



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH
NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

NINETEENTH PLENARY SESSION

14 and 15 September 1999

Garden House Hotel, Cambridge

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

(Produced by the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association)

TUESDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER 1999

The sitting was opened in public at 9.05 am in the Garden House Hotel, Cambridge, with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

1. TRIBUTES TO ROGER STOTT CBE MP

Mr David Winnick (Co-Chairman) opened the Session by paying tribute to Roger Stott, who had died on 8th August 1999. He was born in 1943 in Rochdale and had joined the Merchant Navy when he left school. He had then become a telephone engineer before being elected to the House in 1973 at the age of 30. He had remained MP for Wigan until his death and the previous year had celebrated 25 years in the House at a party in Speaker's House with Miss Betty Boothroyd, who had also entered the House in 1973.

Roger Stott had been Parliamentary Private Secretary to Prime Minister Callaghan and was acknowledged to be one of the ablest people to hold that position. Between 1989 and 1994 he had been a spokesman for the Opposition on Northern Ireland. He had never been to either part of Ireland before he became a spokesman but he had soon taken the island to his heart.

He had become a Member of the Body after his return to the back benches and was dedicated to improving the lives of people whom he met through visits to the island of Ireland just as he was committed to his own constituents. That commitment was matched by his dedication to the peace process.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy (Co-Chairman) said that the excellent Report by Committee D on Education and Inter-Community Relations was a fitting tribute to Roger. He represented the personal commitment that was the essence of the spirit of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. His enthusiasm for the Irish language was very clear from Committee D's Report. Speaking in Irish, he said that Roger recognised that what bound the Body together was the cultural distinctions among individual Members. The report would be his monument. In the words of the Latin tag, "he did indeed raise a monument more lasting than bronze.". Above all, he had had confidence in what people working together could achieve.

The Body stood in silence to pay tribute to Roger Stott.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick) said that the staff of the Body had asked to be associated with the tributes paid to Roger Stott.

2. PRIVILEGE

The Co-Chairman reminded Members that proceedings did not attract parliamentary privilege.

3. ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

The Co-Chairman announced that, pursuant to Rule 2(a), **Senator Enda Bonner, Mr Mattie Brennan TD, Mr Paul Bradford TD, Lord Glentoran, Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP, Helen Jackson MP, Senator Ann Leonard and Senator Francis O'Brien**, being Associate Members, had accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for all of the Session.

4. ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

Ordered, That the proposed Programme of Business for the current Session be approved.-(The Co-Chairman.)

5. COMMITTEE A - ORAL REPORT BY CHAIRMAN ON ACTIVITIES

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly), Chairman of Committee A, presented an oral report on the Committee's recent activities, which had been dominated by the parades issue. The Committee had met the Parades Commission and discussed not only the Commission's work in relation to the issuing of determinations on particular parades, but also the Commission's other statutory functions, particularly in the field of education. The Commission's work had proceeded against a background of hostility from the loyalist Orders. The Orange Order had decided not to co-operate with the Commission at any level. More moderate voices had been drowned out. After 18 months of operations, the Commission now felt it understood the issues much better, and it enjoyed better relations with senior members of the police. It was concerned about the breaking of conditions in some cases, especially that of the band at Portadown.

An opinion survey conducted by the Commission had shown that the great majority of both Catholics and Protestants agreed that parades issues should be resolved at local level. He concluded by congratulating the Commission which had achieved a great deal in a short time. He emphasised that the Commission at all times operated within the rule of law enacted by Parliament.

6. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body, while welcoming the progress that has been made so far in implementing aspects of the Belfast Agreement, nevertheless notes with regret that it has not so far proved possible to form an Executive under the terms of the Agreement; continues to believe that the Agreement still represents the best way forward for the peace process; and calls on all parties to the Agreement and both Governments to redouble their efforts towards reaching a lasting settlement.-(**Mr Charles Flanagan.**)

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly), moving the Motion, said that the Belfast Agreement had been the product of a slow and tortuous process and implementing it would be similarly slow and difficult. The Agreement had already improved the situation considerably. It proposed a system of government which would serve the

interests of the people of Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. It was necessary for politicians in Northern Ireland to take responsibility for their own future. The pro-Agreement parties had to move together. The Agreement was not a *menu à la carte*. Both decommissioning and the establishment of fair policing structures were an integral part of it. Republicans had to convince Unionists that violence was over for good, and Unionists had to convince Republicans that they were committed to the creation of a fair society. The two Governments had to focus the minds of the parties in Northern Ireland on the need to build on the progress already achieved.

Mr Harry Barnes (Derbyshire North East) said that the current situation in respect of the Good Friday Agreement had led to a crisis in Unionism. Those within Unionism who wished to deliver the provisions of the Agreement seemed to be being out-manoeuvred by those who were opposed to it. There was therefore a need to help those who could deliver.

Mr David Trimble's reactions to recent developments may have seemed harsh, but the difficulties which he was experiencing had to be recognised: for example, the withdrawal of his deputy, Mr John Taylor, from the review of the Agreement. The keys to the implementation of the Agreement were the establishment of a clear timetable for decommissioning and an end to punishment beatings and exiles.

The Patten report on the Royal Ulster Constabulary was very important to the implementation of the Belfast Agreement. Unfortunately, its timing had served to exacerbate the current problems. Some of the Patten recommendations might receive general agreement, for example, those on reducing the size of the RUC should the security situation continue to improve, and on the composition of the force. The recent Report from the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee had drawn attention to many of these points. Others were symbolic but nevertheless very important in Northern Ireland: for example, the recommendations on the flying of the Union Flag and on the name of the force. There had to be a compromise. He gave as an example a recommendation of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee that the Union Flag should not be flown on 12th July but should continue to be flown at other times.

The provision of district policing boards was the more problematic section of the Patten report. Unionists were worried about that proposal, since several of the new boards would be likely to have 25 per cent representation from Sinn Féin. For that reason, other aspects of the Agreement, such as decommissioning, became very important for the implementation of the Patten report.

Unionism had to debate within itself the matters contained in the Patten report. The implementation of the report's recommendations should therefore be delayed until May 2000, the deadline for decommissioning.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) drew attention to the enormous amount of time and effort which had been expended by the two Governments on Northern

Ireland, particularly by Mr Blair and Dr Mowlam.. It was a matter of regret that the Executive had not yet been established, and the parties in Northern Ireland should now get on with implementing the Good Friday Agreement. He reminded the Body of the referendums which had been held in the North and South of Ireland which had shown huge support for the Agreement: politicians had a responsibility to reflect the will of the people. He understood the problems which the Unionists were having with the issue of decommissioning and hoped that those parties with influence on the paramilitaries would do everything possible to hasten decommissioning.

He welcomed the Patten report. It was understandable that there would be things in it which one side or another would not like. However, the report had to be taken as a whole and implemented in its entirety. Only in that way could a police force be established which was acceptable to the whole community in Northern Ireland.

Finally, he drew attention to the work of the International Fund for Ireland. He thanked all those who had contributed to the Fund, which had done much work across the communal divide which the two Governments and local government would have found difficult to accomplish.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North) noted that despite the evident pessimism about the Good Friday Agreement considerable progress had been made in implementing its provisions. Human rights institutions had already been established in the North which could address the concerns of both communities. Similar institutions had been set up in the South. Other changes flowing from the Good Friday Agreement, which were not perhaps so tangible, had nevertheless also been achieved.

There were several steps that the two Governments might take if the Mitchell Review proved unsuccessful. First, the Government should press ahead with the police reforms. The RUC had always been seen as the armed force of one section of the community, so it was necessary to create a fair and efficient police service for Northern Ireland. Secondly, he recommended taking forward those areas of the Agreement which related to cross-border bodies. In the absence of an Executive, those matters could be taken ahead on the basis of cooperation between civil servants from both jurisdictions. Finally, in the absence of an Executive, the Assembly had no purpose and should be suspended, if not disbanded. There remained, therefore, much work which could be done by both Governments; but if matters were allowed to drift he feared not only the resumption of violence but also the possible withdrawal of the two Governments from the whole peace process.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) supported the Motion but doubted whether its wording expressed the underlying sense of frustration which existed throughout the island of Ireland. It was widely felt that the Herculean efforts of Republicans and Nationalists to achieve a settlement had been ignored. The Good Friday Agreement had been followed by 15 months of delay as the Unionists dragged their feet on all aspects of its implementation. The peace process had been in deep crisis since Mr Trimble's refusal to nominate members of the Executive on 15th July.

He reminded those present that the Mitchell review was a review of the implementation of the Agreement and not a renegotiation of it. There was a widespread view that Mr Trimble had to be saved at all costs. But in his opinion the approach of the Unionist Party to the Agreement had been tactical all along and was aimed at maintaining the *status quo* as far as possible. The British Government had a responsibility to face down the Ulster Unionists and ensure progress on the Agreement. In conclusion, he acknowledged the responsibility of all parties in respect of the Good Friday Agreement and reaffirmed Sinn Féin's absolute commitment to the peace process.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) felt that there was some doubt as to what the current situation was and how it should be adjusted to. He shared the previous speaker's sense of frustration, which existed not just in Ireland but throughout the UK as well. A remarkable commitment had been shown by the two Prime Ministers; but because "the higher the climb the bigger the fall", he feared a serious decline of interest in Britain. He firmly believed that the peace process would succeed in the end; too much had been invested in it to allow for failure. People in Northern Ireland not only wanted peace but had become used to it and liked it. Politicians now had to ensure that they delivered confidence in peace.

Republicans had to accept that they must help the process by acting within the spirit of the Agreement as well as the letter. For example, the timings of renewed punishment beatings were very unfortunate.

Politically, the Unionists needed some kind of decommissioning by the IRA - although the importance attributed to it in the process as a whole seemed to be a red herring. The words of Mr McNamara were very apt. The Governments had to press on regardless of the activities of individual politicians in the North. Less prominence should be given to those who would not cooperate and greater prominence to the progress that could be made to achieve parity of esteem which might be sufficient to preserve the cessation of violence. However, the stalemate amongst politicians did not seem to have any obvious end at the moment.

Mr Conor Lenihan (Dublin South-West) said that the salaries of Ministers in the North were a subject of much discussion in the South. The position of the First Minister seemed to be that of a chief executive of a company who refused to come to work.

There was a lack of collective leadership in the peace process and individuals had been allowed to slip away from their commitments. If politicians could not rectify the situation there might need to be an initiative for a second Anglo-Irish Agreement. People on the island still wanted the Agreement and no politician or party had the right to destroy it.

There was a tendency in the Six Counties to look outside the island of Ireland for help to solve problems. That had to stop, and Sinn Féin and the Unionists needed to talk to one another. The longer the present situation endured the more it would

yield to those who wanted the Agreement to fail. Time was not on the side of the peace-makers.

He was struck by the churlish response to the Patten report. It represented the minimum of what was needed and it could not be the subject of endless argument. Decommissioning must also happen, but the Republicans had understandable fears that a small amount of decommissioning would inevitably lead to calls for more and more without the establishment of an effective Executive. He wondered whether, if decommissioning actually took place, there would be a unified Unionist response. Mr Trimble had to defend his own position by using leadership skills. Perhaps politicians' pay should be docked for poor performance.

