



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

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

TWENTY-SECOND PLENARY SESSION

26 and 27 February 2001

Kerry Suite, Killarney Park Hotel, Killarney, Co. Kerry

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

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1. Monday 26 February 2001

The sitting was opened in public at 9.35 am in the Kerry Suite, Killarney Park Hotel, Killarney, Co. Kerry, with Mr Michael O'Kennedy TD in the Chair.

1. PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Because we have a fairly full and busy programme today, I shall commence business. Tá fáilte roimh gach éinne anseo go Cill Áirne ach go háirithe ba mhaith liom fáilte a chur roimh gach éinne ón Albain agus ón Bhreatain Bheag. A special word of welcome to our friends from Alba because I know from a recent visit there that the Gaelic language is still strong and vigorous there. If we cannot understand ourselves in English, maybe we sometimes will in Irish. I welcome you all to what I believe will be a very important and busy programme.

Those of you who have been here before will know that we discourage the reading of newspapers at this session. Please leave the room and read what they are saying about us outside. It is a matter of normal order and courtesy to desist from reading newspapers during debates.

We are in session almost as a sub-committee of parliament, so please turn off all pagers, beepers, mobile phones while in this room. I do not use those things anyway but we are working against a very strong tide. The room is quite compact and we do not have the luxury of a public gallery. I therefore ask all non-Members who are attending to refrain from any conversation while our discussions are taking place.

These proceedings do not attract parliamentary privilege. Please bear this in mind although it has never been a matter of any hazard.

2. ASSOCIATE MEMBERS AND OTHER ATTENDING THE PLENARY

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We have a number of associate Members for this session and, in accordance with standing orders, Rule 2 (a), the following associate Members have accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for the whole of the session:

Jeff Ennis MP, Helen Jackson MP, Andrew Mackinlay MP, John McWilliam MP, Stephen O'Brien MP and Seán Doherty TD.

We have apologies from Nick Ainger MP, Mary Coughlan TD, who has recently been promoted to Minister of State - I do not think we will see Deputy Coughlan here again as a Member of the Body - Celia Keaveney TD; Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin TD; Andrew Boylan TD; Robert Jackson MP; William O'Brien MP; Joe Benton MP, Lord Merlyn Rees - it must be the first time he has been absent from a meeting - Geraldine Smith MP; Sir Brian Mawhinney MP; Seamus Mallon MP and Maria Fyfe MP who is ill and I am sorry to hear that.

In some cases substitutes have been nominated, but those apologies have been sent to me by the people in question and they asked me to bring them to your attention.

On the Programme of Business, item 4 relates to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, who will attend to make a statement and reply to questions on behalf of the Irish Government.

Members of the devolved institutions and the islands are in attendance as observers at least for the commencement of business. The Steering Committee has once more decided that they should be allowed to speak even during this debate but under the provisions of Rule 2(c) as it now stands. You know we will move to amend the Rules to give them a new and full status. Pending that determination by the Body, this morning the list of observers is as follows:

Isle of Man: Mr Speaker David Cannan SHK;

Northern Ireland: Ms Carmel Hanna MLA, Mr Barry McElduff MLA and Mr Donovan McClelland MLA;

Scotland: Ms Patricia Ferguson MSP, Ms Cathie Craigie MSP, Mrs Margaret Ewing MP MSP, Ms Annabel Goldie MSP and Mr Iain Smith MSP

Wales: Mr John Griffiths AM and Dr Dai Lloyd AM.

I extend a very special welcome to those who have not been with us previously and I hope they enjoy the experience and take part as much as they wish in our proceedings.

We have received apologies from the States of Guernsey and the States of Jersey who on this occasion have been unable to send a representative.

3. ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I move the adoption of the proposed Programme of Business, which have been circulated. As is our custom, the Steering Committee met yesterday evening and because of events of which you are all aware, we concluded that we should set aside some time at the earliest opportunity to debate the very topical and serious issue of animal disease and particularly foot and mouth disease. A revised Programme of Business has been circulated this morning, which now includes a new notice of motion relating to foot and mouth disease tabled by the Steering Committee pursuant to Rule 12(a) and notwithstanding the provisions of Rule 10. As a consequence of this proposal, it will be necessary to conclude the debate on the proposed amendment to the Rules and the reform of the Body not later than 11.30 am. If we can do so earlier, so much the better because we need to take a ten-minute break.

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

4. PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO RULES AND REFORM OF THE BODY

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): In view of the large number present it would be extremely helpful if those wishing to speak in the debate on the proposed amendment to the rules, which is what we will address immediately, could give their names to the Clerks. We will have to arrange the speaking times so that those who wish to contribute can do so and, if necessary, limit the speaking time to accommodate all speakers. That invitation to speak in this morning's debate on the amendment of the rules extends to our parliamentary observers as they are now. For the purposes of this debate they are not only free but also very welcome to contribute. I suggest a time limit of about four minutes per speaker.

The next item is the proposed amendment to the Rules and reform of the Body. We have received notice of an amendment to this motion from Lord Robin Glentoran, submitted to us in accordance with Rule 17. The Steering Committee considered this notice and agreed that it comes within the terms envisaged by Rule 17 and, accordingly, we are satisfied that it is in order. I ask Lord Glentoran to move the amendment and then we can debate the issue. Lord Glentoran is free to make some observations in moving the amendment.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Amendments to Rules [Doc. No. 80] be made with immediate effect-(**The Co-Chairman.**)

Lord Glentoran: Thank you very much. I move as an Amendment to the proposed Amendment (A) contained in Document No. 80:

Subsection (c), at end insert, "but should be broadly representative of the political parties represented in those institutions."

I welcome the fact that the Body is moving to a new phase. I also welcome our colleagues from Scotland, the Isle of Man, Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. We had considerable discussions yesterday about the timing of this and all it means, particularly to the Northern Ireland parties. However, I am sure this is the right way for the Body to be progressing. As colleagues are aware, particularly in Stormont, issues relating to party balance are very sensitive. The Northern Ireland Assembly was set up under the rules of the d'Hondt formula. I considered including that in the amendment and discussed it with one of the Clerks. However, I decided that that was going into too much detail. I thank the Steering Committee for its support. I think an amendment of this type will be and could be helpful. With luck, it will never be needed. If things were to get even more difficult in Stormont than they are now, this Body could still be a very valuable debating chamber and it would be important not to have any unbalanced representation from Stormont or from any other assemblies or parliaments involved. I beg to move.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I wish to put the proposal in context before opening the debate. The document which has been circulated contains detailed notes on the proposed amendments. I draw attention to the major effects of those

proposed rule changes, in the context of which Lord Glentoran's proposed amendment must be considered.

As you know, the Body will be expanded if we adopt those amendments. This will allow for five Members and four Associates each from Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and one Member and one Associate each from Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Jersey. Associate Members from the small islands will be allowed to attend as of right, but will only be allowed to vote if they are substituting for a full Member. That is in accordance with our existing standard practice and procedure.

Additional places will also have to be provided on the Steering Committee, which arranges the business and prepares the agenda for all of our discussions, both at plenary and committee level. The proposal which is before the meeting provides for a further three places on the Steering Committee for the new Members, to be chosen from among themselves. However, the point which Lord Glentoran has made must be seen in that context, to ensure a balanced representation. Committee A, which deals with matters falling within the responsibility of the sovereign parliaments of Westminster and the Oireachtas, will be preserved as an East-West committee on such sovereign matters. This has been readily agreed by the Members of the devolved institutions, in accordance with our suggestion. Committees B, C and D will be expanded to include representatives of the new Members.

In the new circumstances, the voting system will require some change. In practice the need for a head-count vote has hardly ever arisen in this Body, but, of course, provision has to be made for it, however unlikely its actual use may be. Under the new arrangements, the Body will not be able to come to a resolution unless a combined majority of British and Irish Members present and voting, vote in favour of it. In the absence of such a result, the matter will be deferred.

Clearly, we are still engaged on "work in progress". This Body has been in existence for just over ten years, during which time we have made a number of changes. We have also developed an excellent level of mutual understanding and respect and a reassuring degree of common purpose. The current proposals, which represent the eighth revision of the Rules to date, are presented as the most effective way to bring the candidate institutions into full membership of the Body, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Good Friday Agreement. Those changes, and any subsequent requirement for further change, can be evaluated in the light of experience, in which all of us, including our new Members, will share.

The amendments are now open for discussion.

Dr Norman A Godman MP (Greenock and Inverclyde): I welcome this proposal and I am delighted to see friends and colleagues from Scotland. I have a couple of questions. First, in the event of a political party deciding not to send representatives to the Body, would those places remain unfilled, pending a change of mind by that party? Secondly, while I agree with the unchanging membership of Committee A, let us suppose that the committee is looking at policing matters, which involves, say,

questioning representatives of the *Gárda Síochána*, the Northern Ireland police force and the Strathclyde police force. Given that policing matters are devolved to the Scottish Parliament - quite rightly in my view - it might be useful if Members from the Scottish Parliament could take up the role of observers if we were questioning the Chief Constable or other police officers responsible for the matters concerned.

I feel that both of those questions need clarification.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): In accordance with normal practice, it would be preferable to hear the views of all Members on your second question, to assist us to reach an informed conclusion.

I can respond directly to your first question. It is the right and privilege of Members from any of the newly devolved institutions to attend or not to attend. There is no provision in the current proposals for any such vacancy to be filled in some other way. The query which Dr Godman has raised is very relevant. If he wishes to comment further, I will try to accommodate him at a later stage.

We will now proceed, as usual, to hear alternate speakers from the British and Irish delegations. The immediate list of speakers is: Mr Conor Lenihan, Mr David Cannan, Mr John Griffiths and Mr Peter Temple-Morris. There is a space still available for an Irish contributor.

Mr Conor Lenihan TD (Dublin South-West): I am not for one moment suggesting that the amendment proposed by Lord Glentoran is in any way nefarious in its purpose. However, in the context of the political cauldron in Northern Ireland, the explicit suggestion in the amendment that the character of a delegation sent by a parliament or an assembly should be representative of the party political structures that underlie all parliaments is wrong for a number of reasons.

There is a long-standing tradition, among both the Nationalist and Unionist communities, of boycott and refusal to attend or recognise sovereign and well established political institutions. This amendment will allow certain parties to negate participation by Members of the Assembly, or the people of Northern Ireland, in the workings of this Body. I presume Lord Glentoran does not intend that, but it is a serious amendment which I believe to be wrong. It will mean that those who do not wish to participate in this Body, and wish to prevent the elected representatives of a particular location from participating, be it in Wales, Northern Ireland or wherever, can actually prevent proceedings.

This Body is representative of parliaments and assemblies, and those parliaments and assemblies should be allowed to participate as assemblies and parliaments, not as artificial constructs of political parties. Political parties and their whip systems distribute the members on this Body, but it should always be open to a parliament, notwithstanding dissenting views, to send representatives to this gathering. This amendment would give certain parties the right to boycott, or not to allow participation in, this Body. That is almost a negation of democracy itself.

Mr Speaker Cannan SHK (Isle of Man): The Isle of Man is greatly honoured to be considered for full membership of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. I remind Members that the Isle of Man is a fully self-governing territory with only defence and foreign affairs being the reserve of the United Kingdom government. We are not members of the European Union, do not contribute to the EU and we receive no funding from the EU. We receive no funding from the Westminster government and make a contribution towards UK defence and foreign affairs. We have no representation at Westminster.

We feel that the Isle of Man will make a contribution to the betterment of the greater council of the isles. The Isle of Man is equidistant from Dublin, Belfast, and Liverpool and has close relations with both Dublin and Belfast in commercial activity and in communication by sea and air. A good proportion of its population are from the Republic and Northern Ireland and we hope to contribute on fishing matters in the Irish Sea, where we are closely involved with Irish fishing issues through our Manx fishing fleet. We are also involved in negotiations on transit gas pipelines, and in communications.

In that overall context, we are willing to make a contribution to add to the sense of community among Celtic nations. I hope that Members will support the proposal that the Isle of Man become a full member of the Body.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris MP (Leominster): As one who spoke in Galway to urge Members to bring their proposals from the Steering Committee back to Plenary Session, which they generously agreed to, I realise now that I need not have worried. Members have put admirable draft amendments before the Body which have the right balance in terms of committee and Plenary matters. They are also satisfactory in how they deal with the other parliaments and assemblies, and I give a broad welcome to the proposals.

On more specific matters, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Islands, are a welcome addition to this Body. In various speeches coming up to this meeting I expressed concern that the relationship of the sovereign parliaments not be diluted by any other presence, much as we might welcome that presence. At Galway, a Welsh Assembly Member said that if there was a row between the sovereign parliaments of Ireland and the UK, it would be useful to have another view. I took that on board as it is very sensible. There have not been any rows between the sovereign parliaments and this Body has worked very well, but the new blood and the freshness of view is something—

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I will have to interrupt you, Mr Temple-Morris. People have arrived since proceedings opened and did not hear my message to turn off mobile phones. I am not speaking to anyone in particular.

Senator Paschal Mooney: That was my phone. It was my mistake. I hope you will not throw me out.

Mr Dominic Grieve MP (Beaconsfield): Such honesty.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Perhaps a custodial sentence.

Senator Mooney: This might be the only reason my name is mentioned.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The Co-Chairman, Mr Winnick, has suggested a custodial sentence but in the circumstances I will let the matter rest.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris MP (Leominster): I welcome the representatives of the new assemblies. They add strength to the Body and their views are to be welcomed also.

On Lord Glentoran's amendment I agree with what Mr Lenihan said. It is unnecessary and unwise to isolate the Northern Ireland Assembly and add new elements which would put this Body on a different footing from that which we have always operated on. Mr Lenihan has dealt with much of the subject, and I agree it is unwise to give veto power to any group which attends the Body. The various assemblies and parliaments should decide themselves who represents them and we should judge those who attend on the merits of those decisions.

Northern Ireland has always been out of balance on this Body because the Unionists have not attended, but the Body has welcomed the SDLP and has benefited from their presence. Sometimes the SDLP are otherwise engaged, a point that particularly applies to the Deputy First Minister, Mr Seamus Mallon MLA, who has many other duties, but he is a regular attender at this Body when possible. We were diminished by the absence of the Unionists but operated without them as we had no choice. It would be wrong to prevent the SDLP attending just because Unionists choose to oppose this Body. We have always been out of balance but it would be wrong to separate the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Parliament or the Welsh Assembly along the lines suggested in the amendment.

There is no mention of political parties in the Rules and it is a matter for the Oireachtas and the British Parliament as to who attends. The balance is worked out according to the percentages held by the parties in the respective parliaments. That has been the practice despite the absence of rules. We will have to either have a wholesale amendment to practice in the two parliaments and the other bodies, or we must leave things as they are and let the amendment fall. The amendment does raise an important point however, and I am grateful to Lord Glentoran for putting it forward.

Mr Brian O'Shea TD (Waterford): I welcome the extension of this important Body, which will help it to be more effective and relevant. I have doubts regarding the timing of this initiative, but perhaps there is never a good time to make such a change. Although I will go along with the proposal, I wonder if the addition of MLAs, AMs and members of other assemblies should be substantially increased. Unlike some other Members, I support Lord Glentoran's amendment. If this Body is to be effective, we must have representatives of all the parties in Northern Ireland. As

things stand, Members of the sovereign parliament at Westminster from Northern Ireland are entitled to participate here, but they have not chosen to do so.

It is important that places are kept open for parties from the new Assembly who are not presently willing to participate, as their absence lessens this Body and its effectiveness. Change is possible in the medium or long term, so we should leave place for those who are not willing to come on board at present, but who may do so in the future by adopting the thrust of Lord Glentoran's amendment. It would be appropriate to allocate more places to the Northern Assembly to reflect the balance that Lord Glentoran alludes to in his amendment.

Mr John Griffiths AM (Newport East): On behalf of the National Assembly for Wales, I thank the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body for proposing us as a participating institution, and those who have welcomed us as prospective members. The Assembly is very keen to develop relations with other countries and other parliamentary bodies. It is a member of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and, as chairman of that Association, I know quite a few people here from various gatherings. I am also the Assembly's member of the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, so I am keen to develop relations and get to know people and to make the Assembly an enthusiastic participant in these international bodies. The Assembly sees great value in these associations.

Since the Assembly was founded, it has been particularly keen to develop relations with the Republic of Ireland. A fully staffed consulate has been opened in Cardiff, which we welcome and appreciate. Bertie Ahern is coming to speak at the Assembly on Thursday, which is St David's Day. The development of relations with the Republic, as well as with the other new members of this Body, is very important indeed. We are enthusiastic about playing a full role, and we hope to prove that over the coming months and years.

It is very nice to be in Kerry, as my mother was born and brought up on Valentia Island. She did not leave until she was in her thirties, when she went to Liverpool and then to Wales. I have been to Kerry and to Valentia Island many times, and I feel as if I am on home territory in Killarney. I thank Members for their welcome, and I look forward to the Welsh Assembly proving that it will play a full and enthusiastic role.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Míle buíochas to the Assembly Member, and because of his special link with Kerry, fáilte thar -ais abhaile - welcome back home.

Mr Griffiths: The Co-Chairman could not resist saying that.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I could not. The next speaker also has a certain association with Kerry, and a definite association with this Body.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): I welcome our colleagues from the devolved assemblies, and look forward to a devolved authority for the Kingdom of England. I wonder how this Body will deal with that.

Mr Lenihan raised the matter of Members who do not take their seats. If they have not been taken up when a plenary session arrives, the practice at Westminster has been to fill seats *pari passu* among the parties to enable associates to become full Members. It is up to other assemblies to decide how they deal with it.

While I accept and understand Lord Glentoran's amendment, I do not think that an extra rider is needed. Nothing in our rules prevents parties from coming or staying away; it is up to them. We cannot force them one way or another, so some of Mr Lenihan's fears are exaggerated. Colleagues on the Steering Committee will recall a discussion on the police. It was suggested that if the Strathclyde police or the Isle of Man police were under discussion, it would be proper to invite members from the appropriate devolved assembly to attend.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris MP (Leominster): Mr McNamara said that if Lord Glentoran's rider was to go ahead, so be it. His amendment reads that Members "shall be nominated to the Body in accordance with procedures to be determined by those institutions but should be broadly representative of the political parties represented in the institutions". In other words, nominations which are not broadly representative, as has always been the case from Northern Ireland as Unionists have not participated, are out of kilter. Does Mr McNamara agree that this Body would be forced to reject those nominated from the Northern Ireland Assembly?

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): No, because the rules of the Northern Ireland Assembly state that representatives have to be accepted according to the d'Hondt principle of representation which governs all appointments. The problem rests in Westminster and in the Oireachtas, where d'Hondt is not well known and, perhaps, believed to be one of the ten famous Belgians. The other devolved assemblies adhere to the d'Hondt principle. Lord Glentoran's amendment attempts to underline and expand the point that is made in Rule 1(c) of this Body. Whether we accept it or not will be irrelevant to Northern Ireland as the d'Hondt mechanism, which is part of the Northern Ireland Assembly's own rules and was also part of the Northern Ireland Act, 1998, will safeguard the system there.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): This is an interesting and I hope informative exchange because it helps us all to consider the implications of the amendments. If there are reassurances to be given maybe they would consider those.

Senator Helen Keogh: I welcome the representatives of the participating institutions. We have had many interesting debates within the Body about its composition and I have only one comment which relates to the Isle of Man. I wonder if a representative from there could be co-opted to Committee B which considers European Affairs.

I am in favour of the amendment suggested by Lord Glentoran. I look at it in a positive light and I take on board what Kevin McNamara has just said about it. It seeks to expand and underline subsection (c) of Rule 1 and I disagree with the points Deputy

Lenihan made when he referred to it. Anything that underscores our commitment to being totally inclusive is a good thing.

Mr Brendan McGahon TD (Louth): While all the various islands are very welcome this Body will not reach its potential until the Unionists are present. Recently with Kevin McNamara we met—

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I thought you were dealing with a matter of order but this seems to be a matter of debate so if you do not mind, Brendan, I will put your name in and you will be called shortly.

Mr Gerry Bermingham MP (St Helens South): Unlike the Senator I do not agree that this is a very helpful amendment; I agree with Deputy Lenihan that it is very unhelpful. I gently suggest, having played some part in moving the amendments at the last Plenary Session, that each sovereign institution elects people in its own way. Most of us who are elected by democratic franchise are representatives of an area first and of the parliament second. We are members of a political party and, therefore, when one comes to any institution one comes as a person either elected or appointed but representative of one's own view. That is the art of democracy, to express one's own view. It cannot be dictated in advance how people should vote, that is a negation of democracy.

When one comes to look at this amendment reading it in the terms of the proposed amendment to the Body itself one will note that the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey each have only one representative to reflect their parliaments. It is a nonsense as it cannot reflect the political parties of that parliament because of course there is more than one party in any parliament. While I understand Lord Glentoran's views and the need to reflect on Northern Ireland until the Unionists play a part we cannot have a balanced view from that Assembly. To leave things as they are at present is the sensible thing and I therefore urge this Body to reject subsection (c). The amendments, as proposed, will reflect for all the island the views of those parliamentary bodies as decided by those bodies in the delegates or persons they send here.

Ms Patricia Ferguson MSP (Glasgow, Maryhill): On behalf of the Scottish delegates I thank the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body for its welcome on this and the previous occasion on which we were able to join it as observers. Hopefully, the next time we attend it will be in a different capacity and we will all be very glad of that. I particularly thank the Steering Committee of this Body for working with us to come up with a sensible formula which will allow the devolved parliaments and the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey to play a meaningful role here. We hope that the spirit of co-operation that led us to these amendments will provide the means to move our relationship forward. I was keeping a list of those who welcomed us so that we could thank them but I am afraid it has become rather too long. In any case our thanks are very sincere.

Dr Norman Godman raised a point earlier about Committee A and Kevin McNamara referred to our discussion in the Steering Committee. My recollection of the discussion is very similar to Kevin's as to the way matters, dealt with in the past by committee, would be dealt with in the future. In addition to what Kevin outlined it had been accepted that matters of significant interest or value to the devolved bodies would be referred to another committee to be dealt with so that we could play a full part in those discussions. Where necessary we would be able to send representatives to Committee A. That is a valuable and sensible compromise and we thank you very much for all the work that has gone on today and for making these changes possible. We hope that the future working relationship will be as positive as it has been up to now.

Senator Joe Costello: We are about to be divided on the issue of the extension of the Body but only in terms of trying to get the best amendment to the extension of membership. I welcome the new observers and look forward to seeing them become full Members.

Committee A should not exclude Members from the other assemblies or parliaments. I would like to see a mechanism whereby in certain circumstances they could be Members.

We have to be very careful as to how we deal with Lord Glentoran's amendment. I am usually reluctant to have a *caveat* inserted that focuses on one parliament or assembly. If we do have a *caveat* it should be introduced as gently as possible and that would necessitate a rewording of what is here. The word "but" is harsh and the word "and" is much more acceptable if we are to go down that road. "Political Parties" does not describe the reality. There are political groupings, for example the Women's Coalition in Northern Ireland, which is not a party in the formal sense. What Gerry Bermingham has said is quite true; there cannot be broad representation when there is only one representative from a parliament or assembly, so further amendment would have to be introduced where there are multiple nominations.

The amendment should not read:

"but should be broadly representative of the political parties represented in those institutions".

It should read:

"and, where there are multiple nomination, should be broadly representative of the political groupings represented in those institutions".

I agree with the amendment, though I usually disagree with matters of this nature, the reason being that at the present time the Unionist Members at Westminster are not taking their seats here nor are they being filled by anyone else. The five places should automatically be filled if people decide not to take them but it might be very

hard to reverse the situation later. It is very important to invite representation from the various traditions, particularly in Northern Ireland. The proportional representation system which is coming on board in a broader sense and which is the norm in Ireland gives a broadly representative representation in parliament, more so than in other jurisdictions, and it is not in any way antagonistic when reflected in an amendment.

Mr Dominic Grieve MP (Beaconsfield): I join in welcoming the members of the various devolved institutions in the isles to this Body. They will make a powerful contribution to our future debates and that is very important. It seems to me that Lord Glentoran's amendment, although some have spoken about it in the context of Northern Ireland matters particularly, has a slightly wider significance which we would do well to bear in mind in the context of what is happening to the Body. We are changing from being a meeting ground of two sovereign bodies into something rather more complicated. Although there is an underlying assumption, and it has been followed in the past, that the way in which membership is selected - in our case in Westminster it is effectively done by the Whips - is broadly along the lines of the way the parties pan out in the House of Commons with the House of Lords elements as well. There is a broad measure of representation and there is no requirement that it should follow broadly party political representation. As our membership becomes more complicated there is something to be said for inserting, whether it is with the use of the word "but", "and" - I prefer the word "and" - a reference to the representation being broadly representative of the political parties. Perhaps I can make one or two points why, which go beyond the Northern Ireland context. Kevin McNamara in his usual pithy comments suggested there was a problem about the English regional devolution and how that might be subsequently accommodated—

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): Not a problem.

Mr Grieve:—without wishing to introduce mathematical complexities. It is right to say that the English dimension has never been satisfactorily addressed within this Body. That is a home-grown problem in the United Kingdom but it is one which I think exists. I hope I may be excused saying the following: if this Body is going to turn into a Celtic mutual admiration society then some of the business we need to conduct will be missed. It is particularly important in that context to bear in mind the question of broad representation within each institution. We may find that as the United Kingdom's devolution develops, the question of how many seats, for instance, should go to parties that have very small representation within the United Kingdom Parliament but, nevertheless, have been seen historically as having an important role to play with the possibility of being represented through devolved representation and assemblies may become quite important. I have said before that the actual number of English Members of Parliament represented in this Body is surprisingly small when one considers the statistical representation. If we are to flourish and prosper these are facts which need to be borne in mind. I do not want hard and fast rules but Lord Glentoran's amendment highlights how selection should take place. Without laying down anything stringent, it emphasises it. It has an

important role to play in the Northern Ireland context but, curiously, it also has a knock-on effect beyond that which could be beneficial.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you Mr Grieve. I think even Kevin McNamara is moved by the need to ensure we do not discriminate against the original founder members, the other England, in anything we do here.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): Hear, hear.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Those of us who are the cousins will take that on board, Mr Grieve.

Mr Donovan McClelland MLA (South Antrim): The presumption this morning, listening to the participation of members of the Northern Ireland Assembly, seems to be that Unionists would be reluctant or would not wish to take up their seat in this Body. I would remind you that it was the Unionists who asked for this Body in the earlier negotiations. They may have couched it in different terms, referring to it as a "Council of the Isles", or whatever. I can understand why Unionists were reluctant to participate fully in an earlier Body because they viewed it as the child of the Anglo-Irish Agreement; but in the talks leading up to the Good Friday Agreement it was the Unionists who demanded this type of Body to resolve the east-west relationship and they demanded participation. Do not automatically presume that Unionists will boycott this Body; it may be that one Unionist party will have a difficulty with it because they will view it as a child of the Good Friday Agreement. I want to draw your attention to this presumption that it will automatically be boycotted by all shades of Unionism: that may not be the case.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you Mr McClelland. While that view is coming from a member of the SDLP and is encouraging, on the other hand we would all like to see that Unionist position expressed by a Unionist representative here and we would not have to interpret what they might or might not do. That they would attend to do so is what we have been endeavouring to accommodate for some considerable time.

Mr Brendan McGahon TD (Louth): While the representatives from the various institutions are welcome and will, no doubt, have a role to play in a future "Council of the Isles", we should not lose sight of the original concept of this Body. It will be seen as a talking shop until the Unionists come and take their place. Recently Kevin McNamara and Committee D met in Newry. A Unionist, Danny Kennedy, had no difficulty meeting us. We encouraged him to encourage his party to participate here. We said: "if you can sit down with Adams and McGuinness, who have assailed your community for 30 years, surely you have nothing to fear by coming here". Has the Steering Committee of this Body renewed its efforts and invitations to the Unionists? I am aware they rejected it ten years ago but events have moved apace in the North and it is illogical for Unionists to refuse to come here when they can sit in an Assembly with the IRA. Have you made any fresh efforts to encourage them to take seats here?

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): My Co-Chair will deal with any such query when he replies shortly. Mr Peter Brooke is next, to be followed by Mr Harry Barnes. Other speakers will be Senator Pascal Mooney, Mr John McWilliam, Deputy Brian Hayes and Mr McElduff. I propose, unless someone insists, to close the speakers list on this issue at that point. I need to allow time for the reply to some of the points raised by the Steering Committee.

Mr Peter Brooke MP (Cities of London and Westminster): I join in the welcome to the expansion of the Body. I am half Welsh in the truest sense in that my grandfather played scrum half for Wales but I have no Scottish blood. I have holidayed for many years at Lochaline in Argyll. On Lochaline Point is the ruined castle of the Lord of the Isles and, therefore, I feel a link both with Scotland and the Isles. I pay tribute to my neighbour, Gerry Bermingham, for making this debate possible today by the amendment he moved in Galway. I disagree with him on the substance of what he said subsequently but I will come to that shortly.

