



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

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

TWENTIETH PLENARY SESSION

14 and 15 March February 2000

Grand Committee Room, Westminster Hall, London

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

(Produced by the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association)

MONDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2000

The sitting was opened in public at 9.45 am in the Grand Committee Room, Westminster Hall, London, with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

1. ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

The Co-Chairman announced that, pursuant to Rule 2(a), **Jean Corston MP, Helen Jackson MP and Mr John McFall MP**, being Associate Members, had accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for all of the Session.

2. PRIVILEGE

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

3. ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

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

The Co-Chairman asked Members to give their names to the Clerks if they wished to speak in the political debate the following day. The Steering Committee had agreed to place a time-limit of five minutes on all speakers in that debate, save for those moving and replying to the Motion, who would have ten minutes each.

4. MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

The Co-Chairman read a message from the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Tony Blair MP, as follows:

I am sorry that I cannot be with you today to share in your 10th Anniversary Plenary Conference. I am sure it will be an interesting event and I know you will enjoy the address of my colleague Peter Mandelson.

Since your inaugural Conference in London in 1990 there have been enormous political changes in Northern Ireland. There have been periods of progress and periods of frustration. But there is no doubt of the benefits which peace has brought to Northern Ireland.

Throughout this time of change the BIIPB has been there supporting, and quite rightly investigating, areas of common interest and concerns, and asking probing questions. On behalf of the British Government, I would like to wish you a very happy 10th Anniversary. I hope the Body continues its good work in the years ahead.

The sitting was suspended at 9.55 am.

The sitting was resumed at 10.15 am with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

5. STATEMENT BY THE RT HON PETER MANDELSON MP, SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

The Co-Chairman welcomed the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt. Hon. Peter Mandelson MP, and invited him to address the Body.

Mr Peter Mandelson addressed the Body as follows:

I first want to wish the BIIPB a happy 10th birthday. I am only sorry that it takes place in something some way short of a party atmosphere, despite all that we have to celebrate ten years on from your founding.

During this time, the island of Ireland has become a safer, more harmonious and prosperous place. Ireland in the North has a transformed security situation. Ireland in the South has acquired a modern economic brand image. The potential for both is huge and I have a deep sense of personal commitment to entrenching Ireland's security and prosperity, North and South. We owe nothing less to the people we represent and serve.

It was, therefore, with a heavy heart that on Friday I took a step I had hoped would not prove to be necessary and suspended temporarily the institutions set up under the Good Friday Agreement.

I hope that the suspension will be short. I intend it to be. But it was, even so, a move that the British and Irish Governments, in constant touch with the political parties, pulled out all the stops to avert. If we had found any way of securing enough confidence for the institutions to continue we would have taken it.

The bedrock of the Good Friday Agreement is cross-community support. Without a consensus across the political spectrum, its institutions cannot be sustained. It is not a matter of taking one side or the other. The only side that I am on is that of the Agreement as a whole and the interests of both traditions invested in it.

Decommissioning is not a Unionist or a British fixation. The statements of John Hume and Seamus Mallon confirm that, as do the calls made by President Clinton and Senator Kennedy. Nor is it an issue only in the minds of politicians. It has been called for by Protestant and Catholic, from all corners of Ireland, north and south. That it must happen is agreed by leader-writers from the *Newsletter* to the *Irish News* to the *Boston Globe*. And I do not just mean republican decommissioning. The onus is on every paramilitary to dispose of their illegally held arms for politics to work properly. Such was the overwhelming desire for progress that Bishop Heggarty was prepared to help personally; and I commend his bold initiative. It was, and remains, a crucial part of building consensus, a signal that paramilitaries - from all sides - were committed to playing their part in building a new, peaceful Northern Ireland.

On Friday, there was one very positive development. After I had signed the Order suspending the institutions, we received a report from General John de Chastelain's decommissioning Commission. The Commission reported that the IRA had indicated the context in which they would initiate a comprehensive process to put arms beyond use. In the Commission's view, this held out the real prospect of an agreement which would enable it to fulfil the substance of its mandate.

I do not for a moment underestimate the significance of this. If it means what it appears to mean, it may be the first sign that the IRA are, after all, prepared to give up their arms.

We need to find out what the context is in which the IRA says it will put arms beyond use. Brian Cowen and I intend to follow this up urgently, first by exploring with General de Chastelain what lies behind Friday's report. But, in the situation we faced on Friday, it was too unspecific and it came too late. It provides the basis for answering Seamus Mallon's "whether" question, but not his "when" question or "how". Had it come earlier, we could have sought, and possibly received, greater clarity. But, as it was, with the institutions on the point of collapse, I had no choice but to act as I did - as I said I would - under the review provisions of the Agreement.

Some have said that I acted in breach of the Good Friday Agreement. On the contrary, I acted to save the Agreement as the two Governments said they would in the conclusions of the Mitchell Accord. The consensus necessary for the institutions to continue simply did not exist. Though convinced that this step was the right one, it was with great sadness that I took it.

The institutions set up under the Good Friday Agreement have proved to be the most effective, most democratic form of government that Northern Ireland has ever known. I rejoice in the fact that there are no longer strangers, no more outsiders from Northern Ireland's administration.

Northern Ireland finally had a truly representative Executive, with members drawn from all the major pro-Agreement parties and including two of its opponents. It underlines that there are no second-class citizens in Northern Ireland any more. It had local Ministers, with local accents and deep local knowledge, with the power to make decisions that affect the daily lives of local people. And each and every one of those Ministers, regardless of political affiliation, has fulfilled our highest expectations: that they are the right people to govern Northern Ireland. Government of Northern Ireland from outside Northern Ireland is inferior to inclusive self-government of Northern Ireland.

The Good Friday Agreement created a framework of north-south institutions for practical co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland. This means greater co-operation and better services not just for Northern Ireland but for the whole island of Ireland, and East-West arrangements that will broaden and deepen relations between Ireland and the United Kingdom and throughout the United Kingdom.

Sadly these, too, are now on hold: but *not* indefinitely. I do not want direct rule to continue for a moment longer than necessary. That is why the talks that Brian Cowen and I are initiating with the parties today are so urgent.

In the last 72 hours, some harsh words have been spoken. That is perhaps not surprising. Huge issues are at stake. And yes, at times, there are differences of emphasis between us. There is a keen sense of loss, which extends beyond Northern Ireland and beyond these islands, among all those who support the Agreement and want it to succeed. But this process has worked best when we have all worked together, while honestly recognising the differences between us.

I appeal to all the parties to work with the Irish Government and ourselves, without reservation or precondition, to create the conditions needed to reactivate Northern Ireland's devolved government, to seek the necessary clarity, and to move forward together. Any less wholehearted approach will not be understood or forgiven by the people of Northern Ireland. They take pride and delight in the huge progress which has been made in recent years:

The ceasefires well established.

A peace which is still not perfect, but is infinitely better than what went before. And I do not underestimate the courage and effort it has taken on all sides for that to be achieved.

A remarkably settled consensus about the constitutional questions that have dogged the last thirty years.

The emergence of new institutions in which both traditions play a full part.

The pursuit of an active agenda on rights and equality.

This is not an agenda of "political correctness". I am no fan of gesture politics. But the generosity of spirit and imagination on all sides that have got us this far must not fail us now.

Taking the necessary final steps - and risks - on the way means each side understanding the mind-set of the other. It means, in particular, Republicans understanding better why Unionists are reluctant to join in government without more definitive progress on the arms issue. Why the fact that the guns are silent, welcome as it is, is not enough. And all of us understanding better why arms have the almost totemic significance they have for those who hold them. Above all, it means the avoidance of any suggestion of surrender or climb-down on either side.

There will be dissidents on both sides who do not want us to succeed. But we should not be afraid of the men and women whose gaze is firmly backwards, whose justification is some eccentric notion that nations can be built on violence and intimidation and cite a spurious analysis of history in support -- or equally, of those who refuse to admit that change is either possible or desirable, those who prefer the

certainties of past conflict to the uncertainties of future reconciliation. They have not deterred us in the past and they never will.

That is why I am committed, as I was before devolution, to good government in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland, irrespective of their tradition or political allegiance. That is why I propose to continue to advance the programmes of positive reform that flow from the Good Friday Agreement - because the Good Friday Agreement envisaged not just a new constitution, but fundamental changes to the political and social fabric of Northern Ireland.

The Agreement has given Northern Ireland some of the most sophisticated rights and equality arrangements in the world. But rights cannot simply be tacked on to the systems and institutions of government - we must actively seek new and imaginative ways to encourage respect for rights and equality in every area of public life, everywhere from employment to policing and parades - all areas that must advance regardless of the state of political progress.

I have faced calls to suspend the implementation of the Patten Report on Policing while the institutions are on hold. This is just not possible. In the words of the Chief Constable "the vast bulk of the recommendations are simply about good and effective policing".

Policing is not a partisan issue to be traded as if it were part of some political scoresheet and it must not be used to give comfort to any political party. I have not done that to date and I am not going to start now, however much I respect the right of any politician to express their view on the subject.

I know the passions that reform of the RUC arouses, particularly the prospect of a new name and changed badge. I have heard at first hand, many times, the harrowing stories of how these symbols have come to mean so much to so many people in the RUC family who experienced tragedy. But a nine to one religious imbalance cannot be allowed to continue. A police service that is not representative of the society it serves cannot hope to be fully effective. It cannot hope to draw support and strength from all parts of the community.

We must not rest until all the pillars of the State command the same respect, inspire the same sense of ownership across the community in Northern Ireland - until the State and its agencies truly are representative of and responsive to the society it serves.

So much, though, has changed already in a positive direction in Northern Ireland. And you in the BIIPB have seen at close quarters the great advances that the last ten years have brought. From terrible violence, political instability and little hope of anything better.

I am determined to work harder still to build confidence in the Good Friday Agreement and to create the conditions for the swift return of devolved

government. And I will do all I can to encourage the incremental shifts that have brought ceasefires, then the Good Friday Agreement, then devolution: the shifts that will one day secure truly democratic government and an unbreakable peace in Northern Ireland.

Those are our goals. And we need each other - indeed, unionists need nationalists who need republicans who need unionists - to achieve those goals. That recognition was the mainspring of the Good Friday Agreement. It remains so. It is what will carry us forward.