Mr Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) said that there was no crisis unless people made one. It was important to recognise that progress had been made. Mr Lenihan had been right to assert that politicians were keen to implement performance-related pay for anyone but themselves. However, it had to be recognised that Mr Trimble faced enormous internal difficulties.

Some home truths needed to be expressed about paramilitary beatings. These were unjustifiable but were being exploited by politicians who opposed the peace process. Such politicians claimed that the beatings belonged to the same genre of violence as bombings and shootings. In fact, there were two kinds of violence: that intended to achieve a political outcome, which had now ceased, and vigilante violence aimed at curbing criminal activity. Dr Mowlam had rightly drawn that distinction. Punishment beatings had less to do with the political process than with the lack of confidence in the police felt by some sections of the community.

The Body might wish to make representations to the two Governments on the need to define those two kinds of violence. In addition, implementing the Patten review would help to restore the Nationalist community's shattered confidence in the RUC.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim) said there was a difference between punishment beatings and the preceasefire violence. The beatings occurred because of the breakdown of normal policing and the RUC's failure to deal with problems such as drugs. Similar vigilante action against drug dealers had been seen in Dublin a few years earlier. Those problems were social rather than political in nature. To say that was not to tolerate punishment beatings - which were atrocities - but to recognise why they happened.

The shambles of 15th July had shocked everyone. Mr Trimble and his colleagues had shown that they were not willing to implement the whole of the Good Friday Agreement. He believed that the actions of Messrs Trimble, Donaldson and Taylor were all coordinated, despite appearances. Mr Seamus Mallon's resignation had been a positive move, showing that he was not prepared to take part in a charade.

Mr Chris Patten was to be complimented on conducting a comprehensive review of the future of policing in Northern Ireland. The Patten report should be implemented

in its entirety. Catholics should be encouraged to join the RUC, provided that they knew they would not be intimidated either by their own community or from within the RUC itself. It would take at least a generation before there was full support across the community for the Northern Ireland Police Service.

Lord Glentoran said that he continued to support the Agreement, which he believed was still firmly in place, and was undoubtedly the best hope for peace in Northern Ireland. He agreed with others who had said that the current crisis was overstated. People throughout the Province still wanted peace: not at any price, but peace nevertheless. Speaking to people in Northern Ireland, he had heard no criticism of the cross-border institutions which had been established, and no cry to pull back from the Agreement. What he had heard was a call to take things steady. Recently, the two Governments had been undone by their self-imposed calendar, for example the 15th July deadline which had come at a very bad time.

He accepted the Patten report in principle; but it could not and should not be implemented instantly. In a democracy a police force could not be changed overnight. The report was a sizeable document needing time for study and debate. First reactions to it had been primarily emotional; he believed that in time people would come to see that it was a very sensible report.

He noted that debate in the Body had not perhaps been quite as consensual as in recent times. It had to be remembered that Mr Trimble and his colleagues were elected politicians who had a duty to listen to their electorate. Not enough had been done to manipulate and manage the Unionist population. As a result, that section of the community took a negative view of the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Unionist politicians and people had to be brought back on board. They wanted to get behind the Agreement, but they needed help to do so.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) said that he shared the frustration of many speakers. He noted that history had not always been kind to Ireland. Nevertheless, in recent times they had been more fortunate. Leaders in the US and Britain had been in a unique position to contribute to peace in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, he recognised that that might not last. The American presidential election in 2000 might return a less helpful President; and there might be less confidence in the prospects for a settlement under if Mr Hague were to become Prime Minister. The urgency of the situation therefore had to be recognised.

Those who believed that the Patten report could not be implemented without an Executive having first been established had to be disabused of that idea. The two Governments had the power to implement its recommendations notwithstanding the failure to establish the Executive. The importance of an acceptable police force could not be overstated: Northern Ireland could be ruled without an Assembly or power-sharing Executive, but it could not be ruled effectively without a police force which was acceptable to both sections of the community. Ideally, partnership government went side by side with partnership policing and that policing should be

under the control of a partnership administration. It was very important that local administration controlled the police force.

It was necessary to ensure not merely that more Catholics were recruited into the police force, but that the police force contained people from Nationalist and Republican backgrounds and traditions. The situation had to be created whereby members of the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) could join the police service in Northern Ireland as easily as they could the Garda Síochána.

Unionists had been blamed - rightly in his opinion - for the lack of progress on the Agreement; but they were not the only ones to blame. Republicans had to demonstrate their commitment to peace through decommissioning and condemnation of those who continued to import arms into Ireland.

He warned that the abolition of the Northern Ireland Assembly would result in the end of the participation of many people who had worked for the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, as the salaries and expenses which they received were their only means of support. This had therefore to be avoided; and he deplored the tactics of many who had been elected to the Assembly and were now trying to see it abolished.

Maria Fyfe (Glasgow Maryhill) felt that there was widespread recognition of the progress that had been made; but the murders and punishment beatings were creating a mood of pessimism. She supported the resolution; but she noted that it called for a redoubling of their efforts by the two Governments despite the fact that they had already put in a huge amount of energy into resolving the situation in Northern Ireland. People in Northern Ireland needed to take some of the responsibility upon themselves. She had been disappointed to hear such negative reactions from elements in both communities to the Patten report before it had even been published. She welcomed the report, considered that many of its recommendations should have been implemented years ago, and counselled the rapid implementation of the reform package. She considered that the Body should engage itself in the reform of policing in Northern Ireland and in making sure that the views of the majority of people in the Province were heard on that subject.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan), referring to Mr Currie's comments regarding Sinn Féin, reiterated Sinn Féin's absolute commitment to the peace process and stated that he neither spoke for nor represented people who had arms to decommission.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) felt that real progress had been made and that people of different traditions within Northern Ireland were at last speaking to each other. While welcoming the results of the referendums in both parts of Ireland he cautioned that the election of Assembly members some weeks after the referendum votes had not resulted in such a clear-cut majority in favour of the peace process.

The Omagh bombing had served to remind people of the terrible cost of failure; and he was frequently asked why no one had been charged with committing the atrocity. The continued murders, punishment beatings and importation of arms served to undermine the peace process. Turning to the recent talks, he criticised the timing of the deadline of 30th June - just before the marching season. He welcomed the Patten report but he had been disappointed to hear spokesmen from all sides appearing to close the door on the issues raised by the report before they could be seriously considered. Although Mr Trimble had been criticised, he had come a long way; the problem was that he had been unable to bring sufficient people with him. Mr Gerry Adams had also failed to win enough support for the Agreement among his followers to allow for some token amount of decommissioning of arms and explosives.

Progress should be made on those matters which remained part of the Good Friday Agreement: for example, the implementation of cross-border bodies. He noted the important role which had been played by funding from the International Fund for Ireland (IFI), thanked all those involved and urged them to continue their support. Finally, he noted that a window of opportunity still existed, given the size of Prime Minister Blair's majority and the support which the Dáil had shown for the Taoiseach.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey) said that his constituents found it difficult to accept that there was only a tenuous link between Sinn Féin, the IRA and the Real IRA. He agreed with Mr Conor Lenihan that there was a failure to take responsibility collectively amongst the politicians. Mr Austin Currie was also correct that there was a very small window of opportunity for peace. A new US President would want to look to domestic matters during his first term rather than help to solve the problems of other countries.

Northern Ireland had been in that situation before. The Major-Reynolds cease-fire had stalled; but the Good Friday Agreement had still been achieved, which showed what could be done with energy and a willingness on all sides to conduct serious negotiations. Moreover, the Agreement had been reinforced by referendums.

Society in Northern Ireland was stumbling over a number of building-blocks, the greatest of which was probably decommissioning. The civilian population was very heavily armed - it was among the most heavily armed populations in the world. Decommissioning was not helped by internal power struggles which threatened the position of Mr Trimble in the Unionist Party and Mr Adams in Sinn Féin. A symbolic start to decommissioning was needed. Mr Temple-Morris had been wrong to say that decommissioning was a "red herring", but the achievement targets had to be realistic. Given the number of arms within the civilian population, 100 per cent decommissioning would never happen - but a high level of decommissioning could be effectively policed - and a start should be made by both sides.

The Good Friday Agreement did not specify who would monitor the peace process; but in both that Agreement and in the Patten report there were many references to human rights issues. Indeed, the third recommendation of the Patten report said

that the European Convention on Human Rights should be implemented for policing practice in the North. He had suggested in the past that the Council of Europe might play a role in monitoring the peace process; but that had been rejected by both Governments as interference in an internal matter. Perhaps his suggestion should now be reconsidered.

Communities outside also had to apply pressure for peace. It was the truth that for evil to triumph it was only necessary for good men to do nothing.

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan) agreed with Mr Temple-Morris that people were weary of a weary peace process. The current situation in which the parties asked who was going to blink first was not good enough. The correct question was, who was going to *move* first? The Unionists should grasp the nettle because the war was over. It was vital to realise that the effects of the failure of the peace process were being seen in the stalemate in economic development in the border counties compared with the boom in the Republic. Cross-border cooperation in health-care was also being affected.

Mr Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) said that there had been great hopes that the Good Friday Agreement would lead to a lasting peace settlement. Eighteen months on, that euphoria had been replaced by disappointment that an Executive had still not been formed. Dr Mowlam had taken the right decision a few weeks ago in deciding that the peace process was still intact. It was deplorable that a small minority of thugs were carrying out punishment beatings but such people should not be allowed to overturn the peace process. It was to be hoped that Senator Mitchell could revive the process during the next few vital weeks. There were encouraging reports that the Ulster Unionist Executive had expressed support for the Mitchell review.

There was concern in the Unionist community about changing the name and symbols of the RUC. However, there were more important things than names and symbols. No other police force in the UK used the prefix "Royal". The word "Ulster" was also a misnomer, because the RUC policed only six of the nine counties of that Province. With regard to future recruitment, all police forces should be as representative as possible of the communities they served. Reducing the size of the RUC would be desirable as the peace process developed.

He wished Senator Mitchell and all the participating parties success in their task of fully implementing the Good Friday Agreement.

The sitting was suspended at 12.50 pm.

The sitting was resumed in public at 2.45 pm with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

7. BIIPB WEBSITE

At the invitation of the Steering Committee pursuant to Rule 2(c), **the British Joint Clerk to the Body** made a statement to the Plenary about progress on setting up a

website for the Body. Initial proposals had been prohibitively expensive, but a cheaper alternative had been found and was currently under construction. The website would be hosted on The Stationery Office computer in Norwich. Documents related to the last two Plenaries were already on the site and current documents would be put on the site as soon as possible. If funds permitted, earlier material could be placed on the site in due course. The site would also provide e-mail links to the staff of the Body. Members would be informed when the site was in operation.

8. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS: Resumed debate

Question again proposed, That the Body, while welcoming the progress that has been made so far in implementing aspects of the Belfast Agreement, nevertheless notes with regret that it has not so far proved possible to form an Executive under the terms of the Agreement; continues to believe that the Agreement still represents the best way forward for the peace process; and calls on all parties to the Agreement and both Governments to redouble their efforts towards reaching a lasting settlement.