I hold no brief for the Unionists but I wish to speak in support of Robin Glentoran's amendment. I am conscious of Unionist attitudes to this Body but I was equally conscious, when I went to Belfast in 1989, of the Unionist retreat into a constitutional *cul de sac* after the Anglo-Irish Agreement which had so elevated a tactic into a principle that contrary to the usual practice in the House of Commons, where Members of Parliament write to the relevant Minister with a constituency problem, in 1989 Unionist Members in Northern Ireland were not writing to Ministers but to Permanent Secretaries instead.

It remains an open question for historians as to when the peace process began but it was entirely clear in 1989 that unless the Unionists could be persuaded to come out of their constitutional *cul de sac* which meant, according to their lights, leaving that *cul de sac* honourably, any thoughts of a true peace process were premature.

I am concerned, therefore, that whatever the Unionists' current attitudes to this Body, it is of importance that we should not seal off the *cul de sac* they are currently in by not encouraging broad representation, creating an alibi which could make the attendance of Unionists less likely. I understand Deputy Lenihan's point about the place of the boycott in the history of this island but the empty chair occupied by Banquo's ghost in *Macbeth* has an even greater longevity, with all the significance it played in that drama.

Gerry Bermingham sought to drive an Exocet through the amendment. My view of the spirit of Lord Glentoran's amendment was that it indicated the desire of this Body to be as broadly representative as possible, which we can only be if the delegations which come to us from the individual bodies are representative too. On Gerry Bermingham's observation that one person cannot be broadly representative, I remind the Body of the late Jack Kennedy's observation at the soirée when he entertained all the American Nobel prize-winners at the White House, that there cannot have been a greater array of human talents beneath that roof since Thomas Jefferson had dined alone.

Peter Temple-Morris's endorsement of Mr Lenihan was mildly misconceived as the absence of the Unionists to date has not prevented the presence of the SDLP: nor should it, under the new arrangements for the very reasons given by Kevin McNamara. *Animal Farm* is perhaps an unhappy analogy in the context of our later debate but all Members of this Body are equal and those absent are, in a metaphysical sense, even if not a practical one, equally equal.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I have to observe, Peter, that if we are trying to come up with something as broadly representative as possible, having regard to your diverse routes and origins, including Cavan, you would about fulfil that role. The observation you made is significant and the Steering Committee will have to consider the implications of the term "as broadly representative as possible". If the purpose of this amendment was to frustrate the attendance of other Members, it would not commend itself to the Body but we are taking on board some of the observations made here and hopefully we will reach a conclusion that will be acceptable to the Steering Committee.

Mr Harry Barnes MP (North East Derbyshire): Before turning to the amendment, I want to welcome the proposed rule change. It seems to me that the rule change is in the spirit of the Good Friday Agreement and, therefore, it is something which is important and to which we are committed. Furthermore, the rule change changes our nature in terms of who is involved in the Body and that appears to create a situation which is more attractive to the Ulster Unionists. As a result of that rule change, we are likely to be able to encourage them to take up the positions they have on this Body through their representation in the United Kingdom Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. I have pressed for the Ulster Unionists to take up their membership of this Body and will continue to do that in the future but Lord Glentoran's amendment is mistaken. It appears to put pressure on the Ulster Unionists to come into line and we will not attract Ulster Unionists into this Body by taking that action. That seems to neuter some of the provisions contained in the rule change.

This amendment is not very precise as to what we do in different sets of circumstances. If the devolved bodies do not do as this change suggests, how do we then react? Do we simply say it is unfortunate they are not acting in line with the provisions we set down? It is odd to have rules that lead to nothing being done and if any of the bodies concerned acted differently from the way we suggested, a great deal of awkwardness would be created. We have to remember that it applies not just to Northern Ireland but to the other bodies referred to in the rule change. I would be unhappy to have a provision for new members that is different from a provision applying to existing United Kingdom and Irish Members. If this general, rather imprecise provision is to be made in respect of the new Members, it should apply to everyone. There should not be two different classes of citizens, as it were, involved in participation.

On the matter of the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey having only one representative, if this proportionate arrangement means anything it seems to

indicate that they should really be represented by the major institution within their parliaments and assemblies. That does not appear to me to be helpful. It might be useful if the Isle of Man, Jersey and Guernsey felt that they could change their representation over different periods so that within their institutions a wider range of people from different political parties could gain experience of work within this Body and generally contribute. I hope the amendment will not be carried but I am strongly in favour of the rule change.

Senator Pascal Mooney: Like all my colleagues, I support the introduction of the amendment to welcome the new members from the devolved Assemblies. As someone who, like a number of my colleagues, has had occasion to visit the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly in the course of our committee work over the past two years, I wish to record the sense of history that we all felt in joining with our parliamentary colleagues from the devolved Assemblies and Parliament. The buzz in those meetings, the creative juices that were flowing and the obvious sense of pride on the part of all of those with whom we came in contact should not go unrecorded. I get a sense of that here this morning in the contributions from those who are representing the Assemblies and the Parliament. I know they will play a full role in the workings of the Body.

Having said that, Lord Glentoran, in his amendment, is anxious to ensure that there is the broadest possible representation code for Unionist participation. I regret to say that in any of my discussions with senior Unionists over the past two years, not only have they shown no interest in participating in this Body but on one sad occasion in my presence, they have been somewhat disparaging about its work. I am sure that is familiar to those who have dealt with senior Unionist politicians. It is sad, but that is the reality.

My view is that, notwithstanding the sentiments expressed by a number of my colleagues, including Deputy McGahon, about the need to have the Unionists on side and irrespective of the best efforts in this regard, they will not come on board. That may seem pessimistic, but that is my feeling. My view has been reinforced by the comments made to me, but particularly by the reality of the "Council of the Isles" which will operate at ministerial level. The Ulster Unionist Party in Northern Ireland considers the ministerial tier of the "Council of the Isles" as the outlet for its views. It will use that mechanism to express its views. It is fully entitled to do so and we all welcome the initiative of the "Council of the Isles". It should have happened many decades ago, but an important point is that Unionists do not realise we represent parliaments. As Mr Bermingham put so eloquently, we all have a mandate directly from the people in whatever form it takes. This is an important tier that both sovereign Governments fully recognise and, consequently, they strongly encourage the continuance of this Body.

The anxiousness of the representatives of the devolved assemblies and parliaments to come on board is a further indication of the strengthening of the links this Body has developed and will continue to develop. I do not wish my contribution to be a paean to the work of the Body and I have no solution to offer in terms of how

Unionist Members of the Westminster Parliament can be encouraged to fill the two vacant seats. It appears they are not interested and the only thing we can do is to continue in the hope that they will show an interest. There is also a need for the Steering Committee to bring before the Body at a future Plenary Session its views on the relationship that should develop between the Body and the "Council of the Isles". We must ensure there is not an overlap or any threat to the future stability of the work of the Body.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Senator Mooney stated his position clearly, but I may have misunderstood him. The amendment, or any rule changes, do not apply to Unionist Members of Parliament in Westminster. That is already covered. This applies to the Northern Ireland Assembly, but I may have misunderstood the Senator.

Senator Paschal Mooney: The Co-Chairman misunderstood me. I may be wrong but I started from the premise that Lord Glentoran was motivated by the fact that he wanted to ensure that there would be Unionist representation from the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I take the Senator's point.

Mr John McWilliam MP (Blaydon): In case there are any doubts, I am occupying one of the Unionist seats today. I find it extremely uncomfortable since I am a Scot whose mother was born in Dublin, and an English MP. In common with Mr McNamara, I look forward to the next amendment to the Rules to take account of the regional assemblies in England. That is not far off, although I know Mr Mackinlay disagrees. I welcome the proposed amendment to the Rules of the Body. However, I wish to address Lord Glentoran's amendment, which is not helpful in the current circumstances.

Some colleagues on the committee were with me recently when we met Unionists. They handed in a letter of protest during the meeting about the fact that we even existed. I am surprised at some of the contributions because it is wrong to think that there is only one strand of Unionism. There is a large number of strands of Unionism. In this period of the run-up to a general election, the two main strands of Unionism are at each other's throats in a large number of constituencies in Northern Ireland. It would be unhelpful for us to publish any form of words, like Lord Glentoran's amendment, which would give them another bone on which to chew. Even after the election, if the intention is to encourage Unionist representation from the Northern Ireland Assembly, the amendment will not help in any way. It will be something else to fight about and another excuse to block those Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly who want to contribute to our discussions. I am sorry to say it, but I see no evidence whatsoever of a softening of any strand of Unionist opinion about this Body. Instead, it is hardening. I agree with Senator Mooney that they see their solution in the ministerial section of the "Council of the Isles". They do not see it any other way and they do not consider this Body helpful. It is always wise not to create hostages to fortune: in my long parliamentary experience, they are generally shot.

That would happen if this ever reached the Northern Ireland Assembly and I respectfully ask Lord Glentoran to withdraw his amendment. I understand and applaud his motives, but the effect of the amendment would be exactly the opposite of what he intends.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA (West Tyrone): Gura maith agat a Chathaoirligh. Ba mhaith liomsa fosta buíochas a ghabháil leis an gComhlacht seo as an bhfáilte a fuaireamar.

On behalf of my party, Sinn Féin, I thank the Body for the welcome extended to the representatives of the new assembly in the North. I wish to reiterate the apologies of my colleague, Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, who is unable to attend this Plenary Session. It is great to be in Kerry and I had a pleasant drive down yesterday. I broadly support the proposed extension of membership of the Body as outlined in the motion. I note Senator Costello's constructive attempt to deal with the amendment regarding deleting "but" and substituting "and". However, the make up of the new institutions is designed to reflect inclusivity and that has been achieved. The door needs to remain open and expressed efforts need to be made regarding inviting Unionism to take up its rightful role at the Body. However, the existing arrangements provide adequately for the inclusive approach. There is a political irony of sorts in that, in terms of the east-west focus, Sinn Féin is present and the Unionists are absent. Mr McClelland said it was a strong desire of the Unionists in the course of the negotiations to have the east-west aspect reflected institutionally.

Although he is sitting only centimetres away from me, I must rebut Deputy McGahon's reference to the IRA being in the Assembly. I take exception to those remarks. I have done so in the past in my sitting room when he made such comments during "The Late Late Show", "Primetime" or "Questions and Answers" and I feel I should do it here.

Mr Brendan McGahon TD (Louth): I did not hear Mr McElduff.

Mr McElduff: It demonises the democratically-elected representatives of the Republican community in the North so to describe people in a dangerous political climate where pipe-bombs are being used daily. At best, it is intemperate and unhelpful to describe me, Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness and others as the IRA in the Assembly.

Ms Carmel Hanna MLA (South Belfast): I thank the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body for the invitation and welcome. It is unfortunate that the amendment to the amendment has taken from the thrust of that welcome and invitation. It is particularly unfortunate for the representatives of the other devolved bodies that are present today. In the case of the Northern Ireland Assembly, I believe that we will nominate to the Body with the d'Hondt system. That will mean we will have one Ulster Unionist, one SDLP, one DUP, one Sinn Féin and one other from the smaller parties. There will be no problem that the Unionists will not be invited here. At present, they do not come but I believe they will in the future. Maybe not this side of a British election, but once things settle down and we do actually fulfil all the terms

of the Agreement we will have a Unionist here. I do not think that Lord Glentoran's amendment is necessary. It is possibly harmless but, as someone said, it may also draw attention to the issue, and we might be better without that attention.

Mr Brian Hayes TD (Dublin South West): The last time we met in Galway, a former senior British diplomat in another place described our deliberations as the "Galway Paradox". At one level, Members of the sovereign parliaments did not want to hand over any of their power and at another, they wanted to encourage the newly devolved institutions to be part of this new Body. Today we are moving to what might be described as a "Killarney Settlement". If that is to be a settlement, I suspect it will be more peaceful than most of the other settlements between these islands over the past 300 years.

On the rule change, I agree with Carmel Hanna. I do not believe that the amendment in Lord Glentoran's name is necessary. With or without this amendment, the Northern Ireland Assembly will have to select its five representatives to this Body by the d'Hondt mechanism. If it is not broadly representative, any of the parties can take a case to the courts on the basis of the Westminster legislation setting up the Assembly. They will send their five representatives according to the d'Hondt mechanism. That must be borne in mind. Patricia Ferguson raised an interesting point with me in private. She rightly said that this does not just refer to the devolved bodies but concerns Members of the Oireachtas and of Parliament. You could argue that the 25 MPs, with three seats for Northern Ireland Members - although the UUP do not take theirs - is not broadly representative of the Houses of Parliament. I do not think there is a need for the amendment although I understand the motivation behind it.

It is also important to say that what we are doing here is implementing another part of the Good Friday Agreement. Strand Three directly refers to the work of this Body over the past ten years and, while we are not changing its name, we are for the future changing the composition, and in a sense the whole direction of the Body. That is an intrinsic part of the Good Friday Agreement. While we are pointing out that we are implementing the Agreement, others have yet to do their bit in implementing the full Agreement. We should go forward and welcome the new bodies that are part of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. In that context we should see today's amendments, and the work of the Steering Committee since Galway, as progress along the lines of implementing the Agreement and putting in place all the complex relationships that exist on these islands, as referred to by Dominic Grieve.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): In view of Dominic Grieve's point, I should preface my remarks by saying "British" and "English". Before I deal with the debate, I refer to Norman Godman's point about Committee A. There should be no difficulty if in a particular session of Committee A it is felt that Members of a devolved institution should be invited along; there should be no obstacle. The important point is that Committee A will be preserved as an east-west committee on sovereign matters between the representatives of the two parliaments. I find it

difficult to believe that if there is a discussion on a policing matter, which is a devolved issue, Committee A could not bring along those who want to attend as observers with no voting powers. There ought to be no problem in practice.

I remind colleagues that today we are, in fact, concluding the debates we have had on the future of the Body. I have not counted the number of times we have had such debates. We have taken the view from the beginning that in view of the constitutional changes in Northern Ireland and Britain we should change our Body in compliance as far as we can and according to those constitutional changes. What is interesting and being observed by all - Carmel Hanna put her finger on it - is that not one person in the debate argued against the changes. No one said that we should not have the devolved institutions represented on this Body. There was no divide at all. The only division has been on Lord Glentoran's amendment, whatever one thinks of it. It has been the only focus for debate. No other issue has been discussed in this debate about the future of the Body. The basic points we recommended are being accepted, and, in my view, rightly so.

One of the points I made in the previous debate was that there should be no second class members. What we did not want under any circumstances was the representatives of the sovereign Parliaments would be in effect full members and those from the devolved institutions would be second class members. According to the rules that wording could not be used. We cannot have that and there is no division. If Members of devolved institutions attend a meeting of this Body, regardless of the size of the institutions involved, they come as full Members like those from the sovereign parliaments. Accordingly, there will be representation on the Steering Committee. It is recommended that there should be three.

Deputy Brian O'Shea raised the sensitive issue of it being the right time for change. We know this is a sensitive and delicate time, on what is rumoured to be the eve of a British general election. However, he asked, is there ever a right time? It could be argued that once the election takes place it will also be a delicate issue because of the change in representation at Westminster. It is a difficult issue to decide.

There has been much debate on the amendment. As I understand it, there has been no division between those in favour of the amendment and those against on the issue of how to accommodate the Unionists. Paschal Mooney took a pessimistic view and I share it to some extent. He said that no matter what developments take place in this Body, the Unionists - or to qualify it, the main body of Unionists - will never come on board. Others take the less pessimistic view, like John McWilliam. Peter Brooke made a powerful argument and reminded us of the situation in the late 1990s when the Unionists found themselves in a *cul de sac*. It is a question, as Peter said, of how we get them out of the situation where they are not necessarily in a *cul de sac* but in many respects, like the relationship with this Body, refuse to accept membership. Whether one is for or against the amendment it is an assessment of how we can make the Body more representative.

Brendan McGahon asked if we made any further efforts to persuade the Unionists to come on board. Of course, we have. We have not begged but it is not our job to beg people to come along. Feelers have been put out. People who are associated with this Body and who are close to the Unionists have put out feelers and the response has been negative. Whether one is in favour of the amendment or not, and if Lord Glentoran believes it is necessary to pursue the point, it is a question, not that we do not want the Unionists on board, of what would be the best way: the amendment or otherwise. I take the point that the acceptance of this amendment would not mean that other parties involved in the Northern Ireland Assembly would also engage in a boycott. The SDLP are here and Mr McElduff has spoken for Sinn Féin so the amendment would not lead to a situation where if the Unionists decide to maintain their boycott other parties would not be able to come on board. One makes one's own assessment accordingly.

If Lord Glentoran wants to continue in putting the amendment before the Body an amendment to his amendment has been suggested. It suggested as a possible amendment to his amendment that "should be as far possible representative" replace the words "should be broadly representative". Before going further I have two questions. Is Lord Glentoran going to put the amendment?

Lord Glentoran: Yes.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): If the words "as far as possible" were included would you be in favour?

Lord Glentoran: I would like to take Senator Costello's recommendation and change the "but" to "and". It seems perfectly reasonable to replace "broadly" with "as far as possible" and also the word "parties" to "groupings".

Mr Gerry Bermingham (St Helens South): On a point of order, the amendment has been changed totally if all those amendments to the amendment are accepted and, therefore, theoretically we should start again. That does seem to show the nonsense of trying to alter things the way we are doing it today.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): The Co-Chairman in the Chair should decide whether it would be in order to make any change once debate has taken place. I wish to conclude on the note that, whether the amendment is carried or not, if the recommendations we are making are accepted the nature of this Body will change as a result of the devolved institutions coming on board. That is a very welcome change and it demonstrates that this Body has always been keen to keep abreast of constitutional developments in Northern Ireland and in Britain. It will give renewed life to the future of this Body and I hope these main recommendations will be accepted.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you Co-Chairman. Before seeking a decision from the Body I would like to clarify that Lord Glentoran would refine his

amendment to read, "and should as far as possible be representative of the political groupings represented in those institutions". Am I correct in my interpretation?

Lord Glentoran: That is what I glean from the debate would be the preferred option.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Colleagues have views as to whether that is feasible or not; but after an interesting debate and consultation with my colleagues I propose to accept that wording as the amendment proposed by Lord Glentoran. Accordingly I propose that, "and should as far as possible be representative of the political groupings represented in those institutions" be the new wording for the amendment.

An Amendment was proposed to the question, in the proposed Amendment (A) to Rule 1, at the end of subsection (c) to insert the words "and should as far as possible be representative of the political groupings represented in those institutions."-(Lord Glentoran.)

And the Question being put, That the Amendment be made:

The Body divided: Ayes, 18: Noes, 9.

So the Amendment was agreed to.

And the Main Question, as amended, being put:

***Resolved,* That the Amendments to Rules [Doc. No. 80] be made with immediate effect, save that Amendment (A) to Rule 1 shall be further amended by inserting the words at the end of subsection (c) "and should as far as possible be representative of the political groupings represented in those institutions."**

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): This is a historic step, so it is very important to note with a great degree of satisfaction on behalf of the Steering Committee that it has been carried unanimously. I wish to express the appreciation of the Steering Committee to all of you for the response you gave to our proposed changes and for the contributions you made in the course of this and other significant debates.

***Ordered,* That the Clerks, in accordance with Rule 1(c), do certify the nominations of Members and Associate Members of the candidate institutions provided that the nominations do not exceed in number the following:**

five Members and four Associate Members of the National Assembly for Wales;

five Members and four Associate Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly;

five Members and four Associate Members of the Scottish Parliament;

one Member and one Associate Member of the High Court of Tynwald;

one Member and one Associate Member of the States of Jersey; and

one Member and one Associate Member of the States of Guernsey. - (The Chairman.)

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I wish to express my thanks and appreciation to all of you for this very significant debate. It would be helpful if the names of the Members and Associates from the new institutions could be given to the Clerks as soon as possible.

To mark the accession of our new Members, the staff are now distributing British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body ties.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): Could we note our thanks to the Clerks of both Parliaments for the work they did in ironing out all the many difficulties and making things legible and understandable to most of us?

Dr Norman A Godman MP (Greenock and Inverclyde): I am glad you said "most of us"!

Mr McNamara: We had to make allowances.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I wish to endorse the commendation from our active member of the Steering Committee, Kevin McNamara, to the Clerks of both Parliaments. They have been very efficient in their tasks.

I propose that we adjourn for ten minutes and we will resume on the special debate, having to suspend Standing Orders to discuss the foot and mouth disease.

The sitting was suspended at 11.30 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.50 am with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair.

5. FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I call the Body to order again. I thank you for agreeing, this morning, to amend the Programme of Business in accordance with Standing Orders. The outbreak of foot and mouth disease is a matter of very considerable concern for all parts of the regions involved in this Body. There have been some significant outbreaks and it is important that this Body would not only express its views on the actions to be taken or observations on actions currently being taken but also would demonstrate that, as a group of parliamentarians from

Britain and Ireland and the islands, we are very concerned about the risk to animal and human health, even though it is not a matter of concern for human health to any considerable extent.

There has been very significant media interest in this issue. It is a very important issue as far as they and the public in general are concerned and therefore the Steering Committee proposed that you adopt the amended programme. As a Minister for Agriculture and Food for five years, I am very conscious of the importance of having a disease-free status for beef producing countries and regions. I am also conscious of the fact that when the BSE outbreak occurred in Britain, I immediately consulted with my British colleague, John Gummer, the Minister for Agriculture. As soon as an incident occurred here in County Cavan in 1988, I advised the Government of the necessity to take immediate and, what was seen to be, very stringent action on our meat slaughter policy and on banning meat and bonemeal to ruminants in accordance with the best scientific knowledge available to us at the time. My colleague John Gummer was very helpful and co-operative in acknowledging the significance of the beef particularly to Ireland. I am not saying it is not important elsewhere but it is of huge importance to Ireland.

Our joint approach to the European Commission and the Council was a very deliberate one on our part. We came out with our hands up. In the event, I was not very happy with the response from either the Commission or the Council at that time. It appeared that they did not seem to have a problem. This surprised me given that the practice in many of the intensive feed-lots, in northern European countries in particular, was rather different from our grass-based industry in Ireland. Nonetheless, it has emerged almost ten years later that there is now a very significant problem with BSE and the related consequences.

That is why we should be seen to take the initiative and to move together to make the necessary proposals. I do not want to anticipate anything that may be said beyond underlying the importance to all beef producing areas but particularly for this jurisdiction and the island of Ireland as a whole. I call on Dr Rory O'Hanlon on behalf of the Steering Committee to introduce this motion.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD (Cavan-Monaghan): Thank you. I move:

That the Body notes the outbreak of foot and mouth disease and the immediate actions being taken to contain the spread of the disease.

We are all very conscious of the seriousness of this. Even though the last outbreak in Ireland was in 1941, there is a desperate dread of the disease coming here because of the devastating consequences it would have, particularly for the agriculture industry where 90 per cent of our food produced is exported. Because we are so conscious of this, it gives us a great feeling of empathy for the people of Britain, and its farmers in particular, facing such a difficult and tragic disease. We recognise that we are all in this together.

Nobody knows where the epidemic will end. On Saturday we had hoped that it had been contained; but it is a matter of great concern that it has spread to Devon and may be in Anglesey now. We are very aware of just how contagious the disease is.

As parliamentarians not just from rural parts but also from urban areas, we must be conscious of the impact the disease has for everybody and not just the farming community. We all have a responsibility to ensure that all necessary measures are put in place throughout the areas that each of us represents. This is the first public debate that we are having as the enlarged Body. We must support our respective Governments in what they are trying to do to contain the disease.

We must use every opportunity to make the public more aware of its responsibility. Without public co-operation and support for the measures it will be much more difficult to contain the disease. In larger urban areas, people often feel that they are very much removed from agriculture and it is not a matter that concerns them. They are affected in that they must stay away from farms and also in that there soon may be food shortages in Britain if the disease were to spread at its current pace. It affects the public in other ways. Here marts have been cancelled and hunting has been cancelled.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): Hear, hear.

Dr O'Hanlon: It is possible that it will be necessary to cancel major sporting fixtures in the coming weeks to contain the disease as best we can.

We appreciate the tremendous co-operation between the Governments involved. There has always been tremendous co-operation and co-ordination with the UK authorities on whatever needs to be done on animal health. We recognise the speed with which both Governments moved on the outbreak last Wednesday. There is also very close co-operation between Northern Ireland and us. We very much appreciate the degree of co-operation, communication and co-ordination at departmental level.

No doubt, the European Union will address the issue in a very serious way today. This highlights the whole question of animal health and the need to be ever vigilant and to try to find European wide measures to contain animal diseases. Food safety is rightly moving higher up the political agenda.

Last Saturday, in my constituency, within a five-mile radius, I visited nine checkpoints manned by members of the *Gárda*, and officials from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. They are turning back all food and meat products. It is causing all kinds of logistical difficulties because people who go to Dundalk to do their shopping, travel a mile or two in south Armagh and when they come out again, if they have meat or milk, they are not allowed bring it into our State. That caused a difficulty which, of course, people understand in the context of what we are trying to deal with. However, quite apart from the aspect of the Good Friday Agreement, it highlights the need for Ireland, North and South, to develop a disease-free island, with common regulations to ensure that we maintain that status. We had a similar

situation a few years ago in relation to BSE. Although every crossroad from Dundalk to Derry was manned by a member of An Garda Síochána, the effect was merely to close off the roads but not the frontier. Undoubtedly, the water surrounding the island would provide a much better barrier than the land frontier against diseased animals. I hope we can make progress towards that objective.

The present problem involves all of us, whether as parliamentarians or members of the general public, and puts the onus on us to play our part in dealing with it. Hopefully, the epidemic will be contained very rapidly in Britain and will not spread further afield.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): As there are ten speakers offering, I propose to limit the time to four minutes each.

Mr John McWilliam MP (Blaydon): I support Dr O'Hanlon's comments. I live within four miles of the original outbreak and 80 per cent of my farms are in the infected area. The controls are very strict. I took the precaution of ensuring that the clothes which I am wearing, came directly from the cleaners and that my shoes were washed with the appropriate disinfectants. I am determined that I will not be responsible for bringing this disease to Ireland.

The version of foot and mouth disease which has been detected in the UK is an Asiatic virus. It is now clear that some sheep from the Heddon-on-the-Wall area, not the original farm, which were taken to Carlisle market, were the source of the infection which spread down through the west side of the country. I do not know what has happened with the pigmeat which travelled down the east side of the country to an abattoir.

Our Ministry of Agriculture has acted very quickly. The Secretary of State, Mr Nick Browne, is about to make a statement in the House of Commons this afternoon. Newcastle races have been cancelled. A vast area is now covered by restrictions. However, I do not believe that people are being sufficiently responsible in their own actions, especially those who do not live in the countryside, given the seriousness of the disease. For example, I am aware of game-shooting activities proceeding as normal in an estate near my home, which is surrounded by cattle farms. The estate in question has a substantial herd of deer, which move freely through the area. I anticipate an early cull there.

The farm on which the first outbreak occurred has a highly intensive pig-fattening enterprise, mainly supplying continental markets. Some of that meat has already gone abroad. It is thought that some infected sheep have also been exported. The disease is not just locally contagious; it can be transmitted in aerosol form. Cattle which were infected some miles away could only have caught it as a result of airborne spread. Therefore, while closing roads is a help, it will not stop the spread of the disease.

It is now evident that the original infection went undetected for some considerable time. The MAFF vets reported that the stage of development of the symptoms when reported, indicated that the disease had been present in the herd for at least two weeks. Clearly, there was some laxity there.

The existing penalty of £5,000 for not reporting a disease outbreak, is a totally inadequate deterrent. It might have sufficed in 1967, but not now. Without prejudice to the eventual findings, I think there should also be provision for a custodial sentence in extreme cases. It is up to each of us, whether our own constituencies are affected or not, to make sure that our constituents realise that it is irresponsible to go hiking, walking or cycling unnecessarily into the countryside at this time. People should stay at home and avoid taking any chances. The risks are too great.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Before the debate continues, may I thank all members of the Body for their diligent support and observance of the precautions which are being taken to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease to Ireland.

The latest news report indicates that there are now nine confirmed cases in Britain, including the most recent one in Anglesey. I understand that the British Minister for Agriculture will make a statement in the House of Commons this afternoon, before his departure to Brussels. Mr McWilliam's observations have been very informative, if also rather worrying.

Mrs Margaret Ewing MP MSP (Moray): I am just old enough to remember the 1967 outbreak, the disease control measures and the terror which went through the entire agricultural community at that time. There is a very strong Scottish interest in this matter. Grampian Pork is a major employer in all aspects of that industry, from breeding right through to distribution. We are very concerned about the reported outbreak in Aberdeenshire, which is as yet unconfirmed.

At an earlier stage, the Minister had indicated in the Scottish Parliament that, if Scotland remained free of foot and mouth disease until Tuesday of this week, it might be possible to establish a special zone in which some of the restrictions need not apply. However, that is obviously out of the question now, as we have seen the disease spread from the north-east of England down to Devon and across to Anglesey. The airborne transmission of the disease is a cause for great concern throughout the UK. We fully respect the controls which we experienced on our arrival in Ireland yesterday, including the use of green carpets.

We need to look at various aspects of the problem. The processing of swill for pig feeding is a particular concern, irrespective of any element of speculative media comment or headlines. Our Ministers and their veterinary advisers must consider this issue very thoroughly.

