission on policing for Northern Ireland as part of the Agreement which will have wide terms of reference directed to ensuring a new beginning to policing there, capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole, as well as being representative of it in terms of its makeup. I equally welcome the

commitment of the British Government to initiate a parallel wide-ranging review of the criminal justice system as a whole. Both these reviews will examine the scope for structured co-operation between the relevant agencies on both parts of the island as part of their remit. I hope it will be possible to build on the high level of co-operation that has been achieved under the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Both I and my Department will do everything possible to facilitate this.

I also welcome the Agreement's recognition that the development of a peaceful environment can and should mean a normalisation of security arrangements and practices.

I commend the Agreement to the House. If implemented in the spirit in which it was negotiated, it can open a new chapter in our history. It can create the basis for a new beginning and lasting peace, where the divisions of the past can dissolve, and reconciliation between both parts of and both communities on the island can be achieved. I look to the people of this island to endorse it overwhelmingly in the forthcoming referendum.

Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs (Mr. D. Ahern)

I echo the sentiments of previous speakers by congratulating all the main public players on putting this Agreement together in recent weeks, months and years. I particularly congratulate and thank those people who are, to some extent, behind the scenes — Fr. Alec Reid, the Rev. Roy McGee and Dr. Martin Mansergh. Without constant encouragement, particularly from the two clerics, we would not be where we are today. These two people kept at it in years of extreme darkness and difficulty. We owe them a very great debt of gratitude, as do the people in this country. The comprehensive nature of the Agreement has been outlined by previous speakers, so I will not go into it. I will refer to one or two very important areas which have not been touched on by previous speakers.

This Agreement has been the result of much negotiation over the years, culminating in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Hume-Adams initiative, the Joint Declaration, the Framework Document and, indeed, the ceasefires which, in their own way, have brought us to where we are today. In this way this Agreement can be seen as another stepping stone, a much more critical one than the others, to allow a new dispensation for Northern Ireland and for the island as a whole.

With the necessary will, ambition and vision, all those who are party to this Agreement can create a new era in the history of relations within the island and between both islands. I look forward to developing the issues within the remit of my Department identified in this Agreement on a North-South basis. In addition to the areas specifically referred to in the Agreement, I am confident there are a number of other areas, particularly in relation to the development of community and voluntary sectors, where a high level of co-operation already exists, where further progress can be made through formal and informal channels, North and South.

I consider the Agreement as a response to the challenge of peace in a society which has known conflict for more than a quarter of a century. We are only too painfully aware of the human and political cost of violence. We have been aware too that the conflict has brought with it a massive alteration in security arrangements, particularly in Northern Ireland, but also here and in Britain. The sheer weight and complexity of these arrangements means that changing them is a daunting task. Undertaking that task successfully and with vigour will be an important early test of what the Agreement means for many Nationalist and republican communities in Northern Ireland and in the Border areas most directly affected by the Troubles.

The conflict in the North has resulted in a heavy army presence, an armed police force of an exceptional size and extraordinary security installations, which are all too obvious along the Border, and the

application of emergency laws with regard to search, arrest, detention, interrogation, standards of evidence, the nature of trials and the character of the prison regime for those convicted of scheduled offences.

By any measure, such as the cost of the RUC alone, which runs to more than £650 million per year, these security arrangements are massive and have in themselves made an enormous impact on the society in Northern Ireland. They have affected the nature and functioning of policing and, through the emergency legislation, the manner of applying the law to the detriment of human rights standards. They have become part of a way of life for Northern Ireland, usually positively or negatively depending on the perspective of the community concerned, but rarely in a purely neutral sense. The size of the commitment in terms of personnel in the security arrangements has created a significant economically dependent population. Policing arrangements in particular have become a source of considerable employment for one community, either directly or indirectly, creating many dependent sub-economies.

Looked at more subjectively, the exceptional security arrangements have had a more profound impact on a generation of people living in Northern Ireland. For most Unionists they represent a comfort zone in a time of upheaval and threat, an assurance that every resource would be used in the fight against violence. On the other hand, for many Nationalists they have seriously undermined confidence in the administration of justice and the rule of law. Methods of policing regarded by Nationalists as heavy-handed, partisan and unduly coercive have alienated communities from policing and the law. As the marching season approaches we are reminded of how the policy in Northern Ireland is thrust to the front line of controversy. It is commendable that those who put together the Agreement did so before the marching season started because the negotiations might have been more difficult otherwise.

We must handle the future of policing delicately. We must look to the expectations and fears of people in Northern Ireland against a backdrop in which peace provides a dynamic for change of its own. The Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 sought to address these issues and progress was made. The structures of that agreement in the form of the Intergovernmental Conference and its secretariat provided invaluable channels for communication between the Governments on these key issues. However, in the context of ongoing violence the potential to address the critical underlying causes did not exist. That could only come about in the context of all-party talks. The Agreement recognises that the potential exists now and that the vigorous response to violence and conflict must be matched by an equally determined response to the changes and the challenges for peace.

In this context, I welcome the Agreement's approach to security, policing and justice issues. The promise of real and meaningful change on security issues and the normalisation of security arrangements is not only welcome but critically important to the underpinning of peace. I represent a Border constituency and we know this to be the case only

too well. The greater the reduction in the role and functions of the British armed forces, the sooner we will see the removal of security installations. The quicker emergency legislation is repealed and the more comprehensive an overall normalisation package, the greater the benefit which will accrue to peacemakers on all sides. Timing as well as substance in these key areas add meaning to the peace which will make the overall potential for the Agreement. The Government will continue to consult regularly on these issues with the British Administration to ensure that as rapidly as possible security arrangements will adapt to the challenge of peace. We look forward to the early publication of the British Government's overall normalisation strategy.

The potential of the opportunity we have should not be underestimated. The issue of new policing must be approached imaginatively and with vision. In formulating proposals on policing the Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland will help shape and inform the society which we envisage for that part of the island — one based on partnership, faith and confidence in the law and change mediated through politics and consensus. The outcome of the commission's work will be determined in a significant measure by the quality of the input. It is charged to consult widely, including with NGOs, focus groups, community leaders and groups, the leadership of the various political parties and experts long familiar with policing issues in Northern Ireland. They will have a unique opportunity to inform the commission's thinking. If the new policing is to achieve its goal of being for and of the community it must be shaped by the views and values of society.

I commend the parties and individuals who have contributed to this Agreement. It has been long in the making and much more work lies ahead. Praise is due for the courage and commitment of all who have contributed to it and thanks for everything they have done. The Agreement has the potential to bring a just and lasting peace, a time of accord and conciliation between the traditions and people on this island. The most important task lies in the weeks ahead and that is to

make this Agreement the people's Agreement through the forthcoming referendums. There may be some who have reservations on some issues. This is the best opportunity we have had for many years to bring peace to the island. I live five miles from the Border and I assure the House the Agreement is welcomed by the vast majority of people in the constituency. I look forward to a strong vote for the Agreement in the referendum.

Mr. McGinley

Ba mhaith liom mo chuid ama a roinnt leis an Teachta Dukes agus leis an Teachta Durkan.

An Ceann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. McGinley

Ar dtús ba mhaith liom comhgairdeas a dhéanamh le gach uile dhuine a raibh baint acu le síniú an Chomhaontú an-stairiúil i Stormont — an Taoiseach, na hiar-Thaoisigh, na hAirí, na hiar-Airí, na stát seiribhísigh agus, go speisialta, an Cathaoirleach, an Seanadóir Mistéal ó Mheiriceá, a chaith dhá bhliain ag obair go maith.

Good Friday's peace agreement is the culmination of a long process going back over 20 years. Major milestones along that difficult road included the Sunningdale Agreement of 1974, regrettably short-lived, the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985 that gave our State a presence in Northern Ireland and an input into policies being pursued there, the Downing Street Declaration and finally the Framework Document. All these events contributed towards the achievement of the British-Irish agreement in Stormont and for Irish people, North and South, it must have been the best Good Friday in living memory.

While the Agreement made headlines all over Europe and the world, it is in Ireland that its success or failure will be determined. We have the support and goodwill of world leaders but it is our own leaders and people who can make it work. On the threshold of the new millennium we are handed an opportunity and for the sake of future generations we simply cannot afford to let it slip. One could say that the present millennium, now in its dying days, has been one of conflict in our country. What better legacy to pass on to future generations than a land of peace, mutual understanding, agreement and co-operation?

Public opinion, in so far as it can be gauged at this point, seems to be strongly in favour of the Agreement. The vast majority of people wish for peace and they rightly see the Agreement as the vehicle to deliver the peace they yearn for, not alone for themselves but, more importantly, for their children and future generations.

The fact that there are extremists on both sides of the political divide in Northern Ireland opposed to the Agreement illustrates that a right balance has been struck. If one side or other had been completely happy it would be a sure sign of an unbalanced approach and it would surely be doomed to failure. For it to succeed each side will sacrifice long held and cherished beliefs. We must approach it in the spirit of giving rather than taking. In this way we can all be winners in the long term.

Those against the Agreement are marching to the tunes of yesterday. They are offering no viable alternative, no hope for the future, but rather a retreat into the fogs and prejudices of the past. Their recipe for the future is a continuation of the hatred and bigotry that have inflicted much suffering down through the years. Those who cannot be brought along must be isolated and we all have a part to play in that process in the coming weeks and months.

The happenings of last weekend are encouraging for the success of the Agreement. David Trimble's resounding vote of confidence at the meeting of the Ulster Unionist Party's council is a tremendous boost which I hope will encourage many others of the Unionist persuasion, who may have well founded and legitimate doubts, to grasp this historic opportunity for a new beginning. Likewise the Sinn Féin Árd-Fheis initiated its own debate and the party is addressing the matter in a serious and responsible manner. I hope it will sign up in full support of the Agreement before the referendum.

The SDLP, particularly John Hume, has been instrumental in bringing all shades together through its work over many years. I was disappointed the main Nationalist newspaper in Northern Ireland, The Irish News, ignored John Hume's contribution. He was barely mentioned in any of its articles on the Saturday after Good Friday. The same happened on the Monday. It was only on Tuesday, following a backlash from the Nationalist community in Northern Ireland, that he received any credit for the work he has done. I want to place on record our appreciation of his great contribution.

We have more in common than separates us and violence solves nothing. Down through the years there have been a number of false dawns. On this occasion we must make use of the new day to overcome any obstacles that may hinder the establishment of a permanent peace on our island. If we succeed — I am confident we will — there will be many benefits for all. Children will once more experience the joys of a

normal and peaceful life. Unfortunately, many of their parents have only had experience of conflict, mayhem and killings. What politician or leader could stand in the way of such progress?

Coming from the province of Ulster and the Border county of Donegal I know that lasting and permanent peace would bring many economic and social benefits. The other invisible border between Dublin and Galway would disappear. We all know how the conflict in Northern Ireland has affected the areas north of that line in the past 30 years. It has been almost impossible to attract foreign investment and industry to Border counties. As far as investors are concerned we are in the conflict zone and there is ample evidence to illustrate that. Tourism in Northern Ireland and the Border counties has been seriously hampered. The majority of visitors to our shores stay south of the Dublin-Galway line.

Peace would change the position and open up the scenic delights of Antrim, Donegal and all Northern Ireland to our visitors. In the summer of 1995, during the first ceasefire, we experienced the benefits of peace in the northern part of this island. Permanent peace would transform that area. Each of us has a role to play in bringing this about. We can do this by participating in the referendum on 22 May and giving the proposal a resounding "yes" vote.

Mr. Dukes

As a Member of a democratically elected parliamentary assembly, a democrat, a rationalist and a citizen of the State, I add my voice to the tributes paid to those involved in bringing about this historic Agreement. I will not go on at length about that. Tá siad molta ins na háirde agus mise mo thost, and they richly deserve it.

The Agreement represents a departure in Irish history and politics. It is the triumph of reason over prejudice, of politics over violence, of reality over perception and, more importantly, of humanity over rhetoric. For all

those reasons it will have a profound effect, not only on politics, but on many other areas of endeavour on this island in the future. While I do not wish to single out people for special praise, the Agreement has shown something else. In this regard I contrast the approach of different participants over a long period to the work that went into the Agreement. In particular, I contrast the contribution of John Hume and the SDLP to that of many of the other participants. During the two ceasefires, when others complained because there seemed to be a lack of progress in certain areas, such as on the prisoners' issue and so on, they used this pretended impatience as a reason to go back to violence. They used this pretended impatience not to be too far offside with people who were still wedded to violence at the time. That contrasted starkly with the attitude of John Hume and the

SDLP who for 25 years steadfastly refused to be drawn into any expression or hint that they would support violence in any form. That must be recognised. Although we all want to look forward and make the Agreement work, when people come to decide in whom they will place their trust to make the arrangements work, they should consider the history of those who participated in the process. They should place their trust in those who above all others stood out for the rule of law, for human rights and the right to life in times when it was difficult to do so and who, perversely in the current political climate, are in serious danger of getting less than their full credit for the work they have done and for the many reverses they endured with great patience and fortitude over many years. That will be important because there is nothing easy in the Agreement. I have been encouraged by what the participants in the talks have said about what is required to make the Agreement work.

We are all walking on eggshells because we do not want to offend people, but I may be thin enough to walk on eggshells without being worried about how many of them break. I am sure people will be very concerned about what I have to say. Why did we not have this Agreement ten or 20 years ago? What has changed? Facts or prejudices

have not changed, but, thankfully, people's spirits have. Why did this not happen ten years ago? Why did Sinn Féin not see the world in the same way as John Hume saw it ten years ago? Why did Fianna Fail not see the world in the same way as others saw it 13 years ago?

The Minister for Social, Community and Family Affairs rightly stated that the Anglo-Irish Agreement formed part of what gave us this Agreement. It was a sad disappointment to many of us that part of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was paraded before us in this House as unconstitutional and a very decent former and deceased Member of the House went to Washington to try to persuade the American authorities and their friends not to support it. I ask those questions not to make a political point, but because I am so overjoyed now that reason is triumphing over prejudice that I feel a deep anger that so many people have had to wait so long for this Agreement and that so many have had to suffer unnecessarily when this could have been done a long time ago. It will not be easy to make this work from here-on but it needs a strong commitment and now that reason has been placed over prejudice in making this Agreement, we should make sure we continue to do the same in making its provisions, difficult as they are, work. That is what the political process is about.

Sinn Féin has still not signed this Agreement or stated unequivocally its acceptance of it. People will talk about tactics and persuasion, etc., but this foot dragging is a charade and without being bitter or wanting to be provocative, Sinn Féin should sign up to it immediately and get on with the business of making it work. That is more important than any political advantage or gilding there may be on this in the weeks to come. I hope all parties to this will be fully signed up before the referendum on 22 May, but, if not, I hope the people, North and South, will pass it by a big majority anyway and make their views clear.

With all the tributes paid, I found it sad that one of my colleagues who was involved longer in the peace process than any other individual present at its conclusion has been a little forgotten, Deputy Dick Spring.

As Minister for Foreign Affairs he endured a great deal on the road to this Agreement and that should be recognised. He is a man with whom I have a good friendship and many differences, and no doubt there will be more of both to come, but he should be thanked more than he has been in public over the past few weeks.

Mr. Durkan

I compliment all concerned with the formulation of this Agreement, those committed to constitutional politics in the North, the British Government and the current and previous Irish Governments. I acknowledge those who, until recently, were not committed to constitutional politics and have become involved in the process to the extent they have. The Agreement is a triumph of politics over cynicism as everybody decries politics and refers cynically to it. There has been a lack of politics for 25 years or more in Northern Ireland and, thankfully, it has again come into its own and will replace the violence experienced over that period.

When one comments on the Agreement, one should not forget that the road ahead is neither short nor smooth. It will require dedication and the application of the combined efforts of the British and Irish Governments and both communities in Northern Ireland, not just for a day but for a long time. If that commitment wavers in any way, the Agreement will become suspect and will falter itself. Deputy Dukes referred to the commitment of both sides of the House and one factor which will make or break the Agreement is whether the combined forces of the Houses of Parliament are applied in supporting it.

The people in the South have a major role to play in the upcoming referendum. The degree to which they respond in a positive fashion to the Agreement will determine the degree to which the people directly concerned in the North will be impressed. To do anything less than that would sell the Agreement short and we cannot afford that. This

Agreement is as close as one could get to the Sunningdale Agreement and I know the arguments that took place in regard to that. There are those who said it failed because it went too far and others who said it did not go far enough. It would not have been necessary to have an Agreement unless it went against the grain for someone.

Undoubtedly, both sides will have qualms and that is understandable as it takes time to change. However, if trust and confidence can be built up in the time ahead between the participating groups, we will have achieved a great deal. I emphasise the necessity for the respective Governments to remain totally committed. I again refer to the Sunningdale Agreement and why the British Government at a crucial stage pulled the plug. Various politically expedient reasons were given and it left the leader of the majority in Northern Ireland hanging out to dry in a way which left us facing another 20 years of the same.

This cannot be allowed to happen with this Agreement. If it does, I hope future historians will look back and pinpoint where it went wrong. One should not look backwards but forwards and not repeat the mistakes made previously. I hope the Agreement is successful and will do all I can to ensure it is.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs (Ms O'Donnell)

I wish to share my time with the Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Deputy McDaid.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Ms O'Donnell

I am pleased to support the motion welcoming the Agreement reached

in the multi-party negotiations. I was deeply honoured to have been a member of the Government delegation at the talks since my appointment. Those of us privileged to have been there will long remember Good Friday 1998.

Tribute has rightly been paid to the role of the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, other members of the Government delegation and their predecessors and I add my voice of thanks and praise. It was an enormous team effort on the part of many people over a considerable period. Those more recently involved are acutely mindful and appreciative of the critical role played by previous Governments and, indeed, many Members. Hearts and minds were invested in the process; for each of us no task was more important and all can share in what has been achieved.

The first sentence of the Good Friday Agreement states that the participants "believe that the agreement we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning." The opportunity, in this generation and at the end of the 20th century, to make a fresh start in the life of our island is what connects all the complex detail of the Agreement. It is true that we cannot forget the past, nor should we as there is very much in it of which we are rightly proud. Equally, the failures and the tragedies of our history are a powerful reminder of the need for profound change in institutions and attitudes.

However, there is no need for us to be the prisoners of the past. For too long, even as our culture was celebrated and economic advances hailed, the name of Northern Ireland evoked visions of bitter conflict across the world. At our happiest moments of national celebration and pride the tragedy of Northern Ireland diminished us. Over the past few years, following the Joint Declaration and subsequent ceasefires, we have dared to hope that it could and would be otherwise. On Good Friday, that hope became tangible. It will not finally become a reality until the people of Ireland, North and South, have had their say, and until their

political representatives come together to work the new institutions which are to be created. Commitments to change must be honoured on all sides, but collectively we have a chance such as never before. I hope we will grasp it to the full.

As the Minister responsible for human rights, I am particularly pleased at the prominence assigned in the Agreement to the issues of rights, safeguards and equality of opportunity.

Both Governments know that any new institutional arrangements must be complemented and underpinned by an explicit undertaking by each of them to ensure, as the Framework Document put it, "the systematic and effective protection of common, specified civil, political, social and cultural rights" on the island.

This was an important undertaking against the background both of the perception and the fact that the past abuse of human rights was a major cause of instability in Northern Ireland, and of the need to demonstrate tangible change, based on the principle of equality. This undertaking by the two Governments has been delivered in full in the new Agreement.

The British Government has undertaken to complete the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights in its domestic legislation. In our jurisdiction we have committed ourselves to further strengthen the protection of human rights. The measures brought forward will ensure at least an equivalent level of protection of human rights as will pertain in Northern Ireland. The Government has pledged to continue to take further active steps to demonstrate its respect for the different traditions on the island of Ireland as is proper in a true modern republic. Respect for cultural diversity must be mutual. We in the Republic must reciprocate the tolerance which we require from Unionists for Nationalists in Northern Ireland.

The two Governments have agreed to the establishment of new human rights commissions in both jurisdictions. These new bodies will have an enforcement role and will be able to bring court proceedings where they believe that breaches of human rights have occurred. This is a move which will be welcomed by many human rights organisations, North and South.

In line with the increasing emphasis on North-South institutional co-operation, it is envisaged there will be a joint committee linking the two new commissions which will act as a forum considering human rights matters throughout the island of Ireland. The new joint committee will also examine the possibility of establishing a charter or covenant, open to the signature of all the democratic political parties, reflecting and endorsing agreed measures for the protection of fundamental rights.

One of the main demands of human rights organisations in Northern Ireland in the past has been a Bill of Rights. This is provided for in the new Agreement. The new Northern Human Rights Commission will be invited to advise on the scope for defining in Westminster legislation such a new Bill of Rights which will include additional rights to those contained in the European Convention of Human Rights.

The commission, with a membership from Northern Ireland reflecting the community balance, will formulate these additional rights which will reflect the principles of parity of esteem. They will also include a general obligation on Government to respect, on a basis of equality of treatment, the identity and ethos of the two communities. The commission, in drafting its proposals for a Bill of Rights, will draw as appropriate on international instruments and experience. These are potentially hugely significant developments. The societal goal of parity of esteem will benefit all and will encompass gender.

There will be a new statutory obligation on all public bodies in Northern Ireland to promote equality of opportunity. This will be a particular

priority of the British Government. The existing fair employment laws will be strengthened and extended and there will be a new emphasis on progressively eliminating the present differential in unemployment rates which are experienced by the two communities.

There has been criticism in the past that the Irish language has not received due recognition or support from the authorities in Northern Ireland. This is in contrast with British Government language policies in Scotland and Wales. However, in this Agreement there has been a considerable enhancement of the rights of Irish language speakers in Northern Ireland. There will be a new statutory duty on the Department of Education in the North to facilitate and encourage Irish medium education. This is the first legal recognition of the language in the North. The British Government has pledged it will take resolute action to promote the language and remove, where possible, restrictions which would discourage or work against the maintenance or development of the language. There is also a commitment to encourage and provide financial support for Irish language film and television production in Northern Ireland. The authorities there have given an important commitment that they will liaise with the Irish language community and consult them. The steps outlined in the Agreement represent an unprecedented advance for the Irish language in the North.

The House is deeply conscious of the importance of emblems and symbols in Northern Ireland. The Agreement acknowledges the sensitivities involved in the use of symbols and emblems for public purposes and the need, in creating the new institutions, to ensure such symbols and emblems are used in a manner which promotes mutual respect rather than division. Arrangements will be made to monitor this issue and consider what action might be required.

There is also a recognition in the Agreement of the valuable and frequently understated work many organisations and individuals are undertaking in the reconciliation field. Such work has an obvious and

vital role in consolidating peace. One cannot speak of reconciliation without a positive focus on the sensitivities and needs of victims of violence, the section on which represents a vital part of the Agreement as a whole.

We were acutely conscious in our deliberations of the physical and emotional hurt and difficulties facing victims of violence and their families. Their suffering remains a living and painful reality today. The sense of a new beginning and political euphoria is something many feel they cannot share in just now, measured against the loss of a loved one. It behoves us all to be deeply sensitive to that reality at this time of new hope. In practical terms, the Agreement acknowledges that the provision of services that are supportive and sensitive to the needs of victims will be a critical element in the process of reconciliation. The achievement of a peaceful and a just society would be the best memorial which could be undertaken to victims of violence. The emphasis on victims was an abiding theme of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, whom I commend for their enduring reminder to all of us in the negotiations of the importance and respect that should be afforded to victims of violence. Forgiveness cannot be legislated for. Respect for victims must be factored into our policy and all we speak of at this time, particularly in relation to the issue of prisoner releases.

During the negotiations there was considerable unease among Nationalist parties about the prospects of a return of a Northern assembly. Those fears were based on extremely negative memories of the old Stormont regime and, more recently, on the unacceptable behaviour and practices of some Unionist dominated councils.

However, the new arrangements agreed in the strand one negotiations should serve to ease greatly and, indeed, remove those fears. The inclusion of the concept of parallel consent in the decision-making process effectively means that neither community can dominate the other and that the only way forward is through cross-community

participation. The new focus is on partnership. The arrangement for the allocation of posts of responsibility in the Executive is an inclusive one based on the d'Hondt system. It will ensure that all parties which enjoy a significant level of electoral support within the community will be represented in the Executive. The strand one arrangements are very satisfactory.

One of the personal highlights of Good Friday was to hear Seamus Mallon with a dry voice and a moistened eye outline what had been agreed in strand one in terms of cross-community participation. I applaud his efforts and those of John Hume in achieving fair and balanced strand one arrangements.

Having worked closely with the parties and individuals in the past several months in Castle Buildings, I have enormous admiration for the skill and dedication with which they discharged their responsibilities. While it was fashionable to criticise the slow pace of the talks, the outcome on Good Friday demonstrated to everybody what those of us directly involved had long understood – that the parties were truly committed to a real process of change and partnership. A benign dynamic developed in the process which successfully delivered an inclusive outcome. I commend the leadership shown by the various party leaders.

The Good Friday Agreement offers an immense opportunity for the people of this island, North and South. It holds out the possibility of consigning division, conflict and violence to the past and a new panorama of opportunity for all of us based on mutual respect and respect for difference.

The tragedy of Northern Ireland was that it never had institutional and constitutional arrangements appropriate to its divided people.

The people of the island will have their say on 22 May. I urge them to vote for this Agreement. Much intellectual investment has gone into it. It

is the best Agreement we could have brokered and I hope it will represent a triumph of politics over violence once and for all.