Senator Enda Bonner endorsed the motion and praised the contributions of previous speakers, in particular those of Mr McNamara and Mr Temple-Morris.

At the time of the Good Friday Agreement there had been great hopes for progress. However, with the placing of decommissioning high up the agenda a suspicion had taken root that the Unionists were trying to stall the process. Had an Executive been set up as envisaged in the Agreement, the current stand-off would not be taking place. The history of the Irish Republic showed that decommissioning after conflicts had not been a precondition for political development. In his view, with every month that passed there should be an extension granted to the decommissioning deadline. He abhorred many of the actions taken by the IRA over the previous thirty years; however, he felt that the Sinn Féin leadership had gone a long way towards fulfilling the Good Friday Agreement and that there were mavericks in every organisation. It was deplorable that Mr John Taylor had used the Patten report to jump ship; and he regretted that Mr Trimble had been unable to take a leap of the imagination in July. The previous four or five years had seen great improvements in the dismantling of the paraphernalia of security checkpoints and installations. He welcomed the Patten report and was willing on the basis of its recommendations to argue for a change in the GAA's Rule 21. In concluding his remarks, he stressed the importance of tourism to Donegal and Northern Ireland and called for a full implementation body to address such issues.

Mr David Wilshire (Spelthorne) had already put his opposition to the Good Friday Agreement on the record. It therefore went without saying that he did not support the motion. The Good Friday Agreement was not going to work. Sinn Féin/IRA could not deliver on decommissioning and Mr Trimble could not deliver on setting up an Executive. Those were the facts and it was pointless to seek to trade blame. Unionists, however, needed help to sign up to any agreement. For the Unionists, decommissioning had been a gamble too far and involved an act of trust which they

would not be able to make. The Democratic Unionist Party and the UK Unionists probably spoke for the majority of Unionist opinion in Northern Ireland. Some of those people wished to be involved in finding a solution and it was necessary to find a way to involve such people in the peace process: isolating them could only be counter-productive. The Unionist view was that what had happened since the Good Friday Agreement was not what they had expected to happen.

Mr Trimble needed to be helped at all costs, because a challenge to his leadership was imminent and he did not seem to be speaking for majority of the Ulster Unionist Party. He himself found it easier to support the Patten report than many Unionists. Mr Trimble had probably reacted so quickly to the report because he knew that he was in a very precarious position.

If the Agreement was not popular another way of achieving peace had to be found. The rule of law had to be returned to Northern Ireland, the early release of criminals had to be addressed, and the Unionists had to be reassured. Perhaps there should be a Northern Ireland referendum on whether Ireland should be united. Power should also be restored to local government to allow ordinary people to participate in the decision-making process.

Those who opposed the Agreement were not opponents of peace. If people came to the view that that particular peace process would not reach a conclusion, then some alternative had to be put in its place.

Senator Helen Keogh said that the feeling of the Body at the beginning of the day's debates might have been somewhat demoralised but Members had enough understanding of the issues to be able to think positively about how the Agreement could be made to work. It was a positive sign that the Unionists had decided to become involved once again in the Mitchell process. It was not a huge step forward but was at least a signal that people were willing to keep trying.

All change was difficult, particularly change in a police force. Change in the RUC was probably the greatest challenge of all. Mr Trimble's response to the Patten report had not been helpful.

There had been several comments on the GAA's Rule 21 and she had been pleased to hear colleagues say that the rule should be rescinded. It would be a good gesture to make in the wake of the Patten report. In order to be representative of the community the new police force should also have more women in it.

It was hard to attract the young and ambitious into politics in Northern Ireland; but such leadership was needed now more than every before. Like previous speakers she acknowledged that presidential elections in the USA would make it difficult to look to that country for help in the coming years.

Mr Gerry Bermingham (St Helens South) said there was too much concentration on personalities rather than principles. Politicians should ask what the people wanted. The people wanted peace, and politicians should listen to them.

Senator Ann Leonard said that the people of Northern Ireland feared that the whole peace process might fall apart. The leaders of Sinn Féin and the Ulster Unionists had a particular responsibility. Both sides had agreed to the establishment of an Executive and the commencement of decommissioning. Both sides had to some extent reneged on these commitments. Sinn Féin had an electoral mandate, but that imposed a responsibility on the party to use its influence with the IRA to bring about at least a token decommissioning. Equally, Mr Trimble had to remember that he was not only a party leader but also First Minister of all the people of Northern Ireland.

The Patten report should be implemented as soon as possible. Lengthy delays would be unacceptable.

The Co-Chairman welcomed to the Plenary His Excellency Mr Edward Barrington, Irish Ambassador to the United Kingdom, Lord Alderdice, Initial Presiding Officer of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and Mr George Reid, Deputy Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) wished to raise a specific issue about the implementation of the Patten report. There was a need both to cut the size of the RUC and to create opportunities for accelerated promotion of Catholic officers. On page 117 of the report there was a reference to the possibility of some RUC officers choosing to continue in police service elsewhere in the UK. The great majority, of course, would wish to stay in Northern Ireland; but some might wish to move. The problem was the way that UK police forces were structured, with recruitment in the hands of chief constables, some of whom might not be willing to take officers from other forces. The British Government should impose on chief constables an obligation to set out reasons if they chose not to recruit RUC officers.

Senator Shane Ross said there had been a tendency for speakers in the debate to blame the Unionists almost exclusively for the breakdown in the peace process. He understood the frustration Members felt with the Unionist position, but had noticed a lack of focus in the Body on killings in Northern Ireland. It would have been better if Mr Ó Caoláin had spoken about those instead of taking cheap populist shots against Unionists who were not present to answer back. The Body should not contribute to Unionists' siege mentality.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) said that he disputed Senator Ross's claim about his earlier remarks.

Lord Rathcavan said that Sinn Féin had been predictably disingenuous over decommissioning, claiming it was "nothing to do with me, guv". At least Mr David Ervine, of the Progressive Unionist Party, had been honest enough to admit that he had influence over his paramilitaries. It was sad that the IRA could not even make a

gesture. The only way forward was for each party to develop a better understanding of others' points of view. The Northern Ireland Assembly had led to greater contact between parties. Greater generosity of spirit from key participants was needed.

Mr Matt Brennan (Sligo-Leitrim) said that recent events had shown that Unionists were not interested in sharing power with Nationalists. They could have implemented the Agreement in July but had not been willing to do so. The present British Government had done far more for peace in Northern Ireland than any previous Government. He was disappointed with Senator Ross's remarks: most recent atrocities had been carried out by Unionist paramilitaries, not by the IRA. All paramilitaries should be condemned. The British Government should ensure that the Good Friday Agreement was implemented. If they could not do that, they should withdraw and make way for a united Ireland.

Mr Michael Mates (East Hampshire) said that there had been 25 speakers in the debate. It was not possible to say whether the majority had been optimistic or pessimistic and, regrettably, the debate had been slightly unbalanced owing to the fact that no Unionists were present.

There had undoubtedly been great progress in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement. Unionists had accepted many things - for example, cross-border institutions - which had at the time been the reasons for the failure of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. Everyone who had been involved in trying to achieve progress in Northern Ireland over the last ten years deserved praise.

Mr Harry Barnes had put his finger on the key problem at present, namely, the crisis in Unionism. He was not in the business of trying to preserve Mr David Trimble's leadership; but leadership was the art of the possible and Mr Trimble could not be expected to deliver what could not be delivered. As the leader of the main Unionist party, he represented, directly or indirectly, the majority of the population of Northern Ireland, and as such there was a limit as to how far he was able to go. While many recalled the strong support for the Good Friday Agreement in the referendums, that support had been shown following a strong campaign led by Mr Blair which had been based on the twin aims of an end to violence and parallel progress on the provisions of the Agreement. While there had been much progress on issues such as cross-border institutions there had been no progress on decommissioning; and that was bound to make it difficult for the Unionists to proceed.

He took issue with those who suggested that only a token decommissioning might be necessary. There had been no token prisoner releases and no token cross-border bodies, nor was merely token reform of the RUC envisaged. Nor was it helpful to suggest that vigilante activity was in some way acceptable because it happened on both sides. All violence had to be condemned as unacceptable.

He agreed with those who had suggested that the initial reaction to the Patten report had been unhelpful. He hoped that in the weeks to come a proper look would

be taken by all parties at what was a serious and detailed piece of work. However, he disagreed with those who advocated proceeding with Patten lock, stock and barrel in the current circumstances. So long as there was a threat from terrorism there had to be a police force able to respond. To those who suggested that it was the fault of the RUC that vigilantes had taken it upon themselves to act, he responded that it was rather the fault of the vigilantes that the RUC found it necessary to act as it did. It was up to politicians to bring about change in all those areas where the RUC had been unable to act effectively, and both sides of the problem had to be addressed.

He also disagreed with those who suggested that the two Governments had to press on with implementing the Agreement. Only the people of Northern Ireland themselves could make progress. Politicians from outside Northern Ireland did not help by preaching to political leaders in the Province. They had to support all leaders trying to implement the Agreement. Those opposed to the Agreement should by all means be criticised, but ultimately the people of Northern Ireland had to decide for themselves that the Good Friday Agreement was the way forward. He believed that they still thought that this was the case, and he therefore remained - in common, he believed, with a small majority of speakers - optimistic about the prospects for the Good Friday Agreement.

And the Question being put;

The Body divided: Ayes, 35, Noes 1 (*Mr David Wilshire dissenting*).

So the Question was agreed to.

***Resolved*, That the Body, while welcoming the progress that has been made so far in implementing aspects of the Belfast Agreement, nevertheless notes with regret that it has not so far proved possible to form an Executive under the terms of the Agreement; continues to believe that the Agreement still represents the best way forward for the peace process; and calls on all parties to the Agreement and both Governments to redouble their efforts towards reaching a lasting settlement.**

9. STATEMENT BY THE RT HON DR MO MOWLAM MP, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Co-Chairman welcomed the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt hon. Mo Mowlam, and invited her to address the Body.

Dr Mowlam began by pointing out that progress over the last two years had been the result of the actions of many people over many years as well as the hundreds of people in Northern Ireland who had helped build new relationships across the communities. She paid tribute to Roger Stott both as a good friend and for his contribution to the search for peace in Northern Ireland.

This was the third time on which she had addressed the Plenary. Each year had been crucial in the development of the peace process: 1997 had been a year of preparation; 1998 had been a year of delivery; and 1999 had been another year of

delivery - of the Human Rights Commission, the Equality Commission, prisoner releases and a reduction in troop numbers. On the security side the summer had been one of the most peaceful on record.

But 1999 had also been a year of frustration, especially for the people of Northern Ireland who were fearful that the Agreement they voted for was not being implemented in full. The previous week had seen the start of the review of the implementation of the Agreement. The focus was clear: to reach agreement on the issues of forming a cross-community Executive and the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons. Negotiations during the year had involved both Prime Ministers as well as party leaders and others. An amazing amount of time had been given by the two Heads of Government.