The Co-Chairman thanked the Secretary of State.

Mr Peter Mandelson thanked the Co-Chairman and explained to the Body that owing to an engagement in Ireland he would have to leave for the airport at about 11.15.

6. QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Rt. Hon. Peter Mandelson MP, replied to Questions for oral answer put by Members of the Body.

North West Region Cross Border Group's Infrastructural Study

Ms Cecilia Keaveney (Donegal North-East): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how deprivation levels outlined in the North West Region Cross Border Group's Infrastructural Study can be resolved in balanced manner, given the new focus afforded to the southern border counties through Objective One status and the thrust of the Republic's National Development Plan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Peter Mandelson replied as follows: Matters concerning deprivation levels in the North West Region and their resolution are the responsibility of the Irish Government and the devolved administration in Northern Ireland. As a pause in the operation of that administration has now taken effect I am unable to comment further on this issue. I hope the hon. Member will understand the reasons for this.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney (Donegal North-East) asked whether the Secretary of State accepted that the criteria for funding were not geared to the spatial dimension of regional success. Could a focus be given to deprived areas? If no funding was available there was little that politicians at a local level could do.

Mr Mandelson accepted that analysis. He had recently come to know Donegal well and some accounts about him that were partially true had even appeared in the local newspapers. Donegal was dear to his heart, and he wanted to get to know the area better and to work closely with its local representatives.

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan) drew attention to other areas in need of special consideration.

Mr Mandelson suggested that Cavan would be a good area for consideration.

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan) asked why, if that was the case, Cavan had been omitted from special consideration.

Mr Mandelson said that in Westminster when a Minister did not know the answer he would offer to write to his honourable Friend. That was what he would have to offer to do.

Decommissioning of illegally-held weapons

The Co-Chairman said that he felt that it would be for the convenience of the Body if he were to group all the Questions relating to decommissioning and associated topics. The Secretary of State was therefore invited to reply to Questions 2, 4, 6, 12, 14, 15 and 17 together.[\[1\]](#)

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, when last he met the Taoiseach, and whether they discussed matters relating to the decommissioning of arms.

Mr Harry Barnes (North East Derbyshire): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make a statement on progress towards the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make a statement on the progress being made towards the overall demilitarisation of Northern Ireland, including the decommissioning, or putting beyond use by any means, of the weapons of the Provisional IRA and other paramilitary organisations of whatever persuasion.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what recent discussions he has had with General de Chastelain on the subject of the decommissioning of illegally-held arms in Ireland.

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

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make a statement on the document '*Security - Return to Normality: The Government's Approach*' published on 22 December 1999.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, when it is intended to dismantle the remaining Army observation posts in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Peter Mandelson said that the questions contained different emphases on the theme of decommissioning and that he would therefore address Question 2 first, as follows:

I last met the Taoiseach at the inaugural meeting of the British-Irish Council on 17 December. We discussed the 10 December report of the International Independent Commission on Decommissioning and looked forward to further progress in their January report. The publication of that report and a further report on 11 February illustrated the lack of progress on decommissioning. On 11 February I reluctantly announced a pause in the operation of the Assembly and Executive. During this pause both Governments will initiate a review which will have the primary goal of getting decommissioning and devolution quickly back on track.

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde) drew the Secretary of State's attention to the article in *The Irish Times* of 14 February which said that the Taoiseach found "deep significance" in the last two paragraphs of the second de Chastelain report. Would the review be swift with narrow terms of reference which would lead to the speedy restoration of the devolved powers?

Mr Mandelson said he shared the Taoiseach's view of the significance of the report. The statements made in confidence by Sinn Féin to the decommissioning body now needed to be shared with everyone else. Hard work also needed to be done on the detail of decommissioning. It was to be hoped that no one would put forward obstacles to decommissioning and that the period of suspension would be brief. He had already formed an excellent relationship with the new Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr Harry Barnes (North East Derbyshire) said that there was a sharp distinction in tone between the two de Chastelain reports. The second report talked about a real prospect of agreement. In order to advance that prospect, would the Secretary of State consider the proposal for a National Day of Reconciliation, on which the different parties could move together?

Mr Mandelson said that in principle that was an attractive idea. While there was no moral equivalence between legally and illegally held arms, nonetheless the idea should be considered as a possible way forward, in order to encourage compromise and acceptance of one another's problems.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) said that the last time the peace process had paused had been in February, 1996. That had been due to a loss of momentum. The challenge for the Secretary of State was now to maintain momentum in the absence of the institutions. The second de Chastelain report had spoken of "demilitarisation including decommissioning". The important thing was to put the guns out of use and this approach was the best basis for that end.

Mr Mandelson said that he wished to see decommissioning not just by the IRA but by all paramilitary organisations. The British Government was committed to normalising the security presence in Northern Ireland and removing road blocks, barricades and security checks. In December the Government had published a document containing a further review of the security presence. Progress depended on eliminating the security threat in Northern Ireland. Military patrolling was down

by two-thirds and the troop totals were at their lowest since 1970. There was potential to go much further.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North) said there was a real feeling in certain quarters in Northern Ireland that decommissioning was the first in a series of obstacles that would be raised by Unionists. Those would include reopening the question of RUC reform. Was the Secretary of State confident that such obstacles would not be raised?

Mr Mandelson replied that he felt the spirit of the Ulster Unionist Council the previous Saturday had been constructive, not destructive. He shuddered to think what the outcome would have been had he not decided on Friday to suspend the institutions. He agreed that the last thing people in Northern Ireland wanted was for politicians to find pretexts for impeding the peace process. There should be no grandstanding or preconditions from politicians.

Mr Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) asked whether it was true that last November the Secretary of State had made a secret deal with Mr David Trimble to break the terms of the Good Friday Agreement. Would the Secretary of State now be more open and commit himself to implementing the Agreement in full?

Mr Mandelson replied that it was not true that any secret deal had been made. All his dealings with the parties had been open, transparent and clear. The Taoiseach himself had said that if the institutions encountered difficulties, the Governments would have to assume their responsibilities and take the necessary action.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) said that the British Government document published in December had not seriously addressed the issue of demilitarisation. He asked how the Secretary of State reconciled his commitment to the Good Friday Agreement with his deliberate decision last Friday to collapse the institutions set up under that Agreement. How did he propose to restore confidence in his Government's commitment to the Agreement? His recent action had ignored the principle of parity of esteem between the various parties.

Mr Mandelson replied that he understood Sinn Féin's view. He had listened to all the Sinn Féin statements over the weekend, and respected the points they made. However, he did not recognise the conditions that they described.

He found it a delightful irony that it was the Nationalists and Republicans who were most vocal in insisting that the doors of Stormont should be kept open: it indicated an enormous and welcome transformation of attitudes. The Good Friday Agreement enshrined the principle of consent. The institutions had been created by a British Act of Parliament and confirmed by Treaty.

Rhetoric and partial or partisan understanding of the situation would not help to bring the two traditions together. Both had to have confidence in continuing the institutions. He believed that it was possible to restore both that confidence, but all

would have to have a clear understanding of how the Good Friday Agreement was to be implemented. It was possible that emerging conditions would require those involved to think again about how best to approach implementation; if so, those concerned should say so during the review clearly, quickly and without rancour.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim) asked whether the Secretary of State would set out his policy in relation to the continued presence of Army observation posts.

Mr Peter Mandelson said that the primary function of the observation posts was to protect the security force's bases and patrols. So long as the situation required such bases and patrols to be in place, they must receive all the necessary protection. He would be failing in his responsibility if he left them exposed.

He personally kept the need for such posts under constant review, and the structure could be adjusted as appropriate to match the security level.

The Co-Chairman invited supplementary questions.

Senator Edward Haughey asked whether the Belfast Agreement should properly be known as an Agreement or a Treaty; whether, if it were a Treaty, it were possible for one of the signatories to act unilaterally; and whether the Secretary of State intended to address the autonomy of Ministers in the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Mr Mandelson said that it was both an Agreement *and* a Treaty. Paragraph 7 allowed reviews if there were difficulties in the process. His responsibility was to ensure effective and proper governance under the Treaty. It would be misleading to argue that implementation would be simple in the current complicated circumstances. Politicians had to understand and respond to the politics of the situation. The British and Irish Governments had done that.

The Executive had been in operation for nine weeks. While it may not have been perfectly designed in every aspect, he believed that it had operated remarkably well.

Senator Helen Keogh noted that the Secretary of State had spoken of acting without preconditions. She asked him whether it was possible to do so without preconditions from the Unionist side.

Mr Mandelson replied that he had not been informed of any preconditions set either by the Ulster Unionists or by Sinn Féin. He hoped that all parties would be able to sit down in a calm and measured fashion to probe the detail and proceed.

Ms Marian McGennis (Dublin Central) asked the Secretary of State to confirm whether it was his intention that General de Chastelain should deal with decommissioning. In his address he had spoken of the "how" and "when" being part of the review, and she was concerned that that would lead to the decision on the Executive being postponed. The concerns raised by Mr Ó Caoláin were the concerns of all people, and not just Sinn Féin.

Mr Mandelson said that the choice facing him on Friday had not been between suspension and the continuation of normal business, but between the suspension of the Executive and its collapse. That would have had dire consequences, and he had therefore acted as he did.

He wished to make it quite clear that General de Chastelain would sort out the "how" and "when" of decommissioning in the context of the continuing political discussions. The actions of the Irish Government had been vital. The political and technical issues had to be dealt with concurrently, but the precise details of the decommissioning were a matter for the General.

Mr Conor Lenihan (Dublin South-West) asked whether the Secretary of State agreed that suspension of the Good Friday Agreement communicated a message that he had restored a Unionist veto by an alternative route. Were all parties bound by the conclusions of the decommissioning body?

Mr Mandelson said that all sides had a veto: devolution would never have happened if all parties had not gone into the agreement voluntarily. Sinn Féin had a veto on decommissioning and no one could "cherry pick" the Agreement because that would cause confidence to evaporate. He could not force anyone to do anything but he could consult and encourage all parties to agree.

The Co-Chairman thanked the Secretary of State, and presented him with a BIIPB tie.

The sitting was suspended at 11.20 am.

The sitting was resumed in public in Church House, Westminster, at 2.30 pm, with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair.

