



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

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

TWENTY-THIRD PLENARY SESSION

3 and 4 December 2001

Dorchester Suite, Marriott Highcliff Hotel, Bournemouth

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

(Produced by the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association)

1. Monday 3 December 2001

The sitting was opened in public at 9.40 am in the Dorchester Suite, Marriott Highcliff Hotel, Bournemouth, with Mr David Winnick MP in the Chair.

1. PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Order, order. The body is now in public session. May I take this opportunity of welcoming you to the 23rd Plenary Session. We have quite an agenda before us, including, of course, the Secretary of State who will be coming later on today.

There are various announcements I wish to make before we get down to business. First, I would remind everyone present to turn off pagers, beepers and mobile phones while you are in the room. I also ask everyone, and I trust no-one will mind me saying this, to refrain from reading newspapers while we are in session. There is no vote on that; that is an order!

May I remind members that the proceedings of the Body do not attract parliamentary privilege.

2. ASSOCIATE MEMBERS AND OTHERS ATTENDING THE PLENARY

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): I have to inform the Body that in accordance with Rule 2(a) the following Associate Members have accepted the invitation of the Steering Committee to assume the powers and responsibility of Members for the whole of this session:

Henry Bellingham MP, Matt Brennan TD, John Browne TD, Tony Colman MP, Jeff Ennis MP, Michael German AM, Brian Gibbons AM, Deputy Mike Torode, Dominic Grieve MP, Senator Mary Henry, Steven McCabe MP and Michael McMahon MSP.

We have received apologies from Patricia Ferguson MSP and John Hume MP MLA.

There have been a number of membership changes as a result of the British general election and I have much pleasure in welcoming John Battle, Elfyn Llwyd, Steve McCabe and Rosemary McKenna. Henry Bellingham has returned to the body after a period out of Parliament. We also welcome Michael German and Brian Gibbons from Wales, Mike Torode from Guernsey and Michael McMahon from Scotland, all of whom are attending for the first time. As a result of the general election a number of former colleagues retired: Maria Fyfe, Norman Godman and Gerry Bermingham. Those three of course you will remember were very active members of the body. Peter Brooke and Peter Temple-Morris have returned to us but in a different guise, as Members of the House of Lords, and we welcome them here. There is no need to refer to them as "Lords" but that is officially their title.

I have a sad announcement to make which most of you will be aware of. Mike Burns, who has been the media adviser to this body I believe since 1982, lost his wife Lynette in August. She died of cancer. I am sure all of us would like to express our deep sympathy to Mike and recognise the tragic loss he has suffered.

I am informed by the Clerks that there have been a number of interesting recent developments in professional co-operation between parliamentary staffs throughout the islands in the area of parliamentary reporting and legislation. The Clerks have prepared a note for colleagues which is available on the document table.

3. ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr Michael O'Kennedy): I should like formally to move the adoption of the proposed programme as amended.

***Ordered, That the proposed Programme of Business for the current Session, as amended, be approved.*-(Mr Michael O'Kennedy.)**

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): For those who want to speak in the first debate, the political debate, it would be extremely helpful if you could indicate beforehand if you wish to speak. That does not preclude anyone from speaking but if we have a speakers' list that makes life much easier, not least for myself. You all like short speeches, or it would seem so from last night. The Steering Committee has recommended that there should be a time limit on speeches in the political debate and in the debate on Sellafield on Tuesday of four minutes. Closing speeches will have a bit more time, ten minutes maximum. When I go like *that (indicating)*, that is not just for the sake of it. It is an indication that you have ended your time. I do not like to be too formal as in our main places of work, but it would be very helpful if colleagues realised that four minutes is not necessarily seven or eight minutes.

We now come to the debate on Recent Political Developments. That should take us to lunchtime. If there is a feeling that we should have a break for coffee no doubt you will indicate. The motion on political developments will now be moved by Deputy Jimmy Deenihan.

4. RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD (Kerry North): I move,

That the Body reaffirms its support for the Good Friday Agreement and the conclusions of the Weston Park consultation; endorses the views of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Minister for Foreign Affairs that the outstanding issues relate to policing, the stability of the institutions, security normalisation and decommissioning and that while each of these issues is best addressed in its own terms, rather than being seen as a precondition for progress on any other, the Agreement can only succeed if all parts of it are implemented together; notes the recent political developments

in Northern Ireland; expresses the hope that the election of the Rt hon David Trimble as First Minister and of Mr Mark Durkan as Deputy First Minister marks the beginning of a new era of stability in the political institutions of Northern Ireland; and calls on all political representatives to respect the wishes of the people in the referenda to implement the Agreement in full.

Chairman, I have just a few brief comments. I think that the very positive developments that have taken place in the last month must be welcomed. We now see the Good Friday Agreement really being put in place. I am convinced, and I am sure you all are, that if the institutions are allowed to work and if the Good Friday Agreement is fully implemented then we will have a system in place in Northern Ireland that will be totally democratic, totally inclusive, and will lead to a total normalisation of politics in Northern Ireland. Certainly the structures that are being established there in all parts of government will be a model for other countries to copy because I am convinced that they are going to be so effective.

I should like to refer briefly to the four aspects of the Weston Park consultation: policing the stability of the institutions, security, normalisation and decommissioning.

On policing, it is very heartening that the Policing Board is now up and running and has met on two occasions. All parties have signed up to it, including the DUP. Unfortunately Sinn Féin have not yet signed up to and have not yet taken their seats on the new Policing Board. I certainly hope that they will in the very near future. They do have their difficulties with it but I think these can be surmounted. It is interesting to note that the initial recruitment has been very successful and that 308 recruits have now taken up their places. They are 50 per cent Catholic, 50 per cent Protestant.

Could I also say that the only way that the community in Northern Ireland will have total confidence in this police force is if it is representative of that community. That was one of the problems until now: that the police force was predominantly from one sector of the community. There were a number of reasons for this. One was that young Catholics were not allowed to join the police force or were advised not to. Hopefully now with the new arrangements and the almost unanimous consensus young Catholics and young Nationalists will join the policing arrangement. A good example of that recently has been the numbers that have signed up.

There is considerable interest from young people in the Republic of Ireland in joining the police force in Northern Ireland, even from my own county in Kerry which is one of the most southern counties, and that is to be welcomed. If this continues, if the policing arrangements are supported, then I think in a very short space of time we will have a totally new scenario in Northern Ireland, where Nationalists in places like Omagh had considerable problems in the past with the RUC - that the whole process can be normalised and they can feel confident in the police force that is policing them. That is why with this positive development we are going to have more acceptability of the policing arrangements.

As a member of the Gaelic Athletic Association I would like to explain to members here and to the other Assemblies and Parliament that the Gaelic Athletic Association is an all-Ireland Association whose main aim is to promote the Gaelic games of Gaelic football, hurling, camogie and handball. Since about 1903 there has been a ban on any members of the British security forces playing Gaelic games. On 17 November that was removed from the GAA constitution and rule book, so it now means that members of the security forces in Northern Ireland can play Gaelic games. Basically it means that any young Nationalist that joins the new Police Service of Northern Ireland will be allowed to play Gaelic games. They will be able to participate with their local clubs and that is a very welcome development. Hopefully members of the Northern Ireland police force from the Protestant community will play Gaelic games as well. Members from the Protestant communities do play Gaelic games but, hopefully, with the removal of the ban, more people will now participate.

As regards the stability of the institutions, it was very welcome to see the British-Irish Council meeting and also the North-South Ministerial Council meeting last Friday in Dublin; and it would seem that they were two very successful meetings. Certainly, looking at it on television, it seemed that these Councils had been meeting continuously for the last two years, such was the camaraderie that apparently existed among all the participating members that were there, ministers and leaders and also civil servants. That was a very welcome development. As regards North-South bodies, they have been working very well all along and since the Good Friday Agreement a considerable amount of contact has been established at official level. Hopefully, this will now accelerate; and the effect of the institutions that were set up by the Good Friday Agreement will be fully felt and acknowledged and progress will be seen to be made.

I have often said of this Body in the past that there are two aspects of co-operation between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland at micro and at macro level. We have co-operation now at the macro level through the political process, but also at the micro level - at community level. It is very important that we encourage (and both governments encourage) communities north and south to set up twinning arrangements, to initiate joint projects, to improve the communication between communities in all parts of the island. Just last week I attended a conference in Rosscarbery down in Cork. There were people there who represented us from this Body and from a Unionist community in the north, both political and otherwise, and it was very successful. All those present were in agreement that the more communication there was at community level, at the non-political level, the more it would be welcome and if we want the process to work then it must be encouraged.

On the issue of normalisation I drove through Northern Ireland recently and it was obvious that there were fewer patrols on the ground. I personally did not see any patrol on the ground when I drove right across Northern Ireland. Some of the installations also have now been demolished, like on Camlough Mountain for example, and Sturgen Mountain. The super-hangar at Newtownhamilton has been removed and the Army base at Magherafelt has now been dismantled. As John Reid described it, it is a rolling process in the sense that if there is less of a need for

security arrangements, for patrols, then they will be scaled back. The progress that has been made to date and the fact that it has impacted on the ground must be welcome, because to people who are visiting Northern Ireland, whether they are from the Republic or elsewhere, it is quite noticeable that there is a scaling back of patrols and of security arrangements, and you would not really know whether you were in the Republic or in the north of Ireland. That must be welcomed.

On the issue of decommissioning, the fact that the IRA did decommission and that John de Chastelain described it as a very significant event must be welcomed. This very positive development must be repeated, decommissioning must continue until all illegal arms are taken out of the system, and decommissioning must also happen amongst the Loyalist paramilitaries as well as the IRA and the other Republican paramilitaries. But for decommissioning all the other developments that we are discussing here today would not have happened. The institutions would not be in place. For that reason it was a very significant and welcome development. Obviously, it must continue. We should welcome these developments. It should be one of the more positive Plenaries for some time, because now we see real progress on the ground. I am sure all of you will join with me in welcoming what has happened and, hopefully, this progress can be continued and accelerated.

Ms Helen Jackson MP (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I want to make three points that relate to the political situation in Northern Ireland generally and one more general point.

First, can I echo what Jimmy Deenihan was saying about the potential for cross-border informal get-togethers. I was also at the Ballyncollig Conference at Rosscarbery and was impressed by the positive way that the groups there down in Cork have made contact with the senior citizens and community groups from Derry and Belfast. It was a very successful example of how that can take place.

My second point is to emphasise the significance and to applaud the decision of the SDLP to move into the new Police Service of Northern Ireland. I think, for many people who have been closely involved in the political developments over the past few years, there is a very close understanding that solving the emergence of a civil police service is perhaps the most difficult and most significant of the parts of the end game of that conflict situation in Northern Ireland. The SDLP made a very important move. I hope that Sinn Féin follow suit but everyone needs to understand that the new Police Service now has the opportunity to grow as a civil police service. The chance is there.

Thirdly, I am pleased that David Trimble got through yet another Ulster Unionist Council vote on Saturday. I do not know whether the officers of this body could make a very direct, personal approach to him and the Unionists in the north to play a more active role in this Body. I do think it is a shame now, when so many other things are moving forward, that we do not have an Ulster Unionist member at the meeting.

My fourth, more general, point is about how this Body and how we, as parliamentarians, can work closely with the parliamentarians in the Republic on the issue of Europe. I am conscious that, from 1 January, euro coins and notes will be floating around and we shall have to change our pounds into euros at the next British/Irish conference we have, if it is over the water. I have no doubt the actual implementation will hit a few snags - as it will in every European country. I do think that it is very important that we learn from the snags so that when we - I say "hopefully", because I am a supporter of the Britain in Europe campaign - get to that point we will learn from each other. Over this next couple of years, I do think it is extremely important that we perhaps have one or two general debates between us in this Inter-Parliamentary Body about the implications of the single currency and what that means for both Parliaments.

Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD (Cavan-Monaghan): First of all, we all have to look at the progress that has been made in the last seven years, since 1994, since the first ceasefire, particularly since the Good Friday Agreement. Even the most optimistic amongst us could not have envisaged that we would be as far on as we are today. There has been tremendous progress. I suppose we will have the odd hiccup from time to time but I do not think there is any going back now. We are on the way forward and we are going to continue to go forward.

I believe that the two governments at Weston Park got it right in regard to the two issues that are still outstanding. There are still four issues to be addressed: policing, demilitarisation, decommissioning, and the continuing implementation of the political institutions.

I appreciate that, depending on where you are in Northern Ireland (or indeed along the border) and depending on where you are in Britain, people have a different view on those four particular issues but what is important to recognise is that they are all important, each and every one of them. As you go into South Armagh, there is still a very high military presence. Some of the lookout towers were taken down, but they were not the ones that were the main cause of protest by the people. I am talking about law-abiding Nationalists; I am not talking about anyone who wanted to get involved in any sort of paramilitary violence. There is still a lot of work to be done on that one.

Obviously a start has been made on implementing Patten Report on Policing. Hopefully, that will continue. Obviously, decommissioning has to continue and hopefully we will see that.

The North/South bodies are back in action again and on Friday there was a full meeting of the North/South bodies and also a meeting of the British/Irish Council. There have been 42 meetings of the North/South bodies so far since they were established. Again, I think people do not realise the tremendous amount of good work that has been done by the North/South bodies and how they have settled in. Indeed, even though they cover just six particular sectors, one of the major successes is outside those bodies. That was the agreement on the cross-border gas

line. The bodies themselves have become a catalyst for areas outside the particular areas of responsibility of the bodies to see further progress in North/South economic and social regeneration.

For the 12 border counties - the six in the north and six south - the opportunities have never been better for them because cooperation is now not just at the level of the North/South bodies but at local level. There is tremendous cooperation now. Unionist Councils who in the past did not join the cross-border bodies are now joining and making a major contribution. I would see a tremendous opportunity for the future.

The final point is in relation to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. I have an oral question down for answer this afternoon. Unfortunately, I will not be around to ask my supplementary; but what I would be concerned about is that there has been a promise made by the Secretary of State that he would meet Judge Baron, because it is very important in investigating those bombings that the information that the British authorities have available to them is made available to the judge. I hope that the meeting would take place sooner rather than later and that available information would be made available to Judge Baron.

I am very optimistic about the future. I have always been optimistic from day one, but I see no going back. Everybody who would promote themselves as serving the people has to remind themselves of the two referendums: 71 per cent in favour of the Good Friday Agreement in the north; 96 per cent in favour of the Good Friday Agreement in the south. Anybody who maintains that they represent the public in any form has to work to ensure that the Agreement is implemented in full.

Mr Lembit Öpik MP (Montgomeryshire): First of all, I wish it was this easy to get called in the House of Commons as a Liberal Democrat.

I have always regarded the Good Friday Agreement as a positive step and it has been clear to me that no-one has come up with a better alternative. The recent developments, especially at the crunch point of David Trimble's re-election, were symbolic of whether we proceeded with the Good Friday Agreement or not. His success shows that the optimism has been vindicated.

It is relatively easy to vote against things and for the *status quo*; but that is recognised. Those who do that are making a decision as well. It is not a zero-consequence decision simply to vote against progress: it is effectively a regressive step.

The ever-present pressure on the progressive Unionists, particularly those who are in favour of the Good Friday Agreement, has been considerable and I think it is a credit to David Trimble that he has moved his party a great distance, further than many people would have expected possible even five years ago. Incidentally, the ever-growing membership of the Body is also symbolic of the fact that the British/Irish group itself is seeking to be inclusive.

I would certainly echo Helen Jackson. It would be great to see Ulster Unionists joining this Body. Frankly, I regard that step as being rather less radical than many of the steps they have already taken in the Province in order to support the Good Friday Agreement: so I would say there is a big win for the Ulster Unionist and very little downside, given that they have already paid in terms of pressure for the decisions they have made.

Secondly, I think it is courage that got us here. I have mentioned David Trimble but others have also played a crucial role in moving things forward. I would like record my praise and my gratitude to the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland and David Ford, who took a pragmatic and rather difficult decision to redesignate themselves as Unionists in order to ensure that David Trimble was re-elected. There has been some debate about it and I recognise there are other views. My judgment is that the Alliance Party's decision reflected the spirit of the vote the first time round for David Trimble when 70 per cent of people in the Northern Ireland Assembly and 100 per cent of the Nationalist and Republican vote supported him. It was in keeping with the spirit of that vote that the Alliance Party rightly redesignated for a short time.

However, I am absolutely aligned with David Ford when he says that the non-sectarian, non-aligned parties should not have to redesignate simply to get their votes to count. I think that underlines the way that - for good, understandable, defensible reasons - we have nevertheless, to some extent, institutionalised a community divide in the way that the Northern Ireland Assembly works.

The way the whole thing was set up was an elegant solution to a difficult problem - and an understandable one - but I hope that the current review will see if a system can be devised so that you do not necessarily have to align yourself with one community or another to make your vote count.

I also think that the point already made about the SDLP is very important. The SDLP have made a courageous decision to support the new policing structures in the north. I hope they get some political win out of that because their decision has clearly been a strategic pointer for the Nationalist community to start taking a career in that police service seriously. They deserve a win and I hope it will put Sinn Féin under pressure to support what is a genuine effort to try and make the police service into a cross-community career opportunity and service.

Thirdly, some opportunists still seem to continue to try and use the North as a political football. There is some power in holding things up but it is an entirely negative kind of power. Just as we should be helping the North take the benefits from the decisions, so also I believe we should be supporting those courageous individuals and organisations. I hope that we will over time see the North of Ireland being used less as a political football by opportunists in other places. It is easy to grandstand; but in the brush-strokes of politics, sometimes the right decision is more subtle and perhaps does not get an immediate win. I hope that the long-term harm which is done when that happens is brought into account and we see more maturity in that area.

Finally, the Liberal Democrats are committed to playing our part and we would appeal to those tempted to do otherwise either to come up with a better solution than the Good Friday Agreement or start accepting what the evidence suggests, which is that the majority were right to support the Good Friday Agreement when it was set up.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I am sure all of us on the Irish side would agree that there is a growing realisation within the body politic of the Republic of Ireland that the focus should now be directed towards assisting Unionism to come to terms with the new dispensation.

The appalling scenes at Ardoyne witnessed worldwide have concentrated minds on the underlying reasons why otherwise civilised people would inflict an extreme form of racism and sectarianism not seen since pre-World War Two days in Nazi Germany.

There is obviously real fear in the Loyalist community - in Belfast particularly but also in other parts of Northern Ireland - that we must recognise and address. This is evidenced by the shift in voting patterns to the extreme Unionist Party, the DUP, at the last elections. This fear, which I and many of my colleagues believe is based on ignorance and prejudice, has to be addressed by all of us. In this context, I commend the initiative undertaken by David Trimble and Mark Durkan to end the Ardoyne stand-off. I do not however extend the same praise to many of our colleagues in the House of Commons in London. I would ask the question why so many of your colleagues stayed silent in the face of this hatred perpetrated on young children wishing to take the most direct route to school. This, on what is often referred to in another context by Unionists - here I am thinking of Drumcree - as the Queen's Highway.

Why is there silence also on the more than 200 pipe bombs which have been thrown into exclusively Catholic homes throughout Northern Ireland in the last 12 months, at a time when we are told violence has ended? I respectfully suggest that it is the responsibility of all of us to guarantee the implementation of the Belfast Agreement, but it is also the responsibility of sovereign governments to protect all their citizens. However, I do not really wish to open this first session on a negative note.

I would suggest that enormous progress has been made, as has been evidenced by the contributions so far. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is the first real opportunity that Nationalists have had to play a full and active role in policing in Northern Ireland and I also believe that it is unacceptable that Sinn Féin continue to play politics with this historic breakthrough. The Gaelic Athletic Association have broken with the past. Both governments have broken with the past. The Trimble Unionists and the SDLP are trying to break with the past; yet, Sinn Féin stands isolated. I think it is past time that they came into the fold.

I compliment Mark Durkan on his initiative in speaking to the North Down Unionists recently. Members will probably be aware that Lady Sylvia Hermon MP will be visiting a Fianna Fáil constituency meeting in Dublin within the next week, an

unprecedented breakthrough, where she will be meeting in their constituency with the existing members of the current administration and members of the organisation.

Finally, I wonder whether the Body has a view on the ongoing development of the British/Irish Council? Is there a danger of an overlap of interests? I have referred to this in the past. A press statement last week referred to matters of discussion at the Council's last meeting, including transport links. I am a member of the European Affairs Committee of this Body and we are currently engaged in extensive research in this area. We hope to present our findings to the next Plenary but it would in my opinion be counter-productive if both organisations did not attempt to complement each other's works rather than operating in parallel.

If I could echo the comments of my distinguished colleague, Rory O'Hanlon, there is an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen business links between the two parts of the island. Since partition, sadly, businesses on both sides of the border have reduced and, in many instances, severed their links. There is now no reason why this market should not be seen as an island market in much the same way as southern exporters see the United Kingdom mainland market as being their primary market; the Northern Ireland exporters see the United Kingdom as their primary market and yet both of us are looking across at each other. We should be coming closer together. I would hope perhaps that this Body might take a look at this area and encourage the business community on both sides of the border to interact more on an all-island basis.

Lord Dubs: This is my second meeting of this Body and I am delighted to be here. I am grateful for the warmth and friendliness of the welcome which everybody shows. It is a great place to be, and thank you all.

Could I make a brief comment about Senator Mooney's remarks? I met two of the parents from the Holy Cross Primary School Primary School; indeed, I was all set to go there and observe what was going on as the children went to and from school. Fortunately that trip is no longer necessary because it seems to have settled down.

As regards the pipe bombs, many of us have been loud in condemning what has been going on, but the trouble is that the events of September 11 have somehow taken away the publicity from them. I can assure you that we find those incidents as appalling seen from a London perspective as you do.

It is a regret that there are no Ulster Unionists here. I put the point to David Trimble some time ago after the last meeting and he referred me to Martin Smyth a UK Member of Parliament, "Surely your party ought to be here. After all, you were the ones most fervent about having the Council of the Isles and this is the parliamentary equivalent". He said, "I was never in favour of that anyway", at which point the conversation stopped. I think it is right to put the pressure on because it is a weakness here that we do not have Ulster Unionist voices.

There are voices that keep saying there has been very little progress made. One sees it both in the DUP and the ultra-Republican side of the spectrum who both say from their own perspectives that very little progress has been made and that things are just as bad as they were. I think it is important that we deny those assertions and point out that while things are not as good as they should be - and the pipe bombing is an obvious example - nevertheless the progress has been enormous and positive.

However, we have a number of problems on the horizon as regards British parliamentary procedures and legislation. First is the Criminal Justice Review, which I fear will open up yet again the thorny question of badges and emblems over courtrooms. The Unionists have already indicated their dissatisfaction with the Review. Then we have more legislation to do with prisoners on the run, and it remains to be seen as to whether there will be opposition to an amnesty or a pardon or no action taken against those people. Thirdly, we have to have more legislation on decommissioning; and the Unionists are saying that there should not be any more legislation, that all the decommissioning should happen before the deadline which is March. We therefore have a number of parliamentary difficulties which can have a resonance in Northern Ireland and we have got to watch this.

Set against that is the very positive aspect of the policing progress and I hope Sinn Féin will look at it again. The fact that so many Catholics are wanting to join the police, the fact that there is a new mood, now suggest to me that we are moving into a new area. With the SDLP, the Irish Government and the Catholic Church all supporting this I hope that Sinn Féin will not stay out in the cold for much longer.

Apropos the comment that Sylvia Hermon was going to a Fianna Fáil meeting in Dublin, she was speaking at a meeting at Westminster and said that she had had an SDLP person, Mark Durkan, who went to her local Ulster Unionist Party meeting and she had the biggest attendance there she had ever had. That tells us something.

Finally, may I make a comment about a slightly different issue: the Irish referendum on the Treaty of Nice? I am Chair at Westminster of an all-party parliamentary group on European accession, supporting the case for the accession countries to join Europe. There has been a great deal of gloom and despondency in those countries. They do not understand why the country that has benefited most and has been shown as an example to the East European countries has said, "No, thank you" to the Nice Treaty. I would like to hear from some of our colleagues about what is going on. because the depression that has affected those countries about the Irish referendum has to be heard to be believed.

Mr Conor Lenihan TD (Dublin South-West): I should like to welcome all the positive developments that have happened since our last meeting. It was with a certain amount of dismay that I listened to my own party Chairman, Rory O'Hanlon, earlier in his contribution talking about the lack of co-operation from the British Government in relation to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. This was one of the worst atrocities of the 25 to 30 years of violence that we have seen on the island of Ireland. It seems to me very odd that while all this progress is being achieved the

solicitor that represents justice for the forgotten group, the people who represent the victims of these terrible bombings, still can get no response from Tony Blair or the British Government in relation to furnishing them with the material that will further the investigation that the Irish Government has now initiated into these two atrocities.

This particular set of atrocities underlined the murky underside to British involvement in Ireland. The alleged involvement or collusion of the British in the bombing of those two locations is an issue that has to be investigated properly if we are to progress this particular peace process and involve ourselves properly in a process of conciliation and redress for those people who have been affected by those particular bombings. It is a disgrace at this stage that that is still in issue, particularly given that we are prepared and the British Government are prepared to look at Bloody Sunday and investigate it in a thorough manner. I throw that out to all of the members here from the British Parliament to see if they can use their good offices with their own Government to have this matter properly investigated.

We would also like to welcome the initiative by the IRA of putting weapons beyond use. It is important to use the phrase "putting weapons beyond use" because that is exactly what has happened; not decommissioning, not the surrender of weapons as was demanded by certain of the more extreme voices within Unionism, to have these former paramilitaries humiliated at the door of democracy.

One of the big problems with the obsession with decommissioning (and I use that word advisedly) is that a huge opportunity has been lost collectively by all of the political parties in Northern Ireland and that is investment. An awful lot of investment has been lost to the North of Ireland precisely because of the delays in the political process to date because the momentum was not seized at the appropriate time. I hope that all of the parties there now recognise this, because we are now in a much more uncertain, more difficult investment climate at global level. All parties need to learn that lesson and realise that they can help their own people with investment flows from outside Ireland, to make sure that that opportunity is not lost again.

Mr John McFall MP (Dumbarton): I am delighted to follow others in re-affirming our support for the Good Friday Agreement. I am very optimistic about the future. In the past I have had people who were publicly against the Agreement express concerns in private about the possible fall of institutions, so we have to be optimistic when comments like that are made.

The Agreement is built on relationships. That has to be seen as a fundamental. When we think back to the establishment of this Body in the early 1980s there was huge suspicion around, but people from our own Parliament, like Peter Temple-Morris and others, worked away at that so that the Irish Parliament and the UK Parliament felt at ease with one another. It is that relationship that is important. It is the same with the Blair/Ahern relationship. We remember that Bertie Ahern left his mother's

funeral to come up and finish talks in Belfast and we know that that is a very solid basis for the relationship between the Taoiseach and the Prime Minister.

The relationships which we have to recognise are the Trimble/Mallon and now the Trimble/Durkan relationship, because in particular with David Trimble his leadership role is important. It is quite easy to show leadership when your colleagues are with you; but real leadership is when many of your colleagues are against you day in and day out. David Trimble has experienced that; and I would like to commend him for his work over the past few years.

Mention has been made of the small parties. Leadership has been shown by the small parties. Maybe not enough recognition has been given to them. Lembit Öpik mentioned the Alliance Party this morning. We have Séan Neeson and his colleagues here; and I know from working with them over the years just how much of a pincer movement they experienced in their communities and how much leadership they had to show. I also want to commend Monica McWilliams and Jane Morrice of the Women's Coalition, because it was not easy, particularly in traditional society like Northern Ireland, for women to come out in support of the peace process. I should also like to mention also the PUP with David Ervine and Billy Hutchison. The UDP, which included Gary McMichael others, disbanded last week. That is a tragedy; and I think we have to look at that and try and revive that party.

The PUP and the UDP are in what I would term "working-class Protestant" communities. Those communities do not get the same support as other areas. There is a vacuum between the middle-class and working-class Protestant communities, and as politicians we have to recognise that. If you look at Holy Cross Primary School you will see that the tensions arose because of an isolated Protestant community that did not feel that it was getting any support. That is a big item on the political agenda for both governments to look at; in other words, building up the community infrastructure.

I would say to my colleague Barry McElduff that he and his colleagues could do a big service by not standing out alone on the policing issue but ensuring they come in to work on policing, to change policing from what maybe they perceive as a paramilitary structure to community policing because it is only through the community infrastructure that we are going to get peace and a settlement in all our communities.

A lot has been done in the past few years and we should all be very optimistic about it, but there are political warning signs on the horizon. When we see the DUP on the one hand and Sinn Féin on the other gaining electorally we have to ensure that we do not only shore up the middle ground but strengthen it. That is our objective; and I would commend this Body for the work it has done in that area in the past few years and hope that we would commit ourselves even more to creating a strong middle ground.

Mr Séan Neeson MLA (East Antrim): I welcome the opportunity to re-affirm our support for the Good Friday Agreement. During my leadership of the Alliance it has always been my number one objective. That is why I took the decision during the Westminster elections that the Alliance would stand down in key areas in order to ensure the election of pro-Agreement candidates. Quite clearly that helped the election, not only of Sylvia Hermon but also of David Trimble himself. I think it was a risk worth taking. I came in for a good deal of criticism both within my party and outside it, but I still believe it was the right decision to take.

I welcome the election of David Trimble and Mark Durkan, but what I have to emphasise here today is that, as Lembit Öpik has already said, the present voting system in the Assembly institutionalises sectarian division in Northern Ireland. There is a lack of equality in voting. The present system itself was contrived to promote cross-community consensus and yet the votes of cross-community parties do not count. I am talking not only about ourselves but also about the Women's Coalition.

Lembit has already alluded to the crucial vote when we re-designated. This was one of the most difficult decisions I ever had to take. It would have been as difficult for me to re-designate as a Nationalist as well. I think people have to recognise that if we are to move forward in Northern Ireland it is not to be on the basis of trying to control the divisions that exist but also to create a society in Northern Ireland where sectarianism does not come into the picture at all.

Let me point out to you that in the first vote on the Friday for David Trimble and Mark Durkan 70.6 per cent of the 102 voted; 38 were designated as Nationalists, that is 100 per cent; 29 were designated as Unionists, 49.2 per cent; and there were five others. In the second vote which took place on the Tuesday, of 70.7 per cent (of 99 who voted) 38 were designated as Nationalists; 31 were designated as Unionists, that is 51.7 per cent; and one designated as others.

We are not out of the woods yet. Trimble could well face another crisis in March on the whole question of decommissioning. I welcome the review that has now been initiated but the truth of the matter is that under the present system two people could hold the whole future of the Assembly and the Agreement to ransom. I am talking about Peter Weir and Pauline Armitage. I am very much in favour of some form of weighted majority, let us say between 60 and 70 per cent, free from designation.

It is a great challenge, Chairman, now that we have the Assembly up and running, but the divisions within Northern Ireland still run very deep. We have only to witness the incidents that took place at Holy Cross Primary School. That seems to be sorted out now but we still have not sorted out Drumcree. Here is a major challenge facing both governments and facing the whole community in Northern Ireland, to get Drumcree sorted out once and for all.