Minister for Tourism, Sport and Recreation (Dr. McDaid)

I thank the Minister of State for allowing me to share her time. In this as in other countries great moments in history tend to be marked by exuberant public rejoicing. To me, perhaps the most auspicious aspect of events in the aftermath of the long Good Friday of 1998 was that no flags were hoisted in victory and there was no triumphalism. The mood was not one of exultation, rather one of great relief and thoughtful assent. The absence of public fanfare augurs well for this Agreement. The quiet manner in which the result of these most intense negotiations was received reflected the fact that none of the participants got everything he wanted — no one swept the boards. In the nature of the issues involved such an outcome would have been impossible. The realities of the Northern problem dictated that for any agreement to be viable and to endure it had to be from beginning to end about balance and accommodation. To the eternal credit of all the negotiators that is what they achieved. It was a good period for politics and politicians.

The public reaction, as expressed in opinion polls, North and South, is encouraging at this early stage. People generally appreciate the magnitude of what has been accomplished. If the Agreement is endorsed by people, North and South, as I hope it will be, we will have witnessed one of the most hopeful developments in the long and troubled history of this island. There will be no triumphalism but there will be a worthy triumph for all to hail – the triumph of reason. If the people North and South, hold fast to the spirit of acceptance they have expressed since Easter Saturday and if the referenda are carried, we will have reached a genuine watershed in our country's destiny. It will not simply be a case of turning a new page in our history, it will start a new chapter in an entirely new and different story of Ireland, one full of promise.

All the parties involved approached these negotiations with different and in some cases diametrically opposed perspectives. Despite the tremendous difficulties and the haunting memories of injuries, injustices and tragedies inflicted and suffered by all sides, they were able to agree to these enlightened proposals which point to a better way forward. Most of those around the table represented the communities most immediately and directly affected by the conflict. Many of them witnessed at first hand, saw and shared intimately in the sufferings of the past 30 years. We all have personal memories and tragedies. I do not want ever again to go to a house to be shown a door battered down by a sledge-hammer in the middle of the night and a stairs where a man was shot dead – that man was Eddie Fullerton. Nor do I want to see a couch in a sitting room, seen by millions of television viewers throughout the world, where two 17 year olds watching television were riddled with bullets. From the relative comfort and peace of this State, we should not gainsay the judgment of those who represent those communities.

I spoke of perspective and mine is republican. The majority of people in Donegal share the republican ethos and aspirations of my party, Fianna Fáil. However, there are some who consider themselves sophisticates

and worldly wise and sneer at us for supporting this Agreement. I call these "under the mattress" or "sunshine" republicans. The most deeply felt and honestly held conviction among the great majority of Fianna Fáil supporters is that commitment to republican ideals. I would not claim for a moment that my party has a monopoly of those sentiments but they are central to the political philosophy and very existence of Fianna Fáil. That is why I say to Fianna Fáil supporters that we represent the mainstream of Irish life and traditions and seek to include all sections of the population and all regions of the country. Since our foundation 70 years ago we have been in Government for 50 years and since independence most of Ireland's progress and achievements — political, economic and social — have taken place under us.

Mr. G. Mitchell

This is not the Ard-Fheis.

Dr. McDaid

We have demonstrated over the years remarkable powers of renewal. That is why there is likely to be more heart-searching among supporters of our party about the proposed changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution than among supporters of other parties. Those Articles were included by the founder of our party, Éamon de Valera, in 1937, and he had a sound and justifiable reason for doing so at a time when successive British Governments were asserting an unqualified claim to jurisdiction in perpetuity over Northern Ireland, without any regard for the sense of identity or basic political rights of the Nationalist people. Today, thanks to the confident assertiveness of Northern Nationalists, the untiring efforts of their leaders, and the work of successive Irish and, in fairness, British Governments, the status of Northern Ireland will henceforth be determined by consent. That new position was foreseen by one of the most practical and effective republicans of our time, Seán Lemass, when in 1969 he envisaged constitutional change along the

lines we now propose in accordance with the spirit and substance of the Agreement.

Some 75 years ago the Civil War ended. When Éamon de Valera and Liam Lynch discussed the ending of that war, Lynch wondered aloud what Tom Clarke would say about them. De Valera replied:

Tom Clarke is dead. He does not have our responsibilities. Nobody will ever know what he would do because this situation did not arise for him, but it has arisen for us and we must face it with our intelligence, conscious of our responsibility.

These words could apply to us today, not least to our Taoiseach. We must face matters with our intelligence, conscious of our responsibility. It is often said that politicians look to tomorrow, statesmen look to the future.

I congratulate my Leader, the Taoiseach, Deputy Ahern, on this historic achievement. He and others have acted in a statesmanlike way and have built for generations yet to come. His place in history is assured. I also add my voice to the many who have paid tribute to all those who worked hard to find a peaceful solution in Northern Ireland during the past 30 years – the late Seán Lemass, Mr. Jack Lynch, Mr. Liam Cosgrave, Dr. Garret FitzGerald, Mr. Charles Haughey, Deputy Bruton, and members of their Governments. No one would ever deny the vital and decisive role played by Deputy Reynolds, Deputy Spring, Mr. John Hume, Mr. Gerry Adams, Mr. John Major, Mr. Tony Blair, Dr. Mo Mowlam, the Minister, Deputy Andrews, and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell. We might now add other names to that historic list, those of Mr. David Trimble and Lord Alderdice.

Mr. Connaughton

I wish to share my time with Deputies Boylan and Gay Mitchell.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Connaughton

I wish this historic peace Agreement well. It was a Good Friday in every sense of the word. Like most contributors, I hope the peace agreement will be nurtured so that from a shaky start it will blossom and grow to be an anchor of stability for each community in Northern Ireland to exercise its hopes and aspirations and at the same time reduce the space for the unlawful activities of the gunmen.

This Agreement is a first step on a long journey. There is as much distrust in Northern Ireland today as there ever was. That is not surprising given that in such a small geographical area over 3,000 people were murdered in the past 30 years. Everybody knows somebody who has suffered at the hands of the gunmen. I visit Northern Ireland regularly and every person I meet can tell me about a friend or a friend of a friend who lost their life or was subject to violence.

Human nature does not forget quickly and many people are extremely bitter about the past. However, there comes a time in every dispute when people change their mindset. They realise the old ways did not work and will not work. They also realise that the unthinkable compromises, which would not have been entertained previously, must be considered if the old, discredited order is to change. This is the stage which ordinary people in Northern Ireland have reached.

There were no losers on Good Friday. There will be only winners if the principles and structures enshrined in the Agreement are implemented. It will require great generosity, courage and leadership to progress the

Agreement and its distinctive element is the fact that it was signed by such a wide and diverse number of parties, many of whom would not have sat together in the same room only days previously.

The planned assembly is about the best one could devise for democracy to work. It appears to be designed to ensure that every shade of opinion is represented in it. That is extremely important. The all-inclusive assembly will be one of the fundamental aspects of Northern Ireland's democracy. I welcome the inclusion of an equality commission to monitor the statutory obligation to promote equality of opportunity in specified areas and parity of esteem between the two major communities. They are fine objectives and I hope they are achieved because that is the basis on which the Agreement will work.

I look forward to the introduction of cross-Border bodies. I cannot envisage how they will work. However, if people on both sides of the Border work on aspects of life and commerce that are of interest to both, they will begin to trust each other. Trust can then be built in the community in general. There are great opportunities for co-operation in the agriculture and tourism sectors.

If ever there was a sector in which a cross-Border body was required, it is agriculture. The grass is as green on one side of the Border as it is on the other and a farmer in Fermanagh has the same problems as a farmer in Cavan. It is particularly important with regard to our national animal health status and there is no reason Teagasc could not forge links with the advisory service in Northern Ireland. A cross-Border body would work exceedingly well in the area of environmental controls. The way forward is to build up trust in such bodies.

If we can secure an end to murder and violence, tourism will be our greatest asset. We invest millions of pounds in foreign markets to attract visitors to Ireland. If there was peace in our country, we could double the number of tourists. One can only imagine what impact that would have,

North and South.

I thank everybody involved in securing this Agreement. It was an excellent day's work. It is a small step on a long road and it is incumbent on everybody to support it. I hope people in the Republic of Ireland will realise that we only propose to change Articles 2 and 3, not delete them. Our generosity on 22 May will make a huge difference to what will happen in Northern Ireland.

Mr. G. Mitchell

I welcome the Agreement and I join other speakers in congratulating all those involved in the process. The Agreement is the outcome of a long process of constitutional negotiations which started with the Sunningdale Agreement. A list of notable people were involved at different stages. Particular credit is due to the SDLP, a constitutional, Nationalist party which stuck with the process through thick and thin. It took a hard road. We are trying to achieve an agreed Ireland and that is the most important element of this Agreement.

Many people in communities in Northern Ireland, on both sides of the divide, who were involved in undesirable activities or in activities which were cloaked as community activities will need diversionary occupation for their energies. I recommend to officialdom the process of local development which has been undertaken in the Republic. There are comparable processes in place in Northern Ireland. There is a great need not just for acceptable, parliamentary democracy but also for acceptable, participative democracy where communities and community activists can be involved with the State and State agencies. We must think in those terms in the context of what is happening in Northern Ireland.

I wish to refer to the human rights provisions of the Agreement. I chair the subcommittee of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs

which deals with human rights and I welcome these provisions, particularly as they apply to the Republic. I am most concerned about the racist hatred I hear expressed in Dublin. It compares with anything one might hear in the worst and most extreme comments made by extremists on the Shankill and Falls Roads. I hope the human rights provisions of the Agreement are implemented in the Republic sooner rather than later so that people will be treated in a fair and reasonable manner, regardless of the colour of their skin, their religious beliefs or their country of origin.

I note that people born on the seas around Ireland are to be considered part of the Irish nation in future. Many of these people will not be fair skinned. Many will be black and will not be Catholic or Protestant but Moslem. A large number of my constituents are Muslims. People in the Republic will have to change not only to work with our neighbours in Northern Ireland but also because the Agreement imposes certain obligations which we must meet within the Republic.

There is little we cannot do together. The word "nation" comes from the word "natio" which means greater community. We live in the greater community of the people of Ireland, even the greater community of Britain and Ireland, and we must work within that concept of nation. I wish to make a comment which might generate a few guffaws and seem strange in a debate about Northern Ireland. The idea of holding the Olympics in Ireland has been sneered at and mocked by all and sundry. However, Deputy Albert Reynolds, when he was Taoiseach, did not mock the idea. He examined the proposal.

When I was a Minister I went to Northern Ireland accompanied by my private secretary — who was present in the House until very recently — to meet a counterpart. When we were finished our business the Minister said the secretary would like to raise an issue with me before we left. That senior civil servant wanted to know where the proposed Dublin bid for the Olympics stood, which I told him. He said it would be possible to

have North-South co-operation on such a proposal.

The report on the study of the social and economic consequences of peace and economic reconstruction, which was presented on 14 July 1995 to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, outlines the benefits of peace to this country in terms of the economy, jobs and attracting investment.

Would any Member be surprised if Stockholm made a bid for the Olympics or if the Swedes took the world championships to Gothenburg? Would anyone be surprised if the Olympics were held in Helsinki for a second time, although Finland's population is similar to that of the whole of this island? What is wrong with us as a nation that we believe such events are beyond our reach? There are five million people living on this island and there is nothing we cannot do if we co-operate and act together.

What insults me as an Irishman is not the dismissal of the Price Waterhouse report which says we can make a credible bid, or the dismissal of Tony O'Reilly and others who gave their time to the Dublin International Sports Council, or the dismissal of the business and sports people who chaired the committees which examined every aspect from security to infrastructure and who said we could make a bid, but the belief by some people that we cannot make a bid because we are Irish. We will not grow up as a nation until we take ourselves as seriously as the Finns and Swedes take themselves and ask why we cannot host such events. The reality is that a Dublin Olympics bid would be an all-Ireland Olympics bid. When Manchester made a bid it proposed to hold the water events in Powelli in Wales.

There are people outside this House who have got away with knocking this idea. I want the House to examine it. I want the parliamentary committee to grill me, anyone else who is in favour of it and those who are against it and to then decide on a factual basis, first, whether we can

do it and, second, whether we want to. I want an end to be put to the nonsense which says we cannot do this. There is nothing we cannot do if we put our minds to it and have North-South co-operation.

It is easy for people outside the House to have a great laugh about this and to divide Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Labour and everyone else. There is no political cohesion between us at times but the people in the North are more hardheaded than that. They are hungry to have a say because they have not been able to so do. The Unionists, the SDLP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance Party will not put up with such nonsense and it is time for us to stop putting up with it. We can bring many events to this country which will bring us honour, investment and employment if we co-operate together as an island. It is time to change our thinking in the North and South and ask ourselves how we can do this rather than starting from the belief that it is beyond our reach.

I wish this Agreement every success. I will campaign vigorously for a yes vote and I dearly hope the referenda will be carried north and south of the Border.

Mr. Boylan

The time constraints on speakers reflect the number of Members who wish to put their name to this motion and put on record their support for it. That, in turn, reflects the relief and goodwill of the people, particularly those in my constituency of Cavan-Monaghan who have lived in the shadow of the violence in Northern Ireland for the past 25 or 30 years.

Since I entered public life by being elected to the local authority in 1974 and to Dáil Éireann in 1987 I have never before witnessed such a sense of goodwill to everyone involved and relief. People feel freedom for the first time since the short-lived ceasefire brokered by the former Taoiseach, Deputy Albert Reynolds. That was a good time in this country; it has now

been repeated but this time it will last forever. I have no doubt about that. The bullies and brutes have been shown for once and for all that the bomb and the bullet have no place in Irish politics. Democracy succeeded on Good Friday. People have a will to work together for a lasting peace.

I wish to pay a special tribute to the chairman of the peace talks, Senator George Mitchell, who did trojan work. He had a very difficult task in bringing together all sides and keeping them on board. Some had to be sidelined for a time but they were coaxed to come back in, which we must admire them for having the courage to do. He chaired very difficult meetings and achieved great success. I hope he will not be forgotten when the referendum is passed but that he will be honoured by the country as a whole, North and South. For example, he would make a fitting US Ambassador to Ireland.

I do not wish to be negative but the Government was wrong to decide to hold the referendum on the same day as the referendum on the Amsterdam Treaty. It should have been a day for Ireland, North and South, when no other issue was dwelt on except for the need to vote in support of peace. I am slightly disappointed the Government decided to hold the two referenda on the same day.

Young people are very tuned into the peace process and it is a topic of discussion when I meet them. This process has given an opportunity to the whole country and young people have a different outlook from those of us who are further along the road in life. It is regrettable that many of those young people who are over 18 years of age may not have an opportunity to vote on 22 May, for which we might pay a price. It will be regrettable if some young people find at the polling station that their name is not on the register or they are unable to vote through no fault of their own.

The time constraints imposed by the short notice of the announcement

make it impossible to arrange a postal vote. Many young people are in third level institutions, repeating the leaving certificate or working away from home. They are anxious to vote because they would like to be able to recall that they cast their first vote on 22 May 1998 in the referendum on the peace process but many of them will be denied that right. The Minister should examine this issue which has been brought to my attention. I know there are difficulties but I believe it will have repercussions if it is not addressed.

I implore everyone to vote. I know families who are organising themselves to ensure they will all be at home to vote as a family unit. We must show there is total support, North and South, for the Agreement. A new opportunity has been presented to us on which we can build. The possibilities are limitless. Tourists and industrialists will be attracted here because we are on the doorstep of Europe. As an island nation we have many advantages which are not available to countries with land links to Europe. I congratulate everyone involved and I have no doubt the referendum will be an outstanding success.

Minister for Defence (Mr. M. Smith)

I wish to share my time with Deputy O'Malley and the Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources, Deputy Woods.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. M. Smith

In fully endorsing the peace agreement, I acknowledge the fantastic job of work carried out by the Taoiseach and our leader, Deputy Bertie Ahern. Since he took office, he has worked tirelessly in an effort to bring peace to Northern Ireland. He has left no stone unturned. His trojan work

during Easter week, at a time when he was struck by the sad death of his mother, was an example and a shining light to all of us. I congratulate him and he deserves our gratitude.

The past 30 years in Northern Ireland will perhaps never be forgotten. The many heartbreaking memories of violence and death will live on and on. We cannot afford to waste this golden opportunity of securing lasting peace in our country. Peace is in our grasp.

The Agreement reached on Good Friday is a great example of conflict resolution, with great courage shown by all the different parties as they played their part in ironing out the many differences, some small and some big, which could have so easily prevented an agreement. This historic Agreement, achieved after intense negotiations over the last two years, takes the people of this island on to a new circumstance. Ireland has struggled over the centuries for greater political freedom. There have been dark and bright days. The last 30 years have seen far too many people killed or injured. The North has also seen too many communities retreat into narrow, bitter sectarian hatred and fearful circumstances.

Over the last few weeks we have seen the unprecedented achievement of the principle of democratic consensus winning out over force and violent persuasion. With the signing up of all parties to the Agreement, the vital spirit of democracy has won through. Throughout these difficult years successive Irish Governments have been careful, patient and diligent in building better relationships with all parties relevant to reaching a solution — within Northern Ireland, in Britain, Europe and America.

Thousands of acts of moral courage have brought us this far while successive Irish Governments have helped put in place the building blocks for the Agreement. These include the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Framework Document and now this all embracing new deal which reaches back to transform and reform the world that still remains after

the foundation of the State. In fairness, the British have played their full part in this process. So have the Americans.

In the end, it is Irish men and women who must agree to live together on this small island in a creative and constructive way. It has often been said that there can be no winners and losers in this situation. The achievement of the Agreement required the creation of a delicate balance and a reconciling of very divergent interests. It involves the creation of an interlocking series of institutions involving mutual respect and guarantees. It also involves wide-ranging reforms in relation to equal rights and equality of opportunity in the North.

The key points are the creation of local democracy in the North, with executive authority shared on full cross-party lines. It involves the interlocking creation of a North-South Ministerial Council for deepening co-operation and trust between North and South, as well as a British-Irish Council, linking Dublin with not only London and Belfast but also Edinburgh and Cardiff.

The proposed changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution are balanced by, among other things, the repeal of the Government of Ireland Act. More important, changes to Articles 2 and 3 enlarge our conception of Irish citizenship, not only within the island, but give special recognition to all the Irish living abroad while reaffirming the will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the territory of Ireland by peaceful means and with the consent of all those involved.

There are difficult times ahead. A number of key interlocking foundation stones have already been put in place. The referenda and election offer plenty of scope for the wreckers, so we must be vigilant in what we say and do. In addition, there are political obstacles ahead and nothing is agreed until each crucial institution and agreement has been put in place.

It will be difficult to get some people to accept these momentous changes but we must all campaign, both North and South, for this vision. David Trimble has shown courage in bringing a divided party to the Agreement. We wish him well in the months ahead, as we do all leaders, including Gerry Adams, who likewise has shown courage and patience in bringing Sinn Féin to the talks and agreeing to this new deal. Without the great grit and courage shown by so many people the way out of this seemingly eternal impasse could not have been reached. John Hume and the SDLP have played a pivotal role.

It is important that the people support the referenda in late May. It is a time of challenge, great hope and not a little worry for us all. We must each in our small way ensure that the foundations put in place on Good Friday, 1998, are cemented and made strong. It behoves us as politicians to ensure that the Agreement is a total success, to spare no effort in constituencies to ensure that people are fully conversant with it and what it will mean to the North and the country as a whole and to encourage people to vote on 22 May.

It is a moving experience that there has been such unanimous support for the Agreement in this House and across all party lines. It augurs well for how we try to handle sensitive and difficult circumstances which embody much change, compromise and new initiatives. I look forward to the body of opinion emanating from this House sending a message to the people in all parts of the country, especially the South, to do what they can to ensure that what has been won up to now is carried through to its finality to bring peace and lasting agreement between divided

communities on this island. I thank everybody who contributed to making that possible.

Mr. O'Malley

I fully endorse this motion and the Bill and rejoice in the Agreement made in Belfast on 10 April. I anticipate its overwhelming support in this House and I wholeheartedly commend its approval to everybody on the island, North and South, in the referenda to be held on 22 May.

The importance and value of the Agreement lie not so much in its detailed content as in the fact that such disparate elements within Northern Ireland were able to signify their agreement to it. It would be easy for me, anybody else in this House or anybody on this island to find fault with some of the contents of the Agreement. No one of us, if asked to draft the ideal, would draft what we now have. From everybody's point of view it can be claimed to have deficiencies, but its great strength and huge importance is that it has been accepted by so many parties, including those representing violent and subversive organisations. They have accepted it, warts and all, and I hope the fact that those who see warts in it will not deflect a substantial majority on both sides of the Border from accepting it in the referenda.

It is no exaggeration to say that the Agreement is one of the most momentous events in the history of this island, certainly in this century. It is the one great chance for peace and sanity at last to break out on this island. To reject it would be sheer folly. There is no alternative to it nor can any alternative be negotiated. There can be no cherry-picking; this is all or nothing. It is peace and sanity or violence and lunacy.

I congratulate and thank all the parties and the two Governments that we have arrived at this happy day. I particularly wish to thank a succession of Irish public servants who, under great difficulty, kept plugging away in the hope that some day this would be achieved.

Several of them are now retired. The whole island has benefited enormously from the unstinting efforts and patience of Senator Mitchell, General de Chastelain and Prime Minister Holkeri over a period of nearly two years. Despite many setbacks and rebuffs they stuck to their task even though they must have been near the point of despair. The sheer generosity and persistence of their efforts have few parallels in the history of international diplomacy by outsiders. The most profound gratitude of everybody on these islands is their right. The contribution of the US Administration was also immense and essential to the success achieved.

The continuing attitudes and policies of the two Governments are to be highly commended and are light years away from the confrontation at Government level that was the overwhelming feature in the late 1960s and 1970s. Successive British Governments have certainly learnt a great deal. It is tragic that so much suffering had to be endured by so many before the picture became clear in Britain, which for so long could see little wrong with the way Northern Ireland was run under the old Stormont. I am especially proud that a member of my party, the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Deputy O'Donnell, played an important and valuable role in the detailed negotiations since last July.

Amidst all the delight and euphoria I must strike one serious note of concern. This does not, strictly speaking, relate to the Agreement and is outside its terms, even though it has been portrayed as arising from it. However, some of the consequences arise from the Agreement.

I disagree with and regret the action of the Government in releasing from Portlaoise Prison on Monday, 13 April 1998, nine IRA prisoners, all of whom were convicted of terrorist offences and at least one of whom still has more than seven years to serve, even with full remission. These releases were not necessitated by the Agreement and they immediately sent all the wrong signals, which led on Tuesday last to Martin Ferris, the

Sinn Féin negotiator, demanding the release of all those he described as "republican prisoners", including those on remand not yet tried. Amazingly, that outrageous demand evoked no official public response from the Government, apart from one brief statement by the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Deputy Harney, on Saturday night, until the remarks of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy O'Donoghue, in this debate a week later. The demand was repeated in the same terms at the Sinn Féin Árd-Fheis in Dublin last Sunday.

At present, there are a number of people in custody charged inter alia with the capital murder of Detective Garda Jerry McCabe and the attempted murder of Detective Garda O'Sullivan at Adare subpost office, a place far removed in every sense from the North. These offences correspond to what are described as "scheduled offences" in Northern Ireland. If any of these people are convicted at their trials in the next few months, they will become what the Agreement calls "qualifying prisoners". It is unthinkable and totally unacceptable that they should be released within two years. The Agreement should not have contained that provision, at least in so far as it applied to incidents such as that in Adare. If convicted they should serve the full 40 years with no remission. I observe that these people were described at the recent Sinn Féin Árd-Fheis as "political prisoners". Sinn Féin's idea of politics and mine are irreconcilably different.

It has often been said that in many countries the police force is the thin blue line which separates society from chaos and preserves civilised democracy. The Garda Síochána are our thin blue line. Dozens of its members have been murdered in the course of their duty to the State. If this State will not stand behind them, at least to the extent of the full enforcement of the law against their assailants, it will ultimately place itself in jeopardy. This fact was recognised in the House and in legislation by people such as de Valera and others who had what might euphemistically be called an irregular background or what Lemass once

called a "slightly constitutional" attitude to the State.

A state which does not deeply respect the ultimate sacrifice of its servants and vindicate in law the consequences of that sacrifice may soon find that it has no effective thin blue line to protect it or its citizens. It is exposing those citizens to the risk of anarchy and chaos and it has no right under the social contract of society to do so. Any state's most fundamental duty is to preserve order by and under law. Civilised nations honour and cherish their fallen. That honour should not end with their funerals. I once told the House that under pressure and provocation I would stand by the Republic. I must also stand by those who serve it, especially with their lives.

Minister for the Marine and Natural Resources (Dr. Woods)

This is a unique and all embracing Agreement in which everyone contributes and gains. The talks chairman, Senator George Mitchell, at the final plenary session, speaking about the political leaders of Northern Ireland and their contribution to the talks process, said ". they deserve the gratitude of their people and the just verdict of history." History will give those leaders their just recognition. They stepped outside the history of the past and forged new relationships. It will also recognise the contributions of so many people over a long period to the success of the process. In addition to Senator Mitchell and his co-chairmen, I pay tribute to the Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, and President Bill Clinton as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Andrews, the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, the Northern Secretary and members of their teams.

It is time to make history rather than be driven by it. This moment has the potential to be the most momentous and defining one for us well into the next millennium. The values and principles of trust, consent and partnership which underlie and permeate all aspects of this Agreement are universal principles bound by neither time nor space. However, they

must be grounded in practical working relationships and developed in a generous spirit to lay secure foundations for the future. If we succeed in that task, and I believe we will, then the enormous potential of this island in terms of its social, cultural and economic life will be realised.