1 The replies to Questions 4, 6, 12, 14, and 15 are printed at the end of the Summary among the Written Answers.

7. FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body takes note of the Fourth Annual Report of the Body [Doc. No. 69].-**(The Co-Chairman.)**

The Co-Chairman, moving the Motion, explained that the Annual Report was made in pursuance of a decision in 1996, when the first such report had been presented. He said that the Report was self-explanatory and invited contributions from the floor.

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde) asked what response had been made to the invitation to guests from the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and the devolved institutions to attend meetings of the Body. Had the Body formed any links with the British-Irish Council?

The Co-Chairman said that the 19th Plenary in Cambridge had been attended by representatives from the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly, while at the 17th Plenary in York representatives of the Islands had been present. At the Steering Committee on the previous evening it had been decided to invite representatives from the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Islands to the next meeting of the Steering Committee in June, in order to discuss ways of establishing working relations. This was felt to be an appropriate method of introducing them to the work of the Body.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) said that the Body had a parliamentary role to play in the present difficult circumstances. He saw the role of the Body as essential to the peace process. The Council of the Isles had not yet achieved a comparable position.

The Co-Chairman said that he did not believe for one moment that the Body was unimportant in the present circumstances. He was simply looking to the future.

Senator Edward Haughey asked whether the Unionists would be invited to send representatives to the Body. In the past their objection had been that the Body had been set up under the Anglo-Irish Agreement and they would have nothing to do with it, but that Agreement was now defunct.

The Co-Chairman said that informal contacts had recently been made with the Unionists, but that no informal or formal response had yet been received.

Senator Mary Henry reminded the Body that the Council of the Isles was going to be called the British-Irish Council. It was important that it was referred to by its proper name.

Mr David Wilshire (Spelthorne) noted that in 1999 the Unionists had had seats set aside for them on the Body but that they had not been taken up. This subject should be left well alone at the present time, given the other problems which faced the Unionists.

The Co-Chairman could say no more than that the Unionists would be very welcome.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North) said that Mr David Trimble had been asked about Unionist representation on the Body at a meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party during the previous week. His response had been "one problem at a time". On the subject of the British-Irish Council, the Steering Committee had noted that the British-Irish Council of Ministers were about to discuss the question of a parliamentary tier to the Council and had felt it was important to establish early contact.

And the Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Fourth Annual Report of the Body [Doc. No. 69].

8. SABHAL MÒR OSTAIG AND THE COLUMBA INITIATIVE, AND THE WARRINGTON PROJECT

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body takes note of the Report of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Environment [Doc. No. 72] on Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the Columba Initiative, and the Warrington Project, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.-(**Ms Marian McGennis.**)

Ms Marian McGennis (Dublin Central), moving the Motion, said that she was speaking on a Report by Committee D which there had not been time to complete by the Cambridge Plenary in 1999.

The Committee had visited Skye in July to meet Officers of the Columba Initiative. It had been the last visit which the Committee had made under the Chairmanship of Mr Roger Stott. The Initiative supported projects concerned with the Gaelic language and culture. It was based at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, a college on Skye which had been founded in 1973. The Committee had met staff who organised activities including full-time language courses, music courses and degree courses such as business administration, some of which had a separate language component but which were all taught through the medium of Gaelic. These courses were accredited by the University of the Highlands and Islands. A publishing company, which produced teaching materials in Gaelic, was also based there .

The initiative had been established on 9 June 1997 in order to foster closer cultural ties between Scotland and Ireland. Projects being carried out under the initiative included *Leabhar Mòr na Gaidhlig (The Great Gaelic Book)* - a contemporary Book of Kells which would be exhibited to tourists - and Gaelic training for youth leaders. She invited Mr McNamara to speak on the Warrington Project on behalf of the Committee.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North) said that the Warrington Project had been set up in the aftermath of the death of two Warrington schoolchildren in an explosion. Teachers in the local schools had been asked to explain the reasons behind the Warrington bombing and had found it difficult to respond. Professor Patrick Buckland, of the nearby Centre for Peace Studies, had developed a teaching scheme which the teachers decided that they could use: they recognised the advantage of trying to explain the tragedy in terms of British-Irish relations and working to develop a greater cultural understanding between the two communities. Warrington had seen an influx of Irish immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, so there was rich ground in which to develop such an initiative.

Using Professor Buckland's ideas as a basis, the teachers had developed schemes for each educational level. The new compulsory literacy hour in primary schools provided an opportunity to introduce schoolchildren to the richness of Irish legend. At secondary level, children were encouraged to work on particular projects which

related Irish history to the local community: for example, the impact of the Irish famine on Warrington was studied.

The Schools Inspectorate had reported extremely favourably upon the project. Its importance lay in its success in integrating those topics into the national curriculum rather than pigeon-holing them as Irish studies. The Committee had been very impressed both by the work of the children and by the teachers' enthusiasm and had been encouraged by the development of understanding. One of the members of the Committee, Jean Corston, was also Parliamentary Private Secretary to Mr David Blunkett, Secretary of State for Education and Employment, whom she had told him about the project, and he had invited the Committee to discuss with him how the project could be supported.

Jean Corston (Bristol East) said that she was the only Member of the British Parliament to have attended both visits. Both had been totally inspiring. She had been very impressed on the visit to Skye by the demonstration of the modern relevance of language, and by the understanding of common problems and of a common identity. She paid tribute to the Scottish Office and the Scottish Parliament for supporting the initiative.

The Warrington Project showed that the peace process was not just for the politicians. In order to be permanent, it needed the consent and understanding of all people in Britain and Ireland. It was very important that the teachers had managed to incorporate imaginatively designed projects into the national curriculum and had brought Irish culture into the mainstream. The project had given teachers there the ability to deal with very difficult questions. The Department for Education and Employment had made it clear that the project should receive support. She commended it to the Body as the kind of project which enabled many years of misunderstanding to be left behind.

Mr Harry Barnes (North East Derbyshire) said that he had been very impressed with what the Report had said about the Warrington Project. He had sought to persuade Derbyshire County Council to get involved in a similar project, but he had been told that following recent changes in education funding, support for such projects was a matter for individual schools. The County Council's role was accordingly very limited and no extra funding was available. He hoped that the Government would deal with these concerns.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey) congratulated the Committee on its Report. His only reservation related to resources. He thought that money should be spent on teacher training rather than on the direct education of pupils because "the tree will bend as the twig grows". Education in Northern Ireland was still bedevilled by the sectarian divide. There had recently been an increase in the number of integrated schools, but these still represented a tiny proportion of the total.

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde) said that the initiatives taken on Skye had important implications for the Gaelic-speaking Western Isles. Many people

who had left the Isles when young wished to return if jobs were available. Returning islanders would place a burden on the educational system, especially in relation to Gaelic language and culture. He was delighted with the Report and especially with its recognition of the role played by the new University of the Highlands and Islands.

Mr Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) said that he hoped the Northern Ireland Assembly would be a catalyst for increasing integrated schooling. Recent comments by Minister Martin McGuinness and by Westminster Ministers were supportive of that, so the signs were good.

Mr John McFall (Dumbarton) said that integration of schools was important but should not be seen as a solution to the problem. What was needed was more cultural understanding within schools. A recent document called *Cultural Tolerance* had been launched jointly by Roman Catholic and Presbyterian spokesman. Mutual tolerance was the way forward. A good example of that was a joint project between schools in Glasgow and in North Antrim, which had begun by looking at bullying and had widened its scope to look at broader aspects of the schools' shared culture.

Ms Marian McGennis (Dublin Central) said that she and other members of the Committee had visited Northern Ireland with the preconceived idea that integrated education was the answer to the problem, but it had become clear from their visits to schools that that was not the case. Communities would resist attempts from outside to impose integration on them. Toleration had to flow from the bottom upwards.

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North) said that he wished to respond to Mr Barnes's question about resources. It was true that the promotion of initiatives like the Warrington Project was primarily a matter for local schools but the local education authority could encourage its schools to take part. What really mattered was the energy and commitment of individual teachers and head teachers. The impetus had to come from individuals. What was proposed should be built into the implementation of the National Curriculum. It was therefore not a question of extra resources. He fully supported the Project, which was a valuable attempt to escape from the stereotyping of Brits in Ireland and the Irish in Britain.

The Co-Chairman concluded the debate by paying tribute to the late Roger Stott CBE MP, the previous Chairman of the Committee.

And the Question being put:

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Report of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Environment [Doc. No. 72] on Sabhal Mòr Ostaig and the Columba Initiative, and the Warrington Project, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.

Mr David Winnick took the Chair as Chairman.

The Co-Chairman thanked Mr Michael O'Kennedy and echoed his tribute to Roger Stott.

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

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body takes note of the further Responses of both Governments and of the Northern Ireland Executive to the Report of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Environment on matters relating to Education and Inter-Community Relations within Northern Ireland [Doc. No. 73].-(**Ms Marian McGennis.**)

Ms Marian McGennis (Dublin Central), moving the Motion, said that Committee D had sought the additional responses from both Governments and from the Minister for Education in the Northern Ireland Executive. She described them as encouraging.

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (Kerry North) said that where parents desired an integrated education it should be available. He recognised that integrated education was not a panacea for Northern Ireland's troubles, but if the desire was there the resources should be available, and the Body should be encouraging it.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) agreed that where integrated education was desired by parents, it should be encouraged, and he noted that the Minister for Education in the Northern Ireland Executive was also supportive of it. He welcomed the fact that the Cross Border All Irish medium second level school proposal for Monaghan/Armagh was still a live issue. The original responses from the two Governments had held out little prospect. However, the additional response from Dublin had been very positive, as had the response from the Minister for Education in the North of Ireland; and although he had earlier expressed some reservations about the response from the British Government, it did at least keep the door open.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) said that he would unfortunately have to dent the consensus that had emerged on this issue. He was in favour of integrated education, but it was only part of the solution. One problem with integrated education was that, generally speaking, those children attending integrated schools already came from integrated backgrounds. He suggested that those who wanted to encourage integrated education should focus their efforts on working-class areas, not just the middle class. That should not be read, however, as detracting from his support for the principle of integrated education.