At the end of June agreement had been reached on three key principles: an inclusive Executive, decommissioning by May 2000, and decommissioning to be carried out under the supervision of the International Commission.

The lack of trust between the parties remained the biggest obstacle and there was a danger that confidence in the Good Friday Agreement would be eroded if momentum were lost. It was important not to lose sight of the big picture: Northern Ireland's constitutional status had been resolved by consent. What was now at issue was the attempt to get fierce political rivals to work together. Such was the stuff of politics; but in Northern Ireland the history of violence poisoned the political process. All parts of the community had been victims of the violence and responsibility for it lay on all sides. Senator Mitchell could not make all the mistrust disappear; but a start had been made at Easter 1998 and the process had continued. Parties and individuals met to talk who could never have done so previously. The review could not be open-ended but Senator Mitchell had wisely decided not to set a definite deadline. The Patten report offered the chance of a new beginning for policing in Northern Ireland. The Commission had held hundreds of meetings across Northern Ireland and the consultation period had been lengthened: it would now last until the end of November.

The Patten Commission had heard a broad spectrum of arguments on the future of the RUC and had rejected the extremes of abolition and no change. The Commission had posed the fundamental question of what was in the best interests of Northern Ireland and the answers were not the product of the current security situation. The Patten report was about policing; it was not a bargaining chip in the peace process.

The report set out a prescription for an efficient, impartial force working in harmony with the community and accountable to that community. It recognised that the RUC had been working towards this end for many years, and acknowledged the work of the Chief Constable and aimed to build upon it. The 175 recommendations meant that further consultation would be necessary and to that end a free telephone line had been set up. In the first few days it had received over 50 calls per day, many of which requested copies of the report. That eager readership was very encouraging. The majority of the other calls expressed support for the report.

It was important to emphasise that the report was not about weakening the RUC but about strengthening it. Again, it had to be stressed that it was not a report which responded to the current security situation - indeed the Home Secretary was already looking at ways in which some of the recommendations, particularly with regard to human rights and the form of the oath, could be adapted to the police forces in England and Wales. The Patten report also related very closely to the McPherson report on the investigation of the Stephen Lawrence case and the importance of ensuring that the composition of a police force reflected the composition of the community which it served. In Northern Ireland, working-class Catholic men had to be encouraged to join. At the same time, it was not only the police that Patten was saying needed to change, and it was vital that sometime critics now raised their voices in support of the police.

Some recommended changes were linked to the security situation: changes to police stations, vehicles, numbers and the devolution of command structures could not be made during periods of violence. Other changes could perhaps be taken forward more swiftly, particularly the building of a new police college and training facilities.

Some changes would need primary legislation and parliamentary time for which the Northern Ireland Office was currently bidding. She invited the Body to join in tribute to the whole RUC, particularly mentioning those 300 officers who had died in service and the 9,000 who had been injured over the last 30 years. The Chief Constable was right that there was "much pain" in the report for the RUC but he had also stressed that the pain could be endured if the result was a force to serve the whole community.

Commenting on the Report of the Working Group on the Future of the Body, she said that the Body had the advantage that its change and development did not depend on the conclusion of the Belfast Agreement and it should therefore take the initiative to establish links with the devolved assemblies and to address devolution matters.

The Co-Chairman thanked the Secretary of State.

10. QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt hon Dr Mo Mowlam MP, replied to Questions for oral answer put by Members of the Body.

Parades

Ms Mary Coughlan (Donegal South-West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will consider bringing forward proposals for the complete abolition of parades in Northern Ireland for a five-year period and if she will make a statement.

Dr Mowlam replied as follows: The British Government has no such plans. It would be a mistake to ban all parades for five years. The vast majority pass off peacefully

and are not contentious. The best way to resolve parades where there is a dispute is through local accommodation. When such accommodation is not possible, the statutory responsibility for making determinations rests with the Parades Commission. I fully support the work of the Commission, who do an excellent job in difficult circumstances.

Ms Mary Coughlan (Donegal South-West) asked whether the Secretary of State agreed that parades were often a distraction to political dialogue. Was she confident that the Drumcree impasse could be overcome?

Dr Mowlam said she had much sympathy with those involved. The problem was that both sides had dug in and were not talking. It was a sign of failure when the Parades Commission had to be called in. The way forward was through talking. The rights of both traditions had to be acknowledged.

Patten Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether she will make a statement on the Report of the Patten Commission on Policing.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what plans she has to implement the report of the Independent Commission on Policing; and if she will make a statement.

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she has a timetable for the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Commission for the future policing arrangements in Northern Ireland; and if she will make a statement.

Senator Helen Keogh: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, when the report of the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland will be published; whether the Government intends to implement in full the recommendations of the Report; and if she will make a statement.

Dr Mowlam replied as follows: I have welcomed the Report in principle. I believe the Commission have charted the way forward for the police service in Northern Ireland. Their Report offers the basis for a police service that is capable of attracting widespread community support. I aim to complete the discussion on implementation by the end of November, and then to publish a full implementation plan in December.

I will be discussing with the parties and the Irish Government the implementation of the Patten report. I have already written to them offering initial meetings. But I also want to hear the views of the wider community - it is their police service.

The Report of the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland was published last Thursday, 9 September. People now have three months to comment

on it. I don't think prolonging uncertainty is helpful to anyone. We must recognise, however, as the Report does, that while some recommendations could be implemented immediately, others would require legislation, and others are related to changes in the political and security situation in Northern Ireland.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North) thanked Dr Mowlam for her reply. Her speech had addressed many of the Body's concerns, particularly that the Patten report should not become a bargaining counter in the negotiations over implementing the Good Friday Agreement. He asked whether she could confirm that there would be legislation to enact the Patten Report in the forthcoming parliamentary session.

Dr Mowlam said that she was glad that the Body agreed with her that the Patten report should not become a political football. She had not had a full commitment as to the timing of legislation, but was arguing strongly for legislative time as soon as possible. The Government would not drag its feet on this but it was important to get it right.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) said that he welcomed the Patten report, which had been produced by an expert group. He hoped that the Secretary of State would accept that there should be no picking and choosing, but that the report should be implemented as a whole.

Dr Mowlam said that it had to be acknowledged that parts of the report were very painful for some people in Northern Ireland, especially those who had lost loved ones. She would prefer to implement the report as a whole but could not say that categorically because she wished to listen to other views through the consultation process. Further work was needed on refining some of the report's recommendations.

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly) welcomed the Secretary of State's comments on the Patten report. He urged the British Government not to implement it selectively.

Dr Mowlam said that she did not like the idea of selective implementation, but if 90 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland did not like one particular recommendation then she would be willing to reconsider it. The Report lacked detail in some areas, for instance in relation to the composition of boards, and more work needed to be done on those issues.

Senator Helen Keogh said that the Chief Constable of the RUC had been very positive in his reaction to the report. She asked whether that reflected the views of other senior officers; whether the proposed voluntary redundancy payments would be sufficiently generous; and whether steps would be taken to achieve greater equality between men and women in the RUC, as well as between Catholics and Protestants.

Dr Mowlam said that the redundancy package would be of a size to make people look at it sympathetically. With regard to senior officers' views, even before the Patten report many people in the RUC had come to realise that change was inevitable. However, any changes had to be sensitive to the feelings of people who in some cases had devoted thirty years of their life to upholding democracy and the rule of law in Northern Ireland. With regard to the position of women in the RUC, the mechanisms proposed in the Patten Report to increase the number of Catholics serving in the force could not simply be used to increase the number of women. The Government needed to give further thought as to how to tackle that problem.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey) said that he took the point about not being selective about recommendations, but asked whether a gradualist approach to implementing those recommendations might not have much to commend it.

Dr Mowlam replied that she did not see selectivity as being the same as gradualism. Gradualism was not merely helpful, but in some cases would be the only way to implement the Report's recommendations. Certain of the recommendations were easier to implement than others. Others were reliant on improvements in the security situation, and she would not do anything which might put lives at risk.

Lord Merlyn-Rees, referring to the proposed district police committees, said that there was a misconception that those committees would run the police service. He suggested that Assembly members be invited to visit, for example, North Yorkshire, to see how such committees worked in the rest of the United Kingdom.

Dr Mowlam answered that she would take the suggestion back with her. She recognised the fear that vigilante groups would be represented on the boards, but said that the strict regulations which applied meant that could not happen. It had to be made clear that they would be consultative bodies which would work in public.

UK monitoring of Irish electronic communications

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will make a statement on the serious claims made in a recent television documentary regarding the alleged routine and systematic monitoring by the British authorities of all international telephone, fax, e-mail and data communications to and from the Irish Republic; and whether or not this intrusion into the private communications of Irish citizens, business and Government continues.

Dr Mowlam replied as follows: I am aware of the allegations to which the Deputy has referred. In accordance with long-standing practice, the British Government does not comment on alleged interception activity. All interception of the public telecommunication system in the UK takes place under the strict regime introduced by the Interception of Communications Act 1985.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) said that he was very dissatisfied with the Secretary of State's response. It was a serious matter. He asked whether the Secretary of State recognised the international implications of the activity which was reported to have taken place, and whether she acknowledged the violation of the civil rights of individuals whose private communications had been intercepted. He also asked whether that activity was continuing by other means following the closure of the facility in Cheshire.

Dr Mowlam replied that the British Government was planning to update its communications legislation, but that she was unable to comment any further.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) suggested that the UK legislation was out of date. He also noted that it applied only to the UK's own jurisdiction, not to the interception of international communications.

Dr Mowlam said that she was unable to respond except to repeat that the Government was at present reviewing its communications legislation.

Mr Brendan Smith (Cavan-Monaghan) asked whether it could be assumed that the new facility was not intercepting any communications from Ireland.

Dr Mowlam replied that she was unable to say any more than she had already done.

The peace process and progress on the Belfast Agreement

Mr Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will make a statement on the development of the peace process.

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if when she last met the Taoiseach they discussed matters relating to the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr Conor Lenihan (Dublin South-West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if irrespective of disagreement among the political parties in Northern Ireland, the two Governments are prepared to press ahead with the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, given its mandate from the people; and if she will make a statement.

Dr Mowlam replied as follows: The parties are currently participating in a review of the implementation of the Belfast Agreement, which Senator George Mitchell has agreed to facilitate. The aim of the review is to find a way to proceed on the basis of the already agreed principles of an inclusive Executive and the decommissioning of all weapons by May 2000. The people of Northern Ireland have consistently shown their desire for the Agreement to succeed and, like them, we look forward to an early and positive outcome to the review.

I meet frequently with members of the Irish Government, usually Ministers in the Department of Foreign Affairs, to discuss matters relating to the implementation of

the Belfast Agreement and other aspects of relations between the two Governments. The two Governments cannot force a settlement on the people and the parties of Northern Ireland. The Belfast Agreement is their Agreement, brokered by the parties and endorsed by the people. We anticipate that the parties will recognise the overwhelming desire of the people of Northern Ireland and, with Senator Mitchell's help, find an agreed way to implement the Agreement in full.