The proposed reformulation of Articles 2 and 3 represent, in the context of the total constitutional package which includes repeal of the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, a generous reaching out to the traditions of those in Northern Ireland who regard themselves as British. At the same time, the proposed new Articles reaffirm and strengthen the fundamental Nationalist aspiration to Irish unity. They define the entitlement and birthright of every person born on the island of Ireland to be part of the Irish nation. They state the firm will of the Irish nation, in harmony and friendship, to unite all the people who share the island of Ireland by peaceful measures only and through a democratic process.

The Agreement recognises that it is for the people of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland if that is their wish, subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland. In their totality, the constitutional changes proposed recognise the realities of the relationships within this island. When accepted in referenda North and South, the total package will be underpinned by the democratically expressed will of all the people of the island. The moral force of that decision will be overwhelming. It will represent a democratic mandate for peace and provide a political framework for the future.

Neither the Agreement nor the proposed constitutional amendments have any implications for our jurisdiction over fisheries or offshore exploration. These are governed by other international codes of law and in any case mostly take place beyond territorial waters. The changes proposed in no way impact on the exercise of our existing rights in the

maritime, sea fisheries or Continental Shelf spheres. Neither do they circumscribe, alter or prejudice in any way the potential for the further development or extension of those rights in accordance with EU and international law. Equally, they leave totally undiminished the basis for any claims we may have on the Continental Shelf where actual or potential disputes with the British Government may exist, including our position on Rockall.

Mr. Spring

That is very important.

Dr. Woods

The North-South strand is of critical importance in this Agreement. It instances a number of areas where North-South co-operation and implementation for mutual benefit may be considered. In so far as my responsibilities are concerned, I believe that inland fisheries and aquaculture and marine matters offer very positive opportunities for enhanced co-operation to deliver further sustainable development of the resources, North and South.

The island of Ireland has an inland fisheries resource which is unrivalled in Europe. We have similar objectives on both parts of the island to conserve, manage and develop that resource to the highest standards. Over the years we have cooperated and worked together on matters of mutual interest in the inland fisheries area with tangible benefits for the resource and the communities it supports. In this context, the work of the Foyle Fisheries Commission, the Joint Committee for the Protection of the Erne and co-operation under the INTERREG programme are worthy examples.

The sustainable development of aquaculture is another area where existing co-operation can be firmly improved. We already have strong co-

operative links on fish health, aquaculture research and development. Most recently, joint initiatives are under way to identify and develop new aquaculture expansion opportunities which receive assistance under the EU peace and reconciliation programme. These will contribute economic activity and jobs in our coastal and rural communities.

There is a wide range of other marine and natural resource matters with potential for co-operation on an all island basis. We already have an all island body in the form of the Commissioners of Irish Lights. There is also close co-operation in the area of air-sea rescue. Recently, we had a very successful joint exercise in Carlingford Lough, involving the Irish Marine Emergency Service — IMES — and the corresponding services from Northern Ireland.

We are fortunate to have on the island, in Harland and Wolff in Belfast, one of the world leaders in developing offshore drilling, production and storage systems which ideally meet our potential requirements in the deep waters off the west coast. I have visited Harland and Wolff and worked out with it practical working arrangements for co-operation, particularly with our Marine Institute. I must highlight the vast extent of our marine resource — some 900,000 square kilometres of seabed, which is over ten times our land area. In the long-term, development of this marine resource has the potential to enrich enormously the whole island of Ireland.

This is an historic time for the people of these islands. The importance of the weeks ahead cannot be underestimated. We must work together to ensure the success of this Agreement by commending it wholeheartedly to the people who will vote in the referendum on 22 May. This is the best and greatest compliment we can pay to the courage and commitment of all those who worked tirelessly over the years to bring it about.

It is my pleasure to commend this Agreement and the Bill to the House. I do not have time to mention all those involved but I congratulate

Deputy Spring, who is in the House, on the work he put in, our former party leaders, Charles Haughey and Albert Reynolds, John Bruton, Ray Burke, who was not mentioned today and who put in a great deal of work in this area, and many others.

Mr. Spring

I thank the Minister, Deputy Woods, for his remarks. I welcome the opportunity to offer my full and unequivocal support to the Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations on 10 April. The crisis of Northern Ireland, in effect the political legacy we inherited by virtue of the settlement of the 1920s, has tested the mettle and skills of politicians of all persuasions on this island over recent years. Despite the fact that a viable working compromise has eluded us to date, it now seems clear we have reached a new beginning, as has been said by many people.

Like all beginnings, the Agreement will need careful nurturing from all the people on this island. It is fair to say the Agreement will be tested in the weeks leading up to the referendum. That is an exercise in democracy, and so it should be. It is our function, particularly that of Members, and responsibility to ensure the public is fully informed and understands in detail the terms and contents of the 35 pages of the Agreement.

It is worthwhile tracing the background to this agreement. In doing so, I acknowledge the enormous efforts expended down through the years by many politicians in this House. Important roles were played by Charles Haughey, who was mentioned by the Minister, Deputy Woods, Albert Reynolds, Garret FitzGerald and Peter Barry, who did the ground work leading to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, and in more recent times John Bruton, Proinsias De Rossa and Nora Owen, all played their part. I particularly acknowledge the role played by the Taoiseach at a time of personal family grief. I congratulate him on his courage and leadership and the team of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy

Andrews, and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell. There have been many others down through the years, in particular John Hume who has shown enormous personal courage in his leadership of the SDLP and his efforts to bring Sinn Féin into the democratic process.

I suppose David Trimble would not particularly want praise from me but I applaud the fact he had the courage to conclude the negotiations and offer a new brand of leadership to the Unionist people. He will have difficulties in the coming weeks but I hope the support he has received from the council of the Ulster Unionist Party will see him in a position to carry the referendum among the Unionist population.

I also applaud the work done by David Ervine, Gary McMichael and their parties and that of the Women's Coalition and the Labour Party group in Northern Ireland. I sincerely hope Sinn Féin and its leadership will indicate their support for the referendum on 22 May. I welcome the fact that Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness have given new direction to Sinn Féin in recent years but it is now time to support this Agreement in an unequivocal way on both parts of the island. The sooner the Sinn Féin leadership gives clear direction to its supporters, the better for the process.

I listened to Deputy Ó Caoláin on radio yesterday morning and found the position articulated by him totally absurd and unsustainable. It hardly bears credibility to participate in an inclusive negotiation process for many months, to welcome its conclusions — I do not believe I am misquoting them by saying that — and then to suggest different strategies for their supporters in the North and South. I hope clear and consistent leadership will be given on this sooner rather than later. We are all waiting for that and we certainly did not get it this weekend at the Sinn Féin ÁrdFheis. I hope it will be forthcoming in the coming days and weeks.

We are also fortunate to have Prime Minister, Tony Blair, Secretary of

State, Mo Mowlam and Minister Murphy in charge of British Government negotiations. Over the years I have had many opportunities of discussing Northern Ireland and Anglo-Irish relations with all three and I was particularly gratified that they were not found wanting when it came to travelling the extra mile prior to concluding the negotiations.

I also pay tribute to chairman, George Mitchell, his co-chairmen, John de Chastelain and Harri Holkeri, and the team of assistants who worked long hours and in difficult conditions for them over the past year. Again, the people on this island were fortunate that President Clinton was in the White House. He was always available to assist the cause of peace in Northern Ireland. I also acknowledge the trojan work undertaken by civil servants in the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of the Taoiseach. The public will never know of the hours worked by these men and women beyond the call of duty in the search for peace on this island. I particularly thank them for all the assistance I received when I led our negotiating team to the Stormont talks. I also pay particular tribute to the work done by Martin Mansergh and Fergus Finlay down through the years working with the officials and politicians in charge of our negotiations.

This Agreement is a pragmatic compromise. In fact, it is the only realistic compromise possible given the nature of the historical conflict in Northern Ireland. The ground work for this Agreement has been firmly laid in recent years in the Downing Street Declaration and the Joint Framework Documents. It contains the essential elements to appeal to both Unionist and Nationalist communities. Neither side should claim victory or defeat because that was never the intention when we commenced the talks process.

There is a degree of front loading in the Agreement with the referendum on 22 May, the constitutional changes necessary and the preparations for the new assembly and the cross-Border bodies. I hope all parties will play constructive roles to ensure the success of the assembly and the

cross-Border bodies. It must be in the interests of all parties in Northern Ireland to get political control back after an absence of almost 25 years. The Agreement balances the exercise of powers in a way which enables both communities to have a sense of ownership in the governance of Northern Ireland. The exercise of this balance requires the willing participation and co-operation of all parties in the assembly and I hope it will be forthcoming from all parties. Even if there are parties in Northern Ireland who contest the elections in a campaign of protest, I hope they will accept the democratic results of those elections and that if they take their places in the assembly, they will do so in a spirit of co-operation and one where they are prepared to work with the other parties. After the achievement of the new institutions, there will be an amount of work to be carried out in the coming years. This work is specified very carefully in the Agreement under the headings of rights, safeguards, equality of opportunity, decommissioning, security, policing and justice and prisoners.

I listened carefully to Deputy O'Malley's remarks and I hope the Government understands the sense of outrage among the people last week. I say this very directly to the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, who I believe agrees with my position and that of Deputy O'Malley. There was a sense of outrage, particularly in Limerick and north Kerry where the family of the late Detective Garda Jerry McCabe reside, at the prospect of release for those who perpetrate crimes against the Garda. The Minister for Justice made it clear that was not the intention. I hope the Taoiseach will clarify paragraph 1 relating to prisoners in page 30 of the Agreement. The Garda Síochána, no less than the police force in Northern Ireland, have been subjected to crimes of the most heinous nature in the past 25 and 30 years. The public and the Garda Síochána are outraged. The Garda Síochána is the front line in the defence of this State and needs the support of all parties in this House. The request made by a Sinn Féin spokesperson on radio during the week is totally unacceptable. I hope that is made clear by all parties in this House and particularly by the Taoiseach when he concludes this debate.

The implementation of the proposals in the sections I mentioned will require a change in the mindset of the people on this island, North and South. We in the South must be prepared to embrace change as we always made clear we would, particularly in the Downing Street Declaration. There will be an expectation in the communities in Northern Ireland that we show good faith in changing our society.

A great deal of work needs to be done. As I was preparing my contribution this evening, I heard the sad news on the 6 o'clock bulletin of a shooting in Portadown this afternoon. The circumstances are not clear but the news came as a shock to me. There are many with experience in dealing with the problems in Northern Ireland who say that a bumpy road lies ahead. Both Governments and negotiators have achieved a great day's work. It was not easy and required courage, conviction and a sense of understanding. The necessary compromise required the Nationalist and Unionist leadership to understand what

they could sell to their followers and what would be acceptable to their opponents. That is the key to this agreement and it is the maximum possible on both sides.

There is always a temptation in negotiations like these to come out with the lowest common denominator. On this occasion, it is the opposite. We achieved the best case scenario in meeting the aspirations of the Unionist and Nationalist populations of Northern Ireland. This requires a new relationship. We always said we were at ease in talking about a new relationship between the Governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom. This is not difficult at present. I have not seen any difficulty in negotiating with the British Government and past British Governments. This is made easier for us by our participation in the European Union.

Much has been said about the decision to have both referenda on the same day. The Irish people have an interest in politics and a capacity for understanding both issues which they will be asked to decide on 22 May. There is an interesting analogy. We are voting on the Amsterdam Treaty which brings the people of Europe together. Simultaneously we have an opportunity of voting on proposals which bring the people of Northern Ireland closer together for the first time in almost a century.

I have often said the people of Northern Ireland have been unfortunate in relation to their historical legacy. Through no fault of their own, Nationalists and Unionists inherited a political mess which has been exacerbated since the out-break of the Troubles in 1969. There is more print devoted to the narrow ground of Northern Ireland than any other political conflict in the world.

We now have a new dawn. Like all opportunities, it can be missed through misaction, misjudgment or wilful inaction. There is an historic opportunity for the Irish Government and all parties in this House – and I welcome the unanimous support of the Agreement – to work on this in the foreseeable future. It will not happen overnight. Following the

acceptance of the Agreement between five and six o'clock on the afternoon of 10 April, people did not wake up the next morning and say we have solved the problem of Northern Ireland. Most people, particularly those who have been involved in trying to find a solution to the conflict, realise that the Government's achievement — which I applaud — is one of setting the foundations of the journey on which we have to travel.

I hope the leadership shown by Mr. Trimble and those close to him will justify their actions and will be supported by the vast majority of Unionists in Northern Ireland. It is important for all Members to make every effort to ensure that each of our constituents has an opportunity to study this historic document, Agreement Reached in the Multi-Party Negotiations. I heard that one party will ensure its supporters will receive a copy. I hope the Government has the largesse — subject to the McKenna judgment, which seems to run our lives — to convey the message to all voters. This document should be compulsory reading for the Irish, here and abroad. It contains the formulae which will lead us to peace and reconciliation on this island — a goal to which, ironically, 95 per cent or more of the people aspire.

It is also important that in the next few weeks, all parties who participated in the negotiating process make it clear we do not want a return to violence. I particularly address this to Sinn Féin and the loyalist parties. The loyalist parties have been stoic in the past few years, despite provocation and enormous frustration. I acknowledged the change in direction of the leadership of Sinn Féin. However, it is time to get away from equivocation. The leadership of Sinn Féin and other parties should make it clear that they, the IRA and others have moved on from violence.

If we learn any lesson from the past 26 years, it is that violence will not solve the problems of this island. Many people will carry the burden of the conflict with them to their graves. We should never forget that, and in fairness, the Taoiseach has remarked on this on many occasions. Many

people on this island, particularly in Northern Ireland, will have a sense of loss and hurt for a long time to come. We should be sensitive to their concerns when we deal with issues such as prisoners, decommissioning, security and policing.

I compliment the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and the other Members of the Government team. We have an historic opportunity to define a new peace on this island. History will not look kindly on us if we fail to take this opportunity.

Minister of State at the Department of Finance (Mr. Cullen)

I propose to share my time with Deputy O'Kennedy and Deputy Foley.

Acting Chairman (Mr. Doherty)

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Cullen

I am delighted to contribute to this historic debate which will be a defining moment in the history of our country. The meeting of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference in Dublin in March, which I attended with the Secretary of State, Dr. Mo Mowlam, her Minister, Mr. Paul Murphy, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy David Andrews, and the Minister of State at that Department, Deputy Liz O'Donnell, offered me a small insight into the complexity of the Northern Ireland negotiations. In this regard, we cannot and should not underestimate the significance of the achievement of all the talks participants in delivering this Agreement, be they Irish, British, Nationalist, Unionist, loyalist or republican — one and all deserve a great deal of credit from everyone in this House and the country.

What struck me at that Anglo-Irish meeting was the calibre of the chief

negotiators on both the British and Irish sides. We have been blessed throughout the peace process by having negotiators on all sides who have had the self-belief and strength of character necessary to be able to make compromises and "do deals" in the interest of the greater peace.

No greater leadership could have been shown by both Prime Ministers who, as other Deputies said, were willing literally to drop everything and lead the final part of the negotiations. This was particularly courageous on the part of the Taoiseach given his family's bereavement at the time. I wonder had both the Taoiseach and Prime Minister Blair not been willing or able to drop everything and go to Belfast at the time would we now have the Agreement we have and the chance for peace it offers.

This debate is, probably, the most important political development on this island in decades. This development is concerned not just with the present but has the potential to influence, in a central way, political life on this island for decades to come. We must all seek to ensure the hopes and progress that are now evident are consolidated and built upon into the future.

I intend to speak not so much on the political aspects of the Agreement as on the economic aspects. Even then, I do not propose to anticipate what specific economic developments may arise from the Agreement but rather to speak about the possibilities that may become evident in future years.

It is, probably, helpful to review some of the more important economic trends that have been evident in recent times. Although the economies of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland differ in some important respects, their similarities and shared characteristics are much more significant in terms of their respective longer-term growth potential. They are both small, highly open economies, subject to almost identical competitive challenges. Their long-term success depends on their competitiveness in world markets. Unemployment, particularly long-

term unemployment, remains a problem in both the Republic and Northern Ireland. Therefore, despite the progress which has been achieved to date, there are many challenges to overcome to ensure our economies are well placed to respond to an ever more demanding international environment. In its potential to deliver a lasting peace, this Agreement could be crucial to the future economic prosperity of the entire island.

There is a significant level of interaction between the Republic and Northern Ireland. In view of the many challenges facing us, it makes sense for the two parts of the island to co-operate in areas where this is to our mutual advantage. There have been many examples of such co-operation in recent years. Perhaps the greatest dynamism has been evident in the private sector. Many firms, whether indigenous or foreign-based multinationals with Irish operations, are increasingly regarding the island as a single entity for business and operational purposes. This is evident in the amount of cross-Border investment by firms as they see the benefits of extending their operations to an all-island basis. In banking, agri-business, retailing and other sectors this trend has been evident in recent years. There have been a number of acquisitions of Southern firms by Northern firms and vice versa. The Republic of Ireland is now the third largest investor in Northern Ireland, after Great Britain and the United States.

These developments in investment and trade should not be regarded as surprising. With our joint membership of the European Union and our joint participation in the Single Market, Irish-UK commercial interaction in general and, in particular, South-North commercial interaction — given the geographical convenience — was bound to grow strongly.

I now turn to the prospects opened up by the Agreement we are discussing. We all appreciate the economic dynamic released as a result of the first ceasefire. People from the South visited the North, probably, for the first time in many cases. Tourism in general in the North had an

upsurge. Foreign direct investment by multinationals in the North was stimulated with the active support of the US Administration. North-South trade grew strongly. I have no doubt that with the stability and peace that are the goals of this Agreement there will be a further acceleration of these positive trends. This will be to the benefit of the North and the South, that is, all the inhabitants of this island.

This dynamic in the areas of tourism, investment and trade involves predominantly the private sector but to fully realise even the private sector potentialities, it is necessary to have supportive investment and other co-operation in the public sector. Here is where the North-South structures provided for in the Agreement can, over time, provide a strong underpinning for developments across a span of economic areas.

The Agreement identifies a number of sectors for initial attention. I have no doubt, however, that as the benefits of practical co-operation become more evident there can be significant scope for expansion to other important sectors. The Agreement provides for the establishment of a North-South Ministerial Council to bring together those with executive responsibilities in Northern Ireland and the Irish Government to develop consultation, co-operation and action within the island of Ireland — including through implementation on an all-island and cross-Border basis — on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the Administrations, North and South.

The Council will have a number of functions, including: (i) to exchange information, discuss and consult with a view to co-operating on matters of mutual interest within the competence of both Administrations, North and South; and (ii) to use best endeavours to reach agreement on the adoption of common policies in areas where there is mutual cross-Border and all-island benefit and which are within the competence of both Administrations, North and South. It is far too early to speculate on the precise forms of co-operation which will be worked on in the economic sphere.

However, some of the areas of co-operation suggested in the Agreement which pertain to the economic area are agriculture, transport, aquaculture and urban and rural development.

I am delighted to be a member of the Government and the Fianna Fáil Party on this historic occasion.

Mr. O'Kennedy

As a Member of the Oireachtas since 1965, it is a great privilege for me to contribute to this historic debate and to congratulate the Taoiseach, the Government, the British Prime Minister and his Government and all the parties concerned on reaching the momentous agreement in Belfast on Good Friday. As the Taoiseach rightly said, we all need to rise to the occasion and ensure, as democratically elected representatives, we make the same unstinting commitment to support the implementation of the Agreement as those who negotiated it to a successful conclusion.

As co-chairman of the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body, I wish to announce that my British co-chairman has accepted my proposal to convene a special meeting of the body in the near future in Dublin to endorse, as parliamentarians, the successful conclusion of the Agreement and to assure our respective Governments and peoples of our total commitment to its implementation in all of its aspects.

As British and Irish parliamentarians, we particularly appreciate the recognition the Taoiseach gave to our body by addressing us some weeks ago and enlisting our support for the realisation for the aims of all the parties to the negotiations. I am confident that at this special meeting there will be unqualified and enthusiastic support for the principles and aims laid out in the Agreement to promote, to the extent that we can, a successful outcome to the referendum to be held next month.

We particularly appreciate the formal recognition in strand three of the Agreement of the need to develop interparliamentary links building particularly on the British-Irish Interparliamentary Body. The understanding, friendship and goodwill that are features of this body will be available to the Governments in whatever fashion they choose to establish a framework of parliamentary support in Britain and Ireland.

The Taoiseach has, understandably and generously, acknowledged the groundwork and contributions of his immediate predecessors in office but it will be understood that I feel obliged, with my record in the House, to acknowledge the contributions and achievements of others who have been involved in key Anglo-Irish and North-South negotiations during the past 30 years or more. The Taoiseach has recorded, generously, his recognition of the forward thinking and enlightened approach of the 1966-7 Seán Lemass all-party Constitution committee on which, as a young Member of the Oireachtas, I was privileged to serve. This highlights the fact that the foundations for the historic all-party Agreement were laid many years ago by another all-party agreement

pioneered by Lemass, the great statesman of modern Ireland.

Agreement has been central to all the policies pursued by successive Governments here since then. I pay a special tribute to former Taoisigh Lynch, Cosgrave, FitzGerald and Haughey for their significant contributions to building up a healthy relationship between both Governments, sometimes in difficult and sensitive times. I was privileged to serve in the Lynch and Haughey Administrations, which devoted considerable time and effort to Anglo-Irish relations and to a better understanding and common cause between all the traditions, North and South, in this island.

The historic Anglo-Irish summit of 1980 in Dublin Castle was the first occasion where the totality of relationships was established as an essential element in a new and enduring framework between both Governments. In particular, I acknowledge the role of the former British Foreign Secretary, Lord Peter Carrington, who enthusiastically endorsed that approach at the Dublin Castle summit on that occasion.

Agreement has always been central to the policy of our party. I am particularly pleased to note that the tripod base — between North and South, within the North and between both Governments — of the 1975 Policy Document, which the Fianna Fáil Party adopted on my proposal, is now a central element of this latest historic agreement.

Our policy then was to seek support internationally and amongst friendly states for the implementation of new agreements between both Governments. It is appropriate at this stage that someone like myself, who has been involved over the years, should place on record the contributions of the so-called four horsemen — US Congressmen Tipp O'Neill and Hugh Carey, and Senators Ted Kennedy and Patrick Moynihan — who consistently and vigorously created a new awareness in America of the need to support the efforts and policies of successive Irish Governments.

I should also place on record the immense contribution of my good friend, since our student days, John Hume, and that of his SDLP colleagues over many years. It must also be acknowledged that Gerry Adams has made a major contribution to directing the republican movement in the North away from futile violence towards effective constitutional action. His determination to travel the political road has not started in recent years only. I can testify from personal experience that is a matter of fact, going back as far as the termination of the dirty protest in 1979. Unfortunately, a rigid security approach by the British establishment at the time, frustrated the efforts that could have led, even then, to an agreement of the kind we are celebrating today.

The Agreement creates the opportunity to replace the confrontation on the narrow ground, over almost 80 years of futile violence and suspicion, with progressive and forward thinking co-operation in peace and harmony between all the traditions in the North of Ireland. The young people of the North, of whatever tradition, have such a huge contribution to make, not only to the betterment of their own society but also to that of many other peoples throughout the world who can benefit from their positive and professional contributions.

Unionist and republican alike must, and are entitled to feel equally at home on this island. We must share that home in understanding and harmony and make it clear that not even one step can be made towards

an acceptable future for all unless it is agreed by all at each stage of the journey.

The unique unanimity expressed in this House today has set an example for the type of co-operation and common purpose which, hopefully, will be realised between all the political representatives on this island in a new era of peace, harmony and prosperity.

Mr. Foley

I welcome the opportunity to say a few words with regard to the historic Agreement. The Agreement on Good Friday between the British and Irish Governments and political parties in Northern Ireland aims to end almost 30 years of bitter civil and sectarian conflict and to lay the foundations of peaceful coexistence between the two communities in Northern Ireland and between North and South.

The reality is that what was agreed by all the parties and the Irish and British Governments represents the only way forward for the people of Northern Ireland and the people in the South. There is now in place a blueprint for the peaceful development of Northern Ireland on a number of fronts.

There are still many difficulties which need to be resolved, such as the transfer and release of prisoners, decommissioning and representation on the Northern assembly, but there is no alternative. There can be no going back to the dark days of sectarian violence because it has achieved nothing except grief and heartbreak. The paramilitaries on both sides will have to be dealt with firmly if they persist in their threats to wreck what is at this stage the only solution for the people of this island.

From the outset it was accepted that no one side could expect to come out of the talks with everything it wanted. For progress to be maintained

in returning the North to normality there must be compromise and that applies to people in the Republic as well. The majority here has maintained that self determination must be by consent. The sincerity of how strongly that viewpoint is held will be tested on 22 May in the form of a referendum.

Apart from any threat to the peace process internally in Northern Ireland from whichever side, if the people of the South reject the proposed constitutional reforms which are inherent to the Agreement, that will be the end of it. Truly, there is something in the deal for everyone and each of the parties will be able to sell compromises in their own way and in their own constituencies. Everybody has to give a little to get a little.

Leading Nationalist politicians will sit in the cabinet or executive that governs the assembly, unlike the past when only Unionist politicians could ever perform such functions. There will be arrangements to ensure that key decisions are taken on a cross community basis. The Unionists will never have the opportunity to out vote the Nationalist minority.

The assembly will have 108 members elected by proportional representation in the existing 18 Westminster constituencies in the North. They will exercise full executive authority in matters which are currently the responsibility of the six Northern Ireland Government Departments. Executive authority will be discharged on behalf of the assembly by a First Minister and a Deputy First Minister and up to ten Ministers with departmental responsibilities.

All the major parties will be involved in this power sharing arrangement. The assembly is really the core of the Agreement. On its existence and proper functioning everything else falls. Without it operating in the fashion proposed, the North-South Council will not operate. The proposals for a North-South dimension answer adequately most of what is required by the SDLP and the Irish Government.