Mr Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) noted that the benefits of integrated education also filtered through into other, non-integrated, schools. The important question was how all pupils could be given a balanced picture of all sides of the community.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) drew the Body's attention to a cross-border project which he had recently visited in North Monaghan, which had recently

won a national award. Protestant and Catholic schools were working together and helping to bring together the different communities.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) asked whether the Committee had examined the issue of grants for cross-border students.

Ms Marian McGennis (Dublin Central), in reply to Dr O'Hanlon, said that the Committee had not dealt with that particular issue.

She went on to say that she was glad that the subject had created such interest among Members of the Body. She noted the degree of consensus which had emerged, and fully agreed with Mr Currie's comments. The Committee's last Report showed that there was no single solution to the problems in education. One statistic which had been put forcefully to the Committee was that only 3 per cent of Northern Ireland schools were integrated, but 20 per cent of the capital budget was spent on them. The integrated schools were mainly located in middle-class areas which did not experience the same problems as the schools that the Committee had seen in East and West Belfast.

The possibility that there could be joint funding for secondary schools in the Monaghan area was encouraging, and if implemented it would allow greater educational opportunities.

And the Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the further Responses of both Governments and of the Northern Ireland Executive to the Report of the Committee on Culture, Education and the Environment on matters relating to Education and Inter-Community Relations within Northern Ireland [Doc. No. 73].

10. BUSINESS REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE D

Mr Kevin McNamara (Kingston upon Hull North), Chairman of Committee D, made a statement about the work of the Committee. He explained to the Body that the Committee was leaving the Plenary early in order to meet the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to discuss the Warrington Project. The Committee's next Report would deal with parades. Although attention had often focused on particularly contentious parades, the proposition that parades were a means to affirm cultural identity was worth exploring. The Committee would not be seeking a solution to political issues connected to parades, nor recommending new routes for parades. It would look at the role of parades both in Britain and Ireland as a manifestation of community life.

11. THE FUTURE FOR SMALL FARMS IN THE RURAL ECONOMY

The Co-Chairman informed the Body that the Steering Committee had recommended that, because the two subjects were closely linked, Committee C's Report on the Future for Small Farms in the Rural Economy should be debated

together with the responses of both the British and Irish Governments to the previous Report on CAP Reform by Committee B.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body takes note of the Report of the Committee on Economic and Social Affairs [Doc. No. 70] on the Future for Small Farms in the Rural Economy, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.-**(Mr Séamus Kirk.)**

Mr Séamus Kirk (Louth), introducing the Report, said that in the course of its inquiry in 1999 the Committee had visited farms and had taken evidence from civil servants, action groups and small farmers. Its Report endeavoured to address both the problems farmers faced and the policies with which governments hoped to assist them. The Committee had not sought to be prescriptive in its recommendations. The problems were long standing, and economic forces had for many years reduced farmers' ability to manoeuvre. There was a wide range of government policies and a considerable financial commitment to address these problems.

Small farmers needed and deserved help. It was not just a few individuals but whole rural communities which were under threat. In spite of urbanisation many people still lived in small towns and the countryside and were dependent on the agricultural sector. The Committee had been impressed by the farmers' dignity in continuing an ancient way of life in spite of diminishing returns.

The European Union had taken a lead in recognising the importance of a rural development policy. That had to be built upon and expanded. The Committee had been pleased that responsibility for rural development had been devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive, and the Minister had worked hard to meet the needs of the community. It was sad that the Minister's role had been suspended, and he was sure that all would join him in hoping that her role would be restored quickly.

The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and Agenda 2000 both carried significant implications for agriculture in Ireland and the rest of the European Union. The beef sector faced particular problems, since it was required to produce at or below cost: it was difficult to speculate how long that level of activity could be sustained. Both north and south of the Border there had been a steady increase in dependency by farm workers on non-farm jobs. Farming organisations were concerned with the economy of rural areas as a whole, and would welcome policies designed to encourage the growth of healthy rural economies. He commended the Report to the Body.

Mr Brendan Smith (Cavan-Monaghan) also commended the Report. One of the big problems faced by rural economies was the age profile of small producers. There were very few new entrants into the industry, and schemes in the South to encourage new farmers were not available in the North.

The Committee had proposed a special additional milk quota, to be available to small farmers both north and south of the Border. There had been widespread support for the proposal in Ireland, although the British Government was less enthusiastic. The pig industry had also suffered in the last two years. The stability of that industry would be assisted by a major new processing facility, which would ensure an outlet for the product and assist farmers in gaining access to international markets.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey), Chairman of Committee B, said that his Committee had also looked at CAP reform in its last Report of 1999. Its recommendations had coincided closely with those of Committee C. Its primary conclusion had been that while there was a difference in the economic health of the agricultural industry north and south of the Border, there were also similarities between the two economies. Farmers in Northern Ireland were subject to the CAP as applied in Britain; farmers in the South were not. The differences which arose from this were hard to accept.

Both the northern and southern agricultural industries were largely dependent upon grassland farming and keeping pigs, cattle, and sheep. Little had been done to bring the two regimes together in spite of the strong commonality of interest. Northern Ireland's agricultural sector should be directly represented in Brussels by a Minister working to the same broad objectives as the Minister in Dublin.

The Irish Government's response to the Committee's Report had been full and constructive. It had agreed to the recommendations and had drawn attention to special EU programmes. The response of the British Government, however, had been disappointing and inadequate. During Agriculture Questions in the House of Commons the question had recently been raised as to the status of Northern Ireland beef farmers: while the Republic of Ireland was now classified as an area of low BSE incidence, Northern Ireland was not. That matter needed to be addressed.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (Cavan-Monaghan) said that the opening of the Border had been a great asset to the industry. However, the situation for pig farmers remained serious, and the need for economies of scale was a problem for small farmers in Ireland and in Britain. Farming practice would change over the next twenty to thirty years: the great challenge would be to ensure people continued to be able to live and work in their communities.

He cited the case of a farmer north of the Border who had been told to cease selling milk to a creamery south of the Border and to buy his quota in the north. Since there had been a long history of cooperation between the British and Irish in agriculture, he asked if the Committee had considered that issue.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney (Donegal North-East) told the Body that she represented an area renowned for its agricultural industry. She said that if one considered agriculture as an economic issue, the size of the individual business was clearly important; however, if one considered agriculture as a social issue, the perspective had to change. She agreed that the pig industry was facing particular problems: she

believed that people had a right to process their products at a fair price, and should not be penalised by virtue of where they lived.

She asked whether any Committee had looked at other European countries to see whether any had been successful in encouraging young people to enter farming.

She welcomed the fact that the issues of price-fixing and the beef assurance scheme had been looked at by the Dublin Government.

She hoped that the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture would be reinstated soon. People were needed at that level to stand up for the interests of Northern Irish agriculture.

Senator Mary Henry was disappointed that there had been no reference in the Report to the contribution of women to the rural economy. She thought more emphasis should be placed upon the problems women were experiencing, as well as their contribution, and she gave several examples from the Report of where that contribution should have been noted. In particular, she noted the role of women in keeping rural facilities going, for example hospitals. Rural communities could not survive if women's contribution was not recognised.

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde) commended the Reports. He agreed with Mr Colvin that the responses from the Minister had been sparse.

EU enlargement could not take place in the absence of comprehensive reform of the CAP, which was not due to be looked at again until 2006. The timetable for the accession of Poland and Hungary would slip because of the issues of the CAP and the mobility of labour.

The policy-making process took insufficient account of Northern Irish agriculture. The United Kingdom Minister of Agriculture should take a *primus inter pares* role alongside his counterparts from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. There was now a Concordat between Whitehall and the Scottish Executive which meant that when the UK Minister of Agriculture went to Brussels, he was accompanied by his Scottish counterpart; a similar arrangement should be made with the Northern Ireland Executive. The Northern Ireland Agriculture and Fisheries Minister should be at the shoulder of the UK Minister whenever decisions were taken in Europe which related to Northern Ireland. The experience of Scottish Ministers in that regard should be taken into account. Ministers from the Northern Ireland Executive should engage actively in European negotiations.

Mr Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster) suggested that if he attempted to speak in a debate on agriculture in the House of Commons he would be regarded as an impostor, because his constituency was about as far from being rural as it was possible to get. However, he had strong family connections with agriculture, including in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee of the House of Commons would be publishing a report on the livestock industry in Northern Ireland the following month. Although Lord Dubs had given very good evidence to that inquiry, if the Government were to produce a response as slender as that produced to the Reports that the Body was debating, he could expect trouble from the Select Committee.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) was sorry that the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture was no longer in post. There was no sector which could benefit as greatly from devolution as that of agriculture. Three areas in particular could benefit from greater cross-border co-operation and more research: milk quotas; pig farms; and countering disease, particularly BSE, but also tuberculosis and brucellosis.

The number of farms which did not have an outside breadwinner was getting smaller. What he found most worrying whilst conducting the inquiry was that all four of the groups of economists to whom the Committee had spoken had agreed that, by the end of 2000, there would be 40 per cent fewer farmers.

He hoped that the Governments would learn from those Reports and that that would lead to real cooperation through the new institutions and more young people being encouraged to come into farming. There had never been so many problems in the rural economy.

Mr Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens South) said that although his constituency too was primarily urban, he had a long interest in farming.

He did not regard the Government's Response to the Report as a proper response. Agriculture was on the floor. Interest rates were too high, as was the level of the pound sterling, and the UK should join the euro. The CAP was geared towards the interests of French and German farming.

The rural economy included not just farming, but also other industries such as tourism, and issues such as the protection of the environment. The Government's Response should cover these areas in a much more positive fashion. The CAP had to be redesigned, and Ministers from devolved institutions had to contribute to its reform.

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) noted that the Reports' recommendations regarding representation in Brussels were particularly important, and he was sorry that they had had no response from the Governments. The British Government's Response to the Report of Committee B deserved scathing criticism. If it had said that these were matters to be dealt with by the devolved Executive, he would have understood but it had not done so.

What Dr Godman had said about Scotland had been interesting. It was very important that Northern Ireland should be represented in Brussels, and pressure should be put on the Governments to consider that seriously.

Mr Séamus Kirk (Louth) thanked the Members of the Body who had contributed to the debate, and the members of Committee C who had participated in the inquiry. The Committee had consulted widely and had travelled extensively in the course of the inquiry; that had been necessary to get to the root of the issue.