On the whole question of putting arms beyond use, I live in a constituency where sectarian attacks by Loyalists using pipe bombs happen almost nightly. Loyalists have now got to start putting arms as well, whether by cementing them over or whatever.

I believe that we have reached a stage in the Assembly whereby we can move forward; but the important thing for this Body to remember is that we still need help. There is a big challenge ahead for us.

Mr Brian Hayes TD (Dublin South-West): I would like to support the motion before the Body and would also like to concur with the speeches that have been made by Dr Rory O'Hanlon and by my own party spokesperson, Jimmy Deenihan. Some positive signs in recent weeks must be seen in relation to Trimble's position within his own party. His majority is now on the way up again. The decision of the Ulster Unionist Council on Saturday to support David Trimble is very important and I welcome the increasing support he is receiving from his own party.

In that respect decommissioning (and I use the word selectively) is an important part of this process. It is as much a part of the process as any other part of the Good Friday Agreement. We have a responsibility to all democrats on the island of Ireland and throughout Britain to ensure that there is some finality on the issue of decommissioning because, as Séan Neeson rightly points out, until we get all of the arms from all of the paramilitary parties and their groups taken out of the equation we are never going to see the kind of fully-endorsed democratic settlement in Northern Ireland and throughout these islands that we all want.

I want to make two comments. One is in relation to policing. I very much support the comments made earlier by Helen Jackson. I would ask Sinn Féin now to move beyond the platitudes, to move beyond the kind of foot-dragging that we have seen in relation to the policing issue. Northern Ireland has been a divided society for many years. It is absolutely essential that we have full democratic participation in the new Police Service of Northern Ireland. That is why I want to endorse fully the courageous decision that was taken over the summer by the SDLP to lead their community in fully backing the new Police Service of Northern Ireland. Given the history since the civil rights movement and since the appalling scenes in the 1970s and 1980s, the SDLP have shown tremendous leadership in respect of their decision to involve themselves in the new Police Service in Northern Ireland. Quite frankly, I think Sinn Féin have not shown the same leadership in relation to this issue. I have been told by some of their spokespersons that they have a right to withdraw their consent. If that is the view surely Mr Trimble has a right to withdraw his consent on North-South bodies; the Irish Government have a right to withdraw their consent to the British-Irish Council. This is a united package of measures that have to be implemented. It is absolutely essential that Sinn Féin move positively in favour of accepting the new Police Service and stop splitting hairs on an issue as vitally important as this to the establishment of peace in Northern Ireland.

On the issue of the Patten Report on Policing, we in the South have much to learn from Patten. I believe there are parts of my constituency where the same level of

disconnection exists between the police service and the urban community that I represent. We in the South need a Patten-style report to ensure greater accountability in our police force and greater involvement of the local community because much can be learned from the entire Patten process.

Finally, on the issue of the single currency, it is essential if we are trying to build up links North and South that we have a single currency on the island of Ireland. Frankly, I cannot understand why Sinn Féin have the same position as the British Conservatives on this issue in wanting to oppose the introduction of a single currency throughout Ireland. If there is one thing that can unite our country it is the idea of a single currency; and I would ask Sinn Féin to move away from their scepticism.

Lord Temple-Morris: In my politically resurrected form, can I just say how nice it is to be back? I very much appreciated the various things that were said about me and to me as a co-founder of this Body. At the time they were said, grateful as I was, I did not realise that I was going to bounce back so quickly. It is nice to be here with you all.

With regard to the Body and its value, casting my mind back very briefly, when we were founded we were engaged in removing chips from shoulders and getting British and Irish parliamentarians working together. It is quite significant now that we have gone way beyond that. British and Irish parliamentarians have not only had a series of very frank debates but we are also working together towards peace on the island of Ireland. Between us, we have the frankness to work together for the peace that we need to encourage.

Might I also say that it is very nice to have the extra participation of our National Parliaments and Assemblies, and indeed members of Nationalist Parties as well. That, to me, in itself, bearing in mind what Unionists have said in the past and the present, should encourage them to join this Body. It is high time that, if they are so anxious and keen to preserve their links with the United Kingdom, they came and helped to represent Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom on this Body. I believe that if they heard the way that we approach matters in our debates that would help to encourage them to have the confidence in the process that at the moment is one of the most serious threats to it.

The most serious thing, it seems to me now, that is menacing this peace process is a lack of Unionist confidence. That goes right across the board. It is a very serious thing that we generally and our governments have to address.

At the last speech I made in Killarney I appealed directly to Sinn Féin to encourage the decommissioning that we all wanted. I made that appeal to them as one of the first British parliamentarians to receive and talk to Gerry Adams in public. They have decommissioned now ; and it is worth recognising at this stage in the game that the IRA and Sinn Féin have delivered an awful lot towards this process. Indeed, I go right back to the original ceasefire in August 1994 and the maintenance of that ceasefire

for 16 months without the Republicans ever properly being addressed or talked to. That was a tribute in itself before we had the calamity of Canary Wharf. We are now in an active phase where this peace process is going forward, following the Good Friday Agreement.

Sinn Féin have delivered; and the recent decommissioning, thank goodness, is something which we welcome. But I do echo the words of Séan Neeson that we are not out of the woods yet. Indeed, there will be increasing challenges by elements of the Unionist leadership against David Trimble and all that he stands for. We must support him very heavily, and support those moderate elements mentioned by John McFall. We must get behind them and, not least, support those rather isolated communities that add to that deep feeling of insecurity.

Finally, Unionist fears seem to be based on some sort of inevitability of a united Ireland. In all my contacts with the Republic, I know there is a green romance of a united island of Ireland; but I have never experienced or heard voiced some sort of imperialistic design upon Northern Ireland. Rather, there is a deep desire in the South for peace on the island of Ireland. That is what it is all about; and the future of the island and of the North is a matter of evolution. It will go nowhere without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland: and that means the consent of the present Unionist and Protestant majority. It would be exactly the same thing if they were no longer a majority. We have a long way to go - but so far we are getting there.

The sitting was suspended at 10.45 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.10 am, with Mr David Winnick in the Chair.

Lord Glentoran: There were comments made about business improving across border. I can say that business has always been very good, having worked there as a business person. It has been best recently for smugglers but I join others in hoping that partnerships of legitimate business will grow.

To take up another point of Senator Mooney, with reference to Holy Cross Primary School, Quentin Davies, the Shadow Secretary of State, also went and walked up to that part of Belfast with the priest and had long discussions with both sides in Ardoyne. I am going to refrain - he is not here anyway - from taking Conor Lenihan up on one or two of the points that he made.

As you would expect, I am not quite as bullish as everybody else around the room. I rarely am. I think we have come a long way. I and my party strongly support the Good Friday Agreement. However, we are not enthusiastic about Weston Park and all that happened there. As Lord Dubs said, there is a lot of very difficult legislation coming to our Parliament, some of it as a result of Weston Park, some of it as a result of pressures on Peter Mandelson's interpretation of Patten's modifications of the Police Bill - and I am not sure how helpful any of that is going to be. I will leave it at that.

We also have to face up to the fact that polarisation since the Good Friday Agreement has increased. Under the various things that have happened, the various parts of legislation, the way the negotiations have gone, there is no doubt that polarisation has increased. Everybody in this room and all governments really have a serious task ahead of them to stop that. I know others have said similar things this morning.

I am dreaming, looking forward; and I think the time has come to start working for it rather than dreaming about it. We can get away from this. Polarisation is caused by lack of confidence in either community, by fear at the root. It is also the business of the continuing attempts to neutralise symbols, to neutralise traditions, to neutralise all sorts of things: get rid of the Crown, get rid of the Republican history, get rid of this and that.

I believe the time has come to stop that. Certainly in my own home we not infrequently sing Irish songs, have Irish musical evenings and enjoy them enormously. I believe that happens across the Province to some extent. Somehow or other we need to get an environment where the differing communities are encouraged to take a pride in their traditions and then once again, as they used to do 30 or 40 years ago, to respect and enjoy the traditions, music, emblems, or whatever, of other communities. I think that that is very important.

Perhaps the most significant area - and where the publicity is going to be greatest - is policing. The Northern Ireland Police Service is now in being. Without wishing to be rude or unkind about it, it is fairly impotent. It has lost a lot of its leadership. It is short of staff. Its strength is below the 7,000 that Patten recommended. There is discussion as to whether the Reserve has to go or not; but at the moment there are over 1,300 members of the Reserve being used on a regular basis to keep the Service in being: and that is not really a good way to run a police force of any sort, let alone one that is dealing with the most terrible problems of gang warfare, mutilation, shootings and beatings, a serious drugs problem, and serious smuggling problems across our borders.

The new Police Board set up under Patten is failing to agree over the uniform, the emblems and the hat badge of the new police force. We have Sinn Féin refusing to join it. Thank goodness and well done, SDLP, for joining it, and well done, even more importantly, the Roman Catholic Church for at last supporting it. But we do have a long, long way to go and we have some difficult rows to hoe. I would like to see people in this Body and all parties trying to work towards encouraging people to believe in themselves again, to cease negating positive symbols and leadership motives and to create an environment in which people can move forward.

In my opinion, decommissioning took place as a result, I am afraid, of happenings in America. If the IRA had not shot itself in the foot in Colombia, if 11 September had not happened, and if Colin Powell and President Bush had not got so rough on Sinn Féin and the IRA, I am not sure that we would have had decommissioning. But we have had it, it is there, it is good - and we now have to move forward.

Mr Andrew Boylan TD (Cavan-Monaghan): First, I would like to state publicly my support for the substantive progress that has been made since we last met in February, in Killarney. That should be recognised. The benefits of the Good Friday Agreement are seen now to be manifesting themselves in ordinary people's everyday lives - and that is what we are all about.

When we met in Killarney, many speakers here, including myself, were calling for a number of issues that we wanted addressed immediately. They were decommissioning, the dismantling of the British posts in various locations in Northern Ireland, particularly in South Armagh, and a new police authority. These things now have happened and they should be acknowledged as substantial steps forward.

Decommissioning, in particular, is very important. It is and was substantial and it should not be played down. If we are to encourage it further, we should recognise that decommissioning must take place both from the IRA and from the Loyalists. There is no place for guns or ammunition in Northern Ireland any more. Throwing pipe-bombs into private houses in the dark of the night is extremely cowardly. The war is over. People want peace.

For me, the most significant step - it has only been briefly referred to here - was the removal of the ban by the Gaelic Athletic Association: Rule 21. It was rank and file young people who swayed that great organisation. It was time to move on - and that is what happened. We can build on that progress. People want to work together.

Coming from one of the six border counties, we have tremendous problems. We have not benefited from the Celtic tiger that ran loose in our country but seemed to miss the border regions somewhat. I believe that between the six border counties and the six Northern Ireland counties there are tremendous opportunities for cooperation and marketing of the catchment area for tourism in the area as a whole. Forget the border area: tourists can now move freely. There are no difficulties and the roads are open. All the barriers are gone - the opening of the Arlayne Bridge was a huge step forward. There are opportunities there for marketing. I believe that significant progress has been made and people now see the benefits of peace.

Reference has been made to the Holy Cross Primary School incident, which was a bad reflection on people North and South. It was a bad reflection on our country but it was negotiated - it has ceased. People came together and talked things over. I think that is significant and I believe that is the way forward.

Mr Dominic Grieve MP (Beaconsfield): I welcome the motion and have no difficulty supporting it. There is no doubt to my mind that an enormous number of positive things have happened in Northern Ireland and in the context of Anglo-Irish relations in the course of the last six months. I only have to look at the contrast between the sort of atmosphere we have here and the atmosphere when I attended a British/Irish Association meeting back in early September to see the contrast and the amount of progress that has been made.

Clearly, however, there is a great deal more that needs to be done. There remains a huge gulf of trust and understanding within the context of the Northern Ireland peace process. Comment has been made that the Unionists are still not represented at this gathering. I certainly regret that and hope that they will be represented soon. I think it highlights the way in which there is still a widespread perception that the progress that is being achieved comes about by fits and starts and does not necessarily have a complete momentum to it.

Picking up an earlier point, one is left with the rather unhappy feeling that decommissioning came about as a result of extraordinary circumstances in September and not necessarily, therefore, as a result of a seismic change in attitude. My anxiety is that the longer the weeks and months go on since the first act of decommissioning, the more the tension and pressure will build up again towards some further moment when decommissioning will start to become a critical issue once again.

I would simply urge Sinn Féin, if they want the peace process to work, that it is absolutely essential to bring further decommissioning about in a natural way without it always being the subject of a crisis, because underlying it is the continuing violence at a communal level.

Picking up what Paschal Mooney said, I accept that what happened at Holy Cross Primary School was appalling. But it is right to say that we at Westminster made it clear that we considered it to be appalling; and lots of people, including our spokesman Quentin Davies, went over to see for themselves and to make that point quite clear.

There is always an anxiety from a British context about saying the wrong thing in Northern Ireland, so people sometimes tend to be a bit tongue-tied, worrying about exacerbating the situation. Unless that can be addressed and inter-communal violence, crime and racketeering reduced, which are distinctly and intimately linked to the activities of paramilitary organisations, it seems to me that progress will continue to be in this rather brittle fashion; whereas surely, if there is a lesson to be learned from the first piece of decommissioning by the IRA that has taken place, it is how positive the outcomes have been for everyone from it.

Therefore, if I have one point that I would like to urge, it is that paramilitary groups - but particularly Sinn Féin because of its responsibilities in this regard - need to realise that the future of decommissioning has to progress in a quiet and ordered fashion, and not by further crises.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD (Donegal North-East): I am delighted to be back at another Plenary and I suppose, given the fact that he is a constituent of mine now, I should start by wishing John Hume well in his change of role. I very much welcome Mark Durkan as the new leader of the SDLP.

When we met just after the Good Friday Agreement had been brought to fruition, we had many hopes and aspirations. I impressed Maria Fyfe in explaining where I live by saying I had seven kilometres of border with the rest of the Republic, 70 miles of border with the rest of the North and 140 miles of border with the Atlantic. It made it quite clear as to how important the Good Friday Agreement was for me - and therefore I have no difficulty today in adding my voice of support for the continuation in unveiling of the aspects of the Good Friday Agreement.

In my area, we have had visible, tangible evidence of the work of the Good Friday Agreement. In past lives here, I complained and many of the people who are here either also complained in relation to trying to get money for things. Things like the car ferry that I complained about before, that joined our two areas across the Foyle, will be unveiled at Easter 2002. It is going to be a huge step in cross-border cooperation. It will open up the whole north coast, not only for economic development but for tourism and for mutual understanding.

We have the gas link that was already alluded to. We have the Dublin/Derry air service back in operation: very welcome for people in Donegal who had to drive five hours instead of a 30-minute flight.

The North/South bodies are a catalyst for a lot of things that the local authorities were already doing. We have had a North West Cross-Border Group for 30 years. We have worked on most sides of the political divide. We have had the Ulster Unionists working with us, though we did not have the DUP. Now we have tangible evidence of what is going on; and I hope that we will continue to look at issues of mutual concern, be it roads, be it the Derry-Dublin train service, be it policing issues.

Most of our crime relates to our border location. We are beside a huge city, Derry, but in the context of Donegal. Our policing is geared towards the fact that we live in a small, quiet area, not in a suburb of quite a large urban hinterland. Therefore we have a lot of mutual interests in relation to policing that need to be developed.

I enjoyed Helen Jackson raising the issue of the euro. At a previous Plenary I raised the concept of Northern Ireland having to be a pilot zone for the euro. I think it will be a very practical, very useful experience, because for six weeks in 2002 an awful lot of my constituents will be working not in two currencies but in three, and then they will be back not to one currency but two. They will be quite happy with the concept of one currency.

I see small issues in relation to cross-border working. A lot of our employment now relies on cross-border activity. I was mentioning earlier, in private, some small issues that need to be discussed for which we do not have a forum at the moment. Maybe the whole issue of cross-border working could be taken up in one of our Committees. For example, if I come from Donegal and I have a job in Derry and get a company car, I cannot take the company car home: it is taken off me by our Customs. But if the company had leased the car from Donegal I would have no

problem. There are simple solutions to very difficult problems and I would like to see some of those happening.

There is a long way to go in many areas. Garvaghy Road is, I assume, in the same situation as before. North Belfast has not moved on terribly far. I have raised the issue in an oral question later on. I think it is very important that we have representatives of the Northern Executive here from all sides. I welcome the people from Northern Ireland that are here because they are the only people that can really tell us whether the Good Friday Agreement is working in practice. We can see it from our perspective, and we have our own impressions - but they are at the coal face. I would like to see no preconditions and I was very happy that David Trimble's margin of support increased on Saturday. I look forward to strong leadership continuing within the UUP; but I would also like to see the DUP taking much more of a participatory role in the North-South Ministerial Councils because they were effective and they were just as good as any other Minister when they did engage.

Donegal has a lot to gain out of tourism: employment and economic stability. We have opened up all sorts of new ventures with Scotland and I am glad of that. I have one comment on the actual motion. I would like to have seen something to underline our strength of feeling about those who are trying to continue with violence in order to undermine the Agreement. Maybe we should have addressed that as part of our motion: but I agree with the its sentiments.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP (Thurrock): I wonder what the impact on Cecilia and her constituents has been of the arbitrary - and I think very cynical - withdrawal of flights from Belfast to Heathrow by British Airways, which does not just have an impact on all the counties in the North of Ireland but also has ramifications for other places represented here. There was not a whimper from the United Kingdom Government, nor, it has to be said, from some people who represent constituencies close to that. Deputy Keaveney might want to comment on this, because we should not collectively acquiesce by our silence at a very cynical use of the 11 September tragedy to withdraw from a very valuable commercial slot at Heathrow to the detriment of the people in the North of Ireland because it has implications for the Isle of Man, for the islands and for parts of Scotland.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): I assume, Andrew, since I did not call you, that that was a point of order which has been duly taken up by our colleagues.

Ms Keaveney: And I would be glad to lend my support.

The Co-Chairman: He certainly would not get away with it at either of our two main workplaces. It shows the flexibility of the Chair!

Mr Harry Barnes MP (North East Derbyshire): Conor Lenihan criticised those that had had an obsession about decommissioning. That would probably apply to me. Maybe the reason I have that obsession is that I understood that IRA

decommissioning was of considerable significance to the Unionist community and that they expected progress under the Belfast Agreement towards decommissioning.

The argument that was sometimes put up against those of us who kept arguing was that if decommissioning takes place, Unionism will just come up with something else. It is quite interesting that the very significant move that has been made by putting numbers of weapons, ammunition and explosives beyond use has not led to a situation in which another alternative big issue has been put forward. I admit that decommissioning and the degree of decommissioning are still issues, but while there are whole lists of things that are argued by the two communities, I do not see that there is any big alternative that is going to replace the decommissioning argument. Therefore the action that has been taking place is very welcome.

One consequence of the move to put arms beyond use was that the following day the Secretary of State responded by putting forward the scaling-down provisions for Army installations; and people have talked about the continuing need for a rolling programme of demilitarisation. We should recognise that there is a problem here that we need to face. In current circumstances, as far as paramilitary action is concerned of a wide nature directed towards the security forces, the Provisional IRA are not the threat. Yet it is as if there were agreements made about rolling programmes in response to further moves that are made by the Provisional IRA. The threat comes from the Real IRA, and there is therefore a danger that in reasonably seeking to respond to moves that are made by the Provisional IRA down the decommissioning road, we make it easier for the Real IRA to take action. We need to have our guard up in that particular area. It is a problem that everyone needs to be aware of in the situation that is developing in Northern Ireland.

As Northern Ireland, hopefully, moves more and more to a normal political agenda and the bread-and-butter issues of politics, we need to be aware of other problems that we need to be tough on. The differential duties that on petrol, diesel and cigarettes lead to massive smuggling from the Republic to Northern Ireland, which means a huge rake-off by paramilitary organisations in the border territory involving bodies such as the Provisional IRA and Loyalist paramilitary groups in Belfast and other areas. The need for sufficient fiscal harmonisation between the two governments on the island of Ireland is becoming increasingly important.

The aggregates tax which has been introduced in the United Kingdom has been an issue for the Northern Ireland Select Committee on. It had not been thought of as a problem that was going to hit Northern Ireland; but businesses were going to uproot themselves from border territories and relocate in the Republic, away from Northern Ireland. No consideration was being given to this. We have had some impact on this, in that the Treasury has decided to phase in the aggregate tax over a five-year period. It is illustrative of the fact that there are serious problems on the island of Ireland between different duty and tax regimes which need to be tackled, both domestically and within a European Union context, because there might need to be some agreements as to how we develop these areas. For instance, it should be an automatic consideration for the United Kingdom and Irish Treasuries whenever they

are talking about developing duty policy and tax policy that the land border that exists between the two administrations needs to be taken into account.

Senator Joe Costello: The yardstick of progress is where we were in the spring and where we are now. Undoubtedly there was a greater area of uncertainty and crisis last spring than there is at the present time. There has been very significant progress in what we regard as the key fundamentals: on security, on institutions, on policing and on decommissioning. Policing has been one of the great steps forward. Having read the Patten Commission Report in detail, I regard it as a blueprint for good policing in any country in the world and I would be delighted to see it implemented in the Republic.

We have also seen progress in recruitment, where 50 per cent of new recruits are now Catholics. This is obviously considerable progress. I would certainly hope that Sinn Féin will, like the SDLP, give its support to the new Police Service of Northern Ireland. It is an integral part of the process, it has to be done, and the ground has now been laid in quality policing principles.

Secondly, in the area of decommissioning, again the Rubicon has been crossed. The step has been taken, the principle has been established and, as General de Chastelain has said, significant decommissioning has taken place. That means that there should be no problem at all in relation to the removal of all weapons from Northern Ireland. I think that David Trimble was very courageous and did a fine job in insisting that decommissioning should be done under the auspices of de Chastelain. It should be taken out of the area as a crisis issue for the future.

My real worry is for the Unionist and the Loyalist communities. David Trimble is still limping from crisis to crisis. He still has not been able to get a strong position of leadership within his party. He is surviving more than being able to give a strong lead to his party. On the Loyalist side we have seen alarming developments in relation to pipe-bombs and Holy Cross Primary School and, perhaps most worrying of all, the disbanding of the UDP, because that was the political wing of a considerable sector of Loyalist opinion.

Of course the hardy perennial of Drumcree is still there. There is a great sense of frustration and loss and a kind of limbo situation in that hard-line Protestant community. I suppose that it is natural, considering the changes taking place, that there would be that perception of loss. That is where the worry is, and that is where a lot of work needs to be done to try and get back some community confidence. How that is to be done, I am not so sure; but economic development is obviously one way of doing it. After that I am not quite sure.

The other area, where I have tabled an oral question (as Rory O'Hanlon has) is in relation to the Dublin and Monaghan bombings. I really cannot see why this has not been dealt with. It is 27 years since it took place: after Omagh, probably the greatest single massacre on the island in 30 years. Twenty-seven people were killed. The trail of investigation, as we have been given to understand, stopped at the border; and

there was no co-operation between the authorities north of the border and the authorities south of the border. I cannot see why, in the present context of co-operation and the Good Friday Agreement, thus cannot be resolved and the investigation got under way. There is a very large number of relatives, family members and people who were injured, who want to see this matter dealt with.

My final point is on the Sellafield issue. I understand that as of this morning Ireland has lost its case with the United Nations on that particular issue. To a lot of people in the Republic of Ireland, the commissioning of the MOX plant is an unfriendly act by the British Government against the people of the Republic. That is the perception, and it has to be addressed before it becomes an issue that will sour relations between the two governments.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy TD (Tipperary North): I should like to make a brief observation, Joe. We will be discussing this tomorrow; but in fact the decision this morning of the International Law of the Sea Conference is not quite as you see it. There are two points. First of all, it only deals with the Law of the Sea Conference issues; other aspects of it do not come into play. The application by Ireland at that time was for an injunction to prevent the commissioning of the MOX plant pending a full hearing of the legal case. The court decision refers only to the fact that the injunction was not issued; but the full hearing will go on subsequently.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): John Battle is next, and I welcome him to make his maiden speech to the Body. As some will know, John is a former Minister at the Foreign Office.

Mr John Battle MP (Leeds West): Can I just thank people for a very warm welcome late last night. Some colleagues know that I have been involved for family reasons in Northern Ireland for some 30 years and it is a privilege to be a member of this Body. I do think it is important that this Body formally re-affirms its support for the Good Friday Agreement and moves on decommissioning and policing, which are real, practical and positive steps.

I just want to enter a *caveat* on the danger of a fracture or a disconnection emerging between what I would call "high-level political discourse", at the level of political institutions and structural change, and what is actually happening on the ground. There is a real danger of a disconnection and the discourses missing each other.

In recent weeks I spoke (as others have) to people in North Belfast in Ardoyne-New Lodge. The interface is as tense as it has ever been in 30 years of my experience: divisions are actually intensifying. The peace line is more of a euphemism than it has ever been in history. I agree with a comment that Senator Paschal Mooney made: that there is real fear in Unionist communities and somehow this process has got to address that. There is real tension and it is not just the episode of Holy Cross Primary School. Anyone who listens to radio phone-in programmes will get the impression that attitudes are hardening and are as polarised as ever.

I was interested by the process of drafting the motion for this Body. The original draft was quite short, then an extended version was produced that we are asked to affirm now. I welcome the extension. The Agreement can only succeed if all parts of it are implemented together. I think that is an important addition. The real addition was in the last line. The original version ended: "... this marks the beginning of a new era of stability in the political institutions of Northern Ireland", but then goes on to add, "and calls on all political representatives to respect the wishes of the people in the referenda to implement the Agreement in full".

Just one quick point. Referenda have to be won and re-won. Assent has to be campaigned for and re-won. If you had a vote today it would not be 71 per cent, in my view. There has to be a campaign to do that. If I could have amended the Motion in any way, if it were proper to do that, I would have added that we need to get much more energy into political, social and economic imagination at the local community level. We have got to address the renewal process, in view of the fact that not all are participating in the new boom in Belfast. I have believed for years that arms in the hands of the Unionist paramilitaries have been massively underestimated. There is much work that needs to be done.

Just for my two penn'orth on the euro, I am absolutely convinced that after January, once the euro starts circulating in betting-shops, the bookies have a reputation for transcending national boundaries and it will be accepted much quicker than we all anticipate.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Which just goes to show the sort of debate which is taking place in the UK on the subject.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA (West Tyrone): Thank you, Chair. I want to support the motion. Ba mhaith liom mo thacaíocht a thabhairt don rún seo agus don Chomhaontú. I welcome the opportunity to reaffirm Sinn Féin's support for the Good Friday Agreement.

Ruairí O'Hanlon did well at the beginning to remind us that 71 per cent of the people of the North and 96 per cent of the people of the rest of Ireland supported and endorsed the Good Friday Agreement. I make that 85 per cent of the people of the island.

I think it is also appropriate to acknowledge and emphasise the huge progress to date. We should not take that lightly, particularly when we look at the global scene following September 11 and recent happenings in Afghanistan. Surely that is an incentive for all of us to get it right in the context of our peace process. We are mindful, too, that anything we can do to make the peace process succeed, to bring it to a conclusion successfully, will make its own contribution to world peace.

I believe that very many initiatives have come from Irish Nationalist Ireland. I would choose to put Albert Reynolds's name into the frame alongside Gerry Adams, John Hume and others, people who followed up and did work there as well. Like Cecilia, I

think it is important to record our appreciation of John Hume's and Séamus Mallon's efforts. Séamus Mallon has given way as Deputy First Minister to Mark Durkan and John Hume has retired as SDLP party leader.

Regarding the recent initiative on the part of the IRA, I believe it to be very significant. I would not undervalue it in any shape or form, not least when you consider that the Republicans in the counties throughout Ireland were not ready for it. It was absolutely led by the party leadership, I would suggest. Gerry Adams has used the phrase that to his mind it had the effect of a little earthquake within Republicanism and I do not think that should be taken lightly.

The Motion details four unresolved areas: policing, stability of institutions - and I am glad that the legal ban on Sinn Féin attending at North/South Ministerial Council meetings has been lifted - decommissioning, and security normalisation - or what I would normally call demilitarisation. I believe demilitarisation has not been comprehensive enough. It is minimalist so far; still a very highly militarised society. I have a map at home, and the map of the North looks like an individual with measles. There are so many British military installations here, there and everywhere, surveillance cameras and listening equipment. We know all about it.

Also I would throw into the fray the justice system, human rights legislation and the equality agenda. I am glad that I speak near the end in these debates but you feel as if you are on trial sometimes because a lot of people take the opportunity to urge what Sinn Féin should be doing in the next few months, which is appropriate if they so wish.

I would like to return to a call that I made in Killarney: that people should work towards equality in the north. Whenever I drive along "Prince of Wales Avenue", I think it is called, "the Royal Mile", up to Stormont Parliament Buildings, there are two Union flags on the building and it does not make me feel very good. It does not make my visitors feel very good, people who are asked to share ownership of the new dispensation. Why cannot the Irish national flag fly alongside the British national flag over Parliament Buildings? That is very important from my perspective.

Regarding policing, nobody wants a civil policing service more than those of us who have suffered bad policing. I think it is wrong to portray Sinn Féin as isolated, out in the cold. I have never heard us accused of lacking courage before but I have heard it today a number of times. That is a new one for Sinn Féin. Certainly, it was not courage that we were lacking. It is wishful thinking to portray Sinn Féin as isolated and I do not think wishful thinking gets us anywhere. We do have the right to withhold consent until the gap between the proposals and the Patten recommendations is narrowed and made right. Patten was clear, unambiguous and definitive about the role for the Policing Board. He recommended that the statutory, primary function of the Policing Board should be to hold the Chief Constable and the Police Service publicly to account.

What we have is Patten watered down. We cannot hold the Chief Constable and his force accountable. Partisan political control remains. There is no power to remove thousands of human rights abusers from this new police force. The Board can be prevented from investigating the likes of the Pat Finucane business properly. The William Stobey trial collapsed last week. We do not have an independent, judicial inquiry. Special Branch remains a force within a force. Plastic bullets are still there. Not all officers have to take the oath.

On the ground experience needs to be matched. In relation to the GAA decision—

Mr Lembit Öpik MP (Montgomeryshire): Could you clarify whether it is Sinn Féin policy to advise Catholics and Nationalists not to enter the new Police Service?

Mr Barry McElduff MLA (West Tyrone):

Yes: it is Sinn Féin policy to advise young Nationalists not to join the Police Service. We are not isolated: we have political strength. I am the chair of Omagh District Council. All six district councils in that area have Sinn Féin chairpersons. We are going to have five MPs next time round. I would be careful not to portray Sinn Féin as isolated. I do not think it is the job of everyone here to boost the electoral fortunes of the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists.