There will be a legislative based North-South Council with the power to take and implement decisions through cross-Border bodies also set up by legislation passed by the Dáil and at Westminster. The areas where these bodies will operate are to be identified by a working group. They must include aspects of policy such as agriculture, education, transport, the environment, tourism promotion – which is most important – inland fisheries, health and marine matters.

Unionist demands that the assembly alone should decide the functions of the cross-Border bodies have not been met. However, a somewhat complicated mechanism has been provided to ensure that the assembly will have an input. The various bodies will be set up from consultations between the two Governments and a shadow assembly to ensure that they come into operation on the day that the assembly begins to operate. This allays Nationalist fears that, with the assembly already up and running, the Unionists might refuse to play ball on the North-South bodies.

Strand three deals with the British and Irish or East-West relations, mainly to meet Unionist requirements that a British-Irish Council, or council of the isles, is to be set up under a new British-Irish Agreement. It will comprise representatives of the British and Irish Governments, devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, when established, and, if appropriate, elsewhere in the UK.

Balanced constitutional change along the lines already speculated about is provided for in the Agreement. To meet Nationalist and republican concerns about the RUC, the Agreement provides for the setting up of an independent commission to make recommendations for future policing arrangements for the North.

The prisoner release issue is causing concern. The package commits both Governments to put in place mechanisms to provide for a programme for the release of prisoners from both sides.

This is an historic time for the people of these islands. We must work together to ensure the success of the Agreement by commending it to the people who will vote in the referendum on 22 May. This is the greatest compliment we can pay to the courage and commitment of all those who worked so hard over the years to bring it about. I commend the Agreement to the House.

Acting Chairman

I call Deputy Creed. I understand that Deputies Creed, Deenihan, Gerry Reynolds and Belton wish to share their time. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Creed

I congratulate the Taoiseach and the Government for securing the historic Agreement on Northern Ireland. When distributing bouquets, one should not forget Mr. Seán Lemass, Mr. Charles Haughey, Dr. Garret FitzGerald and Mr. John Bruton because this Agreement is the culmination of years of dedicated work by politicians, North and South and east and west. If 10 April was the most important day in Northern Ireland and in these islands for the past 30 years, 22 May will be the most important day this century.

It is regrettable that an issue of such magnitude and importance should be the subject of confusion as a result of holding two referendums on the same day. I accept there is considerable similarity between both referenda. The Amsterdam Treaty requires us to share our sovereignty with our European partners, while the Agreement on Northern Ireland requires the two islands to share a problem which has afflicted us for the past 70 years. It is regrettable, however, that we run the risk of confusing

the electorate by holding two referenda on the one day. There will be parties campaigning for a "yes" vote in one referendum and a "no" vote in the other and for different votes both North and South. There is considerable potential for confusion which is regrettable, although I accept nothing can be done about it.

Only Fianna Fáil could have negotiated this Agreement because we made our peace when this State was formed. What has been achieved offers the potential for a secure and lasting peace into the next millennium. However, Articles 2 and 3 will be a sticking point in certain quarters. If it is good enough for Mr. John Hume, Mr. Seamus Mallon and the SDLP, it is good enough for me. What have Articles 2 and 3 achieved for Nationalists in Northern Ireland? The proposed amendment to these Articles recognises the identity of Northern Ireland Nationalists and legitimises their political aspiration to a united Ireland. However, it does not threaten the identity of Northern Unionists, which we must also recognise as legitimate, or their political aspiration to remain part of the United Kingdom.

There is an onus on all political parties who negotiated the historic Agreement to sell it to their respective constituencies. We can ill afford the luxury of parties sitting on the fence for a protracted period. History has shown that if political vacuums are allowed to develop in Northern Ireland, bloodshed is the inevitable consequence.

I recognise that the prisoners' issue is an intrinsic part of this settlement and that the Government will introduce legislation to give legal effect to it before the end of June. However, there is a responsibility on us to differentiate between crimes committed in Northern Ireland or in the name of the Republican struggle over the past 30 years and crimes committed against members of the security forces who have served this State well over the years. The calls in recent days for the release of all prisoners, some of whom are only on remand for capital murder, sent a shiver down the spines of many people who are in favour of the

Agreement and run the risk of alienating considerable support in certain quarters.

Mr. G. Reynolds

I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak on the historic Agreement. I will remember 10 April for two reasons — it was my birthday and it was the day the Agreement was signed.

The majority of us who are in politics have always wanted to see some form of agreement reached between the two peoples on this island. This agreement is the basis for negotiations which will help to solve the difficulties which have existed for the past 300 years. The ship is now built but there will be many icebergs along the way.

One must take into consideration the fact that society in Northern Ireland is extremely segregated. It will take years to break the mistrust between people there. However, the Agreement goes a long way in helping to kick start that process. There are also other difficulties to be resolved, such as policing. The Nationalist community mistrusts the police force in Northern Ireland. It will take a long time to set up a community based police force which is acceptable to both sides of the community.

As public representatives, we have a major role to play in the next few weeks to ensure that everyone supports this referendum. I agree with Deputy Creed that it is unfortunate that both referenda will be held on the same day, although I understand the political reasons for it. Both referenda are of major significance for the development and future of this country. I hope that confusion does not reign on 22 May.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to Mr. Dermot Gallagher, who is head of Anglo-Irish affairs in the Department of Foreign Affairs. He is a native of Carrick-on-Shannon and I am proud that someone like him has

played such an integral and important part in the peace process over recent years. I mention him because I know him and he comes from a county I represent. I accept many others have also played important roles but I am delighted Mr. Gallagher was to the forefront.

The Sinn Féin leadership must be congratulated for bringing that party into the political process. However, it cannot have it both ways. It would be extremely foolhardy to support the referendum in Northern Ireland but not in the Republic. That party has brought its people this far, so it must go the next mile of the road. I hope that under the leadership of Mr. Gerry Adams, Mr. Martin McGuinness and Mr. Mitchel McLaughlin it will take the correct route.

Coming from a Border constituency, I know the economic deprivation that has been experienced there over recent years. When the Agreement is accepted by the people, the North-South bodies will play an extremely important role in the economic and social development of the Border regions. I look forward to their establishment soon. I congratulate everyone involved in preparing this historic agreement.

Mr. Belton

I congratulate all those involved in the talks over recent years, particularly Senator George Mitchell who was extremely patient in dealing with one of the most complex problems in the world. The Agreement that emerged from those talks is being put to the people of this island and I hope a sizeable majority will view it as a stepping stone forward. It was said that the setting up of this State was a stepping stone towards peace on this island and 75 years later those words are being used again.

Most of what is in the Agreement was also in the Sunningdale Agreement signed 25 years ago, but at that time some people could not see the way forward through that agreement. I am glad that those people are on side with the Agreement. People must be prepared to

accept the positions of other parties. If this matter could have been solved simply there would never have been all the trouble there has been on this island. Acceptance of the position of other people and recognition of their fear must play a major role in the acceptance of the Agreement.

I pay tribute to the security forces which over the years, at the risk of their personal security and against all the odds, tried to make this island a safer place. The forces of law and order are also true peacemakers and they should not be forgotten in this context.

Mr. Deenihan

I hope the Agreement will represent a new chapter of Irish history. After many false dawns I hope we have reached a turning point in the history of this island. The Agreement is the culmination of years of work of successive Taoisigh. The former Taoisigh, Deputies Reynolds and Bruton, and the Taoiseach, Deputy Ahern, all deserve special recognition for their work towards the Agreement. I also recognise the work of my fellow Kerryman, Deputy Spring, who played a significant role in bringing about this agreement. I pay tribute to the work of that fine civil servant in the Department of the Taoiseach, Mr. Paddy Teahon, who played a very significant role behind the scenes. Martin Ferris also played a significant role and was very much involved in the negotiations, although his contribution was probably clouded by his statement about the murderers of Gerry McCabe last week, but he later clarified his position and said he was not accurately quoted.

John Hume was the prime mover in this process. Had he not doggedly persisted in enticing Gerry Adams into a peaceful strategy which found expression in the Hume-Adams document, I doubt if we would be debating the historical Agreement here this evening. The contribution of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness in pursuing a peace strategy must also be recognised.

I welcome the various provisions in place for strands two and three of the process. The Minister of State, Deputy Cullen, pointed out all the advantages to be gained if the Agreement is accepted. When I was Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry, I had contact with various groups in Northern Ireland. There is great potential for development in that area through co-operation with groups in the North. I am aware of a large number of initiatives in place in industry. One example of such co-operation is the forthcoming visit by the Mayor of San José in the Silicon Valley to Ireland. She will visit Listowel, Dublin, a sister city of San José, and Derry.

On a matter not directly related to this debate, I appeal to the GAA to lift its ban on RUC members. A special conference is due to be held in May and as a gesture of goodwill it is time that ban was lifted.

I agree with the Garda Representative Association which was understandably outraged at the prospect of the release of prisoners convicted of capital murder, particularly of those held on remand in connection with the murder of a fellow countyman of mine, Detective Garda Gerry McCabe. I see no reason those murderers should go unpunished.

The Agreement is Sunningdale Mark II. It has given us back the chance Sunningdale afforded us, but was squandered by extremists on all sides. I hope this opportunity will not be lost or squandered.

Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin

Ar an ócáid stairiúil seo ba mhaith liom ar son Sinn Féin, comhghairdeas a ghabháil leis na daoine uile a rinne obair fhada, dian sna cainteanna a tháinig chun deiridh ar Aoine an Chéasta. Tá buíochas an náisiúin tuillte acu siúd go léir a rinne a seacht ndícheall chun an toradh is fearr a bhaint amach. I dtuairim Sinn Féin ní socrú deireannach é seo ar an gcoimhlint fada idir rialtas na Breataine agus muintir na hÉireann. Ní bheidh sé sin ann go dtí go mbeidh rialtas na Breataine sásta, faoi dheireadh, imeacht as na Sé Chontae. Ach creidimíd go bhfuil féidireachtaí ann anois chun bogadh ar aghaidh, ag fágáil inár ndiaidh na teipeanna a bhí, míchothromas an stáit oráisteach ach go háirithe, agus ré pholaitiúil nua a chruthú in Éirinn.

On this historic occasion I congratulate all who worked long and hard in the multi-party talks which ended on Good Friday 1998. The appreciation of the nation is due to those who made every effort in search of the best result possible at this time.

The Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister by their direct intervention in the final days of the talks — at a time of great personal loss and bereavement for the Taoiseach — ensured that the negotiations did not collapse. They provided a focus that led to movement in key areas of disagreement.

A phase of the peace process has now ended and we have the outcome of the multi-party talks before us, but the peace process is not over. A mountain has been climbed, but many mountains have yet to be scaled before we reach a final just settlement of the long conflict between successive British governments and the people of Ireland.

Before speaking about the Good Friday document I wish to state that the Government's decision to hold the referendum on the Amsterdam Treaty on the same day as the referendum on Articles 2, 3 and 29 is most

regrettable. Those of us who opposed such a move pointed out that if that decision was taken it would be to deliberately confuse two totally separate issues. Already this prediction has been borne out with Government and Opposition spokespersons today and yesterday trying to link the two major and completely unrelated questions which are being put to the electorate. This is dishonest and clearly an attempt is being made to piggyback approval of the Amsterdam Treaty on the expected high turnout for the 19th Amendment referendum.

Sinn Féin does not regard the Good Friday document as a settlement, but we believe the new political scenario it creates can provide a basis for advancement. Our party is currently engaged in a thorough process of consultation, discussion and debate, involving all our democratic structures. Our negotiators were mandated to return to the party with the final document and to let the membership of Sinn Féin decide our course of action. Whatever course we take will be determined by our commitment to lasting peace based on the unity and independence of Ireland and our judgment of how best to proceed towards that aim. Republicans are examining this document carefully, taking into account its positive and negative aspects. We are assessing the new political situation, and what it means for the relationship between Britain and Ireland and among the Irish people. The people who will vote in the referenda on both sides of the Border also need to make that thorough assessment.

We must guard against euphoria and over-blown claims about the significance of the text of this document. Very important decisions must be made about the future of this country by all of us in the weeks and months ahead. Sober judgments need to be made and the electorate needs to be provided with comprehensive information on all the implications of their votes in these referenda.

One thing is certain: there can never be a return to the days of Unionist one-party rule backed by the British government. There can never be a

return to the days when the people of Ireland and Britain, but most particularly the people of the Six Counties, were caught up in a cycle of repression and resistance, and when, on the British side, those with a military agenda, the securocrats, determined British government policy. Nor can there be a return to the days in this State when the national question was merely the subject of rhetoric and counter-rhetoric, when the censorship of republican opinion was in force and when arms of the State were used to repress republicans in the legitimate expression of their political beliefs.

It is not enough, though, to guarantee that there will be no return to the injustice of the past. Such guarantees are worthless, and this document is not worth the paper it is written on if we do not see immediate, substantial and radical change. The Nationalist community in the Six Counties has resisted injustice for decades. This experience, and their initiation of the peace process of the past four years, has given the Nationalist community in the Six Counties great confidence in their ability to achieve equality and freedom. Their expectations are high. The expectations of all true democrats in Ireland are also high. The disbandment of the RUC and the emergence of a new policing service, the release of all political prisoners, the demilitarisation of the Six Counties and the withdrawal of the British Army, the ending of sectarian discrimination in employment, the repeal of repressive legislation, and full and equal status for the Irish language are now awaited and demanded. Let there be no illusions about it. These injustices make up the very fabric of the statelet under which the Nationalist people have had to live, and if they are not brought to an end quickly then new political structures will fail as surely as all the failed arrangements of the past.

The one definite item in the document relating to civil liberties in this State is the reference to a review of the Offences Against the State Act. This odious legislation has been used for nearly 60 years to persecute those whom successive Governments have regarded as political

dissidents. It has violated, and continues to violate, the civil rights of thousands of citizens. It must go.

The Bill before us asks the people of the Twenty-Six counties to approve profound changes to Articles 2 and 3 and specific changes to Article 29 of the Constitution, all in the context of the Good Friday document. There is real and justified concern throughout Nationalist Ireland about the implications of these changes both in the context of this document and for the future.

For many years some in this House have campaigned for the dilution of Articles 2 and 3 even without any peace process and without the remotest prospect of an agreement. Sinn Féin has consistently opposed the removal of the definition of the national territory or the incorporation of the Unionist veto in the Constitution. We sought maximum change in British constitutional legislation and a strengthening of the Irish constitutional imperative to unity.

The proposed incorporation of consent into Article 3 presents a major difficulty. Consent here, once again, is unarguably the Unionist veto in disguise. However, the Government of Ireland Act has been repealed and it can be argued that the overall effect of the document is to weaken the Union. Partition remains, but the all-Ireland structures have the potential to build a new reality.

These are judgments which we in Sinn Féin are currently making. The decision which we take will be that which we judge to be in the best interests of all those whom we represent, and of the unfinished struggle for Irish unity and sovereignty.

For some this document may represent the culmination of the peace process. Most will recognise, however, that this is but another step on a very long road. Sinn Féin has been central to this process from the beginning. We initiated it with others and created a situation where it

was possible in August 1994 for the IRA to declare a complete cessation of military operations. The best opportunity for lasting peace in a generation had been created, but after initial high hopes it was frittered away by the British Government. Despite all the odds, we succeeded in reconstructing the peace process and, after huge resistance from the leaders of unionism, commenced multi-party negotiations. I commend the initiative of the IRA which allowed the peace process to evolve and then to revive after many severe setbacks. The men and women of the IRA had the vision and the courage to persevere, and credit is due to them as much as to any of the participants in the peace process.

Sinn Féin has always made it absolutely plain, despite the many misrepresentations of our position, that when we speak of British disengagement from Ireland we refer to the British administration and not to the Unionist section of our people. We want to see the beginning of a new relationship between the minority of Unionists on this island and the Nationalist majority. This new situation has the potential to create such a relationship which needs to be based on equality and mutual respect.

The Good Friday document opens a new phase in the peace process, a phase in which the same enormous efforts which went into the negotiations will be needed to ensure that the momentum for justice and peace is not only maintained but increased.

Given that my party, Sinn Féin, is still engaged in democratic debate on this document and all that swirls about it, it is not possible for me to record other than an abstention on the passage of this Bill at this juncture. I request the record of this House to so show.

Mr. Farrelly

I wish to share my time with Deputies Barrett and Jim O'Keeffe.

I welcome the opportunity to congratulate all those involved in the negotiations which brought about this Agreement. As I think back over the past 20 years — I have been a Member of these Houses for nearly that long — I recall the Sunningdale and Anglo-Irish Agreements and all the effort and work of the politicians of the day to bring forth some sign of an agreement which eventually would have all the parties in Northern Ireland around the table deciding their own destiny.

The Members and people involved on this occasion are to be congratulated. There is no question that all the parties involved in the talks did not achieve all they set out to achieve. The biggest single achievement is that they came to an Agreement so that both parts of this island could give their decision on it. The parties, North and South, owe it to the people to give them the opportunity to vote for an Agreement which will give them an opportunity to run their own government.

I hope we do not continue to see on television, as we saw again this evening, another family bereaved as a result of violence. As politicians, all we can do is help to try to convince the people in Ireland — the parties in Northern Ireland will try to convince their supporters — that this is the best way forward to bring about peace so that those scenes will vanish from our television screens. The efforts and proposals on cross-Border institutions will help to bridge gaps in terms of various issues. On many occasions I had the opportunity to deal with people from both sides of the divide in Northern Ireland and found them very interested and positive in ensuring a peaceful solution to the problem. It is sad that since Sunningdale, in the region of 3,000 people have been killed. If as many politicians had been prepared to stand up and be counted, many of those lives might not have been lost.

I am delighted to speak in support of this Agreement. In all the time I have been in politics the one thing that has annoyed me most is that so many people have been affected by bitterness and hatred. I hope the

achievement of Good Friday can be built upon, and I know that will not be easy. There has been one success, but there are many more successes and achievements to be made. The support of the people of Ireland for the changes in the referendum is necessary to bring about a lasting peace.

I remember the discussions that took place after the Anglo-Irish Agreement and objection to it by the then main Opposition party. I often wonder whether, if we were on the other side of the House, many people from this side would support us with this important Agreement. The party to which I am proud to belong will always support the Government of the day in ensuring a lasting peace. I recommend to the people that they support the referendum.

Mr. Barrett

I join my colleagues in congratulating all those involved in the Agreement we are discussing this evening. I congratulate the leaders and Ministers of various Governments in recent years who worked hard to achieve this objective. I pay tribute in particular to a person for whom I have much admiration, John Hume, and also to Seamus Mallon and his colleagues who, despite tremendous provocation over the years, stood by the principle of democratic politics. People are often cynical about politicians, particularly on this side of the Border, when they ask why we do not get together to solve the problem. This is an example of politics being conducted in a mature fashion, with politicians from all parties working together over many years to achieve the Agreement which was signed on Good Friday.

While respecting the point of view of people who worried about changes in the Constitution, I often thought they were concerned about a united land rather than a united people. The island of Ireland is united as a piece of land, but the people living on the island are not united. Those of us who have sat in this Chamber for many years and who agree

with democratic politics try to unite people irrespective of their viewpoint rather than worry about uniting something that is already united. One part of Ireland cannot be disconnected from another part. For centuries people on this island were not connected in terms of a common cause.

As a person who has adult children, I often thought what it would be like to be a parent living across the Border, worrying about whether your children will come home safely from a disco or whether they will be shot in cold blood because they come from one political or religious persuasion. These are the things people think about. Those of us in politics should remember that we represent ordinary people, and the ordinary people of this island want peace to go about their daily business and to retain their views and convictions. They want to know that when they go to the shops, the pub, a disco or to their schools they will come home safely and not be fearful that somebody has planted a bomb or has decided to shoot them in cold blood. In recommending this agreement to the people we have an opportunity to allow people who have been denied normal living for many years to experience what we have had the pleasure of experiencing, normal day to day life, with their children growing up with smiles on their faces.

During my visits abroad I met people from the northern part of this island who found the going too tough and left out of frustration. They wanted to live like everybody else, but they left to be educated in Britain and to work in various parts of Europe because they could see no way forward in terms of living a normal life in the North. When considering the words of the Agreement and changes in the Constitution we should remember that the Agreement and the Constitution are about people, about giving them the opportunity to live on this island, to retain their convictions and beliefs, to have the opportunity of going to the ballot box and electing politicians who they believe will represent their viewpoint and carry forward the policies they profess.

The most important aspect of this Agreement is the principle of consent. My party has felt for many years that if a majority of people in Northern Ireland consent to join us in the Republic, they should be free to do so. Those who negotiated this Agreement and carried forward the principle of consent from the Anglo-Irish Agreement have achieved much. If the principle of consent is protected people will, perhaps not in my lifetime but in that of my children, see the wisdom of having an island where all people can live together in harmony and march forward into a new Europe.

My colleague, Deputy Ó Caoláin, said that the referendum on the Amsterdam Treaty is separate from this referendum, but I disagree with him on the basis that we are Europeans. It is important to realise that we are part of Europe and that we must have a say not alone in what happens on this island but in Europe. It is right and proper that the Government has decided to hold both referenda on the same day.

I am certain this agreement can be torn apart if people do not accept that those who negotiated it sought consensus. When one seeks consensus one does not get everything one wants. Much has been achieved through the skill of the negotiators over the years in putting together this package which emerged on Good Friday. The common thread running through the various stages of the negotiations was the need to obtain consensus. There are elements of the agreement about which I am less than satisfied. However, I am pleased about other elements of it. I am sure there are those with views opposite to those to which I subscribe who find other aspects of the document with which they cannot agree. However, when trying to obtain consensus and agreement, one must be prepared to forgo some of the things one holds dear.

I hope the Agreement will be accepted and the assembly established but in the years ahead I am sure we will be obliged to travel rocky roads. There will also be discontent, as there is in this Chamber each day. When

politicians are elected they pursue various policies and disagreements will arise. However, the ability to argue one's point of view in an assembly and to try to convert others to one's way of thinking is the opportunity now being afforded to the people of Northern Ireland. When they elect their public representatives, I hope these people will vote for those they believe best qualified to put forward their point of view. If we recognise the nature of democracy, the need for fair play and the protection of human rights and equal rights — as the Agreement attempts to do — the rocky roads ahead can be smoothed over and solutions can be found.

There is no doubt that one of the key issues facing those elected to the assembly will be the question of policing in Northern Ireland. There cannot be democracy in a country where a large percentage of the population do not have confidence in the police force. It is important to recognise that this issue must be tackled quickly. There must be a police force that all of the people of Northern Ireland can recognise and support.

I congratulate those involved in the negotiations and I wish the assembly every success. I commend the Agreement to the people of this island.

Mr. J. O'Keefe

I am very supportive of the Good Friday Agreement. In endorsing it we are helping to bring about an end to Europe's oldest quarrel. However, I am not supportive of the way this important constitutional Bill is being rushed through the Dáil. The Agreement is historic and deserves better.

I will deal first with the positive aspects of this debate which relate to the substantive issues. I see this Agreement as a development of the "stepping stone" principle expounded by my predecessor from west Cork, Michael Collins. However, he referred to a stepping stone towards a united Ireland. With the political maturity and experience we have gained since independence, that theory has developed and we are now

discussing a stepping stone towards an agreed Ireland. One way or the other, Michael Collins is smiling because, at this stage, all those in favour of the Agreement are aboard the "stepping stone" train.

Another aspect of the Agreement is that it is profoundly Christian. Those on all sides of the political divide in this country are Christians and in discussing Christianity – if one believes in the Lord – we are discussing proper relationships with oneself and with others. We are discussing relationships, we are not discussing territory and from that point of view this Agreement deserves to be recognised as profoundly Christian. We are also discussing our relationship with our nearest neighbour across the Irish Sea. That relationship has developed in the context of the growing maturity and self-confidence we have gained since independence.

As a result of these developments, there can now be a combination of energies devoted to building up the communities on this island economically, socially and educationally. The bottom line involves what ordinary people want, need and deserve. They are not interested in guns, tanks, gunships or submarines; they are interested in basic security, in being able to sleep soundly at night and in being able to walk the streets in peace. This Agreement will help to achieve that and it represents an opportunity for ordinary people to realise their dreams. It also represents an opportunity for the entire island to develop in peace, safety and security in the future.

I offer sincere congratulations to everyone involved in bringing the Agreement about, including the Taoiseach and his predecessors, the UK Prime Minister and his officials and, in particular, the chairman of the talks and his assistants. Senator Mitchell deserves to be nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and I would be glad to put his name forward.

We must consider this peace agreement in the context of developments in Europe. In one sense I am glad the referendum on the Agreement will

take place on the same day as that involving the Amsterdam Treaty. Fifty years ago, when memories of Dunkirk, El Alamein, Auschwitz and Dachau were fresh in people's minds, it was unthinkable that a European Union of the kind which exists today, where people live and work together, would become a reality. In the same way, in 50 years' time people will hardly remember Poyntzpass and other awful tragedies. I hope the relatives of those who died at Poyntzpass and elsewhere during the past 25 years will come to believe their sacrifice was not in vain and ultimately helpful toward achieving a peace agreement.

I will now deal with a number of negative aspects of the debate. Members have gone overboard in their contributions and they have not considered what we are doing. One of the most important constitutional Bills since the foundation of the State is being put through the House in a matter of hours. The lawyer in me and the politician in me rebel against this. It is outrageous that we should be dealing in this way with a complex Bill, which I, as a lawyer, have some difficulty in fully comprehending. How do we expect the people to understand the complexities of this Agreement when the Bill is being rushed through the Oireachtas in three days?