Mr Colvin had noted the overlap in the work of the two Committees, but there was no harm in that, particularly as the two inquiries were very differently focused. The one thing which had come very clearly out of both inquiries was the need for direct representation in Brussels.

He concluded by paying tribute to Senator Paddy McGowan, a previous member of the Committee, who had died recently. He noted that the Committee would be moving on to look at either fishing or tourism as its next inquiry.

And the Question being put:

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Report of the Committee on Economic and Social Affairs [Doc. No. 70] on the Future for Small Farms in the Rural Economy, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.

12. CAP REFORM

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body takes note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on European and International Affairs on matters relating to Common Agricultural Policy Reform [Doc. No. 71].-(**Mr Michael Colvin.**)

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey) said that, in view of what had been said during the debate, something stronger than the original wording of the Motion was called for. He therefore proposed an amendment, to change "takes" to "having taken" in line 1, and to add at the end "requests detailed comments on the recommendations from the British Government".

The Question was amended, in line 1, by leaving out the words "takes" and inserting the words "having taken", and at the end by adding the words "requests detailed comments on its recommendations from the British Government".

And the Question, as amended, being put;

Resolved, That the Body, having taken note of the Responses of both Governments to the Report of the Committee on European and International Affairs on matters relating to Common Agricultural Policy Reform [Doc. No. 71], requests detailed comments on its recommendations from the British Government.

13. BUSINESS REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES A AND B

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly), Chairman of Committee A, said that the Body would be aware that much of Committee's A's work was an attempt to hit a moving target, so in recent years the Committee had not submitted written Reports. At its meeting that morning it had agreed its future programme. It would hold an early meeting with General de Chastelain; it would visit the Border area to monitor demilitarisation; and it would hold meetings with the Chief Constable of the RUC and with the new Parades Commission. He would report on that programme at the next Plenary.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey), Chairman of Committee B, said that at that Committee's meeting that morning he had proposed that the Committee's next inquiry should be into the development by the European Union of a common security policy and the implications for Ireland of the incorporation of the Western European Union into the EU. However, the Committee had deferred a decision on that inquiry until the next Plenary. In the meantime, the Committee would continue its inquiry into transport. It had met in Dublin in January and taken evidence from Irish Government officials and from employers' representatives. The Committee proposed to look at issues relating to air, road and sea transport. Those would include the cost of air travel within Europe, air traffic control, capacity at airports, the privatisation of Aer Lingus and Aer Rianta, road haulage deregulation, controls on cowboy haulage operators, port facilities and maritime safety standards. The Committee would meet at least twice to consider these issues and would produce a report for the September Plenary.

The Chairman said that Mr Séamus Kirk had been called away and would therefore present his report on Committee C's work the following morning.

The sitting was adjourned at 4.40 pm till to-morrow.

TUESDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2000

The sitting was opened in public at 9.30 am in Church House, Westminster, with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

The Co-Chairman reminded Members that those who wished to speak in the debate on recent political developments should give their name to the Clerks. Given the number of those who wanted to speak, he announced that there would be a five-minute limit on speeches.

1. BUSINESS REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE C

Mr Séamus Kirk (Louth), Chairman of Committee C, noted that an interesting debate had taken place in the Body the previous day on the Committee's Report on the Future for Small Farms in the Rural Economy. Members of the Committee retained their interest and concern in this important issue. The Committee had not yet made a final decision on its activities, but it was likely to look at two areas, fishing and tourism. The fishing industry was of significant importance to the economic well-

being of many areas. The tourism industry held a symbolic and practical importance and offered an opportunity for effective cooperation.

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde) congratulated the Chairman and the Committee on their decision to look at the fishing industry

2. COMMITTEE A - ORAL REPORT BY CHAIRMAN ON ACTIVITIES

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly), Chairman of Committee A, made an oral report on the work of the Committee during the past six months. Committee A had examined the possibility of reducing the security presence in Northern Ireland and the continuing process of political normalisation. In doing so it had met a number of representatives of Government and the security forces.

The Committee had met Mr Adam Ingram, Security Minister for Northern Ireland, in November, and had discussed the reduction in troops and the scope for a continuing reduction of the security presence in Northern Ireland. Such a reduction was made difficult by the work of dissident terrorist groups and the delay in implementation of the Agreement. The situation in South Armagh and the work of the Parades Commission had also been discussed.

The Committee had also met Army representatives and discussed the reduction in troops and numbers of patrols. Concern had been expressed about the work of dissident groups, especially the Real IRA. The Committee had also met Assistant Chief Constable Timothy Lewis of the RUC and discussed the recommendations of the Patten Report.

The Committee had held a meeting with a representative of the Garda Síochána at which they had discussed the security situation. The Garda representative had said that there were particular concerns about the Real IRA. The recommendations of the Patten Report had been welcomed.

The Committee would continue to look into those issues and report to the Body.

3. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body, on the occasion of its tenth anniversary, renews its commitment to work towards peace and understanding between all our peoples and to the continued working cooperation between the two sovereign Parliaments; welcomes the very substantial progress that had been made since its last Plenary in the implementation of the Belfast Agreement; however, notes with the utmost concern the serious difficulties now being encountered; calls on all parties to do everything in their power to secure the earliest re-establishment of the democratic institutions in accordance with the overwhelmingly expressed decision in referenda in the island of Ireland, North and South, and the full implementation of ***all aspects of the Agreement.***-(Mr Charles Flanagan.)

Mr Charles Flanagan (Laois-Offaly), moving the Motion, said that since the last Plenary meeting at Cambridge there had been significant political developments. Tremendous progress had been made but in recent days there had been serious setbacks.

The mood at Cambridge had been unsure. Since then, through negotiation and a new level of commitment on behalf of the political parties in Northern Ireland, there had been progress. The Mitchell Report had helped to achieve that. The setting up of the Assembly and other devolved institutions had been an important step forward and many people had been impressed by the eagerness and seriousness of the new Ministers.

The situation was now less encouraging. That meeting was being held at a crucial juncture, following the suspension of the institutions the previous Friday. That had been a blow to progress, and although the attitude of political leaders was encouraging the difficulties must not be under-estimated. Defeatism was not an option and it was essential to maintain momentum. Both Governments and all parties should push towards final and full implementation of the Belfast Agreement. There might be differences in approach but no one should be deterred from that vital aim. The benefits of partnership were apparent on both sides of the Irish Sea.

Reports had appeared in the press of a rift between the British and Irish Governments on the issue of the suspension of the Assembly and Executive. Those surely originated from political briefings, which was to be deplored. A clear message had to be sent out that such briefings would only further the cause of those who wished to destroy the peace process.

He noted that an amendment had been tabled to the Resolution concerning decommissioning. Both Governments needed to consider how to overcome that stumbling block. The paramilitary organisations should be assisted to wither on the vine. Politicians in Britain and Ireland should examine different approaches and reel in these groups with skill and patience. The IRA had come some distance and should be encouraged to move further. Progress should be built carefully brick by brick.

There were several steps that the British Government could take to assist in this. One was the extension of gun controls in order to eliminate the culture of violence. Another was to move towards an unarmed police service in Northern Ireland.

There were places in Northern Ireland where the peace process had brought no tangible improvement in everyday life, and most of them were Republican strongholds. For instance, many people in South Armagh found the army watchtowers oppressive. There was no reason why the North-South Ministerial Council, the British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference and other forums set up under the Good Friday Agreement should not continue in being pending reestablishment of the devolved institutions. In Northern Ireland politics, a vacuum could encourage sinister forces. The terms of reference of the latest review should be quickly established. Paramilitaries should not only lay down their arms but should

announce they were disbanding in accord with the will of the Irish people. Officials in Britain and Ireland working on the peace process probably felt a bit like Sisyphus rolling the stone endlessly up the hill, but their work was valuable and they should not be disheartened.

The Co-Chairman announced that Lord Blease had tabled a manuscript sub-amendment to Lord Glentoran's amendment (which had already been circulated), to leave out the last four words. The manuscript sub-amendment had been selected for debate. He called Lord Glentoran to move his amendment.

Lord Glentoran said that it would be inappropriate for the Body to hold a political debate without tackling the real problem of illegally-held arms in Ireland. The peace process had to be based on trust. As long as heavily armed groups continued to exist within the Province, confidence and trust would be undermined. The element of fear was still there. The Assembly could not operate successfully until weapons were disposed of. That would enable proper policing to take place, along with a lifting of the security presence and the building of trust.

Amendment proposed to the Question, at the end, to add the words ", including decommissioning of all illegally-held arms by all paramilitary groups".-(**Lord Glentoran.**)

Ms Mary Coughlan (Donegal South-West) said that many people she had met in Fermanagh and Derry were angry about the suspension of the institutions. They thought the Secretary of State had jumped in too quickly. In the short time that the institutions had been running, the new Ministers had done a fabulous job, and people on the Border were looking forward to major economic developments. It was wrong to say that there was a rift between the British and Irish Governments, but there was an urgent need to reestablish the peace process. People were worried that the Unionists would put more obstacles in the way. The Good Friday Agreement had to be implemented in full. Decommissioning of weapons should proceed in parallel with the demilitarisation of Northern Ireland. She thought this was adequately dealt with in the motion and believed that the extra words proposed in the amendment were unnecessary.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster) agreed that the amendment was unnecessary and unhelpful. The motion as it stood addressed all the major issues. With regard to Mr Flanagan's remarks about the dangers of a rift between the British and Irish Governments, he agreed that there was no such rift. Although there had been rumours of rifts reported in newspapers and reports of anger at the events of Friday evening, there had been no alternative to the actions taken by the Secretary of State and no one had been more distressed than the Secretary of State at the need to suspend the institutions. Without that action Mr Trimble would have been lost and there would have been a crisis. The anger was understandable from a Republican or Nationalist view point but it was borne of frustration. Again, the Secretary of State had had no alternative.

Last time the Body had met in Church House, the Secretary of State had not been present because he had been called to Downing Street to sign the Downing Street Declaration. Afterwards the Body had had lunch at the Irish Embassy. When Mr Albert Reynolds and Mr Dick Spring had come into the room, everyone had stood and applauded. It had been one of the most emotional moments during his time on the Body. So much had been achieved since then that although there might be difficulties to overcome in the short term, he could do nothing other than wish success for the future.