Mr Denis Canavan (Falkirk West) said that while 1999 had been a year of delivery, as the Secretary of State had said, it had also been one of disappointment. He noted particularly the disappointment that no Executive had been set up. He asked what specific measures she was taking to encourage all parties to participate in the Mitchell review of the Good Friday Agreement.

Dr Mowlam agreed that it had also been a year of frustration. It was now a question of building confidence on all sides. She could not force parties to talk to each other or people holding illegal arms to give them up. What she could do was to help create an atmosphere in which the advantages of implementation of the Good Friday Agreement could be made clear. She gave as an example the fact that she had just opened a new Halifax call centre, which showed the advantages for employment in the Province which peace could bring.

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde) asked whether the review could help to dismantle the recalcitrant stance adopted by some political parties. He welcomed developments with regard to the British-Irish Council and requested that it be based in Glasgow.

Dr Mowlam agreed that the British-Irish Council had a positive role to play. The review meant that everyone had to take another step forward and she urged that support be given to Senator Mitchell.

Mr Conor Lenihan (Dublin South-West) asked whether the two Governments could press on with the implementation of other aspects of the Good Friday Agreement if agreement could not be reached on setting up the Executive.

Dr Mowlam replied that it would not be helpful to outline the options which the Governments might consider in the event of a failure to reach agreement. It was important, however, that she heard the views of Members of the Body on what the options were.

Areas of potential progress in Northern Ireland

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will list the major areas of potential progress in Northern Ireland and on the island of Ireland which remain within the initiative of the two Governments in spite of the parties being unable to agree on constitutional devolution, and whether the British Government will press ahead in those areas in the interests of the people of Northern Ireland.

Dr Mowlam replied as follows: The Belfast Agreement was agreed by the parties and endorsed by the people as a complete and balanced package of reforms. It has always been the Government's intention that the Agreement be implemented in full. We believe that this can be achieved through the Review currently being led by Senator Mitchell and that it would not be helpful to that Review to speculate about the consequences of failure.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) noted the Secretary of State's reply to the previous questioner and asked her to take note of his question if the need for it arose.

Dr Mowlam repeated that she was interested in hearing all views.

Mr Michael Mates (East Hampshire) referred to the referendum campaign during which the Prime Minister had insisted on parallel movement on decommissioning. He asked what evidence she had received that such movement was taking place.

Dr Mowlam said that at the time of the Prime Minister's speech they had been looking at ways out of the impasse. It would not be helpful to be prescriptive as to the way in which decommissioning had to happen but progress on all aspects of the Agreement was necessary.

Punishment beatings

Mr Brian O'Shea (Waterford): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if she will make a statement on the status of punishment beatings by paramilitary organisations in relation to the Good Friday Agreement.

Dr Mowlam replied as follows: In the Declaration of Support for the Agreement the parties firmly registered their commitment to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all. Paramilitary attacks are sadistic, barbaric and wholly unacceptable in a peaceful society and clearly incompatible with the Agreement for which the people of Northern Ireland voted in the Referendum.

Mr Brian O'Shea (Waterford) asked what priority her Department gave to dealing with punishment beatings and what measures would be taken in the near future.

Dr Mowlam emphasized the need to support the RUC and also to put pressure on those groups which were associated with the paramilitary attacks. However, the real way to put an end to punishment beatings lay in creating a police force which was acceptable across the communities.

Mr Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) considered that there were two types of violence: political terror and straightforward thuggery. The latter had more to do with issues raised by the Patten Commission than with possible infringement of cease-fires.

Dr Mowlam noted the point which Mr Öpik had made and pointed out the examples of community policing cited in the Patten report. Her Department was also looking at new ways of dealing with offenders.

Economic development in the border regions

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what efforts are being made jointly by the Irish and British Governments to encourage economic development in the border regions; and if she will make a statement.

Mr Dinny McGinley (Donegal South-West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what economic and tourist initiatives are being taken to assist the economy of the border region; and if she will make a statement.

Dr Mowlam replied as follows: Northern Ireland Departments and Agencies and their Irish counterparts are co-operating in a large range of North-South projects which encourage economic development in the border regions. After this Question Time I will provide the Deputy with a list detailing these projects which include trade, tourism, human resources, transport and energy. I wish to see this important co-operation continue and increase for the benefit of all the local communities along the border. [*Note: the list of projects is published as an Appendix to the Summary.*]

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim) referred to his attempts to set up a joint approach with MPs in Northern Ireland on economic development. He asked whether special measures would be introduced to encourage inward investment as part of moving the peace process forward.

Dr Mowlam replied that district councils in Northern Ireland were increasingly taking the initiative in job creation. Inward investment issues were always difficult and the Government did attempt to ensure a fair spread of projects. However, inward investment suffered from the economic cycle and she stressed the need for developing small and medium enterprises which were rooted in the community.

"The disappeared"

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what further steps she intends to take to locate the bodies of "the disappeared"; and if she will make a statement.

Dr Mowlam replied as follows: I will continue to support the work of the Commission for the Location of Victims' Remains. I will also use any influence I have to encourage those who might have information on the location of the bodies of "the disappeared" to pass it on to the Commission so that the families concerned may see an end to the nightmare which they have endured for so long.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) asked the Secretary of State to join him in expressing profound sympathy for the relatives of the disappeared, most of whom had been seized and murdered in her jurisdiction and whose murderers were still living on the

island. It was important that pressure would be continually applied to assist in finding the bodies.

Dr Mowlam agreed, and noted that the families had recently had their hopes of finding bodies dashed. Pressure would continue to be applied.

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde) endorsed what Mr Currie had said and asked the Secretary of State whether there was any truth in speculation that two bodies had been buried in Scotland.

Dr Mowlam said that she could not confirm or deny any such reports but if she received any more information on this matter she would let him know.

Milk quota

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what progress is being made in securing extra milk quota for the counties of Northern Ireland and the Border counties of the Republic; and if she will make a statement.

Dr Mowlam replied as follows: I am glad to say that the close working relationship between the British and Irish Governments in the recent Agenda 2000 negotiations was extremely beneficial to dairy farmers in both parts of the island. Under the Agenda 2000 Agreement a special allocation of 150,000 tonnes of milk quota was made to the Republic of Ireland and 19,700 tonnes to Northern Ireland. Both Governments are now consulting with interested organisations as to how this additional quota should be allocated.

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan) said that it had not been the reply that he had been expecting because he wanted a peace initiative extra quota for those farmers in the border region who were suffering from the failure of sheep, pig and beef farming.

Dr Mowlam said that she would take these comments back to Lord Dubs. She was well aware of the farmers' problems and that the difficulties extended beyond the North-South borders.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) encouraged the Secretary of State to take the question very seriously. The cross-border bodies needed to be set up quickly so that the border counties could benefit from opportunities for industrial development.

Dr Mowlam said that she and fellow Ministers were meeting weekly to discuss the plight of the farmers.

Millennium celebrations

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (Kerry North): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whether the two Governments are willing to arrange a joint Millennium celebration to acknowledge the history and culture shared by both countries over the past 800 years; and if she will make a statement.

Dr Mowlam replied as follows: The two Governments have, for some time now, been cooperating closely on a number of major events which could be jointly supported as part of their Millennium celebrations. These include events which will acknowledge the history and culture shared by both countries.

Millennium celebrations began in Northern Ireland at the beginning of September with the lighting of a chain of beacons which extended into the Republic and across to Scotland.

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (Kerry North) thanked the Secretary of State for her positive response. It was an opportune time for celebration because of the greatly improved atmosphere of understanding between North and South, much of which was due to the Secretary of State and the work of the Body. The busy Governments should not lose sight of what there was to celebrate, despite the difficulties of the peace process. Cambridge's architecture showed what England had learned from Irish monastic architecture.

Dr Mowlam said that she had just been to a "Millennium Gold Encounter" for children from 30 countries. That generation needed the older generation to fulfill its promises on peace so that they, the leaders of the future, could thrive.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy (Co-Chairman) thanked Dr Mowlam for her speech and responses to questions. Those who identified themselves as Irish Nationalists and Republicans should remember that Republicanism in the best sense derived its dynamic from the Presbyterian tradition in Northern Ireland over 200 years ago. The present Secretary of State had devoted more time and effort than any of her predecessors to the quest for peace. The British and Irish Governments had a mandate from their peoples to pursue this path. The elected representatives who made up the Body had an obligation to support their Governments' efforts. They would carry out this obligation. The people of Ireland, North and South, wanted the Good Friday Agreement implemented. In the referendums they had rejected those who opposed the Agreement. Everyone involved had a duty to implement the Agreement for the sake of the next generation of Irish people.

The sitting was adjourned at 5.25 pm till to-morrow.

WEDNESDAY 15TH SEPTEMBER

The sitting was opened in public at 9.10 am in the Garden House Hotel, Cambridge, with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

1. FUTURE OF THE BODY

Motion made and Question proposed, That the Body takes note of the Discussion Paper by the Working Group on the Future of the Body [Doc. No. 661].-(**The Co-Chairman.**)

Mr David Winnick (Co-Chairman) introduced the Report of the Working Group on the Future of the Body. The Working Group had held two meetings, and had taken into account discussions at previous meetings of the Plenary. The Group had adopted three basic principles: that the Body should have a role in establishing the Parliamentary tier of the British-Irish Council; that it should seek to remain the premier Parliamentary dimension of British-Irish relations over the next few years; and that loss of parity of representation between Westminster and Dublin would be unfortunate.

The Group had looked at two options: maintaining the *status quo*, or merging with the devolved institutions. The Group had recognised the need to deal with developments over the past two years. Even before a Northern Ireland Executive had come into existence, the situation had changed in mainland Britain as a result of devolution to Scotland and Wales. The Group suggested that it should continue in existence to keep a watching brief on developments, perhaps holding its meetings at the same time as the Steering Committee.

Colleagues should bear in mind Dr Mowlam's remarks to the effect that it was envisaged that the Body should continue its work whether the Stormont Assembly remained in existence or not.

Efforts should be concentrated on reforming the structure of the Body to take account of devolution and the new institutions that had come about as a result. That would mean that the Body had a continued relevance even if the British-Irish Council and the other structures envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement came into being. He noted the example of the Nordic Council. He believed that it was essential that the Body reform if it was to retain its relevance and the interest and commitment of Members.

The following year would mark the tenth anniversary of the Body's existence - a historic moment in relations between Britain and Ireland. He noted the change from ten or twenty years previously when there was very little continuing dialogue between the two countries.

The Body had been a success, but now a new structure was needed to ensure that it remained as relevant as possible given the changes which had taken place.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) said that it was an admirable Report. The fact that it had come to tentative conclusions was right. It was not known what was going to happen regarding the proposed new institutions, and so it was necessary to wait and see before coming to firm decisions.