The issue of compensation will obviously come up. It should not apply solely to farmers but also across the board for all those affected. It often seems that just one

section of any given industry receives compensation, rather than the whole industry, with all its ancillary importance.

I fully agree with Mr McWilliam that a £5,000 fine is an absolutely ludicrous and inadequate penalty. When I heard that figure mentioned last week, I found it utterly incredible as a penalty for failure to report a possible outbreak of such a virulent disease which could cause endless damage to our agricultural business. The restoration of consumer confidence in agricultural products is a major issue; but the British Isles should pride itself on the high quality of its produce. Sometimes we argue about which country produces the best beef, perhaps Scotland or Ireland see themselves in that light, but we are all proud of what we produce. Having just picked up from BSE and the small outbreak of swine fever, we will have a great fight on our hands to restore consumer confidence, not only at home, but abroad where our markets are.

Mr Seamus Kirk TD (Louth): I am glad to make a contribution to the debate on this most serious issue affecting both the UK and Ireland. The potential for devastation in the agricultural industry north and south in Ireland, and in the UK, is obvious. The speed with which the disease is spreading serves to underline and illustrate the dire economic consequences which will flow from the spread of foot and mouth if not got to grips with quickly. Given the contagious nature of the disease coming to terms with it is not going to be easy.

We must bear in mind the significant changes that have taken place over the past ten to 20 years in the structure of the agricultural industry in the UK and Ireland. There has been a steady outflow of participants from the agricultural industry and as a consequence we have a significant intensification of production on individual farms. Where you have intensification of production the speed of the spread of foot and mouth will also intensify considerably.

Agriculture is an industry dictated by the agricultural policies at EU level, by harsh economic realities in the sector, and by an underestimated third element - the power of the multiples who deal with the primary producers and the processors. These multiples are an underestimated dynamic for change within the sector.

The most important element of all are consumers. Given the ongoing problems with BSE in the UK and, to a lesser extent in Ireland, and now with the foot and mouth outbreak also, it is easy to understand why consumers are bewildered by it all. While there is no health risk to humans from foot and mouth disease, there is a large psychological impact which will affect the attitude of the consumer when he or she goes into the supermarket or food outlet. The impact on consumer purchasing decisions will be better gauged in one month or so.

Oireachtas delegates to this Body empathise with the serious difficulties suffered by public representatives in the UK because of the very serious impact of this disease, particularly those from agricultural communities. However, I will get a little parochial on the issue and discuss a matter that Dr Rory O'Hanlon mentioned. The need to

establish a single veterinary regime for the island of Ireland is so obvious that one asks why we have not got round to implementing it before now. There is a significant difference in the veterinary regimes of the North and the South but a large measure of co-operation also.

The Co-Chairman, Mr O'Kennedy, illustrated how problems were dealt with when he was the Minister for Agriculture in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. When the first problem emerged with BSE a decision was taken to implement a slaughter-out policy in the Republic. Many of the agricultural and economic commentators felt that the measure was over the top and unnecessary given the relative scale of the problem. When we analyse that period now, we see the measure was not over the top, as it served to get to grips with the problem in the Irish agricultural industry, and it served to reassure the consumers who buy Irish meat.

That reassurance is vitally important because we are consuming 10 per cent of the food we are producing. Some 90 per cent is exported and whether it goes to the UK, France or other countries, the integrity of that food product is absolutely essential. It is easy for the reputation of that product to be damaged because of less than adequate control measures. I think the Co-Chairman, Mr O'Kennedy, can take a bow for his earlier actions.

We need to immediately approach animal health in Ireland on an all-island basis as there are clear benefits for us if that is in place.

Mr Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): I have got three times more cows than I have constituents.

I was late this morning as I had to meet with concerned farmers yesterday in the UK. I was surprised on my arrival at Cork Airport that I did not have to walk across disinfected straw. I was handed a very sensible note on the foot and mouth issue but there has to be an absolute removal of risk where it can be controlled. I took the precaution of not wearing clothes that I had worn outdoors recently in my constituency, and took particular care with my shoes when I got up at 4.15 this morning. I was very conscious of the care needed.

I represent about 1,500 farming enterprises in my constituency. There is a need for education on foot and mouth disease as most farmers, and their public representatives, lack knowledge of the control measures required because the last outbreak was so long ago. I remember the stench of burning cattle in Cheshire as a nine-year old and do not want to see that repeated, especially as agriculture is currently a business sector in crisis.

Anglesey is now notified as a new source of foot and mouth. That is a big concern as it is an abattoir area which services my constituents. Under EU directives there have been major closures of small abattoirs and there are lessons to be learned from this as we consolidate our businesses domestically, and as we think about the globalisation of exports of animals and their feed. There are rumours about South

African swill. The risks we face from the transfer of material are different to those faced in 1967. We need new measures for a new risk which is as great as the lowest practice, not the best practice, around the world and to deal with those who may be tempted by legal action. It is not yet relevant to speak of insurance schemes.

As politicians, we need to give the maximum support to farmers and to everyone involved in the rural economy, as Ms. Ewing said. We must immediately educate the public of the importance of this and take steps beyond the disinfection of straw. The motion is a very good and important one, but we should not only note the problem but take action to contain the spread of foot and mouth disease. This meeting should send out a message which lists immediate actions, including education and practical measures.

I have four hunts in my area, and they are very much in tune with the countryside. There may be differing views about the merits of hunting, but it is a way of life and a freedom which is being intensely debated in the United Kingdom. The four hunts should be noted for their responsible actions, as they immediately stopped hunting on hearing of the outbreak, understanding the risks involved. John McWilliam pointed out that those who shoot may well come from towns, and are to be distinguished from those in hunts who have taken an immediate step to cease all hunting. I call for as much education as possible, as well as practical steps to help farmers and those who depend on the rural economy.

Ms Annabel Goldie MSP (West of Scotland): It is a pleasure to be here, and an interesting political experience to mix with interesting and diverse colleagues from different parts of the United Kingdom, Ireland and the islands.

I grew up in the countryside, so to be on the farm is an everyday experience. Since the last major outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom, two curious things have happened. There is a hugely diminished rural presence in our country, and there is vastly increased public access to rural areas. Whereas the community I grew up in had knowledge and experience of country living, there is now an extensive ignorance of country ways and practices. Alarming, that is concomitant with vastly increased access to the countryside.

Where I come from, in the west of Scotland, there is an extensive agricultural presence, but agriculture in Scotland has been in a very critical condition. I applaud the measures that have been taken to deal with the disease in the United Kingdom. I am aware of the geographical proximity of Scotland and Ireland, and I hope that Scotland is spared an outbreak. We are optimistic, and I hope that optimism will be justified.

If the last outbreak in the United Kingdom was in 1967, I wonder if we are up to the mark in terms of responding to a national crisis. We require businesses, offices and organisations to carry out fire drills; we expect people to respond quickly and effectively in such critical situations. We expect the best technical information to deal with increased risk. I wonder if we have been sufficiently alert to the need to be

aware of potential risk, instead of having to react to a crisis. We are blessed with hugely increased technological attributes, but perhaps they have not been fully and broadly used. I applaud the measures taken by the United Kingdom Government to deal with this crisis, but it may also be an opportunity to learn and to take ourselves to task for not being alert in dealing with the crisis, and for not availing ourselves of the attributes to hand.

Mr Austin Currie TD (Dublin West): Do I understand correctly that when Mr Stephen O'Brien arrived in Cork airport this morning, there was no disinfectant and he could not see any protective measures?

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): It was the same yesterday.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I think Deputy Currie understood correctly, and it is a very significant point. If Deputy Currie wishes to make a point, his name can be added to the list.

Mr Currie: It is a matter of some urgency, and I think the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development should be contacted, and a demand made that protection be supplied and that it be supplied now.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I take Deputy Currie's comments on board. I am very conscious of the significance of the contributions to which he referred.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD (Cavan-Monaghan): On a point of information, I have already spoken to the Department this morning.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): You telephoned the Department?

Dr O'Hanlon: Yes, and they told me that it would be done.

Mr Currie: As a sign of its concern, this meeting should ask that the Department supply disinfectant protection.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I assure Deputy Currie it will be done at the conclusion of the debate.

Mr John Ellis TD (Sligo-Leitrim): We are worried about the outbreaks of foot and mouth disease that have taken place on the mainland of the United Kingdom in the last couple of weeks. A number of long-term questions will be asked as a result of this. The source of the infection will have to be traced, and if we are to control this in the future, we will have to trace the source of feedstuffs imported into both islands. The original outbreak in Heddon-on-the-Wall was imported through feedstuffs or something else which was imported on to the farm. The movements of the farmer should have been immediately monitored, and trucks and other vehicles should have been grounded until they had been properly disinfected.

The movement of transport now is probably about 100 times greater than in 1967. The movement of livestock, especially in Britain, is enormous. Stock from the south of England often end up in Scotland, and *vice versa*. All movements from foot and mouth-infected areas in recent weeks should be traced, perhaps by using the permit movement system that operates in the United Kingdom. We need to follow all such movements to find out their destinations.

We must also be conscious of the danger of a shortage of food supplies. We do not want to see products going off the shelves because of this problem. Certain unscrupulous organisations, for example some of the major multiples, may try to increase the price of foodstuffs. They will not do this for the benefit of primary producers, but for the benefit of the middle profit-makers such as themselves. Such a worrying scenario can already be seen in Ireland, where a lot of milk, especially in the Border counties, has been coming in from Northern Ireland. It is now banned and that is going to cause problems for some processors. I hope the farming organisations ensure that those processors continue to get supplies. I heard of a case over the weekend where Southern milk was exported to Northern Ireland for processing under veterinary supervision quite legally. Some of those exporting the milk were refusing to supply Southern processors which worries me as jobs could be lost as a result.

This Body should show its support for the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in the Northern Ireland Executive, Brid Rodgers, and her counterpart here, Deputy Joe Walsh, who are working on a 24 hour basis to ensure that this island does not have an outbreak. I appeal to those commuting to and from the UK to make sure that they abide by all the regulations. Nobody from here visiting the UK should visit a farm unless it is a case of total necessity. The quickest way of bringing the outbreak to an end is to prevent people and animals from moving. If there were a total close-down except for slaughter purposes for a few weeks that would be acceptable. Livestock marts would have to close in order to prevent movement and the possibility of the disease spreading.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Many members are concerned about this and have very strong feelings and though I am reluctant to curtail contributions we are running up against time pressures so I ask Deputy Ellis to conclude.

Mr Ellis: It is a pity we were not told this at the outset.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I did.

Mr Ellis: I put my hands up. I was not aware of that because I had to take a phone call relating to a constituency matter which can often be more important. The only way to bring about a quick resolution to the current problem is by preventing movement.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We have at least 12 more speakers and that means we have already run over time so members should try to confine their comments to about three minutes.

Lord Glentoran: I will be very brief. I am a member of the shadow MAFF team in Westminster but I do not intend to play politics today. I just want to make a few observations, some of which will be similar or repetitive.

One of the things I heard was that it is thought this disease might have started with waste products from Heathrow Airport and there is a huge waste situation there. That is purely rumour and I know nothing about it but I did arrive in Heathrow on Sunday afternoon from India. I left Heathrow on Thursday afternoon for Northern Ireland and I left Northern Ireland on Saturday for London arriving with most of the delegates in Cork yesterday. Throughout the whole of that time, other than the piece of paper that was put in my hand at Cork, I received no instructions or cleansing.

I have a sizeable farm in Northern Ireland with sheep and cattle and for most of my life we have had a message on every flight that landed at Aldergrove saying: "If you have been in contact with animals or farms please go to the Ministry of Agriculture official." In the baggage collection area there was always a uniformed member of the Department of Agriculture. That all finished not very long ago and certainly had not been replaced by the time that I came back. I debated with myself whether I should ring the Ministry of Agriculture immediately or not and, perhaps unwisely, I decided not to. It was someone else's business, it was a devolved situation.

We have not acted quickly enough anywhere. I support Dr Rory O'Hanlon's observation strongly and it always used to be that Ireland was a unit when it came to protecting ourselves and our agriculture from disease. As a child I remember only too well that throughout the island we did our very best to use the sea boundary to ensure our safety and I sincerely hope that that is happening today.

We have the problem of food safety and we have a Food Safety Agency in the United Kingdom but we still have not grasped the idea of labelling and, as other delegates have observed, there is an enormous amount of transportation now of livestock and deadstock and feeds and so on. We have been forced by the European Union to reduce the number of abattoirs we have so that animals have to go hundreds of miles to be slaughtered and with all these things coming in we have been seriously caught napping. I sincerely hope that all governments and parties will work together, including our European colleagues and those who control agriculture there. Although we are closing the door after the horse has bolted it must be done. Much more stringent restrictions have to be imposed throughout the industry and throughout Europe.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you for giving us not only the benefit of your general experience but of your experience over the weekend which is not at all reassuring. It is important that we know these things.

Mr John Griffiths AM (Newport East): It is indeed important that all governments work together on these matters, including, of course, devolved governments. The Assembly has responsibility for agriculture in Wales and it is something that we discuss at great length and, in common with many other parts of the UK and the world, we have had a crisis. Farmers are just recovering from BSE, and all the other problems we all know about, and obviously these latest developments come on top of all that and are very grave indeed. We had hoped we would be free of foot and mouth in Wales but we have heard about the possibility of a case in the abattoir in Anglesey. We have been on the phone to agricultural officials and to Carwyn Jones, the Rural Affairs Minister for Wales, within the last half an hour or so and we were told that it is not possible to confirm at present if there is indeed a case on Anglesey or not. The results of the tests may be available this afternoon or tomorrow. Carwyn Jones is in Brussels and he may well make a statement later today. We are hopeful that Wales may remain free of this current outbreak but obviously there are grave concerns and anxieties. It is the case that we will be in constant touch with the Assembly and if we do hear anything we will let you know immediately what the position is, but that is the most up to date position as it has been relayed to us this morning.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you very much for that up to date information which is very useful to us as a Body.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD (Cavan-Monaghan): The first thing to say is that it is extremely traumatic for the farmers concerned wherever they live, be it in Anglesey, Devon or anywhere else. We sympathise with them because, bluntly, it is like a bereavement for someone to lose their whole herd and to come through the trauma of this disease. The other thing that must be said is that it is not a public health issue and the danger is that it will be linked to BSE which would be a problem as far as the food industry is concerned.

Ninety per cent of all our food is exported and the majority of that goes through the UK either to be used there or as a land-bridge to the rest of the EU and further afield. Our link to the present problem is very serious. The issue of the Border with Northern Ireland is equally sensitive. Many refer to the fact that it was closed satisfactorily in 1967 but the situation then was totally different. We had customs posts and a clear land boundary identification. In addition, all vehicles had to be clearly identified. If they travelled North or South, they had to be stamped. Therefore they were easy to trace.

The reason this is so serious is that if there is a disease in any one of five counties in Northern Ireland, that is, Derry, Tyrone, Fermanagh, Armagh and Down, it is only a matter of yards or miles to the Border. The fact that this disease is airborne explains our sensitivity. As I said in the Dáil last Wednesday, the only logical way to deal with this is on an all-Ireland basis. We should try to utilise the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the more recent Belfast Agreement to ensure that everything possible is done by the Northern Ireland Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development, Ms Bríd Rodgers, and the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Deputy Joe Walsh.

Regarding what happened at Cork Airport, the measures at the Border are being improved but I visited some of the crossing points on Friday and felt that the measures left much to be desired. I visited the crossing points again yesterday and found them to be much improved. Even if one blocks the roads, one cannot block a virus from coming across the fields or elsewhere. In the interests of the island of Ireland, we should utilise a resolution from this Body to try to encourage the EU to declare the island of Ireland a clear area. The all-Ireland approach is vital.

Somebody spoke earlier about the legal aspect of it. Anybody acting illegally in this area must be brought to justice and realistic penalties must be imposed.

Somebody referred earlier to the veterinary service—

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Deputy Crawford, I would ask you to conclude.

Mr Crawford: As somebody who lives right on the Border, I have had to deal with the Northern Ireland veterinary service for a long number of years and I import many cattle from there. Until recently their traceability measures were much better than ours and I would have no difficulty working with them to try to ensure this can be dealt with.

Education is equally important but we must look seriously at the issue of the importation of meat from outside the European Union. It is dealt with under a different production regime and also a different veterinary regime. Whether it be meat, milk products or poultry, the issue must be examined again in the light of what has happened. Poultry products are being imported on an *ad hoc* basis from areas where there are poor traceability procedures. Under the special European Union arrangements, we must agree to some of these imports but in the future we, as a Union, must take greater care to protect the important status of EU food products.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you, Deputy Crawford. I am afraid I must ask you to conclude.

Mr Crawford: As a former Minister for Agriculture, you will be aware that hormones are used all over the United States and beef produced using hormones can be imported to the EU. That is wrong.

Lord Dubs: This is my first time on this Body and it is my first contribution to any discussions. I am sorry it is on such a sombre and depressing topic. I was Agriculture Minister in Northern Ireland until devolution in December 1999, and therefore I am well aware of the close working relationship which exists between the Department of Agriculture and Regional Development in Belfast and the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development here. It ought not to be too difficult to extend that co-operation and provide for closer co-operation.

I, too, was surprised that there was no disinfectant to walk through at Cork Airport. I am old enough to remember arriving in Dublin in 1967 during the previous outbreak in Britain, when we had to walk through disinfectant automatically, irrespective of

where we came from. Everybody arriving in Dublin had to do so. Therefore, I join in the expressions of surprise that there were no such facilities at Cork Airport.

Perhaps more importantly, I have been asking this question: what is happening at Belfast International Airport and at the other airports in Northern Ireland, as Lord Glentoran said? It seems to me that the right procedure should be to have tougher controls at the airports here and similarly tough controls in the airports in Belfast, Derry and elsewhere. Only in that way can we extend the controls.

Second, I understand, although I do not have direct evidence of this and only have it second-hand, that cars coming from the North drive through disinfectant. That is okay for the tyres. What about the people in the cars? If they are coming from the North, the odds are that some of them have been on farms. Should they not get out of the cars and walk through disinfectant or does that not work from a technical point of view because they have already dirtied the inside of the cars? I would like to know whether those controls are good. Above all, it is the controls in the North against infection from Britain which should be tougher and tighter.

I want to make two other quick points. I agree that we should investigate the possibility of a single veterinary regime. It would make sense in order that best practice here is adopted in the North and *vice versa*. The system of traceability in the North is excellent and it has set a pattern for traceability elsewhere.

When this dreadful epidemic is over, perhaps this Body would be well placed to carry out an investigation regarding future safeguards across all the territories covered by the Members here.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I take that point. That is something which the appropriate committee will obviously be interested in looking at. Deputy Brendan Smith will be followed by Mr Peter Temple-Morris MP. After that, there will be five more speakers, including Mr Kevin McNamara MP, who will conclude the debate. That closes the list at this point.

Mr Brendan Smith TD (Cavan-Monaghan): In deference to your request, Mr Co-Chairman, I will be extremely brief as I endorse the remarks which have been made already. The forceful message we saw this morning on our television channels was the incineration of animals. It was a frightening picture. It brought home to all of us, and to me in particular, the serious difficulties facing agriculture and the economies of both Britain and Ireland. Last week the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development implemented the first wave of protective measures by imposing a ban on the importation of cattle, sheep, pigs, beef and dairy products. Later that evening the European Union implemented the exact same measures, mirroring, in effect, the actions taken by the Department.

In 1967 and 1981, I suppose we in Ireland were fortunate that the protective measures implemented at that time prevented an outbreak of foot and mouth disease here but, as other speakers said earlier, we are in a different era, where

there has been a huge increase in the volume of traffic, both in persons and goods, between our countries. Mr Stephen O'Brien highlighted this in particular. The import of his contribution was the need to provide an educational process to the community at large regarding the dangers facing agriculture in Britain, Ireland and Europe. We cannot place enough emphasis on the fact that this is not an agricultural issue; it is a national issue. While agriculture may be naturally of critical importance to the rural economy in Britain, it is of crucial importance to the entire economy in this country. Exports of food and drink amount to £5 billion. That is a very considerable sum considering this is a relatively small economy. I would hope that the European Union would implement the same measures across the entire Union.

In both Plenary Sessions and committees of this Body in the early 1990s, we discussed at length the need to have a common veterinary protocol for all of the island. It is unfortunate that we must return to that subject today and that in the meantime it has not been implemented, but the message we should send clearly to both Governments and to Mr David Byrne, Ireland's European Union Commissioner, is that there is a need to provide a common veterinary regime for the island as a matter of extreme urgency.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris MP (Leominster): I want to associate my constituency with this debate. Not everybody knows where Leominster is. If I say North Herefordshire, mention the Hereford breed and say that it extends 700 square miles, which, when I started 27 years ago, did not have a single traffic light, one begins to get the idea of it being more akin to a Welsh, Scottish or even Irish constituency in its pure rural nature. It is certainly very rural in comparison to many English constituencies. In view of that, I want to express sympathy for what is happening in the way Deputy Seymour Crawford, as a farmer, did so well.

There are many small livestock producers in my constituency. What has been brought home to me today is how dependent we are on each other. For example, if John Griffiths's report on the situation in Wales is bad, Stephen O'Brien and I will be immediately affected. We are all in the same boat. Even the Irish Sea may not protect this lovely island but let us hope that it does. That is my first point.

My second point is that fair compensation should be paid. I hope it will not be necessary to pay as much as might be the case. This is still a situation of menace because we do not yet know the extent of the outbreak. If it is a real outbreak, the question of compensation will have to be dealt with in the context of the broader issue of the continued existence of the livestock industry. It could be as serious as that.

My final point is the most important. Other speakers referred to intensification, farming methods and the diminution of abattoirs. It was significant that this outbreak was first detected in Essex, of all places, and that the disease had travelled south from Northumberland. It seems that where as before there were thousands of abattoirs in Britain, there are now only 300. That means it will be more difficult to contain the spread of the disease. Farming standards, the drive for cheap food,

intensification and, perhaps, the lack of tight controls have all played a part. It is significant that environmental health officials visited this farm/depot in Northumberland, a gathering place for pigs, on five occasions in recent months. In addition, it was visited on three occasions by the RSPCA, which was investigating the condition of the animals there. I understand that access was refused.

There is a clear case for granting further powers to those responsible for investigating such matters. I would like to see an inquiry into this problem, regardless of the severity of the outbreak. It might be enough to have the Department of Agriculture investigate the matter. However, a more wide-ranging inquiry may perhaps be needed so that issues such as intensification, farming standards, the drive for cheap food, the conditions in which animals are kept and the consequent spread of disease can be investigated. Agriculture, in that regard, is its own worst enemy and nobody suffers more than those involved in the industry.

Mr Peter Brooke MP (Cities of London and Westminster): I represent a highly urban constituency in the cities of London and Westminster. Livestock are only kept in Hyde Park during wartime, although Smithfield Market is situated in my constituency. My reason for contributing to the debate is because a constituent of one of my predecessors, John Donne, Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, began his most famous literary passage with the words "No man is an island". I echo John McWilliam in endorsing the role that townspeople must play, in terms of massive and informed self-restraint, in ending this terrible scourge. I have honoured my commitment to the Co-Chairman by completing my contribution in less than 40 seconds.

Mr Brian O'Shea TD (Waterford): As a former Minister of State with responsibility for food, I wish to endorse the calls for an all-Ireland veterinary regime. I was responsible for establishing Bord Bia and I believe that there should be an all-Ireland board to promote the sale of produce. However, that is a matter for another day.

On the positive side, Margaret Ewing has brought it to our attention that disinfectant mats were in place at Kerry Airport and that people were asked if they were carrying agricultural produce or if they had recently visited a farm. However, I was alarmed by reports earlier in the week that the virus could travel across the Irish Sea in certain climatic conditions. If roles were reversed, I am sure the same could happen in Britain. As a number of speakers stated, we must identify the spread of the infection back to its origins. Reports indicate that it is of Asiatic origin, that it may have been carried into Britain in swill from South Africa or that it may have been contained in some waste product at Heathrow. There is a need to identify the origin of the virus and to take action at European Union level to ensure that member states are protected.

The question of compensation is important. Difficulties have already arisen in my constituency as a result of the BSE crisis and this has led to employees at processing plants being made redundant. When we discuss the payment of compensation, we should not forget employees at food processing plants who can suffer just as much as producers when difficulties of this nature arise.

Mr Dominic Grieve MP (Beaconsfield): I wish to deal with the issue of origins. We may never discover the origin of this outbreak. The fact that standards at the farm in Northumberland may have been poor does not explain the arrival of a virus that previously was not present.

I wish to pick up on a point made by Lord Glentoran. On the Friday before last I was visited at my constituency surgery by the contractor who has the principal contract at Heathrow Airport for the impounding and quarantining of foodstuffs that are imported, both legally and illegally. He came to see me, not in relation to the foot and mouth outbreak, but to express his concern about the sheer volume of illegally imported foodstuffs, particularly those from African and Asian countries, which is being brought into Britain in people's personal luggage. These foodstuffs are either for consumption or for sale to certain specialist outlets that serve particular communities. The individual in question said that this practice was unstoppable and, without serious infringements of human rights laws, it would be very difficult to control. He referred particularly to the dangers posed by the Ebola virus and stated that he had seized large quantities of monkey brains and body-parts in the past three months.

I accept that we are dealing with the movement of feedstuffs and cattle, but my aim in highlighting this matter is to suggest that the Governments must consider a more fundamental issue, namely, the fact that people are importing, from all parts of the world, quite exotic foodstuffs which are often uncooked. Dealing with this matter will be a challenge for the European Union, but it will also be a challenge for our two countries.

Mr Gerry Bermingham MP (St Helens South): I remember the devastating outbreak in 1967 because my friend's father's farm was badly affected. Both men eventually killed themselves as a result of what they endured. The new outbreak must be dealt with by the introduction of stringent and tough measures. If that means the freezing of movement of animals of all sorts, then that is what must be done. If the disease spreads further, Cheltenham and other racing festivals will have to be postponed because we cannot afford to take risks. The only way to destroy this virus is to eliminate it and the only way to eliminate it is to exterminate the animals that have contracted it and completely obliterate their carcasses.

I also recall the financial effects the 1967 outbreak had on friends of mine and, in my professional capacity as a lawyer, on a number of my clients. We must look realistically at the question of compensation. It is not just farmers who suffer. Transport companies cannot operate, abattoirs must close down, consumers cannot buy preferred foods and racecourses cannot hold meetings and bookmakers lose out as a result. It is strange to state that bookmakers may have to be compensated but it may be necessary to do so.

We must consider this issue in a realistic manner. First, we have got to eliminate this disease. Afterward, when the fire has been extinguished, we can ask what caused it. We may have to reconsider the way we dispose of waste and what happens to

uneaten products. We must ensure that we emerge from this crisis with the proper structures in place so that, as was the case with BSE, it cannot happen again. Just as we have sought to eliminate medical diseases, we must seek to eliminate this disease and then ensure that those who suffered from it - no one caused the outbreak because the virus entered Britain from outside - receive compensation. We must also ensure that we make good on the economic losses sustained by the farming and other industries. I accept that this will be expensive, but it is the only way we can deal with this matter in a civilised fashion.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): This has been a wide-ranging and important debate. Some 18 members of the Body have taken part in it, which in my time as a member of the Body makes it the debate with the most speakers.

A number of important points have been made. The first, voiced by all speakers, has been the need for proper, effective and immediate measures at airports and ports of entry. I hope, following Dr O'Hanlon's telephone call and as a result of publicity we may get for this debate, the issue of more effective disinfection processes throughout the countries will be taken up by the authorities with responsibility for it in the devolved institutions and at my Ministry of Agriculture.

The second point is that there is a need for responsibility, especially on the part of townspeople. I am vice-president of the Ramblers' Association in my area. One of the first and most immediate steps taken once it was known that there was a possibility of foot and mouth was that we immediately asked the one million members of the Ramblers' Association of Great Britain who go out walking each weekend not to do so and to keep out of the countryside and away from livestock. I commend them for their prompt action. Townspeople are aware of the existence of this disease, especially those who use the countryside.

The next point which arose came from something the Co-Chairman said earlier. Committee C compiled a report about nine years ago recommending that there should be a unified veterinary service and organisation on this island. There was a great deal of hostility from the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture and also from the Republic of Ireland's Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development. What is important is that one of the cross-Border institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement deals with animal health. That is a good opportunity for the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Oireachtas to do positive work on this issue. It is fundamental and I remember that even some of the most rabid members of the Democratic Unionist Party were anxious that the island of Ireland should be treated separately from the island of Great Britain on the question of animal health and husbandry. It is important and something in which there is room for co-operation and positive action. That again has been demonstrated. It was prescience on the part of Committee C many years ago to see the need for and importance of this matter.

Another matter which arose was the labelling of the origin of food. This is something about which the European Commission is not happy, but it is something which is

necessary, not only in terms of trying increasingly to individualise production and being able to trace produce to farms and areas, but also in tracing problems which arise, be they *e.coli*, foot and mouth or whatever. One can find the source and it is easier in the interests of health that this be done.

Industries important to the rural economy will be affected by foot and mouth disease. Bed and breakfast accommodation, which is widespread in Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, is an important and powerful industry and will be affected considerably. I do not know how a list for compensation might be drawn up. Mr Bermingham showed how it could be extended indefinitely but he did not state whether those punters who lose their money every week will receive refunds or make voluntary contributions to the bookmakers in the way they do normally. I am sure that, if it is to be part of his election manifesto in April or May, it will go down a treat.