Since the August 1994 cease-fire, decommissioning had often been used as an obstacle to progress. In the past he had been accused of calling decommissioning a "red herring" in the debates on the Peace Process. However, there was now a clear and pronounced obligation to persuade all the parties by constitutional means and to find a way forward in the hope offered by de Chastelain II.

Senator Joe Costello agreed with almost all of the Motion, in particular the last clause, and therefore had difficulty with both the amendments. Although the Secretary of State had said that decommissioning was not a Unionist or British obsession, some Members of the Body would disagree with that statement, and it would not therefore be appropriate to highlight any aspect of the Agreement in the Motion.

It was very hard to describe the suspension of the institutions as a way forward because it would be more difficult than ever before to restart. He was disturbed by the role in the peace process which was now being played by the Ulster Unionist Council. Speed was certainly of the essence: all parties must examine de Chastelain II and the IRA statements. The problem was that the most positive IRA statement seemed to have been made before the suspension and it was doubtful whether it would still stand. A situation in which anybody considered himself to be a loser had to be avoided at all costs. Arms had to be placed beyond the reach of use in a process that could be validated. Mr Seamus Mallon had asked how and when that could be done. "When" was answered by "as soon as possible". "How" was more difficult to answer but he had one proposal: in 1924 the IRA had made an offer of a range of arms to the National Museum. They were to be given for posterity. They could perhaps be encouraged to make another such offer which would not imply any surrender.

Mr David Wilshire (Spelthorne) said that recent events proved the continuing need for the Body. He feared that any restoration of the peace process would now be a long haul. It was no secret that he had opposed the Good Friday Agreement because of what he perceived to be a fudge on decommissioning and it gave him no pleasure to see his expectations come true. However, all parties needed to see failure as an opportunity not a dead end. It was a chance to revisit the concerns of those who had said "no" to the original Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement would be rejected in the Unionist community if it were put to a vote now. Everybody had to understand that Mr Trimble could not deliver a second time on the same terms. The first time had been a miracle and he would not have been able to achieve that success without

the compromise of a February review. If his actions were not reciprocated by decommissioning no words would suffice to heal the wounds. A lasting settlement also depended on the Irish Government engaging not only with Mr Trimble's Unionists but also the Democratic Unionists and the United Kingdom Unionists. They were a significant proportion of Unionism and could not be ignored. Even if it were possible to discover one, a quick fix simply would not work.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) said he supported the Motion as presented by the Steering Committee. Substantial progress had been made since the last Plenary session in Cambridge, culminating in the establishment of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly in November. However, Mr Trimble and the Ulster Unionist Council had created a further contraction of the timetable for arms decommissioning and a false deadline had been imposed. At the same time, some Unionists had narrowed the definition of decommissioning.

The suspension of the Assembly and Executive was very regrettable. It was the best means of ensuring that decommissioning would never take place. The bodies had to be reconstituted. Sinn Féin had demonstrated that it was willing to work with all parties and would continue to do so.

He did not support the amendment proposed by Lord Glentoran, as it highlighted decommissioning out of context and placed it above all the other areas of the Good Friday Agreement. Such concentration on this issue had been used by the Ulster Unionist Council as a blocking mechanism to hide its general opposition to the Agreement itself. That had to be confronted.

It was important to recognise that arms were out of commission and out of use. All parties now had to build on the progress made. Sinn Féin remained committed to the implementation of all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement.

Lord Blease moved a sub-amendment to Lord Glentoran's amendment, to leave out the words "by all paramilitary groups".

He supported the motion and the general principles of the amendment, but wished to highlight the fact that arms were held illegally by individuals, or groups other than paramilitary organisations, for motives which included recrimination.

Sub-amendment proposed to the Amendment, to leave out the words "by all paramilitary groups".-(**Lord Blease.**)

Mr Michael Ring (Mayo) supported the Motion. He urged members of the Body to consider how much progress had been made. He made a plea to the media to give the politicians space at this very delicate time. The headlines which had appeared in the papers were unfortunate. It was vital that the show got back on the road. The Executive had worked successfully and the people of Northern Ireland had supported it. The guns had been silent. The politicians should do whatever had to be done to ensure progress.

Mr Andrew Boylan (Cavan-Monaghan) paid tribute to the former Secretary of State, Dr Mowlam. He said that the people of Northern Ireland had given an overwhelming mandate to the Good Friday Agreement. They wanted peace; the war was over. The Executive had been a great success, as had the various Bodies which had brought North and South together. Initiatives such as the George Mitchell Peace Bridge had made a real difference to ordinary people's lives. They did not understand why the Assembly had been suspended.

He expressed concern that the deadline imposed had been more artificial than real - in time for the six o'clock news. The Assembly and Executive should be reinstated immediately.

Turning to a more a parochial issue, he said that many small towns and villages close to the border were still without basic infrastructure. A Committee of the Body should inquire into that issue and see what additional funding could be made available. There was a need to spread the benefits of peace evenly.

Mr Harry Barnes (North East Derbyshire) said that there was a problem in that the media were not procedurally sophisticated. The amendment caused difficulties, because if it were voted down it might give the impression that the Body opposed decommissioning, which was not the case. So whilst the amendment provided an opportunity to debate this important issue, it ought to be withdrawn.

Decommissioning was not just a British and Unionist fixation. It was the key to a proper democratic system in Northern Ireland. Democracy could not operate in a culture of excessive fear. Increasing numbers of people were putting pressure on paramilitary groups to decommission. The first de Chastelain report had acknowledged the difficulties in achieving decommissioning, but it was of massive importance that it be achieved and pressure placed on all concerned to do so.

There seemed to be three segments in the Ulster Unionist Council. The first was inspired by hope; the second was dominated by fear; and the third was somewhere between those two extremes. It was that third group which now needed to have its concerns addressed.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney (Donegal North-East) said that until it was realised that all politics was local, no progress would be made. Many people had taken local action on the ground to improve relations with those from other communities, even when that had not been popular.

The county in which she lived had a 90 mile border with Northern Ireland, a 140 mile border with the Atlantic Ocean and only a 10 mile border with the rest of the Republic, so she recognised the need for a solution for the whole of the island of Ireland. Economic development required peace. Legislation was also required, especially in relation to the protection and development of fishing aquaculture in the Foyle.

Local people should be able to work through their own difficulties. The suspension of the Assembly had been extremely disappointing. Local political bodies and local accountability were needed. There was no better way to get people to fight their corner on a cross-party basis than to find a local cause.

She disagreed with the amendment, as all parts of the Agreement were vital, and she supported the Motion.

Mrs Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill) said that many efforts had been made in some quarters to unpick the Belfast Agreement, as had been demonstrated by some on the Opposition benches in the House of Commons during the previous week. Decommissioning was difficult, although progress had been made on other parts of the Agreement and that should be recognised. She saw no point in the amendment and urged for it to be withdrawn.

An unknown number of people had left the IRA to join more hard-line paramilitary groups, but many people in the Nationalist community had urged the IRA to get rid of their arms. It was vital to recognise the real fears which existed on both sides. She was pleased that the Secretary of State and Mr McGuinness had both acknowledged that a body to achieve reconciliation might provide a useful way forward. A way to bring people together had to be found.

Senator Mary Henry said that there was a great deal of mistrust on both sides. Consideration should be given to the extension of the post-Dunblane gun controls to Northern Ireland as that would help reduce concerns held in all communities.

Mr Seymour Crawford (Cavan-Monaghan) said that he supported the motion. It was important that all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement should be put in place. There had been great improvements in the border area, with roads reopened and army checkpoints removed. The one thing that would enable further progress to be made was decommissioning. Most aspects of the Good Friday Agreement had already been put into practice, including the release of prisoners, which victims of terrorism had found very difficult to accept. A recent opinion poll showed that 85 per cent of the people of Ireland supported decommissioning. The new Ministerial posts in Northern Ireland should be re-established as a matter of urgency. The Ministers had just begun to show what they could do. There were now less than 12 weeks till the deadline for decommissioning of all arms. A token hand over of arms would be of enormous help.

Mr Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West) said that as a Member of the Scottish Parliament he could imagine the outrage if a London-based Secretary of State had taken a decision to suspend the Scottish Parliament. He acknowledged that the situation in Scotland was not as complex as that in Northern Ireland but there was still an issue of principle at stake. There were strong grounds for believing that the Good Friday Agreement had been unilaterally breached by the Secretary of State. He understood Unionist concerns about the lack of progress on decommissioning, but it was unrealistic to suppose that total decommissioning would ever take place. He could

not therefore support Lord Glentoran's amendment. The Good Friday Agreement called on all parties to use their influence to have arms decommissioned, and this should now be done. However, more important than the decommissioning of weapons was what George Mitchell had called "the decommissioning of mindsets".

Mr Austin Currie (Dublin West) said that 25 years before he had been a member of what had always been described as the short-lived power-sharing executive. The latest power-sharing executive had proved even more short-lived. Mr Trimble, Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness had all played a part in bringing down the Executive in the 1970s, but in a twist of history they were all now deploring the suspension of the current Executive. The last suspension had lasted a quarter of a century. If there was not a quick resumption of the new institutions, Northern Ireland could sink into a political quagmire lasting for years. It was essential that maximum co-operation should continue between the two Governments. What was needed was not a "review" but a firm thrust to implement the obligation in the Good Friday Agreement on all parties to use their influence to secure decommissioning. The latest de Chastelain statement provided a basis for progress. In the past Republicans had wanted all initiatives to fail in order to secure the ultimate objective of British withdrawal. There were still people who thought like that: in Mr Adams's words, "they haven't gone away, you know". He agreed with most of what the Secretary of State had said yesterday, but disagreed with his suggestion that border installations were kept in being "to protect the security forces". Surely the only reason for the presence of the Army was to protect the community. Finally, it was essential for there to be progress on the issue of the "disappeared". The Republican movement had sole responsibility for this and needed to face up to that responsibility.

Mr John McFall (Dumbarton) said that it was still a time of great hope. Less than two years before the Unionists and Sinn Féin would not have sat in the same room to talk to one another without passing their remarks through the chair. It was progress of a kind to see that they were now lamenting the absence of a forum for their discussions.