He expressed some doubts about the suggestion that the Body might serve a new role as a link between Westminster and the devolved institutions of the British Isles. It was not the job of the devolved institutions to see through the task of bringing peace to Northern Ireland. Rather, that remained the task of the sovereign Governments and Parliaments of the two countries. The Body was there in case of real difficulties in relations between the two Governments, as a place where views could be floated and problems aired. That would not be possible if the devolved institutions were involved. In particular, he raised the question of the status of Dublin in such a Body: it could not be regarded as equivalent to a devolved institution.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) welcomed the Report. He hoped that the Body would remain the premier institution, representative of the two sovereign Parliaments, whatever happened regarding the British-Irish Council, though of course the Good Friday Agreement had to be implemented in its entirety, and it would be necessary to see how the situation developed.

He recommended making informal contacts with representatives of other institutions to let them know what was happening. In his opinion, parties such as the Channel Islands or the Isle of Man did not see the relevance to them of the British-Irish Council.

There was a need to look at the Body's structures, at its committee system and plenary meetings. He hoped that it could look at issues of concern to both Governments, and have before it not just the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, but, for example, the two Ministers for Agriculture.

Finally, he noted that it was unfortunate that the Unionists had not taken up their seats in the Body.

Mr Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) considered that the status of the Body to be dependent on developments in the Province. The Body needed to define what it wished to achieve and then consider how best to achieve it. He recommended a continued involvement in any discussions on future British-Irish organisations with a view to making a strategic input at the appropriate point.

Mr Michael Mates (East Hampshire) recalled the mutual suspicion with which Irish and British parliamentarians had viewed each other at the time of the setting up of the Body ten years before. The Body had served a crucial role in defusing such suspicions and in building strong personal relationships between parliamentarians of both countries. It was particularly significant that over its ten-year history many members of the Body had gone on to serve as Ministers in their respective Governments.

The two sovereign Parliaments at Dublin and Westminster had more in common than any other two nations; but wider devolution would make it necessary to bring

in others who shared a common interest. The parity of membership between the two Parliaments would cease to be so important in the context of including the new parliamentary bodies. Voting power had never been significant in the workings of the Body and it would cause him no concern if Irish Members outnumbered those from Westminster. The inclusion of the devolved assemblies would, however, necessitate a change in the way committees worked. Committee A was likely to remain an exclusively Dublin-Westminster affair; but the other Committees might need to broaden the range of their work beyond those of North-South issues. It would therefore be necessary to consider changes in the subject remits of the Committees and possibly create more of them.

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde) stressed the importance of maintaining a watching brief on developments in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast. A serious dialogue had to be developed with the devolved assemblies, though in his view the small islands should only be accorded observer status in any new structure. Devolution had changed the UK's constitutional landscape and had created 297 new parliamentary representatives in the devolved assemblies. There was a growing debate on federalism versus unionism in Scotland. The UK was experimenting with asymmetrical devolution on the lines of Spain, rather than the federal structure of Germany. It was clear to him that the development of the Assemblies in Cardiff and Belfast and the Parliament in Scotland in the coming years would impinge on the work of the Body.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North) said that there was growing pressure for the development of devolved assemblies in the English regions. There would soon be a plethora of devolved assemblies with different powers. It seemed that the idea of a Council of the Isles had never really been properly thought through; but it was absolutely right that devolved Assemblies should be associated with such a linking body. He wondered how that related to the BIIPB? If the Good Friday Agreement came to fruition there was little doubt that there would be pressure for a Council of the Isles. Yet at York it had seemed that the Isle of Man and the Channel Isles were not very keen on becoming members of such a body. That might have been something to do with the extraordinary hospitality provided in York!

The Steering Committee should examine the repetition of much of the committee work of the Body, particularly in Committees B, C and D. He had lost count of the number of times that the International Fund for Ireland had been reported upon. There was also a tendency for Irish colleagues to seek to examine issues which were prominent in their constituencies. The Steering Committee should also consider changes to the ways in which Ministers appeared before the Body. If the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs were not unhappy about a possible challenge to their spheres of influence then it would be appropriate to ask people such as the British Defence Secretary to appear before the Body.

Whether or not the Good Friday Agreement went ahead there would still be a case for a Council of the Isles. Someone now needed to consider how the relationship between devolved Assemblies and the national Parliaments would be developed.

Mr Denis Canavan (Falkirk West) said it should be remembered that the Body had representatives from two sovereign powers but was not itself an executive body. A successor to the Body must include representatives from all devolved assemblies and parliaments and from the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, Mr George Reid, who was present at the meeting that day, would be able to take back to the Scottish Parliament the views of the Body.

Scotland and Northern Ireland had many cultural, economic, trade and tourism links. It was often said that the relationship between Scotland and Northern Ireland was stronger than any relationship between other parts of the United Kingdom. That relationship had its darker side. Scotland had a marching season and anybody who had ever been to an "Old Firm" football match would know that sectarianism still existed.

A Scottish composer, James MacMillan, had recently claimed that "Scotland is Northern Ireland without guns". He did not agree. Scotland had made a lot of progress in the last fifty years. Gone were the days when some Scottish Church leaders called for the Irish in Scotland to be deported. The Scottish Parliament was built on a pluralist society in which people had forged relationships by attending the same clubs, trades unions and political meetings. The Parliament even had a power-sharing Executive. However, there was no room for complacency. Dr Mowlam had suggested on the previous day that the Body should make early contact with the new Assemblies and Parliaments. He seconded that suggestion.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) agreed that the Council of the Isles had been the least considered part of the Good Friday Agreement. In his speech he would seek to canvass opinion on its development. There would, of course, be some matters which were exclusively for discussion between Dublin and London. Security was one such matter.

The Body would need to establish relations not just with the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly but with smaller legislatures such as the States in the Channel Islands and Tynwald in the Isle of Man. The Isle of Man in particular had a historic and linguistic relationship with the East of Ireland. It should be possible for the Secretariat and the Co-Chairmen to identify matters with a London-Dublin dimension and develop a variable-geometry Plenary with two agendas, one of which would relate to matters involving the two sovereign Parliaments, and the other to matters of concern to the other jurisdictions. If approached in the right spirit, it should be perfectly feasible to develop the role of the Plenary in that way. His final suggestion was that the House of Assembly in Gibraltar might have observer status in the new expanded Plenary.

Senator Helen Keogh said that she wished to acknowledge the success of the Body. However, its friendliness and rapport could lead to cosiness and complacency. There was a need to make the Plenary sessions more dynamic. Issues relevant to Members' constituents needed to be tackled. She was very disappointed at the way the two Governments responded to Committee Reports. They were not discussed in the sovereign Parliaments and were just left to gather dust. The suggestion that Ministers should come to the Body was a good one. She hoped that links would develop with the new Parliaments and Assemblies. This would help give the Body a much needed shake-up. Links with the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly were needed; but the smaller bodies should have observer status only. Within the context of the Belfast Agreement, the Body could continue to play a very worthwhile role, using the relationships that had built up over the years.

Lord Glentoran said that he agreed with everything said by the previous speaker. The Body had achieved its original purpose, of establishing friendly relations between parliamentarians, and had become rather cosy. The way forward was to get Ministers in, to challenge policies where necessary and to stir things up a bit. He was sure that the Body would continue to fulfil a useful purpose for several years to come.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy (Co-Chairman), concluding the debate, said that it was difficult to sum up a debate in which so many interesting suggestions had been made. He would concentrate on some broad strands in the debate. There was general agreement that the goodwill generated by the Body should be built upon. There was also an awareness of the devolution patterns emerging in Scotland and Wales and a wish to create strong links with those institutions. He also noted Mr Kevin McNamara's comments about movements for regional autonomy in England.

He hoped that the Body would be flexible enough to ensure that its proceedings always remained relevant. For this reason, he believed that it had to take account of devolution and establish the closest possible links with representatives of the devolved institutions. This would make both the work of the Body and the work of those institutions more relevant to the common interests of all involved. As an example, he noted the interest that the Body had taken in European and international affairs. Two things in particular had to be achieved. The first was to make the Body's procedures more relevant, for example by bringing other Ministers to it, as had been suggested by several speakers. The second was to look at areas where things could be achieved outside the sphere of foreign affairs.

Understanding and goodwill were the foundation of the Body. He hoped that that would continue in opening discussions with representatives of the devolved institutions as quickly as possible.

He hoped that the Deputy Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament would take back to his institution the Body's expressed willingness to co-operate with it. Mr Reid and Lord Alderdice were present as observers, but he hoped that the future would

bring their active participation and immediate and direct contact between members of the Body and their respective institutions.

He noted a sharper interest in the future of the Body from the British rather than the Irish side, as indicated by the number of speakers from each who had contributed to the debate.

He drew the Body's attention to the final paragraph of the Report, which recommended that the Working Group should continue. That would ensure the continued relevance and effectiveness of the work of the Body. He recommended that the Working Group set an agenda for a meeting with the Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen of the Committees, with a view to discussing how Committee Reports might be debated in the Plenary in a more relevant way.

He hoped for regular contact with colleagues in the devolved institutions, and believed that the Body should be in a position to have that contact whatever happened to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster), on a point of information, noted that in earlier years Ministers other than the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had attended meetings of the Body, though there had never been simultaneous attendance of equivalent Ministers from both Governments, as had been suggested might happen, nor had Ministers ever participated in debates.

And the Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Discussion Paper by the Working Group on the Future of the Body [Doe. No. 661 entitled 'The Future of the Body: Options for Development'].

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick) invited the guests from the devolved institutions, Lord Alderdice, Initial Presiding Officer of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and Mr George Reid, Deputy Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, to address the Body, pursuant to Rule 2(c).

Lord Alderdice outlined the respective roles of the inter-parliamentary bodies envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement. The North-South Ministerial Council under Strand 2 might require a parliamentary body, but that would be a matter for the Irish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The British-Irish Council would continue the work of the existing inter-governmental councils, which had to a large extent been shadowed by the Body. The Council of the Isles was, however, a separate development of a new kind. The British-Irish Council and the Council of the Isles were not simply afterthoughts. The new devolved structures in the UK would require the creation of organisations which could bring together those Ministers who had responsibility for subjects under discussion. A previous speaker had referred to the possibility of the Body questioning Agriculture Ministers of both Governments.

But in the future agricultural policy in the devolved areas would be determined by the Minister of the Assembly or Parliament concerned and not by the Minister of Agriculture in Westminster. The notion of sovereign Parliaments would be less persuasive over the next twenty years; and Scotland and Wales and both parts of Ireland would have many bread and butter issues in common.

Turning to the mechanics of setting up an Assembly in Belfast, he emphasized the extent to which views had been exchanged with other Parliaments and Assemblies. Political progress might be slow, but a great deal had been done on the practicalities of setting up an Assembly. Although focusing on high profile issues made for an interesting life, it was actually the practical issues which made it possible for experience to be shared and for politicians of different traditions to get to know each other.

Mr George Reid said that the Scottish Parliament had followed a model for devolution which respected the sovereignty of the State of which it formed part. The setting up of the Scottish Parliament had taken place against a background of dynamic change in Ireland. While he fully understood the difficulties of expanding the Body to embrace the new devolved structures, there was a new reality to be addressed and the devolved institutions would create new relationships. The framework had been one of asymmetrical devolution within the United Kingdom.