Mr Brendan McGahon TD (Louth): Mr McElduff did not respond to Mr Öpik's question when he asked him why the IRA are advising—

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Once a speaker has concluded, you cannot question him because that is totally outside of parliamentary procedure. If someone is on his feet and someone else wants to intervene and the person speaking agrees, that is permissible - though we do not want to make too much of a practice of it. No doubt if you want to make a contribution, Brendan, you will certainly be able to do so.

Mr Jeff Ennis MP (Barnsley East and Mexborough): Speaking in support of the Steering Committee's motion, I agree very strongly with the earlier comments of both Rory O'Hanlon and John Battle. All of us in this Body need to remember that the Good Friday Agreement does not belong to politicians either north or south of the border. It belongs to the people of the island of Ireland. An expectation has been built up on both sides of the border since the Good Friday Agreement was signed and we must not allow that expectation to fail in the medium or long term.

There is no doubt that this autumn has been a rocky ride, initially, in the politics of Northern Ireland as two technical suspensions of the Assembly were followed by major developments on policing and IRA decommissioning. Many said IRA decommissioning would never happen but it is now a reality. Decommissioning must become a reality on all sides.

Several speakers have noted a lack of action by the British government on the continuing level of Loyalist violence. There is no doubt in my eyes that Loyalist

violence is totally unacceptable at its present level; but I do think the British Government is trying to respond. John Reid has obviously tried to do what he can in specifying both the UDA and LVF; but a lot more still needs to be done by the Government to discourage this level of continued violence. I am sure that Ministers will continue to respond in a positive vein.

The establishment in November of the Police Service of Northern Ireland was a very positive initiative. I was extremely encouraged by Jimmy Deenihan's comments earlier about the interest from youngsters south of the border in joining the new force. We have also had support from the SDLP and the Catholic Church in Ireland for the establishment of the new Police Service.

A lot has been achieved recently; but there is still a lot more to do. Our goal has to be the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement - and that means there are still many difficult issues ahead that all sides will find uncomfortable to deal with. I remain optimistic that, with continued goodwill on all sides, we can now achieve our ultimate objective.

Mr Austin Currie TD (Dublin West): I am just going to deal with one issue because of the centrality of that issue to the whole political future of Northern Ireland, and that is the issue of policing. I look forward to the day when the Northern Ireland Executive will itself have control of policing, because any administration that does not have control over policing, that cannot be responsible for the enforcement of its own edicts, is a eunuch. That depends on Sinn Féin playing its proper part in policing Northern Ireland.

Reference has been made to how satisfactory the situation is with 50/50 representation in the recruitment. People have welcomed the number of Catholics who have applied to join the new Police Service. Being a Catholic is not enough. If one is to concentrate on Catholics and the 50/50 membership of Catholics, you could have a Police Service that would still remain unrepresentative of the situation in Northern Ireland. It is young Nationalists and young Republicans that we require in the new Police Service, not just young Catholics.

To that extent, the decision of the GAA to abolish Rule 21 was of fundamental importance because it is the type of young person who plays football with the GAA, people who are members of Galbally Pearses or Dungannon Thomas Clarkes or Brackaville Owen Roes or Coalisland Fianna, are required in the new Police Service in order to make it representative of the community.

As you might expect, I disagree very strongly with the attitude that Sinn Féin has taken. It has made the position of the SDLP more difficult and made the decision they have to take a more courageous one. It seems to me there is no longer any logic in the Sinn Féin position. After all, they now give their consent to the existence of Northern Ireland. They are involved in the government of Northern Ireland. They are taking decisions in government about the future of Northern Ireland and in those circumstances it is only logical that they should support the Police Service of

Northern Ireland for which that government of which they are members will have some, I hope greater, responsibility in the future. It would be a logical step for them to take if they really want to see a Police Service in Northern Ireland that is representative of the community.

I have to say that there are some people - and they are not all members of the SDLP - who doubt that there is that commitment as far as Sinn Féin is concerned. When I go back to my former constituency in East Tyrone and I talk to people from Republican backgrounds, I get the very strong impression that they do not actually believe that the day will ever come when Sinn Féin will be advising people to join the new Police Service.

I heard the question posed as to whether Sinn Féin was advising people not to join; and I think the honest answer was that they *are* advising people not to join. Certainly, I have seen leaflets in circulation which very strongly advise people not to join. I do not mind advice. Advice is all right but it can very quickly go beyond advice; and the tone of some of those circulars that I have seen makes the advice seem very strong indeed. I hope it does not go any further than that.

Barry McElduff has referred to the alleged weaknesses of Patten in terms of the Chief Constable not being sufficiently responsible to the Board about inaction in relation to plastic bullets. These are precisely the matters that will be discussed by the Police Board, for example, when they are appointing the new Chief Constable to succeed Sir Ronnie Flanagan. If Sinn Féin is really interested in finding the solution to these problems, they should be in there fighting for a solution - that is, if they really want to see a solution to this policing problem.

Mr Michael O'Kennedy took the Chair as Chairman.

Mrs Margaret Ewing MSP (Moray): Could I very briefly preface my remarks by paying tribute to Patricia Ferguson who led the Scottish Parliament delegation on the last few occasions we have been together? I know she has written to both of our Chairmen; but she has asked me to express her good wishes to the Body and to say how much she will miss us all, especially when we get snowed up in Kerry, if we go back there again.

It seems to me, listening to the discussion today, and in supporting this motion, that there is still this general consensus of the big picture. Everybody, if asked, says, "We agree with the Good Friday Agreement", but like every agreement, the devil is in the detail. I therefore want to pick up on one or two of the issues at a social or a socio-economic level.

Helen Jackson talked about cross-community projects; and others of us had the joy of being at Ballincollig recently. Although Helen did not win a standing ovation from Dai Lloyd and myself for calling Scotland and Wales fringe regions, it was very interesting to work with all the people who were there from all denominations and

no denominations and who were determined at grass roots level to make these projects work.

Simultaneously of course, Jimmy Deenihan explained to us the complexities of the Gaelic Athletic Association and the changes that had been made there. These are the details which we often miss when we are having these discussions because many of the details are going to be worked out by the people themselves. What we have to do as a Body, whilst we are supporting all of these organisations as best we can, is to ensure that that work is somehow or other given the merit and publicity which it undoubtedly deserves.

As someone who regularly watches the Irish situation, it seems to me that we only ever have negative publicity coming from Ireland. The national newspapers all record all the bad bits and none of the good bits. These good bits are being done by many ordinary people who deserve our support. I wonder, for example, if any of the papers will carry much about our discussions here today, where parliamentarians from across so many political boundaries are coming together to try to work on the issues of the Agreement?

Given that we have new institutions in Scotland and Wales as well as in Northern Ireland, there is also a responsibility on us as delegates to take back the work of this Body and the other organisations to our own institutions, because I suspect a lot of people have never heard of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. If we were to go out on to the front in Bournemouth today and ask, "What is the BIIPB that is meeting here?" they would look at us as if we had come from Mars.

Beyond the cross-boundary projects which are being done at grass roots level, I think the committee work which has been touched on by various members at political level is very important. Senator Mooney touched on the European Committee and I do think that is a fundamentally important Committee of this organisation because so many of the issues affect all of us. I certainly endorse Andrew Mackinlay's wonderful intervention about British Regional Airways and British Airways. I am also looking forward to the debate tomorrow on Sellafield.

I think we have a responsibility to promote - and maybe this fine body of men and women sitting behind us who work for the journals and for the media should spend a little bit more time promoting - the hard and good work that is going on to progress the Good Friday Agreement, rather than always portraying the difficult bits and the crises which come along from time to time.

In conclusion, could I pay tribute in wishing David Trimble and Mark Durkan all the very best in their work? Could I also pay a personal tribute to Séamus Mallon, who is now no longer the Deputy First Minister? I think all of us owe a great debt to Séamus for his selfless and fearless approach to the Good Friday Agreement.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD (Cavan-Monaghan): I want to make it clear at the outset that I fully support the motion before us and, of course, the Good Friday Agreement.

I think there are still many problems there. Some of them have already been alluded to. Helen Jackson mentioned the need for trying to talk to and encourage Unionists to become involved in this Body. I want to say that some of us in all parties in Dublin have tried to talk to some of the more hard-line Unionists in the recent past to try and get them to see that the Good Friday Agreement is the only way forward. The reaction was that, for instance, if decommissioning was started they would then work totally with the Agreement; but of course once decommissioning started they raised the stakes to a somewhat different level. There is a problem there and it is sometimes very hard to come to grips with exactly what they do need or want.

My colleague Austin Currie has talked at length about the police so I will not do so to the same extent. However, I do want to remind people here, in case they forget it, that in the past Catholics did join the police and Catholics did pay the supreme sacrifice for doing so; and it is no wonder that Austin and others worry about leaflets that may be out there in case that might happen again. Those are facts and we cannot get away from that. We certainly want to see all involved so that it will be a truly even-handed Police Service that everybody can adhere to. But I have heard people from different political organisations down south saying that they do not agree with the Garda either. We do have some ground to cover.

Like others, I wish to pay tribute to the work of John Hume and Séamus Mallon. Séamus was a very active member of this Body and he, along with David Trimble, has put a tremendous lot of work into making sure the Good Friday Agreement is implemented. I certainly wish them well and wish David Trimble and Mark Durkan every success in the immediate future, because what is delivered in the next few months will be extremely important towards the long term situation in Northern Ireland.

I turn to decommissioning, "putting arms beyond use" or whatever we like to call it. Decommissioning was the word that was agreed to by all parties that signed up to the Good Friday Agreement. As I have said many times in the past, I was not hung up as much about decommissioning as I was about the release of prisoners, some of whom carried out extraordinary atrocities. Prisoners were all released, so I cannot see any reason why decommissioning does not move forward. It is equally important that Loyalists are brought into the decommissioning process as well as the IRA. The events of 11 September were certainly the catalyst and we cannot ignore that.

I want to finish by saying that you have the street protests that are causing an awful lot of anxiety, not just within this country but also outside it. You also have a lot of "fund-raising" - I use the word very carefully. Harry Barnes referred to it. We have all sorts of racketeering, whether it be in drugs, oil, cigarettes or whatever. We must start asking a lot of questions about where funds are coming from, how they are used and all the rest of it. This is one area where, if we are to be successful in making sure that this is really a peace process and that the motion before us works, we must make sure that this whole area is dug into.

Mr Henry Bellingham MP (North West Norfolk): It is a pleasure to follow Seymour, who always talks a great deal of sense, and I would like to join him in the tribute he paid and a number of other members paid to Séamus Mallon.

It is a pleasure for me to be back on this Body. It is a great privilege, particularly to see the way it has moved on and expanded, taking in members from the devolved institutions, from Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man. The one comment that a lot of friends have made to me is "Over the last four years since you were last here amazing progress has been made" - so maybe if things do not work out too well in the next few months I ought to stand down and then come back again.

I should like to pick up on two or three points. Senator Paschal Mooney mentioned the silence in Westminster over Holy Cross Primary School and related incidents. I can tell him, as my colleague Dominic Grieve also pointed out, that the Opposition has not been silent on this issue in Westminster. Our Shadow Northern Ireland spokesman, Quentin Davies, and his junior, Crispin Blunt, have been over to the school. They marched side by side with the schoolchildren and parents. We put down parliamentary questions. We questioned the Prime Minister on this when he made his statement about a month ago. So I can assure you that we have not been in any way silent. Obviously the media are only going to report very often what they want to report.

Senator Joe Costello and Conor Lenihan mentioned Judge Baron's inquiry. Again, I can tell them that in the Opposition we are concerned about this and we are putting pressure on the Government. We are writing letters and asking questions. It is going to be very interesting to see what the Secretary of State has to say this afternoon.

Finally, Chairman, a number of members have mentioned the attitude of both the Unionists to this Body and Sinn Féin to some of the other wider parts of the framework in the overall political process. Lord Glentoran made some very sensible remarks about how it is very important to keep the Unionists on side as much as possible. He mentioned the dumbing-down of symbols, and I entirely agree with him there. One way forward is obviously to make sure that we get the Unionists on to this Body although, as an Associate Member, if they were here today I would not have my place. I would willingly give that place up to see the Unionists involved in and engaging on this body, and particularly on the different committees that this organisation has spawned. On those committees they could really wield considerable influence and have a very important input indeed.

On Sinn Féin's role, I was certainly interested to hear what Barry McElduff had to say, although I have to tell him that I felt that his remarks about the lack of Sinn Féin participation in the Police Board were really nit-picking. I do not think he came up with convincing arguments at all. I would like to see Sinn Féin involving themselves on that Board. I would like to see them involving themselves as much as possible in this Body. I would like to see them taking their seats in Westminster. Obviously they are now part of government in Northern Ireland. They have to play a role in all aspects of that, and the policing side of it in particular is absolutely crucial.

One final remark. The very fact that we are going to be debating Sellafield and the fact that our Irish colleagues are so incandescent about this shows remarkable progress. When I first came on this Body, if we said we were going to spend two hours debating Sellafield everybody would have said that we were completely mad because there were certainly more important political issues to discuss. It is a sign of the times and it is very welcome.

Mr Brian O'Shea TD (Waterford): First let me state my full support for the motion. Some speakers have alluded to the need for police reform in the South. May I say that the Labour Party in the South has published a document on policing that has drawn very heavily on the Patten model. I recall from my schooldays that George Bernard Shaw once said that imitation was the sincerest form of flattery. I, too, will have to say that I regret very much that Sinn Féin did not take up its places on the Board of the new Policing Service of Northern Ireland.

I should like to allude to the substance of the oral question to the Secretary of State that I have down for this afternoon, referring to punishment beatings. May I say that one development in relation to punishment beatings which I welcome very much is that since the end of October there has not been any punishment beating that has apparently emanated from a Republican source and there has been a marked decrease in the number of Republican-attributable punishment beatings. I hope that that is an indication that the Republican movement is taking a more positive attitude towards the new Police Service.

If you look at the punishment beatings—

Mr Séan Neeson MLA (East Antrim): On a point of order, Chairman, there was a shooting in West Rock Parade on Saturday, I think, when a young Catholic was shot in the ankle.

Mr O'Shea: I take the point. The figures I have would be up to the 18th; but I thank the Member for that assistance. 298 punishment attacks have taken place since 1 January and 191 of these are attributable to Loyalist sources: 110 shootings and 81 assaults. Republican-attributable punishment beatings would be 107: 61 shootings and 38 assaults.

Surely, if there is any area that the new Police Service must address it is this whole area of a parallel system of justice and policing. It is extremely barbaric. There are hopeful signs in these figures from the Republican side and I hope that augurs well for the future.

The other issue that I would like to raise is the Colombia issue and FARC. Some of the reports have alleged, for instance, that visits there related to a new type of bomb - a pretty devastating type of bomb. I would seek a categorical denial from the Republican movement that there was any involvement with any such weapon. In a situation where there is still a high level of polarisation, allegations such as this, if they are not fully and comprehensively refuted, engender fear in the other

population. I would also say, categorically, that Loyalist decommissioning is just as important as Republican decommissioning.

One final point I would like to make is in relation to the North-South body which deals with Irish language. I believe that the Irish language has a very important cultural existence throughout the whole island - but we should watch how we use it. For instance, a lot of the names of towns and districts in Northern Ireland would have an Irish origin. For instance, Derry comes from the word "doire" which means 'oak grove'. There are many ways in which the Irish language can enrich society both North and South: but it should never be used to embarrass people, it should never be used as a political weapon. It is an integral part of the island of Ireland. This is one area that I have a great personal interest in. It is not discussed very often and one of the initial tasks is to complete a definitive English-Irish dictionary. I leave it at that, Chairman. I thank you for your tolerance.

Ms Carmel Hanna MLA (Belfast South): Before I start, can I thank all those members who have spoken so appreciatively of the SDLP leadership? I will certainly pass their sentiments on to John and Séamus.

I wish to support the sentiments of the motion; but I do wonder how stable the institutions really are. I am pleased that the timetable of commitments under the Agreement is substantively back on track. We in the SDLP have stated again and again that our policy is the Good Friday Agreement in all its aspects. I welcome the start to decommissioning by the Provisional IRA and that both the principle and the substance of decommissioning are accepted by that movement.

I have to say that recently most of the violence has come from the Loyalist paramilitaries - the UDA, the UVF, the UFF, the RHD, the RHC; and the political leadership given to them generally is very poor. It is very unfortunate that the UDP have had to stand down in the last week but, just to mention policing, it is at the very heart of our problems. It is unfortunate also that Sinn Féin have not taken their places on the Policing Board, since that would give Nationalists their full representation which presently is going to the Unionists.

It is totally unacceptable that not all young Nationalists and Republicans feel free to join because of the Sinn Féin veto. I welcome the removal of Rule 21: that has helped. I would urge Sinn Féin to join the Board, to get in there and work it. That would certainly contribute to stability.

The Assembly elections will be held in less than a year and a half. Certainly my party, the SDLP, will have the major task of reorganising ourselves and equipping ourselves with the means of effectively combatting our political opponents.

For Northern Ireland generally, all the pro-Agreement parties need to prove that the Good Friday Agreement is working, that devolved government is working and that we can deliver stable government to the benefit of all the people of Northern Ireland.

I hope we are entering a new era of stability in the political institutions, as the motion states. When I look at the 56 per cent vote for David Trimble last Saturday at the Ulster Unionist Council, it is somewhat better than the last time but it is certainly not large enough. The capacity of certain Unionist members to create mischief in that party knows no bounds. They are going to have to be confronted and dealt with at some stage by their own party, and the sooner that is done the better.

The politics of punishment, of boycott, of holding the institutions to ransom, deadlines, are all a thing of the past, but sadly the message from the Unionists keeps changing. Decommissioning is not at the top of the list at the minute. It is our British heritage, it is the loss of our police service and it is boycotting North/South institutions. That is very unfortunate. I know that there has been some talk of a "cold house" developing for Unionists; but certainly those from my political tradition have no intention of ever forcing anyone into a cold house. I believe that the fears of the Unionists and Loyalists are directed more towards Britain than those of the Irish tradition. I would have to say to anyone who may fear a cold house that they should look at the tremendous safeguards in the Agreement. If those of us who do want to build a constructive future together have learned anything, it is that we are interdependent and that there is no other path but through the commitment of partnership to equality and to mutual respect as the guiding principles of our relationships.

Senator Enda Bonner: I, too, welcome the motion. The Good Friday Agreement, as was stated, was supported by overwhelming numbers of people in both the North and South of Ireland. While there have been difficulties in the last few years I do believe that full-scale violence has been turned back in Northern Ireland, that the support that may have dwindled amongst the Unionist communities will again come back for the Agreement. It is the only way forward and it is going to take a long time to fully implement it.

I would like to take this opportunity also to thank John Hume and Séamus Mallon for what they have done for the people of Ireland and particularly for the people of the North of Ireland when they came out a long time ago in favour of peaceful means of going forward in the North of Ireland.

I am also very pleased that Mark Durkan and David Trimble were eventually elected as First and Deputy First Ministers in Northern Ireland. I would have to pay tribute to David Trimble. It is not that long ago since he triumphantly marched down the Garvaghy Road hand in hand with Mr Paisley. He has come a long way and I consider him a very brave man. I do hope that he continues to get support. It took a lot of guts and leadership to hang on. I see him as being a very important factor in getting the Good Friday Agreement fully implemented.

The Good Friday Agreement will not be an overnight solution. It took centuries to get to the situation where we are. It took over 30 years to get into the real mess in Northern Ireland and it will take at least 30 years to get back out of it. I believe that,

whether it be by an inch to be followed by maybe a quarter of an inch backwards again, the main thing is that we are going forward.

People mentioned Ardoyne. Margaret Ewing also mentioned the negative publicity of the media. I was away on holiday at the beginning of September when the children went back to school and morning after morning at breakfast time when on holiday it was the highlight on the television news every day.

The same media that give huge coverage to Garvaghy Road, the 12 July etc., do not get in behind the scenes as well as they did on the Ardoyne Road. Maybe it was not as dangerous on the Ardoyne Road; but I do believe the media have a huge responsibility. The issue of the Ardoyne Road is only chicken-feed compared to the hatred in a lot of other areas in Northern Ireland particularly in places like Portadown. That issue is there, it is going to be there, and it is going to have to be moved forward bit by bit.

Lord Dubs mentioned the rejection of the Nice Treaty by the people in the Irish Republic. We regret that that happened; but I believe that it was a wake-up call for the European Commission. It was the ordinary people of Ireland who voted. I do not believe that they voted against enlargement or against the Commission in general. They were just telling the bureaucrats that they are not 100 per cent happy. I know there are a lot of politicians on the other side of the water who have spoken against the European Union; but this was the ordinary people of Ireland and there were many reasons for it. Even the euro would have been a reason and, possibly, the erosion of neutrality.

One thing that has developed, apart from our economy growing, is objectors. There is a huge volume of objectors now in Ireland and they seem to have got the message across. If you take my own constituency on the very peripheral coast of Europe, I heard my colleagues, Deputy Keaveney, claiming that John Hume was now one of her constituents. I claim Gerry Adams as one of my constituents. I do not think that he would probably ever vote for me but that is beside the point.

Our fishing industry has disappeared over the years, all due to our membership of the European Union. This was one of the reasons that people spoke up against it; but I believe the Irish people will endorse the decision eventually. It was a wake-up call.

On the issue of policing, Sinn Féin or the IRA, whatever you want to call it, made a brave step in relation to decommissioning and I, too, regret that there does not seem to be the same publicity about the lack of decommissioning amongst the Loyalists.

On the policing issue, I am a very active member of the GAA. I played football for my county in the seventies and late sixties. I appreciate where the six Ulster counties are coming from and I know Sinn Féin are coming from the same situation. It is all about votes for Sinn Féin and the communities they represent; and I know how difficult it

was for people like the relatives of Séan Browne in Bellaghy in Derry and why they are not going forward.

I believe that if the Nationalist and Republican young people become part of the police force over 30 or 40 years they are the people who will help get community and trust back into the situation. I hope that the IRA and, eventually, the Sinn Féin leadership will accept the new Police Board. Barry McElduff himself said that the decommissioning was leadership-led; and I would ask them, not immediately but over time, to give leadership again over this issue.

Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville: I apologise to the Body for my absence at the beginning. I had an appointment with the National Health Service and one of the first rules of public administration in the United Kingdom is that if you have an appointment with the National Health Service you do not cancel it. I am not expecting anyone to make inquiries about my health. I found it personally reassuring that my right ear is in great shape and my left ear has trouble. I apologise if anything I say has been said already. Following on my visit to the National Health Service, my remarks will be diagnostic and not prescriptive.

The last report of the Commons Select Committee on Northern Ireland in the last Parliament, thanks to an initiative by Harry Barnes, produced a report on paramilitaries moving people out of their homes. I do not have it on my person but it is available in good bookshops everywhere.

I draw attention to two pieces of evidence as indices of security normalisation on both sides of the community that I would continue to pay attention to. The first one is on page 58 of the second volume, the volume of evidence, which shows charts up until July of this year (so they are not totally up to date) of punishment beatings and shootings in Northern Ireland. You can see from them the pattern after the 1994 ceasefire and also the pattern after 1998.

The pattern for punishment beatings shows roughly the same pattern. The interesting diagram is the pattern for shootings which shows remarkably few shootings in the aftermath of 1994, but they go up very sharply after 1998. One could not help but feel that the paramilitaries were permanently pushing against the boundaries and, frankly, pushing their luck to see how much they could get away with. In terms of security normalisation, that is obviously a bad sign.

The second piece of evidence is that the Human Rights Commission say that, despite human rights patently being interfered with by people who are moved out of their homes, they have never had a single complaint, as Commission, that human rights were being offended in this way. That is also, in terms of again of security normalisation, a bad sign.

Finally, through absence, I am not sure whether Sinn Féin has been accused of lack of courage this morning: but I told the BBC after the decommissioning that I thought

it represented considerable courageous leadership on the part of Sinn Féin and what I say to the BBC I am perfectly happy to say to the BIIPB.

That said, there is a Chinese saying: "In long journey, first step most important." That patently has taken place. I say gently, in English, to Sinn Féin, "second step important too". I would say it in Gaelic if I had the abilities of my forebear, Charlotte Brooke, who was the first person in Ireland to collect Gaelic poetry and translate it into English.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): Had you been here earlier, rather than attending the National Health Service appointment, you would have been warmly reassured by the welcome that you got on your return here as a consequence of your elevation - or is it demotion? I am not sure, but you are back with us and you are very welcome.

Mr John Ellis (Sligo-Leitrim): We all fully support the motion here and it is great to hear Barry McElduff say that he supports it because his colleague, Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin, on a number of occasions down the years found himself out on a limb. I think it is important to see that everybody in the room is supportive of the motion from the Steering Committee.

We have to look at some of the recent developments and we have to give special praise to David Trimble and Mark Durkan for the way they dealt with the Holy Cross Primary School situation. They actually went into the community, saw what the community's problem was and dealt with it. Hopefully, it will be the end of the overall problem. The more hands-on all politicians on all sides in Northern Ireland are in dealing with the social community problems that are there, the sooner we are going to get respect for the various organisations of state.

As to the police force in Northern Ireland, I think we all accept that it has a very chequered career as far as a lot of people are concerned, especially those of a Nationalist persuasion. The trust and confidence that people would have expected who had dealt with other police forces has not been there. I would say one thing to Barry McElduff. If you want to get involved in anything, there is only one place to change it from and that is from inside. You cannot change from outside. I think Barry and his leadership will accept that. They have found that they have made more progress as far as improving the lot of the people they represent, both themselves, the SDLP, the Alliance and all the other parties in Northern Ireland, by becoming involved in actual, active politics - not outside throwing in but inside dealing with the situation. That is the only way this can be dealt with.

Séan Neeson and his party took a courageous decision in making sure that David Trimble was re-elected because what was being thought at that stage by those on the fringes was destabilisation and that is the one thing where people of extreme views can thrive on, an unstable situation.

We need to have the problems of vigilantes, pipe-bombs and everything dealt with in a fair manner, because every night we switch on the television we see that there

has been a pipe-bomb thrown through somebody's letter box, into their back garden or down the road. We saw the effects of that recently when a young Loyalist was killed by the pipe-bomb that he was throwing. That is a tragic life lost that there was no need to lose, just as it has been on the Nationalist side down the years.

Let us remember that if we are going to become active in all of this, we have a duty to support those who are coming in from the fringes and to give them the political support that may be necessary by dealing with the problems of their communities, to allow them to become involved in active politics of progress, rather than the politics of disagreement which we have had for quite some time.

Senator Mary Henry: I support the motion too. I speak because I would like to stress the fact that there has been a great deal of progress on North/South institutions which do not involve politicians, for example, between the universities. I think we are leaving these out of the equation. I have been involved in projects between departments in University College, Cork, Trinity College, Dublin and the University of Ulster. When you can get such cooperation on an all-Ireland basis over research projects, I think it is quite tremendous and worth noting. As well as that, the Institute of Public Health, which is an all-Ireland body, has not been mentioned either; and it has published some very good reports recently, not least for those of us in the Republic reminding us that our mortality rate is six per cent higher than Northern Ireland - which is quite a bit. There are huge areas of cooperation which I do not think we are pointing out. If we had not had the cooperation between the Departments of Agriculture right at farm gate level, what would have happened with the foot and mouth epidemic which we could have had so easily within the country?

Many people have talked about the punishment beatings. I should like to stress the dreadful report from Professor Liam Kennedy of Queen's University, Belfast, called "They Shoot Children, Don't They?", which talked about the shooting of children and the beating up of children, minors, by both groups of paramilitaries. It is really quite dreadful that discipline in what are described by the locals as "delinquents" is being maintained by either beating them up or shooting them.

Finally, it is sad that the Unionists are not here. I think all we can do is keep asking them again and again. I wrote to David Trimble about three weeks ago saying I hoped he would send people this time, people like Sylvia Hermon, Dermot Nesbitt, Reg Empey, people who were able to make the Unionist point of view. I personally regret very much that they are not here.

Senator Helen Keogh: Like all colleagues, I would like to support the resolution in front of us today. I had a lot of sympathy with what Cecilia Keaveney had to say in relation to violence. Perhaps sometimes our motions are a little too bland. Maybe sometimes we should be more hard-hitting. A number of the issues I would like to raise have already been spoken about so I will not delay too much on them.

I am particularly anxious to pay tribute to Séan Neeson and the Alliance Party and to the Women's Coalition in relation to recent events. I would also like to join in paying

tribute in particular to Séamus Mallon. Obviously, I would agree with remarks made about his contribution over the years as absolutely extraordinary.

I have an oral question down to Dr Reid this afternoon in relation to policing. I was quite interested in the theme of the debate this morning because I think that it is the only question tabled on that issue. I would agree with those who have made the point about participation of Sinn Féin on the Police Board. It is absolutely essential and has been reinforced by colleagues who have a very wide variety of views. That is quite exceptional here; and I would ask that that message be very firmly brought home.

I particularly welcome the decision of the GAA to rescind Rule 21. Sporting activity is so much part of the culture of every parish in Ireland that I think it absolutely essential that people who are involved within the community should become involved in the Police Service.

Particularly in urban areas - I see it in Dun Laoghaire and what you might call the tougher areas where we have drug problems and so on - we see alienation from our own police force. There are often difficulties enough in relation to policing without adding this extra layer in relation to participation in Northern Ireland. I appeal for this matter to be resolved as soon as possible.

Finally, I would also like to agree with colleagues about issuing another invitation to Unionists to join the Body. When I look around I see people from Scotland, Wales and further afield. The big gap here is the lack of representation from the Unionists.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): First of all, I think there has been a general consensus here in relation to our desire to have our Unionist colleagues here with us. That is a measure of respect for the progress they have made, the sacrifices they have made and the courage they have shown. I hope that the Steering Committee would be able to take that on board and, in a sensitive but persuasive way, communicate again particularly with David Trimble who has been very widely acknowledged here at this meeting this morning.

For background information on the GAA ban for our British colleagues and those from Scotland, Wales and the islands, when the Cumann Lúthchleas Gaél was launched - and Jimmy Deenihan was one of the greats who captained the Kerry football team to win the All-Ireland final - when that organisation was banned just before it was formed, they imposed a ban on what they called foreign games as they saw it: the garrison games. That did not include golf or tennis, but it included rugby, cricket and soccer particularly. Anyone who played any of these foreign games, with the taint that implies, was banned from playing Gaelic games.

I am happy to say that in my own first experience of government office in 1970 I spoke with the greatest Gaelic sportsman of the time, Jack Lynch, who was Taoiseach, and said, "This nonsense cannot go on." The only game I played was hurling. We communicated to the GAA that that should go. The first step was taken

in that the ban in that form was abolished. From now on, young lads who play soccer, rugby, cricket or whatever can play Gaelic hurling as well. It is a huge thing, as you will appreciate, in our communities and in our parishes.

The other irony is that Gaelic games are conducted on an inter-county basis. For those of you who are not very conscious of the shire you come from, let me tell you that in Ireland we are *very* conscious of the county we come from: and the reason for that is that the Gaelic Athletic Association - that most Gaelic of all organisations - has based our competitions on an inter-county thing. There is no Irish person here who is not conscious of whether they are from Kerry (the Kingdom), Tipperary (the premier county) or wherever.