I have not four but two green fields in my constituency and I am, therefore, very much the urban dweller, although my grandfather had two acres of grazing rights in Adrigoole. While I do not always like some of their actions in the Countryside Alliance, one must feel sympathy for individual farmers. They have, certainly in the United Kingdom, suffered a great many blows. Although I have very few fields in my constituency, immediately across its boundary is the East Riding of Yorkshire, which is one of the greatest centres for pig production in Europe. Some of them have suffered very badly from classical swine fever. Farmers with cattle have been dealt tremendous blows because of BSE. It affects all industry in the rural economy and results in the psychological attitude of defensiveness and looking inward among producers of food because of the blows they have suffered. Those of us who are townies must acknowledge that this is real and important. One of our colleagues spoke of the psychological effect it has on people and that is of the utmost importance.

On behalf of the Steering Committee we take on board the points made. The issue of abattoirs was mentioned by John McWilliam earlier. The irony is that the abattoir where the outbreak began was a specialist one dealing with specialist forms of meat. That is why the livestock travelled from Northumberland to Essex. There are many abattoirs in the country, but the ministries of agriculture must examine their policies carefully, namely, using European Union standards as an excuse for closing abattoirs rather than as a reason for improving them. That is a different type of attitude and, in terms of quality of meat and animal health, it is better we have a greater number of abattoirs at a high standard rather than centralising them. It should be remembered the immense effect the burning of the abattoir in the Six Counties had on the island of Ireland. The more abattoirs exist and the higher the standard, the better it is.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I have been greatly reassured and am in no way surprised by the responsibility and concern members of the Body have shown in their attitude on entry into Ireland. We appreciate that. That was the reason I had the Clerks notify members coming to Ireland this weekend of this issue. Having been

reassured by that, I am far from satisfied and am appalled to think the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, over which I presided for five years, had not taken effective action measures at all airports. Kerry Airport seems to be the exception. That is unacceptable. It may have amended the position but it is extraordinary that the Department primarily responsible had not taken action beforehand.

In light of some of the points made about penalties and other issues, the Steering Committee might examine a composite resolution to bring to the Body at a later stage which, while not addressing every detail, would embrace the matter in a more effective way rather than the somewhat anodyne motion we introduced, which was simply to facilitate what has been an excellent debate.

There has always been in the spirit of this Body a recognition of the interdependence of us with each other. Something which has come through in the debate is the interdependence of town and country, and we are all anxious to ensure urban residents are conscious of their responsibilities in any dealings with rural communities until this matter is resolved. So thank you very much, it vindicates our decision to suspend standing orders for this motion. I now put the question on the motion - though we may come back with another motion later. The question is, "That the Body notes the outbreak of foot and mouth disease and the immediate action being taken to contain the spread of the disease."

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body notes the outbreak of foot and mouth disease and the immediate actions being taken to contain the spread of the disease.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Before the session is suspended Deputy Brian Hayes has asked me if I could indicate that members of Committee A should come together for lunch directly after this session. You can join Brian for lunch; he apparently wants to make some suggestions and announcements. We will resume at 2.30.

The sitting was suspended at 1.10 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.30 pm, with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair

4. STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER FOR JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND LAW REFORM, MR JOHN O'DONOGHUE TD

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Before I call the hall to order, it is a very special privilege for me as a latecomer to this Body to welcome back one of its founding and long time members. This person will be renewing acquaintances with some of the old established figures who are still with us. I welcome the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform, Deputy John O'Donoghue. I wish to let him know that since he has been with us, today particularly, we have had a very significant development

in that we have amended our Rules to embrace as full Members the representatives of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly, the Northern Ireland Assembly and the islands of Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey. We had a very significant first debate with the new members in relation to an issue which is of considerable concern to all of us, that is, the outbreak of the foot and mouth disease and the common actions we could take and the recommendations this Body could make to support the actions of Government.

Ba mhaith liom céad míle fáilte a chur romhat ar ais anseo go Chiarraí. I welcome the Minister back to his native county. It is a privilege to have Minister O'Donoghue with us. He has always had a very positive interest in the Body and has been no little help in recommending to us the facilities which we can enjoy here. I invite the Minister to address us.

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform (Deputy John O'Donoghue (Kerry)): Co-Chairs of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, colleagues, Members and guests, I am very pleased to be here this afternoon to address your Plenary on behalf of the Irish Government. I thank you sincerely for giving me this honour and I would like, in welcoming all members, to extend a very special welcome to the new members of the Body. As a founding member of the Body, it is indeed a great pleasure for me to be back in these familiar and welcoming surroundings. I am delighted, as the local representative for the area, you have chosen Killarney as the venue for your stay. I would like to assure you of a very warm Kerry welcome. I hope this is not the last we will see of you here. Like your Co-Chair, Deputy Michael O'Kennedy, you will have noticed that in Kerry, as opposed to Tipperary, there are many beautiful mountains. We like to tell people like Deputy O'Kennedy that the reason for this is that we have so much land here we had to pile it up in heaps.

This Body has witnessed many political changes since its foundation 11 years ago. The presence of colleagues representing so many administrations here today is a very clear and powerful symbol of the tremendous changes brought about recently by devolution and the British-Irish Agreement. I am happy to see you continue to thrive in this new and exciting climate and I have no doubt but that colleagues who have recently joined from Scotland, Wales, the Isle of Man, the Channel Islands and the Northern Ireland Assembly will add another valuable and significant dimension to your work.

I attended the first Plenary Session of this Body in London in 1990 and since then I have always followed with a great deal of interest the very important work you carry out. I understand that this morning you debated the very important issue of foot and mouth disease which is of the utmost concern in both Ireland and Britain. An outbreak of that disease in Ireland would have the potential to cause enormous economic damage to our agriculture and food processing sectors and would, furthermore have far-reaching implications regarding our export markets. We are therefore acutely aware of the impact of the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease on farmers in the United Kingdom and on the agricultural economy there.

We are also aware, through our contacts at political and official levels, of the scale of effort being made by the relevant authorities to tackle the current outbreak. We have not had a case of foot and mouth disease in Ireland since 1941, due in no small way to the manner in which we responded to outbreaks elsewhere in Europe in the intervening years, most notably in Britain in 1981 and on a far more extensive scale in 1967. We believe there is a clear understanding among all concerned with our agricultural and food processing sectors of the threat posed by foot and mouth disease. We have also taken care to make it clear that the consequences should the disease spread would not be confined to these sectors alone but would permeate the entire economy. Our people have, therefore, a stake in ensuring that the disease does not spread. The fact that we have now learned of a suspect foot and mouth disease on the island of Anglesey is of great concern from an Irish perspective and additional resources will now be focused on access routes from Holyhead.

I want to take this opportunity to record the Government's appreciation of the excellent co-operation which we have received from the authorities in London and Belfast in seeking to deal with this issue. Relationships between the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development in Dublin and its counterparts in Dundonald House and Whitehall have always been excellent but at a time when officials in London and Belfast are under intense pressure in dealing with the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease it is only proper that we put on record our deep appreciation of the co-operation they have given us in seeking to manage the implications for our jurisdiction of the current situation.

Finally, I want to express our hope that the trauma now being experienced will be short-lived and that efforts being made to contain and eliminate foot and mouth disease will be successful. We will obviously give any assistance that may be sought in this regard.

When this Body was first founded, the central concern was reaching a peaceful settlement in Northern Ireland. This remains a common objective today. When we recall the situation in Northern Ireland in 1990 and compare it to today we begin to have an idea of just how far we have come and how much progress has been made. There are still problems, of course. Indeed, even as we speak, intensive talks continue between the Irish and British Governments and the main parties in an effort to break the current impasse. It would not be useful to speculate this afternoon on the prospects for the outcome of those negotiations. It is important to remind ourselves of how far we have come.

When the Body first met in 1990, much progress had been made in the preceding decade towards achieving a resolution of the age old conflict of Northern Ireland, particularly through the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985. However, resolution was still a long way off and violence and tragedy continued to have a devastating effect on the lives of the people of Northern Ireland. The early 1990s saw the British and Irish Governments convene round-table talks which reflected the three sets of relationships underlying the situation, namely, the relationships within Northern Ireland, between the North and the South and between Britain and

Ireland. Even though agreement was not reached at that time the foundations for the vital work that followed had been laid. Later in the decade, we saw the progressive development of initiatives which all lead to long lasting peace. Of these the declaration of a ceasefire by the IRA in August 1994 was perhaps the single most dramatic breakthrough and helped lead to the engagement in political dialogue which resulted in multi-party talks and eventually the historic British-Irish Agreement in 1998.

The advent of peace was not an accident of history or fortuitous chance. It came about because of the courage of political leaders and their supporters from all sides of the political spectrum and their deep commitment to addressing the problems of Northern Ireland. Current and previous Irish and British Governments, together with the political parties, continued efforts over many years to lay the foundations necessary for the peace process. Now that we have achieved this historic breakthrough we will continue together to make every effort to try to ensure its success. Above all we are determined that there will never again be a return to the appalling violence and instability of the past. The people of Ireland, and generations to come, must be allowed the opportunity to live the peaceful and prosperous lives they deserve.

Even a brief glance at the work of the Body throughout those years, including the debates and committee reports, shows the importance of the rich contribution you have made and continue to make to supporting and sustaining this peace process. This work is very much appreciated. It was difficult to secure the Agreement and inevitably it has been difficult work to achieve its implementation. As I said earlier, there are issues outstanding which need to be resolved and discussions continue even as we speak. These relate to policing, decommissioning, normalisation and the inclusive operation of the institutions. All these issues are inter-connected and it is important that all the pieces fit together comfortably in a way which is acceptable to all involved in the long term.

The last time I had the honour of addressing the Body in March 1999, the institutions in Northern Ireland had not yet been established and we were struggling to overcome the impasse on decommissioning and the formation of the Executive. In some ways we continue to be faced with the same challenges now. At the same time, there has been much progress, even in the short time since we last met. A power-sharing Executive has been established in Northern Ireland as have the North-South Ministerial Council and the related implementation bodies, and the British-Irish Council has been created.

These institutions have on the whole been outstandingly successful. The co-operation between Ministers of all backgrounds and ideologies has been low-key, effective, and above all marked by respect and a commitment to ensuring practical benefits in all cases.

The first devolved budget in many years, a Programme for Government for Northern Ireland and a comprehensive agenda for the new institutions have been agreed by

the parties in the Executive. This important work continues to have an enormously positive effect on the day-to-day lives of the people of Northern Ireland.

Significant progress is also being made in the areas of human rights and equality. We have seen new institutions, both North and South, being established. These will help to develop a strong respect for human rights. I hope shortly to bring to Government a draft Bill for the incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights, to allow the domestic courts play their part in upholding the Convention rights.

The excellent progress achieved by the North-South Ministerial Council is also very welcome. In the short time since its establishment, the North-South Ministerial Council has become a central part of the functions of this Government and of the Northern Ireland Executive. The ministerial meetings in the sectoral areas have been invaluable in developing North-South co-operation. The implementation bodies are also making significant progress. We would, of course, wish to see the Council continue to develop and grow on the fully inclusive basis intended.

The British-Irish Council, of which all of you here are members, has also made a very productive start, and we look forward to its development and to meaningful co-operation between all the administrations in a number of priority areas of interest to us all. The Co-Chairman, Mr David Winnick MP, said to me before this address that he now considered that this Body represented the parliamentary tier of the British-Irish Council and I think that is a very good description.

We still have problems which have to be dealt with and in I suppose that is the business of politics. These include the appalling problem of the misuse of drugs on which my Government hopes to host a meeting in the near future, and issues relating to environment, transport, social inclusion and the knowledge economy which affect us all. We look forward to exchanging views with other members of the British-Irish Council on these issues, and to co-operating on practical solutions which will benefit us all in the future.

It is against this background of extraordinary progress and the promise of great opportunity for the future that we continue to try, together with the British Government and the parties involved, to resolve the difficulties which remain. We need a new police service to which all parts of the community can give their support and allegiance. All parties with the democratic mandate to do so, must be able to participate fully in the institutions of the Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement called for a new beginning to policing, and the Patten Commission provided a detailed and considered plan for police reform. The Irish Government is working to build on what has been achieved to date, to resolve the outstanding difficulties and provide the necessary reassurance that the vision and values of the Patten Commission will be realised.

The new arrangements will not deliver an acceptable and representative police service unless the parties and the people, on a cross-community basis, are satisfied that they are adequate and effective. The Irish Government hopes that all parties

will be able to take their places on the new Policing Board soon, and that they will be able to encourage their constituents to join the new policing service. In this context, I note that Senator Maurice Hayes in a piece in the *Irish Independent* this morning said that recruitment in advance of the Policing Board represented the cart being put before the horse, as so often happens in Northern Ireland politics, but he did hold out a great deal of hope. We all know that it is vital to the future long-term peace of Northern Ireland that the new Police Service of Northern Ireland is acceptable to all sides of the community, and one which all sides of the community can trust.

We all need to know that the question of arms will finally be dealt with. Significant progress has been made towards achieving the goal of a return to more normal security arrangements. Much remains to be done. This is particularly true of south Armagh.

None of these issues is easy to resolve. None is insuperable either. The challenge is to find a way forward which respects the aspirations and convictions of all sides, in spite of competing concerns. We know this is possible but that it will once again require effort, leadership and courage.

There is no doubt that it is the absolute wish and desire of all right thinking people on this island to find the way forward. None of us ever wishes to return to the tragedy and violence of the past. We are determined to find a way to reach agreement on these issues, and I have no doubt that the will and commitment to do so exists.

I know that we can count on the support and encouragement of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body and its members new and old as we continue with the vital work of consolidating the peace. While the problems in Northern Ireland most directly affect the people living there, all of us here know that the instability and uncertainty of the situation has had a far-reaching effect across all parts of these islands. I assure you that your support is very much welcomed and appreciated.

Indeed, the presence of new members here in Killarney today is a fine symbol of your commitment to the Good Friday Agreement and strongly encourages the development of Inter-Parliamentary links, as outlined there. I would like to congratulate you all on welcoming the changes and adapting to the new environment.

I have every confidence that the participation of the new members from the devolved institutions of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and the representatives from the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man will further enrich the work of the Body, and support the promotion and development of harmonious and mutually beneficial relations among all the people of these islands.

On behalf of the Government, may I say how much we have appreciated your support in the past and we look forward to your continuing friendship and co-

operation as the Body enters this exciting new phase of its life, and we continue to avail of the historic opportunity for peace.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you very much, Minister. As colleagues will be aware, the Minister has agreed to take a series of questions which have been submitted in advance. We have a certain time constraint but I think we will be able to reach most if not all of the questions. The member who tabled the question should signal the number of the question and when the Minister answers, that member will have the opportunity of asking a supplementary. If possible, I will allow a supplementary from some other colleague. I will try to alternate those supplementaries between the British and Irish sides or the new colleagues and members who are with us.

Protection of wrecks

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP (Thurrock): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if he will initiate discussions between the members of the British-Irish Council with a view to securing common legislation for the protection from looting and trespass by divers of ships and other vessels sunk during periods of conflict in the 20th century.

Minister O'Donoghue: Under the Good Friday Agreement, the British-Irish Council will exchange information, discuss, consult and do its best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on matters of mutual interest within the competence of the relevant administrations. The British-Irish Council normally operates by consensus and suitable arrangements are to be made for practical co-operation on agreed policies. The British-Irish Council is not competent to make legislation.

The first summit meeting of the British-Irish Council in London in December 1999, agreed an initial list of areas of work for early discussion within the Council. These were drugs, the area of work in which Ireland has taken the lead, the environment, transport, social inclusion and the knowledge economy. These areas currently remain the focus of the work of the Council. In addition, an indicative list of other issues suitable for the Council's work was agreed, and it is open to Members to propose further issues for the Council's consideration. From an Irish point of view, the relevant legislation is the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1987, which caters for the protection of wrecks. This legislation allows the Minister for Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands to place any shipwreck of any age or nationality in Irish territorial waters subject to an underwater heritage order prohibiting a disturbance of any kind. Our legislation is currently being revised but we are satisfied that all wrecks - and I do not mean political wrecks - within our waters are open to ministerial protection.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP (Thurrock): I thank the Minister for that reply. I invite him to discuss protecting these wrecks, which are war graves, with United Kingdom colleagues bi-laterally with a view to raising it with the justice or law enforcement ministers of the other jurisdictions represented here. While the issue of artefacts is

important from a cultural point of view, we must consider the sanctity of the war graves. With the growth of technology and leisure sports, including diving, it is a problem. Around these islands, there are some 1,000 or more significant 20th century war wrecks, the most famous of which is the Lusitania off the Old Head of Kinsale. It requires the initiative of, primarily, the United Kingdom Government but also the good friendship and support of the Irish Government and other Governments to stop this abuse before it becomes widespread.

Minister O'Donoghue: I accept that there is a need to protect the wrecks concerned and it is a matter, which the BIC can address. However, unfortunately or fortunately depending on a person's perspective, the BIC is not responsible for legislation. Any person may consult their own Government with a view to having the matter raised at the British-Irish Council, which can then discuss it. I stress that it is not a matter for the British-Irish Council to frame legislation though it has power to discuss proposals such as this with a view to enhancing legislation to protect the wrecks concerned. I ask the member to raise the matter with his own Government in the first instance and then it can be raised at the BIC.

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy

Mr Brendan Smith TD (Cavan-Monaghan): To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform if, in view of the current crisis in the European beef industry, he will outline the steps being taken to eradicate BSE in Ireland; the measures being taken to restore public confidence in Irish beef; if he is satisfied that the control and eradication measures in place in Ireland have been an adequate response to BSE and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Minister O'Donoghue: In the 12 years since 1989 there has been a total of 620 cases of BSE in Ireland from a total bovine population each year of approximately 7.5 million. The low level of the disease in the country has been recognised by the European Union and, in view of the criteria adopted by the OIE, Ireland can claim for the purposes of international trade the status of a country with a low incidence of BSE. Nonetheless, we have been committed to the control and eradication of BSE since the first case was identified in the State.

Since 1989, an extensive range of surveillance and control measures has been in place to deal with BSE. These were very significantly revamped in 1996 and 1997 in the aftermath of the announcement of a possible link between BSE and new-variant CJD. They include: the compulsory notification of the disease; the depopulation of herd-mates, birth-cohorts and progeny of the infected animal; a ban on the use of meat and bonemeal for farmed animals and the removal and destruction of specified risk materials from ruminant animals. This regime has been scrutinised by a number of independent bodies, including the food and veterinary office of the European Commission, the veterinary authorities to which we export. The conclusions of the EU Commission's geographical risk assessment of member states and third countries last year was that the system operating in Ireland has been optimally stable since 1 January 1998. It is not expected that the numbers of BSE cases will decline until the

full effect of the measures taken in 1996 and 1997 are seen during and after the year 2002.

In 2000 the measures were supplemented by a programme of targeted active surveillance for BSE among fallen and casualty animals and all cattle over 30 months of age entering the food chain are now being tested for BSE. Up to Wednesday, 14 February 2001, some 44,792 over 30 months have been tested for BSE. No BSE positives have been found to date. I am satisfied that this range of measures is proving effective and that it provides a sound basis for consumer confidence in beef and for the protection of public health.

The issue of foot and mouth disease is currently of the utmost concern in Ireland and the United Kingdom - I addressed this issue in my remarks earlier. Within hours of being notified of the foot and mouth disease outbreak in the United Kingdom, the Irish Government put in place the first wave of protective measures. This involved the imposition of a ban on the importation from the United Kingdom, including Northern Ireland, of cattle, sheep, pigs and goats and of meat, meat products, milk and milk products. This mirrors the action by the European Commission in introducing an export ban applicable to the United Kingdom. A range of measures involving the Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces is now in place to ensure that this ban is effective. Guidelines on aspects of its operation have been issued to various elements of the agri-food sector. A public information campaign has also been activated.

We hope that these measures and others, which may be necessary as the situation unfolds, will, with public commitment and co-operation, keep the disease from spreading. I hope that the trauma now being experienced will be short-lived and that the efforts being made to contain and eliminate foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom will be successful. We will give any assistance that may be sought.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Before Deputy Smith puts his supplementary, in view of the importance of this issue, I propose to allow an extra supplementary from a colleague from the United Kingdom. If one of our new colleagues wishes to put a supplementary I hope I will be able to accommodate that as well.

Mr Brendan Smith TD (Cavan-Monaghan): I thank the Minister for the detail in his reply. I was glad the Minister took the opportunity to outline clearly the very serious threat posed to the farming community from foot and mouth disease. He also gave us a clear reassurance that there is ongoing and close co-operation between the Departments of Agriculture in Dublin, Belfast and London. Since it cuts across his own Department, can the Minister assure us that every necessary resource will be deployed to ensure that the most stringent enforceable measures are implemented while this threat exists? I am thinking of the deployment to the Border areas of Gardaí, army and relevant Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development veterinary officials.

Minister O'Donoghue: As this evolves, measures are being put in place. The protective measures are, in the first instance, the responsibility of my colleague the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and his officials. The role of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Garda Síochána is activated on foot of advice taken from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and, in particular, the chief veterinary officer. Already we have deployed 300 members of the Garda Síochána to the Border in the first wave of concern. We have now sent a further 180, bringing the total to 480, manning 141 different points and the number of points of entry has been reduced to approximately 30. Following the scare on the island of Anglesey, which we heard of today and which may prove well founded, on foot of advice received from the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, we immediately manned the ports of Dublin and Dún Laoghaire. The Anglesey incident would be of major concern because many people travel through Holyhead, which is nearby. It is crucial that people, in every sector of the economy, realise that this has the capacity to do damage to everybody. This is not just a case of damage limitation in respect of the agriculture or food industries. It is a question of ensuring that no individual or sector is adversely affected. In the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, we continue to liaise with the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and take the required steps on foot of any advice given to us. The response of the Gárda Síochána has been very expeditious and highly professional. This is acknowledged by the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development and I also wish to acknowledge it. Because of the crucial importance of this issue to the entire economy, and especially to the food industry, all possible steps will be taken to prevent the spread of the disease to this jurisdiction. I wish to re-iterate that there has not been any outbreak of the disease in the Republic of Ireland to date.

Mrs Margaret Ewing MP MSP (Moray): Is there substantial co-operation between the Republic of Ireland and the EU authorities on any causal research between BSE and CJD and on attempts to find a cure?

Minister O'Donoghue: My colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, is attending an EU Council of Ministers meeting today, as also is his UK counterpart. I feel sure this matter will be discussed there. I also understand that the EU Standing Veterinary Committee, which has an important function in the matter, will meet in Brussels tomorrow. While I cannot anticipate the outcome, I expect that there will be a united front at EU level in relation to this disease, as indeed there is on other crises affecting the Community.

Drug courts

Ms Patricia Ferguson MSP (Glasgow, Maryhill): Whether, in view of the fact that the Deputy Justice Minister in the Scottish Parliament is currently working with the Scottish Court Service and the judiciary to develop a pilot scheme for a Drug Court, he can offer any advice to the Scottish Parliament based on Irish experience; what criteria are used in Ireland for directing the accused to the Drug Court; and whether he has any evidence of the effectiveness of the initiative.

Minister O'Donoghue: In the context of measures to combat the drugs problem the 1997 Programme for Government included provision for the creation of a drug courts system which would involve court-supervised treatment programmes for less serious drug-related offences. I subsequently requested a working group of the Courts Commission, chaired by the Hon. Mrs Justice Susan Denham, to consider the establishment of a drug courts system in Ireland. In September 1998, the Government approved the publication of the report of the working group on drug courts, which set out details of the experience of drug courts in other European jurisdictions and in the USA. The Government also approved the establishment of a drug courts planning committee, to prepare plans for the establishment of a pilot project in the District Court, which is broadly equivalent to the UK Magistrates' Court. The planning committee recommended a pilot project in the Dublin north inner city area, to run for a period of 18 months and to be available, on a voluntary basis, to persons aged 17 years or over who had pleaded guilty or had been found guilty of a drug-related offence which would ordinarily warrant imprisonment. They also recommended the provision of a rehabilitation programme, capable of being tailored to meet the individual needs of each offender, to be primarily provided by the Eastern Regional Health Authority, the Probation and Welfare Service, FÁS - the national training and employment authority in Ireland - and the Department of Education and Science. Further services would be sought from other agencies, when necessary, and the availability of these services would be on a dedicated basis, under the auspices and control of the drug court.

The pilot drug court programme commenced on 9 January this year in the Dublin District Court and is confined to persons who have resided in the north inner city for a period of 12 months. The decision on entry to the programme will rest with the judge in the case. In arriving at a decision, the judge will consider a number of matters, including the consent of the convicted person, the report of the Probation and Welfare Service and any submission from the Director of Public Prosecutions or other prosecuting authority.

While the report of the drug court planning committee stated that it was not advisable that the programme should only target offences of possession of drugs, they did propose a conservative approach. For example, they stated that serious crimes of violence should not be included. I emphasise that the drug courts system is designed as an alternative measure for dealing with the less serious and non-violent drug offenders. Those offenders who seek to profit from drug dealing, will continue to face the full rigour of the criminal sanctions available to the courts. There will be no easing up on the fight to put these people out of business. Drug courts are for the less serious and non-violent offenders. There is no question of this system being put in place as a soft option for drug pushers and dealers.

It is too early to assess the effectiveness of this initiative. However, I can say that consultants have been engaged to evaluate the pilot project and I look forward to assessing the results in due course. We will, of course, be pleased to share any conclusions with our colleagues in Scotland.

Ms Patricia Ferguson MSP (Glasgow, Maryhill): I thank the Minister for his reply and for the welcome which he extended to the new members of this Body earlier in his address. The Scottish Executive has decided to take forward a pilot programme, similar to what he has outlined, beginning in Glasgow in the very near future. Realising that it is still too early to assess the effectiveness of the Irish programme, can the Minister indicate the number of young offenders, or offenders generally, going through the system and whether or not they are actually able to maintain their course of rehabilitation?

Minister O'Donoghue: I refer again to the criteria of the programme, which I outlined earlier. I have not got precise figures immediately available to me as to the number of offenders passing through the drug courts system. Based on the US experience, I am confident that this will be highly successful. Up to 75 per cent of people participating in the US drug courts programme who actually complete the course, do not come to the notice of the authorities again. This was a factor which encouraged us to introduce the pilot programme in Ireland. It is logical that the drug court should operate in places where people are addicted to hard drugs. That is why we introduced it in the north inner city area of Dublin, where there are a number of young addicts who might avail of the programme. While I have not got precise figures, I do know that there was considerable interest from young people in the programme. It has brought together, possibly for the very first time, the various outside agencies dealing with the drug problem and the judicial system itself. The judge who currently officiates in the court, would be glad to assist the Scottish authorities. Indeed, I understand that he will shortly attend a conference there on this topic. I believe this concept has the capacity to give their lives back to young people and to give them an opportunity to participate in society.

When we have a report from the consultants who are evaluating the pilot programme, we will have a clearer idea of how best to proceed further with it. Those findings will be readily available to you and we will be glad to assist in any other way.

Demilitarisation in Northern Ireland

Mr Peter Temple-Morris MP (Leominster): What assessment he has made of the timetable for demilitarisation in Northern Ireland and the possible extent of further terrorist violence.

Minister O'Donoghue: In the Good Friday Agreement, the British Government undertook to make progress towards the objectives of a return, as early as possible, to normal security arrangements in Northern Ireland, consistent with the level of threat. Progress has been made since April of 1998 towards achieving this goal, including the withdrawal of a number of battalions of the British army, the ending of military controls throughout much of Northern Ireland and the closure or dismantling of a number of military installations.

Work is continuing in relation to the most recent package of normalisation measures, which was announced last September by the RUC Chief Constable,

particularly in County Fermanagh, where the three remaining border installations are currently being removed. On 29 September last, the British Ministry of Defence announced its long term intention to reduce the number of troops in Northern Ireland to a peacetime level of 8,000. It also signalled that the current 64 military installations would eventually be scaled back to about 20.

The Irish Government very much welcomes these measures, including the British Government's objectives outlined on 29 September. However, progress towards normalisation of security arrangements has fallen short of Nationalist expectations, particularly in areas such as south Armagh. The continued presence of many obtrusive military installations and high levels of military activity in these areas is a source of frustration to the local communities. Elected and community representatives in these areas have put the case to the Irish Government that the absence of tangible progress towards normalisation runs the risk of undermining support for the peace process and increasing support for the dissident position. It is clear that to maintain the objectives set out in the Good Friday Agreement, further normalisation measures are necessary in south Armagh.

This is a difficult issue as the rate of normalisation is tied to a number of factors, including assessments of the threat posed by dissident paramilitary groups. The Garda are co-operating closely with their counterparts in Northern Ireland to counter the threat posed by dissident paramilitaries. There have been a number of arrests and seizures involving members of dissident republican groups in this jurisdiction over the past two years, resulting in several convictions.