He understood the "wait and see" approach, but reminded members of the Gaelic saying '*Se obair latha tòiseachadh - 'se obair beatha crìochnachadh*': "starting is the work of a day, but finishing is the work of a lifetime". In both Scotland and Ireland politics were about process as well as structure. The Scottish Parliament had emerged from a long process of networking and the involvement of both civil institutions and the political parties. The results had been the creation of a legislature very different from Westminster.

Scotland and Ireland each had a large diaspora. He noted the success of the recent Youth Parliament of the Gaidhealtachd at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in Skye, which had served to emphasize the common Celtic culture shared by both countries. Indeed, Ireland had been the only country to be invited at Head of Government level to the opening of the Scottish Parliament.

It was not his role to talk about the structure of future relationships between Scotland and the Body; but members of the Body should note Scotland's wish to play a wider part on a broader stage. Scotland had always been very outward looking and looked forward to cooperating with the Body in years to come.

The Co-Chairman thanked both the speakers.

2. REFORM OF THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body takes note of the Report of the Committee on European and International Affairs [Doc. No. 67] on matters relating

to Common Agricultural Policy Reform, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.-(**Mr Michael Colvin.**)

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey), Chairman of Committee B, moving the Motion, said that the Report was the eighth from Committee B; and he hoped that other members of the Body would agree that there was quality as well as quantity in the work of the Committee. There had been a lack of agricultural experience amongst the British members of the Committee, particularly after Mr John Home Robertson had left their number - he alone farmed more acres than the rest of the House of Commons put together. The Committee had not got its boots dirty on farms but had taken a lot of oral and written evidence. The Report started with a history of the CAP, which at its inception accounted for some 80 per cent of the entire budget of the Community. Not until Commissioner McSharry got to grips with reform in 1992 were the costs reduced to about 45 per cent.

Any crisis in farming affected more than the economic fortunes of farmers. It also affected Britain and Ireland in different ways. In Ireland people were leaving the land to go to cities. In Britain, 20 per cent of people now lived in the countryside but only 2 per cent were employed there - with the result that there were growing problems of transport and employment in rural areas.

CAP III, also known as Agenda 2000, sought to address the problem of enlargement of the Community to the east. The membership of Poland and Hungary alone would have doubled the cost of the CAP to the EU budget under the current funding arrangements. Agenda 2000 had four main pillars: agriculture, the rural economy, the environment and consumers. It had received a mixed response from Member States. At the Berlin conference at which Agenda 2000 had been discussed, the British Government had been preoccupied by the budget rebate of £2 billion. The Agriculture Minister, Nick Brown, had said that the agreement at Berlin was a good outcome for consumers, farmers and the environment. The order in which he made that list was instructive, because farming was in a dreadful state.

There was a myth that only small, tenant farmers were suffering in the present economic climate. Agenda 2000 had proposed a cash limit on the amount of support that large farmers could receive. That had been resisted by the British Government because Britain had many more large farmers than the rest of the EU. His own farm was an example of what large farmers suffered. Two years ago he had made a net profit of £50,000 which represented an investment return of 2 per cent. Farming, however, was more than an investment, it was a way of life. In the previous year he had suffered a loss of £70,000: yields had increased and costs had been contained, but farm-gate prices had collapsed. He, as an owner-occupier, could weather the storm for a while, but the example served to show that large farmers were suffering too - while tenants, around half of all British farmers, did not have the collateral security to enable them to be carried through the present crisis by their bankers.

One of the main conclusions of the Report was that there were more farming similarities between the North and South of Ireland than between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. This, the Committee concluded, would have wide-ranging implications for the development of farming policy. Agenda 2000 suggested national "envelopes" of farming policy. The Committee had supported the introduction of regional envelopes within national envelopes.

Although farm gate prices had come down, there was no evidence of falling prices in the shops, so both farmers and consumers were losing - and the shopper was being "ripped off". The Report called for more cooperation between the Ministers involved. In particular, the Northern Ireland Minister of Agriculture should take a direct part in Agriculture Committee meetings in Brussels. This would not only help Northern Ireland, but it would also strengthen the position of the Republic in negotiations.

Mr Brendan Smith (Cavan-Monaghan) commended the Committee for producing a progressive, comprehensive but concise Report. CAP reform was important not just to farming in a narrow sense but to the whole rural economy. From an Irish point of view the Agenda 2000 negotiations had been successful. He was glad that the additional milk quota had been granted to Northern Ireland as well as to the South. Dairy cooperatives north and south of the border were campaigning for extra quotas to be given to smaller-scale producers in the border counties. Those should be funded not from the general national envelopes but from EU Peace and Reconciliation funding which was focused on the most disadvantaged areas. He was worried by reports that the British Ministry of Agriculture was not supporting that campaign as strongly as was the Irish Ministry. The proposal would only succeed if both Governments vigorously argued the case before Commissioner Fischler.

He supported the comment in the Report that the agricultural economy of Northern Ireland resembled that in the Republic more closely than that of the rest of the UK. Farm sizes in the north and south of Ireland were similar, and quite different from those in England. He thought that more emphasis should be placed on North-South cooperation in food production, slaughtering, and processing capacity. The destruction of the pig processing plant at Ballymoney in County Antrim in 1998 had led to a crisis in pig production on both sides of the border. That showed the urgent need for joint cross-border action.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) commended the Chairman of the Committee for his work. The background to the Report was the continuing depressed state of agriculture in both Britain and Ireland. Mr Nick Brown's recent comment about over-production had been criticised by farmers; but in their hearts they knew it to be true. When he left his fertile English constituency to go up into the hills of Wales he could see that the number of sheep on hill-farms was increasing despite the fact that that was uneconomic. Farmers were conservative people who took a long time to make necessary changes.

The Report illustrated well the virtual irrelevance of the border. National sovereignty and borders increasingly needed to be treated with flexibility. The Report pointed up the difference in national policies towards agriculture in Britain and Ireland. Northern Ireland was out of kilter with the UK Government line on CAP reform. There was a crying need to set up a cross-border body dealing with agricultural matters.

The Report also dealt with representation in Brussels. Northern Ireland was not well represented in EU decision making, while the Irish Republic's representation in Brussels was first-class and focused on national needs. He hoped that the devolved institutions within the UK would be increasingly involved in that process.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) recalled his time as a farm lobbyist, when he had had first-hand knowledge of the common interests of farmers in the North and South of Ireland, which were not always recognised by their Governments.

He welcomed Agenda 2000, which was better than previous proposals for CAP reform, but noted that it did nothing to alleviate the crisis in farm incomes. In the Republic of Ireland, only in the dairy sector had incomes remained stable in recent years. The recent suggestion of subsidised reductions in cattle numbers showed how the farm industry was tied in with the greater good. All had to work together, North and South, towards that good.

It was clear that young farmers had difficulties with future prospects for farming in Northern Ireland. Very few young farmers could see the prospect of earning a reasonable living from farming, and the situation was compounded by the availability of other more attractive jobs which had not existed 20 or 30 years ago. He agreed with a previous speaker that there was much room for cooperation between North and South in animal health and welfare and in food safety.

Mr Bill O'Brien (Normanton) said it might seem strange that he wanted to participate in the debate, as he had no direct personal or constituency interest in agriculture. However, he came from a mining background and he saw many parallels between what was happening in the agricultural industry and what had happened in the mining industry. When the CAP had been introduced by the European Commission in the 1960s it had been intended to increase production and efficiency. When this objective had been achieved by the mid-1980s, the whole structure began to collapse, just as had happened in the mining industry.

He had much sympathy with those farm workers in their early fifties who were now facing redundancy or early retirement. They still had much to offer, and he appealed for help for those people as part of the Agenda 2000 package. He also noted that the collapse of the agricultural industry could have many knock-on effects, both for the communities in which it was based and for the environment. The main victims of the collapse in the industry would be the small farmers, just as the main victims of the collapse in the mining industry had been the small pits.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim) saw the future of farming as highly uncertain and one in which off-farm employment could become the norm. In the next generation farming was likely to split between those large farms which could operate as commercial businesses and those smaller farms which could only be run on a part-time basis. There had always been a high level of integration within Irish agriculture: for example, livestock in the South had been sent North for finishing. He called for an all-Ireland approach to processing and product development and for the regionalisation of the national envelope within the UK and possibly also within the Republic of Ireland. Nobody wished to see a decline in rural communities but a reversal of that trend would require support from national governments or the European Union. Finally, he expressed his concern that processors and distributors were taking a disproportionate share of the shelf price which consumers paid for food.

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (Kerry North) welcomed the report but noted a few omissions. A new cattlebreeding body had been established in the South which he hoped could encompass the work of cattlebreeding societies in the North as well. He called for the joint promotion of agricultural products at international marketing fairs. The Leader programme had been highly effective in rural development; but whereas a trans-national programme existed in the South, no similar programme existed in the North. Steps needed to be taken to rectify that situation in the next Leader programme.

Turning to the issue of regional and national envelopes, he called for Northern Ireland to have its own representation in the European Union in the same way as the German Länder. A market-oriented policy was making farming less economic for up to 60 per cent of farmers; and the British Government's agricultural policy was not favourable to farmers in Northern Ireland.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West), Vice-Chairman of Committee B, thanked Members for their comments on the Report and the suggestions they had made. The Chairman, Mr Michael Colvin, had noted the lack of agricultural expertise on the British side of the Committee which had been amply made up for by the farming knowledge of Irish members. As one who shared his British colleagues' lack of agricultural know-how, he too paid tribute to the expertise that the Committee had shown.

He summarised the comments of other speakers in the debates. Mr Brendan Smith had referred to the need for additional milk quota for the border regions. As was made clear in the previous day's debate, that was a matter of great urgency. Mr Peter Temple-Morris had referred to the need for improved representation at Brussels. The Committee had made that a significant part of its Report. It would be vital for the farming interests in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland to make their voices heard at Brussels. Recent events had shown clearly how easy it was for differences to arise between the Agriculture Ministers of Wales, Scotland and the United Kingdom, regardless of their respective political affiliations. It was interesting that one of the candidates for Minister of Agriculture in Northern Ireland had been

Mr Martin McGuinness. He wondered how Mr McGuinness would feel about working in cooperation with the United Kingdom Minister in Brussels. He or any other Minister from a devolved Executive would want to assert his or her independence. There should be discussions in Brussels about how the devolved institutions would be represented.

Mr Seymour Crawford had lent his valuable experience as an agricultural lobbyist to the work of the Committee. Several speakers had mentioned food safety, and Mr O'Brien had made interesting comparisons between the plight of the miners and of the farmers. Mr Jimmy Deenihan's suggestions would be taken on board by the Committee.

In conclusion, he said that anybody who looked at a map of the island of Ireland could see that there had to be North-South cooperation in agriculture. Only when taking evidence from Ministers and officials had the Committee become aware of the extent of existing cooperation. Its recommendation 52 was born out of the envy of farmers in the North for the efficiency and power of the Republic's farming lobby. Northern Ireland farmers could learn from their example and sponsor their own lobbyists to act in cooperation with Dublin.