Mr Wilshire had mentioned fudges. Everything in Irish history was a fudge. Precision could not always be the key: pragmatism also played an important role. One example of a pragmatic approach was the need for those seeking to expand the gas and energy market in the North and the South of Ireland to work together.

There were two sides to the debate: the general and the particular. In a general sense it was the role of the Body to provide encouragement and support and in that sense decommissioning was implicit in the motion. The particular details of the agreement were not the responsibility of the Body and needed to be discussed by officials and Ministers away from the glare of publicity. The integrity of General de Chastelain would also play an important part in this process.

Dr Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde) said he supported the motion but not the amendments. The previous week in the House of Commons he had told Mr Mandelson that he had severe doubts about suspension but had given him support

in the Lobby. He had also been able to speak about proceedings in the Northern Ireland Assembly following a day visit before the suspension. He had noticed that many things were very similar to life in Westminster: Mr Ian Paisley rose on numerous occasions to make spurious points of order and DUP representatives criticised Ministers, in particular the Education Minister. However, Members of all the parties told him of their commitment to the Assembly and of the bills that they wished to introduce. At the end of his visit, Mr Gerry Adams had told him that he had had an opportunity to see for himself how the Assembly was working.

Those who could not reconcile themselves to the Agreement would have to adapt. There was a profound movement towards constitutional reform in the United Kingdom and those in Northern Ireland who were unreconcilable would have to learn to reconcile themselves to the terms of the debate in the same way that secessionists argued for independence for Scotland. He hoped that Mr David Wilshire's gloomy prognosis would be proved wrong.

Mr Séamus Kirk (Louth) said that the Good Friday Agreement heralded a new future for the island of Ireland. There was no reason why it could not still work and why the level of economic prosperity currently being experienced in the South could not be shared by the North. The Executive had been working very well. It was to be hoped that its suspension would be brief because any longer delay would diminish the prospects of its re-establishment.

It should not be beyond the capabilities of all parties to move forward on decommissioning. Trust would be the bedrock of any success but building trust was inevitably a slow and tedious process. A symbolic gesture would be of tremendous help and the Body should offer all the support to the parties that it could muster.

Mr Dinny McGinley (Donegal South-West) agreed with the terms of the motion. Ever since the Cambridge Plenary dramatic changes had occurred, particularly concerning policing, power-sharing and prisoner release. Articles 2 and 3 were now a footnote to Irish constitutional history. Most important, guns were silent but in Northern Ireland that did not necessarily mean that there would be an immediate peace. Unlike a war between different countries, war in Northern Ireland was family against family, street against street. Trust was needed and the Good Friday Agreement still provided the opportunity to build such trust.

In the short time the Executive had operated it had gained the trust of the Northern Irish people. The Ministers had been accepted and their work fully supported. The sight of the Agriculture Minister addressing the farmers of Ulster to a rapturous reception had been a welcome one.

The suspension was not a repeat of 1974. It was a temporary 'blip' on the road to peace. Politicians should waste no time; they should keep the momentum going. It was vital not to impose new pre-conditions but to see how the institutions could be reinstated as soon as possible.

General de Chastelain was to be commended for his excellent work. He had maintained the confidence of all parties.

In conclusion, both Governments had to do all they could to get the Assembly and Executive working again, in order to achieve the permanent peace sought by all.

Mr Brian O'Shea (Waterford) said that he enthusiastically supported the Motion put forward by the Steering Group. He understood the sentiments behind the amendment, but did not feel it was prudent to emphasise one aspect of the Good Friday Agreement in such a way.

Representative democracy had to begin with a democratic mandate. That had been clearly demonstrated by the cross-community consensus on the Good Friday Agreement. It was right to be concerned about the present power vacuum, but it was important to move the political process away from the destructive cycle of deadlines and brinkmanship. The present 'blame game' had to stop. He considered the comments of Mr Wilshire that Mr Trimble could not deliver twice on the same terms unhelpful.

Northern Ireland had seen a fleeting glimpse of normality. People had put their trust in the politicians to deliver peace. As part of that process the Body was important because it fostered a spirit of trust and reconciliation among Members.

In conclusion, he commended General de Chastelain for his efforts. Both islands were lucky to have someone of his ability and skill to direct these vital negotiations.

Mr Brendan Smith (Cavan-Monaghan) recalled the themes of the 1998 Plenary meeting in Dublin Castle - the need to move forward and the inclusive nature of the Good Friday Agreement. The preface of that Agreement had referred to "a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning". That had happened with the setting-up of the Executive and the Assembly. Northern Ireland had experienced all-inclusive democracy for the first time.

The success of the Executive was notable. Its Ministers had gained the trust and respect of the public. Local administration generated its own confidence and increased access. Much positive work had been done at the level of the North-South bodies and between Ministers. It was incumbent on all involved to emphasise that the Good Friday Agreement was the only blueprint for the future of Ireland.

Contact between the two Governments should be conducted with a view to re-establishing the Executive and the Assembly as a matter of urgency. The present vacuum of power was dangerous, and there was a risk that the negative press reporting and media briefing would create their own difficulties. The people of Ireland had mandated their politicians to bring about peace. It was time to deliver.

Mr Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) said that there was not a crisis in Northern Ireland unless they made it so. They were instead facing an end-game, which by its nature was tense. They now faced the last significant hurdle to peace.

The previous night the House of Commons had passed an extension to the deadline for the amnesty for illegal weapons. This was an example of the step-by-step logical progression being made towards the result they all wanted: peace.

The press were always on the look out for negative stories. He noted an article in that day's *Independent* referring to "serious setbacks". It was important that the Body and others did their best not to provide material for such negative stories. London and Dublin were working together. Of course there would be difficulties, but it was important to demonstrate an optimistic approach.

Decommissioning should not be presented as an issue of triumph or defeat for any side. The Republican movement had some strong reservations: their concerns needed to be considered with sensitivity; and the Body should not try to find scapegoats.

It was necessary to focus on the one remaining issue keeping them from peace. If ever there was a time to cash in on the goodwill between London and Dublin which the Body had generated over the past 10 years, it was now.

Senator Paschal Mooney said he had been impressed by the degree of consensus expressed in the Body. Mr Wilshire's contribution had been important, as he openly represented the empty Unionist chairs. It should be recorded that the Body would welcome Unionist participation.

British Members might not have had an opportunity to notice that one of the last acts performed by the Executive in Northern Ireland was the signature by Mr Peter Robinson, the Minister for Regional Development of a contract for design work to be carried out on an eleven-mile stretch of road on the M1 between Belfast and Dublin. Mr Robinson was an important player as he had stated that he had originally been firmly in the "no" camp, but that he was now in the "yes" camp. He had stated that he had been impressed by the work of the Assembly and of the Government.

There had been a real sense of excitement generated by the new institutions. He recalled the words of King George V in 1922 when he had said that partition was not a long-term solution and encouraged Unionists to look south and to put their hands across the Border. In recent years progress had been made, yet here they were again discussing decommissioning.

He was no apologist for the IRA, but those from that culture noted with fear that the vast majority of illegally held guns were held by Loyalists, and that there remained 13,000 armed RUC officers, 90 per cent of whom were Protestants. He concluded by urging the Secretary of State to make a gesture by reducing the visible military presence in Northern Ireland.

Mr Brendan McGahon (Louth) said that while the opening of cross-border roads had been lauded, it was necessary to remind colleagues that the reason they had been closed was for security purposes and the preservation of life.

As an opponent of all terrorism he had to acknowledge the compromises made by people from different communities. While the IRA might have made some progress, the buck had stopped last Friday and it had stopped with them. If they were sincere in their participation in the Assembly, the IRA had to do that little bit extra to help peace along the way.

As an Irishman he wanted to deny the rights of any group to have a private army. Almost 4,000 people had been killed over the past 30 years, and he was sometimes surprised by the willingness of British MPs to appease the groups which had carried out these killings. To make any real progress, the IRA had to decommission: they had been responsible for almost 67 per cent of those people killed. Their words alone were not enough. Neither was their two-and-a-half year ceasefire, as that might be broken. What had happened at Canary Wharf might happen again. It was now necessary for the IRA to hand over weapons: the buck stopped with them.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo- Leitrim) said he supported the original Motion without amendment.

It was important to consider what could be done in order for the Executive to be reestablished. Mr Peter Robinson had reflected the views of many Unionists, who had thought for the first time that they now had genuine representation and an ability to contribute to their own government. He noted the views expressed by a Unionist on television accepting that he now was represented by an Agriculture Minister in Northern Ireland, even though that Minister was a member of the SDLP. That was a remarkable step forward.

The Executive had worked effectively for the past twelve weeks, with cooperation between the parties behind the scenes. He hoped that that was continuing, because it was in the interest of Sinn Féin, the SDLP and the Unionists to remain in contact with each other and to get the institutions re-established. The Ulster Unionist Council was not representative of Unionist opinion. It was seen by many as an archaic body which had outlived its usefulness. A long vacuum in the peace process could have serious consequences for the ability of Mr Adams and Mr McGuinness to persuade the more militant wing of their movement not to return to violence. The progress achieved during the past two years had shown that politics achieved more than the armalite.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy intervened in the debate to announce that the Taoiseach was coming to London to meet the British Prime Minister. He hoped that meeting would ensure that the urgent quest for political progress would continue.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy took the Chair as Chairman.

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey) said that was welcome news. He was disappointed that Members had not shown more support for Lord Glentoran's amendment. In his view the original motion had not been explicit enough in calling for decommissioning. He also supported Lord Blease's sub-amendment. The recent IRA proposal to initiate a

comprehensive process of putting arms beyond use needed further clarification. It had been a mistake not to link the release of prisoners to decommissioning, with prisoners being freed *pro rata* as arms were decommissioned. It was important to define what was meant by arms: he had enough fertiliser and other materials on his farm to blow the Houses of Parliament sky high. A further factor in the equation was compensation for victims of terrorism. At present this was derisory and needed to be greatly increased.

Ms Marian McGennis (Dublin Central) said that she did not support the amendment. It would be preferable to stick to the original wording of the Motion proposed by the Steering Committee, which addressed the totality of the problem.

Mr David Winnick resumed the Chair.