Mr Conor Lenihan TD (Dublin South-West): Chairman, a point of information. I think we should acknowledge the British Government's role in introducing the county system to Ireland.

The Co-Chairman (Mr O'Kennedy): That is what I am saying. That is the very thing I was going to conclude on. That is the great irony: that our clan system was the basis of our system until the British introduced the shire system. The irony of it is that we in Ireland have taken it into our hearts more than you have in Britain!

Mr David Winnick resumed the Chair.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Not necessarily brief but very entertaining. Michael Mates to conclude the debate.

Mr Michael Mates MP (East Hampshire): I am very glad you are back in the Chair after that brilliant, delightful, totally out of order remark from the Co-Chairman!

This has been a splendid debate and it just shows (as I seem to have this job to do year after year) how the maturity of the Body goes on increasing. First of all, no-one has spoken against any part of the motion. I suppose that is a credit to the Standing Committee. We do dance on the head of a number of pins trying to put these things together and making sure we are not going to offend anybody, and this time we have succeeded.

There have been four main themes running through thirty-two contributions, excluding the Co-Chairman's. I cannot call that a contribution; I would call it a diversion! Of the themes that have run through it, first of all is the general welcome for the normalising of both institutions and life in Northern Ireland. I think this was summed up, if I can divulge the contents of the Steering Committee meetings which are supposed to be private, by my good friend Rory O'Hanlon who said, "Well, it is certainly getting more normal. I was stopped for speeding the other day in Armagh". That is how it takes some people, and long may that continue - not to Rory O'Hanlon, but long may normal law and order prevail.

There has been mention of the lack of Unionist attendance and this has been a recurrent theme for the last ten or eleven years. We have always been sad about it. I

am glad that the Co-Chairman said that the Steering Committee has been charged with trying to put this right and I shall be doing something towards that end over the coming months.

I sense that in some part of some jurisdiction of the countries represented around this table there must be an election looming, because my good friend Conor Lenihan thought he ought to say something anti-British and anti-Unionist at the same time. I make this point because had he said it five years ago there would have been instant uproar, one or two people would have walked out, and deep offence would have been taken. As it is, we shrug and pass on! But he redeemed himself just now by reminding us of the good of the British heritage which he has in his country in that we invented the counties which are now so dear to you.

A major and serious theme running through the debate has been with us for a long time: decommissioning. There has been a huge welcome for the huge step that Sinn Féin/IRA took, but I think the words of Peter Brooke, as always, are the wisest of all: first step, very important; second step, just as important. To that end I am afraid I disagree with Lord Temple-Morris who said that decommissioning has happened. It has started to happen. It must continue. I know he said in Limerick that he thought it was an irrelevance. I do not believe it is an irrelevance. I believe it is at the heart of what is happening and what must happen.

I am delighted that David Trimble managed to overturn some of the people in his own party who wanted to set another deadline. I have never thought deadlines were particularly helpful because you always come up against them - and then you have to use some subterfuge like stopping the clock, or changing your affiliation, or whatever, in order to overcome the consequences of a deadline which nobody wants. I do not think that anyone should be under any illusion at all that there will come a time when, if we have not had further decommissioning and significant further decommissioning, another deadline will loom. The longer we can put that off, the better. The longer we can get on with all of the other things that have got to be done, the better. Do not let anybody think that that one act is going to be sufficient to solve all the problems and in the eyes of many people comply with the spirit and the letter of the Good Friday Agreement.

The next major issue to which many members have referred is that of policing, from Joe Costello's passionate demand for Sinn Féin to change their minds, echoing from all sides and all countries. I would never accuse Sinn Féin, or perhaps especially Barry McElduff, of lack of courage. I do not think that was the intention of the speaker, because everyone has had courage in this performance over the last five years. I think that the courage that is now required is the courage for Sinn Féin to change their minds. I think Barry McElduff is jolly brave to sit here while everyone has a go at him. If I may say so, he does it with a great deal more aplomb and a better sense of humour than the other Sinn Féin representative who sometimes comes here; but it is known that he and I have crossed swords on this matter.

It was Austin Currie, as always, in a passionate and (for him) very short contribution who said it all: the need to get Sinn Féin involved so that policing can evolve and change, as it is doing, so that we can have everybody playing a full part in what is a vital sector of putting right people's perceptions.

John Battle raised very interesting point about the euro. I took with a slight pinch of salt the proposition that Sinn Féin and the Conservative Party are the only ones who are agreed on this. There is a debate within my party, as I think people will know. Indeed, there is a debate within every party in the United Kingdom. But he is absolutely right. When you in the Republic start turning from the punt to the euro in January, by the time you get halfway through the year and the punt has been withdrawn we are going to have a very interesting situation as far as Northern Ireland is concerned.

He may also be right that the bookies are going to be the first on to it, but in the remarks that Harry Barnes made he highlighted the difficulties we have with different taxation systems which will now be compounded by a currency system that both can use. Because any company in the United Kingdom and in Northern Ireland can use the euro and deal in the euro and trade in the euro, as they are doing now, I think we are going to find that a new form of currency cooperation is going to develop between North and South. It is issues like petrol, cigarettes, the non-harmonisation of our taxes, and the environmental levy on aggregates which Harry and I are looking at in our Select Committee that are going to matter more and more and are going to force politicians in Dublin, Belfast and Westminster to look again at arrangements which are going to exist for some two or three years at least when we have the single currency operating in the Republic of Ireland across a land border with Northern Ireland. It is going to bring up some of the problems that we have been trying to examine during the last two years over the difference in the value of the currencies.

It has been said many times before that everything in Northern Ireland is a matter of perception. One of the problems we have now all got to address is the difference in perception between those who lead and guide affairs and those on the ground. If we get a more disjointed approach to this, then I see trouble ahead. There has been enormous progress in this Body, as I have mentioned. There has been enormous progress in the North/South institutions. There has been enormous progress between Westminster and Dublin on a governmental level. There has been enormous progress in the GAA changing their rules. There has been enormous progress on decommissioning.

Where there has not been anything like commensurate progress is on the ground in North Belfast or in Drumcree where, from whatever side they come, people are still feeling disconnected from either the old or the new political situation, where they are still intimidated by the paramilitaries from both sides, and where, as far as they are concerned, all of our congratulations about the progress we have been making are not worth the paper they are written on. I believe that the challenge for all of us here, all of us back home with our governments, and for the new institutions in

Northern Ireland, is to make certain that all of the progress that we have achieved over these years in creating a better understanding is now reflected in the realisation that it is the needs of the people living on the ground in the difficult areas in Northern Ireland that must be everybody's first priority and that none of us must do or say anything which would upset that.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Thank you very much, Michael, for ending on that quite constructive note, and I am sure we all appreciate the way in which you concluded the debate.

And the Question being put.

Resolved, That the Body reaffirms its support for the Good Friday Agreement and the conclusions of the Weston Park consultation; endorses the views of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Minister for Foreign Affairs that the outstanding issues relate to policing, the stability of the institutions, security normalisation and decommissioning and that while each of these issues is best addressed in its own terms, rather than being seen as a precondition for progress on any other, the Agreement can only succeed if all parts of it are implemented together; notes the recent political developments in Northern Ireland; expresses the hope that the election of the Rt hon David Trimble as First Minister and of Mr Mark Durkan as Deputy First Minister marks the beginning of a new era of stability in the political institutions of Northern Ireland; and calls on all political representatives to respect the wishes of the people in the referenda to implement the Agreement in full.

5. MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): We have received a message from a Member of the UK Parliament who I understand is not unknown - the name is Tony Blair. The Prime Minister has sent us a very warm message of support for the Body and for what we have done for British/Irish collaboration in a number of fields. I am not going to read it out but copies have been made and distributed.

The text of the message was as follows:

I am sorry that I am not able to address the BIIPB plenary Meeting in person. But I wanted to give my support to a Body that has done so much to deepen and strengthen relations between the Westminster and Dublin Parliaments since its first meeting 11 years ago.

There is a temptation to see British-Irish relations entirely through the lens of Northern Ireland. And it is perhaps the most obvious example of how joint working can move mountains.

Of course there is a great deal that goes on behind the scenes that doesn't make the headlines or arrest the world's attention. But which is every bit as crucial to relations throughout these isles and every bit as important to the lives of ordinary people on both sides of the Irish Sea: agriculture, transport, culture and the environment.

And there is more to British-Irish relations than Dublin and Westminster.

I am particularly pleased that, following the establishment of the new institutional structures under the Good Friday Agreement, you have now widened your membership to include representatives from the Assemblies of the devolved administrations and the Channel Islands and Isle of Man, which will enable the BIIPB to address the totality of relationships within these Islands.

Bertie Ahern and I have picked up where our predecessors left off widening and deepening relationships between and across the United Kingdom and Ireland. On 12 December 1997, in the margins of the European Council meeting in Luxembourg, we issued a joint statement calling for enhanced cooperation between Ireland and the UK, based on our unique relationship, stemming from geographical proximity, shared history, and the resulting close intermingling of people and cultural influences. On 1 June 1998, in Dublin, the Taoiseach and I followed this up by announcing our wish to develop a more intensive bilateral relationship, based on a programme of closer working cooperation across the whole range of common business, including EU matters. I renewed this call in my speech to the two houses of the Oireachtas on 26 November 1998, when I called for a "dramatic new effort in bilateral relations". The Taoiseach and I committed ourselves to seeking a new dimension to the relationship, involving a real partnership between governments and peoples which would engage our societies at every level.

Your work has underpinned our joint endeavour, cementing links across the board, in every area where we share a mutual interest. Proving that we can work together but maintain our unique identities. That we can set aside our differences for the benefit of all the people of these islands. And that we can only truly protect and further our interest when we unite in partnership.

I wish you well for this year's meeting and for your continued success - bringing governments together; and bringing government closer to the people.

Tony Blair

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): We come back at 2.45. Those who are late may not be called early at Question Time. Thank you very much.

The sitting was suspended at 1 pm.

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

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Order, order. The sitting is resumed. Can I take the opportunity first of all to welcome Quentin Davies who is the Conservative Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland? Quentin, we are very pleased that you could come and join us and play a leading role in Northern Ireland affairs as the spokesperson for the Opposition Party. I hope you enjoy our proceedings and I understand that you will be joining us tonight.

Mr Quentin Davies MP (Grantham and Stamford): Thank you very much.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): I cannot allow you to heckle John Reid, but otherwise you can do whatever you wish.

According to the Programme of Business we are going to start off by debating on the two governments' responses on the cultural significance of parades. We are not absolutely certain what time John Reid will be coming, but we hope that at about four o'clock he will be addressing us. That will be followed by oral questions.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP (Thurrock): Chairman, I remember that in Killarney there was some disappointment by some colleagues that there were no supplementaries. Equally, many people understand that because you are on the list and you have taken the trouble of putting a question you do not want to be left out. Could you, perhaps, give a ruling or sound out colleagues about whether or not they want to have supplementaries or whether you will just go through the list as it is?

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): In the main, colleagues want to ask supplementaries. What normally happens is that on each given question, after the colleague who has put down the question, I would ask two or three others who catch my eye. Obviously, on a very controversial item a quarter or more of the gathering may wish to ask the Secretary of State a question and it would be impossible to take more than two or three. We will play it by ear and obviously, so far as possible, I will try and call anybody who wants to come in.

6. THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PARADES

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): The next item is the responses of the British and Irish Governments to the report of Committee D on the cultural significance of parades, Document 82.

Ms Marian McGennis TD (Dublin Central): In February 2000, which seems like an awful long time ago, Committee D of the Body decided to undertake an enquiry into the cultural significance of parades.

In conducting our enquiry we attempted to distance ourselves from the more obvious controversial parades such as Drumcree and the Garvaghy Road. These

controversial parades tend to overshadow any discussion of the subject. Of the 3,403 parades notified to the Parades Commission in 1999-2000, 3,106 were "uncontentious" and only 297 required consideration. Of these, restrictions were imposed on 152 parades, in other words over 90 per cent of parades pass off without dispute.

While the enquiry has touched on disputed parades such as the annual march by the Apprentice Boys of Derry and the St Patrick's Day parade by the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Kilkeel, the emphasis has been on the motives of the participants. Our enquiry focused on the broad significance of parades, the traditions and beliefs expressed through marching and the role of parading organisations. As a consequence we extended the scope of the enquiry beyond Northern Ireland and we talked to both the Orange Order and the Ancient Order of Hibernians in Scotland.

Within Northern Ireland we met the Parades Commission, academics, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Apprentice Boys, the Bogside Residents Association and businessmen attempting to mediate between the parties in Derry. We are very grateful to all the witnesses who took the time to discuss these issues with us and they are listed in the appendix. We regret that despite many requests we were unable to meet with the Orange Order either in Northern Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland.

This report does not attempt to compare directly the groups which we met. There are differences in scale between the various groups and also differences in the nature of the social, cultural and political activities in which they are engaged.

The roots of the major parading organisations in Northern Ireland can be traced back more than two centuries. The Orange Order was formed in 1795. The first Apprentice Boys Club was established in 1714. The Ancient Order of Hibernians claims to have roots in the sixteenth century although the Order was founded in the USA in 1838. For all these organisations marching is an essential part of the celebration of their traditions. However, the nature and significance of marching has not been constant. There is quite a lot of detail regarding this in paragraphs 5-9 of our report.

Those organisations that talked to Committee D were unanimous that they marched in order to celebrate traditions and culture rather than to make political points or to antagonise opposed communities.

The Apprentice Boys stressed that their organisation was based on the history of the city. They insisted, "The day the parade is stopped, that day the entire culture of the city is stopped".

The Scottish Orange Order also emphasised the importance of tradition. However, their view of tradition was less localised than that of the Apprentice Boys. The Grand Master in Scotland, Ian Wilson, said that he saw the Glorious Revolution as the source of civil liberty, the establishment of the Protestant faith and the Union. The

Scottish Orange Order shares a common tradition and heritage with their Irish brethren. Nonetheless, they are proud of their separate identity and independence. They deeply resent being presented in the media as no more than an offshoot of the Irish Order.

The number of parades in Scotland is small compared to the number in Ulster. The Order assured the Committee that they were happy to re-route parades if there was any objection from local residents.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians claims to be descended from the secret societies devoted to protecting the Catholic religion and clergy. It retains a strong traditional, religious and cultural element holding its major parades on St Patrick's Day and the Feast of the Assumption. There is also a deeply ingrained Irish nationalism in the Order. It is necessary to be of Irish birth or ancestry to be admitted to the Order. Members in Scotland told the Committee that they still saw themselves as Irish. Scotland was merely where they paid their taxes. Members in both Newry and Port Glasgow insisted that the Order was non-party political and non-sectarian and the Northern Irish AOH had proposed a general, non-sectarian festival on 12 July.

Neil Jarman and Dominic Brian, who are academics, in their evidence to the Committee also confirmed the role of tradition. They traced the origins of the parading tradition in Northern Ireland still further back than the Orders themselves, to the Corpus Christi parades in Dublin. The parades by the Freemasons in the 18th century had influenced the Orange Order. Both Loyalists and Nationalists had paraded in the 19th century, most notably in Derry, where both traditions used the town walls.

Both Jarman and Bryan, while acknowledging the traditional elements of parades, admitted that it was difficult to define because tradition was in fact a process of change. The Orange Order and the AOH fulfilled different needs in different parts of the world. Tradition was often invoked in response to threats, but in fact those who attended any one parade had many different motives. This was most apparent at Orange Order parades. Younger Loyalists were still attached to parading culture but increasingly not under the umbrella of the Orange Order, which was not considered to be sufficiently militant.

Marching bands were now increasingly important in attracting younger people. The Order set out rules for choosing bands but these were generally not followed. Instead, the paramilitaries and the blood and thunder bands were growing in strength. These bands were often seen at parades organised by the Order. This revealed both the weakness and the strength of the Order. On the one hand they no longer controlled a fragmented Unionist tradition, but on the other its parades still permitted a wide range of people from the Unionist tradition to come together and so gave it a continuing strength and prestige within that tradition.

In Scotland, the Grand Master said that the Grand Orange Lodge strictly controls participation in parades. Bands had to be notified members of official band

associations and those with paramilitary links were not tolerated. Members of the Orange Order had been expelled for such links and some had joined the recently formed Independent Orange Order.

In the Nationalist tradition, a similar fragmentation is revealed by the decline in membership of the AOH in Scotland. At the start of the troubles, the Scottish AOH had about 15 bands. Many of these bands left to join the Western Band Alliance, which was purely a band organisation. The WBA had no religious ethos. The AOH believes that it is strongly political with links to Sinn Féin. The AOH and the WBA are two distinct organisations and never hold joint parades.

Religion plays a crucial part in the life of both the Orange Order and the Ancient Order of Hibernians. Both are exclusive organisations. To join the Orange Order you have to be a Protestant and uphold the authority of the Bible. To be a member of the AOH you have to be a practising Roman Catholic. In fact, the president of the AOH of Scotland told the Committee that the Order investigates potential members in order to confirm their regular attendance at church. In some cases, scrutiny goes further as some divisions of the AOH do not admit divorcees.

Parades organised by the Orders are in many cases specifically religious. Dr Anthony Buckley, of the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, emphasised the importance of religion, particularly to the Orange Order.

For some participants in marches the motivation is genuinely religious, while for others parades are a demonstration or assertion of political power. For others a parade is principally a social occasion. The Orange Order has retained a strong political connection in contrast to the Apprentice Boys. As a result, the Apprentice Boys of Derry generally do not have party political speeches at their parades while the Orange Order have often been deeply divided by the selection of speakers for 12 July parades.

The Grand Lodge in Scotland emphasised that they were less political than their brethren in Northern Ireland. Brendan Duddy and Garvan O'Doherty, businessmen involved in mediation between the Apprentice Boys and the nationalist community in Derry, also emphasised the political aspect of parades. While accepting that Protestant culture was deeply ingrained in many of the Apprentice Boys, they felt that the more important motivation was power. This point was confirmed by the Bogside Residents' Group who summed up the feeling of the Nationalists in Derry towards the Apprentice Boys as more one of annoyance than intimidation.

Motivation for membership of Orders is also diverse. Family tradition, religion and social attractions can play a part for potential members. Witnesses from both traditions commented on the difficulty they face in attracting new members.

The Committee was anxious to explore the way in which parades and parading organisations impact on the community as a whole. The AOH argues that parades still have an important social function and that they brought important benefits to

local economies. The other side of the coin is that disputed parades seriously damage local economies.

Parading organisations provide a focus for much day to day social life within their communities. Pastor Helen Walker, formerly Grand Mistress of the Ladies' Orange Association of Scotland, told the Committee about the Association's charity work. Annual donations were made to hospitals. Such gifts are made without any conditions and she regretted that the media failed to pay any attention to such good work. The AOH mentioned dances at the AOH hall attended by over 100 people and regular trips to Celtic park to watch the football.

The position of women in the Orders was described by the Grand Master as "semi-detached". Men write the rules and men alone make up the Grand Lodge itself. The Orange Order and AOH as well as the Apprentice Boys have their roots in the exclusively male secret societies of the 18th century, including the Freemasons. However, it is noteworthy that the Grand Master of the Orange Lodge in New Zealand is a female. The other marching organisations are similarly male dominated. I draw members' attention to the fact that the issue of contested parades is dealt with very significantly in detail in paragraphs 35 to 46.

In conclusion, generally speaking, the Committee is extremely grateful to all the witnesses who met with us. We regret that the Orange Order in Ireland did not take the opportunity to present their case. In contrast, we are very encouraged by the readiness of the Grand Orange Lodge in Scotland to discuss issues so candidly.

The role of the media is extremely important. They have a role to play in informing the public about the cultural and social significance of parades in the lives of the Orders. The Orders also have a part to play in educating the public.

The Orders play a complex part in the life of the community. Anyone who meets with the officers of the Orange Order or the Ancient Order of Hibernians cannot doubt their religious sincerity. However, exclusivity creates problems for the Orders.

Another aspect of the exclusivity of the Orders is the limited role they grant women. We welcome indications that the Orders in Scotland are prepared to contemplate admitting women to senior positions and we hope that their brethren in Ireland will follow suit.

The Committee does not question the right of the Apprentice Boys of Derry to celebrate the memory of key events that took place in Ireland after proper consultation with local communities. Similarly, St Patrick's Day and the Feast of the Assumption parades by the Ancient Order of Hibernians remain highly symbolic.

Parades combine different elements, a sense of community, religion and history. Marching organisations should accept that tradition is not constant or unchanging. All sides of the community will have to show sensitivity and a spirit of compromise.

The Parades Commission is a necessary mediator to conflict resolution. Committee D applauds the efforts being made by all the parties in Derry.

In conclusion, the damage that parading disputes have inflicted and continue to inflict on Northern Ireland community is considerable. A resolution of such disputes would be correspondingly beneficial. Parades need not create conflict. They can form an accepted part of social life, bringing people together to celebrate their cultural heritage and benefiting local economies. We look forward to the day when this will be possible in Northern Ireland. We therefore urge all parties to seek resolutions to disputed parades, based on the principles of dialogue, mutual respect and consent.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body takes note of the responses of the British and Irish Governments to the Report of Environmental and Social Committee [Doc. No. 82] on the Cultural Significance of Parades and the conclusions and recommendations of the Report.

Mr Bill O'Brien MP (Normanton): I want to share my appreciation with the members of the Committee for presenting what I consider to be a very good report. We have received reports over a period of time on issues which have been important to the work of this Body and highlighting issues which are apparent in Northern Ireland but I think this report does give us some information and guidance as to this issue of parades. It also substantiates the decision by Her Majesty's Government to introduce the Parades Commission because, as the report outlines, there was substantial opposition to the introduction of the Commission in Northern Ireland. When we read the report and the research that has been carried out in this document, I think we understand a great deal more as to why the Government introduced the Parades Commission.

It obviously helps the RUC, and it highlights a great number of other factors which need to be reported because of the way that the parades have developed over a period of time. It also emphasises the Commission's aims and objectives: to reach a situation in which parades can take place in an atmosphere of mutual respect. I think everyone would agree with that. No-one wants to see the parades abolished; but I think it is fair to say that over the past few years many of the parades have been hijacked for political motives and political dimensions and this has obscured the cultural and social dimensions that the parades were established for in the first instance.

The figures in table 29 highlight the fact that people have been using the parades for other purposes when we see the number of increases in the parades and the potential contentious parades that the Commission have recorded. That is very important. We must take cognisance of it because of the problems that have developed and will continue to develop if there is no directive or help for the police to highlight these problem areas.

In paragraph 31, we see the comment from the RUC where it says, "There are perhaps twelve sites in Northern Ireland where there are problems but these are localised problems. Because of the political situation in Northern Ireland, they are capable of having a Province-wide effect." This is the basis on which I want to record my concerns over the issues arising out of the report involving contentious parades. The Committee have highlighted the areas we should be considering further; and I feel sure that the Committee will revisit the report to give us further information following their research as to what further recommendations we should be making to both governments on the issue of parades.

The nearest situation that I can reflect on is when we used to have miners' parades in our mining communities. They were established to allow miners and their families to have a day of celebration, a day of highlighting their needs and what they considered at that time to be important to their culture and to their way of life. I consider that the people organising these parades wish to see that kind of intention in their localities, in their townships, and in their communities; and I hope that that is going to be allowed to continue. But I hope also that the people who infiltrate the parades for political and disturbance activities will be weaned out and prevented from operating within the parades to cause disturbance and to bring discredit on some of the parades.

I welcome the report and I hope that the Committee will revisit it in the future so that we can follow up the very important issue that is arising out of this report.

Ms Carmel Hanna MLA (Belfast South): I have little personal knowledge about the Ancient Order of Hibernians but I have quite a fair bit of contact with the Orange Order. I do try to understand and appreciate the importance of the Order and of their parades to them, especially in the present political climate where their perception may be that they are losing their culture and traditions and what they hold dear, while Nationalists and Republicans appear to be asserting themselves.

I believe they are sometimes their own worst enemies. In my constituency of South Belfast, we have the largest Orange parade in Northern Ireland. It takes place every 12th July. It traverses the length of the Lisburn Road, which is entirely within my constituency. The parade itself is mostly uncontentious and I hope it remains that way. But the demographics of the Lisburn Road are gradually changing. I do not think that should affect the parade; but for many Catholics and Nationalists it has meant that they either close their doors or leave Northern Ireland entirely for the 12th fortnight. Indeed, there is now a mass exodus from Northern Ireland in the 12th fortnight. The whole upheaval decreases stability and is costing the economy in many areas: extra policing, damage to property and other issues.

South Belfast has what would be perceived as neutral space where there is a lot of recreational activity, and the Lisburn Road is a hub for the rest of Belfast to enjoy those facilities. People want to have that neutral space. Sometimes I am concerned that the Loyal Orders, by condoning the behaviour of hangers-on, are not doing their cause any good. Rightly or wrongly, at times the Loyal Orders appear, not exactly to

condone misbehaviour, but not to be too bothered by the fact that the same people who erect the Loyal Order flags also erect paramilitary flags.

The former field at Finaghy which is also in my constituency is now overwhelmingly a Catholic housing development and the Finaghy crossroads is now seen by some as an unofficial dividing-line between two communities. There are hooligan elements on both sides who, during the summer months, are quite aggressive and we now have quite a lot of sectarian tension in that area. The police would admit that most of the incidents come from the Loyalist side. Certainly, the elected representatives are working very hard to address this issue because this is how we develop areas where we have this sectarian tension. If we do not manage to address it before it gets out of control we may have a real problem there.

In another part of my constituency, the Lower Ormeau, there is a problem there every year with the Feeder Parade. If dialogue does not take place, then this is where the Commission has to come in to play and, indeed, has to make the decision. I believe that we need the dialogue; but if we cannot get it the Commission has to make the decision.

I have talked to the Orange Order in South Belfast with other political representatives. I have also met them in a group with the Revd Paul Burns, but other than in Derry I do not really believe yet that they are making sufficient effort to convince people of the importance to them of that culture and tradition.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Thank you very much. Steve McCabe is next. Steve, this is your first appearance. You are most welcome.

Mr Steve McCabe MP (Birmingham Hall Green): Thanks very much. It is a pleasure to be here at my first meeting. I welcome this report because I think it covers one of those areas which continues to be extremely contentious, certainly in Northern Ireland. I thought that the report had some echoes of a similar report which the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee conducted into the work of the Parades Commission.

One of the first things that struck me about the Committee's report was that there may be - and I do not want to overplay this - some lessons from the situation in Scotland. It would be quite useful if they could be taken on board by some of the people operating in Northern Ireland.

I recognise that there are some communities and areas where these parades are welcomed and I certainly would not want to see anything done to damage that. I would be very loath to dismiss people's traditions. However, I am struck by a comment that the Northern Ireland Parades Commission made. If I can paraphrase it, they point out that there is a right to parade and to protest and that there is a tradition, but that these rights are not absolute. It seems to me that in any situation where the consequence is likely to put great stress on the community as a whole we really should question the value of that apparent right.

In that respect it has been quite interesting that there has almost been a consensus across the political spectrum that the Northern Ireland Parades Commission is now the whipping-boy. It strikes me that that Commission would not be there if there had not been a problem which predated it. I wonder whether, if people put more energy into looking at the fundamental problem and less into being critical of the Commission, we might be making greater progress.

One of the distressing things in the report was the non-engagement of certain organisations with the Committee. Again, this seems to be the same experience with the Northern Ireland Parades Commission. Why will people not engage? They may want to talk about their long-honoured traditions; but I wonder if we need to be a bit more honest and straightforward here. I remember from my own childhood, growing up in Port Glasgow, that there were plenty of parades that were quite harmless events and were undoubtedly family picnics. I also witnessed some parades recently in Northern Ireland which were similar.

It also occurs to me that there were plenty of other traditions when I was growing up. It was quite common to use words like "coon" and "nigger" and to have golliwogs on Robinson's jam-jars, but none of those is a tradition which I would be too happy to defend nowadays.

Likewise, I wonder how much we would want to defend any organisation that finds it so difficult to accommodate women into its basic structure. There is a role for challenging some of the traditions that people claim they are preserving. Where those traditions are clear and where they are inoffensive, I cannot see why there is any difficulty in seeking mediation or in engaging in dialogue, whether for information purposes with a committee or with the community where there is some disagreement. Where people are reluctant to do that, I wonder what the tradition is that is being preserved.

Finally, I want to reflect on one parade that I saw in Northern Ireland where Jeffrey Donaldson, the Ulster Unionist Member of Parliament, was one of the key speakers. I have to say that if that was meant to be a non-political event designed to preserve a long-honoured family tradition, I would hate to see what was happening if I were at a hanging meeting, because it struck me as a very different type of event.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Michael McMahon is next. He is a Member of the Scottish Parliament and is also making his first appearance here.

Mr Michael McMahon MSP (Hamilton North and Bellshill): Thank you very much. This is my first visit and I hope that I am given a bit of leeway in the way that I address this motion, because some of the comments may be seen as a bit tangential to the issue. I looked at the heading of the motion, which is on the cultural significance of parades. Perhaps my concern is that what we should be looking at is the significance of the culture of parades. From that point of view maybe I am a bit disappointed in the report. although I do welcome the report's conclusions.

I am a representative of the Scottish Parliament but from an Irish background, as you can tell from my name. I think it has caused a few raised eyebrows from my Irish colleagues to find out that I actually represent the Scottish Parliament. Scotland, like the rest of Britain, is not a homogeneous country, although many of the institutions which are set up treat it as a homogeneous country. Unless we start to look at the cultures which create those institutions and how the institutions that we have treat the cultures that exist within our country we are going to find ourselves in a position where it is difficult to come to terms with the differences and divergence which we have within our society.

I am a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee in the Scottish Parliament; and the Scottish Parliament is proud of the fact that it has got the highest representation of women of any Parliament in the world. That did not happen by accident. There were over many years purposeful efforts to create that situation; and they came about because of the strength of the Women's Movement. I am always loath to talk about how successful they are, especially in the company of people like Rosemary McKenna who are so prominent in achieving those aims, but they did not achieve those aims by arguing that they were the same as men. They argued that what they could bring to the institutions and to politics would enhance the political process and that they could do better in many instances than the men had done. It is an identification of the difference between men and women that allowed women to move forward, not to argue that they were the same as men. We have to do the same with differences in religion. We have to respect those differences. We have to accept the diversity which exists within our countries, and only then can we begin to tackle the ignorance that exists. You cannot tackle that ignorance by legislating it out of existence. What we have to do is work to educate one another on the backgrounds that we have, and build on what we consider to be our strengths.

Coming from the west of Scotland I can identify very strongly with some of the conclusions that the report brought out, especially in relation to the Ancient Order of Hibernians. I believe that the Ancient Order of Hibernians is holding back the progress of the Irish culture, especially in the west of Scotland, because recently there have been complaints about the behaviour of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in parades. But the biggest outcry that I have noticed was when Comhdail na Muinteoiri le Rinci Gaelacha (the Congress of Irish Dance Teachers) was prevented from participating in the Edinburgh Festival this year.