The two Governments are also working together to combat dissident activity. They are working closely with all concerned parties in an effort to resolve the outstanding issues surrounding normalisation. We look forward to further tangible progress at the earliest possible opportunity in those areas which have not yet seen noticeable levels of normalisation.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris MP (Leominster): I am very grateful for the Minister's full answer. It is nice to have the Minister with the Body again as a friend in Government, because he was an active Member of the Body when in Opposition. Is there an appreciation by the Irish Government of the British position on the issue of demilitarisation? The British Government would love to march the troops out of Northern Ireland immediately and take down the ugly watchtowers and the apparatus connected with a difficult security situation. I appreciate that the Irish Government has to stand up for the republican and Nationalist position, but while there is a terrorist threat from dissident groups, and no decommissioning from the IRA, the British Government cannot move on demilitarisation as fast as it would like.

Minister O'Donoghue: I welcome Mr Temple-Morris to Killarney. There is a difficulty with demilitarisation as it is linked to threats to the security environment. It is equally true that a heavy military presence in some areas may be counter-productive. Mr Temple-Morris makes a good point, but a heavy military presence

can undermine support for the peace process in some areas, and increase support for the dissident position. This is why it is important that normalisation proceeds.

This Government is working extremely hard to combat dissident republican activity. We have co-operated closely with the authorities in the North to counter the threat posed by paramilitaries. There have been notable successes in terms of arrests and seizures involving members of dissident paramilitary and republican groups in this jurisdiction, and a number of convictions. I condemn in the strongest possible terms the violent activities of dissident republican paramilitaries. Their actions can only bring death or injury. I appreciate the difficulties that Mr Temple-Morris has outlined. However, I am conscious that there are areas where a greater level of demilitarisation would lead to a greater degree of support for the peace process.

Mr Seamus Kirk TD (Louth): I represent a constituency in close proximity to the Border and the lookout posts. I am acutely aware of the negative symbolism which the posts exude because of their location and their doubtful current value in security terms. Would the Minister care to venture a time scale for the dismantling of the lookout posts?

Minister O'Donoghue: That is a question for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and for the British Prime Minister. We can only outline here the view that a greater degree of demilitarisation would without question lead to greater support for the peace process in certain areas. There is tremendous co-operation between both Governments with regard to tackling dissident republicans. It is important that dissidents realise that they will not be allowed to subvert the wishes of the vast majority of the people on this island, north and south.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Kennedy): I could allow a supplementary question to Mr Brendan McGahon on question No. 7 which is related to the matters under discussion.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Would the Co-Chairman consider grouping question No. 10 with question No. 5 which is similar, without prejudicing in any way what Deputy Ellis wishes to ask?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Kennedy): The Minister seems agreeable to that, so questions No. 5 and No. 10 will be taken together.

Cross-border infrastructural links

Mr John Ellis TD (Sligo-Leitrim): If he will make a statement on the progress that has been made by the two Governments with regards to the upgrading of the N16 which is the main link road from the West of Ireland serving the Port of Larne.

Senator Paschal Mooney: If the operational procedures of the North - South Implementation Bodies permits co-financing arrangements for infrastructural developments on a cross border basis.

Minister O'Donoghue: Improved co-operation on strategic transport planning is envisaged in relation to the North-South Ministerial Council. Following a meeting of the council in December 2000 it was agreed to prepare a detailed work programme in this important area. The National Roads Authority has overall responsibility for the planning and supervision of works, and for the construction and maintenance of roads, in the South. In the North, the roads service of the Department for Regional Development has similar responsibilities.

It is a matter for the NRA to decide on funding priorities for the national road network in the South within the framework of the national development plan for the period 2000-2006, together with the community support framework and the economic infrastructure operational programme. The N16 connects Sligo town to the Border at Blacklion. The NRA has provided grant payments of more than £5.5 million to counties Cavan, Leitrim and Sligo for various improvement works on the N16 from 1994-2000. More than £1.6 million has been provided to Leitrim County Council to continue with improvement works from Shanvaus to Tomrud and for a constraints study, the terms of reference for which include a proposed Manorhamilton bypass on the N16.

Senator Mooney asked about the co-financing arrangements for infrastructure developments on a cross-Border basis. The funding of the six North-South implementation bodies set up under the Good Friday Agreement is met by moneys voted by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Dáil Éireann. The level of this funding is a matter for recommendation by the North-South Ministerial Council with the approval of finance ministers North and South.

The undertaking of specific projects and activities, including those of an infrastructure nature, is a matter for each North-South body under the overall policy direction of the North-South Ministerial Council. Some of the North-South bodies are more likely than others to be involved in infrastructure activities. A current example of a cross-Border infrastructure project involving a North-South body is the proposed restoration of the Ulster Canal. This proposal comes within the remit of Waterways Ireland and is under active consideration. If approved this will be a major infrastructure project.

Mr Ellis: Have provisions been made for dealings between the Northern Ireland DoE and the NRA on the matter of the N16, the road that serves Fermanagh and west Tyrone? There has been no expenditure on the road between Blacklion and Ballygawley for 20 years. This is the only road that can provide proper access to Larne from the north-west and the west, and it must be prioritised on a North-South basis.

Senator Paschal Mooney: While Deputy Ellis and I agree on most matters, I can assure the Body we did not meet before this Plenary Session to decide to ask similar questions. I support Deputy Ellis's call for funding for a specific road, and I await the Minister's reply with interest. There are three cross-Border groups who devote a considerable amount of time to the preparation of reports and the identification of

infrastructural deficiencies in the Border region, which is a problem. The Minister, Deputy O'Donoghue, outlined the amount of money that has been spent on the N16. There seems to be more money in the South, because of our recent economic success. The same financial commitment is not apparent in the North. The Minister referred to the Ulster Canal. Another canal, the Shannon-Erne waterway, is a successful cross-Border project. In that context, I wonder if there is a financial deficiency, as the roads which need work have been identified?

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): If I allow Members to speak on a question which they did not submit themselves in order to ask a supplementary question, they should respect that by ensuring that their supplementaries are brief.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I am sorry.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): In deference to other members, a brief supplementary would be appropriate.

Senator Mooney: My question is a separate one.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I am aware of that. I did not have to take your question out of place, and I am now asking you to ask a brief supplementary question.

Senator Mooney: Could the Minister reply with regard to the matters I have raised?

Minister O'Donoghue: There are six North-South implementation bodies, which are charged with formulating a corporate plan. The funding for any plan, including those mentioned by Deputy Ellis and Senator Mooney, must be approved by the Government in each jurisdiction. Accountability, therefore, is maintained by the Northern Ireland Assembly and Dáil Éireann. The implementation bodies facilitate more infrastructural projects between the North and the South. People will soon see that the bodies are delivering on the promises made when they were set up. It will not happen overnight, but it will happen. Ultimately, I sincerely hope the members have the highway into the North that they seek.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Because we started late, we are running out of time. With the Minister's consent, I propose to take two further questions, and conclude around 4.15

Drug courts

Ms Cathie Craigie MSP (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Whether it will be possible for some of those involved in setting up the Drug Court in Ireland to participate in the forthcoming conference on the subject organised by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, in order to give Scotland the benefit of their experience.

Minister O'Donoghue: I understand that the chairman of the Drug Court Planning Committee, Judge Houghton, who also presides over sittings of the drug court, has

been invited to a drug court conference in Scotland on 15 May, which he will attend. Judge Houghton, and other members of the drug court team or Steering Committee, are happy to provide whatever assistance they can to Scottish authorities on this matter.

Ms Craigie: I thank the Minister for his reply, and I am pleased that representatives from Ireland are to attend this conference. Those who prey on our communities by peddling in drugs do not recognise the boundaries or borders, nor can they see the consequences of their actions. Their mission is to profit from drug misuse and addiction by keeping their clients and customers hooked on their product. As regards dealing with the causes and effects of drug misuse and addiction, and the consequences for individuals, families and communities, does the Minister agree it is important that all levels of government work in close co-operation? Can the Minister advise the Body how his Government is working towards sharing information and intelligence?

Minister O'Donoghue: I agree with Ms Craigie. We co-operate on an ongoing basis with the police in Britain, and the RUC in the North, to tackle the menace of drugs. Like the forces to which I have referred, we are involved in Europol, whose influence is increasing. We have set up a Criminal Assets Bureau, an inter-agency bureau comprising of members of An Garda Síochána, the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, the Revenue Commissioners, and Customs and Excise. It has been spectacularly successful, and has succeeded in freezing millions of pounds worth of assets, a power it was given in the Proceeds of Crime Act, 1996. It does not matter whether or not a person has been convicted of an offence, as long as the assets are illicit.

I have discussed the formation of a similar bureau with people from the Scottish Assembly and the British Parliament and Government. Its spectacular success here means that we are more than willing to help those who are interested. There has been a great level of co-operation and sharing of intelligence, and it has led to successful convictions.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): After Mr McNamara's contribution, I propose to allow supplementary questions from Deputy Brendan McGahon and Mr Michael Mates.

Progress in implementing the Good Friday Agreement

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): If he will make a statement on progress in implementing the Good Friday Agreement.

Minister O'Donoghue: Since the achievement of the Agreement almost three years ago, the Government, working in co-operation with the British Government and pro-Agreement parties, has prioritised its implementation. While there are outstanding areas of difficulty, which are being intensely discussed, enormous progress has been made. The Constitution and relevant British legislation have been amended to reflect

fully the principles underpinning the Agreement, in particular that it is for the people to determine their future constitutional status. We have seen all of the institutions under the Agreement established and begin to undertake important work on behalf of the people. Since its restoration last May the Executive in Northern Ireland has brought forward a challenging and imaginative *Programme for Government* and has had its first budget approved in the Assembly. Important work is being done at all levels, by Ministers, by the committees and by Assembly Members themselves. Progress within the North-South Ministerial Council has been particularly heartening with two plenary meetings, one in Armagh and one in Dublin, having been held to date. A great number of Minister to Minister meetings have taken place on a regular basis in the council's various sectoral formats. The implementation bodies have also made significant progress. It is particularly disappointing then, that in recent months the work of the NSMC has been disrupted as a result of difficulties in other areas.

In the British-Irish Council, which includes representatives from all of the jurisdictions that are represented here today, new methods of working together in a structured, co-operative and consensual way are being developed. In the areas of human rights and equality we have seen new institutions established North and South to promote a vibrant human rights culture throughout the island and I hope shortly to bring to Government a draft Bill to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights so that people will be able to have their convention rights vindicated in our courts. There remain some difficult issues to be resolved if the Agreement is to be implemented in full, though we are working intensively to find a basis on which these can be resolved.

The issues are familiar: to ensure a police service that can command the support and allegiance of all parts of the community, to ensure the operation of the institutions on a fully inclusive basis as envisaged in the agreement, to ensure that the question of arms is dealt with in a permanent and verifiable manner and to ensure a return to a normal security environment in the North. These discussions are difficult and detailed and I am sure that members of the Body will forgive me for not saying more about them at this time. I firmly believe that all parties are sincere in their efforts to find a way forward and I remain hopeful that we will.

Mr McNamara: I thank the Minister and welcome the poacher turned gamekeeper back to the Body. We always enjoyed the Minister when he was a member of the Body. I welcome the positive statement he has made and the progress that has been made. Turning to the question of policing for one moment, the Minister will be aware that all the district commanders who have been appointed have all come from within the RUC. He will also be aware that no members of the Garda Síochána have been short-listed for the position of Assistant Chief Constable. I therefore ask him whether in terms of the District Commissioners not being advertised outside the RUC, in terms of the statements that were made that the candidates from the Garda Síochána were not of sufficient quality and training to be Assistant Chief Constables, whether he accepts that as a fair reflection of the candidates? Finally, is the Irish Government yet in a position to recommend to Nationalists in the North that they should join the police force?

Mr Brendan McGahon TD (Louth): Does the Minister agree that most of the Belfast Agreement has been satisfied with the exception of decommissioning? How great a priority is it for the Irish Government? It strongly pressed for it some years ago but now it seems to have gone soft on the issue. Does he accept that the timetable for demilitarisation hinges directly on a timetable for decommissioning?

The Minister mentioned that several dissidents had been charged in Irish courts with the exception of Murphy who has been charged with the Omagh bombing. Can he name anyone else who has been charged or can he tell me the number of persons who have been charged?

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): For the benefit of those who may not have been here this morning, we do not allow the reading of newspapers during the session.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): It carries a custodial sentence.

Mr Michael Mates MP (East Hampshire): While the Minister has been very robust in his condemnation of dissident IRA persons and their acts of violence he was silent on the question, by Peter Temple-Morris, of the Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin constantly refusing to make any meaningful advance on decommissioning. Does he realise that if we can only get over that hurdle then demilitarisation will follow as will normal policing? If that is the difficulty; and as his Government probably has better connections with Provisional IRA and Sinn Féin than does the British Government, can he assure us that his Government is really doing all that it can to bring this about?

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The Chair does not comment on any questions, otherwise I might be tempted to comment on that.

Minister O'Donoghue: I am delighted to see that Michael has lost none of his verve for the battle. I assure him that I am not aware of any special friendships between the Government and the IRA. Of course all of the issues are interrelated, there is a general acknowledgement of that and we would all like to see decommissioning happen. It is of pivotal importance to the peace process that it happen. It is important that I stress that as we speak very delicate negotiations are going on in connection with the matters members refer to. You will forgive me if I do not go into detail in relation to any of the matters concerned other than to acknowledge that the whole question of policing, of normalisation and of decommissioning are of pivotal importance in the context of moving the peace process forward.

In any society, unless there is confidence among the general population in the police force it would be very difficult to get respect for the rule of law. That is why policing is such a fundamental issue. At present Sinn Féin and the SDLP have not signed off on the question of policing. The wish of everybody concerned would be that we reach a resolution of that issue in order to see the full implementation of the Patten Report. It is important that we do not seek to divorce one strand from another. It

probably is not realistic to try to do so but at some point it has to be realised that some strand may have to advance on another strand if we are to make progress.

I have already outlined that we are taking steps to deal with the dissidents in this jurisdiction. There have been a number of arrests and convictions. I do not know if there have been convictions of dissident republicans in the North of Ireland. Nobody should be under the illusion that dissident republicans are located south of the Border only. It is not a problem for one jurisdiction alone. The problem of dissident republicans is a matter for both jurisdictions, as is suggested by a considerable amount of evidence. There is no denying that and that is why there is such close co-operation between the RUC and the Garda Síochána.

With regard to Kevin's question, of course the Garda are trained to the very highest possible standard. We are extremely proud of their professionalism and expertise which has been tested in many different environments over many decades and has come through with a great degree of distinction on each occasion. Deputy McGahon referred to the question of dissidents also and I hope I have answered his question. I am constrained in regard to the replies I give because we are still engaged in extremely intensive negotiations which I sincerely hope will yield the results for which everybody prays.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I regret, due to the fact that it is almost ten minutes later than the time at which the next session was due to start, that Deputy Deenihan, who was next to question, and Deputy Hayes, who hoped to ask a supplementary, cannot be called. I hope they will appreciate I am constrained by that fact. I indicated before we started that I would endeavour to call, for supplementaries, someone from the other jurisdiction and I have adhered to that as fairly as I can. I hope you will understand that I would like to be able to accommodate those whom I cannot. For those members whose questions have not been reached, the practice has always been that the Minister would communicate, if they wish to have their questions dealt with, answers through the Clerks of the Body. I presume the Minister will be available and ready to do that also on this occasion.

Minister O'Donoghue: Certainly, I will. I have no difficulty in doing that.

Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD (Kerry North): I suggest that in future, because Question Time is the most important aspect of these Plenary Sessions, we start on time and try to get through as many as possible.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I agree entirely and I did everything possible to ensure that: but it did not happen.

The sitting was suspended at 4.20 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 4.40 pm with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

8. THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PARADES

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): The sitting is now resumed and the Body is now in public session.

We now come to the debate on the report of Committee D on the cultural significance of parades. That is document No. 81, which has been distributed. I now call Kevin McNamara to move the draft resolution.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): I move:

That the Body notes the Report of the Environmental and Social Committee on the Cultural Significance of Parades, and agrees with the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.

We took this subject because we felt that the questions of the Lower Ormeau and Garvaghy Road were clouding the whole question of the nature of parades in Northern Ireland, their cultural significance, what they meant to the communities and the fact that the vast majority of parades, as can be seen in the figures in our report, are without contention. Nobody objects to them. They take place within their communities and with the support of the communities on both sides of the community divide. Only a handful, but an important handful, of parades have taken on particular security and political significance which the committee felt was untoward in the amount of attention they were getting from the rest of the press.

We did one important, self-denying ordinance. We did not seek in any way to examine what was happening on the Garvaghy Road or the Lower Ormeau Road, nor did we seek to do anything which might be seen in any way either to be compromising, influencing or different from the work of Mr Curran and his attempts to find a solution to what is happening on the Garvaghy Road. I note, however, that in a paper that he put forward to the Grand Lodge of Ireland he pointed out the dangers of what might happen to Orange parades because of their entrenchments.

We have had one major disappointment and that is that despite repeated efforts, neither the Grand Lodge of Ireland nor any of the lodges in the North, and, more particularly and sadly, the lodges in Donegal or Monaghan would meet with the committee. In one sense, this report is very much Hamlet without the prince but we were fortunate in that the Lodge of Scotland was more than delighted to meet with the committee and was hospitable, forward looking and helpful to the committee in giving their ideas and presentation of the way they saw the role of the Orange Lodge in Scotland. They were careful to distinguish themselves from the other Orange lodges in the United Kingdom and in Ireland and were, in many ways, somewhat distressed and embarrassed that whenever there was an incident in Northern Ireland, the Grand Lodge of Scotland was asked to make a comment and, almost by implication and direction, suggested that they were guilty of some particular event which may or may not have happened in the North. They were asked to make off-the-cuff remarks about their brethren in Northern Ireland but over whom they had no jurisdiction or control.

I should say that in terms of our effect upon the Scottish Grand Lodge, having met us, it has now issued an invitation to Members of the Scottish Assembly to meet with them and talk about their role and the part they play in the community. This is far more open and something which the committee as a whole welcomes very much because we felt this was an important step forward.

With regard to the other main parading organisation, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, we found that their activities have considerably diminished from the hey days in the 1920s and before. We were told their role as a friendly society had been largely overtaken by Lloyd George's Insurance Act and the creation of the Welfare State Act of 1945, so many of the purposes they had as an organisation had gone.

We also found, however, that they, as indeed the Orange Order in Scotland - we will talk about the evidence we have from Scotland - were very much aware that because they tended to be more responsible and more careful in their attitude to the troubles, and because they took a more judicious approach to them both in Scotland and Northern Ireland, were losing out to the extremists. Many of the bands that normally would have been associated and which have taken part in their processions in the past went, for example, to Scotland to join the Western Band Alliance, overtly and directly in support of the more militants elements of nationalism in Scotland and in Northern Ireland. The Orange Order also had a number of bands which had gone the same way with regard to more extreme elements.

Regarding the question of controlling what happened on parades, the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Orange Order, by and large, were able to control their parades. This was of particular interest because one of the points made to us by the Apprentice Boys when we were in Derry was that people over whom they had no control often arrived to march and process. This created difficulties and problems for them. We also noted how the Apprentice Boys in Derry are very much in the minority position. They realised that if they were to maintain their position within society, they had to become a more social and all embracing organisation. Therefore, they tended to try to hold their main parades in December and August as part of a cultural, city-wide festival. They showed the necessity to meet the demands and objections of the Bogside Residents' Association and various other organisations.

The Committee was impressed by the two businessmen in Derry who spent much time brokering an agreement between the Apprentice Boys and the Bogside Residents' Association. They achieved a meeting of minds on the question that people should be allowed to demonstrate and proclaim their identity and cultural roots. However, one problem in Derry does not exist in other areas. If one is a member of the Apprentice Boys in Derry, one wants to march around the walls so the route cannot be changed. However, they found a way of coming to terms with the situation whereby, if the parade was considered offensive, challenging or was causing ructions, they would keep quiet. By and large, the situation has gone well in Derry as a result. It is still not perfect and there is still stone throwing. There is still a degree of sectarian antagonism, but the organisers and organisations have reached a

way of living with things. It appeared to us a way forward that could be achieved. Therefore, it was all the more regrettable as far as we were concerned that the Orange Order was not prepared to meet us.

The main body with regard to the control of parades is the Parades Commission. We had a long and interesting meeting with it. The commission is in a difficult position because it can only deal with the issue of a particular parade. It cannot view it within the compass of a pattern of parades or a relationship of parades. This becomes particularly important in terms of the Lower Ormeau Road parade, which is a feeder parade for other parades such as the big one on 12 July or the celebrations in Derry. If feeder parades are allowed through the Lower Ormeau Road, the spin off is the attitude of the Bogside Residents' Association towards allowing a parade in Derry when their people, as they see it, are being imprisoned in their own homes and behind police vans on the Lower Ormeau Road while a feeder parade passes. Their view was, why should they allow one group to parade and be prepared to meet their interests when their own community interests on the Lower Ormeau Road were not being met? This is in part a fault of the legislation and it needs to be considered by Westminster in terms of the way the Parades Commission operates. It should be able to consider patterns of parades and the way matters are developing one way or the other.

The other point of interest to us arose out of the treatment of parades, particularly regarding a point made by the AOH in Newry. It felt it was being unjustly penalised by the RUC. Given what we discussed earlier - there is a footnote on this in our report - it felt that, as matters stand with regard to reforms within the constabulary in Northern Ireland, it did not feel at that time that it could recommend that anybody from its community join the force. This was the view of older Nationalists who had been through it all. They were respectable people and wanted to be in a position to be able to recommend that people should join an established cross-community police force. However, they felt that, in those circumstances, they could not do so.

The AOH in Scotland in some ways did not appear to be part of the Scottish scene as we appreciated it. It was very conservative in Catholic terms. To be a member, one had to be a practising Catholic and do one's Easter duties. If one went to a social function with somebody else's wife, they would ask what one was doing and where one was doing it. I understand this is not necessarily the way things are regarded now in holy mother Ireland. Nevertheless, they were undoubtedly a decent body of men, although out of place and out of time. It was evident regarding them and the Orange Order that one could not deny the religious conviction, sincerity and integrity of the people we met. This does not mean that all members of the AOH or the Orange Order fit into that particular definition, but in terms of the people we met, we were impressed by their attitude and their complete lack of sectarianism. They were firm in their beliefs and they had attitudes to Rome or Protestantism, but there was no sense among them that they were sectarian. This was most welcome.

My overall impression regarding the AOH parading on the Assumption and St. Patrick's Day, in terms of relationships on the island of Ireland and the future governance of Ireland, is that it has outlived its time. It is something of an anachronism now in Scotland, although the position is different in Ireland.

In terms of the Orange Order in Scotland, the only one on which we can comment, it appears to be still vigorous. In common with all voluntary organisations, such as political parties, trade unions and churches, it suffers a reduction in membership as other things take over in society. In Scotland, it still appears to be a more vigorous organisation than the Ancient Order of Hibernians. They also felt they had a particular cultural role. They were very keen to assert that they were there because they accepted the constitutional settlement of 1688. Under those terms, they could have Scottish nationalists in their party provided they were prepared to accept the crown as the head of state in Scotland and, therefore, they had a number of SNP councillors.

It was refreshingly different as an inquiry to meet some of these people after considerable difficulty. I thank all the people who met us, including the Parades Commission, academics, members of the various orders and the people in Derry. It was a longer and more difficult report to prepare because, in some ways, it is only descriptive. It does not have a great many recommendations; there are only one or two conclusions. However, we are certain that while violence is associated with any of the parades, it has a bad effect on the communities and the organisations. It also has a bad effect on local economic activity in the particular area. Both the AOH and the Apprentice Boys were keen to point out to us that when their parades went off without incident, it brought more trade into the small towns and the city of Derry if they do it over a week. In that way they saw the parades providing a positive contribution to society.

I thank my colleagues, the staff and, in particular, Dr Lucy Moulard, who is no longer with us, for their work in helping us carry out this task.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Thank you, Kevin, for outlining the report, which makes interesting reading. The fact that you moved the motion added to our interest in the parades inquiry of the committee. Deputy McGahon, do you wish to make a point of order?

Mr Brendan McGahon TD (Louth): No. As a member of the Committee, I would like to contribute.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I will certainly add your name to the list of speakers.

Ms Jean Corston MP (Bristol East): I am only too willing to admit that during the course of this inquiry I changed my mind about parades in Northern Ireland. When it was mooted and when we embarked on this, I took the same view of parades in Northern Ireland as many people on the mainland of Britain, which is, that they are utterly inexplicable. One could not understand the reason for them and, indeed, on

the mainland there is quite a lot of fun poked, particularly at Orange parades. People found the sight of men marching with insignia in bowler hats inexplicable. Having talked to people in Northern Ireland, although, as the Chairman of the committee said, only on a limited basis, and to academics, I changed my view. I could indeed see that there was a political, religious and historical significance of parades about which people had a deep and genuine feeling. I would want to be identified with all the comments made by our chairman, Mr McNamara, about the non-sectarian nature of the people to whom we spoke.

The Apprentice Boys of Derry treated with reverence banners which showed the Apprentice Boys locking the gates of Derry against James II. The Ancient Order of Hibernians we met in Newry were only too proud to show us their banner, which depicted a priest officiating at a Mass rock at a time of Catholic persecution. These were events, which they felt should be remembered and which they wanted to commemorate and I entirely accept their right to do that. I have a greater understanding of it as a result of this investigation, although I would say that there is always a fine line between the recording of history and triumphalism. That fine line has been the cause of much of the conflict and the dispute over parades. Admittedly the dispute has been over a small number of parades in Northern Ireland over the years.

I found it utterly inexplicable that the Orange Order would not meet us. I know that the Ulster Unionists play no part in this Body, a fact which I am sure many of us regret because their absence is obviously noted and their presence would contribute greatly. What I find more inexplicable - this was raised by Deputy McGahon at one of the informal meetings - is that, as a result of the Belfast Agreement, Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly are working together in committee within a new political structure with people who had represented in the past political and religious antagonists, and are making that work. The fact that they are able to work across a huge political, religious and cultural divide with each other in Stormont seems to me to make it even all the more inexplicable that they would not meet people like me, Deputy McGahon, Deputy Marion McGennis and Mr McNamara MP for a discussion about parades. That is something which is of very great concern for Ulster Unionists in Northern Ireland because, after all, the Orange Order is represented at the Ulster Unionist Council, which formulates UUP policy.

I want to say one thing about feeder parades, the one aspect which I did find hard to understand. I cannot see why it is necessary to take coaches to a particular location to march to a railway station which was closed decades ago. The notion of feeder parades was, and remains, utterly inexplicable to me.

I would also want to report on the position of women in these organisations. This is referred to briefly in the committee's report. The role of women seems not just peripheral but invisible. Indeed, when I jokingly asked one of the Apprentice Boys of Derry, who were very courteous to us, whether it was possible for the woman making the tea that day to be a member, he said, "Well of course not, she is not a boy." I do not want to be rude about him but he was 70, if he was a day. I said to

him, "With the greatest respect, you are not a boy either." This seems to me to be a bogus argument. The treatment and position of women in organisations on both sides of the community leaves a great deal to be desired.

As our report states, and as Mr McNamara stated, the experience in Derry does show that it is possible to reach an accommodation. It could be said that this has only arisen because of numerical weakness, the fact that the Protestant tradition of the Apprentice Boys is in a minority in Derry, but that does not invalidate the argument that there is no reason organisations should not have discussions with resident groups and people in the business community. After all, disputes about parades and violence have a terrible knock-on effect in a local economy and it is terribly important that business people should be involved. The fact that that has happened with a measure of success in Derry indicates that it is possible for people to show the outward and visible signs of cultural identity without threatening others, without being triumphalist, without there being violence. Furthermore, within the spirit of parades, about which many Irish people will tell you, one would hear Protestants say that when their friends went off to the St. Patrick's Day parade, they would mind their animals for them or when they would go off to a Unionist parade, their neighbours would help out and look after their houses. It is possible for that to happen. There is now no need for anyone in Northern Ireland, particularly in the light of the Belfast Agreement, to adopt a siege mentality and feel that they are in any way threatened because there is now, at last, a democratic mechanism to resolve dispute.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I will call people in the order in which they indicated they wanted to speak. Normally we would alternate between Members of each Parliament but I think we have gone beyond that in some of our debates.

Mr Peter Brooke MP (Cities of London and Westminster) : In a monochrome world it is always a pleasure to be provided with incidental moments of joy. I once reviewed a book on the Victorian underworld where the entire labour was worthwhile for discovering that in 1818 in my constituency there was formed a body called the Society for the Suppression of Mendacity. In exactly the same way, I thank Committee D for a sentence in paragraph 11 of the report, which states:

"Other Grand Lodges around the world are also independent and diverse. Mr Wilson recalled the grand master of the Grand Orange Lodge of Togo making a speech to the imperial council in French."

That has certainly added to my pleasure in attending this particular conference.

I stated at our meeting in Galway that a House of Commons Select Committee was examining the Parades Commission. It embarked on its examination at approximately the same time that Committee D commenced its work on the report we are considering today. I am extremely grateful to Committee D for that report, which is a thoroughly valuable document.