Mr. D. Wallace

It is being rushed through with the agreement of all parties.

Mr. J. O'Keeffe

It is entirely wrong to do so. The quality of our democracy depends on the people being fully aware of what is involved. The people will be the judges of the Agreement at the end of the day and it is wrong that the legislation should be rushed through the House. I hope I am not going against the good spirit underlying the Agreement by focusing on an issue which deserves consideration.

In my view the Dáil should have been recalled to debate this matter last week. I understand the imperative of trying to pass the legislation so that the referendum can take place on 22 May. However, that date is not sacrosanct. A huge effort must be made, in which I am prepared to participate, to make up for this hasty legislation with which there are difficulties. For example, Article 46.4 of the Constitution states that a Bill containing a proposal of the Constitution shall not contain any other proposal. However, we are in the process of approving changes to the Constitution in addition to the peace agreement. Is that not contrary to the Constitution we stand by?

I do not have time to discuss the complexities involved but I believe it is wrong to rush the legislation through. That is the negative aspect of this debate. I will conclude positively by stating that I fully endorse the Agreement. I hope it will be accepted by the people and I also hope that a new era will dawn on this island as a result of that acceptance.

Minister for Education and Science (Mr. Martin)

I propose to share time with the Ministers of State, Deputies Dan Wallace, Flood and Ned O'Keefe.

An Ceann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Martin

I pay tribute to all concerned in the achievement of this peace settlement, particularly politicians on all sides of the House who for many years have remained committed to the democratic process and to attempts and efforts to achieve a lasting settlement on this island. I pay particular tribute to the Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, who has invested enormous personal energy and effort into this stage of the process. His work has now borne fruit.

I pay tribute to all the parties to the Agreement including the Ulster Unionist Party, led by Mr. David Trimble, who made a significant contribution, the PUP, the UDP, Mr. John Hume and Mr. Seamus Mallon of the SDLP and indeed those in the Sinn Féin Party who have made a significant contribution in recent years in developing their thinking and in moving the republican movement on to a road towards democratic dialogue and peace.

Over the years this House has had many debates on the developing status of the Northern peace process. As each small step was taken and as the various setbacks were overcome, the basic underlying message remained clear and the desire of the people of this island for a lasting and just settlement became stronger with the passage of time.

The Agreement provides for that settlement and it deserves the support of all sides of the House and a strong momentum to bring it to realisation. While I am mindful of Deputy O'Keeffe's comments and understand his desire that the House should have been given more time for this debate, the overriding need for momentum on this Agreement is the essential point. Deadlines must be met and we have to move with sufficient momentum to ensure we can bring the settlement to realisation. We are not yet through all the hoops. This is a first step and there will be many difficulties ahead.

We are not being too hasty in this debate. The Government has the most comprehensive constitutional advice available to it in terms of the debate and the agreement the Government is seeking. There will be ample time for Deputies to debate this issue. This process will be ongoing in terms of the contribution of political representatives, both inside and outside the House, to the national debate that will ensue on the constitutional amendments that must be made as a result of the Agreement.

The Agreement represents a leap of faith for the many parties involved and it challenges us all to overcome our preconceived notions and work together in a spirit of co-operation. To achieve a balanced settlement, compromise is required from all sides and that is embodied in the Agreement. Through a system of checks and balances and a comprehensive treatment of the principal issues, the Agreement provides a new way of dealing with politics on this island.

Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution have always had a tremendous resonance for all who aspire to a united Ireland, but we need to be careful about putting too much emphasis on the form of words adopted in 1937. The proposed amendments are consistent with the continued will of the significant majority of the Irish nation to be united in one State. However, they also recognise the strong will of the Irish nation that a united Ireland can only be brought about through peaceful means and by consent.

The new wording is crucial in that it establishes a mechanism whereby the reunification of the country can come about without the interference of any person outside the island. This is a vital new element in the process when taken together with changes in British constitutional legislation and the Agreement accepted by Unionist parties. The proposed changes are not only consistent with the sentiments of Nationalists throughout the island but they set a framework within which these aspirations can be accommodated and

realised.

The establishment of North-South ministerial bodies represents a significant development. These bodies can have a dynamic future and can make a significant contribution in the field of education. I have little doubt that the people will give their resounding backing to the Agreement. It is vital to realise that the process is by no means over and that there are difficult weeks, months and even years ahead. A series of obstacles remain to be overcome before we can put behind us the destructive conflict between people on this island. We need to put all our efforts into an active agenda of reconciliation. This must touch every aspect of our work and I have no doubt education must be central to this. Crucially, we must give all our young people the opportunity to overcome barriers of distrust and misunderstanding.

Many schools have had impressive programmes in place for some time through which ongoing exchanges occur with counterparts in the Northern education system. I recently visited a school in east Belfast which has been involved in exchanges with a school in Dublin for more than 15 years and I was very impressed by the impact of this programme on staff and students. While I have increased the available funding for exchanges this year, we now must go to a new level of cross-Border interaction by school children because it is only through young people meeting more often and exchanging their experiences that we can break down the barriers of prejudice and the preconceived notions older generations possess and find more difficult to shed.

I was mindful of this in recent years when I visited Northern Ireland, along with other Deputies, and met a number of loyalist and Unionist politicians. The views we had and the myths we entertained about each other really only came to light when we wrote them down on a blackboard. As we discussed and teased them out we found we had much more in common than issues which divided us as human beings.

I want every school to develop proposals on how they can participate in expanding understanding and reconciliation. These can range from using the opportunities of the new Scoilnet initiative under the IT 2000 plan, to full school exchanges and visits. The Government will provide whatever support is necessary to ensure our schools are to the fore in the lasting achievement of peace and reconciliation. In the area of mutual recognition of qualifications and indeed in the development of a common student support framework, there could be a potentially active agenda for the benefit of young people and students throughout the island.

Mar fhocal scoir ba mhaith liom a rá gur maith an rud é go bhfuil aitheantas tugtha don Ghaeilge go speisialta sa Chomhaontú a bhfuil ar dtacaíocht a thabhairt dó inniu. Is léir agus is ceart go bhfuil an méid seo tacaíochta á thabhairt don teanga sa Chomhaontú. Tá an teanga antábhachtach do an-chuid daoine sa Tuaisceart in a saol agus in a gcuid scolaíochta agus mar sin de agus is íontach an rud é go bhfuil an t-aitheantas seo á thabhairt dí.

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment (Mr. D. Wallace)

I warmly welcome this historic Agreement and I commend every individual and group who contributed to its evolution. They have performed an admirable service for the people of Ireland and the United Kingdom.

It is only appropriate and fair that Deputies in this House fully acknowledge the outstanding leadership provided by our senior politicians and political advisers throughout the peace process. In the past, leaders like Jack Lynch, Liam Cosgrave, Garret FitzGerald and Charlie Haughey strove to assist Northern Ireland escape from the wilderness of distrust, division and conflict to a much desired social atmosphere of acceptance, friendship, respect and justice. Each of these

leaders now deserve acknowledgment for their individual roles in serving the cause of peace.

In more recent times, outstanding qualities of courage, determination and innovative political skills allowed our colleague, Deputy Albert Reynolds, play a crucial role in securing the first vital practical steps towards peace, the 1994 ceasefire, and he was ably assisted in this by Deputy Dick Spring. Extremely important contributions followed from senior figures such as Deputy John Bruton, the late Deputy Hugh Coveney and the former Deputy Ray Burke. The exceptional political skills and humanitarian commitment of our Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, made him an ideal leader to secure the best possible ultimate agreement between the extremely diversified parties at the talks. As with former leaders, he was ably assisted at both political and advisory levels by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Andrews and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, Mr. Martin Mansergh and Mr. Seán Ó hÚiginn, among others, deserve the highest praise and thanks.

Before addressing the many formidable issues on the road to permanent peace and increased prosperity, and in the tradition of understanding in the North of Ireland, I again express my strong support for the Agreement and record my firm belief that it is a document of exceptional quality and potential. The highest praise and acknowledgement is fully deserved by all involved in its construction.

While time does not permit me to fully address the issues raised by the Agreement, I will refer to three specific points. First, the Agreement marks a decisive turning away from the easy but absolutely futile pathway of hate, distrust and violence. The superiority of dialogue, dignified compromise, generosity, forgiveness and, above all, hope have been vigorously asserted. Second, the distance between Northern Ireland and our State has been dramatically reduced in terms of ongoing interaction and practical joint initiatives. We must rise to this challenge and ensure that every opportunity for linkage between North

and South is availed of for the common good of both areas. Every commitment must be enthusiastically backed by practical action.

One world-wide feature of society can be used as a vital instrument of healing between the peoples of these islands. This is the rapid and often bewildering process of change which challenges all societies to plan comprehensively for the future. Exploiting to the full the potential for tackling and shaping change for the betterment of all provides a unique opportunity for common purpose and action between the peoples of these islands. It also allows a major shift of emphasis from the past, which no one can change, to the future, where each individual has the power to contribute positively. The days ahead are truly exciting and full of promise for each man, woman and child, on these islands. Let us all work together to maximise our contribution to their well-being.

Minister of State at the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation
(Mr. Flood)

Without naming all the individuals who have contributed over the years to this momentous occasion, I would like to be associated with the congratulations to them. I take a certain pride in the fact that it was Deputy Bertie Ahern, Leader of Fianna Fáil and Taoiseach, on whose shoulders it fell to participate with the other local and national leaders and to be centrally involved as the endgame approached on the development of this Agreement. I can be allowed to take some pride in that fact, but that is not to underestimate the contributions made by the many others now and in the past in negotiating towards this multi-party Agreement.

This Agreement brings great hope to all the people on this island. I am extremely encouraged by the comments that are increasingly being made in the wake of the Agreement being circulated throughout both islands as people, whether they claim to be from the Nationalist or Unionist tradition on this island, begin to inform themselves more clearly

on its contents. Many of the comments are very positive and augur well for a very decisive result in the forthcoming referenda.

There is a new hope that this Agreement will be able, among other things, to assist us in the further development of the entire island. The economy on this part of the island has made tremendous progress over the past few years and can only get better under this Agreement. Many areas will benefit greatly, apart from the prime area of peace where no one will lose life on this island for so-called political reasons in the future. That is a tremendous scenario to look forward to, particularly for our children who, for at least a generation, have suffered greatly because of violence and trouble on the island.

I hope the new arrangements for the Government of Northern Ireland will embrace both communities, and others who claim not to be aligned to either side in Northern Ireland. Perhaps it would not be too much to hope that in the fullness of time, with the new confidence in Northern Ireland in its renewed democratic structures, the first Minister of the new regime in Northern Ireland will be welcomed to this House to address us, as have many other eminent leaders in the past, that that person will feel honoured to come into this House, that we will feel honoured by the contribution she or he will make, and that reciprocal arrangements can be made for the Leader of this Government in time to be welcomed with honour and dignity to make a similar address in the new parliament in Northern Ireland. These are positive things to which we can now look forward which in the past we did not believe would be possible.

There are many areas where, as an island, we can co-operate. In my area of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, the Minister, Deputy McDauid and I look forward to co-operating closely with our colleagues in Northern Ireland for the betterment of the entire island. Recently I had the opportunity to visit the United States and to work with our Bord Fáilte organisation there developing tourism and encouraging tourists from North America

and Canada to come here and assist us in our economic development. We and the Northern Ireland tourism office, working as a team, met the promoters of tourism in North America with a view to developing the tourism industry across this entire island.

There are other areas, for example, the area of recreation, where we can co-operate fully and forcefully. Another area where we could co-operate is in relation to drug misuse. I have responsibility for the national drug strategy and I believe we can learn from each other on this island. It is suggested, for example, that there is no serious heroin problem in Northern Ireland. Perhaps we could learn why that is so and how we might better cope with the problem in the South.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture and Food (Mr. N. O'Keeffe)

This debate is probably the most important in which I shall ever speak as a Member.

As a constitutional republican, I hold great faith in all the Articles of Éamon de Valera's 1937 Constitution. It remains my view that, in the longer term, a United Ireland achieved by agreement still offers the best and most durable basis for peace for the people of the island.

Furthermore, I fully appreciate that each referendum on the Constitution is a precious example of democracy at work. May 22 next will be no exception.

I heartily support the motion this evening welcoming the Agreement reached at the multi-party talks in Belfast. As I studied the Agreement, it immediately struck me that it was the area of agriculture that merited proposal as the first item for future North-South co-operation under the framework of the Ministerial Council. Such prioritising is correct in my estimation. It is clear that the production and processing sides of farming within both jurisdictions play a vital role in our respective

economies. Agriculture and the agri-food sector make a relatively large contribution to GDP in both regions, amounting to 14.1 per cent in this State, and 7 per cent in the North — this is relative to 2.8 per cent in the European Union as a whole, indicating the importance of agriculture in Ireland.

Similarity between farmers, North and South, is due to the fact that they share a similar climate as well as the same land area consisting of about 8.3 million hectares. The structure of the farm size is similar and the lion's share of this agricultural area is devoted to grass, while beef and milk production accounts for over 70 per cent of total agricultural output. Farmers on this island face the same future obstacles — EMU, the CAP and World Trade Organisation negotiations, as well as the reality that animal diseases do not recognise borders.

It is undoubtedly true that, as with the agri-food industry, a better future for the primary producer lies in co-operation rather than in isolation. I was particularly impressed by the joint submission by the Irish Farmers' Association and the Ulster Farmers' Association to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation, in March 1995. The two groups proposed, inter alia, (1) to accelerate the development and structural improvement of agriculture, North and South, and to ensure competitiveness in the more open trading environment of the future; (2) to remove or minimise any remaining distortion of competition or unjustified barriers to trade between the two regions; and (3) to promote a common or co-operative approach to the marketing of Irish food products with unique emphasis on the clean, healthy, unpolluted environment which characterises the island of Ireland.

Such common-sense objectives are indeed laudable and will no doubt be included as targets for achievement between my Department and the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland. There are many further opportunities for development of agriculture on an all-Ireland basis. Key issues for the future include efficiency of output, food safety,

and environment-friendly farming.

In the first instance, three interdependent areas are ripe for agricultural co-operation on an all-Ireland basis. First, food development and marketing are crucial for the success of the agri-food sector. This is especially true as the island as a whole exports over 80 per cent of its food products. Positive developments in this area, as well as co-operative business arrangements, would realise unquantifiable synergistic benefits for those involved in the industry. Second, at EU Council level in Brussels, the challenges facing Northern Irish farmers are akin to our own. The Minister, Deputy Walsh's recent support for the lifting of the beef export ban in the North exemplifies our good faith in this regard.

Third, the training of young farmers is of paramount importance to extend viable farming into the next millennium. The potential for agri-tourism and off-farm employment will be explored fully by the relevant agencies, North and South, on behalf of our young farmers. When the Taoiseach opened the Teagasc training college in Ballyhaise, County Cavan, last June one-third of the 20,000 young farmers attending were from the North. Furthermore, there is great scope for sharing technical expertise between Teagasc and the Department of Agriculture in Northern Ireland.

The Agreement sets out for the first time a framework for the functioning of real politics in Northern Ireland. I praise the crucial role played by the former Taoiseach, Deputy Albert Reynolds, the Taoiseach, Senator George Mitchell, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Andrews and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell. The courage of the various party leaders at the talks also deserves mention. We should not forget the role of those behind the scenes such as Father Alec Reid, Reverend Roy Magee, Dr. Martin Mansergh and the legions of hard working civil servants who have helped to bring us to the eve of the first 32 county plebiscite on the future of Ireland since 1918.

I do not underestimate the enormous task which lies ahead in making the Agreement work. I am confident that our inherent optimism and the weight of history points to a new enlightened era for the people of Ireland. I pay tribute to the original political architect of this peace deal, the former Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, whose vision clearly demonstrated the truth behind the maxim that politics is the art of the possible.

Mr. Currie

I will begin by quoting from the Official Report of the Northern Ireland Assembly, 20 May 1974, volume 3, column 1252, from a contribution by myself, then Minister of Housing, Local Government and Planning. I said:

Irrespective what happens and how this community may go in the future, somebody at the end of the day is going to have to come in and pick up the pieces, no matter how shattered those pieces are. When he does that someone will remember – and I should like to think a lot of people will remember – and say there was an idea about once; the idea was partnership in the North between Catholic and Protestant . and partnership on this island between Irishmen.

Only two minutes after I made that speech the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended and the historic and courageous attempt at power sharing in Northern Ireland at that time ended. I serve now in a different parliament, the Oireachtas, and I am honoured and privileged to be here.

Although it has taken much longer than I had envisaged at the time, I never thought it would take 25 years. I rejoice that at long last my words have come to pass and we have another agreement where partnership in the North between Catholic and Protestant, Unionist and Nationalist and partnership on this island between Irishmen is the central concept. I am pleased to be able to say that in the Dáil.

It has been necessary for us to exercise responsibility. Words said here and elsewhere can be quoted in or out of context. I recall a former SDLP colleague of mine, speaking about the Council of Ireland, saying that it was a vehicle to trundle us through to a united Ireland. Those words were used strongly against us at that time and are still used by Unionists on occasions. Deputies may have seen Mr. Steven King, assistant to Mr. John Taylor MP, on "Questions and Answers" last night. He spoke about having learned from Sinn Féin and the Provisional IRA what he called "psyching out the other community" as a deliberate policy. Those contributions I have heard in the House today have left no hostages to fortune.

Valuable lessons must be learned from past developments. I did not consider it helpful to respond to repeated requests made to me to make comparisons with the Sunningdale Agreement while recent negotiations were ongoing. For me to have done so could have had an adverse effect on Unionist and republican negotiators who opposed the Sunningdale Agreement and helped to bring it down. However, an essential and central message which cannot be over emphasised for the present and future generations is the futility of violence and how self-defeating it can be in bringing about political change. Nothing illustrates that point better than some comparison with the Sunningdale Agreement of 25 years ago.

Sunningdale was historic in its time. It had power sharing, a concept in Northern Ireland which was absolutely revolutionary and an idea which was only about two years old. The idea of Catholics, never mind

Nationalists and republicans, holding office in Northern Ireland was anathema to many Unionists. It had a Council of Ireland, a council of ministers with executive and harmonising functions, a consultative role and a consultative assembly with advisory and review functions. The Council of Ireland assembly was to consist of 60 members — 30 from the Oireachtas and 30 from the Northern Ireland Assembly. Perhaps the Leas-Cheann Comhairle and I would have been members of that assembly together. What better symbol could there have been of what we wanted.

There was to be a secretariat to the council, headed by a secretary general who would recruit his or her staff. There was also to be a permanent headquarters. I remember that Mr. John Taylor MP, although he was opposed to the agreement and campaigned against it, was very keen to have the headquarters of the Council of Ireland in his native city of Armagh. I always regret that he did not have his way. There was to be a role for the Council of Ireland in policing arrangements in Northern Ireland.

However, Sunningdale had one major deficiency — it failed. Sunningdale did not work — it was brought down by the combined efforts of Unionist and republican extremists and circumstances such as the Heath election, the Boland Supreme Court case and others which were not predictable. It could have succeeded and its failure was not inevitable. The major advantage of the present Agreement is that the forces which brought down Sunningdale are in support of it, at least we hope they are all in support of it. It remains to be seen whether Sinn Féin will adopt the honourable and statesmanlike course and support fully the Agreement. The big advantage of this agreement over Sunningdale is summed up in the expression "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush". The Agreement is more practical and appears to have more chance of lasting.

No problem has existed in Northern Ireland for many years, if ever, that

justified the loss of a single life. How truly can it be said of the differences between Sunningdale and this agreement that all the lives lost in the interim have been wasted totally. Since the start of the Troubles 3,249 lives have been lost and, hopefully, another has not been lost today. Of those lives, 2,327 or two thirds have been lost since the fall of the Sunningdale executive. The totally innocent victims apart, what can I say to the mother of a young man who spoke to me on Sunday last, a man who died on active service with the IRA? She asked me what he had died for. Those who even now talk of continuing violence should note that question. There are many examples in history of the futility of violence. The Germans and French slaughtered each other over the centuries, particularly in two world wars this century, and they now happily co-operate in the European Union. This island also presents an historic example of the futility of violence.

Tributes have been paid today to all those in public life who contributed to the Agreement. I join those tributes and emphasise the gratitude we owe to those people. I particularly remember today the ordinary people of Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestant, whose resilience over a period of almost 30 years must be admired and praised. I also remember those who lost their lives and the continuing suffering of their relatives. We all recall the major atrocities – the Enniskillen and Miami showband bombings, the La Mons and the Ormeau Road bookie shop murders, the Kingsmills murders and the Dublin and Monaghan massacres. There are many more to which I could refer.

I also remember today those whose lives were taken away by republican and loyalist terrorists and by the security forces, some of whose names have been forgotten except by their relatives and neighbours. I remember Jim and Gertie Devlin who were personal friends of mine. I was one of the first to arrive at the scene where they were massacred in their car; I will never forget it. I remember too Dinny Mullen who was chairman of the Moy SDLP branch, those murdered in the murder triangle, Constable Scott murdered on traffic duty outside the Catholic

church in Dungannon, Sergeant Paddy Maxwell and Constable Sammy Clarke murdered while on a mission of mercy and Aiden McAnespie murdered by the British Army. For what were all those people murdered? I also remember Columba McVeigh, one of those who have disappeared in this jurisdiction and was denied a Christian burial. For what?

I remember those of the constitutional parties in the North who stood by the political process. As a founder member of the SDLP, I pay tribute to the ordinary members of the SDLP who held the line against fascism, despite attempts at intimidation, vote stealing and boycotting. I often think of the consequences if at any time during those years the men of violence had been able to claim a mandate from the majority of Northern Nationalists. On this entire island we owe those foot soldiers a debt of gratitude.

I look forward to playing as active a role as possible in promoting a "yes" vote. We describe every election and referendum as important, even crucial, and sometimes historic. It is impossible to understate the importance of a substantial majority in the North and the South voting "yes" in these referenda. We must give a political and moral authority to the new institutions, an authority which violence-minded dissidents will challenge at their peril. It is in the interest of Unionist tradition, as well as the Nationalist tradition, that we get that majority. It is a guaranteed future for their tradition on this island. The possibility of a "no" result is too awful to contemplate.

Of course I have some concerns. Policing remains the Achilles heel. There will be major difficulties unless a solution is found to that problem. Identification with the new institutions will help enormously. With identification will come the will to defend those institutions. It or they must be "our police service", not "their police service". It will not be easy to transform attitudes forced on people over centuries by the conditions in which they have lived. It will not be easy to bring about positive

attitudes to government and its security agencies. The question of the implementation of decisions taken by a government not in control of its police is another matter of concern. There are very few decisions taken by any government worthy of the name which do not ultimately depend on sanction. Reliance on another government to implement one's decisions raises problems.

Sinn Féin's attitude is another problem. I cannot believe it is seriously considering a different policy North and South. The party which prides itself on being the only all-Ireland party proposes calling for a "yes" vote in one jurisdiction and "no" in the other. How can Sinn Féin erect a poster on the Northern side of the Border post at Aughnacloy calling for a "yes" vote and one calling for a "no" vote on the Southern side? Is that not the symbolism of a partitionist attitude? I find it difficult to believe it is seriously considering such a course of action.

A leading member of Sinn Féin stated at the Árd-Fheis that the approach of the party would be devious. That is precisely what Unionists suspect of republicans and even Catholics. How many times have we heard them say that? I regret the use of that word and I believe he will too. I also regret the approach of my constituency colleague, Deputy Joe Higgins, who described the Agreement as fatally flawed. He fails to recognise the problem in Northern Ireland. There is very little class difference in Northern Ireland or, for that matter, in this jurisdiction. The basic problem in the North, which Deputy Higgins does not recognise, is one of reconciling contrasting national traditions. It is not a class problem.

The Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, referred to symbols. I emphasised in this House on a previous occasion the importance of symbols. I outlined how as a Minister in a power sharing executive I was driven in a State car past the Carson statue and was faced by the portrait of Lord Craigavon, the first prime minister of Northern Ireland, when I entered the Stormont building. One could search that entire building

and not find any hint of another tradition in the North or on this island. An alien from Mars would believe it is an entirely British tradition. That must change. There must be a new symbolism to emphasise the partnership future.

A co-ordinated message should be sent out from parties and groups in the South in favour of a "yes" vote. We should sing from the same hymn sheet. We should also co-ordinate with parties and groups in the North in favour of a "yes" vote, including, as far as possible, the Unionist Party. We must urge the British Government to take steps to reduce massive personation in the referendum and assembly elections. The bodies of the disappeared must be returned so they can have a Christian burial and their relatives a focus for their sorrow. The new government in Northern Ireland must have the tools to do the job of economic reconstruction. Working together in government will bring about reconciliation. There have been suggestions of Northern representation in the Dáil which are unrealistic while there are two states on this island. There is a strong argument for giving a vote in presidential elections to those in the North who want it as the nature of the presidency has changed. The Irish diaspora should at the very least include our citizens in the North. I am confident of the future and Members know that even in the darkest days I remained confident that agreement would be reached.

The Taoiseach referred earlier to members of the Opposition who asked easy questions and I was one of them. Indeed, there were occasions when I did not ask any questions in case I would cause embarrassment because I wanted to be as helpful as possible and there were times it was difficult for me to keep my mouth shut. The Taoiseach stated:

None of us can pre-empt what decision will be taken by people in the future and it is they, not us, who will decide if the present Agreement is to be a transition to a united Ireland or the basis for a continuation of the Union.

I sometimes quote the late Cardinal Conway on this matter. He was a wise man. He was asked when the power sharing executive, of which I was a member, was in operation whether the involvement of Catholics and Nationalists in Government at that time which guaranteed them a fair crack of the whip would make them accept partition and be happy with it or whether their involvement in Government would allow them to see possibilities and encourage them towards a united Ireland. The Cardinal replied, "I am prepared to leave the answer to that question to history". With regard to these new arrangements I am also prepared to leave the answer to that question to history.