We have to look at how government institutions can support the development of organisations which celebrate the culture of Ireland, organisations like Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Éireann (which promotes Irish music). They are starting to become stronger in the west of Scotland as the AOH diminishes. I, for one, am particularly pleased about that, because this development is identifying the Irishness within the Scots. I think that that is a great strength, rather than the position which came out in the report and evidence, that the AOH consider themselves to be Irish rather than Scottish.

We have to accept that neither Ireland nor Britain is an homogeneous entity, and start to tackle it from that point of view. If this Body could do more to raise the importance of diversity, that would be a major achievement. Maybe we could take the focus away from whether certain parades should exist, and instead look at how we could break down the barriers in terms of ignorance about those parades.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Rosemary McKenna is next. Rosemary is also making her first appearance here.

Ms Rosemary McKenna MP (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Can I associate myself very much with the comments of both Steve and Michael? The situation in Scotland is quite different. I welcome the report, as we welcomed the Parades Commission. I think it is a step along the way. In some areas there is disappointment; but it is very early days.

I do not want to repeat what Michael and Steve have said, so I will comment on other aspects. Parades in Scotland are very different from parades in Northern Ireland but they are also very localised. There are whole areas of Scotland where there are no parades and, significantly, in the five Scottish New Towns there is very little evidence of any sectarian parades (or of any parades at all) and no evidence of any support for them. What this shows is that parades are traditional events in the older communities, but happily, I think, parades are diminishing. I hope they continue to diminish in a natural way, that the younger people do not want to be involved and that they see parades as sectarian and not in any way helping to take the process forward. Any organisational attempts to introduce a new parade or to vary the route of a parade creates conflict. We must celebrate our different cultures; but we must not celebrate or encourage sectarianism in any way.

I would question one point in the report which was also given in evidence. If the report were to be revisited then I think it is something that should be looked at. One of the organisations gave evidence that there were far fewer parades in Scotland than in Ulster. I am not absolutely certain about that. The local authorities in Scotland who oversee the whole issue would be able to tell you how many parades there are and how many are contested. You might be quite shocked at just how many there are in some of the older traditional communities.

All in all I welcome the report, and I hope that it will help in the future to bring stability to those communities.

Mr John Browne TD (Wexford): Michael McMahon explained earlier on that Irish people found it strange to think he was from Scotland. I would want to assure the Scottish people that I do not own the Glasgow shipyards either!

I welcome this report. I think it is very balanced in a difficult situation where the understanding of both sides has been outlined. Some years ago I experienced this myself, when I visited relations in Co Down. It was very close to 12th July and I enjoyed immensely the spectacle of the rehearsals that were going on, the bunting,

the bands, the colour. When I went home that evening to my relations I was telling them how I enjoyed it and they were shocked that I would have such a thought because they did not see the bunting, nor did they hear the music. They saw it as a form of intimidation and nothing else. I am quite sure the Unionists see the St Patrick's Day parades in the very same way, as triumphalism.

We all know the saying that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder". It is what you think it is or, to go for another quote from Shakespeare, "there is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so". If people think there is something wrong, then this is where the difficulty arises. Even though the marchers may have the best of intentions and they may think they are having a religious ceremony or whatever else, it is the onlookers who are going to have to understand them. That is where I think the report got to the nub of the trouble. Our only hope is that people will be tolerant and where there are sensitive areas, if the Commission decide a march should not go there, the marchers will have enough common sense to stay out of those areas.

In the long run, people will have to be more tolerant. It is going to be difficult, I suppose, to get people to be tolerant of the other person's point of view, but even in sporting circles - and the Co-Chairmen up there will understand full well - if a harmless band of Clara supporters tried to march through Thurles with the Clara colours they might not get a great reception. It is a little bit more serious than that; but tolerance is very important and I think that the Commission have a very difficult job in trying to prevent marchers going through very sensitive areas. Please God, the rest of the politicians will encourage people to be more tolerant of the other point of view.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA (West Tyrone): I would commend Marian and Committee D on their work. Like Carmel Hanna, I know very little about the Ancient Order of Hibernians - surprisingly perhaps - and about their workings. They do not have a very big profile in Co Tyrone.

I would just ask if Committee D has given or will give any thought to the review of the operation of the Parades Commission and of the legislation under which it was established. If they have not done so already, will they give consideration to that in the future? Quite clearly, at the Weston Park talks there was a linkage of the marching issue to the wider political process. Very recently, I think it was 27 November, there was an announcement from the Secretary of State, John Reid, that George Quigley was to oversee this inquiry or review into the operation of the Parades Commission and of the legislation.

I am mindful of what South African mediator Brian Curran described these overtly political interventions as unhelpful. There is a suspicion on the part of some people that the review of the Parades Commission's operation is meant to be helpful. Tell the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party that the announcement a few days before his 1 December meeting was to meant to be helpful, and that the timetable of the review - probably January 2002 until October 2002, with implementation of the results for the marching season the following year - was helping nicely the May 2003

Assembly elections. I have to say that there is a definite suspicion abroad. I would want to see no repeat of what happened in July 1996, when party political leverage was used to reverse the ban on our Drumcree march down the Garvaghy Road and we all witnessed the scenes on television when a political intervention of that nature happened.

In conclusion, I want to quote from a recent newspaper article which was written by the spokesperson for the Garvaghy Road residents, who are very strong about their right to freedom from sectarian harassment:

"The onus remains upon both Irish and British governments to clearly and publicly explain their reasoning behind the inclusion of the marching issue in the Weston Park document. It may well be that their aims are to create more consensus on this issue or, perhaps, even be part of an attempt to go some way towards ensuring that the North does not become a cold house for Protestants"

- playing on John Reid's recent remarks there.

"However, recreating a potential situation whereby Nationalist minority communities in various parts of the North could again begin to feel the chilled winds of the past should not be viewed or accepted as some form of political counter-balance."

Mr Lembit Öpik MP (Montgomeryshire): I would like to commend Committee D on the report, not least because I am a member of it. What the report shows is that it is culturally acceptable to relate anything to the divisions in the province from badges to emblems to parades. The physical existence of parades is not the issue. It is the symbolism that is everything. It relates to the assertion of identity and rights and sometimes to the oppression of identity and rights in other individuals or groups.

By addressing the treatment of identity and of rights, we cure the cause in a way that we cannot by simply regulating or even oppressing the symptoms. As such, I think the report goes as far as anyone can with regard to treatment of parades; but I think if we address the underlying issues which bring us together for a few days every six months the problem of parades simply dissolves.

Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD (Kerry North): The work of Marian McGennis and Kevin MacNamara, who is not with us today, should be recognised. Looking at the various meetings we had, Kevin attended all of them and I think Marian just missed one. Both of them put a lot of work together with the other Committee members and the officials into producing this document.

I visited Belfast with the Committee and it was fascinating - a great experience. We were in the middle of the marching season. It was better that we went and saw what was happening on the ground. It struck me that an Orange Order march in Fermanagh would have a lot of cultural connotations and would be a real cultural

event, whereas an Orange march in parts of Belfast would represent a turf-war, mostly between Loyalist organisations themselves. There was competition between the various Loyalist organisations to see who would beat the drum loudest: that was very obvious. The flags and emblems on the various stretches of street obviously reflected competition between the various Loyalist factions. To them, it was more than just an expression of supremacy, maybe, over their Catholic neighbours. It was also a competition between themselves as to who controls what part of Belfast. Nevertheless, it was a very good experience.

Regarding the AOH marches, obviously they are not as prevalent as the Orange marches and they are totally different. As Barry McElduff was saying, there are no marches in Tyrone. Mostly, the AOH march in America more than in Northern Ireland, and I would see nothing wrong in encouraging them to march.

A former leader of my own party, James Dillon, was very much involved in AOH. Brendan McGahon, who has just come into the room, is a member of the AOH. Maybe he would like to make a contribution about marching.

As I would see marches, I think they are healthy. They should be encouraged, provided that they are not sectarian and provided that the organisers can reach agreement with local people as regards routes. They are a good exercise to get people together. I have enjoyed the marches that I have seen in the past. From a tourist point of view, they are also a tourist attraction. I know that people leave Northern Ireland during the marching season, but people also come to see the marches. If they were conducted properly, if there was no sectarian trouble surrounding them, then they could actually help the whole tourist industry in Northern Ireland.

I look forward to the day when the Orange Order can march through O'Connell Street in Dublin. Last year they were going to march but, for various reasons, the march was called off. I would love to see Orange Order marching through the streets of Tralee for the Tralee Festival. That is the way we have to look at it if the objective is to go forward. There should be no inhibitions whatsoever on people marching, provided they are within the law and provided they are peaceful and not upsetting anybody.

Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville: I join in welcoming the report. I recall commenting on it when we were in Killarney. I do not wish to repeat anything I said in that regard, except to re-express my pleasure at the remarkable evidence which the Committee secured from the Ivory Coast Member of the Imperial Grand Order. I had no idea that there was an Ivory Coast interest in Orange Lodge activities.

I do, however, want to read one thing across to the Report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee to which reference has already been made in this debate. I have of course absolute, total confidence that everybody in the room has read it; but just in case one or two were not able to get right to the end it is worth drawing attention to paragraph 115 where we said: "We are acutely conscious of the cultural

significance of parades to both traditions in Northern Ireland, a subject which has recently been usefully reviewed by the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body."

I quote that sentence because none of the Unionist members of the Select Committee made any effort to take that relative clause out and were therefore quite content for their name to rest on a reference by the Select Committee to the work of Committee D. That seems to me to be, on the whole, a good sign.

Since the Parades Commission is, like our own Body, one with which the Orange Orders are not prepared to have any degree of affinity, I also draw to the attention of those who, perhaps, have not read the Select Committee's report right to the end to paragraphs 94 to 96, where there was, in fact, a comment by the Apprentice Boys of Derry to the Commission about one particular facet of activity in the Lower Ormeau Road. In evidence to us the Commission indicated that they had taken note of the Apprentice Boys' comment on a parade activity which had been notified to them by the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community.

Taking a long view rather than a short view, I take encouragement from the possibility that Unionists will, in due course, take a more generous view towards us and the Orange Orders will take a more generous view towards the Parades Commission than they have historically, because there is no question at all that the Parades Commission came down on the side of the Apprentice Boys in paragraphs 94 to 96.

Mr Séan Neeson MLA (East Antrim): I deeply resent the fact that every year in July, Northern Ireland is held to ransom because of the Drumcree situation, and all of us are put under considerable pressure because of the failure to reach agreement on the parades issue, particularly at Drumcree.

I want to correct something that Barry McElduff said. I was on the Police Authority in 1996 when the decision was made to reverse the original decision about Drumcree. I was deeply concerned that the reversal of the decision brought Northern Ireland near to almost outright civil war. It was for that reason, as a member of the Police Authority, that I put down a resolution of no confidence in the then Chief Constable, Hugh Annesley. I can assure you, knowing the gentleman as I do, there was no political intervention. It was a decision taken purely and simply by Hugh Annesley at the time.

A number of years ago, I was canvassing in Enniskillen and I came to this Nationalist estate. As you know, estates in Northern Ireland are well-known for their graffiti. On the gable end of this Nationalist estate ran the slogan, "Forget 1690. We demand a replay." I think maybe that is the spirit in which we can move forward.

Ms Marian McGennis TD (Dublin Central): I just want to thank all those who have commented on the report. The Committee will be meeting in the morning, so maybe the members themselves might like to decide if we want to extol further some of the points raised by members.

Barry McElduff suggested that the Committee might look at reviewing the Parades Commission. Carmel Hanna has brought to my attention the fact that, although it is omitted from our report, there is not a woman on the Parades Commission - so maybe that is where we will start the review.

I would like to thank the members. I would also like to put on the record, as Jimmy Deenihan has done, the thanks of the committee to the staff who drafted the report, who travelled with us, who took notes of the hearings and who, I think, produced a fairly good, substantial report.

And the Question being put:

Resolved, That the Body takes note of the responses of the British and Irish Governments to the Report of Environmental and Social Committee [Doc. No. 82] on the Cultural Significance of Parades and the conclusions and recommendations of the Report.

6. ADDRESS BY THE SHADOW SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, MR QUENTIN DAVIES MP

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Since we have a gap before the Secretary of State comes along, Michael O'Kennedy and I were wondering if we should use the time, with your consent - we are allowed to do so under the Rules - to ask the Shadow Secretary of State questions of an informal nature. If Quentin wants to say a few words, obviously he is welcome according to the Rules. Michael is saying to me that, strictly speaking, Rule 2(c) states: "Members of the participating institutions, not nominated members of the Body, and others, may be invited by the Steering Committee in writing", which we have done already in the last few moments, "to address the Body. Invited members of the participating institutions may also take part in debates and details of these invitations shall be included in the programme of business."

I had in mind that perhaps Quentin would take the opportunity of responding to questions. First of all, would there be any objections on the part of the Body?

Mr Michael O'Kennedy: I am not a stickler for procedure but I think we have conformed with the Rules. In fairness to our guest who will be invited to address us if the Body gives us that authority, it might be going a little far but if he is ready to take questions, fine. I do not think we should spring it on him if he is not disposed to take questions.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Quentin Davies is willing to address the Body and answer questions, as I understand it. Can I first of all have consent in accordance with Rule 2(c)?

It was so agreed.

Mr Quentin Davies MP (Grantham and Stamford): Thank you very much. I am very grateful for this invitation and I do appreciate it. I am honoured to be asked to address you and answer questions. I am delighted to do both. While people think of the questions that they may want to ask, let me just say a couple of words - I will not trespass too much on your time - about where the Conservative opposition stand on these difficult issues of Northern Ireland.

To get rid of one particular type of illusion or misunderstanding that sometimes arises, our attitude towards Northern Ireland is not, necessarily, one which is best described by the word "bipartisanship". Sometimes people say, "Do you have a bipartisan policy on Northern Ireland?" That is not correct. That would imply that we had nothing particularly different to say under any circumstances from what the Government is saying. I do not think that would be a sensible or realistic position.

We are not bipartisan in the sense that we have given the Government a blank cheque; but there is no doubt that this is an issue which is far too important to be left to the normal conventions of party politics. We are not at all in the business of just mindless, party political government-bashing - I hope, by the way, we are not generally in the Opposition these days. That is not our concept of opposition, and it certainly would not be in the case in regard to Northern Ireland. We are a very constructive Opposition; and that means that we look to do what we can to contribute in the national interest and the interests of the citizens of Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom to help build a viable, devolved democracy, and to establish peace and the economic prosperity which flows from that.

In common with the Government we have a conviction that the Belfast Agreement, for all its imperfections - and there were many aspects of it that were very unpalatable for many of us - represents the best opportunity and the best foundation, for moving forward. There have, of course, been many positive developments since. The Agreement was endorsed by 70 per cent of the electorate of Northern Ireland. We have to take that into account. In terms of objectives, there is nothing very much between us and the Government; but in terms of means of getting there, from time to time, we may differ in emphasis or indeed in the views that we put forward.

One of the essential things that we hope for - and I think this is a key to some of the things we have been discussing this afternoon - is normalisation. Obviously, we want to see a situation - I hope before the end of our political lifetimes - in which people in Northern Ireland can lead exactly the same kind of civilised life that they would be able to lead in London, Dublin, Paris or Rome.

We want to de-escalate and eventually get rid of the appalling suspicions and hatreds that exist and the physical representations of those tensions and hatreds, which themselves contribute to the problem in their own way. I am thinking of things like the walls, a totally artificial and really sinister, horrific phenomenon in a modern democracy in the 21st century. I am thinking also thinking of the Parades Commission. Clearly, in an ideal world, it would not be necessary. People have said

from both sides of the argument this afternoon and from both communities - and I am very glad to hear it - that parades in themselves provide colour, music, social and civic occasions. These things are contributors to our civilisation and to the richness of life. In principle, nothing could be nicer than that there should be a tradition either from the Ancient Order of Hibernians or from the Orangemen or from the Apprentice Boys in Londonderry or whomever of having these parades. We want to get into a situation in which we can take these things for granted and no one can be threatened by them.

When I met the Grand Master of the Orange Order the other day, Mr Salters, I said to him - and he did not demur - that it is a strange irony of the present situation that the Orange Order can have its most unproblematic parade, that is to say, with the least danger of anything untoward happening or any opposition, in County Donegal, where they have carried on for a long time and no one is worried. I think everybody is very happy to have them there. That is the way forward.

In parades as in other areas, it seems to me that the best solutions politicians could encourage would be to get people from the organisations on both sides involved. As I happen to know, they have never met. Is that not an extraordinary situation? The Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Orange Order in Northern Ireland have never actually met. They have never sat down at a table and said, bilaterally, "How can we sort these things out? How can we help to agree a pattern of parading which will enable everybody to have the parades they want with the minimum frustration and difficulty?" This is a very abnormal situation and we have to hope that as time goes by (in a shorter rather than longer time frame, I hope) we can resolve these issues.

That perhaps gives a slight flavour of some of my concerns and I hope that that is long enough for me to fill your gap, Chairman. I am delighted to be able to serve a useful, modest purpose in your programme this afternoon. I am happy to answer any questions Members may have.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Michael O'Kennedy): Arising from your last comment, Quentin, we do appreciate the fact that you have made yourself available. I have to tell you that if we are going to fill that gap that you have suggested in question time you will be here for another hour. Do you want to withdraw that suggestion?

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Michael Mates has told the Chair that the Secretary of State will not be here until five o'clock at the earliest. Quentin is happy to take questions and at the moment I have questions from two Labour Members of Parliament and one Liberal.

Lord Dubs: I hope I do not destroy the harmony of the proceedings by asking a hostile question. In the House of Lords we are currently discussing emergency legislation on terrorism: the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Bill. The Conservatives successfully moved an amendment last Thursday defining "terrorism" in such a way as to encompass terrorism, so-called, in the United Kingdom. That, in effect, brought Ireland fully into the scope of this legislation in such a way as to

suggest that the Conservatives wanted to bring back internment, among other things. I may not have got that right, but could you explain the purpose of that amendment?

Mr Quentin Davies: I am delighted to do that. Since you obviously have a problem with that let me take full responsibility. I think it was I who took the initiative as a result of a conversation with my deputy in the House of Lords, Robin Glentoran, who is here this afternoon and who drew my attention to clause 23 in the Bill. I said that we really had to take a very clear line on the distinction in the Government's Bill between international terrorism, which was defined in clause 23, and terrorism directed at a part of the United Kingdom. That seemed to me to be an utterly invidious and absurd distinction to make. Clearly terrorism is not just a very bad thing; it is a major threat to people's lives in the modern world.

To suggest that we are somehow less concerned with terrorist threats to our own citizens within these islands (whether Great Britain or the island of Ireland) than we are with terrorist threats elsewhere, in Colombia or Afghanistan or somewhere, would be utterly absurd. That seemed to me to be a thoroughly unacceptable distinction. As soon as Robin Glentoran had drawn this to my attention I therefore called an immediate meeting with Oliver Letwin, which Robin may remember, to make sure that I had my colleagues on my side; and I suggested that we as a party took a strong line on this. I was speaking two days later at the UUP Conference in Belfast and I wanted to clear with colleagues the line I was proposing to take. I said what I have just said now: that no such distinction has a place in our law - it is utterly invidious and utterly wrong.

To turn to what you said about internment, it has been used in the Republic, I believe rather successfully, against the IRA. It was used extremely unsuccessfully and rather disastrously in the early 1970s by the then Stormont Government, as you know very well. There is no suggestion either by the Labour Government (but they must speak for themselves; they are well represented here) or by us that we should bring back internment at all.

What the Anti-Terrorism Bill does is to provide for some response when we have people against whom there is very serious hard evidence of malfeasance and involvement in terrorist activities or planning terrorist activities who arrive here, claim asylum (and, as you know, when you arrive here and claim asylum you immediately trigger the rules that have been set up in accordance with the international refugee conventions and the ECHR and all the rest of it so no-one can deport you), and stay here indefinitely, for months or even years. Unless you can bring a case before a court there is nothing you can do about it. You cannot extradite these people or deport them or send them back to where they have come from if they have come from a place where they might be subjected to some kind of cruel punishment or torture or a capital sentence - which often is the case with people who come from places where there is a lot of Middle Eastern terrorism.

There are serious issues here with such people in this country or with people who are being sought elsewhere in the western world, such as the United States, for serious offences. The Government have brought in proposals to deal with that. We support that, though our own preference would be to change the ECHR or the particular basis of our adhesion to the ECHR, and to provide for us to be able to extradite these people when necessary. If that does not work, we accept the Government's proposals. We do not have a quarrel with that part of the Bill itself. We have a very strong quarrel with that distinction which, as I have mentioned, was very ambiguous and I think we are absolutely right to get it out of our law.

Mr Henry Bellingham MP (North West Norfolk): This morning we discussed the situation at Holy Cross Primary School; and a number of our Irish colleagues mentioned that there had been silence - someone described it as, almost, indifference - by the British Parliament and by the press in London. Certainly the press probably had not given it the same sort of attention that they might have given an incident in, say, Leeds or Manchester. Could you comment on those remarks and also mention what the Opposition's feelings are?

Mr Quentin Davies: If it is true that the British press are less interested in a case like that if it happens in Belfast than if it happens in Leeds or Manchester, then I think that that is a profoundly shameful state of affairs and one that must be very worrying to all of us. As you know, that was not my view. and when I decided to accompany the children and the parents at Holy Cross Primary School it was very much in a sense that it was about time that some elected politician did take a stand on that issue. The issue is a very clear one. Somebody has to take a stand in Northern Ireland against the complete nonsense in which I refuse to acquiesce in any circumstances: that "this is my street" and "that is your street", and "this is an orange street" and "that is a green street", and "I belong here" and "you belong there", and you have to go round a back way if necessary so that you keep on the green streets or the orange streets, as the case may be - complete rubbish. We cannot have a civilised country on that basis.

Another thing is the whole idea of bringing children into a political dispute. God knows, terrible things have happened in Northern Ireland over the last 30 years; but when somebody decided to target children in this particular dispute they crossed a new line of unacceptability, in my view, and somebody needs to make that clear. Not just ourselves, but everybody in the House of Commons and everybody in the Dáil I think, would subscribe to that; and I trust that almost everybody in the Northern Ireland Assembly (although I fear I have to be a little more cautious in what I say there) would agree with what I have just said, that the situation in North Belfast and the Holy Cross Primary School is very bad.

It is perfectly true that there has been a lot more attention paid to it in the Northern Ireland press than in the English press; but the main thing is that there has been progress in resolving the matter and that must be very encouraging - not least because I hope it will discourage anybody in future from whichever community, whatever the political dispute is, to repeat that particular tactic.

Mr Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): As somebody who has been working on the Northern Ireland brief for a long time and who has been to the Holy Cross Primary School, I am pleased that you have taken the initiative to be more proactive in that way. However, turning to the rather surprising Thursday vote in the Lords, I want to clarify what you said. You recognised that the amendment in legal terms reintroduces internment, which is good: we agree on the facts.

Mr Quentin Davies: No, I did not say that. You misunderstood me entirely, Lembit.

Mr Öpik: I did not misunderstand you. Could you clarify that?

Mr Davies: We have not reintroduced internment at all. We provided for a way of dealing with people I have just referred to who are non-British, non-EU citizens who have claimed asylum where there is a *prima facie* case that they are involved in terrorist operations. That is all we are talking about. I must correct you. I did not say that that was internment in the sense that we have had it either in the Irish Republic or in the United Kingdom before.

Mr Öpik: I suppose what confused me was that you spoke in positive terms about internment, which is not a position which I would share. Nevertheless, accepting your definition of the intent at least, why do you feel it was necessary to take up so much time during the anti-terrorism debate on an amendment which cannot have helped to maintain a cross-community allegiance to the process if it actually became law? Given that we spent a period of time following the Omagh bombing specifically introducing legislation to address this, why did you feel that you needed to use this Bill to do something which certainly I regarded as potentially destabilising? Can you give an assurance that you will not be pursuing this amendment if it gets rejected again by the lower House?

Mr Davies: Maybe I am not speaking very clearly but I am going to have to repeat some of what I just said. First of all, this is not internment in the sense in which that term and that concept has been used before, both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic. This is something that does not affect our citizens at all. It is a way of dealing with people who do not have a legal right to be here but are here because they have claimed asylum, though they are clearly very undesirable residents of this country, and we cannot deport them or allow them to be extradited for reasons connected with the ECHR. There is nothing else we can do with them. We have suggested to the Government that we can resign from the ECHR and rejoin it the next day with certain reservations, as the French have done, and solve the problem of Article 3 in that way. It is all very technical.

If the Government do not want to do that then we have to do something about these people and we have accepted that. It does not mean to say that I am in favour of internment. By the way, because these people are not British citizens, are not EU citizens, are not Irish citizens, they do not have a natural right to be here but they come from somewhere else. They can always leave if they want to. They can go back somewhere else or to some third country. Of course I accept that, being the sort of

people they are, not many third countries will want to have them. This is not internment at all because they do not have to come here in the first place. If they want to leave they will be able to leave at any time, so I did not accept internment; that is not true.

Secondly, I stand by what our colleagues in the House of Lords have done. Your party is a strange party, Lembit, and one can never be quite certain what line you are going to take on anything. We have had a situation recently in which Jenny Tonge, one of your party spokesmen, was against bombing in Afghanistan, and later in the same debate your foreign affairs spokesman, Menzies Campbell, was supporting the American bombing in Afghanistan, so it is quite difficult to know where you really stand. On this occasion in the House of Commons, you in the Liberal Democratic Party went along with us in opposing this invidious distinction between international terrorism and domestic terrorism. By the time the Bill had got to the House of Lords a few days later, for some reason your party had changed its official line. I do not know what line you will be taking on it next week or the week after. It is entirely a matter for you; but if you are asking me about my policy and whether we will change our view, no, of course we will not. We are very pleased that the upper House has come to the conclusion it did. I think it would be extraordinarily unwise and foolish of the Government to attempt to use the Parliament Act to reverse that decision.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Michael O'Kennedy): This is very stimulating and I am happy to hear the responses but, just on a point of clarification, reference has been made to internment in the Republic as well. I do not think any member of the delegations here from the Republic will remember having internment. That has long since gone off our statute books. I have been a member of the Dáil since 1965, and it was long since gone before I came in. It was applied last in the nineteen-fifties, so it is not the kind of precedent that we would like to see being used.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA (West Tyrone): My question might have been covered by Mr Bellingham's question. It was really to invite Mr Davies to comment on his experience of walking with the girls from the Holy Cross Primary School and how it impacted on him personally, but I do not mind if he rules that he has covered that.

Mr Davies: It was walking a gauntlet which, of course, the parents and the children had been doing for many weeks. It was not very pleasant. I was called at one time - and I hope I am not going to offend any sensibilities here - a "f***** Fenian bastard" by one group of demonstrators.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Compliments all the way!

Mr Davies: So I had to say that actually I came from Lincolnshire.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Which part of the insult did you not like?

Mr Davies: It was, if you like, an interesting and memorable experience - directly - of some of the pressures and some of the unpleasantness that a lot of people have

been going through in the Province over the last 30 years. I did not only accompany the parents and the children but I then decided I ought to go and speak to the demonstrators. That was the most interesting bit of all psychologically, because it meant approaching people who were starting off at full decibels - they had been throwing things, although they were not actually throwing things as I approached - and trying and calm them down. By this time the RUC (as they were then) were getting quite worried about my safety so they were falling in behind me which was quite reassuring.

As most of the politicians in the room know, if you want to get someone's attention you have to speak very softly, so I had to say, "If you have got some arguments I would quite like to hear them", and I said that two or three times and I ended up having some quite interesting conversations with some of the demonstrators. It was certainly an experience I would recommend to any politician who wants to take an interest in the affairs of the Province. All I can say is that I hope I can tell my children and grandchildren about this in later years at a time when it will be inconceivable to them that people in any parts of our islands could have been behaving in such a fashion.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): We all certainly echo that.

Lord Glentoran: All I was going to say, Chairman, was that I felt that it was seriously inappropriate for my good friend Alf Dubs and others to bring up, in a place like this, a party debate about the Home Office that happened in a totally different place. I have no question to put.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD (Cavan-Monaghan): I was going to ask about the Belfast situation and that has already been covered; but I do want to comment on the issue of the AOH and the Orange Order. You said that they had never met in Northern Ireland, but I can assure you that in my own home area 50 or 60 years ago they shared the one set of drums, they shared the one bandmaster, and they communicated very closely amongst each other. Unfortunately, the activities of the last 30 years have made things totally different. There was a time when there were good relations and I am sure there still are in certain areas. They have a lot in common and I would hope they would get back to that stage where they can work together.

Mr Davies: Thank you very much for that. I think it is a very nice note on which to close because it shows it has been done. It has been done in the past and let us hope it is not too long before we shall see that particular scene again.

Mr Dominic Grieve MP (Beaconsfield): I was earlier expressing some surprise at Lembit's question. As an Opposition Home Affairs spokesman, I can confirm that the Liberal front bench in the Commons fully supported the amendment that we tabled in the Terrorism Bill in order to extend the provisions relating to detention of suspected foreign terrorists to those who might be seeking to commit acts of terror

within parts of the United Kingdom, so I found his question completely incomprehensible.

Mr Davies: This is not time to continue the party political debate. There is a time for party politics and a time when they are not appropriate. We shall look forward to getting at the Liberals and reminding the Liberals of these inconsistencies in the debates that we will be having on the subject.

Lord Temple-Morris: It is a first for the Body to have the Shadow Secretary here, and as far as I am concerned no Shadow Secretary is more welcome than Quentin Davies. Could I ask him to clear up one matter which I think is of underlying concern to some, if not all, of us here? That is, in view of various speculative reports, the relationship of the Conservative and Unionist Party to the Ulster Unionist Party. Some of the reports have almost been talking about amalgamation, whip-taking and going back to the old days. I just wondered if Quentin Davies could clear that up.

Mr Davies: No such proposal has been made to the Conservative Party. As you know, there was a time when we were the same party; and after 1972-73 we had a formal electoral pact with the Ulster Unionists. That continued until the Anglo-Irish Agreement; sadly, they felt that they wanted to part company with us over it. There has been speculation which I am well familiar with; but I see quite a lot of David Trimble and that matter has not been raised.

All I can say is that I regard my job as Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland as to keep in touch with all the parties. I have met with everybody including, of course, Sinn Féin. I will continue to meet any democratically-elected party in Northern Ireland. We will continue in opposition (and I hope in three and a half years' time no longer in opposition) to do the best we can to make a constructive contribution to ending a period in our national history which is one that none of us on any side can be proud of. We are all looking very much forward, as Seymour Crawford says, to creating a new, happier future for everybody in Northern Ireland. We hope that Northern Ireland will no longer need to feel in the future the kind of handicap, the kind of special *angst*, which it has felt up to now, and can feel like any other part of the European Union and, like any other civilised country, a perfectly normal place where they can go about their lives and plan them in freedom: in particular, free of any sense of threat.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Quentin, can I genuinely, on behalf of the Body, thank you very much for coming at such short notice to answer questions. Obviously, your comments will not be agreed to by everybody, but you have put your point of view and we much appreciate it.