And the Question being put;

***Resolved,* That the Body takes note of the Report of the Committee on European and International Affairs [Doc. No. 671 on matters relating to Common Agricultural Policy Reform, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.**

3. EDUCATION AND INTER-COMMUNITY RELATIONS - A STUDY OF DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 1995

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Environment [Doc. No. 68] on matters relating to Education and Inter-Community relations within Northern Ireland.-**(Ms Marian McGennis.)**

Ms Marian McGennis (Dublin Central), Acting Chairman of Committee D, paid tribute to Roger Stott on behalf of the members of Committee D. She had valued his friendship and their working relationship. In particular, she admired the way in which he had attended every meeting of the Committee even when it was clear that he was not well. His death represented a tremendous loss to everyone who had known him. An indication of the esteem in which he was held was shown by a letter she had received from Mr Micheál Martin, Minister for Education and Science in the Republic. He had written in the following terms:

I refer to the report of Committee D of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body - a Study of Developments since 1995. First of all, I would like to say that it is with deep sadness that I learned of the recent death of the Chairman of the Committee, Roger

Stott. The invaluable contribution he made to the work of the Committee will, I hope, bear fruit in the development of more harmonious inter-community relationships.

I am glad to broadly endorse the report and enclose some observations on the conclusions and recommendations. Please convey my thanks to the Body for the report, which is a valuable contribution to increasing mutual understanding through the educational systems on this island.

The Members of the Committee were pleased that both Governments recognised the potential for education to contribute to mutual understanding. However, they were puzzled that there was little concrete action proposed in the Government responses. The Irish Government did not mention the Committee's suggestion of an Irish-medium school at the border, while the British Government had said that it was not feasible. The Committee was concerned by this and had decided to continue to monitor the way in which its recommendations were acted upon.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) said he wished to be associated with Ms McGennis's tribute to the memory of Roger Stott. Roger had been a special person in many ways, and had represented the spirit that was essential to the success of the Body. Ms McGennis had also focused on inadequacies in the Irish Government's response to the report. In particular, it had not commented on the recommendation for a jointly-funded Irish-medium school in the border area. The British Government's response had been wholly negative, simply raising obstacles to the implementation of the proposal. The Committee had agreed to pursue the matter further with both Governments. Leaving aside that particular proposal, he broadly welcomed the two Governments' responses to the overall thrust of the Report.

Ms Marian McGennis (Dublin Central) said that she agreed with Mr Ó Caoláin that the primary school recommendation should be pursued in both Parliaments.

Mr Bill O'Brien (Normanton) said that he, too, believed that both Governments should give a more positive response to the proposal.

And the Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Environment [Doe. No. 68] on matters relating to Education and Inter-Community relations within Northern Ireland.

The meeting was continued in private.

4. ADJOURNMENT

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body do now adjourn.-(Mr Kevin McNamara.)

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North), moving the Adjournment, thanked the Clerks and administrative staff of the Body for their work, the journalists for their attendance, the Co-Chairmen of the Body, and, in particular, the staff and management of the hotel. The management of the Moat House Group had been especially cooperative, and had sent their Head Chef to Cambridge to assist in providing the meals for delegates. Hotel staff had been unfailingly helpful and courteous. He also wanted to thank Cambridgeshire Constabulary for their unobtrusive presence.

He hoped that in the year 2000, the tenth anniversary of the Body, suitable occasions could be found for celebrations in both capitals, perhaps including some old faces. He recalled how initial hostility between the two delegations had quickly melted and turned into the current general goodwill.

Finally, he welcomed the speeches which had been delivered by the representatives of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Scottish Parliament.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy (Co-Chairman) noted that the Steering Committee had suggested that the next plenary be held in London, to mark the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Body.

And the Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body do now adjourn.

The Session concluded at 12.30 pm.

The Nineteenth Plenary Session of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body was adjourned.

APPENDIX
JOINT EFFORTS BEING MADE BY BOTH GOVERNMENTS TO ENCOURAGE ECONOMIC
AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE BORDER AREAS

DEPARTMENT/AGENCY	BORDER AREA AFFECTED	TITLE OF PROJECT PROGRAMME/ACTIVITY	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
DOE- Air and Sea Ports Division	Northwest	City of Derry Airport	<p>Runway improvement works jointly funded by DOE(NI) and Department of Public Enterprise. ROI-DOE has offered £1.4m stg and DPE some £1,528 IR under the Peace and Reconciliation Programme EU - Cross Border Infrastructure.</p> <p>The project is in 3 phases - Phases 1 and 2 are under way but Phase 3 is subject to planning approval.</p>
DOE - Roads Service	Counties Armagh, Down and Louth	Prospective Newry to Dundalk Cross-Border link road	The provision of 14km of new 2-lane dual carriageway from the southern end of Newry Bypass at Cloghoge to the northern end of the

			<p>Dundalk Western Bypass at Ballymascanlan. Total estimated cost £60m.</p> <p>Subject to completion of statutory processes and availability of finance.</p>
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	All of Northern Ireland	Overseas Tourism Marketing Initiatives (OTMI)	<p>This is a public / private sector All Ireland Marketing Effort with an annual budget of circa IR £7m for Germany, France, UK and US. NITB has contributed to the Initiative since 1995.</p>
Northern Ireland Tourist Board / Bord Fáilte / Department of Tourism, Sport & Recreation / Department of Arts Culture and Gaeltacht	Northern Ireland excluding Belfast and Border Counties of ROI	Implementation of Tourism Measure of INTERREG II	<p>Approximately £13m EU aid towards developing marketing and capital projects in the eligible area.</p>
Northern Ireland Tourist Board / Bord Fáilte	Selected Border Towns	Border Towns Initiative	<p>Approximately £350,000 EU aid under the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (SSPPR) for the</p>

			development of urban based tourism marketing projects.
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	Shannon- Erne Corridor	Shannon Erne Waterway Development Programme	<p>NITB and Bord Fáilte provide funding to supplement IFI funds designed to encourage tourism development in the area surrounding the Shannon-Erne Waterway.</p> <p>NITB are also supporting an INTERREG application to fund a promotional brochure.</p>
Northern Ireland Tourist Board	12 Border Counties of Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland	Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (SSPPR)	<p>The programme enables NITB and Bord Fáilte to jointly develop and implement a mutually beneficial programme with synergy of marketing activity.</p> <p>A specific image of the "North Country" has been</p>

			<p>developed and promoted to give additional focus to this area of the island, which is not as developed as a tourism destination as other areas of the island.</p>
<p>DED in conjunction with DPE (ROI)</p>	<p>INTERREG area ie all of Northern Ireland (except Belfast) and six ROI Border counties</p>	<p>Energy Challenge (founded under the INTERREG II Energy Measure).</p>	<p>An annual competition (has been running four years) to encourage local people to seek local solutions to local energy problems.</p> <p>Best proposals receive grant aid. Total Northern Ireland annual funding is £450,000.</p> <p>DPE Minister, Mr Joe Jacob, will be attending the launch of this year's competition on 28 September 1999.</p>
<p>LEDU</p>	<p>Tyrone / Donegal</p>	<p>Tyrone / Donegal Partnership</p>	<p>Joint Craft Programme is being run to encourage the</p>

			development of the craft sector in Tyrone and Donegal. A Christmas Programme is being supported by LEDU.
LEDU / Irish Trade Board	All areas	MIDEM 1999/2000	LEDU and ITB have jointly organised participation by over 45 businesses involved in the music industry, north and south. This international show in Cannes, France is regarded as the premier music market and hosts strands by record companies, publishers, labels and distributors.
LEDU / Irish Trade Board	All areas	MIPTV/MIPCOM	This is the second year LEDU and ITB have jointly sponsored the event. Due to the large number of clients wanting to participate, the agencies organised two stands to

			<p>accommodate everyone.</p> <p>The event took place in January 1999. LEDU is currently working with Enterprise Ireland on preparations for the January 2000 event.</p> <p>Previously, LEDU and the Irish Trade Board have jointly organised participation by television production and broadcasting companies at these two international shows in Cannes.</p>
LEDU	Leitrim / Dungannon	ARIGNA - South Tyrone Cross Border IT Training Programme	<p>An economic appraisal is currently being carried out to enable the South Tyrone Partnership and ARIGNA Leader Group to run a cross border e-commerce training programme. LEDU is working to try to get the programme</p>

			under way.
LEDU	Derry, Tyrone, Fermanagh & Donegal	NORWESCO's Innovation II Programme	<p>The programme is targeted at "Hi Tec" businesses employing more than 10 people. They are hoping to recruit 8 companies from the north and 8 from the South.</p> <p>The aim of the programme is to attempt to change the approach and attitudes of all of the people involved in the business, management and staff alike - resulting in more efficient and profitable small businesses.</p>
LEDU / Enterprise Ireland / FÁS / Cavan County Board	All of Northern Ireland and the six border countries of ROI	ACUMEN Cross-Border Business Development Programme	Through the provision of individual company consultancy and sales salary support, participating companies North and South are assisted to identify new

			business opportunities and increase cross border sales.
IDB / LEDU	Armagh / Monaghan	E-Commerce Corridor	Discussion of establishment of call centre initiative, to support growth of e-commerce in region
Department of Economic Development - Northern Ireland Dept of Finance - ROI	Donegal / Londonderry	Digital Economy Project	<p>The project's main objectives are to:</p> <p>Improve the capacity of the regions current job creating sectors (ie government, health, tourism, retail and SMEs) to survive in the digital economy.</p> <p>Create a system of regional innovation to stimulate jobs within the region and develop the growth of an indigenous knowledge based sector.</p> <p>Improve the attraction of the region as a</p>

			location for IT based inward investment companies.
<p>Department of Economic Development Northern Ireland</p> <p>Department of Finance - ROI</p>	<p>Counties in ROI: Monaghan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Cavan, Sligo</p> <p>Counties in Northern Ireland: Londonderry , Fermanagh, Armagh, Down, Tyrone</p>	Integrated Area Plans	<p>A border corridor strategy based on the area being competitive, inclusive, sustainable, outward looking & integrated.</p> <p>An integrated plan based on the above criteria for each of the 3 cross-border groups.</p>
All Departments	All of Northern Ireland (except Belfast)	INTERREG II	<p>Joint NI/ROI Structural Funds Programme for the period 1994-1999.</p> <p>Its twin objectives are to promote the creation and development of networks of cross-border co-operation and to assist the eligible area to overcome its special</p>

			development problems in areas such as Economic Development, Human Resources, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Tourism, Infrastructure and Environmental Protection.
Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland Rivers Agency / Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands	Fermanagh, Leitrim, Cavan	Restoration and management of the Shannon-Erne Waterway	Linkage of the Erne system to the Shannon Navigation to provide one of the longest inland navigable waterways in Europe with over 20,000 boat passages on the Northern Ireland side recorded since re-opening.
Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland/ Department of the Marine and Natural Resources	Irish Sea	Marine Fisheries Research and Development	To enhance knowledge and international management of common commercial fish stocks. Several EU-

			<p>funded research projects conducted in collaboration with Marine Institution (ROI): <i>Nephrops</i> (prawns) age and growth; fish biomass from egg production; discarding of unwanted fish at sea.</p>
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