Mr. Ellis

I wish to share my time with Deputies Kenneally, Ardagh and Brendan Smith.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. Ellis

We are debating the greatest development in Irish politics for 70 years. Special tribute should be paid to all those involved in bringing about the Good Friday Agreement, especially the Taoiseach, the British Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, the party leaders in Northern Ireland who participated, and those involved in the earlier negotiations. I was in the Irish Embassy in London the day the Framework Document was signed in Downing Street. Everyone saw that as a new beginning and when the then

Taoiseach, Deputy Albert Reynolds, came into the building everybody stood because we realised there was a new beginning. This work was followed on by Deputies John Bruton and Bertie Ahern as Taoisigh. The effort put in by both Governments and their officials and George Mitchell and his two co-chairmen is to be complimented.

There is a new horizon, a new beginning as far as North-South relations are concerned and it will be hard for certain people with regard to some proposed changes. Articles 2 and 3 may become a problem for some but what is proposed is acceptable to me and the bulk of people in this country. We are not in the business of trying to make it harder for people who have been marginalised on either side. All areas have been looked at in the Agreement in terms of those who have suffered on all sides in Northern Ireland and the South and nobody wants to see a return to such suffering. People want peace and see this as an opportunity that comes but once in a lifetime which should be grasped with open hands by everybody.

However, those in Northern Ireland who are trying to discredit the Agreement should look hard at it because they must realise, especially Mr. Paisley, that many of their supporters want this Agreement to work. Recent opinion polls have proven that with regard to Mr. Paisley's party. He should come in from the cold and realise that democratic politics, fairness and equality have arrived in Northern Ireland. The two Governments will have problems down the road, but it will be up to this House and the House of Commons to support the Governments whenever problems arise. We will have a duty as Members to see to it that those difficulties are ironed out for the benefit of the people of this island.

We are Irish and should be proud of it. There should be no difference if one is a native of Cork or Antrim. We owe a great debt of gratitude to officials on both sides who persevered through long and agonising meetings and problems and those who had the courage to stay in when

it would have been much easier to leave. Some Northern Ireland parties could have found it much easier to walk away from the table than to stay but by staying they showed a commitment to bring about peace on this island.

We understand the economic benefits that may result but as politicians we have a job to do between now and the end of May to sell this Agreement to the electorate and let it know we support it and see it as a new beginning providing an opportunity for peace to return to this island. Those responsible are to be complimented on bringing this about.

Mr. Kenneally

I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate, the results of which will have a lasting and major impact on society in Ireland for decades to come. The debate was brought about by the situation on this island which is ten days, 30 years, 75 years or 800 years old depending on what part of the island one inhabits, to which Government one gives one's allegiance or to which tradition one belongs.

I prefer to deal with the past 30 years which have been bloody, shameful and, in the present climate, best forgotten. It is sterile to try to apportion blame for that period and, against the background of the current Agreement, highly inadvisable. We are repeatedly told the Agreement is not an end in itself but an important step to a peaceful settlement, a step towards bringing an end to 30 years of agony for the population of Northern Ireland and to discrimination against Nationalists in that jurisdiction. It cannot be a bad document when summarised like that.

I am wholeheartedly in favour of this Agreement and congratulate the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and their team of civil servants on

successfully bringing these negotiations to a conclusion which all sides of the House can openly and enthusiastically endorse. I commend especially the Taoiseach for his dedication, commitment and perseverance in what was a sad and unhappy time for him. His achievement in the negotiations will have gained him a place in the history books but his single-mindedness and unswerving dedication at a time of personal trial will have gained him the respect and appreciation of every member of this party and the wider membership of these Houses.

I congratulate the party leaders and the teams of the Unionists side, those who were a motivating force from the start and those who had the sense to eventually recognise that this attempt at a settlement had to be for keeps, that the people demanded it and, more especially, that they deserve it. I pay tribute to the Northern Ireland Secretary and the British Prime Minister whose fresh enthusiasm and whose concern for and understanding of the particular suffering of people within his jurisdiction finally meant the holder of his office would make his contribution to the process. I commend this Agreement to the people and particularly those in my constituency for many reasons, not least because it is the first realistic opportunity for peace in Northern Ireland for 25 years.

How can I reassure myself we are not selling out a Nationalist Ireland in this process, something of which no doubt we will be accused? Having consulted as many as I can find who are knowledgeable on Northern Ireland affairs I can only see who is in favour of the Agreement and decide on that basis if it has the wide range of support necessary to succeed. The SDLP, the legitimate and elected representatives of the Nationalist population, who have been traditionally moderate in their politics are not just promoters of the Agreement but have been architects and midwives of the process for many years.

I wonder whether the more extreme views of the Nationalist population

support it. Sinn Féin also have been architects and midwives and are now promoters of the process. The only indication we have of the thinking of the Nationalist voting population is through an opinion poll. Loath as I am to depend on their results, a four to one majority cannot be all that wrong. The Unionist population have bought heavily into the process and are active promoters of the Agreement at all levels. As with the Nationalist side, they are traditionalists and representatives of what can be termed the more extreme elements behind the process so that support is increasing.

The British Government which has de facto jurisdiction over the territory and will have to back the Agreement with the necessary resources has shown determination, commitment and will. This leaves only the dross of the political melting pot behind, ancient creatures lost in a time warp, the strangest bedfellows such as Ian Paisley and Ruairí Ó Brádaigh who cannot conceive of the concept of compromise and whose language is as archaic as the twisted principles they purport to promote. The balance is clear. The scale is tipped unerringly towards acceptance. I for one could not seek to deny the people of the North their opportunity for a normal life.

Mr. B. Smith

I welcome the opportunity to make a short contribution on the important and worthwhile multi-party Agreement achieved in Belfast on Good Friday. Credit is due to the two Governments and all the political parties which participated in those talks. As an Ulsterman I am particularly proud of the decisive leadership given by the Taoiseach during the final days of those talks. I express my appreciation of the very important role played by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Andrews, the Minister of State at that Department and the many Government officials whose stewardship of the peace process in more recent times and previously of Anglo-Irish affairs is to be commended.

My constituents in Cavan-Monaghan welcome this Agreement. I have listened to many of our neighbours in County Fermanagh whose clear message to us in the Oireachtas is one of welcome for the conclusion of the talks and hope for the future. I believe it is the overwhelming view of my constituents that on this Agreement a lasting and just peace can be established for both traditions on this island. In any democracy where new political orders are established, difficulties have to be overcome. A critical period lies ahead and the Governments need and deserve the full support of the people of the 32 counties. The widespread support on both sides of the House for the Agreement is heartening. Credit is due to members of previous Governments who have contributed to this process.

It is essential that the electorate, North and South, give a resounding yes vote on referendum day. In the post-referendum period let the Governments continue their work with the additional inspiration that their efforts command the support of the overwhelming majority of the people on this island.

Earlier the Taoiseach rightly stated that for the first time we have an Agreement capable of winning the support of both traditions in the North as well as the support of North and South. Another major historic date will be 22 May when the people of all this island address the same issue through the ballot box. In the context of the evolving Northern Ireland situation, successive Fianna Fáil leaders clearly stated our party's willingness to embrace balanced constitutional change. Unilateral constitutional change would not be acceptable to the Irish people but a proper balance has been achieved with this Agreement with changes in both British and Irish constitutional law.

The debate in recent weeks about Articles 2 and 3 highlights in no uncertain manner the skill, leadership and political foresight of Eamon de Valera and his Fianna Fáil Government in drafting a Constitution that has stood the test of time so well. Naturally, Bunreacht na hÉireann had

to be a product of the times in which it was drafted and Articles 2 and 3 were an important and proper constitutional response to the British territorial claim in the partition Act, the Government of Ireland Act, 1920. Those Articles were a proper constitutional response because Irish identity is a vital part of the Northern minority sense of itself and they can express that identity through a relationship with the Republic.

I welcome the decision to repeal the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, and with that goes the British claim of sovereignty. The Irish people in future will be sovereign. I am glad that constitutional provision is being made to guarantee Irish nationality and citizenship rights to everyone born on this island. Quite properly the aspiration to unity is articulated in Article 3 and a mechanism to achieve a united Ireland is provided for in the amended Article.

The provisions in the Agreement will ensure that never again will we have in the North the discrimination and lack of equality that existed there in the past. The elements of the Agreement comprising human rights, a Bill of Rights, fair employment and provision for the Irish language are extremely important matters for the people as they go about their daily chores. Equality of treatment for both traditions will be a powerful underpinning for the new political structures on this island.

The southern Border counties, as the Leas-Cheann-Comhairle and Deputies Crawford and Ellis are aware, have suffered immeasurably since 1969. Those counties need special consideration and specific programme of investment if we are to have any hope of catching up with the rest of the country economically. A concerted Border areas investment programme is needed. A minimalist approach in regard to infrastructural improvements and job creation will not suffice either North or South.

This Agreement affords the people of this island the opportunity to consign to history the violence, mayhem, heartbreak, horrific murders

and maimings. Ireland and its people deserve a peaceful future. We will be true to the noble republican tradition of cherishing everyone equally, regardless of class or creed.

Mr. Ardagh

In Ireland there is inequality between man and woman, the able and the disabled, the traveller and the tradesman, the asylum seeker and the citizen. In the section on human rights in the Good Friday Agreement, the parties thereto affirmed, among other rights, the right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity; the right to freedom and expression of religion; the right to freely choose one's place of residence; the right to freedom from sectarian harassment. The Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations offers the Republic of Ireland a unique opportunity to continue the march of our nation, the achievement of mutual respect, equality, civil rights and religious liberty for everyone in the community.

The Taoiseach stated that the reformation of Articles 2, 3 and 29 reflects modern, progressive republican thought that is truly pluralist and keeps faith with the inclusive tradition of Irish nationalism stemming from Wolfe Tone and the United Irishmen. Tone stated that it was necessary to forget all former feuds to consolidate the entire strengths of the whole nation and to form for the future but one people. In 1916 the Proclamation of the Provisional Government guaranteed "religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens" and resolved "to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation . cherishing all the children of the nation equally".

The best statements on human rights in the 1937 Constitution are as follows. Article 40.1 states: "All citizens shall, as human persons, be held equal before the law". Article 40.6.1º.i provides for "The right of the citizens to express freely their convictions and opinions". Article 40.6.1º.ii

guarantees "The right of the citizens to assemble peaceably and without arms". Article 40.6.1^o.iii states "The right of the citizens to form associations and unions". Article 44.2.1^o provides that "Freedom of conscience and . practice of religion are, subject to public order and morality, guaranteed to every citizen". The latter is the most liberal of the Articles relating to human rights in the Constitution. Article 45 is "intended for the general guidance of the Oireachtas". Article 45.1 states: "The State shall strive to promote the welfare of the whole people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice and charity shall inform all the institutions of the national life." Without putting a tooth in it, the Irish Constitution is at present weak on equality and human rights.

Under the Agreement the European Convention on Human Rights will be incorporated into Northern Irish law. Its courts will have the power to overrule assembly legislation on grounds of inconsistency. The Irish Government has stated it will take further steps to strengthen the protection of human rights in its jurisdiction. The Agreement states that in the Republic of Ireland: "the measures brought forward would ensure at least an equivalent level of protection of human rights as will pertain in Northern Ireland".

Deputy Brian Lenihan, chairman of the All-party Committee on the Constitution, should act with all haste to ensure the aspirations of human rights and equality enunciated by Wolfe Tone, the Provisional Government of 1916, the European Convention on Human Rights, and the Good Friday Agreement will be brought into Irish law as soon as possible. There is no doubt that the Irish Constitution needs a good injection of equality and human rights provisions and the time is now opportune. Let us grasp the moment and put in place a charter of human rights and equality which is second to none. The marginalised and excluded, each man and woman whether able or disabled, the asylum seeker, the professional, the traveller and the tradesman will all then have dignity and opportunity. I commend this Agreement to the

people of the nation of Ireland.

Mr. Crawford

I wish to share my time with Deputies Cosgrave, Ring and Fitzgerald.

Previous speakers mentioned Articles 2 and 3 but it is not just people in Fianna Fáil who have problems with changes to those provisions — people in all parties are worried about what such a change might mean. It is extremely important that the Taoiseach and others leading the campaign for a "yes" vote make the meaning clear at the outset. A lady said to me on the telephone today that she wanted to understand what was happening in her language, because she wants to vote for peace.

The Agreement signed on Good Friday, 1998 is the result of long, hard but worthwhile negotiations but it must be seen as only the beginning of a new opportunity for the people of this island, especially of Northern Ireland, to build a system where all can have ownership of future political structures. The fact that the two Governments, with all the parties, had so much direct involvement in the Agreement means that everyone who so wished had an input to the final document. The enormous capacity and skills of Mr. George Mitchell and his co-chairmen are clearly evident in the Agreement and but for that team it could not have happened.

However, I congratulate in no small way the Taoiseach, Deputy Ahern — who worked hard despite all his family problems — the British Prime Minister, Mr. Blair, and their immediate predecessors, Deputy Bruton and Mr. Major. They put an enormous amount of their time in the last two years in to this section of the talks process. Their united approach and commitment to work together in the interests of the long-term future of the people of Northern Ireland are the ingredients which can make this opportunity work.

The Agreement is a long document which means there are many opportunities for those who wish to oppose it to pick lines and paragraphs out of context and use them for the wrong reasons. It is a compromise and, therefore, cannot be as any of the participants would have wished. However, it is the end product of a genuine effort and must be supported. Can those who knock it suggest a better alternative? Almost 30 years ago I suggested to a hardline Nationalist that our entry to the EU would lead us towards a time when all the people of Ireland could work together within a united Europe. His only worry at that point was who would get the praise. Thirty years later, with almost 3,500 deaths and many thousands more carrying the wounds of the Troubles, this is the best opportunity we have had to ensure the next generation is not bound up in our past but has a new opportunity in a peaceful and economically viable Ireland.

As someone said earlier, there must be no return to the bad ways — the bomb and the bullet — of getting parliamentary power. General John de Chastelain recently made clear that he and his colleagues spent much time on the decommissioning issue and were ready when the opportunity presents itself. Decommissioning is important as a guarantee for long-term peace.

The release of prisoners is also part of the process but we must never forget the victims and their families. Murders such as those of Garda Jerry McCabe could have been passed off as the work of a criminal gang but for the Garda arrests. Can the House agree that those who carried out that murder should be set free? I believe not, and if that is so we must try to understand how others feel because every life is precious, irrespective of the person's religious or political background.

People like Mr. Hume, Mr. Trimble, Lord Alderdice and the representatives of the smaller parties must be supported in their commitment to make this Agreement work. Mr. Gerry Adams, who had a major involvement in the talks, must take the same step for which he

congratulated Mr. Trimble — that is, to lead his party into support for the Agreement. It was sad to see on the evening of Good Friday that supporters of his party or people who leaned that way were putting up posters advising people not to vote for it. It beggars belief that it is suggested that any group could vote one way in the South and another way in the North, while rejecting the existence of the Border.

We must all lead to ensure a massive "yes" vote. The reality of the recent sectarian murders, the bomb in Moira of which I have some personal knowledge — it was not done by amateurs but by sophisticated, well-organised people — the bombs in Portadown and the deaths of two friends in Poyntzpass shows us there is a better way. Towns like Clones, Belturbet, Castleblayney and Ballybay show the damage done by the past 30 years of war. The first ceasefire brought clear benefits in tourism etc. There has been clear co-operation in many areas such as agriculture, health and tourism.

I congratulate all concerned in the Agreement, including the backroom staff — the civil servants and, as another Member said, those who made tea during the long negotiations. However, I hope the Border region will get a fair share of the financial support to help towards job creation. When the first ceasefire was implemented, I congratulated the then Taoiseach, Deputy Albert Reynolds, and asked him for funds to reopen the Border roads to make the peace work. I ask the Taoiseach to ensure the Border region receives its rights. For example, the N2 motorway which was not allocated any Structural Funds, should be made a priority to ensure people can travel freely and enjoy the peace. I will do all I can to encourage support for this Agreement.

Mr. Cosgrave

This is an important moment in the developing relationship between the Governments of Ireland and Britain. It is a development which is long overdue and one which will hopefully allow the process of

democracy to grow, taking with it all the people who inhabit these islands. We who aspire to the creation of a 32 county republic must, in the interest of human life, be prepared to give a little so that all may gain a lot.

The founding mothers and fathers of this State saw that in the acceptance of the Treaty in 1922, the opportunity would present itself to create a State which would be open and welcoming for all the Irish nation. This Agreement, like Hillsborough, Sunningdale and the Anglo-Irish Agreement moves towards an ordered approach so we can all share this island. For too long, mothers have lost their sons and daughters to violent death. Children have been left without a parent and communities have been torn apart in the name of nationhood.

The patriotic thing for Irish men and women to do now is to work, in a constitutional manner, to develop an open and caring society, fit for Irish people to live in — a society which welcomes Catholic, Protestant and dissenter with open arms because they are our neighbours and we want them to be our friends and fellow citizens. Those who lost their lives must not be forgotten. Their suffering and loss leaves a legacy of profound regret which we must not allow hold us in the past. We can build a monument to them as we build a new Ireland which must be respectful of the democratic rights of all people — whether they are a majority or a minority. Only in this way is a democracy safe. The central belief in adopting this approach must be that every person counts, taking a fair account of the needs and aspirations of each person, with the rights of all being protected.

It is a major step forward that the principle of self-determination is recognised in this Agreement, putting in place a recognition that the people of Northern Ireland are the only ones who may decide to which State they will pledge their allegiance. We can all make criticisms of any agreement. There must be concern about the role of the Secretary of State. It is unclear how they will organise the holding of a poll to

determine if a majority wishes to consent to becoming a part of a united Ireland. What basis will be used to allow them to decide that it may be likely that such a vote may succeed? No criteria are in place so it is at the discretion of the Secretary of State of the day.

The proposed replacement wording for Articles 2 and 3 suggest it is the will of the Irish nation, in friendship and harmony, to unite all the people of the island. This is how it should be, a fair, just and caring Ireland. The prospect of all shades of reasonable opinion in Northern Ireland sitting down together to administer their affairs fairly is a great one and is to be welcomed and encouraged. It is a great step forward that the Unionist party has accepted it needs to change and take account of other views. It is a step which cannot have been easy but one which it has taken. Mr. Trimble and his party are to be congratulated for the courage of that leadership. I am sure that in time, Mr. Adams and his associates will also ensure the views of their supporters will play their part in this move forward.

No side may for a moment believe this is an end to the matter. Each will have to work hard at establishing confidence and trust between their people. There is much to gain as we go along the path to reconciliation. We can save the spilling of so many mother's tears, the breaking of so many hearts, and there will be so many lives to live if we can all come to act for Ireland's people and not just for Ireland. Seventy seven years ago there was much hope – the dreamers dreamt, the idealists did, people died, and the brave moved on and founded a State. We should make it a State of which everyone on this island wants to be part.

Mr. Ring

I congratulate all concerned with this historic Agreement – the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and the political leaders who went before them and played a major part in it. I also compliment John Major who

has been forgotten. He also helped this process, although he did not have the majority of Tony Blair, who has the power to negotiate this Agreement.

The SDLP and John Hume must also be complimented on this historic Agreement. For the past 30 years it has represented the Nationalist community and has always believed in democracy rather than the gun. I also wish to pay tribute to a person who is always working behind the scenes on behalf of the SDLP, Séamus Mallon, who never gets the credit he deserves. He was at the negotiating table every day and has always been a great spokesman for the SDLP. We sometimes forget about him and he should be complimented on the wonderful work he has done on behalf of the SDLP and the Nationalist community in the North. I have always admired and respected him. He has put his heart and great commitment into the peace process.

Tribute should also be paid to Senator George Mitchell who gave two years to negotiating this Agreement. We are losing our American Ambassador and we could not have a better replacement than Senator Mitchell. I hope the post is offered to him by the President of the United States as I am sure he will be a popular Ambassador to this country. Such a post would be right and fitting for the wonderful service he has given this country and the American people.

I hope this peace process works. A young girl interviewed on "Prime Time" a few weeks ago was asked what concerned her when she got up in the morning. I will never forget her reply. She said the first thing she did every morning was put on her stockings and shoes so that if gunmen came in, she could run up the road. That speaks volumes. I was saddened at the shooting in the North today as I hoped on Good Friday we would never see anyone dying violently again.

People in the South, including those in Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, are concerned about Articles 2 and 3. Armchair generals in the pubs are

giving their opinions on the issue even though they have made few contributions to this country. However, we have to give some leeway on this side of the Border.

Ms Fitzgerald

I thank my colleagues for sharing time with me. I am honoured and deeply touched to be a legislator at this time because the Agreement presents an historic opportunity and is full of promise. The challenge for all of us is to ensure that promise is fulfilled and all the opportunities it offers are met.

The Agreement will be severely tested, as can be seen from the shooting dead of a Catholic in the North tonight. It will come under pressure from those who will continue to use violence despite the opportunities it offers for a better society, North and South.

There are many people to praise. Credit is due across a broad spectrum of people. Many of the names have been mentioned. They include the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy David Andrews, and the Minister of State at that Department, Deputy Liz O'Donnell.

Members of my own party, including Garret FitzGerald, Peter Barry and Deputy John Bruton, have made huge contributions during the years to creating a climate that is pluralist and accepting of difference and which has made this Agreement possible. The British Government also deserves mention. The support of the international community has been critical.

In reviewing how the Agreement came about one is struck by the patchwork of effort needed from so many sources to make it happen. We should not forget the community activists who worked so long across divisions and the parents of children who died, who forgave and came together and were willing to put in the enormous effort needed to ensure the Agreement came about.

I pay special tribute to the Irish civil servants who during the years have had to face many challenges in working on this area and to make many personal sacrifices, as have had all the participants in recent times. There has been generosity, in terms of their contribution, time, skill and compromise.

As my colleague, Deputy Ring, said, the American Ambassador, Jean Kennedy Smith, has made a major contribution, as has the British Ambassador. The generosity of George Mitchell and his colleagues is extraordinary. The fact that eight parties stayed with the discussions through to the end is highly significant.

The Agreement presents a wonderful opportunity for us. It is a fair and balanced document. Clearly, there are compromises on all sides. What it does, primarily, is create a new set of challenges for us which centre on creating new sets of relationships on this island. How will the Agreement be followed up? How will we create the opportunities? Will we have the creativity, North and South and east and west, to build a new complex set of relationships that will offer new opportunities, North and South? It is an exciting opportunity but it will not happen by chance. It will need much effort.

There is much evidence that societies emerging from conflict need huge input in a variety of areas if conflict resolution is to continue. Many resources will be needed to ensure this happens, North and South. I cite as examples the input that will be needed from the European Union and the detailed work that will need to be done by Ministers and their

Departments in the South to make the North-South bodies meaningful. Ministers and their Departments will have to think carefully about how these bodies will develop. They will face many challenges. We face a real challenge in the South to make a contribution to the workings of the North-South bodies. Much will be expected.

I particularly welcome the section on human rights to which a number of Deputies referred.

It presents a challenge for us in the South. The Agreement is not just about change in the North but also about how we cope with change in the South. There is a huge agenda which I do not have time to discuss. I welcome the commitment to the enhanced participation of women, North and South, and to the creation of a civic forum to which I ask the Taoiseach to give his support. As we have seen, social partnership involving NGOs has worked extremely well in the South. There are many opportunities for a continuation of this and in the relationship, North and South.

I pay special tribute to the Women's Coalition without which there would have been no women present in the frontline negotiations on the Agreement. They helped to create an environment where good thinking could be done about the future of our society. I am delighted to welcome the Agreement and to call for support for it.

Dr. O'Hanlon

I wish to share my time with Deputies Conor Lenihan, Fleming, Briscoe and Kirk.

There has been violence on this island for centuries. Since the establishment of Northern Ireland 75 years ago there has been violence every decade. This is the first real opportunity for peace. The Agreement is worthy of the support of all the people on the island.

While I recognise the contributions of all concerned, it is fair to single out people like John Hume and Seamus Mallon of the SDLP who had a vision of a solution to the problem on the island which would accommodate the views of both communities. This vision has been realised in the initial phase of the development.

The Taoiseach is entitled to much credit. When in Opposition he met Sinn Féin when it was not popular to do so but he did so to ensure it re-entered the negotiations for inclusive talks following the breakdown of the first ceasefire.

The role played in 1981 by Charles Haughey should not be forgotten. He succeeded in getting the then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, to accept that there could not be an internal settlement in the Six Counties and that any settlement would have to address the three sets of relationships, between the two communities in the North, between North and South, and between east and west.

It is not possible in five minutes to look at the Agreement in detail but certain aspects are important. The institutions that will be established will be interdependent. The structures that will be put in place will ensure the new institutions will function effectively and that one community will not dominate the other, as happened in previous parliaments in the Six Counties. It is important that there are no winners and no losers.

I can understand the concerns of the many people who have difficulty in facing changes to Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution. I am satisfied, however, that the proposed changes will not diminish in any way the

Irish identity of Northern Nationalists. Taken with the repeal of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, the North-South Ministerial Councils which will be established, the human rights legislation and police reform — this is essential to ensure the police will have the confidence of the Nationalist community which it has not had since the foundation of the Northern Ireland statelet — the rights of Northern Nationalists are being greatly enhanced in terms of their Irish identity and the conditions under which they live and work.