The sitting was suspended at 4.20 pm.

The sitting was resumed in public at 5.10 pm.

5. ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND, RT. HON. DR JOHN REID PC MP

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): We are very pleased indeed to welcome you, Secretary of State. In the short time that you have done the job, you have certainly made an impact. There is no one here or ever likely to be involved in British or Irish politics who is not aware of the work that you have put in during the last year since you took over. With great pleasure, I now invite you to address our plenary meeting.

Rt hon. Dr John Reid PC MP, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Can I apologise for not being here earlier, although in the spirit of inclusivity that we like to encourage and inculcate in Northern Ireland as elsewhere it did give an opportunity, rarely experienced these days, for my opposite number to answer some of the difficult questions. I am sure that he performed as well as he always does. I would like to say how pleased I am to be here. Not only have I have never addressed this gathering before, but I have never addressed a gathering of this nature, of so many different views, no doubt many of them antagonistic - with the possible exception of the Scottish Labour Party, where there is a range of views as well! I am delighted to be here.

On a sadder note, I would like to express my condolences to Mike Burns on the sad loss of his wife, Lynette, because I understand that Mike, as Media Adviser to your own institution for many years, and Lynette regularly attended and that Lynette played an active part in the proceedings, particularly in the spouses' programme. I know she will be sadly missed by this Body and I thought it was worth recording formally my own condolences.

There is a book by Paul Arthur, *Special Relationships*, which I commend to everyone here, that I think is worth reading. One of the first things he says in that study of Northern Ireland's internal politics is that it led him almost inexorably into the larger arena of Anglo-Irish relations. He writes that Dublin, Belfast and London can be characterised as "three solitudes", as he calls them. He describes how they first moved apart; then they came together. There are few better forums than here at the BIIPB in which to look at how, across the United Kingdom, we are breaking down the barriers between these three solitudes of which he spoke.

The three solitudes which he referred to are Dublin, Belfast and London. By deepening and strengthening the relationships throughout these islands, I believe that we are achieving something which not only addresses these apparent solitudes but goes much wider, not just between Belfast, Dublin and London, but including, obviously, Edinburgh, Cardiff and the islands by reappraising how we relate to each other and the world around us. I want to say something of that today in a general, conceptual and practical sense, rather than just deal with the tactical ebb and flow of some of the developments which have been taking place over the last six months, though I will be happy to answer any questions.

Part of that process of addressing these solitudes of Belfast, Dublin and London is by examining our own identity and allegiances by demonstrating, each of us in different ways, how an inclusive, pluralist government can be, and is, a template for an inclusive, pluralist society.

The British-Irish Treaty of December 1999 gave us the constitutional framework for relations throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. The institutions that it set up now span the whole of these islands represented here today, institutions with diverse responsibilities but with a single purpose, which is to enhance practical cooperation for the benefit of all of our people. This Agreement, the high water mark in many ways of Anglo-Irish relations, was the culmination of years of work and a gradual shift in our thinking. It did not arrive overnight and it did not arrive without much work at the practical and human level and also at the conceptual and the analytical level, from the recognition in the Sunningdale Agreement back in 1973 of the importance of the Irish dimension to today's understanding that we, the British Government, can only really tackle conflict in close cooperation with the Irish government and the Irish people.

That cooperation must extend to the totality of relations between and throughout these islands. Just last week the BIC Summit in Dublin met to take forward important work on drugs and social inclusion. We met with representatives of the broad range of people who are represented here today under the chairmanship of the Taoiseach and the British Prime Minister.

There is another more esoteric but equally important facet to our endeavours because each of our democracies is the product of decades - indeed, centuries - of history. Each demonstrates the positive influence of responsible politics on society and each of them, in a shifting world, is embracing change, adapting to new political constellations here and abroad, while maintaining a strong and confident sense of what makes us, as individual groupings, unique, what makes us us.

It is a tribute, in my view, to the Irish people that they were able to emerge from British rule and from the divisions of a civil war as a stable democracy, particularly during a period when other newly-emergent states in Europe were succumbing to dictatorship. Over the past 30 years, that same self-confidence has allowed Ireland to embrace the benefits of greater European integration without feeling that their identity or their sovereignty is threatened.

Under the United Kingdom, too, we have been learning to live with dramatic constitutional change, probably the most dramatic for around three centuries. The experience of devolution has made many of us think about what it means to be British. It was that as well as the development at the European level that made me think about the contribution here today because I know as well as anyone those developments. I am proud to be a Scotsman by birth, by culture and, though you may not have noticed it through my rather refined BBC accent, by accent as well. I am also proud to be playing a hopefully useful part at Westminster as part of the United Kingdom. I am also proud to be Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I

hope that I contribute something to be part of a collective effort in a small way in shaping the future of our continent of Europe.

We have a constitution and a society, I believe, developing in the United Kingdom that recognises that my allegiance to each of these is equally valid. Where possible, we now have devolved power to the regions, believing that local people are best placed to meet local needs, and also outlining to those who feel an identity as Scottish or Welsh (or indeed, I would argue in Northern Ireland, as Irish) that they need not be in conflict with the constitutional construct that is the United Kingdom or the even larger constitutional construct that is the emerging Europe.

We have local decision-making and we have local identity; but in some areas like the economy, like collective security, we understand that we are better served by that bigger unit that is the United Kingdom itself. Whether we are ardent Europhiles or not, we all have to adjust to the reality that our future is in Europe, to adjust, adapt, and make the Europe that we want, that serves our national, collective interest.

I believe that in other ways we have yet another identity recently thrust upon us, because the events of 11 September shook the world to its foundations. Once the initial horror of the attacks had subsided, we began to realise there were people who would band together as all citizens of the free world and there were people who would lump us together and treat us as their definition of the enemy. It is entirely possible and consistent for one person to be all of these things, to recognise in himself or herself all of these dimensions of their culture and their character.

I believe that our democracy encourages that and I believe that the future health of our society depends upon that. Nowhere is this more relevant than in Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland's recent conflict had its roots in a longstanding, Nationalist sense of alienation from government, whether at Stormont or Westminster, and a very real feeling that they were losing out socially and economically. Their anger and their fear in that community was balanced by a similarly strong Unionist fear that Nationalist inclusion would come at their expense and that they were a minority on the island of Ireland. Both of these positions were only imperfectly represented. In a sense, the irony of the direct rule years was that both sides suffered from Northern Ireland's democratic deficit of local government. The Good Friday Agreement overturned that deficit, creating an Executive made up of all traditions, including dissenters, and resolved Northern Ireland's constitutional argument once and for all by placing the final decision in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland itself.

Of course, different aspirations will continue to be legitimately held about the future of Northern Ireland. That is not unusual. The same is true in Scotland. The same is true in Wales. Indeed, the same is true in England, about the future of their own representative and democratic constructs. Now there is agreement that the future of Northern Ireland can only be determined by and with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. While the Agreement gave us the framework for a new Northern Ireland, it still of course needed to be fleshed out. This is the continuing struggle that we have.

I have said before that when people sign a declaration of war they acknowledge, in so doing, that they will have to continue every day, perhaps every month, for years, in the pursuit of the objective of the declaration of war. When people sign a declaration of peace they somehow think that that is it: finished. But it is not. It needs the same application, endurance, consistency and determination over time to accomplish the objectives of an agreement of peace as it does in the case of war.

On all sides of the community people still needed signs even after the Good Friday Agreement that in all this change they were still "us", "what makes us, us". This is their challenge in everything we do: to preserve the best of Northern Ireland's traditions, to learn to celebrate difference but to forge a single community in the process and begin to evolve a different understanding of the celebration of difference and a recognition that recognising that diversity can be a source of community unity.

When I spoke in Liverpool a couple of weeks ago I set out how I saw the relationship between the two traditions. I said then that the Catholic community today breeds a degree of confidence, coherence, dynamism and energy which has not always been evident in the past. Catholics are increasingly integrated into the highest level of almost every area of economic and social activity including government. Of course there is still a long way to go. Catholic men, for instance, are significantly more likely to be unemployed despite the diminution of that divergence between the two communities in that sphere in recent years, and there is still a powerful need for a reassurance that Nationalists have a legitimate stake in Northern Ireland's future.

However, it is also importance to recognise the other dimension; and that is why I also pointed to a decline in Unionist confidence. This is more than just an impression. The dissolution of the Ulster Democratic Party last week illustrates the extent of the fragmentation in Unionist politics and the feuding within Loyalism.

There is of course another, sometimes unseen, constituency, for the many who are not politically aligned, this dreary round of what is seen as zero-sum politics with every move being regarded by one side or the other as somehow, if it is an advance on that side, diminishing on the other. The narrow focus on one-upmanship has been light years away from those who would not align themselves with one or the other of the two communities. As you would expect when anyone puts forward an analysis of events in Northern Ireland, I have been criticised on both sides (*plus ça change ...*). Some have accused me of pandering to Unionist unease while others have blamed me for causing Unionist unease. To me, both of these criticisms go some way to proving the point I was trying to make: that each side finds it difficult to leave the safety of oppositional politics. There is always more comfort and ease in criticising than in contributing.

There is still widespread suspicion that an inch moved in Northern Ireland is an inch surrendered. The progress is measured in gains for one side and that must mean corresponding losses for the other side. I believe we all want to see great strides, along with those that we have made, in establishing inclusive democratic

government reflected in society as a whole in Northern Ireland. We all want the people of Northern Ireland to enjoy the same rights and the same respect for tradition, but the tolerance of difference that we expect elsewhere in the United Kingdom and in Ireland.

How do we turn these fine ideas, these fine ambitions, into reality? I am under no doubt that the template must be the Good Friday Agreement. If by some tragedy we were to lose this peace process and embark again on a period of conflict, whether it be five, ten, 15 or 20 years, we would certainly have more deaths but we would come back and analyse the same problems, the same 80 to 800 years of history, we would reach the same conclusions, and we would produce roughly the same template as we have now. That is why I am intellectually, practically and politically convinced that our template must be the Good Friday Agreement. Implemented in full it promises the same rights and the same respect for all parts of the community, not as Nationalists or Unionists, Republicans or Loyalists, but above all as *citizens* who mutually benefit from the establishment of basic rights. If we are to challenge confrontational politics we have to challenge the notion that there must always be victors and losers, that every move involves victory for one side and defeat for the other. More than that, we must challenge that because that misconception (which is what I believe it to be) is intrinsic to what I would call one of the central viruses of the problems in Northern Ireland - sectarianism. Wherever it is found we must root out and destroy that virus of sectarianism.

One of the hardest questions I am faced with runs like this. When Northern Ireland has its own government, when we are working so hard to renew the police and criminal justice system, when progress has been made in decommissioning, when the institutions are up and established and participative government is now a possibility, when human rights apply to all and equal opportunities have been extended to all, why is there such anger, hatred, violence and bombs on the streets of North Belfast? The reason is that there are still deep wounds that cannot be healed by constitutional change alone. Like the all too frequent paramilitary attacks that inflict terrible suffering and mock the principles of fairness of justice, like the arson attacks that wreck lives and homes and deny whole communities the basic right to live free of fear, like the contentious parades and some of the contentious counter-demonstrations against them, we cannot place a sticking-plaster over those sores and hope they will go away, because the problems and the answers lie in the very bedrock of Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland has a rich tradition within both communities. At their best these traditions make it what it is and what it could be to a far greater extent: a vibrant, creative society capable, despite its painful history, of great dynamism, tolerance and inclusivity; but we must ensure that all parts of the community are confident enough, that their fear is reduced enough and they feel secure enough to embrace not only their own culture but also different beliefs and cultures without feeling threatened.

For those who say that can never be done I say two things.

The first is, look at what is happening in Londonderry, look at what is happening there in such small ways, where there is a building of the beginning of an understanding between the community as a whole and a celebration of the culture of both sides through the Apprentice Boys of Derry extending their festival - supported incidentally by the Irish Government - and the Nationalist community, a celebration of their culture and their music and their poetry. It can be done.

Secondly I say this. Almost everything we have done in Northern Ireland we have been told cannot be done. We were told only six months ago that we would never get stability into the Assembly. We were told six months ago we would never get cross-community policing. We were told six months, six years and 60 years ago we would never get an act of decommissioning by the Provisional Irish Republican Army. We have achieved that. We have still a huge way to go, but it can be done. So when I say that we must ensure that all parts of the community are confident enough in themselves to embrace a recognition of different beliefs and cultures without feeling threatened, I genuinely do believe that it can be done.

There is, of course, a great deal that a government can do to build trust. We can legislate to safeguard human rights and advance equality. We can explain continuously that opportunity for all does mean advantages for each and every person irrespective of their background. We can encourage, persuade, cajole, and sometimes bully, politicians to work together. On occasions, as Northern Ireland's politicians will tell you, I am guilty of trying all of those things. But we cannot impose trust by *diktat*. Trust, like peace, comes building slowly. It has to be built painstakingly from the bottom up by local politicians, community and church leaders, and by the people of Northern Ireland themselves, the silent majority whose most fervent wish is for a stable and prosperous environment free from the intolerance and hatred they grew up with.

That is where I believe this Body today fits in, and fits in so well, because the tectonics are changing, the plates are shifting. Increasingly, the divide in Northern Ireland politics is not the obvious one of Catholic and Protestant or Unionist versus Nationalist, or Republican versus Loyalist. Imperceptibly but increasingly there is a divide growing up between those who are committed to inclusive participation on the basis of parity of esteem and equality of opportunity and those who are opposed to that concept. Some of them do it legitimately and politically through participation in the normal democratic process. Others do it in the old way, by refusing to accept the will of the people and by using the bombs and the guns and the blast bombs and the petrol bombs and the murder and the mayhem that was once much more widespread. I quite frankly do not care under what glorious banner they parade, whether they declare themselves the true heirs of Republicanism or the true heirs of Loyalism. They are the two sides of the one coin. They are anti-democratic; they have no support; they have no strategy, and they offer no future to people in Northern Ireland except the murder and mayhem that so often afflicted us in the past.

If anyone in their moments of despair, when they see the headlines that tell us we have another mountain to climb in Northern Ireland, wishes to reflect on whether it has been worth it, all they have to do is to remember what it was like ten, 20 or 30 years ago. No-one has to look in the crystal ball. We can all read the book. If we do not have time to read the book, look at tonight's news, look at the Middle East, and just remember how what was thought to be an inevitable process towards peace, because of the misjudgement or lack of application of the participants, has resulted in the terrible tragedies we see today and the despairing look into the years of the future to seek out some solution which was possibly within the grasp of people within the Middle East two or three years ago.

That is what is at stake in this process, and that is why I return to the theme on which I started here, which is that we have got to work every day and in every way to make this Agreement work. It is not irrevocable; it is not irreversible. Peace is not in any way inevitable. It has to be worked at and we cannot work at it in solitude. By definition we have to work at it in partnership. We have shown that no solitude is so complete that it cannot be broken down. We have shown that centuries of antagonism between Irish and British can result in a constructive partnership where there is the political will to address the most huge problems together. We have illustrated that Catholics and Protestants, Republicans and Unionists, Loyalists, can work together through the Belfast Agreement and indeed through the Executive and the Assembly. We have shown that all of the impossibles in Northern Ireland can and have been made possible from the decommissioning act on 23 October this year through to the first cross-community support and policing. We have broken down the impossible and we have broken down the solitudes.

Everyone here today is living proof of positive change that can be brought by the thaw, both in terms of the practical benefits for all of the people on these islands, and in our acceptance of our unique, complex, yet compatible identities. If we can achieve, not the end of this process because it will go on for a considerable period of time, but the overcoming of the biggest, highest mountains we have to climb and set ourselves on a path which is relatively irreversible, for everyone in this room I am sure that the decision to dedicate your own lives to politics will, by that fact alone, have made all of your endeavours worthwhile. That is certainly how I feel.

I am privileged and happy to be here with you this afternoon and I will attempt to answer as many questions as I can in the time available.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Thank you very much indeed for that very inspiring address. We were delighted to hear you outline the position as you have done and we have every confidence in the work that you are undertaking as Secretary of State with the support not only of your own political party but, broadly, of all the political parties in the United Kingdom.

6. QUESTIONS FOR ORAL ANSWER

Demilitarisation

Mr Barry McElduff MLA (West Tyrone): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what plans he has to accelerate the programme for demilitarisation within Northern Ireland; and if he will he make a statement.

Dr John Reid: In the Good Friday Agreement we stated normalisation as our objective. We have made major process since the signing of the Agreement. 46 military bases, which includes ten bases shared with the police, have been closed, demolished or vacated. There are currently around 13,500 troops in Northern Ireland, about half the level at their height and the lowest level since 1970.

We continue to fulfil our obligations under the Agreement, most recently as part of the Weston Park package. Four installations have been demolished or closed and the government obviously has always made it clear that we are committed to the normalisation of security in Northern Ireland consistent with the level of threat.

I have regular meetings with my security advisers and consider whether any further normalisation measures are possible against the level of threat and I am meeting with them at present.

Mr McElduff: Unsurprisingly, my view is that the programme of demilitarisation is too slow. It is not comprehensive enough. I am very conscious for the potential for local, economic regeneration in places like Omagh and Carrickmore, where I believe it is crucial. Almost a fifth of the land-mass of those villages and towns is taken up by big garrisons. If that was dealt with, it could be freeing up local amenities for regeneration. I would like it to be accelerated.

Dr Reid: So would I. I would like not to be in a position where, in the last fortnight, we intervened with a 200-pound bomb capable of massacring the citizens of Northern Ireland that would have been bigger than Omagh. Unfortunately we did. There was a three-minute timer on it. I would like not to be in a position where we have marked 15 mortars, regularly discovered. I would like not to be in a position where what I want to do in normalising Northern Ireland society and demilitarising was, ironically, impeded by the very people who say they want the British military presence removed: ie, the dissident Republicans.

There is an irony in this that, as late as two days ago, those who say they want the unity of Ireland managed to disrupt the unity of Ireland on the main rail line once again. Those who say they want a peaceful Ireland were just about to perpetrate a massacre as big as the worst one we have had in Northern Ireland. So I agree with you. I will do all I can within my power, commensurate with the obligation that is on every government, to defend our citizens, Protestant and Catholic, and in the case of Omagh, born and unborn. What we cannot allow is for the citizens of Northern Ireland being exposed not only to the threat but to the actuality of massacre that would be caused by some of these.

Castlesaunderson Scout Project

Mr Andrew Boylan TD (Cavan-Monaghan): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will give his support to the Castlesaunderson Scout Project at Castlesaunderson, Co. Cavan on the Cavan/Fermanagh Border.

Dr Reid: I have been briefed on the detail and the merits of the Castlesaunderson proposals and I agree that it appears to be a very worthy project. I am sure that you will understand me qualifying this by adding the *caveat* that any funding application submitted through any of the Northern Ireland departments - for instance, from the European Union Peace II Programme - would have to undergo detailed scrutiny and economic appraisal.

Mr Boylan: This is an all-Ireland project. The estates have a status presently in the ownership of *Scouting Ireland*. There are three scouting organisations representing the different religious beliefs in the country. What I am seeking is funding to develop the estate into a scouting jamboree, both nationally and internationally.

Dr Reid: It comes as a complete shock and surprise to me that you might be looking for money for this! I only accidentally put in the *caveat* at the beginning that that would have to undergo detailed scrutiny and economic appraisal. I know what the aim of the project is: to provide a jamboree camp-site for up to 35,000 scouts and to accompany that with facilities for reconciliation between the various communities. I have no hesitation in saying that it is one of those projects which I think all of us would agree are worthy. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to determine from today that it will be given financial assistance - but I think it is certainly worthy of it.

Electricity pricing

Lord Dubs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what is the average price paid by industry for electricity in Northern Ireland and how this compares with the average prices in: (a) Scotland, (b) England, (c) Wales and (d) the Republic of Ireland.

Dr Reid: It is not possible to calculate the average prices presently paid in each jurisdiction because the electricity markets have been opened, either wholly or partially, to competition. There are therefore different rates available and customers may seek out a deal most favourable to their situation. However, it is widely understood that electricity in Northern Ireland is more expensive than in Scotland, Wales and England and that the electricity in the Republic of Ireland is less expensive than in the United Kingdom.

Lord Dubs: Would you be persuaded by me that the figures suggest that electricity in Northern Ireland for industry is about 65 per cent more expensive than in the Republic and also it is higher in Northern Ireland than anywhere else in the United Kingdom, that this high cost of electricity hits manufacturing particularly, especially the textile industry, which is 20 per cent of Northern Ireland manufacturing, and that this is a serious impediment to that industry? I wonder whether, in cooperation with

the Chancellor of the Exchequer, you might see whether anything can be done to help give Northern Ireland industry more of a level playing-field.

Dr Reid: I would not like to accept without any qualification the figure that you give me but I think, whether or not we argue about a specific figure, the general thrust of the point that you make is taken.

There are probably three main reasons for the price differentials. Firstly, electricity production and distribution is more expensive in Northern Ireland than most regions of Great Britain because power stations are smaller; the level of the required back-up spinning reserve is higher and customers are more dispersed. Secondly, because the operation of the Power Purchase Agreement put in place at the time of privatisation, allied to the use of older, more inefficient technology, has resulted in higher generation costs in Northern Ireland. The third reason is that the transmission and distribution costs in Northern Ireland have increased sharply since privatisation compared to similar costs in Great Britain.

I take the point that is made and I certainly will see what we can do in order to assist that. I know that the whole production of energy, right across the field, is something which exercises Reg Empey in his role in developing the economic future of Northern Ireland and its relationship with Great Britain, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland. He has been involved in that recently and in the pipeline developments. I will certainly have a look at that.

Sellafield

Mrs Carmel Hanna MLA (Belfast South): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will make a statement which addresses the concerns of the people of Ireland on the proposed Mixed Oxide plant development at Sellafield.

Mr Séamus Kirk TD (Louth): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he is aware of the very serious concern along the east coast of Ireland at the proposed commissioning of the MOX plant at Sellafield; and if the British Government will reconsider the decision in relation to it.

Dr Reid: The Government is obviously aware of concerns in Ireland about operation of the mixed oxide fuel manufacturing plant at Sellafield. It must, however, be understood that the operation of the plant will have virtually no impact on the environment or health. This position is supported by the European Commission's Expert Panel which concluded firmly that in both normal operation and in the event of an accident, operation of SMP "is not liable to result in radioactive contamination significant from the point of view of health of the water, soil or airspace of another Member State". Obviously, security and safety at United Kingdom nuclear sites is stringently regulated and kept under regular review. The Government's recent decision and the justification of the MOX manufacturing were taken properly by due process, following full public consultation and taking into account all the facts.

Since this answer was prepared, we have had a decision today by the Law of the Sea Tribunal. I welcome that decision. Obviously, we are always ready to share information with our colleagues in Ireland; and I note that, although it was open to the considerable range of judges who make up the Tribunal in this case and who gave their verdict this morning to place an interim prohibition on the proceeding of the MOX plant at Sellafield, they chose not to do so. We will read carefully what they have said. We will carry out the recommendations and no doubt we will go back on 17 December, as requested.

Ms Hanna: Thank you, Secretary of State, for that answer. Do you believe that the MOX plant development is economically sustainable?

Dr Reid: Yes, I do. I think that there are two dimensions to the development of the MOX plant. One is that it is economically and financially sustainable, and the second is that by converting raw plutonium into mixed oxide fuel itself it creates a safer situation in due course than we have at present.

Mr Kirk: Can I ask the Secretary of State, having regard to what happened in the United States on September 11, when, for example, the Pentagon was hit, whether he would agree that the significant population both in the Republic and in Northern living on the east coast have every reason to fear that a fanatical terrorist could well at some future date decide to target Sellafield, similar to the targeting of the Pentagon and the twin towers, and even with the best and most secure protection system it is not possible to provide absolute security against that happening in Sellafield?

Dr Reid: So far as the risk is concerned, let me say that security and safety are of paramount consideration to us, the British Government, not least because - and this does not in any way diminish those who live slightly over a hundred miles away - we have British citizens living at or within a mile or two of Sellafield, so obviously any government that was responsible and which placed safety and security in such high measure in its list of priorities would have regard to its own citizenry. Therefore, those who might be tempted to think, "They do not really care because we are a hundred miles away and we are in another country" will be relieved to know that our people from the United Kingdom are not a hundred miles away in a different country; they are there around Sellafield.

That is why I think that people will at least judge our own priority on safety and security by the standards that any government would adopt when it came to its own citizens. Obviously, I understand the concerns that are displayed about this issue, and it is perfectly and legitimately correct for the Irish Government to seek to remedy any concerns they have, whether it is through asking us to share information with them or whether it is through taking recourse to law. All I can say is that we are convinced that we have done everything possible to make this secure.

I noticed that Séamus used an absolute at the end of his question. I do not know if he could say whether there is anything in the Republic of Ireland that is absolutely

safe from terrorism. Certainly, I do not think even the most powerful nation in the world, the United States, would say that they could give a guarantee that everything is absolutely safe; but I can tell him that, living in the real world where there are no absolutes, we are as certain as certain can be, on the basis of the paramount priority we give to safety and security, that we have done everything possible to make sure that is safe, not least because it is our duty to prevent any of those risks afflicting our own citizens.

Policing

Senator Helen Keogh: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what response there has been to the new police authority from the various communities in Northern Ireland; whether recruitment has been embarked upon; and if he is satisfied with the response from the Nationalist community.

Dr Reid: The Northern Ireland Police Board was appointed on 29 September 2001. The Board comprises nine independent members and ten political members representing the UUP, the SDLP and the DUP. They will all be wanting the widest possible representation on the Board. Sinn Féin declined at this stage to nominate members to serve.

The first recruitment campaign for the Police Service in Northern Ireland was launched in February of this year. We are expecting to appoint around 300 new recruits on a 50 per cent Catholic, 50 per cent non-Catholic basis. Patten said that leaders of all communities should actively encourage young people to apply to join the Police Service. Obviously the Government agrees with that and particularly welcomes the encouragement that has been given to Catholics to apply to the Police Service, including encouragement from the Catholic Church and the SDLP. I would also like to commend the role played in this by the Irish Government themselves, who have been very supportive of the attempts we are making to establish the new policing service.

Senator Keogh: Thank you, Secretary of State, for that answer. By the way, I would also like to thank you very much for your very thought-provoking address. I hope that it provoked a lot of interest with colleagues here as well.

Would you agree with me that the decision of the GAA to rescind Rule 21 is a very forward-looking and welcome move to allow members of the police and British security forces to play Gaelic sport and would you agree that that is the type of attitude that should be taken? Would you also agree with the sentiments that were expressed by many colleagues here this morning at our debate, that it is absolutely critical that Sinn Féin take up their places on the Board as a matter of urgency?

Dr Reid: OK on the first one about hoping my speech will provoke a response. It will in Northern Ireland. Everything I do does over there. It is not always entirely consistent throughout Northern Ireland's political spectrum but it is usually unanimous in believing that I am wrong. I hope it does provoke people to at least

consider some of the issues of identity, culture, sectarianism and diversity which perhaps have not been expressed as openly as they should have been in the past.

As regards the GAA, yes, I unhesitatingly commend what they have done. I did not say anything at all before they reached their decision: first, because I thought it was appropriate that they themselves in their own Council reached that decision and, secondly, because I know that whatever a British Secretary of State says is liable to cause some people to go in the opposite direction. I think it was timely.

In relation to your third question, I hope it will also cause people to reflect. First, when not only the British Government but the SDLP, the Irish Government, the Catholic Church, the GAA, the United States including many Irish-Americans who have previously supported Sinn Féin, are all saying, "Look, this is a good enough start for all men and women of goodwill to participate in shaping the Police Service for Northern Ireland", I hope that Sinn Féin will reflect on that. I want the widest possible community support for policing in Northern Ireland and in the wake of the support that has been coming I hope the leadership of Sinn Féin thinks again.

Secondly, people are entitled to the protection of policing. We spend a lot of time discussing the great issues of the peace movement, the peace process, the great constructs of politics. Actually, what this is supposed to be about is making everyday life better for ordinary men and women in Northern Ireland, irrespective of the background that they come from. If people are suffering from antisocial behaviour, if they are suffering from car thefts, burglary, violence and the sort of behaviour that makes people's lives a misery, they are entitled to have that addressed. Those in working-class, Catholic areas are every bit as entitled to have that addressed in their area as anyone else. That is the second reason I hope that Sinn Féin will look at the position they have.

The third reason is this: if there is not adequate policing, there will have to be substitute law enforcement by the paramilitaries. We will get a continuation of the beatings, the mauling, the mutilation, the suppression, the rough justice and the kangaroo courts. I do not believe that is in the interests of people in the communities in Northern Ireland and I do not believe it is in the interests of Sinn Féin or any other political party that that continues, because I believe ultimately it will alienate a great many people in these areas.

Mr Barry McElduff MLA (West Tyrone): On a very brief point of information, I agree with Dr Reid that the SDLP and the Catholic Church have spoken on this matter but I would urge him to take on board that the Gaelic Athletic Association said expressly, in the statement issued by the President after the Rule 21 vote, that they were not taking a view on new policing arrangements in the North. What they were doing was keeping up with human rights legislation and they did not want it to be misinterpreted as a judgment on the acceptability or otherwise of new policing arrangements. I think we were slightly misled on that matter.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): The Secretary of State has heard what has been said.

Dr Reid: I do not want the GAA or anybody else to make political statements. I do not mind you having the last word if that is what you feel obliged to do. What I wanted the GAA to do was the right thing - and I think they did the right thing. What I want you to do is the right thing as well.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): All those questions not answered for obvious reasons will be answered in the usual way.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Michael O'Kennedy): First of all, we would extend the normal thanks and appreciation to you for coming to this Body. In the circumstances in which you have come to us this afternoon, with a very rushed programme, we especially appreciate your readiness to come and address us. We particularly appreciate the fact that you have given us the benefit of an analysis based on conviction, on tolerance and confidence. It is very reassuring for all of us in this Body to know, those of us who have observed your attitude and your confidence and tolerance in the course of your activities over the last twelve months, the basis and foundation on which that whole attitude is based.

On behalf of this Body, we always have seen it as being our role and purpose here to create a reassuring support from the elected representatives, which is what we are, of the peoples of both of our islands. It is our privilege to support what both governments have set about doing - and have done very well. I think you can take it as read - I want you to convey this to your Prime Minister on the part of this Body but particularly on behalf of the Irish members - that your constant, consistent efforts will not only be supported here but will be endorsed here. Having heard you today, I think we can be even more confident in the future in the direction you are going.

We used to engage in the solitudes here as well. I was in a sense part of that solitude before this Body was launched. I remember those days of solitude. I remember the suspicions, tensions and apprehensions we had. I am glad to tell you that those solitudes have evaporated here. Here we have exchanges, as often as not, not between the Irish, the British, the Welsh and the Scots, but often between families themselves within the same particular grouping.