Mr Michael Mates (East Hampshire), summing up, said that that was the sixteenth time that he had wound up a political debate within the Body. Members of the Body in that time had come miles and miles in understanding each other's point of view. In that day's debate even the most extreme views had been more moderately expressed than in the past. There had been humour in the debate, which was a contrast to the Body's first debate ten years before, when the sense of tension had been palpable. The motion proposed by Mr Flanagan had been thoroughly debated. Lord Glentoran's amendment had served a useful purpose by focussing minds on the difficulty which had led to the suspension of the institutions. Lord Blease's sub-amendment did not alter the sense of Lord Glentoran's amendment. He hoped that Lord Glentoran would now withdraw his amendment to enable the main Motion to be agreed unanimously. Mr Flanagan had be right to say that no one should be allowed to divide the two Governments. The two leaders should now make clear that there was no rift between them.

Almost all the speakers had referred to decommissioning. Mr Temple-Morris had referred to it as one of the obstacles in the process. He was inclined to say that it was now *the* obstacle. Many difficult compromises had been made to bring about the establishment of the Executive and he did not believe that any one wanted to resile from that achievement. Mr Trimble had taken a gamble for which he should be admired, but his faith that others would make the same leap had been misplaced. The difficulty was now to persuade Sinn Féin-IRA to take the same leap of faith.

Mr Barnes had mentioned de Chastelain I and de Chastelain II - the pessimistic and optimistic reports. He was entitled to ask Sinn Féin why they had not make their statement on decommissioning earlier in the process. There was too much bluffing, and he defied any one to tell him that it would have impossible for Sinn Féin not to have moved earlier on decommissioning. They were playing politics.

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan) said that the entire thrust of Mr Mates's contribution had been objectionable and against the spirit of the Motion. He spoke to register his rejection of the sentiments expressed in Mr Mates's speech.

The Co-Chairman said that he hoped the debate could be concluded in the spirit in which it had been conducted so far.

Mr Michael Mates (East Hampshire) said that the essence of democratic debate was listening to one another. He did not resile from one word of what he had said. Vacuums in the political process were dangerous because they were filled by men of violence. He saw no way forward unless Sinn Féin-IRA acknowledged in full the Good Friday Agreement. They had to show some sign that they were willing to do so.

It should come as no surprise that the institutions were working. During the daily graft of politics there was always consensus about making life better. The citizens of Northern Ireland were proud of their new democratic institutions and processes. A prime example of effective democracy had been the recent meeting between the Minister of Agriculture and the farmers. Anyone holding back from the Agreement was working to the detriment of the citizens of Northern Ireland. There was no question that every Member of the Body wanted all parties to proceed with full implementation of the Agreement.

The Co-Chairman stressed that the Motion was the result of an attempt by the Steering Committee to achieve a text upon which there could be broad agreement. He invited Lord Glentoran to indicate what he proposed regarding his amendment.

Lord Glentoran said that, as was the practice in the House of Lords, he had intended the amendment to be a probing amendment. He thanked the Body and asked to withdraw his amendment. He supported the original motion.

The Amendment was, with the leave of the Body, withdrawn.

And the Main Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body, on the occasion of its tenth anniversary, renews its commitment to work towards peace and understanding between all our peoples and to the continued working cooperation between the two sovereign Parliaments; welcomes the very substantial progress that had been made since its last Plenary in the implementation of the Belfast Agreement; however, notes with the utmost concern the serious difficulties now being encountered; calls on all parties to do everything in their power to secure the earliest re-establishment of the democratic institutions in accordance with the overwhelmingly expressed decision in referenda in the island of Ireland, North and South, and the full implementation of all aspects of the Agreement.

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 Motion, looked forward to the next Plenary session, which it was hoped would take place in Ireland

on 9 and 10 October. He thanked the organisers from the Secretariat, particularly Miss Amanda Hay, for their hard work in making this session and the previous session run so smoothly. The secretarial staff and Clerks from both Parliaments were also to be commended.

Church House had proved an excellent venue, and he gathered that Members had also been very satisfied with the service provided by the Marriott Hotel. Overall the 10th Anniversary meeting of the BIIPB had proved to be an excellent occasion. He particularly welcomed the decision to reduce the use of name tags, which contributed to a more informal atmosphere.

He concluded with some excellent news for the Body. Committee D had gained Government funding for the Warrington Project, which aimed to produce material on Irish literature and history for teachers. This had been finally agreed at a meeting with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, Mr David Blunkett, on 14 February. He thanked Jean Corston (Mr Blunkett's Parliamentary Private Secretary), who had played an important part in achieving that positive result.

And the Question being put;

Resolved, That the Body do now adjourn.

The Session concluded at 12.35 pm.

QUESTIONS RECEIVING A WRITTEN ANSWER

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland:

Telephone interceptions

Mr Brendan Smith (CavanMonaghan): If he will make a statement on the widespread concerns in relation to the revelations that the British Ministry of Defence has been involved in an elaborate interception of Irish telephone traffic.

Mr Peter Mandelson: I am aware of the allegations to which you refer. I understand that you posed the very same question to my predecessor, my Right hon. Friend the Member for Redcar (Dr Mowlam), and will therefore be aware of the Government's longstanding practice of not responding to speculation on alleged interception activity.

Decommissioning of illegally-held weapons

Mr Harry Barnes (North East Derbyshire): If he will make a statement on progress towards the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons.

Mr Peter Mandelson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde.

Cross-border community projects

Mr Jimmy Deenihan (Kerry North): If in view of the very positive recent political developments both Governments will put in place a special fund to facilitate communities, both North and South of the Border, who are developing joint community projects; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Peter Mandelson: Both Governments have introduced a wide range of initiatives designed to assist communities on each side of the Border. I very much welcome and support these. With regard to the creation of a special fund, this is a matter, so far as the northern side of the Border is concerned, for the devolved administration. As a pause in the operation of that administration has now taken effect I am unable to comment further on this proposal.

Demilitarisation and decommissioning

Mr Peter Temple-Morris (Leominster): If he will make a statement on the progress being made towards the overall demilitarisation of Northern Ireland, including the decommissioning, or putting beyond use by any means, of the weapons of the Provisional IRA and other paramilitary organisations of whatever persuasion.

Mr Peter Mandelson: With regard to overall demilitarisation, the Government, for its part, published a security strategy document on 22 December which initiated further reviews of security installations. These are ongoing and reflect our desire to make progress on normalising the security presence in Northern Ireland. As to the issue of decommissioning I refer the hon. member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. member for Greenock and Inverclyde.

Dublin to Derry trunk road

Mr Dinny McGinley (Donegal South West): If a joint initiative could be adopted by both Governments to upgrade the Dublin / Derry Road (Dublin to Moy Bridge N2 / Moy Bridge to Derry through Omagh to Strabane A5) to the status of a motorway; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Peter Mandelson: Roads planning and construction is the primary responsibility of the devolved administration. For the reasons I gave earlier I am unable to comment further at this time.

The Patten Report

Mrs Maria Fyfe (Glasgow, Maryhill): If he will report on progress on implementing the recommendations of the Patten Report on the future policing of Northern Ireland.

Mr Peter Mandelson: On 19 January 1 announced to Parliament the Government's decisions on the Patten Report. I will introduce legislation before Easter to bring those decisions into law. Other administrative action, for example on severance, is under way.

Implementing these changes will entail a major and challenging piece of work, not only for Government, but also for the Chief Constable, the Police Authority and, in due course, the Policing Board. As I said in the House of Commons on 19 January, this is not an overnight event, but a process of change that will extend over several years.

North-South Bodies

Dr Rory O'Hanlon (CavanMonaghan): If he will make a statement on the work to date of the NorthSouth Bodies and the initiatives they are taking to improve the economic and social development of the twelve border counties.

Mr Peter Mandelson: The establishment of the institutions and associated cross border bodies in December was an historic political advance though sadly in more recent days the process has suffered a setback. As to the details of the work of the bodies, these are matters which fall to the Irish Government and the devolved administration. For the reasons I indicated earlier I am unable to comment further at this time.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr Michael Colvin (Romsey): What representations he has received from farming organisations about governmental representation at deliberations on the Common Agricultural Policy.

Mr Peter Mandelson: None.

The Patten Report

Mr Tony Killeen (Clare): What timescale he envisages for implementing the changes announced by him on January 19 arising from the Patten Report on the RUC; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Charles Flanagan (LaoisOffaly): If he will chart a path towards the full implementation of the Patten Report on Policing in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Peter Mandelson: I refer the Deputies to the answers I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill.

General de Chastelain

Mr Kevin McNamara (Hull North): What recent discussions he has had with General de Chastelain on the subject of the decommissioning of illegally-held arms in Ireland.

Mr Peter Mandelson: I most recently met General de Chastelain and his colleagues late on Monday 31st January, to receive his interim report and discuss its contents.

The peace process

Mr Dennis Canavan (Falkirk West): If he will make a statement on the development of the peace process.

Mr Peter Mandelson: Despite intensive efforts throughout last week, sufficient trust and confidence in the institutions established before Christmas could not be sustained by all sides. A Commencement Order, under the Northern Ireland Act 2000, suspending the Assembly and Executive came into effect at midnight on 11 February. I share the widespread sadness that this had to happen so soon after devolution had begun. We all hope that suspension will be for a relatively brief period. I will be consulting the Irish Government and the political parties at the earliest opportunity with regard to establishing a review which, I hope, will allow trust and confidence to be rebuilt and enable the institutions to be restored and decommissioning to start.

'Security - Return to Normality: The Government's Approach'

Mr Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin (Cavan-Monaghan): If he will make a statement on the document *'Security - Return to Normality: The Government's Approach'* published on 22 December 1999.

Mr Peter Mandelson: The paper sets out the overall strategy for achieving normal security and policing in Northern Ireland. It explains what has already been done and describes the further steps the Government intends to take. These include the review now underway which will focus particularly on specific security arrangements, including various security installations.

Telephone interceptions

Senator Joe Costello: If he will outline the circumstances under which the electronic traffic to and from Ireland is monitored by the British authorities; if he will list the categories of information sought; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Peter Mandelson: Further to my response to Mr Smith, the Government does not comment on matters relating to security and intelligence. And I think that the Senator would not seriously expect me to do so.