I wish to make one observation. In his introduction, Kevin McNamara referred to the Orange Order's failure to co-operate with the Parades Commission and Committee D. In paragraph 2 of its report, Committee D indicated that it had decided not to investigate Drumcree and I presume, therefore, that it did not have contact with the Garvaghy Road Residents' Association. Committee A recently engaged in contact with that association. This was not in contradiction to Committee D's experience but it *was* in contradiction to that of the Select Committee of the House of Commons, which has taken evidence, both written and oral, from the Orange Order in Northern Ireland - on a Province-wide basis - and the Portadown No. 1 Loyal Orange Lodge. The Select Committee, therefore, has had a contradictory experience to that of Committee D. On the other hand, the Garvaghy Road Residents' Association has declined to have any contact with us.

I am not suggesting that people are playing games. However, this variable availability seems to indicate that there is an element of "horses for courses" involved. It would be a mistake, therefore, for everyone to leap to conclusions on foot of any report which has been published on the Parades Commission, particularly if it is based on incomplete evidence. We must hope that sufficient self-confidence will develop on all sides, which will encourage people to give evidence to a single body exploring this topic. That makes the issue of broad representation, which we discussed earlier, critically important. It is the broad representation on a single body which encourages people to believe that they will have their day in court.

In the evidence the Select Committee has been taking, it was revealed that direct costs alone for the policing of Drumcree in 1998 amounted to £11 million. When one reflects on the scale of such public expenditure and considers the other areas in which this money could have been spent, it is clearly important that we arrive at a solution to these problems.

Mr Brendan McGahon TD (Louth): As a member of the committee, I wish to thank Kevin McNamara for the work he has done, his dedication and his willingness, along with that of Jean Corston, to travel to different places. Our visits to the various contending bodies in Northern Ireland and Scotland were very educational because we gained an insight into the minds of people who, as Kevin suggested, live, to a large extent, in a time-warp. I commend the Apprentice Boys of Derry who, in direct contrast to representatives of the Orange Order, were anxious to meet us. We had a fruitful meeting with the Apprentice Boys and, as Kevin stated, they appear to have reached some form of compromise with the residents of the Bogside who oppose them. The Apprentice Boys see themselves as an asset to the business community in Derry. They were very reasonable in their approach to the committee and the residents of the Bogside.

I travelled to Glasgow under the impression that all hell usually breaks loose when Celtic and Rangers meet. We were informed that there was a great deal of tension during games between the two teams but that there was no sectarian violence before or afterwards. The leader of the Orange delegation we met in Glasgow was extremely rational and welcoming. I am the only member of the Ancient Order of

Hibernians in the Dáil and I discovered a startling contrast when we visited the last outpost of that order in Port Glasgow, the membership of which numbers approximately 1,000, and met people who are living in a time-warp. Knowing that the Ancient Order of Hibernians is dedicated to "Faith and Fatherland" I asked our Scottish hosts to tell me the fatherland to which they are dedicated. They replied immediately, with one voice, that they are dedicated to Ireland. However, they were at pains to disassociate themselves from those who sing IRA songs in Parkhead.

The members of the AOH in Port Glasgow are expected to perform their Easter duties in a religious way and when I inquired what would happen if I brought another man's wife into their meeting place they replied, again as one, that I would be removed.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): I mentioned that already, Brendan.

Mr Brendan McGahon TD (Louth): I inquired if they had not heard about developments in Ireland and I was informed that they had not.

I also spoke to three elderly brothers from Kilkeel at the AOH hall in Newry. They were very decent men but, again, they were prisoners of history. They were fearful of and condemned the actions of the police in Kilkeel, which is a notorious trouble spot, particularly for the Catholics who live there. Listening to them brought to mind Mo Mowlam's request that centuries-old problems should be solved by particular deadlines. The people to whom I refer hold views which are, to say the least, ingrained and these problems will not be overcome just because Mo Mowlam or any body or group wants them to be. These people are prisoners of the past and it will take many years for the to be set free.

Another point to which I wish to refer was identified by Jean Corston, namely, the question of parades. Some method will have to be found to ensure that contentious parades are not forced upon communities which do not want to play host to them. One of the major challenges the authorities in Northern Ireland will be obliged to face will be finding a formula to ensure that a stop is put to this type of activity, which, after all, plays into the hands of terrorists or those seeking trouble. The British and Irish Governments must place this matter at the top of their agendas.

I reiterate that Kevin McNamara carried out an inordinate amount of work in respect of this report. I thank him for that.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD (Cavan-Monaghan): I compliment Kevin and Committee D on this excellent report. He made the point that most parades pass off without difficulty. That is as it should be, because people should be able to celebrate their history, culture, etc., without being exposed to the bitterness and dissension that marks some parades. The problem does not exist just on 12 July. Where there is a contentious parade, there is a period of about three to four months from Easter on where provocation of the local community occurs. That is often overlooked. It is only

when July comes and the marching season begins in earnest that the difficulties are recognised. The Orange Order in Monaghan did not meet the committee.

Why did the committee not examine Drumcree? I understand what it said in paragraph 2 that it did not want to go to contentious areas, but Drumcree, and a few other areas have the capacity to create serious trouble throughout the North and have done so. Mr Peter Brooke referred to the fact that it cost £11 million in 1998 to police the North because of the Drumcree parade. The air of tension in Portadown is something which has led to many problems, including the murder of Robert Hamill in the town. These are all interlinked and some solution must be found to the Drumcree situation.

The other problem is that serious discussion to solve the problem does not begin until a few weeks before the parade in July whereas people should address it at this time of the year. I know the South African lawyer, Mr Brian Curran, is involved in trying to solve the problem. Whatever chance there is of finding a solution, now is the time to find it before the tension rises. I would like to see more progress in that regard. I happened to be in Portadown in 1997 when a whole community was locked up for 12 hours to allow a parade of 12 minutes to proceed. I would not like to see that happen in my community.

While the report is very good and the people who compiled it were very objective, they might have examined the Drumcree situation and one or two other areas where contentious parades take place.

Ms Carmel Hanna MLA (South Belfast): I welcome this report which is well researched and a valuable contribution to the continuing debate on the issue of parades. I represent the constituency of South Belfast where the Ormeau Bridge is located. It is an annual flashpoint second only to the Garvaghy Road in Drumcree.

The report makes the interesting observation in paragraph 9 that the number of marches in Northern Ireland has increased considerably since the mid-1980s but does not venture a reason for this. I suggest that many of the contentious parades may be a continuation of an old Irish tradition of coat-trailing. It is a device to provoke reaction. It is the hangers-on who generally create the larger problem. As someone who has been and continues to be in dialogue with both the loyal orders and protesters, I reaffirm that it is only with dialogue, debate and discussion that we will make progress.

It is futile for the Orange Order to continue to refuse to engage with the Parades Commission. The vast majority of people, and certainly those who vote for me and the SDLP, are thoroughly fed up with the intransigence of the marchers and protesters who annually for several months over the summer stoke up tension and are responsible for significant damage to the economy. This also incites sectarianism which expresses itself in various ways, one of which is the desire to impose territorial domination.

The Orange Order must engage with the Parades Commission. If any of the residents' leaders is supposedly an obstacle to negotiation, for example, the fact he or she has been in prison, while the residents have a right to protest, they should try to show flexibility by putting forward other spokespersons. Overall, I remain optimistic about the future of dealing with parades because matters certainly seem to have improved in Derry. However, it will not be sorted out this year.

The level of sectarian incidents in south Belfast was more than 90 in the past year and many of them were not reported. The parades issue gives sustenance to those in the community who orchestrate these attacks. It is only when the overall problem of parades and flags is dealt with that these people who indulge in sectarian behaviour will be deprived of this sustenance.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I call Mr Barry McElduff to be followed by the last speaker, Miss Annabel Goldie.

Dr Norman A Godman MP (Greenock and Inverclyde): Excuse me?

Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I had not seen Dr Godman. I certainly would not like to penalise him.

Dr Godman: I have been uncharacteristically quiet.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): The emphasis is on the word "characteristic".

Mr Barry McElduff MLA (West Tyrone): I want to be associated with the congratulations to Committee D on undertaking and delivering a very substantial work. Members paid a special tribute to Mr McNamara and Ms Corston for doing great work.

I am mindful of the specific reference in the Good Friday Agreement to the right of all citizens to live free from sectarian harassment. Like Dr O'Hanlon, I would like to have read a bit about engagement with the Garvaghy Road people and with those who would like to walk down the road. That said, there is a great deal of substance in the report.

Like others, I note the reluctance of the Orange Order anywhere in Ireland to meet the committee. It raises many questions about the attitude of the order to the notion of dialogue. It belies the argument that Breandán MacCionnaith and others are an obstacle to talks. They are not. Communities have the right to appoint their own spokespersons. The attitude that even talking or entering into dialogue is a sell-out or an unacceptable compromise or concession is worrying. I would like to hear if the Orange Order, North or South, offered a reason for not meeting the committee.

It has been pointed out in the report that the argument of tradition is used to justify almost anything. I am conscious that it is used in a little-known spot, Newtownstewart, County Tyrone, where people have a terrible experience every summer which goes unreported. It is one of the areas which is not highlighted. The

report correctly points out that tradition is not constant and unchanging and needs to take account of change, such as demographic change. Paragraphs 15 and 54 are very positive in this respect. Coming from a Nationalist perspective, I often see this as domination over Catholics. I do not expect everyone to agree with me on that but we see it as being told annually and ritualistically to remember our place in society which is not one of equality.

Paragraph 57 constitutes a good conclusion. Consent is a very good word to have as the final word in that paragraph, which states at the end: "mutual respect and consent". I support beleaguered communities who are under fierce trauma and pressure every summer.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I must explain that we should leave at 5.30 pm, but we are delayed for many reasons with which we are familiar. As it is now 5.30 pm, and four speakers remain to contribute, I suggest that Mr Kevin McNamara makes some brief concluding remarks, after which I have a few brief statements to make about tonight. Perhaps Members could keep their statements brief to about two to three minutes.

Ms Annabel Goldie MSP (West of Scotland): I come to this debate with a degree of neutrality. I am not a member of either the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland or the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Scotland. I am a member of the Scottish Conservative Party and we do not go in much for parades.

Dr Norman A Godman MP (Greenock and Inverclyde): Just two are needed.

Ms Goldie: I did find the report interesting and I think it is a very helpful and informative piece of work. I was just curious, and this is not posed as a criticism, Mr McNamara, it is merely made as an observation, in relation to the Scottish dimension, that no attempt was made to take extraneous elements from either the peace force - the law and order enforcement agency - in relation to parades from the local authority as a license issuer for parades or indeed from the business community perhaps in the form of Glasgow Chamber of Commerce. I was just slightly curious at these omissions because when you go back to Peter Brooke's point, I think the evidence-taking has improved if there is an attempt to either corroborate or maybe refute assertions that have been made. That is the extent of my comment. It is not a judgement, Mr McNamara, just a matter of curiosity on my part.

Dr Norman A Godman MP (Greenock and Inverclyde): I was anxious just to make a couple of comments because Kevin and his colleagues, in preparing for this report, came into Renfrewshire and Port Glasgow. They mentioned the Ancient Order in Port Glasgow and the last time I visited the hall was to attend a wake following the requiem mass for a trade union official, a member of Kevin's union.

This has been a very good and rational debate on this hugely controversial issue. I know that is the view of Robin Glentoran, here on my right. I wish to make a couple of points.

You must not think it is all peace and stability in Scotland. I got involved in the case concerning Jason Campbell, who was at that time to be deported to a Northern Ireland prison for the horrific slaughter of a young Celtic supporter. I was the first Labour MP in Scotland to say: "This man must continue to serve his time in Shotts Prison." Fortunately, good sense prevailed but some of the strongest supporters of the Orange Order in Portadown are to be found in the west of Scotland, indeed in my constituency. Many of the lodges in central and western Scotland each year travel across to join the parades. They take their holidays to travel across. If you look at Drumcree and the parades you will see there are Scottish bands there and that has been the case for many years, so there are profound cross-cultural ties between Scotland and Northern Ireland and these tangled relationships are made manifest in all kinds of ways.

There is a strong Orange presence in my constituency and I have received delegations at my clinics to remonstrate with me - from Orange orders - about my opposition to the re-engagement of Private Clegg and Guardsmen Fisher and Wright. Peter Brooke and others will know I objected to these re-engagements in debates in the House of Commons. I have also received delegations complaining about police reform and the need to abolish the Parades Commission. So, as I say, Kevin and his colleagues did not have time to go into these elements of the Scottish-Irish relationships. Incidentally, a former paramilitary leader once told me after he had had a few pints that two of his best hit-men came from my constituency but he added, with great magnanimity: "They vote for you, Norman. They think you're a good constituency MP."

On the members of the Ancient Order in Port Glasgow, some of whom I know personally, many of them are elderly. They are not in a time-warp, with respect to Kevin and his colleagues. They are old-fashioned Catholics who rue the decline of their church in their community. Port Glasgow, as Annabel will confirm, is utterly a community on its own, even if physically and economically and in other cultural ways it is linked inextricably to Greenock. That is what perhaps Kevin and his colleagues encountered when they spoke to those friends in that Order.

Finally, in relation to paragraph 12, I also wondered, along with Annabel Goldie, I am sure, and other Scots MPs, why no discussion or interview was sought with the Chief Constable or others, as Annabel mentioned. The parades in my part of Scotland are viewed by the overwhelming majority of the population as nothing but a bloody irritation. They hold up the traffic, some of them are pathetically small and some are very substantial, so they range in that sense. They are well policed.

One last comment on the parades: I agree with the conclusions in this report but I have to say, having met people in Drumcree, I think Brian Curran has an enormously difficult task in trying to persuade those two sides to compromise on the basis of

what Kevin and his colleagues say in the very last sentence of their report, "The principles of law, dialogue, mutual respect and consent", given the implacability of the opposition they have for each other. I just wish Brian Curran all the very best of luck but it is an almost impossible task he has got.

Mr Conor Lenihan TD (Dublin South-West): I will be very brief. I feel somewhat culpable as it was myself that suggested we have this report and slightly disappointed also. The reason I suggested we do so from a cultural perspective was to soften the blow in the sense of not to be going cruising in on Orange marches as an issue and causing problems either for the Order or for anybody else in the political sense. I am profoundly disappointed there was no effort made by the Orange Order to engage with it. I just find it inexplicable because it is probably the most harmless committee in the world on probably the most harmless topic, though sometimes controversial: the cultural implications of parades. But that is Northern Ireland for you and I suppose we do look to Scotland to some extent to see a good example and we did see some good example in Scotland. Perhaps we should have investigated more in Scotland but it is profoundly disappointing and a pity that the Orange Order does not engage with anything, even people who wanted to hear their case and their cause.

Mr Harry Barnes MP (North East Derbyshire): Kevin McNamara was a little apologetic at one stage in connection with the report when he said it was sort of descriptive, namely, although there were a number of points towards the end. However, I think that description that is contained in it, is very important indeed and I think the description of the Apprentice Boys of Derry and the careful links with the Bogside Residents' Group and that extension that has developed is really important. That is the sort of development that gives us all hope that the context of the Good Friday Agreement creates a type of atmosphere in which these things can be developed and extended.

I agree with the points that have been made about the failure of the Orange Order to meet with our committee. It was strongly put by Barry McElduff; but you will remember that Peter Brooke pointed out that the Northern Ireland Select Committee, of which I am a member also, has found itself unable to get interviews and have discussions with the Garvaghy Road residents. I hope that those who have influence and connections in that area in Sinn Féin may yet be in a position to try to persuade the Garvaghy Road residents to meet with our Select Committee, as I am sure many of us would try to press in the other direction to see that the Orange Order meets with the committee of this body.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Harry, that was brief. Kevin, do you want to say anything?

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): Yes, very quickly.

First, on the question of women, and to defend the Ancient Order of Hibernians, they had women trustees in high echelons, which did not exist in the Orange Order.

With regard to the Apprentice Boys, one of the things they were careful to say was that they were not specifically a religious organisation; they celebrated a historic event, not a religious one. On Rory and Annabel and others attacking us on our failure to meet the police and other matters, policing did not seem to us to be an issue in Scotland. It was neither raised with us in any particular way, nor indeed the prospects, and therefore the need to meet the local authority and so on did not arise in that sense. It was never suggested to us in any way that there were problems in relation to that. There may have been an omission on our part.

With regard to the Garvaghy Road and Drumcree, we deliberately decided not go there because we felt it would distort the picture for the majority of parades. I realise there is a spin-off but we believed it would distort the position if we concentrated on that. We felt this would be a disservice to many members of both communities who parade in a perfectly peaceful manner. We sought to identify what they regard as being important. One of the aspects of our meeting with the parades commission, although we did not pursue it a great deal, was that people were more concerned this time than in the past about paramilitary organisations within the Unionist community seeking to create their dominance and to get control of their own communities. It was also hinted that they were concerned with controlling the drugs trade in these particular areas. Again, we felt that was not what the majority of honest Orangemen who were parading to survey the situation were about.

In relation to Ms Hanna's description of it as in many ways coat-trailing, I accept that we did not take evidence on it. These parades, which are taking place as feelers for the main parade, are seen as coat-trailing. As Ms Hanna said, that is an old Irish custom. However, it does not justify it taking place because that old Irish custom of coat-trailing ended up with that old Irish phrase, "wigs on the green", and that meant fisticuffs and, in these cases, far worse.

Question put and agreed to.

***Resolved,* That the Body takes note of the Report of the Environmental and Social Committee [Doc. No. 81] on the Cultural Significance of Parades and the conclusions and recommendations of the Report, which should be forwarded to both Governments for their observations.**

The sitting was adjourned at 5.45 pm till tomorrow.

2. Tuesday 27 February 2001

The sitting was opened in public at 10.10 am in the Kerry Suite, Killarney Park Hotel, Killarney, Co. Kerry, with Mr Michael O'Kennedy in the Chair.

1. BUSINESS REPORTS FROM COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The meeting is now in public session.

The first item on our agenda this morning will be business reports from the Chairmen of the individual Committees. The reports should be brief, about five minutes is allowed. We must then move on to the oral report of the shadow chairman. I propose to call Dr Godman, who is Vice-Chairman of Committee A.

Dr Norman A Godman MP (Greenock and Inverclyde): Thank you Chairman. I wish to give apologies for Brian Hayes, who had to return to Dublin and also Rory O'Hanlon who I think is on duty this afternoon.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I am beginning to wonder what is happening up there in our absence.

Dr Godman: Apologies also from Senator Helen Keogh. Members of the committee wish to return to the issue of parades but, obviously, everything is dependent upon the timing of the general election in the United Kingdom. In March of this year, it is our intention to hold meetings with the Chief Constable and members of the Parades Commission, Brian Curran, representatives of the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community and representatives of the Belfast Walkers' Club, which, as you all know, is a part of the Apprentice Boys movement. Later in the year, members wish to return to Drumcree and amongst other things engage in debates once more with representatives of the Orange Lodge there and members of the Garvaghy Road residents' coalition.

That is in the future. In the short term, the intention is to speak to these individuals and groups that I have mentioned in Belfast.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you Norman. I wish to make a brief comment. I express our appreciation to the committee. The contacts you have established, the informal discussions you have had across the range of people involved, are very helpful. I am sure they will be reassured by our approach to these matters that have been a cause of contention from time to time. We do respect the culture of the various groups and elements. I think they should be aware that we are not implying any criticism of traditional practices or cultures. It is important that you report back to us when you have had the opportunity of meeting these groups. Austin Currie is the Shadow Chairman of Committee B and he will give the report.

Mr Austin Currie TD (Dublin West): Thank you Mr Chairman. I give apologies on behalf of Robert Jackson, our Chairman. Committee B has continued to pursue its inquiries into transport links between Britain and Ireland. Earlier last year, we held meetings to discuss this inquiry with civil servants and business people from Dublin and London. Since the last Plenary Session, we have held two further meetings in Scotland and Wales. In November 2000, we visited Edinburgh and met the Scottish Minister for Transport, Ms Sarah Boyack, and her officials.

We also held a joint meeting with the environment and transport committee of the Scottish Parliament and met representatives of CBI Scotland and Dumfries and

Galloway councils. Two weeks ago, we visited Cardiff to visit the National Assembly for Wales and held discussions with the Welsh Minister for Transport, Ms Sue Essex.

In order to complete our discussions with decision-makers on both sides of the Irish Sea, we have tried to arrange a visit to the North of Ireland to meet with those responsible for transport issues under the new devolved administration.

Unfortunately, this visit has proved somewhat difficult to set up. The Minister for Transport, Mr Gregory Campbell, has let it be known that in accord with the policy of his party, the DUP, he is unwilling to meet with a committee of the Body. Likewise, it has not yet proved possible to arrange a meeting with the Regional Development Committee of the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Ulster Unionist Party members of that committee are reluctant to meet with Committee B given the party's policy of non-participation in the Body. The SDLP chair of the committee, Alban McGuinness, very understandably wishes to proceed only on the basis of consensus. Discussions with the Regional Development Committee are continuing and I hope it will be possible to reach agreement on a meeting. However, there are possible complications such as an impending election in Britain.

With regard to the inquiry itself, this has been a broad-ranging look at links between the two islands by air and sea as well as road and rail links to ports and airports. We have looked at issues including the impact of differential fuel duties, north and south of the Irish Border; the prospects for the expansion of air traffic; the need for further investment in road and rail links and the possibility of opening up new routes for Irish freight across Britain and on to continental Europe.

An interesting aspect of the inquiry has been the opportunity to study how the new devolved arrangements within the UK are working in practice. Transport is self-evidently an issue, which cuts across national and regional boundaries. The new arrangements must allow for effective liaison between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland on transport issues as well as scope for the Republic of Ireland to make an input at the various different levels within the UK.

We have also been concerned about the extent to which the devolved institutions are able to pursue their interests in negotiations with the EU given that they cannot do this directly but have to channel their concerns through representation at UK level. We will produce a report on these issues for discussion at the next plenary.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you Mr Currie. Are there any observations on that report?

Mr Peter Brooke MP (Cities of London and Westminster): Although I can quite understand the difficulties they are having with the elements of the Assembly, Northern Ireland Railways is quite astonishingly willing to co-operate and to show them anything that is available.

Senator Paschal Mooney: As Deputy Currie has eloquently pointed out, in light of our experience of meeting for the first time with the devolved administrations, and

the remarks of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform yesterday that this Body would perform the parliamentary tier of the British-Irish Council, we were also made aware that the British-Irish Council is also discussing transport links. Perhaps the Steering Committee might bring forward proposals for the next Plenary as to the links between the parliamentary tier and the British-Irish Council, as our experience has proven that there is a danger of overlaps. I have a number of suggestions in that area but I will not hold up the meeting with them.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris MP (Leominster): I want to support what Senator Mooney has said. It is an important point, which might be pursued at Steering Committee level, quite apart from individual committees that will be getting in step with them right from the outset.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I entirely endorse views expressed by Mr Temple-Morris and Senator Mooney in relation to the co-ordination with the British-Irish Council. The Steering Committee is establishing itself as the tracking element with the British-Irish Council. This will be on an informal basis for the moment, but we will be looking for an endorsement from the Body for this purpose. We are in liaison with them to ensure that the overlap that both of you mentioned will not arise. In view of the observations of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform yesterday it would be vitally important for us to ensure that whatever we do here at plenary and committee level is done with the full co-ordination and knowledge of others. Your observations are very much *ad rem* and we had already taken some steps in that direction.

It is self evident that matters of transport co-ordination and co-operation, with a view to improving the infrastructure, particularly on this island, can only be to the benefit of everybody. From the response you got from Scotland and Wales, it is clear that they are very conscious of this, as we would expect. It is sad that there are elements within the administration in the North who for one reason or another find that even to discuss transport co-ordination and co-operation is somehow a contaminant from this source. It belongs to a different era and through our discussions, I hope that we will be able to demonstrate to them that our only intentions here are to have something that will advance the infrastructure in both parts of the island to our mutual benefit. This is particularly true for the young people North and South who would not be too concerned about whether a rail link could contaminate much less undermine traditional values.

I call on Mr Seamus Kirk to give the report on Committee C.

Mr Seamus Kirk TD (Louth): Thank you Chairman. Committee C is looking at the tourism industry North and South. The preparatory work for the report is ongoing. We were not able to meet as often as we would have liked in the latter half of 2000. A number of members of the committee had a pleasant day on the Erne catchment and they recommend it highly. On 17 and 18 January, the committee visited Belfast and we rounded the two-day trip off by having a pleasant lunch with the chairman of the IFI, Mr William McCarter, in Bushmills. There is no doubting the beauty and

splendour of the north Antrim coast and that can be recommended also to those who wish to spend their holidays there.

Mr Austin Currie MP (Dublin West): Did you get some Bush?

Mr Kirk: We met officials from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Northern Ireland Tourist Board, the exchanges were very worthwhile and we left much wiser than we went. The tourism industry north of the Border has some distance to come but they realise that they have moved into an era where there is potential for development and they are proceeding apace.

The IFI was established in 1986 and since then it has supported 4,000 projects both north of the Border and the six counties immediately south of the Border. There has been a total investment of £400 million. That is a significant statistic in the context of the largely underestimated work that the International Fund for Ireland has put in since its establishment.

The committee met this morning and we have arranged to meet officials in the Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, Bórd Fáilte and the regional tourist boards. We are hoping to arrange a meeting with an academic in the economics area who might act as a devil's advocate for discussion purposes and help to identify any potential shortcomings.

That is the state of play as of now. We are continuing apace and the intention is to intensify the efforts. We hope to have the aforementioned meeting before the end of March. With one eye on the date of the next election in Britain, not to mention the possibility of an election here, later on in the summer, —

Senator Paschal Mooney: Do not tempt fate.

Mr Kirk: —they will largely determine what will happen after the proposed meeting in March. It is our intention to intensify the efforts to progress things as quickly as possible.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you, Seamus. I note with satisfaction what you say on the huge financial commitment being channelled through from the International Fund for Ireland. I knew it was very significant but I was not aware that it has been as extensive as that and, with your permission, I propose to write to the Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland expressing our appreciation as an Inter-Parliamentary Body for the magnificent continuing contribution they are making to the economic development in the Border regions. Is that agreed?

Mr Austin Currie TD (Dublin West): I wish to be associated with the kind remarks in relation to the International Fund for Ireland. It is perfectly true that the role which this Body has played has not been generally recognised. The International Fund for Ireland was established as part of the British-Irish Agreement of 1985. It was boycotted by the Unionists for some time afterwards. Then John Taylor decided to make an application and, to his surprise, was successful in an area where all other

similar applications had been unsuccessful. Opinion gradually changed and the advantages of that Fund are now recognised by both communities in the North.

It may be that there are certain lessons to be learned there in relation to the Unionist attitude to this Body. Their initial objection, which was not firmly based, was that this Body emerged from that same Agreement, whereas, of course, it predated it. We owe our origin to the two parliaments. My point is that the Unionist allegation against this Body is less firmly based than their objections to the International Fund for Ireland, which they have subsequently come around to accepting. Maybe there is a lesson there for all of us.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): That progress underlines the fact that there can be no disadvantage or disability arising from co-operation on economic matters, particularly where that involves maximising the resources available, either through Government level, or through the various devolved Administrations or through an organisation such as the International Fund for Ireland. Under any circumstances, that position can hardly be misrepresented by anybody as a negative issue. We can only continue to demonstrate the benefits that flow to people and communities and let the case speak for itself. I call on Mr Kevin McNamara, MP, Chairman of Committee D, to present his Committee's report.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP (Kingston upon Hull North): Our report on parades was completed yesterday and there is nothing further to add on that. On other matters, we examined a list of proposals and came to the following conclusions. We will make a one-off visit to Armagh to look at a Celtic Centre there and to use it as an addendum to a previous report. We need to review the situation as the Armagh people felt that they had been cruelly let down. We had a request from the University in Cork about business education and connections between business schools in these islands. We decided to pursue our interest in that matter through correspondence with the Departments of Education in the various Administrations, to get their views and information on existing links and exchange arrangements. We did not see a need for meetings or direct discussions at this stage. Our final conclusion was that we should try to involve all the new devolved institutions who are now members of this Body, in looking at the question of the protection of scenic areas, in the various jurisdictions, from over-use by tourists. The objective would be to have those areas, such as the Lake District, the Peak District and the Giant's Causeway, accessible to tourists, while at the same time ensuring that they are suitably managed to prevent damage and destruction through over-use.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): The educational aspect of these programmes is very important. Knowledge-based industry has become a major feature in the economic development of this island, North and South. We should encourage co-operation to the maximum possible extent in that regard, so that the huge resource which is represented in our young people, will be employed to best advantage. With regard to the environmental issues which have been referred to, perhaps our visit to this location will have signposted the need for greater attention to environmental protection, even in such a beautiful place as this. It is a matter of concern that

developments which were intended to provide extra facilities for people visiting scenic areas, can sometimes undermine the very attraction and nature of the place which they are intended to enhance.

That concludes the business reports from the committees. We now proceed to the progress report from the Chairman of Committee A. In the absence of Brian Hayes, who is engaged in Dáil business, the report will be presented by Norman Godman.