I am concerned with and note what you say about totality of relationships. I was a member of our Government as Foreign Minister when that expression first emerged at the first Dublin Castle Summit. It was slightly misunderstood or misrepresented at the time. I am glad now that we have reached that stage of maturity and confidence that we can talk in that context, as you put it.

Finally, we will open up for the wonderful communities in Northern Ireland the great avenue, opportunity and potential, that they have been deprived of because they have been unfortunately, through history and whatever else, confined to

confrontation for years on the narrow ground. There is a broader, bigger world out there with potential for young people particularly: our common attitude in Europe that we have touched on and our common obligation to peoples who are much more deprived than any of us are. If we approach it on that basis, that in helping to solve the problems of others as you have indicated we can do an awful lot to guarantee the peace that you have so very, very effectively outlined to us. Thank you very much. It is a great privilege. Cead mile fáilte, a hundred thousand thanks that you may have the rewards of your efforts - and, if you do, they will be great rewards.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Thank you. The session is concluded until ten o'clock tomorrow morning.

The sitting was adjourned at 6.10 pm.

2. Tuesday 5 December 2001

The sitting was opened in public at 10.05 am in the Dorchester Suite, Marriott Highcliff Hotel, Bournemouth, with Mr David Winnick MP in the Chair.

1. BUSINESS REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): I remind the Body that we are going to have a debate on Sellafield, bearing in mind that we hope to conclude all our business by 12.15.

The first item is business reports from the Chairmen of individual committees. I should remind colleagues that a business report should be brief and to the point since we wish to move on to the Sellafield debate. I will start with Michael Mates.

Mr Michael Mates MP (East Hampshire) (Committee A): Committee A met this morning at 9.25 and due to the fact that the Irish were a little late I had to re-designate myself in best Alliance fashion as an Irishman so that we had a quorum—

Mr John Browne TD (Wexford): Objection.

Mr Mates: Thank you very much: objection not taken! We have decided that we will make a visit to Belfast in early February to go and see the Police Service of Northern Ireland, how they are settling down in their new role, and also to go to the training college to see how the first group of mixed recruits is getting on so that we can report this to the next Plenary in March.

Sir Brian Mawhinney MP (North West Cambridgeshire) (Committee B): Committee B decided to conclude its long running investigation into transport and to present a report at or before the next Plenary.

Mr Séamus Kirk TD (Louth) (Committee C): The report will be very brief and to the point. As you will know, because of foot and mouth and because of the general election in the UK, the activity of Committee C was very much restricted in the last

12 months or so. We now have the debate back on the rails and we are examining the tourism industry generally and hoping to get a report together with recommendations as to how it might be progressed. The position is that we are going to invite submissions from interested groups north of a line from Galway to Dublin. We plan to meet representatives of the agency dealing with the new market promotional strategy for tourism generally on the island. We have a target date for the end of January for a meeting and we are hoping to be in a much more positive position to report to the next Plenary in March.

Mr Conor Lenihan TD (Dublin South-West) (Committee D): We have had considerable correspondence and inquiry into the topic of business education links across Ireland and Great Britain and we will be working on that into the future. In the meantime this morning the Committee decided to make a visit to the Sellafield nuclear power plant with a view to having an initial investigation into the health, safety and security procedures that operate at the plant because one or two of the members expressed deep concern that public fears in relation to those procedures should be allayed in some fashion. That is the essential purpose of that particular visit to Sellafield.

2. SUBSTANTIVE MOTION FOR THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE BODY

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): We now come to the beginning of the on Sellafield. As the body agreed in approving the programme yesterday, it will be on a substantive motion for the adjournment of the body. That is a device which enables us to have a general debate on all aspects of Sellafield. Can I make it clear from the beginning that a verbatim report will be given to both governments, so it is not simply having a debate on the adjournment just to hear our own voices and to tell each other our views. That verbatim report will be communicated to the appropriate ministers in both governments. The fact that we are having it on the adjournment and not on a particular wording makes no difference to the outcome because both governments will see very clearly from the verbatim report the feelings of those participating for and against Sellafield.

I understand that Séamus Kirk is going to start the debate rolling. What we had in mind was a time limit of four minutes, which does not apply to Séamus.

Mrs Margaret Ewing MSP (Moray): On a point of order, Chairman, in your opening remarks you said that the report would be sent to both governments. I wonder if that could also be extended to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly because all of them have very important interests in this particular matter.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Margaret, that is indeed a valid point and I should have mentioned that at the beginning. My apologies. It will be communicated in the same way as to the two sovereign governments to the devolved assemblies and the Scottish Parliament.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Chairman, on a point of order as well, in the context of your remarks on the wider debate on the adjournment you will be aware that yesterday and again this morning at the committee meeting I raised the question of the relationship between this Body and the British-Irish Council specifically in the context of reports that are being prepared in committee and then passed on to the governments. I did raise the concern, and I would be anxious to have your views on this, as to how one should be guided to a conclusion. There may be a very real danger that the British-Irish Council will be investigating areas of mutual interest that this Body has already issued reports on and is actively debating reports on. I raise the specific question of what the relationship should be between this Body and the British-Irish Council and whether the Steering Committee have exercised their minds in that regard or whether you feel that it is relevant in the context of our ongoing progress as a Body.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Would it be your wish that the verbatim report should also go to the British-Irish Council because to a very large extent, as you know, the purpose of expanding this Body was that we should become a parliamentary tier?

Senator Mooney: I accept that as a sensible decision; but I was concerned more about the structures of both organisations and the relationship between them, and whether there should be an institutional structure that allows this Body and the British-Irish Council to interact in the context of reports.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): I think that is a matter that should be taken up with the British-Irish Council. We have not had any direct communications as such, for very obvious reasons, with the British-Irish Council up to now. I would have thought that the Clerks should notify the British-Irish Council secretariat at the conclusion of this debate that the verbatim report will be sent to them as quickly as possible.

Senator Mooney: Finally, what raised my initial concern was a report last week following a meeting in Dublin that the Council would be examining and investigating areas of mutual interest to both countries and specifically transport. We as a committee are involved in a transport study and it seems to me ludicrous, if that is the inference—

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): What are you actually suggesting?

Senator Mooney: What I am suggesting is, why should the Body be investigating a report under a particular topic and then find that the British-Irish Council are doing exactly the same thing when it relates to both jurisdictions and the matters are of mutual interest, just because there are two separate levels? That is all.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP (Thurrock): I should like to support Paschal Mooney. It seems to me that now is the time to pounce in terms of extending the status of this Body. Perhaps through your good offices the Co-Chairmen or the Steering

Committee should approach the British-Irish Council, in the hope that we can establish a relationship similar to that between the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. It seems to me that the British-Irish Council is ministerial. There should be a presumption, that is, it should become custom and practice if not actually institutionalised (which I would like to see), that not just one minister would attend this Body but indeed, when they produce a report - for instance on tourism - it should be *ipso facto* that a minister would come. That would greatly assist all the things we have talked about this weekend, encouraging Unionists to come and so on, and it is also what was always envisaged with the people who wanted to quote the institutions and the settlement between the islands.

Sir Brian Mawhinney MP: When Paschal raised this matter this morning in Committee B we asked our Clerk to make some enquiries relative to the British-Irish Council on the specific question of transport. I thought you ought to know that because if you are going to open a broader debate with the British-Irish Council then it will clearly subsume the question of transport because you will not want two sets of enquiries going to the Council as it were in parallel.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): On these points of order, which obviously are important, the British-Irish Council is an executive body of ministers. We are of course a parliamentary forum and, as I have already indicated, the purpose is to a large extent that we should be the parliamentary tier of the ministerial body. There should be some parliamentary accountability. What I would like to suggest is that the Steering Committee is left with the position, if that is satisfactory to you, of looking at this aspect and we will do so because Paschal and others have raised a very important point. We will make sure that at our next Steering Committee meeting we have this item on the agenda. Is that all right?

Senator Mooney: Thank you.

Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville: A point of order, Chairman. At the risk of finally proving C S Lewis's observation that if you hear of somebody going round doing good to others you can always tell the others by their hunted look, can I ask, prompted by some sense of geography, whether authorities in the Isle of Man are going to get a copy of this report?

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): I said all the devolved institutions and I do not think they would be very happy if they were left out in any way whatsoever. If we have exhausted those points of order I will ask Séamus to begin the debate on Sellafield.

Mr Séamus Kirk TD (Louth): I am very glad of this opportunity and am pleased that this matter is on the agenda here, because this is an ideal parliamentary forum to discuss what is a very important political issue, certainly in Ireland. I am sure as the debate unfolds we will be able to gauge its relative importance and the spectrum of politics across the UK.

The issue of Sellafield has certainly climbed up the list of political priorities in Ireland, principally on account of two developments. One is the proposed commissioning of the MOX facility and the second is the happenings in America on September 11. In an unusual way the combination of the two has intensified the level of debate. It has heightened the anxiety of people generally along the east coast.

I represent the Louth constituency which is pretty well directly across the Irish Sea from Sellafield. On September 11 in America the unthinkable happened. The Pentagon was hit, the twin towers were hit. It really proved the point that if you have fanatical terrorists, and apparently we have had more from across the world than we realised at the time, any target can be hit.

I am coming to this debate from the angle that if we were unfortunate enough to have an attack on the Sellafield plant similar to the attack that we had on the Pentagon and the twin towers, the implications of that would be absolutely horrendous. They would be horrendous for the population immediately around Sellafield in Cumbria. I respect what I anticipate will be an observation that Sellafield is a very important part of the economic infrastructure in the UK, and the numbers employed in and around the place are quite significant in a part of Cumbria where alternative employment may not be readily available.

Nuclear energy generally and its public acceptability are diminishing. Perhaps they are diminishing at a more rapid rate in places like Eire where we do not have a nuclear industry; but I believe that in time the population of the UK will come to realise the quite significant hazard that exists on their doorstep with the Sellafield plant. The issue of the economic justification for the MOX facilities seems to be in some doubt. Some of the projected statistics we have seen so far suggest that it will never be utilised to its full extent. It begs the question: why commission the facility in the first place?

If we had an accident in Sellafield perhaps similar to the accident that took place in Chernobyl a number of years ago, all we have to do is to look at the fallout implications from Chernobyl. In places like Belarus, large tracks of the terrain will lay barren for generations. Many of the people who live locally have had their health severely affected because of the fallout. In reality, it appears that the health service generally for the area has been singularly inadequate and is very much dependent on the work of those who give unstintingly of their time to go to places like Belarus to help the local population recover from it.

If we come back to the east coast of Ireland, if we did have an unfortunate fallout - and the Secretary of State made the point yesterday, which I readily accept, that the local population in Cumbria will be the first to be affected - we have a significant proportion of our overall population located on the east coast of Ireland. We have the city of Belfast, we have the city of Dublin and we have two large urban centres, Dundalk and Drogheda, in between, both of which happen to be in my own constituency. The necessary population movement in the circumstances of a major catastrophe would be the ultimate logistical nightmare. While I am sure there will be

people at this forum today who will argue that the likelihood of an accident taking place is small, the possibilities are there. My Government, no matter whoever is in office, are going to have to have an emergency plan in place to deal with it. The adequacy of that emergency plan, hopefully, will never be tested; but we have got to have it in place.

Any of the sentiments that I am expressing here today are genuine expressions of the heightened fear and anxiety that exists among the population on the east coast. It has not been exaggerated one whit. This issue of Sellafield has been on the political agenda with us for many years now, but the intensification of interest in the subject is very obvious and very marked. At any local, political meeting I attend in my constituency, invariably it is the first item on the agenda. That is part of the great worry that we have.

I realise that there will be others who may wish to speak on the subject and I respect their views. Some of them will probably be alternatives of the point that I have been making, but we are coming at this issue from the point of view that the respective governments, both in Whitehall and in Dublin, have brought a great sense of maturity to their deliberations. There has been an underestimated contribution from this Body in promoting a greater understanding of respective interests, both in Ireland and in the United Kingdom. If we look at the level of maturity, wisdom and common sense that has been brought to bear on these deliberations in the North of Ireland, I have every confidence that the same level of maturity and understanding can be brought to bear on this particular subject. I certainly hope so.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Body do now adjourn.

Mr Elfyn Llwyd MP (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Can I first of all support the remarks of Deputy Kirk? Perhaps he has given an optimistic view of things in the scenario where there would be need for evacuation. Evacuating the population from the east of Ireland would not help very much because the fall-out would inevitably pass by the west and every other part of the country as well. Perhaps, in putting forward his case as he did very ably, the situation might be worse than even he was saying.

I have had a special interest in nuclear power for many years and so has my party, Plaid Cymru. We are long-time opponents of nuclear power, based on the inability of science to come up with a real and safe answer as to what to do with the toxic waste.

I am also a villager of Llanwchllyn, a small village near Bala, where surreptitiously some years ago NIREX, the body responsible for looking for "safe sites" to bury this awful, poisonous material, were investigating in the mountains above the village the possibility of burying nuclear waste without reference to the local people. It was only by accident that we found out about this and many of us, including myself, a practising barrister, were threatened with High Court proceedings to stop us preventing them from carrying on with it. I have a healthy disregard for NIREX and for many people in the nuclear industry, for I do not believe most of what they say.

We had a public meeting at that time and we were meant to be baffled by the science of it, but we had engaged Dr John Large, who is an eminent nuclear scientist of international renown. He put them to rights. They were flabbergasted that he was at the meeting because we were meant to be spoon-fed a load of scientific nonsense. I have great cynicism about statements from nuclear bodies who are of course directly involved in all of this.

When one undertakes a cost benefit-analysis, leave alone the whole idea of the toxic waste, the thing does not stack up either, because of the huge government subsidy that goes into production of nuclear power. The vast clearing-up costs would be far better used to properly subsidise renewables and NFFOs which are not being subsidised to the degree they should be.

I referred in opening to my particular interest in nuclear power. As the crow flies, 11 miles from my home is Trawsfynydd Nuclear Power Station which is now being decommissioned. We also have Wylfa Power Station a few miles away on Anglesey. As Séamus Kirk said earlier on, after 11 September we are becoming rather nervous about it. I know that people will say that these buildings are safe if aircraft collide with them but it is also a fact that the older they are the more decrepit the building becomes and the more infected with radioactivity the concrete becomes. That does not really stack up either. To say that anybody building these plants in the sixties had in mind the awful events of 11 September I think is to stretch it a little bit.

We in Meirionnydd nant Conwy also suffer from the continued fallout from Chernobyl. The sheep in my constituency are still infected. In some areas, the infection is becoming worse and not better. We are acutely aware that when something goes wrong, it goes wrong (to use the vernacular) big-time. I went to Chernobyl a few years ago and I have seen first hand the desolation in Belarus and in the Ukraine. I have actually been inside Chernobyl power plant. I am sure that those who built Chernobyl would equally say, in the same way as the proponents of MOX in Sellafield, that everything is fine. Let us also remember that those running Sellafield were cooking the books until they were discovered not so long ago. Higher levels were going out into the sea, far higher than what they said they were. They were brought to book at some point.

The potential for dirty bombs in Sellafield has to be vast. Even with a five kilometre exclusion zone around Sellafield, it would take an aircraft 14 seconds to collide with the buildings. If the buildings withstood it, what about the pools of toxic waste outside? Potential for a huge, dirty bomb. As far as I understand, the nearest Air Force aircraft could be scrambled within ten minutes. That is quite worrying. The Irish Government, in their stance, are not simply putting forward the Irish interests. I believe that their stance is for all the peoples of the British Isles. Yesterday's refusal of an injunction will, I hope, not colour the ultimate view on the efficacy of this awful plant and this potentially dangerous MOX plant.

I do hope that common sense will prevail before long and that we will bring this whole matter to a halt. It is causing huge numbers of people a great amount of

concern and really it is now time to step back and to consider, is this right or is this wrong?

Lord Dubs: I may find myself in a small minority. I did not set off when I came here to Bournemouth thinking that this debate would be taking place, so any comments I make and any facts I have, have been assembled very quickly.

I used to be passionately against the nuclear industry. I changed my mind some years ago as I learned more about it. The incident that changed my mind was when I was once in Bombay and I met the head of the Indian nuclear industry. I said to him, "It is terrible. You should not have a nuclear industry" and he said to me, "Look, you have a wealth of fuel choices. You are rich in the west. We have no choice. If you say we cannot have nuclear energy, you are saying we cannot have any energy at all and you are sentencing us to poverty for ever." That was his argument and it made me think again about it. I set out to learn more about the nuclear industry.

I should declare an interest, by the way. I have a house which is about 15 miles from Sellafield so I know Sellafield quite well and I have met lots of people both who work at Sellafield and people who live locally who have nothing to do with Sellafield.

I think the debate is now one not about MOX, although I would be happy to engage in that if that were the sole issue. I think the debate is about having a nuclear industry at all. Certainly Elfyn Llywd's comments were about the nuclear industry as a whole and I suspect that Séamus Kirk's comments were also more about the nuclear industry as a whole than simply about one plant, namely Sellafield. If I am wrong, please do interrupt me: but I think we are talking about the nuclear industry as a whole of which MOX is just one recent element.

I understand the concerns and I would not expect any politician from the Republic to agree with me because they have an election coming and I know what the issues are. At least, I would not expect them to agree with me publicly. I have been in politics a while and nobody in politics wants to commit political suicide. You do not have to agree with me. You do not even have to tell me afterwards that there may be something in the argument.

Let me put it this way. Elfyn talked about the possibilities of what could happen and he said that he had been to Chernobyl. I wonder whether anybody has been to Bhopal. I have not been to Bhopal; but 5,000 people died as a result of an accident at a chemical plant there and yet the consequence of that has never been put into a debate where we say we should close down the world's chemical industry. Yet that was probably the most horrific industrial accident there has ever been.

I only mention that in order that we get the risks of modern industry, energy, chemicals and so on into some sort of perspective. There is no risk-free environment. If we think of the people who have died over the years in the mining industry, it is absolutely horrific. If we think of the people who have died in oil exploration, even just in the North Sea, it is horrific. Other chemical plants have had accidents. The

building industry has had accidents. We are living in a world which is dangerous and the question is whether we can make it less dangerous and what the consequences are.

Set against that, I have yet to be told of one single person who has died through the nuclear industry in Britain: not one. Maybe there are people who allege it. I have talked to them. I have looked at the evidence about leukaemia clusters in the area where I live in Cumbria. None of that has been proved. It may be that proof will come eventually, but so far people have worked pretty hard at it and there is no evidence.

Can we get it into some sort of perspective? Yes, I find the history of emissions from Sellafield unacceptable. I am told that they have gone down, from the 1970s to the present time, by 99 per cent. They are under a lot of pressure from the various regulatory bodies to reduce still further anything that goes into the sea. When we set off what happens in terms of any risks from Sellafield against natural radiation, it is still very tiny. The difference is something like 1000:1. That means that although we may be concerned about the nuclear industry I think we are right to be concerned, because there is something about the nuclear industry. We cannot see radiation; we cannot see radioactivity and we feel more threatened than if we could see it openly and clearly.

What we have are concerns; and I repeat that I understand them. I would urge anybody who takes the view of the first two speakers to talk to the trades unions who work at Sellafield. After all, the Transport & General Workers' Union and others represent those who work there, day in, day out. They are not 20 miles away, as I am. They are not 90 or 100 miles away as I think Dublin is. They are within yards of it. I have talked to the trade unions on a number of occasions. All I would say is, "talk to them", because they are the workers and they are not going to be so daft as to justify their people working in dangerous circumstances. When Committee D goes to visit Sellafield, please make sure you get some time to talk to the trades unions there and see what they have to say. All I am arguing is I think we should get this in perspective.

Could I just say a word about MOX? My understanding is that the emissions that might come as a result of the MOX plant are equivalent in radiation effect - you may not believe the information I have been given - to one second in an aeroplane. If that is accurate, that certainly puts it into perspective.

What we are talking about is, by reprocessing nuclear waste, reducing the total level of waste. Of course it has to be shipped backwards and forwards; but my understanding is that if anybody were to get hold of MOX fuel that has been reprocessed and is being sent to whichever country, it would take a very high level of technical skill, plant and so on, to get any plutonium out of it. It would be virtually impossible unless you were able to produce atom bombs anyway, without intercepting the MOX fuel, so I do not think that is a threat.

The key issue that is new is 11 September and the consequences of it and whether that is so serious that we ought to close down the world's nuclear industry. As far as Chernobyl is concerned, my understanding is that it is not really a fair comparison. Chernobyl was, in modern design terms, an unsafe plant. The person who caused the catastrophe there was experimenting in a totally unacceptable way. There were not the safety levels; there were not the extra safeguards; there were not the automatic switch-off procedures. I have been assured that there is no nuclear plant in Britain now that could possibly go the way of Chernobyl. Some people say they do not believe what is being said, but that is my understanding. Of course, the knock-on effect of Chernobyl is still there. I have not been to Chernobyl, but I went to Kiev and I learned quite a lot about the consequences there. It was pretty horrific but I do not believe we are at all in that situation.

What about an aeroplane crashing into Sellafield? I asked some of the people from BNFL a few weeks ago, "What about that?" They said that their assessments were that the consequences would be localised and small. The main risk is if a plane hit the tanks full of liquid which contains some of the waste. What I was told was that there would be a local effect but it would be a local effect measured within the locality of Sellafield and not going further. Obviously, we need more evidence on that and I think it is a more difficult area; but I would not have thought that the threat of a plane crashing there is itself a reason to close down the world's nuclear industry. It may be a reason to look for extra precautions and to have extra safeguards; but in that sense I do not think Sellafield is any more vulnerable than any other nuclear plant.

Bearing in mind that the bulk of French electricity generation is nuclear, I think we need to get this into perspective. I do not expect to convince anybody. I am just saying that there are other arguments. I repeat: I do understand the concerns and anxieties and I am not expecting anybody from the Republic to agree with me publicly or privately, but I do think there is a case the other way. I do not believe that any government would allow its people to be put into danger as the people of many parts of Britain would be, particularly in Cumbria and the surrounding areas, if there were to be an incident, because we would be by far the worst affected.

I am a very keen hill-walker. I love walking in the Lake District fells and I have been on fells and looked straight down into Sellafield about eight miles away. One can see it and I certainly do not believe that any government would allow people locally to be put into the sort of dangers suggested. I say that without being an unswerving optimist and in a realistic sense. These risks are looked at and I hope they will go on being looked at.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Thank you. Alf Dubs has put his point of view very strongly, whether it is in the minority or otherwise. This is a Body which has all points of view, very often on controversial topics, and that is how it should be.

Deputy Mike Torode: I am certain that this August Body would not have invited us insular people to attend unless you expected us actually to say something not necessarily directly either related to the British/Irish problems.

This issue of Sellafield is of great interest to me and indeed to many of the people that I represent down in the Channel Islands. I have a direct interest in Sellafield in that I have a daughter and a grandson living in North Wales, so that obviously is something to sharpen my own pencil; but I have to say that down in the Channel Islands we live within very few miles of what is arguably the largest reprocessing plant in the whole of Europe. That is the plant at La Hague. Therefore, I follow with interest the arguments of successive British governments about Sellafield and what they want to do with it and how they want to keep it in business, because their arguments are quite indicative of the marked reluctance that they have had in bringing the fears of the three insular authorities to the attention of the French through proper, international channels.

The island of Alderney is just seven miles from La Hague, Guernsey is something over 25 and Jersey about 40. Two hundred British citizens living in peace and quiet in their own homes are continuously at risk from La Hague. Of course, following 11 September our concerns have been twofold.

One is the business of La Hague being the target of some form of terrorist attack. The French have responded very well - and so they should because they live even closer to it than I do. They have put an air exclusion zone around the processing plant and installed a missile battery at the plant. They have got fighter cover ready to scramble from Cherbourg airfield which is only a matter of a mile or so away and they have what appears to me to be nothing less than company strength of specialist troops actually on the site. That is just one half of our concern. Prior to 11 September I guess our concern was about the contamination that happens on a day-to-day basis from La Hague. It is proven that there is from time to time a small leak of radioactive material principally through the cooling system. This goes into the sea which nurtures the fish and shellfish that I eat, the shellfish that my neighbours eat, and hopefully the shellfish that you eat if you come and visit us.

One of the dangers as far as we are concerned is the perception that we have a major problem. If too many tourists think we have a problem our tourist industry goes even further out of the window, and I hate to think of what it might do to people who come down to the islands in connection with our finance industry, who all seem to want to eat lots of very lovely lobster lunches when they arrive.

Lord Dubs has suggested that any bad effect from any of these plants is local: but how local is local? We in Guernsey host each year, and have done for many years, a whole load of Belarusian schoolchildren. I have seen the effect on these youngsters, I have seen how they come to us, and I have seen frightened, pale, skinny little kids after a month of good Guernsey weather go back looking like normal kids. Unless you have actually had dealings with young people like that I do not think you can clearly understand just how serious the effects of contamination can be.

In relation to the small quantities of contaminants that go into the sea off La Hague, people pooh-pooh the idea and say, "But it is only minute. It is barely readable on all of the relevant instruments". My argument is that it is not for my life that I am concerned; it is not for my children's lives that I am concerned, perhaps not even for my grandchildren's, but my grandchildren's grandchildren. All of these nuclear contaminants have a half-life which is suggested as being a thousand years plus. What are we building up, not just at La Hague, but at Sellafield, which is how I come to this particular debate?

I am disappointed that the Law of the Sea Tribunal has not been able to do something about our concerns. It does not mean to say that we cannot try and resurrect it in another way; but I am concerned that we are laying up trouble in store for future generations in 200 or 300 years' time.

Can I say to you that you and your successors in office may not recall our names in the future, you may not remember our faces, but I have to say that you will recognise us because when you switch the lights off we will be the ones who glow in the dark.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Thank you, Mike, very strongly put. Tony Colman is next. Can I welcome him to the Conference for his maiden appearance? We are delighted to see him.

Mr Tony Colman MP: I am particularly pleased that Committee D is visiting Sellafield. One of the critiques of the nuclear industry is that they say, "You never come to see us, you never come and listen, you never come and look". I have been there, and I would urge all members of this Body to go and to understand their case and to listen. You may not agree - I did not agree - but it is very important not to look at this solely on an emotional basis. I have to say that it took three goes before they would invite me, but they did.

I am disappointed that it has not been possible for the Isle of Man to be represented today, because this debate is particularly pertinent to their concerns. I would suggest that there are three key questions about Sellafield. First of all, is it economic? Secondly, is it safe? Thirdly, is it needed?

In terms of whether it is economic, the UK Government in June came to the view that it was economic, looking at the sunken costs and somewhat writing them off and believing on the basis of 35-40 per cent of the reference case of the amount of fuel that would need to be taken through to achieve break-even that that could be achieved. Only some six per cent of the reference case has so far been achieved and certainly all the noises coming out of Japan indicate that they may well cancel their element of the six per cent.

As Mike Torode has said in his very moving speech, could the MOX plant at Sellafield compete with the COGEMA plant at La Hague which is much cheaper than anything which the MOX plant has put forward in terms of its operating costs? If it had to sell

MOX at a price which is similar to that of COGEMA it would have to have not 30 per cent of its base reference case but a level which is some five times higher, so there is tremendous over-estimate in terms of the possibility that this plant will ever make money in the future.

I do not believe that there is an economic case for the MOX plant. This has been laid out by independent consultants and I would suggest that what we saw yesterday in the decision of the International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea was only a refusal of the emergency injunction case (not in fact a full hearing of the case) and I understand that Friends of the Earth have taken forward a separate appeal on this. The appeal was heard on 27 and 28 November and the result is due in the next few weeks: primarily on the basis of whether there is an economic case. I would put to this Body that there is no economic case for the MOX plant to be commissioned. Less controversially perhaps, there is no real economic case for the nuclear industry, full stop. On that I think I would look at other colleagues around this room who would also be concerned at the long-term problems of dealing with the nuclear waste.

Secondly, is it safe? Colleagues have talked about September 11. There are no anti-aircraft batteries or aircraft on patrol over the skies above Sellafield, so clearly it is there as a sitting target as is the case with other nuclear power stations around the UK. I am not sure whether it is true but there seemed to be an extremely authoritative report in *The Sunday Times* at the beginning of October saying that the fourth plane, the one which was brought down to the west of Philadelphia, was heading for Three Mile Island and for a grouping of nuclear power stations. There is a very real threat out there which needs to be taken account of.

In terms of the MOX plant we are not simply talking about the plant, which is sitting duck that could be bombed from the air, but also about the boats which would bring the spent plutonium from around the world up through the Irish Sea to Sellafield for reprocessing and back. I am not sure how anyone can say in the days of Al-Qaeda that this is not an additional threat to the people of these isles.

Going on to the third point about whether it is needed, all of us are concerned about issues of global warming. One of the plus points of nuclear energy is that while it has an appalling long-term effect on the UK and Ireland and on the world, in the short-term it is not a CO₂ emitter. The question is, is it possible for us to phase out the nuclear energy in these islands and still keep the lights on and be able to continue with the Kyoto Protocol and the considerable reduction in CO₂ emissions that we require?

The Guardian in the UK reports what I think is a very good initiative that was taken today. Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State for the Environment and Agriculture in the UK, has stated that the UK target of 10 per cent for renewables by 2010 is going to be extended to 20 per cent by 2020. Obviously, we need to increase that to a much higher level in order to ensure that the phasing out of the nuclear industry does not affect our CO₂ emissions.

If I can declare an interest, in my constituency in the UK I have the International Energy Authority Clean Coal Technology Centre which is working on 100 per cent zero emissions for coal-fired stations with gas fluidisation and the World Coal Institute. We could move very rapidly, if we wish to, towards reducing emissions from coal and from gas by using the work that they are carrying forward.

What should we do as parliamentarians about these three issues? We have an energy review going on in the UK and I would imagine there could well be an energy policy review leading up to the general election in the Republic. We should ensure that we as parliamentarians work together on this within this body. I hope that Committee C or one of the other committees will look at the wider issues of this question of the economic case for a change in energy policy and move away from nuclear generation.

There is a world body which involves legislators called GLOBE, *Global Legislators for a Balanced Environment*. The Americans are very strongly involved in that and are working to move towards renewables and away from nuclear energy and fossil fuels. There was, sadly, a decision taken at the OECD in Paris on Monday this week not to back the American position in terms of the export of fossil fuel and nuclear technology being downgraded and that the Export Credit Agency should in the future be in favour of renewables. The Americans put their very strong position and were not backed by either the Irish Government or the British Government. I think that this is a great shame, given that they have taken this moral high ground on renewables being the way forward for the future.

The issue is not simply about Sellafield or about nuclear energy for these islands, but also about what we do across the world. I hope that the UK Government will change its mind and not go forward with the MOX plant and that in the energy policy which it will be bringing forward in the next few weeks will work on the basis of no new nuclear power stations and a phasing out over the coming years of nuclear stations in the UK, including Sellafield.

The sitting was suspended at 11 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.20 am.