Many people in the Border region have felt the pain of the violence. They have had family and friends killed and injured in the conflict. As a doctor, I had the unpleasant duty to tell teenage children that their father had been killed in a bomb explosion. I hope this is at an end, although we should all be concerned that a Catholic was shot dead in Portadown on a day we should all be celebrating this great achievement, the reaching of agreement between the different communities on the island.

The economy of the Border region has been severely damaged by 30 years of violence. It is important to recognise the contribution of the European Union through the INTERREG and peace and reconciliation programmes and that of the International Fund for Ireland during the years to regenerate it.

In the new North-South bodies and in the new institutions, I hope the 12 Border counties will be addressed as a unit in terms of economic regeneration and development. That is as necessary in the six Southern Border counties as it is in the six Northern ones. I hope we will see a co-ordinated and integrated approach.

I commend the Agreement and the Nineteenth Amendment of the Constitution Bill to the House.

Mr. C. Lenihan

I consider it an honour to be a Member of the Dáil, but to be given the opportunity to express my views on this occasion is an even greater privilege. I would not be in politics but for the peace process which, in its current phase, began with the ground breaking Hume-Adams initiative, which I had the privilege of covering as a journalist. This initiative and the events that flowed from it are a credit to the body politic and to democratic politicians. It restored my faith in our fledgling democracy. For once it appeared to me, and perhaps to others also, that politics was a deeply meaningful vocation or profession.

Politics is about peace and saving lives. The peace process and the Agreement we are debating have the potential to save even more lives. If there was to be a theme to my speech it would be the very notion of the triumph of peace. That is what the referendum we are to face into is about—the triumph of peace, politics and deeply held ideals pursued by political means.

At another level it is about the triumph of optimism — the triumph of those who say "yes" or even "maybe" over those who, to borrow a phrase, constantly say "Ulster says no". Ireland will not say "no" to peace. The language of our ancient quarrel has even been changed by this peace process.

This debate means more to me, particularly because I was one of those Deputies who expressed concern about changes to our constitutional claim to the Six Counties. In doing so, I was expressing the worries and concerns of many of my activists and friends. Their worry and mine was that our nation would become a disembodied thing, an empty aspiration not rooted in a sense of place. Thankfully, this is not now the case. The proposed wording for the changes to Articles 2 and 3 of our Constitution, far from redefining what constitutes the Irish nation, only further develops the concept in a more conceptual framework. In this respect the proposed new wording resembles a similar wording contained in the West German constitution or basic law, prior to the

collapse of the Berlin Wall.

The poet, Richard Murphy, in his poem about the 12th of July march in Ulster described it in terms of "bygone cannon, bygone spleen". I hope this will be the case this year. I hope this summer will not be yet another occasion where history and human dignity are the losers with people losing their lives. This year, I hope, there will be a new spirit of Drumcree, where Nationalists do not feel hemmed in by history and put upon by marching feet.

Mr. David Trimble will have his role to play in all of this and, I hope, he will build a bridge to the other side. I know he has expressed some public regret at his dance of joy at the first confrontation at this venue. Maybe this year he will follow that expression of regret through by urging peace to all who live in that quarter of the Northern state. Mr. Trimble has taken a risk for peace. I appeal directly to those ordinary members of Sinn Féin, who will attend their specially convened árd-fheis in a few weeks' time, to also say "yes".

Political leadership, indeed leadership of any kind, sometimes involves expressing an unequivocal "yes". At this time, Ireland does not need people who look both ways. The era of the ballot box and the armalite is over. It was always an unfortunate phrase, produced in time for a particular ard-fheis. It should now be banished forever.

To those who still entertain doubts, I would point out a few facts. When Mrs. Thatcher condemned ten men to die on hunger strike, she did so brazenly staring them in the face. That was the British Prime Minister then, but look at the British Prime Minister now. Mr. Tony Blair is looking for a "yes, yes, yes" vote rather than the sterile rhetoric of "out, out, out". Mrs. Thatcher's was the language of absolutism, a negative certainty which she obviously felt that could never entertain difference or see the other side. The death of Bobby Sands and his fellow prisoners was the death of accommodation and the idea that politics was about reaching

over to the other side. Thankfully, those days are at an end.

This peace agreement is not an end to difference, nor even an end to division, but a beginning of peace. It does not finally resolve our difficulties but it provides a framework within which we can begin to work things out. It points neither to territorial unity nor to fuller integration of the Northern statelet within the UK. In this respect the opponents of the Agreement are correct; it is a compromise. It compromises on the competing, yet at the moment unattainable, goals of territorial unity and further integration of the Northern statlet within the UK.

We have arrived at a transitional agreement rather than a final settlement. The key point is that it allows the Irish people to pick and choose. It is historic in that it is the first occasion on which the Irish people, throughout the island will have had the opportunity to express or determine their own future since the last all-Ireland election of 1918. On that occasion a clear majority of Irish people wished to go along the separatist path, to leave the Empire and cast aside British dominance.

However, a significant minority in the north-east wished to remain within the UK. As an Irish republican I wish it had been otherwise but I am not so foolish — as de Valera pointed out on another occasion — as to believe that coercion on that occasion, or now, would ever work.

As an Irish republican I would like to see this Agreement evolve towards unity of the Irish people. Wider events in Europe and within the island will probably push things that way, in any event. The important thing now is that this time, and the next time this is voted upon, there will be no external impediment.

The British attitude to the conflict in Ireland was well set out by the former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr. Peter Brooke, in his ground breaking statement of some years ago. It was this statement and

the series of further statements that triggered the current phase of the peace process. We are evolving towards a kind of unity; perhaps not the kind of unity that many dead patriots in their graves dreamed of, but unity nonetheless. The Irish unity we now fight for is a unity that is not worth dying for. We must now signal an end to the terrible deaths.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the role played in the unfolding events by my own leader, the Taoiseach. Deputy Ahern is a practical man who negotiates his way without prejudice. In having him here at this time, history has matched the circumstances we find. He negotiated this Agreement at a time of personal bereavement. So often bereavement immobilises, frightens and makes people relapse. Ireland is lucky that was not the case on this occasion.

I commend this Bill to the House and I ask the people to vote a resounding "yes" in the referendum. Anything less will short change our history, our aspirations and our future as a people.

Mr. Fleming

I welcome the Agreement between the Irish and British Governments, signed on 10 April, and the Agreement reached in the multi-party negotiations. This is an historic Agreement which comes after centuries of conflict and difficulty, and decades of violence. Above all, it has been arrived at through agreement between Unionists and Nationalists. This is what makes it special.

I particularly wish to thank the Taoiseach, Deputy Ahern, the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, and all the parties which negotiated the Agreement. On 22 May the people of Ireland will speak together for the first time since 1918 with one voice. This is a unique opportunity for them to say "yes" to peace and to the future. I call on the people to give a resounding "yes" on 22 May and to show their interest in this issue by voting on the day.

I will refer to many aspects of this Agreement, including sovereignty. Many people in Northern Ireland are concerned about sharing sovereignty with people in the South. I would remind them, however, that we have been pooling and sharing sovereignty in the European Union for decades. Sharing sovereignty is not a new concept. What is new, however, for people in Northern Ireland is that they will be consulted on the matter by way of referendum. To an extent in the past, sovereignty has been shared over their heads by the British Government. It is good that they will now be consulted in the matter.

The question of consent is a cornerstone of the Agreement. Any agreement which is freely given by parties willingly entering into negotiations, is much better than an agreement which is imposed by outside parties. When looking at this Agreement, I urge people to think of our children and grandchildren – the future generations. While we can learn and draw from the past we should not be prisoners of it. This Agreement is this generation's response to the difficulties we find ourselves in now. Previous generations had their response and, no doubt, future generations will make their decisions also. They must be free to do so. This Agreement leaves all options open for future generations. I ask those people who are genuinely concerned to think deeply about the future.

We are reformulating Articles 2 and 3; we are not removing them. The new wording will be better and stronger. The revised Article 2 states that everyone born on the island of Ireland will have a constitutional right to

Irish nationality. That wording does not draw a distinction between people born in the North and those born in the South. Furthermore, as this amendment to the Constitution has been approved by the two sovereign Governments of Ireland and Britain, there is international recognition of Ireland's assertion that persons born anywhere in Ireland have the right to be regarded as Irish citizens. At present, the right of a person in Northern Ireland to Irish citizenship is based on the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956, but it is only a one-sided recognition.

The revised Article 3 contains a recognition that a united Ireland shall be brought about by peaceful means and only through consent. I approve of this new departure of writing into our Constitution the possibility of a united Ireland. Furthermore, it will have international recognition because this Agreement has been approved by the two sovereign Governments.

I appeal to all parties not to play politics with this Agreement. They should be consistent in what they say inside and outside this House. This is a new era for Ireland and I appeal to the people to have the confidence and courage to make decisions for their future. They should not be afraid of change. I ask everyone in the North and South to support this Agreement.

Mr. Briscoe

This is one of the great historic occasions in this House. Between my father and myself, we have been in this House since 1927. There were also some great occasions during his time here.

We all want our names in the record of this House as having spoken in favour of this Agreement which will be passed because the people are sensible. This Agreement is about reconciliation. People need to know what reconciliation means and how important it is to extend the hand

of friendship to each other. When one meets people of the Unionist persuasion from the North travelling abroad, they are as proud to admit that they come from the island of Ireland as we are.

There are people caught in a time warp and it will be difficult to move them out of it. These people do not want to change. I heard tonight on the 10 o'clock news that a Catholic was killed in Portadown. The people who carry out such killings are Neanderthals who are not fit to take part in a political process since they have shown they are not capable of using their brains.

My heartiest congratulations to everyone on the Unionist and Nationalist sides, particularly Mr. John Hume, Mr. Seamus Mallon and the SDLP who have done a wonderful job over the years and worked hard for peace. Let us hope this dream is coming true.

Mr. Kirk

I thank you, a Cheann Comhairle, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this important debate. Many Members are anxious to speak on this historic occasion. I congratulate the parties and people involved in negotiating the Agreement. It is an historic achievement to find the common ground between the various groups in the North.

The road to peace has been long and tortuous. Despite the fact that the North's population is relatively small, it has endured many years of hardship. A harmonious and peaceful environment in the North will quickly bring clear and tangible benefits. The structures which have been negotiated have the potential to develop fairly quickly.

As someone who represents a constituency in the north-east which is near to the North and has probably the greatest number of displaced people from the Six Counties, there is a keen appreciation of what is involved. My constituency of Louth has suffered considerably in

economic terms because of the Northern troubles. We are looking forward to days of greater prosperity where closely integrated economic development in the North and South will bring significant benefits not only to Louth but across the country. The Border counties have suffered because of the difficulty of attracting investment to the area.

This is an opportunity to congratulate the various personalities for finally bringing the Agreement to fruition. The Taoiseach has played a pivotal role. We should also congratulate people such as Mr. John Hume and Mr. Seamus Mallon who have toiled tirelessly over the years to bring about this great day. We wish all the parties well and we hope the Agreement will bring great success to the nation.

Ms O'Sullivan

I wish to share my time with Deputy McManus.

An Ceann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Ms O'Sullivan

It is a great privilege for me in my first speech in this House to contribute to this historic debate. It is encouraging that so many Members of the House have shown their support for the Agreement. It is important to have this extended debate and that elected representatives of all parties voice their support for the Good Friday Agreement.

This Agreement has the capacity to transform political, economic and social life on this island. As other speakers have said, there are many people to praise and thank for the work they have done on the Agreement reached in Castle Buildings on Good Friday. The Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of State at the Department

of Foreign Affairs and their team of civil servants and advisers deserve our gratitude and respect for the huge efforts they put into the process since taking office and especially during the final stages of negotiations in Stormont. The role of the two Governments was critical in this process since its inception. I extend my congratulations to them on the momentous work that produced the Agreement on Good Friday.

In common with all Members of this House, I have carefully studied the text of the Agreement. It is probably one of the finest uses of the English language I have seen. It is carefully balanced and finely worded. It is fair and imaginative and it seeks to produce a solution to the years of heartache and terror which the people of this island, particularly in Northern Ireland, have endured. The Agreement is based on respect, compromise and consent. It is a document whose language is inclusive, generous and respects diversity. It is part of the tragedy of modern Northern Irish politics that these values have until recently been overshadowed by the twisted values engendered by the bomb and the bullet. For the first time in decades we have a real opportunity to move beyond sectarianism and division and to create a new future for all the people of Northern Ireland.

This document acknowledges the complex nature of society in Northern Ireland. Under the heading, "Constitutional Issues", it states that the two Governments will "recognise the birthright of all the people of Northern Ireland to identify themselves and be accepted as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose". This language is particularly liberating rather than constraining. It sheds a new light on how society in Northern Ireland is changing and how people are beginning to grasp their identities in a more complex way than they did in the past. Over the coming weeks and months strong and brave leadership will be vital to ensure that this opportunity is grasped. No one can say it will be easy. In fact, tonight's news is an indication of how difficult it will be.

The leadership that has been shown by all participants to talks in the

recent past has been commendable. It gives us all hope for the future and that the potential in the Agreement will be harnessed to achieve a better island for all its inhabitants. Most speakers have alluded to the credit due to political parties and how much this has done for people's perception of the political process. I agree with that, but another section of society deserves our recognition and gratitude, the multitude of community and voluntary organisations that have worked, often behind the scenes, to foster trust and understanding between the divided communities in Northern Ireland. Those groups and their courage and dedication throughout the years have helped in no small measure to pave the way for this Agreement. I refer to the various people who worked to build cross community understanding in the past few years, groups like the Corrymeela Community, the Society of Friends and others who have worked assiduously to bring people together who may have distrusted each other, but learned to trust each other. The Minister, Deputy Martin, referred to that in his contribution. I also had the opportunity to meet people in that context and it was enlightening to see that when people are brought together they can understand each other's point of view and respect each other's right to hold a different viewpoint. The influence and ground work these people have worked so tirelessly to achieve will prove invaluable over the coming weeks as we, the citizens of both jurisdictions, prepare to vote on this settlement. They have chipped away very carefully and patiently and if they had not done that we would not have been able to take the various steps culminating in the Agreement on Good Friday.

We in the Republic have a huge role to play in this process and the Members of this House and Seanad Éireann must work very hard on this over the coming weeks. The referendum and plebiscite to be held on both sides of the Border on 22 May is one of the most important dates the people on this island will have with the ballot box. We have a responsibility to ensure that the electorate in this State understand the choice put in front of them and that as many of them as possible fully endorse the historic Agreement. It will be the overwhelming assent of all

the people on this island which will ultimately secure the future of this Agreement. In the recent past we have had referenda where voter turnout has been low. The responsibility rests with us to ensure that does not happen on 22 May. There is also an important duty on us to explain that the changes in Articles 2 and 3 of the Constitution are an integral and positive part of this Agreement. I welcome the support that aspect of the Agreement has got in this House. It is crucial that we persuade the Irish people of the importance of these changes and of their positive aspect.

The Agreement reached in Stormont represents a victory for common sense over the forces of evil. It presents us with the structures to develop a new political reality on the island of Ireland. It presents no side with a victory and every side with a future. It will take a long time to build that future just as it takes a long time to forgive the people who murdered a loved one or to recover from the bitterness of a generation of violence. There are names that still resonate across the recent history of these islands, Darkley, Enniskillen, Greysteel, Warrington and many more. Every vote for peace in the coming referendum is a way of saying never again will we allow our future and the future of our children to be dictated by violence or coercion. Every vote for peace is a way of saying yes to a better future for all on this island of Ireland. The unity of purpose displayed in this House is an excellent start in bringing this message to every home in the country. It behoves us all to continue this work up to polling day to ensure that this island never again revisits the dark days that cloud so much of our history.

There is great hope for the future in what we are discussing here today, but it will not happen unless there is also great effort on all sides and an effort to forgive and move forward. The future of our country is very positive on this day.

Ms McManus

I, too, congratulate everybody who has participated in reaching this Agreement, all those who have been named and those who were working in the background who cannot be named because we do not know their names. It is a great triumph for politics that this Agreement has been delivered. It is also a triumph against the dark forces of violence and sectarianism. It is living proof of the old Churchillian axiom, jaw-jaw is better than war-war.

I was a participant at the talks in Stormont in the very early days. At that time the road ahead appeared very rocky. We were looking through a very dark mirror. I do not believe anybody felt anything but a sense that we had a very long way to travel and the possibility of failure was not something anybody could easily dismiss. Even at that point the basic shape of the Agreement was defined in the three strands. The detail was not defined in people's heads or on paper, but it was taking shape and the new edifice is now defined in considerable detail in the Agreement.

I noted that the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, used an architectural analogy when he spoke about this being a good design and that the buildings still had to be constructed. Deputy Quinn also used architectural analogy when he referred to the complexity of this Agreement and that its creativity reminded him of the building of a Gothic cathedral. When I trained as an architect I remember an engineering lecturer made the point, which was very reassuring to us as apprentice architects, that no building ever falls down unless it really has to. The building that will be produced as a result of this design has a good chance of holding up because its foundations were laid in a way that those of the Sunningdale Agreement were not. The foundations of this Agreement were laid on discussion, open debate and inclusion over considerable time and considerable commitment by all parties to ensure that the people, particularly those of Northern Ireland, might have some sense of ownership of it. It will stand because the alternative is too chilling for us to contemplate.

I have lived and worked in Northern Ireland and my first job as an architect was based there. Although there was violence when I was living there, it was not only violence that threatened daily life there. Life lived in that place, in its typography, in the way people communicate at work, in social connections and even in personal relationships, is circumscribed by sectarianism. That is a fact of life and one we will have to face for some time to come. It is not a normal life. It is distorted by hatred and disabled very often by suspicion and fear. It is worth noting that we have not managed in our past to avoid the ill effects of sectarianism. Older people in this House will remember expressions of sectarianism.

It was interesting to discover a good deal more about Archbishop McQuaid and the reality of what it meant to be something other than a Catholic in Ireland in the not too distant past. I was touched by Bishop Walsh's apology to all those affected by the *ne temere* decree. It was something that nobody took great notice of unless one was directly affected. I wish to record my thanks for that apology.

This Agreement provides what the Opsahl Commission referred to in its preface as a clearing in the jungle, but it will not provide an absolute and complete solution on its own. It offers the possibility of solutions. However, there are constitutional issues still outstanding. People might be surprised to hear me say that since there is obviously major constitutional change proposed for this part of the island. I and my party fully support that change and will take an active part in the referenda campaign. There is to be constitutional change in relation to the British Government's role, but it is ring-fenced within Northern Ireland. This is an issue which we must consider because in the foreseeable future there will be a sizeable minority living within the British state. An accident of history put them there for the foreseeable future. Devolution, as started by Prime Minister Mr. Blair is a very good thing, but it is not a replacement for constitutional change at the centre. We need to consider that in relation to the British constitution under which Northern

Nationalists must live many decisions will still be made at Westminster which will still be the seat of power, and that there are clear fundamental differences of view between the British constitution and the Irish Nationalist and republican perspective. That is a reality.

I do not accept the rather facile argument of Mr. Tim Pat Coogan that somehow we will see an outbreeding by the Nationalist community relatively quickly which will sort out the problem. People must have a sense of belonging even though the state is inimical to them, or certainly has traditionally been inimical to them.

Our experience and tradition stem largely from the republican principles of 1798. We see ourselves as citizens of our State while the British see themselves as subjects of their state. There is a fundamental difference between the two perspectives. The Nationalist and republican community in Northern Ireland sees its relationship the way we do; they have our traditions and allegiances. That creates dilemmas and questions, not just for Northern Nationalists but, indeed, for the many people, within England, Wales and Scotland, who want to see their state constitutionally changed and modernised. They want to get rid of an extraordinary provision whereby 21 bishops from a particular denomination automatically have a place in the House of Lords. That kind of sectarian provision would be unacceptable here. There is a monarch who is the defender of the faith. When Prince Charles made the rather good proposal that he wanted to become instead the defender of the mixture of faiths in Britain, he was hammered by the Establishment.

We must consider changes which are larger and wider than ones which are included in this Agreement. We must acknowledge that whether there is a united Ireland or the Border remains into the foreseeable future, there will always be a sizeable minority with a different allegiance.

On the question of remembrance, we need to make clear efforts to establish a mechanism such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in South Africa which has produced extraordinary results. There is great bitterness, hurt, sorrow and tragedy and people are not being given a chance to find their way through that bitterness and sorrow. The families of the Bloody Sunday atrocity were able to achieve an inquiry through great resilience and determination, but there are thousands of families some of which have not even had the solace of being able to find the victims who have disappeared. We must not forget them. In the Agreement there is not enough recognition of the need to respect their loss in a formalised way. We do not remember the names of the people who died in the civil war in 1923. We cannot even say the numbers who died then. Let us remember the names as well as the numbers when it comes to recording all those who have lost their lives and who were maimed, hurt and damaged by what has happened over the past decades.

Ms Hanafin

I want to share my time with Deputies Moynihan, Pat Carey, Eoin Ryan and Matt Brennan.

The history of Ireland in the second millennium is a history of a people engaged in an enduring and abiding quest for freedom. It is a history of a people who, throughout every age and generation, have made manifest their desire to be free. It is a history of struggle, disappointment and hope.

It is fitting that in the final years of this millennium the hope of freedom, which for so long has been cherished, should blossom into an agreement which recognises the rights of Irish people to be free. This historic Agreement will highlight the road to Irish freedom.

Our right to freedom is no longer denied. It is accepted. What remains is

for Irish people to convince other Irish people that our future lies together. Gone is the ancient impediment. Gone is the claim of another country to be entitled to rule this island as of right. Gone is the claim of the United Kingdom to be entitled to rule any portion of this island as of right.

As a result of this Agreement Ireland can be united when the people of Ireland decide. After generations of effort we have reached the stage when the words of Ireland's most recent Nobel Laureate, Séamus Heaney, can be applied to his own island:

And suddenly you're through, arraigned yet freed, as if you'd passed from behind a waterfall.

Today we have an opportunity to unite as a people bringing all shades of political opinion together. We recognise cultural and ethnic diversity. We have moved away from the closed mindsets which give rise to conflict, either national or ethnic, and into a time of recognition and acceptance.

We live in an era of tolerance. This week we witness peace talks in Israel, Sri Lanka, Korea and Afghanistan. The spirit of co-operation generated in Northern Ireland can give hope to leaders everywhere that peace and reconciliation are attainable.

The Agreement reached on Good Friday is based on selflessness, integrity, strength and courage. It is the culmination of years of work by many great leaders, captained in the final stages by the Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Andrews.

It provides people, North and South, with a challenge to move forward in harmony and friendship. Rights, equality and opportunities are guaranteed. The vision of a new Ireland is enshrined.

Fáiltím roimh stádas na Gaeilge sa chomhaontas. Nach iontach an rud é Rialtas na Breataine a fheiceáil ag tabhairt tacaíocht don Ghaeilge. Cabhróidh sé go mór le leathnú labhairt na teanga, múineadh, craoladh agus úsáid na Gaeilge.

Ach tá sé thar a bheith tábhachtach nach gcoimeádfadh aon dream nó aon pháirtí amháin úinéireacht ar an nGaeilge. The Irish language belongs to the Irish people of every age and generation, of every religion and every political background. It does not and must not belong to a particular social group or party. It is at the core of our diverse national identity.

It is a great privilege to be a Member of this Dáil, to contribute to debates on justice and education, to legislate and participate in governing this country. It is exciting to be a political representative with a young Taoiseach who can work so closely with other young leaders like Prime Minister Blair and President Clinton.

A whole generation of young politicians in Northern Ireland have never had that opportunity – never debated, contributed, decided or participated. Political leaders have devoted their whole lives to finding a peaceful settlement, but now the new generation can play a role in determining their own destiny.

The role of women in the peace process is evident since the 1970s in support groups and organisations, and more recently in the negotiations. The political role denied them for so long can now be realised.

Cross-Border initiatives, which have been ongoing for many years, can now be put on a formal and legal footing. Young people who have twinned with schools, and tourism and sporting ventures have led the way to co-operation which can now be developed.

The absence of violence creates an environment in which new relations based on recognition and respect can grow both between North and South and within Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is well placed to grow socially, culturally, politically and economically. It is at the bridgehead of the most successful economy in western Europe, the Irish economy.

Northern Ireland at peace will have the benefit of American goodwill and regeneration programmes and its success can be managed by the people of Ireland. Only the Irish people can decide whether to accept this Agreement. The decision is ours alone. The sculpting of this Agreement took leadership and courage. It took determination to face up to issues which have been the source of division. Courage and leadership were needed to construct the Agreement and courage and leadership are needed to bring about acceptance of the Agreement by the people. Progress can never be achieved by clinging to the past. There is a time when the fighting has ended, the debate is over, the listening is done and action is required, and now is that time. I can think of no better words to offer to the Irish people at this historic time than those written by James Joyce in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, "Let go, let fly, forget; you have listened long enough, now strike your note."

Mr. M. Moynihan

Ba mhaith liom buíochas agus comhghairdeas a thabhairt don Taoiseach agus do na hAirí a bhí i mBéal Feirste. I am delighted and privileged to be a Member of the Oireachtas at such an exciting time in Irish history. I compliment the work of the Taoiseach and the Ministers who were involved in the peace talks in the North and brought them to a successful conclusion on Good Friday. I compliment all the other Members of the House, past and present, who were involved in bringing about this historic Agreement. The matters discussed in the weeks leading up to the Agreement had been discussed on many occasions previously, but on this occasion the talks were all-inclusive, with every

section of society involved to bring about peace on the island. It behoves every Member of this House and all the people, North and South, to give full support to this Agreement on 22 May.

In recent days people have had reservations about changes to the Constitution. For the first time it will be laid down not only in Irish legislation but also in British legislation that the Irish people, North and South, have a right to belong to the Irish nation. That will allay the fears in regard to constitutional change.