2. COMMITTEE A - ORAL REPORT ON ACTIVITIES

Dr Norman A Godman MP (Greenock and Inverclyde): This will be a brief report. The committee held two inquiries since the last Plenary. Visits took place on 9 and 10 November of last year and again early this month. Our first visit concentrated primarily on the issue of parades, notably the Drumcree one. We met members of the Parades Commission, the mediators, the Garvaghy Road residents' coalition and the Portadown Orange Lodge. The meeting with the Orangemen was a lively affair, to put it mildly.

We were informed that the issue of contentious parades is severely damaging the economic, political and social life of Northern Ireland. This Body should not need to be reminded that the issue of parades, especially at Drumcree, has resulted in the tragic loss of life, most notably the terrible deaths of the three young Quinn children.

The cost of the Drumcree dispute to the town of Portadown has been deeply damaging. Its communal relations have been adversely affected, and, again, that is putting it mildly. The economic and social well-being of residents of the Garvaghy Road area has suffered and the security of both sides in the community has been badly affected by the growth of loyalist paramilitarism in Portadown. This was evident to all of us last summer, from scenes of the UFF parading openly on the streets in loyalist areas of the town.

The resolution of this great problem would be of immense benefit to the entire community of Northern Ireland. It is the committee's view that contentious parades need to be resolved by way of mutual tolerance, respect and genuine negotiations, as referred to in the report yesterday by Mr McNamara. The rights of local communities and marchers must be placed at the heart of such negotiations, and it is incumbent on all parties to disputed parades to make every effort to reach accommodation and to resolve their disputes through meetings, not by shouting at each other through the media.

The committee supports the work of the Parades Commission and the mediators, including the Mediation Network and the independent mediator, Brian Curran. It opposes and deeply deplores the actions of those parties which have sought to exacerbate and inflame conflict, and have deliberately sought to undermine the rule of law. We urge all sides to make every effort to engage with these bodies and work towards peaceful resolution of such conflict.

Just one week ago, we travelled to Larne and Belfast to inquire into the rise in sectarian harassment and attacks which were made more prominent by the extensive use of pipe-bombs by loyalist groups. During its inquiry the committee met the Chief Constable of the RUC, Sir Ronnie Flanagan, and representatives of Unionist parties, the SDLP and Sinn Féin. We were deeply concerned by the appalling sectarian attacks which have been perpetrated in Larne, north Belfast, Ballymena and Coleraine, to mention just a few of the areas blighted by this sectarian disease.

This is not a sudden growth but is the outcome of the deliberate and persistent ratcheting up of sectarianism and harassment of the worst kind. It was put to the committee that this growth in harassment and violence takes place in identifiable stages. First, there is the minor irritation of the painting of kerb-stones. Next there is the painting of paramilitary murals, and from there windows are broken, before the final stage occurs, when people come under fire or pipe-bombs are thrown through windows into houses.

The effects of these attacks are deeply disturbing. We were told by parents of changes in children's behaviour and schoolwork declining in an alarming fashion. In some vulnerable homes, one parent stays up all night with buckets of sand ready to deal with these vicious bomb attacks. The committee met a young single mother who was advised by the police to give up her job because her regular travel to and from work made her a soft target.

The Body should know that we met Unionist representatives in Larne to discuss these matters and hear their views. It was also put to this committee that the victims of these assaults, some of whose houses have been attacked up to six or eight times, need more assistance from the community, from the police and from the British Government. They and their homes are vulnerable to the vicious pipe-bombers. We were told that the installation of protective windows, fire retardant doors and improved locks would cost approximately £1,000 per house. This would allow the victims of repeated attacks some security, even if it is no guarantee of a peaceful life.

We suggest that the Government urgently consider providing help to these victims. We also believe that it is a matter of urgency that Larne Urban District Council install closed circuit television in the town centre in order to provide a greater degree of protection for the Catholic community, and to assist in the arrest and detention of the thugs who carry out these vicious attacks.

We noted the lack of success in convicting such pipe-bombers. At the time of our visit there had been recent finds of pipe-bomb factories but, sadly, this success does not seem to have been maintained since our visit. We strongly urge that more effort be put into catching the attackers, and to putting them away once convicted. Such persons should suffer punishment for these vicious attacks on ordinary, decent families. It is a miracle that no-one has yet been killed and every effort must be made to ensure that they are stopped before the first murder takes place.

I make no apology for the circumspect language of this report. People must be protected and it is important that the trust that this committee is building up with certain groups and individuals has also to be protected. This committee is building relationships with groups which hitherto would not have spoken to British or Irish representatives of this body. That is to be welcomed. We sometimes have to listen to diatribes of one kind or another, but we are engaging with individuals and groups and the trust-building that is involved has also to be protected. Hence, the reticence of this report.

I offer my thanks to the committee's two Clerks, Conor Long and Huw Yardley, for their work on behalf of the committee and this Body.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Kennedy): Thank you. I do not want to comment on the significance of the report Dr Godman has just given us, beyond suggesting that the committee continue their work, as I know they will do. The observation made in the report on the establishment of trust with groups and individuals based on confidentiality is something that members respect. The observation that this Body is becoming more recognised because of the committee's work and its availability to meet people who have been subjected to harassment, is also significant and positive from our point of view.

Mr Austin Currie TD (Dublin West): The observations on events in Larne, and in other areas in the east of Northern Ireland, should not go unremarked. These actions deserve to be condemned in the strongest possible terms. There is no doubt that some elements decided on a deliberate policy of pipe-bombing of Catholic homes. They may have been politically motivated by a desire to attract a reinvolvement or a reaction by the IRA. I am glad that bait was not taken. It is clear that elements in the UDA were heavily involved in the action, although it is denied that the harassment was officially organised. Rather, it is claimed that individuals operating at local level were responsible. I note with satisfaction that the pipe-bombing campaign appears to have ended in recent days after a period of sustained attacks - over 60 since the New Year. It is not just coincidence that it has ended in the aftermath of statements made by the leadership of the UDA and what appears to have been some form of direct action by the UDA. The results of those efforts is welcome, but it underlines the previous suggestion that UDA members were behind the attacks. Let us welcome the end of the campaign and hope it does not begin again. Larne is not a metropolis. It has a relatively small population, it is a largely Unionist area and one where we are told the RUC and security forces have had a large measure of support. One would have expected that those responsible for pipe-bomb atrocities would have been made amenable to justice, and that the RUC would have received information in order to bring these people to justice. That has not happened, although a pipe-bomb factory has been located, and weapons have been seized. It is significant and worrying that those responsible have not been brought to justice, which seems to suggest that the new police service is badly needed.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): While Deputy Currie's comments are as significant as usual, I think we seem to be drifting into a debate on the political motion.

Mr Currie: I thank the Chairman for bringing me back on track, and helping me to terminate my contribution.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I am always prepared to help.

Mr Peter Brooke MP (Cities of London and Westminster): The House of Commons Select Committee is inquiring into the Parades Commission and into paramilitary intimidation of families causing them to leave their homes. The RUC evidence on both occasions was given by Assistant Commissioner McQuillan, who has been an outstanding witness. Anybody investigating something which involves community activity and requires RUC evidence would be well advised to take evidence from him.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I would not like it to be believed that I do not feel great concern, personally or in my capacity as chairman, about the alarming matters indicated in these reports. I should restrain myself from making further comments on the matter.

I wish to thank Dr Godman for a clear and consistent report, and I hope that he continues his work in a similar fashion.

Before we move to item three, I should point out that Mr Mates will wind up this debate at about 11.45 pm.

3. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Mr Tony Killeen TD (Clare): I move:

That the Body takes note of recent political developments in Northern Ireland, calls on all of the pro-Agreement political parties to redouble their efforts towards the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, and continues to support the Irish and British Governments in their efforts to achieve this goal.

This ongoing debate concerns the two Governments working to restore the North-South Ministerial Council to full operation. There are a number of issues which need to be resolved, and a number of outstanding difficulties in the implementation of the Agreement. The principal of these is probably policing, and we all hope that our deliberations will be overtaken by a positive movement in this regard. Another important question concerns the re-engagement of the IRA with the de Chastelain commission. There is a need for the removal of the Ulster Unionist Party's sanction against Sinn Féin Ministers attending the North-South Ministerial Council, which arose from the Ulster Unionist council decision of 28 October 28, carried by 54 per

cent to 46 per cent. The two Sinn Féin Ministers have successfully appealed the decision, but the First Minister has appealed that to a higher court.

Since our last meeting in Galway, John Reid has replaced Peter Mandelson as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The political situation on the ground has been made very difficult by loyalist pipe-bomb attacks in Larne, Ballymena, north Belfast, Coleraine and other places. Many of these attacks have been preceded by so-called punishment beatings, which is a long way short of the normalisation of life in the North we aspire to. Demilitarisation of certain parts of the North continues to be an issue.

The inaugural North-South Ministerial Council meeting took place on 13 December 1999, and six implementation bodies were subsequently set up. A total of 25 meetings have been held, 23 of which were sectoral meetings. At one meeting, the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister attended because the DUP Minister refused to attend. The six implementation bodies are completing their corporate plans, acquiring premises and appointing chief executive officers and permanent staff.

Considerable progress has been made, including the undertaking of three studies. The first of these is to consider the establishment of a North-South consultative forum. There is also a study of possible obstacles to mobility between both parts of the island, and another looks at enhancing the competitiveness of economies in the North and South.

Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement provides for a joint parliamentary forum, which is a matter for the legislatures North and South. The Governments have strongly indicated they support such a move. There have been formal contacts between the Stormont Assembly and the Dáil. Last November I had the honour of leading my committee to give evidence to a committee in Stormont. The committee in question is chaired by Donovan McClelland, who is here today as a new Member. At least four Unionist members attended the meeting, asked difficult questions and participated fully in the discussion. A Stormont committee, including a Unionist member, has also visited our Committee of Public Accounts. There are indications Assembly members are beginning to regard themselves as parliamentarians in a wider sense than one would have thought heretofore.

Considerable progress has been achieved in recent years. The cease-fires were a major breakthrough, and have brought about a wonderful change in the quality of life for people in all communities. The Agreement was the culmination of many years' work by both Governments, the pro-agreement parties, and, indeed, this Body, which provided considerable positive input on occasion. The establishment of the institutions allows the people to take decisions at local level and to operate normally through locally elected representatives. The programme for government and the first devolved budget are a huge step forward for the communities. The development of North-South co-operation by the North-South Ministerial Council is

recognised as being significant in all communities, North and South. The British-Irish Council is also doing great work.

In formally moving this motion, I urge this Body, especially considering its extended membership since yesterday morning, to continue to be a positive influence in supporting the work of the two Governments. We should urge the pro-Agreement parties to redouble their efforts to resolve outstanding issues.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I thank Deputy Killeen for his comprehensive, encouraging and reassuring report on parliamentary contacts. This Body may well take on board his final comments that this expanded Body now has the potential to be more significant than ever.

Mr Peter Temple-Morris TD (Leominster): I am flattered to be called so early in the debate. I was hoping to sit and listen to others and to make my speech up as we all went along. I thank Tony for his opening which was admirable and, coming straight to the point, I mainly want to talk about the problems of the moment which I deem very serious, in particular of course, decommissioning and demilitarisation on the one hand and policing on the other.

It seems that this week, in the words of the Taoiseach and others, is absolutely crucial. We have a British general election increasingly imminent and it is not just a question of us being absorbed in that election, which will obviously be the case, but it is the effect that a general election traditionally has in Northern Ireland. We all know that they tend to become much more rigid and inflexible whenever they have to face the electorate. We have the added difficulty that on each end of the spectrum we have somebody riding shotgun. In other words the SDLP is extremely limited in its room for manoeuvre because of the presence of Sinn Féin, and on the Unionist side there is a clear division which tends to make the Ulster Unionist Party, the officials if you like, more rigid.

This combination of the general election and the vulnerability of parties to divisions is very dangerous. Whilst it would be easy to say, as some do, that the process should be put on ice, that we should mark time, go through the general election and come back just as if nothing had happened, to my mind things are far too sensitive. Those who are being inflexible at the moment have to wake up to the fact that after the election, with all the pledges and the questioning it will lead to, the peace process might be very difficult to reinstate.

I wish to address the republicans and Nationalists here directly because - and I do not want to put Barry McElduff over there in the dock - one of the values of this Body is that we have Sinn Féin here to answer as we have had the SDLP for some years. To establish my credibility, in my former political party I was hardly the pin-up of the year when I publicly agreed to meet Adams. I was the first Conservative to do so and I had a number of private meetings with him, as well as with Martin McGuinness, in the cause of peace. I believe that helped to open doors and aided progress. Obviously, I was not the only one so engaged, but I was one of very few

Conservatives. Kevin McNamara and I had various meetings when I was still a Conservative so he knows exactly what I am talking about.

With that hopeful credibility I say that Sinn Féin is being far too inflexible at the moment and you have got to answer for your party. You seem to be behaving as if it is all there, that you can demand whatever you like, that you cannot lose and that somehow or other the process will go on in spite of these demands. You have got to wake up to the fact that if you go on with the inflexibility being shown at present there will come a time when the Unionist leadership, which is under very considerable strain at the moment, will not be there for you to deal with. Indeed, there will be nobody there that will deal. That is the importance of and danger of the scenario and you have to deal with it.

In this context I separate the issue of decommissioning from policing. My appeal to Sinn Féin is that on the policing issue you can certainly do business.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Peter, I am reluctant to intervene, not in terms of the content or substance of what you are saying, but to remind your good self, who is more experienced than I am, that your remarks here should be addressed through the Chair.

Mr Temple-Morris: I am sorry. I got quite carried away with the intimacy of the room and the occasion and I accept that it is a much better procedure for debate to go through the chair removing the contact of direct address. I do apologise to the Chair for that but you will appreciate the appeal I make and the reasons for it. I was just saying that Sinn Féin can do business on policing even if they claim they cannot on decommissioning.

I appreciate the position of the SDLP. Their hands are, to a certain extent, tied behind their backs. They are under electoral threat and possibly in electoral difficulty. They have been the initiator of this process in many respects and it is very brave. I salute John Hume and Seamus Mallon, bearing in mind that they initiated that which may not in the long term be of political benefit to them. Following the brave gesture of the initiation all those years ago of a process that is now some way down the road, I think it is again time for the SDLP to show leadership. There was an excellent leader which some here might have read, in *The Irish Times* last Friday entitled Going For It On Policing, which really said it all for me. It is time for the SDLP to go for it and if Sinn Féin wants to remain inflexible and rigid they will, in Nationalist terms, be on their own. It might also give the Irish Government a bit more room for manoeuvre.

On decommissioning, and the putting of weapons beyond use, we are too far down the road not to have had some progress. In the past I have been someone who has written down, if not off, decommissioning because it was being deliberately used by various elements, not all of whom were Unionists, as an obstacle to progress. Demands for decommissioning were going on and on and on. We have now made progress. We are down the road and that issue cannot now be ignored. It cannot be

shoved aside and put there with the claim that in Irish historical terms there has never been decommissioning, that the guns are not being used and will rust. We are in a very real political situation here and there is one party to this process that cannot move, and indeed will deteriorate *vis-à-vis* the process, unless they have something given to them. I am directly talking here about the Unionists.

It seems to me that for the IRA to not even engage officially with General de Chastelain is really way out. They should do that. They are engaged in formulae of words about what they might do, but to not even engage and to keep that commission doing nothing is really not good enough. It is small wonder that on the other side of the political fence there is difficulty. We have made some progress on demilitarisation and I put on the record here that, in regard to security, we have got the lowest troop levels since 1970 with 3,500 soldiers having left since the cease-fire. One hundred and two cross-Border roads have been opened, 32 security bases have been closed and eight out of 12 police divisions patrol without the routine support of troops. All that has been done thus far, forgive me for reading it from the brief but it should be said.

We dealt with this yesterday at question time and it has to be appreciated here that there are very real threats. We have not had any decommissioning and there are IRA dissidents around who are extremely unpleasant and potentially very violent people. It has only been by the close security co-operation of the governments, and those that work with them and for them, that a number of potentially very nasty incidents have recently been prevented. Thank God for that. We also have the question of sectarianism, a form of ugliness which has already been ably referred to.

So much for decommissioning and the demilitarisation, there are difficulties here which should be appreciated but above all we have to deal in practical terms with how quickly we can get the military out. We would dearly love to get the military out but it would help, just a little bit, if there were some gesture on decommissioning which led to a programme of decommissioning which would give confidence to all concerned. It has to start somewhere but we have not even had a gesture, let alone the offer of a programme. I would include in decommissioning the putting beyond use.

On the policing front we are now getting down the road. The recruitment drive has already started and indeed on television various attractive young ladies are presenting themselves in nice items of clothing which turn into police uniforms. I have not seen the particular advertisement. We are getting underway with it and, yet, the SDLP, in particular, has not even said it is prepared to nominate to the policing board. I believe they are going to take some action on this.

With regard to Patten, I served on the standing committee of the Police Bill, as did others here. I have no hesitation in saying it follows the thrust of Patten and, indeed, Patten himself said so. For those on the Nationalist side, to treat the Patten report as having a status of some vestal virgin that can never, to the least extent, be touched or interfered with, is not practical politics. Any official or Government report is a

starting point. In terms of dealing with all the parties, let alone the standing committee, there had to be a spirit of compromise. It was vital on that standing committee that the Unionists were kept on board as well as Seamus Mallon and his particular views. At the moment he has been very rigid. All of us know and like him dearly and admire him but on this particular issue he has been more rigid than ever I have seen him before. What was achieved on—

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): I am reluctant to intervene for obvious reasons but there are three or more speakers.

Mr Temple-Morris: In that case I will wind up straight away. I was letting go because you did not seem to have any speakers. With regard to giving way on the Bill, we produced a situation, to which I was party, where Ken Maginnis actually moved the amendment, which was agreed by the Government, which has given the name of the Policing Service of Northern Ireland. What more can we accomplish than that in terms of getting that particular amendment from that source. It is a delicate balancing act but I believe we have done the best that any Government can.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Thank you. I did not indicate any time limit at the introduction of this debate. If I do not indicate a time limit, it does not exist. The normal practice is allow four to five minutes but in any event we still have enough time. I appreciate your particular observations and your commitment in this area for some considerable time. If there are some others who wish to speak I suggest they indicate now. The next speaker is Senator Pascal Mooney to be followed by Mr Stephen O'Brien.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I compliment Dr Goodman on his somewhat shocking report which outlines the deep sectarianism that exists in Northern Ireland society. I believe I am not being partisan in praising the considerable restraint shown by the Nationalist people of Northern Ireland in the face of the outrageous attacks on their homes and property. It is one-sided. Even Unionists who have legitimately called for an end to this - I applaud their initiative - have conceded that the overwhelming majority of pipe-bomb attacks have been inflicted on the Catholic side. No less a personage than the Rev Ian Paisley in an RTE interview last Sunday conceded as much. Therefore, I am not being partisan in saying I praise their considerable restraint. I hope this process will end in a situation where we would not have to listen to this catalogue of horrors coming from a section of civilised society.

Our British colleagues have been at the coalface listening to Unionists views of all shades and opinions in the House of Commons. We have not; we have been somewhat inured from it. We do not often get the opportunity of meeting them face to face and certainly not in the bear pit of political debate. As you can gather from the various comments made by speakers here this morning there are still strands of Unionism who even refuse to discuss very basic issues of common interest to this Body. It sounds like being somewhat pessimistic but it shows the importance of the two Governments continuing efforts to reach agreement on the issues dividing the two sides in Northern Ireland.

On policing, I hope the British Government will accept the need for independent appeals procedures and for independent inquiries. Those of us who know by instinct how Nationalists feel about the police force in Northern Ireland can only watch with mounting concern that there does not seem to be a reciprocal view on the British side that there should be independent appeals procedures and public inquiries into the murders of Pat Finucane, Pat Hamill and all the others who have been killed allegedly due to collusion with security forces in the North. I hope that stumbling block will be removed.

I agree with what the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform said yesterday about the need for continuing demilitarisation, notwithstanding—

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Just an observation, some of my colleagues are not receiving you loud and clear. I can hear you clearly and the argument is clearly presented but some of my colleagues cannot hear you.

Senator Mooney: I was about to say that I agree with what Mr Temple-Morris said in terms of the statistics he outlined about demilitarisation. I endorse the views expressed by the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform yesterday that, particularly in south Armagh and in areas of sensitivity where there are strong Nationalist populations, there is a need on the British side to understand the sensitivities involved here and, most definitely, there is a need to review the whole area of demilitarisation, notwithstanding what has been done. I do not want to detract from what the British Government has done in this regard but it is counterproductive and is feeding on the attitudes and, sometimes, bitterness that has been generated over decades by the presence of high military apparatus. Notwithstanding that I agree also with what Mr Temple-Morris said that Sinn Féin has a responsibility in this regard and I will be interested to hear what our colleague, Mr Barry McElduff, has to say in response to this debate.

The two Governments, however they can do it, should continue to provide a boost to pro-Agreement candidates in the forthcoming elections to the Westminster Parliament. It is vital that the pro-Agreement side on both sides of the political divide in the North are given as much support as possible. It is not in the best interests of Northern Ireland or of the continuing relations between these two islands that there is a shift to anti-Agreement candidates following the calling of the next British general election.

I welcome what Deputy Killeen said about the links with the Northern Ireland Assembly. It is vital that there is a continuing link between the Northern and Southern Parliaments and we need to continue talking to each other. I hope the various house committees will continue to do their good work and that those on our side would follow up on the initiative from Deputy Killeen's committee and arrange visits with the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The matter I am about to raise is not a new issue and I have raised it by way of questions. I recall when Mo Mowlam was Northern Ireland Secretary. This may seem

to be outside the political arena but I strongly believe that for the vast majority of people on this island there is a need for further co-operation over a wide variety of social and other links. It is not just about politicians and the two parliaments, or about the prime ministers meeting in summit but about what happens on the ground and how ordinary people going about their daily lives can interact and relate. In that context there should be enhanced sporting links between North and South, specifically soccer. Of all the sports that operate on this island soccer is the most riven with sectarianism. All the other sports have arrived at and achieved a consensus.

We have often heard about leading Unionists who are happy and proud to turn up at Lansdowne Road to cheer on the Ireland rugby team. I have no doubt if the game goes ahead on Saturday there will be many of the Unionist persuasion who will do exactly that. They have no difficulty about it. It happens right across every major sport one can think of. This country is united with the exception of what is the people's game - the one that attracts the greatest publicity and the greatest hype. One cannot turn on the television without being confronted with it. Without wishing to labour the point, there is a need now that the Northern Ireland Assembly is in place and in the context of the house committees, and Mo Mowlam expressed the view that some initiatives should come from the elected politicians in the Northern Ireland Assembly initially to try to instigate stronger sporting links, specifically in the area of soccer, and to eliminate the virulent sectarianism that is present in Windsor Park. It is unlikely that there are any Catholics who support the Northern Ireland soccer team. That is sad but it is a fact.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): We have to hear from four more speakers before I call on Michael Mates to conclude at 11.45 a.m. I just want members to be aware of that. The next speakers are Stephen O'Brien, Carmel Hanna and then Barry McElduff.

Mr Stephen O'Brien MP (Eddisbury): Thank you, Co-Chairman. I will try to keep my points brief. As this is my first time to be a member of the Body, I am grateful to have an opportunity to contribute to this important aspect of our deliberations.

Focusing on the sentence at the end of the motion, that we continue to support the Irish and British Governments in their efforts to achieve this goal, I would like to take a different angle. As the Body which is seeking to articulate what is common and aspirant between our two parts of the British Isles, perhaps we should seek to raise our sights in line with what I believe to be the enormous pent-up demand waiting to be released in the north of the island. I say that against a background of having been involved in business in the North and trading across the 32 counties of Ireland before I entered politics. From the time I first started that involvement during the troubles, I will never forget the relief, not necessarily the happiness, on the faces of those who worked in the factories for which I was responsible when the first cease-fire, but more particularly the second, was declared. That relief was not so much for themselves but for the knowledge that their wives were able to get on and off buses

in Belfast without sheer fear. That is something we all prize and it is something which is tangible about the peace.

Noting that the economic position of the broad GDP but also the individuals and families in the North are relatively less prosperous than mainland UK and, indeed, over more recent years, in relative comparison to the success of the Republic, we have to focus on ways to stimulate the economic opportunities in the North. That pent-up demand is waiting to be released. It is the ultimate dividend of peace that people in a free world have access to free markets and opportunities, and that would cement the peace above all else. It would also help many to believe that they have much more to lose by a return to or a persistence of violence, in association with the ghastly men of violence, if they have economic prosperity compared to what they have today.

In pushing this angle of the argument, which I hope would further marginalise those who depend upon their power through the ghastly underworld of racketeering and extortion, I ask that this Body send a very loud message that the re-establishment and the celebration of local politics to deal with local services and issues is to be welcomed and encouraged. Above all, we should seek to find ways to do that and, perhaps, it would be appropriate for this Body to call for a proper, wide-ranging, all-party inquiry as to how we could find the appropriate economic stimuli for releasing that pent-up demand in Northern Ireland focused upon enterprise and entrepreneurship and not upon subsidies, grants and condescending aspects of financial support. We should seek to engage in participation of the private banking and finance mechanisms and funds that could give a certain degree of expectation of return on their investment over time which is more extended than, say, the normal venture capital funds one would be accustomed to in Dublin or the City of London. Those are areas where we could seek to make an improvement to help raise sights and improve lives. It would be both cross-Border and cross-community focused. That can only be for the good of the people and this Body could have a real added-value in laying emphasis on the earnestness of what we mean by this motion.

I have just been given a note that I have to leave to deal with a constituency matter so I hope you will forgive me, Co-Chairman, and not think me discourteous if I do not hear all the other speakers but I will return as soon as I can. I am grateful for the chance to make this contribution.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): Whatever the constituency problem, always blame the last Government.

Mr O'Brien: There we agree to differ.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): You will probably observe that many of our colleagues are attending to constituency problems this morning, either in the vicinity of the hotel or even closer to their constituencies.

We now have to hear from four speakers before Michael Mates is called upon to conclude so we will have to adhere, by and large, to the four minute time restriction. I call Carmel Hanna and after that we will hear from Brian O'Shea.

Ms Carmel Hanna MLA (South Belfast): As part of the extended membership referred to by the mover of the motion and as a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, I want to contribute on behalf of the SDLP.

I am sure when this motion was drafted it may have been anticipated that more progress would have been made at this stage than has actually been the case. In spite of intensive negotiations and much hard work, we have not got the breakthrough but there is a feeling in the North that this week is absolutely crucial.

The SDLP has supported the Patten report from day one. We have never changed our position on that. We want to see Patten fully implemented but we know if it is not implemented, our constituency certainly will not go for it and it will not work but we are not looking over our shoulders at Sinn Féin. We are representing our constituency. It is essential that the outstanding matters of decommissioning, demilitarisation, policing and the integrity of the institutions must be resolved before the British general election is called.

I support the proposal for round table talks of all the pro-Agreement parties. All these matters should be resolved together and I agree with Senator Mitchell that having made the Good Friday Agreement, it would be unthinkable to let it fall due to lack of implementation.

The SDLP has invested more in the Good Friday Agreement than any other party and, as far as we are concerned, policing is the major outstanding issue for us. We will take whatever steps are necessary to see the full implementation. We hope that all the pro-Agreement parties can reach consensus. Hard decisions will have to be made but I hope that the SDLP, a party committed to solely peaceful means, will not have to fight the general election on a platform of non-achievement and without the political breakthrough. More importantly, we in the SDLP will continue to make decisions in our own best interests and in the interests of the people we represent.

Mr Brian O'Shea TD (Waterford): There is general agreement that the pre-election paralysis in terms of forward movement is setting in and, as Carmel Hanna said, this is a critical week. I do not know how much progress we can anticipate between now and the forthcoming British election.

The various issues such as demilitarisation, decommissioning and policing have been dealt with but I want to make one brief point. I tabled a question to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform on this matter yesterday but it was not reached. I find it alarming that since the beginning of the year and up to 4 February, there were 23 loyalist and 15 republican punishment attacks, as they are described here, making a total of 38. Last year, the comparable figures were 163 loyalist punishment attacks and 103 republican attacks, which is significantly up on the figures for 1999. If one

multiplies 38 by 12, that is around 450 which is a considerable increase on last year. Obviously, the resolution of the policing issue will have some bearing on this area but this type of activity is taking place during an alleged cease-fire. People are being attacked and mutilated at an unacceptable level. Any level is unacceptable but this is a very high level. I urge our colleagues from Northern Ireland, and indeed the Body, to seek to bring these barbaric beatings to an end. We lose sight of them when we look at the bigger picture. However, it is affecting people in the areas that are experiencing difficulties. A parallel system of crude justice is in operation and that is totally unacceptable in a democratic society.

Lord Dubs: How long can Mr David Trimble survive? How much effort should the Governments and other parties put into helping him survive? Should we decide to forget it because we cannot keep bailing him out? When I put it to Nationalists and republicans that the process would be lost if Mr David Trimble goes - I believe that would be the case - they ask how long we can go on appeasing him. Given the alternative, the answer is that we must continue helping Mr Trimble to stay in place. I shudder for the future of the process if Mr David Trimble does not stay on. Given the forces assembling against him in the coming election, he is in serious difficulty. His parliamentary party in Westminster is almost entirely against him any way, so changing one anti-Agreement Member of Parliament at Westminster for another will not make that much difference except in a psychological sense. I fear Mr Trimble may not even be able to hang on in his current position until the election and that is serious.