Looking at what happened on Good Friday and listening to the television on that fateful day it came across loud and clear that the vast majority of people, particularly in the Six Counties, considered the Agreement as a means of getting away from the dreadful past and the tragedies of the previous 30 years. We must put our full weight behind this Agreement because the alternative is dire. Irish people, North and South, must move forward on this historic Agreement. We must move forward in peace and harmony and work together for the betterment of all.

Mr. P. Carey

Many of us recall where we were at significant times in our lives. I was in Johannesburg airport on the way back from the inter-parliamentary union conference when the peace Agreement was announced. I was moved, as were members of the public of all creeds, class and colour from across the world who gathered around the television set in the airport lounge. The out-pouring of goodwill towards the peace settlement was truly emotional.

John F. Kennedy's remarks in his inaugural address in January 1961 come to mind: "Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate". If that attitude did not permeate the discussions of parliamentarians north and south of the Border and in the UK in recent

years we would not have reached the present position. It is a great privilege to be in this House tonight to speak strongly in favour of this peace Agreement. It is a truly remarkable Agreement. It is a tribute to the dedication of the parliamentary process and the success of democracy. I pay tribute to the Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs, successive Taoisigh and many people who are not here for the work they have done. I remember the 21st anniversary celebration by Jim Tunney who was a Member of this House and one of his guests of honour on the night was Chris McGimpsey from the Ulster Unionist Party. From the reaction of the people there, it seemed Mr. McGimpsey had several heads. I look forward to the day when we can interact with such parliamentarians on a normal basis.

I pay tribute to the many people in this House who held significant and sensitive Ministries for the way they defended democracy, particularly in the past 30 years. They often placed their lives and those of their families at risk. This Agreement is testament to their achievement. This country will be transformed by cross-Border bodies. The education system and voluntary and community organisations have a huge part to play and I look forward to them being leading lights in breaking down the barriers of sectarianism which have blighted this country in recent years. We have come a long way from Burntollet Bridge and I salute all the people who contributed to achieving a successful outcome to the journey.

Mr. E. Ryan

I am delighted to support the motion on the Agreement reached on Good Friday in Belfast. This is the most positive day in this House. This Agreement will bring about profound and positive changes for all of this island. We pass many motions and Bills and hope they will bring about positive change, but I have no doubt that huge changes will be made by this legislation. We spent many days here condemning violence, condemning the IRA and Unionist paramilitaries for committing murder

and other heinous crimes, and it is great to be here discussing the future in a positive way.

I wish to add my tributes and thanks to those Members, past and present, who made a contribution to the forging of this historic accord, the members of the Government delegation led by the Taoiseach, Deputy Ahern, and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Andrews, ably assisted by the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell. They deserve the highest praise for their efforts, particularly in the crucial last weeks of negotiation. They brought to fruition the work of past Governments and leaders such as Charles Haughey, Garret FitzGerald, Deputy Albert Reynolds and Deputy John Bruton, Ministers such as Deputy Spring and officials who served with them. The Agreement is the culmination of the painstaking and courageous efforts of the Irish and British sides in Anglo-Irish relations over two decades.

I also wish to mention people such as Dr. Martin Mansergh and Dave Donoghue who worked so hard in the North on our behalf. Enormous credit is due to party leadership in both communities for their courage and vision in securing agreement despite the difficulties involved. I wish to mention in particular John Hume and Seamus Mallon as well as a person who, I am happy to say, deserves enormous praise for his courage, David Trimble.

There are many other unsung heroes on both sides who took brave and courageous steps to bridge the sectarian divide at a time of active and appallingly violent conflict. The name of Fr. Alec Reid immediately springs to mind in this regard. Brought face to face with the reality of the conflict he persevered and reminded those who needed it of the potential of peace to redeem, to make better the prospects for all, to transcend the barriers which sustained the conflict and to achieve what violence postponed – the ending of division and the beginning of a new era in relations between the people of this island. In time history may shed light on all those who, like Fr. Reid, helped inch forward the peace

process. For now let us pay tribute to them as contributing architects of the Good Friday Agreement. They deserve our most profound gratitude.

This Agreement represents a threshold, a dividing line between one philosophy and another. With this Agreement we have consigned to history a dark philosophy, reflected on both sides of the divide and based on force and coercion. In its place we are enshrining a new ethic based on consent and agreement. In place of division and mistrust, we have placed politics and persuasion.

The dynamic of consent, persuasive politics and agreement is prevalent throughout the Agreement. This dynamic has been applied to the real and imagined obstacles to the trust and confidence required of a peaceful and just settlement. It has also been applied to Articles 2 and 3 of our Constitution. Many Members will find constitutional change a matter of discomfort and, perhaps, uncertainty. However, the change is an essential recognition that relations on this island and the traditions which inform them are about people. The united Ireland anticipated by our Constitution can only come about with the consent of those involved, namely, a majority of the people, North and South.

The dynamic of consent and agreement informs the institutions of Northern Ireland and the structures for North-South co-operation. The internal mechanism for decision-making is based on the parallel consent of both communities within the assembly and mutual agreement within the North-South Council. Similarly, every institution in Northern Ireland is obliged to obey the legal and binding strictures of equality and rights which are laid out in detail in the Agreement.

The dynamic of this Agreement is obvious. It seeks to nurture and encourage the greatest possible degree of agreement, based on consent and equality on this island between the various people and traditions that share it. If we are to secure the unity to which we aspire, I can think of no other way to achieve it. The Agreement is a blueprint of how we

can achieve this kind of concord and conciliation between the people of Ireland on whom the future depends. I commend the Agreement with the deepest conviction to the House and to the people of both parts of this island whose judgment is required if words are to be turned into reality.

Mr. M. Brennan

I join other Members in expressing delight and satisfaction at the successful outcome of the Northern Ireland talks. I offer my congratulations to everyone who took part in those negotiations. I say "well done" to each of them for the qualities of leadership, judgment and common sense they showed in putting aside many of their differences so that this historic and important Agreement could be reached. I pay tribute to the leaders who for many years had the courage to continue the fight.

Our deepest gratitude is due to the Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern, his predecessors, Deputies John Bruton and Albert Reynolds, Charles Haughey and Seán Lemass, Senator Mitchell, John Hume and Gerry Adams who started the peace negotiations. These men deserve much credit as does President Clinton who provided Gerry Adams with a visa to travel to America to discuss peace in this country. It is great to see how many people worked for peace in Ireland in recent months.

Good Friday will go down in history as the day on which the deal was clinched. The people of this country, North and South, have a unique opportunity to set aside the differences which have divided Unionists and Nationalists for many generations. It is my sincere hope that peace will prevail on this island and that the referendum will be passed on 22 May.

Mr. McGrath

I wish to share time with Deputies Bradford, Timmins, Perry and Naughten.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Mr. McGrath

I must express my disappointment that we have not been given additional time to speak on this issue. Members' contributions have been curtailed and it is a pity that additional time was not provided. The euphoria of the House has been tempered by another murder in Northern Ireland. It appears that this was a sectarian act and I am disappointed it took place.

I congratulate the Taoiseach and the Government for achieving what, until recently, seemed to be unobtainable. We pay tribute to previous Governments that paved the way for their success and I must refer to two people in this regard, Dr. Garret Fitzgerald, for his work in the 1970s and 1980s, and my constituency colleague, Deputy Albert Reynolds, who did so much to achieve what seemed to be unobtainable by securing peace and a ceasefire in August 1994.

I must also refer to Senator George Mitchell who chaired the talks as his skills, patience, dedication and enthusiasm played a crucial role in making the Agreement possible. I propose that he should be recognised by the people and by this House. I suggest he should be made an honorary citizen and I hope the Tánaiste, Deputy Harney, will take that on board because it would be a fitting tribute to a man who has given much of the past two years of his life to securing peace in Ireland.

I appeal to the electorate, particularly in County Westmeath, to show their enthusiasm for this balanced Agreement by turning out in large

numbers on polling day and offering an overwhelming endorsement of its terms.

Mr. Bradford

I add my support to the motion. I fully welcome the Agreement reached between the Governments and the parties and I look forward to its being passed by the people, North and South, on 22 May.

It must be stressed that we are discussing an agreement, not a settlement. The word "settlement" is very final, emotive and strong. It is about winners and losers. An agreement is about give and take and that is what we are discussing in this debate. Irish people have a tendency to replay history, often to suit ourselves, and to predict the future with certainty. We should not do so, we should hope that a settlement will be reached by future generations. If the members of the current generation can learn to stop killing each other and begin working together, we can let future generations reach the settlement to which I referred.

I welcome the fact that the North-South bodies will be established in the strong fashion demanded by Nationalist Ireland, which has been agreed by both Governments. That is important. I look forward to observing the workings of the new Northern Ireland assembly. I hope it will allow new young politicians from all sides of the divide to emerge. I welcome the debate on constitutional change because it will test our maturity as a people. The Agreement involves giving a little and getting a little in return. I support it wholeheartedly and I look forward to the people of Ireland, North and South, giving it their support on 22 May.

Mr. Timmins

For many of us, the conflict in Northern Ireland has always been present. It had evolved into a constant and had almost become part of the culture of this island. We grew up with the image of atrocity after

atrocities and all that lay before us was a long dark tunnel. There were some rays of hope along the way in the form of Sunningdale and the Anglo-Irish Agreement. While in recent years we felt that there may be something in the offing, we shielded ourselves against disappointment. The vision, sacrifice and commitment of many people have brought us to the point of a brand new dawn. In "As You Like It", in referring to the exits and entries of man, Shakespeare states: "And one man in his time plays many parts, His acts being seven ages." Several men and women have certainly played their part.

This Agreement is only the beginning and its success depends on the commitment of those who reached it. There are many elements outside the process who do not want it to work. Between now and 22 May they will make many exaggerated claims. However, I believe the people of this island are no longer preoccupied with lines on a map but rather holes in the ground. For too long we have had "closing time" republicans and loyalists who never took time to reflect on the lowering of a young father or mother into a new grave. Where do these elements wish to take us, what have they in store and what alternative do they offer?

Let us not forget the many people who have been murdered. While we rejoice in new hope let us spare a moment for the many mothers who sit tonight looking at portraits of sons and daughters, some of whom have never received a decent burial. Having been involved in the search for Don Tidey at Ballinamore, I particularly remember Private Kelly and trainee Garda Sheehan, both murdered at Derrada Wood. Many decent and innocent families have been destroyed and nothing can rectify that fact. Let us give the men of violence a clear answer on 22 May. I must reiterate my party leader's view that this Agreement should not be seen as a basis for advancement by any one group, and I regret Deputy Ó Caoláin's statement that he sees it as such.

Mr. Perry

I welcome the opportunity to speak to the House on this historic Agreement. The political agreement concluded by all the participating parties on Good Friday represents a major breakthrough. It is an enormous privilege to be a Member of this House at this important time in history.

This is an historic time for the people of these islands and the importance of the weeks ahead cannot be underestimated. We must work together to ensure the success of this Agreement by commending it wholeheartedly to the people who will vote in the referendum on 22 May. That is the greatest compliment we can pay to the courage and commitment of all those who worked tirelessly over the years to bring it about.

The important declaration which was signed by all the participating parties sums up the position quite well. It states:

The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.

We are committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between these islands.

They are important principles.

This country, particularly the Border counties, can gain enormous benefits from the Programme for National Recovery and the peace and reconciliation funding. This is an important day and one we will all remember.

Mr. Naughten

It is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to speak on this historic Agreement, particularly as I am the youngest Member of this House. All the individuals involved in this process over the years must be complimented on helping to reach this Agreement, including my constituency colleague, Deputy Albert Reynolds. We must now look forward to the future of this island as a whole.

The young people of Ireland have seen nothing but murder and beatings over the past 30 years. We now have a unique opportunity to build trust and destroy the bigotry which has been part of Irish politics for generations. I urge the people on both parts of this island to visit the other part, meet the genuine people there and help break down the mistrust and bigotry which have built up over the years.

People have visited many European countries and travelled worldwide, yet few have travelled across the Border other than to shop or purchase petrol. We must break down the psychological divide on this island before we can bring about lasting peace in both communities, North and South. I appeal to young people to lead by example, to meet young people on the other side of the Border and help break down the bigotry that has destroyed communities on both sides of the Border. That is the only way we will solve this problem.

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment (Miss Harney)

At the opening of this debate this afternoon, the Taoiseach asked

everyone to rise to the occasion presented by the Agreement reached in Belfast on Good Friday. I believe the House has done so, from the standing ovation given to the Taoiseach at the end of his contribution, which is probably unprecedented, to the magnanimous comments made on all sides of this House. The people's representatives have clearly demonstrated the people's wish. We are witnessing history in the making and, as the Taoiseach said at the conclusion of his contribution, momentous days and weeks lie ahead.

Victory was achieved in Belfast on Good Friday. We saw the victory of parliamentarianism over paramilitarism, the victory of talk over terror and, hopefully, the final victory of the ballot box over the gun and the bomb. Everybody in this House who has shared Government over the past number of years can share in that victory because each party has played its part, from Sean Lemass in the early 1960s to Garret FitzGerald, Charles Haughey, Deputies Albert Reynolds, John Bruton and the Taoiseach, Deputy Bertie Ahern.

I want to pay a special tribute to the outstanding Irish officials who have worked tirelessly with successive Governments to bring about the Agreement. In particular, I want to pay tribute to the officials in the Department of Foreign Affairs, led on this occasion by the Secretary-General, Dermot Gallagher, and the officials in the Department of the Taoiseach, led by Paddy Teahon. They have done an outstanding job which the people of Ireland and future generations greatly appreciate.

Like all political agreements, the Belfast Agreement is based on compromise. Two years of talking produced a successful outcome because the two traditions accepted and recognised certain basic realities. For their part, Nationalists recognised that the principle of consent applies, and that Northern Ireland will remain within the United Kingdom for as long as that is the wish of the majority of its people.

Equally, the majority community recognise the stark reality that, even

within the United Kingdom, a state that is 43 per cent Nationalist cannot be 100 per cent Unionist: there had to be an all-island dimension. The result is an historic compromise which can provide the basis for a new beginning in Northern Ireland.

We might ask whether this Agreement could have been reached 25 years ago. I think it probably could but the political learning curve in Northern Ireland has not been particularly steep and the pace of change there has at times seemed almost glacial.

Seamus Mallon, in his own inimitable style, has characterised this Agreement as Sunningdale for slow learners. It is important to realise, however, that not all the slow learners were to be found in Northern Ireland.

The fact that agreement is now possible is not unrelated to the enormous changes that have taken place and are taking place in Ireland, in the United Kingdom and in Europe. Down here, attitudes to Northern Ireland have been transformed over the past 30 years. As our own society gradually became more liberal, more tolerant and more inclusive, our understanding of the complexities of the Northern problem deepened. Simplistic solutions were rejected. Time and time again the use of violence for political ends was comprehensively rejected by the people. Instead, we developed an openness to explore new avenues, pursue new initiatives and seek new accommodations. Effectively, the famous handshake between Sean Lemass and O'Neill more than 30 years ago marked the beginning of a long process that culminated in the signing of the Good Friday accord.

The United Kingdom is also changing. The changes that are taking place are the most significant in centuries. The Blair Government is set to achieve nothing less than the constitutional transformation of the United Kingdom over the next few years. The British regions will be given greater autonomy, Wales will get its own assembly and Scotland will

secure what is, in effect, home rule.

It is in this context of a changing Union that the new structures proposed for Northern Ireland must be seen. For years, British Governments resisted devolution for Northern Ireland lest they have to introduce it in Great Britain also. The devolution of power is now such a central part of British policy that it would have been difficult to exclude Northern Ireland from the process.

The pace of change in Europe too has been impressive. Three decades of ever closer political and economic integration have diminished the significance of frontiers in western Europe. Co-operation in the European context has brought the Irish and British peoples closer together and it has broken down much of the distrust that at one time bedevilled the relationship between us.

The new Agreement provides the current generation of political leaders in Northern Ireland with a marvellous and exciting opportunity. It gives them a chance to make a new political beginning and to create a new political order. The only kind of society that will succeed in Northern Ireland is a partnership society in which both traditions are afforded equal respect and recognition. That is the kind of society envisaged in this Agreement.

The Agreement provides sensible and workable solutions to the problems of a divided society. The strand one arrangements provide all the safeguards needed to ensure that both sections of the community can work together successfully in the operation of the new assembly and its committees.

The principle of cross-community support is built into the very fabric of the new arrangements. Decisions will be taken either on the basis of parallel consent or weighted majority voting. Either way, neither community will be able to dominate the other.

Co-operation is set to replace confrontation as the central feature of political activity in Northern Ireland. Provided the political will exists, Northern Ireland can become one of the most prosperous and successful societies in Europe. For 30 years political violence and civil instability prevented Northern Ireland from achieving its full potential. Normal politics in Northern Ireland has, to all intents and purposes, been dead for the past 25 years. Some would say it has been dead for the past 75 years.

For decades there has only been one item on the political agenda in Northern Ireland – the constitutional question. The 108 members of the new assembly will now have to start grappling with the same problems we have to grapple with in this House – health, education, transport, industrial development, unemployment and social exclusion. They face a daunting challenge but I have no doubt that they will rise to it.

If the talks process has shown us anything it is that Northern Ireland is blessed with several political leaders of quite considerable stature and ability right across the spectrum. I have great confidence in their ability to shape an entirely new society in Northern Ireland.

Strand two of the Agreement provides for the establishment of a North-South Ministerial Council, with implementation bodies working on an all-island, cross-Border basis. That is the "Irish dimension" which has been recognised for more than 20 years as a prerequisite for any political settlement. Some would argue that the problem in Northern Ireland is that Unionists outnumber Nationalists not by a large but by a small margin. The demographic profile of the North has shifted significantly in recent decades and the Nationalist percentage of the population has

increased. The most recent census in 1991 showed that there were Nationalist majorities in 11 of the 26 council districts, with a clear Nationalist majority west of the Bann. A modern state cannot be run on a sectarian headcount — that is what created this problem in the first place — but account has to be taken of the demographic realities in framing a solution to the Northern Ireland problem.

Not all Nationalists necessarily want a united Ireland, but they want full and proper recognition of their Irish identity, and this Agreement delivers that. The signing of the Belfast accord can pave the way for a new era of reconciliation and understanding in both parts of this island. I do not want to underestimate the scale of the difficulties involved — eighty years of almost continuous sectarian strife have left a legacy of bitterness and mistrust which will take a long time to overcome. Nevertheless, the early signs are encouraging.

The decision by the GAA to hold a special congress to consider changing rule 21 is very welcome. The association deserves particular commendation for the approach it has taken. The ban on members of the British security forces taking part in GAA activities is understandable in the context of Ireland's troubled history, but the Agreement signed in Belfast on Good Friday charts an entirely new political course for this island, and a new political relationship between this country and Britain. In this context I hope that, when it comes to rule 21, the GAA will be able to make its own momentous contribution to the peace process. I hope also that the British authorities will see fit to end their occupation of the Crossmaglen Rangers GAA grounds in south Armagh. The two issues may not necessarily be directly linked, but if we are to have confidence building measures, they must come from all sides.

We in the Republic also have our part to play when it comes to confidence building. As part of our contribution to resolving this problem we are being asked next month to amend our Constitution to remove the territorial claim to Northern Ireland. I am particularly pleased

to see that this is happening because it was one of the founding tenets of the Progressive Democrats in 1985. There are many people worried about the dropping of the territorial claim who may be worried for the wrong reasons. It will be incumbent on all supporters of this settlement to offer guidance and reassurance to the electorate. Will changing the Constitution make Northern Nationalists any less Irish than they are now? No, it will not. Will changing the Constitution deprive Northern Nationalists of their rights to Irish citizenship in any way? No, it will not. Will changing the Constitution diminish the fervent aspiration of many Irish people to achieve the ultimate unity of this island? No, it will not.

We in the South should also look beyond constitutional change when it comes to confidence building measures. We want to see parity of esteem for Nationalists in the North, and rightly so, but what kind of esteem have we shown to the Unionist tradition over the years? Are we prepared to preserve buildings which are associated with prominent figures in Unionism such as Carson, and maintain them as historic sites? Are we prepared to see the site of the Battle of the Boyne become the centre of a major annual commemoration, in which those of the Unionist tradition would be invited to play a prominent part? That is not to say there has been no recognition of the Unionist tradition in the South — far from it. It is ironic in the extreme that, at a time when there is massive controversy about the routing of Orange marches in Northern Ireland, the first Orange march of each season takes place every year without incident in Rossnowlagh in County Donegal.

The Belfast Agreement is not an a la carte menu — one cannot cherrypick the bits one likes and discard the unpalatable bits. One signs up for everything or for nothing.

The Agreement comprises a set of institutional and constitutional arrangements which are interlocking and interdependent — the Northern assembly, the North-South Ministerial Council implementation bodies, the British-Irish Council, the British-Irish Intergovernmental

Conference, and amendments to British legislation and the Irish Constitution. These arrangements are — and I cite the text of the Agreement itself — "so closely interrelated that the success of each one depends on that of the others".

All the participants will find at least some aspects of this package difficult to swallow; for my own part, as a member of the Cabinet sub-committee on Northern Ireland I have had to make tough decisions agreeing to the early release of people convicted of very serious terrorist offences. I did not find it easy, but I felt it my duty to do so. I felt I had to play my part to ensure that the essential confidence building measures were achieved. I felt I had to do my part to show that for those who abandon violence there is a real peace dividend available.

Many speakers in this debate have rightly expressed concern about those who are facing charges in relation to the murder of Garda Jerry McCabe. As the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform made clear in the House this afternoon, the Government has made it clear to all groups with which it has been in contact that those who might be convicted of the murder of Jerry McCabe do not fall within the ambit of this Agreement.

The fact is that all of the participants will have had to make compromises — that is what constitutional politics is all about. What has been agreed has been agreed. There can be no retrospective renegotiation by any side now. It is regrettable — but perhaps inevitable — that not everybody in this country is able to support the Belfast Agreement and campaign for a "yes" vote on polling day. The "no" campaign will certainly bring together some strange bedfellows. Lined up against the Agreement are the Democratic Unionists, the LVF, the IRSP, the INLA, Republican Sinn Féin and its paramilitary fellow travellers. All I can say is that if those are the people who are against it, I am glad I am for it.

For too long we have had to listen to the apostles of despair, North and South. It is ironic, to say the least, that after all these years, Ian Paisley and Ruairi Ó Brádaigh should finally find themselves on the same side of a political argument — they both say "no". I would ask questions of all those who oppose the Agreement. Do they have a better solution? Do they have any alternative to offer? Do they have any vision of the future to put before the people of this island? The answer in all cases would seem to be "no".

I do not want to finish without saying something about the role of women in the achievement of this historic settlement. For years women have been completely marginalised in the political process in Northern Ireland. Here we have got used to female Ministers, female Presidents, even a female Tánaiste, but women have not played similar roles in Northern politics until recently. It was refreshing to see major changes on this front in the current peace process. Several key players in the process were women — Mo Mowlam, Monica McWilliams, Bríd Rogers, Eileen Bell and many of the women in Sinn Féin played a leading role. As leader of the Progressive Democrats, I am particularly proud of the role played by my colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Liz O'Donnell. Not all of those women are part of the political system, but I hope that the achievements of the peace process and the role played in it by women will serve to encourage more women to take part in politics north of the Border. A start could be made in the forthcoming assembly elections, and I hope all the parties will make a real effort to bring forward more female candidates.

What happened at Stormont on Good Friday was the result of political effort. It was a triumph for politics over cynicism, and that is something of which everybody in this House should be proud.

Politics is not a popular profession these days and much of the media comment on politicians in recent times has drifted from criticism to cynicism.

The signing of the Belfast Agreement is a major achievement for the political process on both sides of the Border. Here, all five parties which have participated in Government in the last four years have made a significant contribution to the success of this enterprise. All can be proud of the role they played. On 22 May we will see the first exercise of democracy on an all-Ireland basis in almost 80 years. The historic and political significance of this event should not be lost on us. Militant republicans have always claimed democratic sanction for their actions in the general election of December 1918. That election was conducted on a 32-county basis, albeit within the United Kingdom, and Sinn Féin won 70 per cent of the seats. Long after mainstream nationalism had abandoned violence for political ends, the republican movement continued to use the 1918 election as a mandate for its military campaign. Now 22 May provides the people of this country with the chance to resolve this issue once and for all. A vote for the Agreement is a vote against violence in the clearest possible terms. Once the referenda have been carried, North and South, no group will be able to claim any kind of democratic justification for the use of violence. That is why 22 May will be a significant day in the history of our country. I call on all the people of this country, North and South, to support the Agreement and to support it enthusiastically, to give a clear and resounding message to those who have supported violence on all sides that the future of this country will be built by peace makers, not war makers.

I pay tribute to all those who have been involved in this process. The Governments led by Seán Lemass, Jack Lynch, Garret FitzGerald, Charles Haughey, Deputy Albert Reynolds and Deputy John Bruton have played a significant role. The role played by the Taoiseach in one of the most difficult weeks of his life made us all proud. I pay tribute to him, to the

Minister for Foreign Affairs, Deputy Andrews, and the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell. They have achieved a momentous and historic Agreement of which every right thinking person is proud. I hope the opportunity of 22 May will be used to show that it has widespread support.

Cuireadh agus aontaíodh an cheist.

Question put and agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

When is it proposed to take Committee Stage?

Miss Harney

Tomorrow.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle

Is that agreed? Agreed.

Committee Stage ordered for Wednesday, 22 April 1998.

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- **An Bille um an Naoú Leasú Déag ar an mBunreacht, 1998: Ordú don Dara Céim. Nineteenth Amendment of the Constitution Bill, 1998: Order for Second Stage.**
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