I know how difficult the Unionists have found the policing changes. I do not wish to enter the argument about how far away the Government's proposals are from the Patten report. My view is that they are relatively close to the Patten report, but the Government's margin for manoeuvre on policing has been almost zero given the pressures from the other direction. I always said it was more difficult talking to Unionists about policing changes than the RUC. It appears much more relaxed and flexible about them than some Unionist politicians who are making more of an issue of them. Nevertheless, the Government has moved enormously regarding the policing proposals. I hope it would not take much more effort to bring the SDLP on board. Things could then change very dramatically for the better.

The problem I sense is that the UUP lacks self-confidence in a big way. Some of its actions are based on its lack of self-confidence and the feeling that it is beleaguered. I am not attempting to defend it because I am as critical as anybody else about many of the things it does. However, it lacks self-confidence. Given that any alternative to Mr Trimble would be disastrous at present, the name of the game must be what can be done to ensure he stays on as leader and the Agreement continues in place. However, I am not optimistic at present.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA (West Tyrone): I wish to remind everybody present of the republican commitment to the Good Friday Agreement. Irish Nationalists and republicans are wedded to the Good Friday Agreement. Unfortunately, there are

some exceptions, but a significant body of republicans is wedded to the Agreement. This is a considerable achievement in itself and it is important to make this point.

If one revisits the arrangements reached last May to get over the difficulty of the collapse of the political institutions, Sinn Féin's direct understanding of that deal was that the Patten report would be revisited and would not be diluted. There was to be an absolute return to the Patten report. In relation to policing, my personal experience of the RUC, and the experience of our community, has been extremely bad from the start. When I was studying at Omagh Christian Brothers grammar school, I came between first and seventh in nine subjects in one particular year and played Gaelic football for the school team. However, I found myself in Goff barracks that year receiving lectures rather than questions from morning to night about how inferior we were as a people. Eight detectives in four teams of two told me that Gaelic football was inferior to soccer and that Catholics were inferior to Protestants. I was told Carrickmore was inferior to Omagh and all our teachers were perverts. This is the upbringing we had regarding the RUC. If one lived in Donaghadee in County Down, one would not think that happened. However, there is a completely different perception of the same thing a few miles away.

The Patten report was a compromise. When Sinn Féin initially looked at the report, we did not jump up and down with delight because this crucial issue would be resolved adequately. However, with time and in the spirit of compromise, we began to look seriously at the contents of the Patten report and acknowledge that the commission did much work. A comprehensive programme of demilitarisation was promised and it was to be accelerated and delivered in line with moves towards normalisation. Everybody's understanding was that this package for moving forward would include the Patten reforms, demilitarisation and movement on arms.

However, Sinn Féin Ministers were treated as less than equals when they were debarred from attending the North-South Ministerial Council. The two Governments did not intervene to ensure the integrity of all the institutions, including the Assembly. The crucial element that attracted our interest and support was the all-Ireland dimension and we do not apologise for pushing the all-Ireland agenda. The legal challenge from Sinn Féin was successful, but phrases such as "Sinn Féin are in detention" were bandied about. It reminded me of the beginning of the process when Sinn Féin was supposed to have been put in political quarantine for a few months. This less than equal treatment is not acceptable to Sinn Féin.

We want a police service and we want to be policed. It is a crucial cornerstone of the whole process. The Good Friday Agreement, which I keep to hand because it needs to be constantly revisited and reread, envisaged a new beginning to policing. We felt the Patten report was close to a new beginning, but the Mandelson Bill was not close to it. Mr Clifford Shearing, one of the members of the Patten commission, wrote the following in the *Guardian*:

"The core elements of the Patten commission's report have been undermined everywhere... The Patten report has not been cherry-picked - it has been gutted."

This was the view of one of the Patten commissioners. We have been well supported by the Irish Government on this matter because it understands the difficulties Northern Nationalists have in this respect. We must get it right. Ms Hanna is correct in her analysis of the importance of getting it right and, if necessary, waiting longer. The current offer on the table will not be the last word in the policing debate because it is too important an issue for people to rush for the sake of it. It might involve more waiting, but that is fine.

I speak about demilitarisation from a republican perspective and it is happening at a snail's pace. We feel the British army will not allow the British Government to make progressive moves and that the "securocrats" are in charge. Radical change is required in this respect. The figures show the number of British army and RUC fortified barracks in rural and urban locations in counties Armagh, Fermanagh and Tyrone. Even if one takes it from the perspective of a farmer in South Armagh, more than 40,000 livestock have been killed since 1994 as a result of low flying helicopters. There are over 3,000 British troops and RUC personnel in the South Armagh area - one member of the British forces for every eight citizens.

What is the position regarding the equality agenda? Our Irish national identity must be legislated for and reflected institutionally. It was difficult for us as Irish republicans going to the Stormont Assembly, given the history of that institution where in its entire history Nationalists succeeded in passing one Bill, which I think was about wildfowl shooting.

Mr Austin Currie TD (Dublin West): The Wild Birds Act 1949.

Mr McElduff: I thank the Deputy. On flags and emblems, we reasonably expect - again, this is a compromise - that just as today outside this building there is the Irish national flag and Union flag to reflect what is happening in this room, similarly we believe that the flags and symbols must be treated equally at the Assembly and at all Government institutions and buildings in the North.

The Irish language must be resolutely promoted. It is illegal to have the Irish language on road signs in the Six Counties. TG4 has not been extended to all parts of the North.

The skewing of public resources to target the social need and to remove the unemployment differential between Catholics and Protestants has not been put on a statutory basis. There is an absence of timetables to eliminate the under representation of Catholics in senior grades in the civil service and the whole judicial area has yet to be adequately addressed.

I respect the contribution here of Mr Temple-Morris. I respect the effort which he and others have made in this process. We are accused of inflexibility. I suggest that we are very determined about "absolute equality" in society, not just equal opportunity.

There is a deep sense of frustration at the failure of the two Governments, and particularly the British Government, to implement fully the Good Friday Agreement in every respect. Irrespective of the difficulties, Sinn Féin pledges its commitment. We are in it for the long haul. We are committed to the peace process. We will not lower our expectations for anything less than full equality but we would call on the two Governments to act as guarantors of the Good Friday Agreement. They are participants and parties to the Agreement, not referees.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Go raibh maith agat, Barry. Now Michael Mates will conclude.

Mr Michael Mates MP (East Hampshire): How good it is to have, albeit from a narrow point of view, a constructive contribution from someone from Sinn Féin at this Body. I only wish that there had been a Unionist here to listen to Barry put his points as he did, in a calm and, in his view, reasonable way in order that we could have had a response from a Unionist in the same tone of voice. If we have got halfway there in this Body, my prayer would be that before too long we will have some Unionists here. Those of us who are spectators rather than participants at the coalface in Northern Ireland can hear both sides of this debate. It will not surprise the Body to hear that I did not agree with everything Mr McElduff said, but I thought that his contribution was made in a spirit of wanting to get a point of view across in a reasonable way, and I congratulate him for that.

It has been a low-key debate. Normally people are queuing up to take part. It has been highlighted, first, by the question of policing, second, the vexed question of a British general election, which I want to cover briefly, and then the intransigence of one side or the other. It has been interesting to hear Mr Peter Temple-Morris MP saying that it is Sinn Féin and the SDLP who are being intransigent and Senator Paschal Mooney saying that it is the Unionists who are being intransigent, and no doubt they can continue this argument in the bar afterwards, but it is quite clear that there is a feeling on both sides of this argument that the other side is being more inflexible.

There is only one thing I want to say about the British general election, that is, that they are bad for attempts to make peace in Northern Ireland. One only need remember what happened when the miners' strike caused Ted Heath to go to the country in February 1974, just as the Sunningdale Agreement was bedding down and the Executive was starting to work and, lo and behold, the tribes went back into their trenches and the extremists prevailed. I hope that does not happen if we come to a British general election shortly. Perhaps the best news of all is that this foot and mouth disaster has more or less ruled out a general election in April. If this is a crucial time, as the Minister told us it was yesterday, it will at least provide time for

reflection on that and we will not be thrown straight into a general election before everybody has been able to digest whatever, if anything, the political leaders can come up with this week.

I agree with most of what Peter Temple-Morris had to say about policing. Somebody must take the plunge over this. Whether it is the SDLP or Sinn Féin, neither party can sit on a position that if they do not get everything they want, then all bets are off. That is the way some Unionists have been behaving over the years over the issue and the pressure of events has caused them to move. One either wants to have a police service which will start to give one some of the things one needs or one will continue with a police service which one, as they say, despises and fears.

It is absolutely wrong of Barry McElduff to say that it is linked with demilitarisation. Nothing would be better from a British defence point of view than to be able to remove our soldiers from Northern Ireland. The regiment in which I served is now sending people to Bosnia for the third time in a year. It is having an effect on the families and on recruitment. It is very damaging indeed to the British defence policy and the way the British army is able to deploy itself. If we could take 3,000 or 4,000 people back from Northern Ireland, the relief which would be felt throughout the British military would be palpable. Therefore, he should not blame the military for wanting to stay. The day they can go will be a very happy day for them but of course what is making them stay is not the desire of British "securocrats", if I remember correctly the phrase Mr McElduff used, but the fact that the Chief Constable and the Government do not believe life will be safe with a lower level of military presence and military help to the police. The only reason he finds it so much more offensive in south Armagh than anywhere else is that the RUC cannot patrol in south Armagh without a military escort because they will be killed, and they have been killed. They live in fortified barracks in order not to get bombed and mortared as has happened in the past.

All of us of course then do come around to the one thing which Mr McElduff did not mention, that is, decommissioning. I wonder why he did not mention it. It is sad that he did not mention it because I would like to know whether he is in favour of it happening, if he thinks there should be a start made now and whether he thinks that is an aspect of procrastination which perhaps has caused all of the problems, to which others, and Lord Dubs, in particular, were referring, about the position of Mr Trimble and the Unionists. I strongly believe that if there was a start made to decommissioning, the job of Sinn Féin and the SDLP would be so much easier. The Unionists would not have a leg to stand on about agreeing to all of the things on which they are holding off - the agreements - if the IRA was putting the arms beyond use. When that happens a whole number of consequences will flow from it, but it is not happening.

If I was in charge of the IRA, I would not be handing in the weapons either because I would be getting 90 per cent of what I wanted without doing so. When the Good Friday Agreement, with which Mr McElduff has made great play, was produced, both Governments said, "here is the way forward. There must be parallel movement." The

overwhelming Unionist support for it in the referendum was on Mr Tony Blair's direct promise that there would be parallel movement. As almost everybody sees it, there is no parallel movement and that is really the problem. The moves made towards implementing the Agreement have almost all been on one side. The prisoners have all been released and, had I had responsibility for it, I do not know if I would have approved their being released unless I had received a response. If I was head of the IRA, I would be saying, "why should we surrender our weapons? We have our boys back, many things are being done and the police services, and its name, is being changed. I will wait a little longer and further developments will occur." That is what has caused the huge lack of confidence among members of the Unionist community.

I do not hold a brief for Mr Trimble. However, I will say that he has struggled to hold his party together. If he does not receive assistance in the area of decommissioning, he is unlikely to survive because in a general election the hard-liners will emerge as they did in 1974 when Dr Paisley rode rampant over the process and destroyed everything that had been achieved. I do not want to see that happen and, therefore, Barry McElduff should use whatever influence he has to ensure that the process of decommissioning commences. If steps can be taken to do this, the results will be startlingly good for the peace process, for moderate Unionism and for Sinn Féin and the SDLP.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): That brings to a conclusion what has been a comprehensive, reasoned, balanced and tolerant discussion which was consistent with the practices and principles of this Body.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body takes note of recent political developments in Northern Ireland; calls on all of the pro-Agreement political parties to redouble their efforts towards the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement; and continues to support the Irish and British Governments in their efforts to achieve this goal.

Mr David Winnick took the Chair as Chairman .

4. FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): I move:

That the Body take note of the Fifth Annual Report of the Body.

In May 1996 it was suggested that the Body should make an annual report. The Fifth Annual Report is a factual document which gives details of the meetings the Body has held in the past year and the record of attendance at those meetings and provides information on the meetings of Committees A, B, C and D. However, if any

member wishes to make a contribution in respect of it they should indicate their intention to do so now. No response? Then I will put the question.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the Fifth Annual Report of the Body.[Doc. No. 79].

5. ADJOURNMENT

The Co-Chairman (Mr Winnick): That brings us to the Adjournment. I call on Kevin McNamara, who normally does a good job of moving the Adjournment, to do so again.

Last night, Michael O'Kennedy referred to those who will be retiring from the body when and if an election is called in the United Kingdom. They are: Peter Brooke, Maria Fyfe - who, unfortunately, is not present due to illness - Norman Godman and Peter Temple-Morris. I will not say anything about these four individuals because my Co-Chair made some very appropriate remarks about them last night. All four have made an immense contribution to the work of the Body and we are extremely grateful to them for that: and I propose that our appreciation should be recorded in the Minutes of the Body.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy resumed the Chair.

Mr Kevin McNamara (*Kingston upon Hull North*): I move:

That the Body do now adjourn.

The first occasion on which I was obliged to perform this task was at a charming Fawlty Towers-like hotel in York and I had to apologise profusely for what happened there. The problem with staying in Irish hotels as guests of the Irish delegation is that the quality of the establishments, the charm of the staff and the greatness of the food are such that words are not sufficient to pay them justice. Every time we stay at a different hotel, the standards seem to be even higher. I do not know how we will match our Irish counterparts when our next meeting is held, either in Bournemouth or Manchester. However, we are grateful for the hospitality we have been shown.

On behalf of all Members, I wish to thank the staff of the hotel for their charm and courtesy. They were always around and always helpful, without ever being in the way. I also wish to thank those who took part in organising the meeting - particularly the staff on the Irish side who did a great deal of work - and the members of the Garda Síochána who provide us with protection, mostly from ourselves rather than from any perceived enemy.

I was going to complain about a particular matter but I am no longer in a position to do so. Jean Corston and I were trying to arrange for an e-mail to be sent to the Chief Whip stating that we were snowbound, that we would not be able to return to

Westminster for a week but that if Gordon Brown was polite we might try to get back in time for the Budget. When I woke this morning, the snow had disappeared but I understand that Cork Airport is still closed. I must inform my colleagues that if there is a fight for seats on the plane, I am prepared to hold back. Indeed, I am sure the British Members would all be fighting to remain behind.

We have had a very good conference. Yesterday's meeting was quite outstanding, particularly in terms of welcoming our new colleagues because the Body, as we know it, has changed irretrievably into something which, I hope, will be different, better and more all-embracing. Whatever happens during the coming week and whatever happens in the North, there will still be a body containing all the other devolved institutions. However, I hope representatives from the Northern Ireland Assembly will always serve as Members of this Body. Despite the difficulties everyone is facing this week in the negotiations, everyone hopes that on the next occasion we hold a plenary session we will have with us the existing representatives from the Northern Assembly and some of their Unionist colleagues.

I ought to mention that representatives of the Alliance Party have been in attendance in the past. The Alliance Party is a Unionist Party, allied with the British Liberals which, perhaps, explains why it has so many problems at present.

This has been a very successful conference and I extend our congratulations to everyone involved. I wish to pay particular tribute to Mr Mike Burns who has appeared, completely dressed and alert, despite not having been to bed for the past 72 hours. I thank him and his colleagues in the press for the coverage they have given to this meeting.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Body do now adjourn.

The Session concluded at 12 noon.

QUESTIONS RECEIVING A WRITTEN ANSWER

To ask the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Homeless Irish in London

Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD (Kerry North): Whether both Governments should draw up a programme of action to support the homeless Irish in London, following the recent publication of a survey which showed that 50 per cent of those sleeping rough in London are Irish.

Minister O'Donoghue: The Irish Government is concerned by the continuing extent of homelessness and housing need within the Irish community in London. Despite the real reductions in the numbers of young people leaving Ireland for London, there is ample evidence that homelessness still affects a disproportionate number of Irish

people, both among the newly arrived and among the older Irish in London. The Government, through the Embassy, maintains close links with Irish organisations and frontline agencies providing services to the disadvantaged members of our community in Britain, including those in insecure and temporary accommodation as well as those sleeping on the streets.

I understand that there were media reports late last year to the effect that "more than 60% of London's homeless are Irish". Every six months the Simon Community counts the homeless people sleeping rough on the streets of London. Its latest survey on 11 November, 2000 found that there were 316 such people in the inner London boroughs of Camden, City of London, Haringey, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster. What is significant is that the nationalities of the people were not recorded and the reports in the media were based on an uncorroborated statement about the count made by a member of the Simon Community. The Director of the Simon Community in Britain has since informed the Irish Embassy in London that, in his view, it would be more accurate to say that at least one-third of the homeless people in inner London are Irish. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the Housing Services Agency, a body which provides resettlement services for homeless people in London, published statistics to the effect that 11% of people sleeping on the streets of Greater London were Irish. Whichever figure is correct, it is a cause for concern.

The particular social and health problems of Irish people in Britain are receiving special attention from the Interdepartmental Committee on Emigration. Irish and British officials are considering the possibility of special action, in the context of combating social exclusion, to address those problems, including homelessness.

The Irish Government is committed to taking further steps to tackle the problem of homelessness among recently arrived Irish immigrants in Britain, especially in London. Through the Díon Committee, based at the Irish Embassy in London, the Irish Government has this year allocated in excess of £2 million for grants to voluntary Irish organisations in Britain which advise and assist young people there, including groups which care for homeless Irish people. This represents an increase of 100% on the allocation in 2000, which itself was an increase of over one-third on the 1999 figure.

Commercial fishing and the Common Fisheries Policy

Dr Norman A Godman MP (Greenock and Inverclyde): If the British-Irish Council has at any time discussed matters relating to commercial fishing and the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy.

Minister O'Donoghue: The British-Irish Council has not discussed matters related to commercial fishing or the European Union's Common Fisheries Policy.

Under the Good Friday Agreement, the British-Irish Council "will exchange information, discuss, consult and use best endeavours to reach agreement on matters of mutual interest with the competence of the relevant Administrations".

The first Summit meeting of the BIC, in London in December 1999, agreed an initial list of issues for early discussion within the Council (Drugs, Social Inclusion, Environment, Transport and the Knowledge Economy). The meeting also agreed an indicative list of other issues suitable for the Council's work. "Sea fisheries" was included in this list and may be discussed by the Council at a future date.

Human Rights Commission

Lord Dubs: What progress has been made by the Irish Government in setting up a Human Rights Commission as envisaged in the Belfast Agreement.

Minister O'Donoghue: The Government appointed Mr Justice Donal Barrington, former Judge of the Irish Supreme Court and of the European Court of First Instance, as President of the Commission last year. We then offered appointment as Ordinary Commissioners to 14 people.

All of these have now accepted appointment to the Commission. It had originally been the Government's intention to appoint only eight ordinary Commissioners but, following representations made to me and the Government, we accepted that by increasing the representation on the Commission it would be possible to enhance the objective of ensuring the fullest possible representation across the spectrum of Irish society. For that reason the Government decided to appoint an additional six people to the Commission.

The Human Rights Commission Act, 2000 will need slight amendment, principally to cover the increase in membership, and I hope to include the necessary changes in the forthcoming Bill to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law. However, there is no impediment to the Commission meeting as an interim body in the meantime. Indeed, I have been in contact with the President of the Commission in that regard and the first meeting of the Commission is scheduled for the 6th of March.

The Government is genuinely endeavouring to implement this part of the Good Friday Agreement, and it is my hope that the Commission which has a major task on hands that will be of considerable importance to Irish society for the future, will now be in a position to start its work.

Paramilitaries on the run and intimidation

Mr Harry Barnes MP (North East Derbyshire): If he will make a statement on the current situation concerning paramilitary members who are on the run and those who have been forced to relocate due to paramilitary intimidation.

Minister O'Donoghue: On 29th September 2000, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland announced that the British Government would no longer pursue the extradition of persons on the run who had been convicted of certain offences committed prior to the Good Friday Agreement and who would, by virtue of the accelerated release scheme under the Agreement, have little if any of their original sentence to serve were they to return to Northern Ireland. That decision affected cases where the UK had made a request to Ireland for extradition.

The plight of those who have been forced to leave their home areas as a result of paramilitary threats or intimidation is a cause of serious concern, and the Government condemns all such acts of violence and intimidation. The right to freely choose one's place of residence is recognised by the Good Friday Agreement and should apply to everyone equally. The right of those concerned to have the threats against them lifted and to return home is fully endorsed by the Government.

The British authorities have confirmed, through the British-Irish Secretariat, that no figures are maintained on the numbers of people actually forced to leave Northern Ireland. Given the nature of the problem, neither the groups involved in making the threats nor those who receive them are likely to make information on numbers available.

The Government continues to urge all those with influence on paramilitary groups both to ensure the safe return of those forced to leave Northern Ireland, and to bring this completely abhorrent practice to an end. Members of the Government have made this position clear on many occasions and will continue to do so.

Punishment beatings

Mr Michael Ring TD (Mayo): How many paramilitary-style assaults were reported in Northern Ireland in 1999 and 2000; and how many people have been prosecuted in relation to such assaults.

Minister O'Donoghue: I want to avail of this opportunity to reiterate where the Government stands on all acts of violence and intimidation, including punishment beatings, paramilitary 'exiling' and the continuing sectarian attacks - we condemn them utterly and unequivocally. Such acts are totally unacceptable.

Since the beginning of this year up to 4 February, there have been reports of 23 loyalist and 15 republican 'punishment attacks'. The corresponding figures for last year were 163 loyalist and 103 republican 'punishment' attacks. In 1999, there were 137 loyalist and 70 republican 'punishment' attacks. There are no figures available for prosecutions in relation to these attacks.

Punishment beatings have been a part of the violence which has scarred Northern Ireland over the past thirty years. It is right that society expects such beatings to end immediately, just as we expect an end to the violent sectarian attacks which have been taking place in recent months.

Conflict resolution and reconciliation in Northern Ireland

Senator Joe Costello: What initiatives have been taken at Government and community level towards conflict resolution and reconciliation in Northern Ireland; which organisations, bodies and groups which are being supported by the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Administration towards the promotion of peace and reconciliation; what sources of funding are available in both jurisdictions; and what systems are in place for accessing funding for the promotion of peace and reconciliation.

Minister O'Donoghue: As outlined in the Good Friday Agreement, the political parties in Northern Ireland and the two governments "recognise and value the work being done by many organisations to develop reconciliation and mutual understanding and respect between and within communities and traditions in Northern Ireland and between North and South." They see this work as having a vital role in consolidating peace and political agreement.

The two governments have given a commitment in the Good Friday Agreement to "positively examine the case for enhanced financial assistance for the work of reconciliation". As a consequence, on 27 April 1999, our government decided to increase the funding available for North-South Anglo-Irish Co-operation in the Department of Foreign Affairs from £250,000 to £2 million (an eight-fold increase on 1998).

This increase enabled the provision of grants to 78 organisations involved in a wide range of cross-community, educational, research and outreach activities last year. The Reconciliation Fund has been provided with an allocation of £2 million again in 2001, which will be used to continue assisting groups active in the field of peace and reconciliation.

In the context of EU Programmes, the Special EU Programmes Body an allisland implementation body established on 2nd December 1999 under the Good Friday Agreement has a central role. It will be the Managing Authority of the new PEACE II Programme and will chair the Monitoring Committee for the programme. PEACE II, the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland, is a distinctive European Union Structural Funds Programme which will assist Northern Ireland and the Border Region to address the legacy of the violence and troubles of the past 30 years and to take advantage of opportunities arising from the peace process. It will carry forward the work of PEACE I, the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (1995-1999), together with a new economic focus.

Threats by dissident groups to the Good Friday Agreement

Mr Brian Hayes TD (Dublin South West): What action, if any, his Government has taken to counter the threat which is currently posed by dissident republican and

other groups to the Good Friday Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Minister O'Donoghue: The Government is, of course, conscious of the threat which continues to be posed by dissident groups to the Good Friday Agreement. The Garda authorities continue to pursue persons who may pose a threat to the whole peace process and since the Good Friday Agreement twenty one such persons have been convicted before our courts.

In the aftermath of the Omagh bombing, the Oireachtas passed the Offences against the State (Amendment) Act 1998, the purpose of which was to provide the additional protections and powers needed to tackle the threat to the security of the State and the integrity of the peace process presented by certain dissident groups. Principally these amendments made changes in the rules of evidence in relation to the offence of membership of an unlawful organisation and, more generally, other offences under the Offences against the State Acts and scheduled offences. The Act also created new substantive offences and extended the maximum period of detention permitted under section 30 of the 1939 Act.

Contentious parades

Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD (Cavan/Monaghan): What progress, if any, has been made in addressing the Drumcree and other contentious parades in the coming summer.

Minister O'Donoghue: The Government has maintained a consistent approach to the issue of contentious parades based on mutual respect, dialogue, agreement and respect for the law, including the rights of local communities. We have stressed that the resolution of contentious parades lies through dialogue and local agreement.

We have also supported the Parades Commission in its often difficult work. The Commission was established in 1997 primarily to make determinations on contentious parades, failing local agreement. The first Commission placed emphasis on the need for direct dialogue between those wishing to march and local residents. Its successor, appointed in February 2000, has continued this policy.

With regard to Drumcree, no agreed and mutually-acceptable solution has yet been found to this ongoing dispute. Just before the start of the marching season last year, a mediation exercise was initiated by Brian Currin, a South African lawyer with a background in mediation. He is also Joint Chair of the Sentence Review Commission in Northern Ireland. He was asked by the parties to the Drumcree dispute to act as an independent and impartial mediator.

Since his appointment, Currin has been engaged in a series of contacts with the Garvaghy Road residents, the Portadown District Lodge and the British Government on the situation in Portadown. These mediation efforts are ongoing. This initiative is to be welcomed and we would encourage all those involved to work with Mr Currin

in the period ahead in order to arrive at an agreed and mutually-acceptable resolution of the Drumcree dispute.

The Government will continue to monitor closely the situation in the coming months.

Reported storage of depleted uranium in Sellafield

Mr Séamus Kirk TD (Louth): If he will make a statement on the reported storage of depleted uranium in Sellafield and the consequential health hazards, particularly in the light of the reported health problems of British Army personnel arising from the usage of depleted uranium during the Gulf War.

Minister O'Donoghue: It is understood from the Radiological Protection Institute of Ireland, that there are large quantities of Depleted Uranium in storage at Sellafield. Depleted Uranium (DU) is a by-product of the process for converting natural uranium for use in nuclear reactors and in nuclear weapons. It is also recovered in the reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel. The reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel is one of the activities carried out at Sellafield.

Depleted Uranium is approximately 40% less radioactive than natural uranium. DU is also less radioactive than other waste, which is currently being stored at Sellafield. External exposure to DU could occur during proximity to DU metal, for example, working in a munitions store or vehicle equipped with the DU munitions armour or through contact with dust or shrapnel created following explosion or impact. Internal exposure occurs by inhalation of such dust or ingestion of food or water contaminated by dust. In the military environment wounds present an additional route of exposure.

Notwithstanding the fact that DU is less radioactive than other substances in storage at Sellafield, its storage at Sellafield is a matter of concern to the Irish Government. The Irish Government is totally opposed to the reprocessing operations at Sellafield, which result not just in arisings of DU but also of high level radioactive waste, which is stored in liquid form at Sellafield. Sellafield's reprocessing activities are also the primary source of radioactive contamination of the Irish Sea.

The Irish Government and the RPII have for some time now regarded the storage of high level waste in liquid form in tanks at Sellafield as a major risk area. The concerns of the Government in this regard have been made known on numerous occasions to the UK authorities at both official and Ministerial level. The storage of DU at Sellafield adds to our concerns about the waste storage facilities at Sellafield.

Punishment beatings

Mr Brian O'Shea TD (Waterford): What input, if any, he has had towards dealing with punishment beatings and people being forced to leave their homes because of intimidation in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Minister O'Donoghue: I have dealt with the issues of 'punishment' attacks and paramilitary 'exiling' in my earlier replies to Deputy Michael Ring and Mr Harry Barnes MP, and I would refer Deputy O'Shea to those answers.

Northern Ireland Police Service

Mr Austin Currie TD (Dublin West): If he will make a statement on the progress of the establishment of the Northern Ireland Police Service; and if he has satisfied himself that it will attract into its ranks young people from Nationalist and Republican backgrounds as well as from Unionist backgrounds.

Minister O'Donoghue: The Government had detailed discussions with the British Government - at both Ministerial and official level - on the Policing (Northern Ireland) Bill as it progressed through its various stages. In the course of the legislative process, substantial improvements were made to the Bill which passed into law on 23 November last. We have also had detailed discussions on the draft revised Implementation Plan. However, the parties continue to have concerns on some aspects of the new Police (NI) Act 2000 and of the Plan.

Our current efforts are directed at resolving the remaining issues and providing the necessary reassurance that the vision and values of the Agreement and of the Patten Commission will lie at the heart of the policing project.

It is our hope that the parties will soon be able to nominate representatives to the new Policing Board and will also be able to encourage young people from their communities to join the new policing service.