Mr Andrew Mackinlay MP (Thurrock): First of all, I am a member of the All-Party Westminster Isle of Man Group. They have just had their elections and the Speaker is no longer the Speaker and he represented us here and so I guess I am the next best thing.

Mike Torode and Tony Colman raised the question of the security of these particular plants. There is extensive defence on the Clyde for the nuclear submarine bases and it is quite well known (indeed, it is part of the defence mechanism to tell the people) that the Comacchio Commando Group is there and there is final denial and so on. It seems to me that there is a case for us being given some information as to what are the defences of these nuclear power stations. It should be part of the defence to

make it known what is there. I imagine there is some form of final denial even if it is not adequate.

The debate this morning is against the backdrop of a considerable lack of trust (which I share) about the nuclear industry and its advocates and its management. There has been a lack of candour and a degree of deceit in the past; and that inevitably heightens one's anxiety about whether we could be acquiescing by our silence in something which either this or future generations would regret. Of course, it is also against the backdrop that in some other areas scientists have advised governments and government ministers in goodwill have taken the word of scientists, only to be proved disastrously wrong. We have seen that in the field of agriculture. The fact that we have these constant reassurances that there is safety is in my view something which we should take very cautiously. In any event, we have a duty to keep up the criticism because it is only by the criticism and in our own debates in our parliaments that we make sure that the people who have the stewardship and management of nuclear plants maintain high standards. Once you abandon that vigilance, you increase the likelihood of sloppy management and carelessness.

My colleague Alf Dubs prayed in aid the unions. He said, "Speak to the unions". Of course if you cut me in half I have got "union" going through me like a stick of rock; but I do not take their word for it on everything. The tobacco unions write to me; but I disregard the views of the tobacco unions. I happen to believe that it is an evil trade that should be combatted in every way it possibly can be. I have a very distinguished General Secretary who called me into his office once. I thought he was going to give me a gold badge or something; but the management of BAA and British Airways had got to him and asked him if he would lean on Mackinlay to ease back on his criticisms of the Heathrow Terminal 5 application. It is amazing how employers find the trades unions useful when it comes to commercial considerations, and it is amazing how gullible the unions are when they swallow hook, line and sinker that if they do not do the pleading and advocacy for the employers there will be social and political Armageddon in their places of work.

Mr John Battle MP: Trade unions are a moral evil?

Lord Dubs: There is a difference between commercial considerations and the safety of people working at a nuclear plant, and the unions are there working in proximity to the nuclear material. That is the difference.

Mr Mackinlay: It is a valid point, but I do not think it diminishes my view. You can have the utmost diligence in terms of normal health and safety; but those people will not necessarily know what a maverick management - and you only need one maverick - or careless management may do at some stage to provide neglect. This is without regard to the potential for terrorist attack which has been amplified adequately by others.

Alf Dubs also referred to Bhopal. Bhopal, tragic as it was, would pale into insignificance against the potential of a major terrorist attack on a nuclear plant. There is also, in my view, a moral issue here in regard to our relationship with other States. When your next-door neighbour wishes to put another house in his garden (assuming it is not what is called "permitted development" in the United Kingdom) you have a right in law to object and to be consulted. It seems to me in relation to States where they share common ecosystems, where they share common seaways, that there is at least a moral right which should now be developed into law that there should be real consultation rather than just being told what is going to happen.

I invite people to consider what has happened in the Danube. One of the States in the Danube rather selfishly wanted to put in a major dam. It was a matter of common interest to the Czechs, the Slovaks and the Hungarians. You have there all the potential for very serious disputes if you ignore your moral obligation to your neighbours and the fact that they have common moral ownership anyway with some of the waterways. In this case the seaways are clearly shared between Ireland and the United Kingdom in close proximity to this plant. Of course the same would be true of an obligation to the French in my view with regard to jurisdictions which abut them.

Colleagues, I do think that this debate is appropriate. I think it is time that we flagged up concern. There is the question that international law should intervene here - although it appears it does not, in terms of rights to be consulted rather than merely to be told. As regards the system of arbitration in relation to what happened in the Danube, not in relation to nuclear plant but where one State rather selfishly indicated that its interests were overriding on a common river way, the same principles should be applied when it comes to nuclear plants which clearly cause considerable anxiety. I have to say that the burden of proof is on the industry; and they have not yet satisfied me that this is sufficiently safe and secure. The United Kingdom also should reassure us about the final denial arrangements in terms of terrorist attacks.

Mr Conor Lenihan TD (Dublin South-West): There have been many very high calibre speeches and statements here from the British Members and from the new Members, from Mike Torode and from Elfyn Llywd here beside me. All of them have spoken volumes for the understandable concerns that British, Irish, Welsh and Scottish people have about nuclear power.

Andrew Mackinlay, a few minutes ago, justified how he became Back-bencher of the Year in Westminster with a fine contribution and I think his point about international law is a very valid one, about good neighbour policy in relation to building infrastructure of this kind.

Elfyn Llywd was very good on the point about the misinformation and downright lies that have been told about the nuclear industry. It is that rather than health concerns that really worries people. We would be ready to believe the nuclear industry if their record of truthfulness was good in the past; but, unfortunately, the record from the

nuclear industry, not just in Britain but elsewhere as well, has been highly suspect. I discovered this, much to my disappointment, as a journalist. The information-flow from the nuclear industry is highly dodgy and not to be trusted. I do not say that loosely. I think that is a pretty much accepted worldwide view about that particular industry.

The security concern has been addressed. Committee D, as you know, will be visiting Sellafield. I think that the security concern is real, all the more so because the scientific evidence is endless in relation to nuclear issue. Seemingly, it can never be resolved to anyone's satisfaction. There are concerns, but no scientist that I have met or heard of can say definitively that it is wrong or that it is right or whatever. We are not going to resolve that.

The security issue is hugely important in the wake of 11 September. Security in an uncertain world is the paramount concern for most politicians around the world. It is important that we redouble our efforts to make sure that these plants, if they are to continue, remain safe and secure from terrorist attack. I do not say this lightly. I believe that, for instance, Sellafield would be an ideal target for a dissident Republican group like the Continuity IRA. Even an unsuccessful attack would guarantee them massive publicity and massive awareness levels. That is a real threat and it is a real issue, how vulnerable these plants are to attack. I think we have to make sure that they are safe.

Security procedures in Britain are not the best. We have seen the Brighton bomb, Canary Wharf and even the mortar attack on Downing Street, so security is not invulnerable or invincible in Britain. It is important that those security concerns in relation to Sellafield and other nuclear plants be addressed in a meaningful way so that the public can be reassured.

I was very impressed with Tony Colman's statement that there is no business case for nuclear energy. It is the first time I have heard that said by a British Member. It is very encouraging, in the sense that people are thinking that at that particular level: is there an economic or business case for nuclear energy and is there a realistic way, through renewable energies, of diversifying our interest and, if you like, phasing out nuclear power? That is very laudable; and hopefully we will return to that theme at this particular gathering.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD (Donegal North-East): I wanted to come in on this debate because I did not want Séamus Kirk to feel that this was his election issue, as Lord Dubs might have intimated: that it was merely an election campaign. As somebody coming not from the east coast but from the north-west coast, I wanted to lend my support, not knowing an awful lot about the nuclear industry but wanting to know more facts. I think this debate is very useful in terms of throwing up a few issues that we have not thought about.

We had the story of the three-headed fish and the two-finned fish being landed, whether this was fact or fiction. I did not see the fish; but it is on much the same

lines as the information we get from the nuclear industry as to how safe or unsafe the situation is.

One of my greatest concerns is the belief in Sellafield that a terrorist attack, an accident or whatever will never happen. On 11 September, America thought it was invincible. The Pentagon and all the big untouchables were touched that day. If the last plane had got where it was going, the White House probably would have been hit as well. To say "it will never happen" is a dangerous presumption and that is where my interest has been more sharply concentrated since then.

There are a lot of jobs involved in Sellafield, but are they jobs at any cost? If Sellafield is not economically viable, the MOX plant will not be economically viable, which is the rumour that we are getting - although the Secretary of State did not say that last night. I was told it that would take 100 years to decommission the plant, so there will be jobs in the foreseeable future for people in Sellafield even if they decided to close it down this very moment.

I do not see how safety can be guaranteed, whether it is from an accident, some deliberate attack or even from a leak into the Irish Sea which will concern the fishermen and the livelihoods of many people in our own area; but on the bigger picture, we are more aware that our own junior minister was lambasted for not having a good evacuation plan and not having his iodine tablets and this, that and the other ready.

My concept of an accident at a nuclear plant - and again, I am only looking for some more information from people that might be more knowledgeable than me - is that if we have a proper accident at Sellafield we will not be worried about iodine tablets or whether we have ten seconds to get to the air-raid shelter. Possibly, we would be hoping that we did not need an evacuation plan because, maybe, given the situation we would be left in afterwards should we survive it, we might be better off not surviving. I am not coming from a background of knowing, but I am coming from a background of the ordinary, common person that I would be talking to. That is their perception: that we will not be too worried about evacuation plans if such an accident happened.

I would like to see the vitrification of the liquid waste moved faster than 2015, safer storage, and that we would try to minimise, reduce, and try to find alternatives so that only essential nuclear waste, if there is such a thing, remains. Then it would be easier to deal with smaller amounts.

Lord Dubs talked about many people who had died from accidents in the building industry and said that he had never met anybody dying from a nuclear accident. In the Dáil we have had four years of the Health Committee looking at the tobacco industry and I was interested in Andrew Mackinlay's contribution. The tobacco industry came before our Committee and said smoking was not addictive. When I asked them what addiction was they said, "People think they are addicted to golf. They are addicted to chocolate and they are addicted to computers." That was their

concept of addiction. I worry about this. I know people who have died from drinking and driving and getting killed in a car crash. I know people who have died, people would say, from smoking. It is not easy to say that they have definitely died from smoking; but 7,000 people die in Ireland every year from smoking. Similarly with the nuclear industry person dying: we do not see it, we cannot see the radiation.

Going back to what was said by Deputy Torode, we used to have an advertisement in Donegal for *Ready Brek* or *Weetabix* or something in which the person from Donegal walked around with a glow. I did not want to see that happening in ads at the time, even for food. I would not like to see it happening in reality in the future.

Mr John Browne TD (Wexford): I stayed late deliberately. Maybe it upset you a bit, but we have to hear what the other people are going to say. I knew, coming here, what my views were. It is very important to hear the other views. One particular view demands a scud missile from me towards Lord Dubs. It is not nuclear; he will be OK. Cecilia has mentioned it already.

Lord Dubs was trivialising the whole thing to suggest that there is an election in Ireland. Long before this election was mentioned, long after the last election, long before the previous election, it has been a serious problem. There are studies on deformities of children born in Séamus Kirk's area. It is a very serious problem. It has a new impetus now, because of the American terrorist attacks and with the introduction of MOX as an extra possibility. Things are hotting up with no connection whatsoever with the election.

Lord Dubs gave examples of accidents in industry and so on which are always tragic, but there is no continuation of that afterwards. A nuclear explosion or anything that happens is going to continue for years and years. Chernobyl is an example. You cannot compare a normal accident. If you interview unions, how can so many airline pilots crash and get killed? The unions would give you very assuring views beforehand - and they had better not tempt fate as I am flying back tonight. You might not be able to interview some of the unions in the nuclear camp on how they felt about it if there is an explosion afterwards. It is a different kettle of fish altogether.

I appreciate the views that are expressed here and I know that a lot of what we are saying is conditional. It is based on what would happen if an attack came - and that is the difficulty. I hope it never does come. I agree very much with Mike Torode who gave the viewpoint that maybe it is in 100 years' time that all of this is going to come to light and that our grandchildren perhaps will suffer because we have allowed pollution to take place and the environment has been affected.

I have a note here of the result of the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea. It says, "The United Kingdom has an obligation to prevent pollution of the marine environment which might result from the operation of the MOX plant." We already have pollution there. It has ordered the United Kingdom to devise measures to prevent pollution of the Irish Sea from the MOX plant.

The idea that nothing is happening at the moment because there has not been any major tragedy does not mean that we have not got to be realistic enough to plan for the future and prevent what might be tragic situations later on, when we have passed on.

I want to thank everybody for their views and I am sorry, Lord Dubs, but I could not accept your line.

Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville: I am not qualified to speak on Sellafield and, frankly, I would not have put my name in to speak in this debate but for the opportunity to make a short speech towards the end of it. I will consequently speak at the level of the general rather than of the particular.

I have three things to say. The first is to declare an interest in that my brother, who is now a senior judge, was the counsel to the Sizewell B Inquiry between 1983 and 1986 over the construction of that power station. The Inquiry lasted two-and-a-half years. That is widely attributed to the number of questions that my brother asked of all the witnesses on every side. The protesters decided fairly early that he was a reliable figure on their behalf when (I take my metaphor from cricket) he removed the middle stump of the Assistant Secretary of the Department of Energy who was giving evidence on behalf of the Secretary of State who had authorised the plant. My brother also (I say this to his credit) gave up a week of his own holiday to have a one-to-one seminar with the leading academic authority on nuclear safety in the United Kingdom so as to be absolutely certain that his cross-examination of witnesses who appeared on the issue of nuclear safety would be armed with the most up-to-date information from that particular academic sector.

Of course I recognise that that Inquiry, which came down in favour of the building of the plant after what was the longest planning inquiry in British history prior to the one at Terminal 5 to which Andrew Mackinlay made reference, predated the events of 11 September. I recognise that 11 September does make a difference. I recognise the significance of 11 September. But, as politicians, we have to ask ourselves if terrorism is simply being used as a final stick with which to beat the nuclear industry.

I say this in particular because, under the British planning system, the responsibility for taking the decisions about this sort of thing is, as I understand it, under forthcoming legislation by the present Government going to fall on parliamentarians and not be subjected to two-and-a-half-year and five-year planning inquiries in the way that they have up till now. What we have been engaged in today is but a foretaste of what parliamentarians are going to find themselves doing in the future, at least on this side of the water.

The second thing I want to do is to quote a version of the influence of chaos theory which was once put forward by an impartial if ironic observer, who said,

"It starts with protesters in the United States mounting a campaign against a power-station in California which is going to provide much of the power for

the western part of the United States. That protest was successful and that power-station and its supply of energy was then taken out of the American grid. By a whole series of economic step-changes, that then moves down through the cycle of energy alternatives because, with the removal of that particular major provider, there is going to be a price effect in terms of competition throughout the industry. Gradually, it gets down to the level of the price of kerosene and paraffin and an African living on the edge of the Sahara Desert who cannot afford the price of kerosene and paraffin that has been induced by this interference with the pattern of energy supply basically has to go and cut down trees, thus making the Sahara a more arid place than it was before that process started. The next thing that happens,"

said the impartial but ironic observer

"is that protesters in the United States start complaining about the cutting down of trees on the edge of the Sahara."

The third thing I want to say is that some years ago I think (from the cast list who attended the event) I was the only parliamentarian in London to attend a conference on the transportation of irradiated fuel through urban areas. That conference, a day-long conference, was opened by Brian Flowers, a Fellow of the Royal Society, a Rector of Imperial College, later a Vice-Chancellor of the University of London, an erstwhile Chairman of the European Science Foundation in Strasbourg, and no mean academic - a Member of the same House as Lord Dubs, Lord Glentoran and myself, and still active.

I recall vividly the keynote address he gave at the beginning in which he said,

"The fact that I as a scientist am satisfied that you can transport irradiated fuel through an urban area is irrelevant if the people who live in that urban area are not convinced of it too. Therefore, there is an obligation on scientists to make sure that there is confidence on the part of the public at large in what the industry is doing."

That is a very good reason for having the debate which we are having today; and the whole process of debate should continue.

Mr Brian O'Shea TD (Waterford): We should seek to base our arguments on the scientific information that is available to us at any particular time. In answer to something Alf Dubs said earlier, that he suspected that the opposition from the far side of the Irish Sea is in the context of Sellafield and not just in the context of the MOX plant, I have to say that I come from that school of thought.

I have a Down's Syndrome daughter. Therefore the Windscale fire and the outcome of that would have been something that was of particular interest to me. I suppose the case put forward at the time was that, at the time of the fire, the prevailing wind was blowing towards Dundalk. The case then was put forward that there were eight

girls in boarding school from a total number of 120, if I can recall, who had early Down's Syndrome births. There were also figures put forward in relation to a village in Cumbria where, from the same age cohort, three girls had given birth to Down's Syndrome children. There has been quite a bit of investigation done on this but there are no proven links between the two events. I suspect that there may not be a link; but then, again, these are matters of opinion at this stage.

I should like to refer back to the BSE situation and the link that a lot of people suspected between BSE and New-variant CJD. Right through the nineteen-nineties we were hearing that there was no scientific link established. Then in 1996 we were told that all the information pointed in the direction of a link; and I do not think at this stage anybody doubts that there is a link between consuming beef infected with BSE and New-variant CJD. On the other hand, it would have to be stated that there is not a conclusive link proven.

I can recall reading on one occasion that tests had shown that the plutonium level in Dublin Bay was 100 times what it was in Galway Bay. That may have been coming from a very low base; but we know that in terms of weaponry plutonium is a material that is a by-product of the nuclear industry. I welcome the fact that Committee D will be making a visit to Sellafield in January. I must say that that is a mighty undertaking in terms of the sort of assessment they need to make. I believe that it is incumbent upon the British authorities to have a proper environmental impact assessment carried out not only on the plant but also in terms of the transportation of materials.

At any stage in the evolution of human kind knowledge is in a state of flux and moving onwards. We had the point made by Alf Dubs which have already been referred to: what about the workers in Sellafield? Equally, what about the mineworkers who would fight for their jobs? - but if the conditions they were working under were highly and unacceptably hazardous it would be a different argument. At the end of the day there has to be disclosure of all information by the British authorities. Concealing information on issues such as this is not acceptable. Arguments can be advanced in terms of security, whether it is military security, commercial security or whatever.

Our colleague Deputy Mike Torode put it in a proper context when he said that it may not be ourselves or our grandchildren but our grandchildren's grandchildren that we are talking about here. The science around this whole area has to move onwards in terms not just of the safety of the plant and the risks from terrorism, but also the long-term environmental damage that can be done. For instance, in the Atlantic you have waste material from nuclear plants dumped encased in concrete. Concrete is a relatively new material. Nobody knows how long concrete will last. I believe that it is important that full information is provided and that a proper environmental impact statement is carried out. Let me say on my own behalf - and here I will be reflecting Labour Party policy - that we certainly want to see this MOX plant stopped and certainly we have very grave concerns about the existence of Sellafield at all.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Like my friend and colleague, Cecilia Keaveney, I want to express solidarity with our colleague Séamus Kirk on this issue and again, like Cecilia, my knowledge of the industry is somewhat limited. However, I take up the point that Brian O'Shea made. The one thing that I do know is that in spite of the efficiency of nuclear fuel as an energy source and the relative cheapness of it, scientists have not yet devised a method of disposing of toxic waste. All of the issues that have been raised in that context are obviously something that brings a very heavy moral obligation on politicians on both sides of the Irish Sea to open up this debate even further.

I also would like to take the opportunity for the benefit of our British colleagues to reflect some sense of the mood in Ireland as a result of September 11 and the whole question of Sellafield. Cecilia made reference to our Minister of State with responsibility for energy, Deputy Joe Jacob, a member of my party, who was positively pilloried as a result of going on to an early morning radio programme live - which all politicians will have a certain trepidation about, subjecting yourself to a live programme on a matter such as this on the emergency plan. Following that particular programme, a leading political commentator in a national newspaper, which I must say concentrated my mind, referred to the performance but also talked about women friends of hers who had called her up and who were crying listening to this and who were petrified with fear at what they saw or what they perceived to be a lack of responsibility on behalf of the Government to have a plan.

It brings up the point that Peter Brooke made about the eminent scientist. It is all very well to put forward scientific views; but if the people on whom this is impacting do not believe it, then we do have an obligation. It is happening to us in Ireland in the context of mobile phone masts across Ireland where there are people who genuinely believe, despite all the scientific evidence to the contrary, that there is radiation emanating from these masts and who have mounted and continue to mount challenges and are making life very difficult for local and national politicians.

I just want to give a sense of the mood in Ireland. In the follow-up to yesterday's decision, reading the editorial line taken by all of our leading Irish newspapers, again it gives you an indication of the mood in the country. For example, the *Irish Independent* says that in winning the nuclear battle in three weeks' time it clears the way for "armed shipments of nuclear waste off the Irish coast". It goes on to say in its editorial that Joe Jacob, whom I referred to earlier, "appealed to Britain to delay commissioning until the parties have reached agreement on measures to prevent pollution from the MOX plant, as suggested by the Hamburg Tribunal". They go on to say: "In any event the risk of a catastrophic terror strike on the plant, however remote, is a risk too many". The Cork-based *Irish Examiner* states in its editorial that the two governments "have different perspectives on the gravity of the nuclear threat posed by Sellafield" and that to say that "would be a gross understatement .. With the threat of a catastrophe on a far greater scale than the Chernobyl disaster hanging over this country," (that is, Ireland) "it is crucial for the Government to persist in exploring every avenue with the aim of shutting Sellafield."

Finally, on a related issue, there is a report emanating from New York which brings back this whole question of the security element (and I take on board what the Secretary of State said yesterday in answer to questions about the security threat) which says, "US put on a new terror alert: America was put on a new terror alert last night after security experts detected a growing number of threats against the country". If that is the mood in America among the security service, and Britain from our perspective are the closest allies of the US in what is going on in Afghanistan, is it not then acceptable that Irish people, who know absolutely nothing about nuclear safety, who know nothing about scientific evidence but who, as in Séamus's constituency, have a whole array of statistics relating to birth defects and other things, should expect Irish politicians to reflect that very serious alarm, which is bordering on hysteria in some instances, in debates such as this?

I contributed primarily to express solidarity with Séamus on this. I come, like Cecilia, from the north-west of the country and this does not impact on me directly; but I also want to put in context the mood in Ireland as a result of September 11 so that, hopefully, our British colleagues, when this debates opens up, as Peter Brooke has said it will inevitably open up, will at least be armed with that particular reality.

Mr Matt Brennan TD (Sligo-Leitrim): I want to express the concerns of the people of the east coast of Ireland in particular. Séamus Kirk spoke about it very passionately and no doubt he is very concerned because he lives within 60 miles of Sellafield.

For somebody that happened to work in a nuclear power station in Great Britain myself in my younger days on the construction of a nuclear power station in Trawsfynydd in Merionethshire in North Wales, I can say that the standard of construction is very good. It is not like Chernobyl where you have a single line of concrete around the reactors. In Great Britain you have a double lining of concrete around the reactors and that is what we were putting around it when we were building the nuclear power station.

The many Irish people that worked on all these nuclear power stations (and I am quite sure that Sellafield, which was built in 1957, was no different) would have emigrated from Ireland to work there the same as I did in the very early sixties. At that time I did not know anything about nuclear power stations. We were interested in our pay packets at the end of the week. Nevertheless, the people are indeed concerned about nuclear power, and in particular after the disaster at Chernobyl. The winds were blowing at the time of Chernobyl and on the Ox mountains quite near where I live in Co Sligo, when the sheep were examined they were found to have traces of what came from Chernobyl. There is indeed great concern in Ireland and particularly on the east coast of Ireland about what might happen if ever there were a nuclear disaster in Sellafield.

I want to say again that the power stations in Great Britain are good. They were very well constructed. I was talking to John Battle earlier and he told me that his father was an electrician and worked in 1957 on the nuclear power station in Sellafield, the same as many Irish people did. Nevertheless, the waste has to be stored here for the

next 10,000 years. If it has to be stored in power stations it is a long, long time and there will be great concern for a long, long time. They are lucky in Great Britain. They have a tremendous safety record with 18 nuclear power stations all over Great Britain. I hope that that safety record will continue and God forbid we would ever have a disaster like we had on 11 September in New York.

Senator Helen Keogh: Just as an aside, I would like to say that it is fascinating to hear the different experiences of people. At events like this we often find out more about our colleagues than ever we thought we would. Hearing Matt Brennan talk about his own experiences was absolutely fascinating.

I hope when the Committee goes to see Sellafield they will realise, as I realised when I went to see Sellafield in 1994, the whole economic imperative of the place. Alf Dubs recanted on his observation in relation to this being perhaps an election issue. This has been an ongoing issue in Ireland for many years now. For someone who on a clear day can nearly see across to Sellafield, it is something that I, too, have had grave concerns about over quite a number of years. That is why I went there, just to see the place in action. I was flabbergasted at that time because I did not realise, as many Irish people still do not realise, how much of the local economy is utterly and completely dependent on the Sellafield plant. I came away with a much more realistic idea of what the British Government were going to do about Sellafield. That is, they were going to keep it open because it was essential to the local economy. Somebody said it that closing Sellafield would be a bit like closing down Intel in Ireland. You are talking about that extent of employment dependent on it. I had absolutely no idea about that until I went and saw the place and saw the extent of it.

There are huge environmental concerns and complete lack of trust as well. It is very important to emphasise the point that Irish people I do not think will ever be convinced about the safety management at Sellafield. That lack of trust, unfortunately—

Mr John Battle MP: I am not convinced of the case that the plant is being kept going for the local economy. I would just ask you to consider the fact that the plant is the main waste storage plant in Britain. It stores waste from Ireland as well. There would have to be a plant somewhere storing the waste for thousands of years to come because we do not have the means to deal with the waste that remains and kills. I think that is the prime consideration.

Senator Keogh: I would agree with you. There are very different perspectives on this. The point was made earlier about whether this should be a debate on the whole nuclear industry - and perhaps that is what it should be. You will find Irish people very difficult to convince about the safety aspects. Unfortunately, because in the past there were cock-ups, there was a view that these were in some way hidden from us or that we did not get the full story. I think transparency is absolutely essential because of that.

There are many issues around this. The fact is that the Irish public are on a crusade now to have Sellafield closed. I do not know what the outcome of that is going to be, but we know that the lines are drawn. That is the way it is going to be and it is an emotional thing at this stage. You are not going to be able to convince the Irish people that this should not continue.

Mr Andrew Boylan TD (Cavan-Monaghan): If we could get one message across, I would want it to be the genuine concern of people back home in relation to the Sellafield plant. It was an interesting contribution by Lord Dubs that, maybe, we are seeing the thinking of people in this country at a higher level and that the issue will go away after the next general election.

This issue will not go away after the next general election because the issue will not be resolved. The issue did not arise as a result of the upcoming general election: it has been ongoing for decades. It is the record of safety at Sellafield. It is the fear of the unknown. It is the statistics of the birth defects along the east coast, as Deputy Brian O'Shea outlined.

Back home in County Limerick there is an aluminium plant at Tershy. Adjacent to that plant there is an abnormally high loss of animals, cattle and horses. Despite all the scientific investigation, it cannot be explained. The herds have been wiped out. The scientists have assured us that it is not coming from the aluminium plant. If it is not, what is happening? Where is it coming from? Sellafield is in the same bracket. Lord Brooke here, my good friend, is perfectly right. No matter how much the scientists tell us it is safe, if the people feel it is not safe, they are living in fear and that is not acceptable. Do not doubt for one moment what Deputy Séamus Kirk has stated here today; we fully and totally support him. He is in the eye of the storm. I live inland, but that will not protect us. It will just sweep across the country and we know that. This is a debate we must come back to and resolve in all our interests for good relationships between our two countries.

Lord Dubs: When I said I knew it was an election issue that was not to minimise it; it was to say that it is the hottest election issue in the Republic according to what people here have said to me. I am well aware that it has been an issue for 20 or 30 years in the Republic and I did not mean to belittle the argument by suggesting it will go away after the election. I know it will not, but I also know that it is a particularly big issue at the moment.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Michael O'Kennedy): Could I express my thanks to my colleagues on the Steering Committee and to the members of the Body for agreeing to have this discussion this morning? I proposed to them some time back that it would not be realistic if this Body met without having a discussion on an issue which I think all colleagues will understand is a matter of very pressing concern in Ireland. I think the views that have been expressed right across the floor underline just how significant and important it is.

It is of such wide ranging concern, Alf, that it is not an election issue; it could not be, because all the parties are of one view. If the government of the day were not taking a strong position on this, they would be decimated at the polls. The reality is it is not an issue at the election because it is a matter of the most constant and universal concern.

I am in the unusual position that I was a member of the government from 1977 to 1980-81 which specifically declined the proposal from the then Minister for Energy to locate a nuclear energy plant in Carnsore. I recall it very well. We did not have the level of knowledge that we have now; but we knew enough to know how little we *did* know. It was a very definite decision on the part of that government and it has been followed consistently by all parties and by all governments since, just to put it in perspective. No government at that time felt entitled to take risks that we could not assess or analyse, despite the fact that we are a very energy-dependent country. In many ways it would have seemed a practical thing to do; but that is the reality of the background.

Andrew Mackinlay has made the point that most of us here (our Scottish colleagues excepted) operate the common law. A number of the principles apply in private law, as Andrew mentioned. One of the most fundamental principles of that common law is that nobody is entitled to use his or her property in such a fashion as to interfere with the use, enjoyment, health or otherwise of a neighbour's property. If that is a principle of the common law, I would respectfully endorse what Andrew Mackinlay has said, that it is also a principle of international law and should be respected at all times.

A number of colleagues have said that we need further information and assistance. I suggest, Co-Chair, that when we look at this again in the Steering Committee we might consider getting some professional report on which we could report back to this Body. That will not in itself be a conclusive answer to anything but it is a matter that we should consider, because a number of questions were asked this morning that we clearly are not in a position to conclude on.

In relation to the Committee D proposal to visit Sellafield, someone has made the observation already that that is an enormous undertaking in the sense of how much they can learn from one visit; but it does demonstrate the concern at the same time.

Mr John Battle MP: I am on Committee D, and we have agreed to go to Sellafield; but I am not sure what the remit is. Are we just looking at that one plant or at the nuclear industry as a whole? What frustrates me a little bit in the debate is that when we talk about the nuclear industry, we only talk about the energy production part. A third of the nuclear waste in Britain is from medical use.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Michael O'Kennedy): We do not want to get into that now. The first I heard was this morning, that Committee D proposed to go. I do not know what, exactly, they are suggesting. I would suggest to the Chairman of Committee D

that they indicate to the Steering Committee the terms of reference that they propose to apply.

Mr Battle: The Steering Committee will look at it?

The Co-Chairman (Mr Michael O'Kennedy): Yes, I think so; but I would not like to see it extending out into the medical area. That is way beyond our remit.

Mr Battle: No, it is not.

Mr Michael Mates MP (East Hampshire): He is quite right. It is at the heart of it. Where does Irish medical waste go? To Sellafield.

The Co-Chairman (Mr Michael O'Kennedy): I am not making any conclusions at all on this. What I meant was that it seems to me that we are going to have a reasonably tight remit to consider this issue. We could engage in a whole discussion on a whole range of waste. This debate was not about medical waste; but if the Body suggests to me at a further time that it should be engaged in a debate on medical waste we will consider it. It was not part of today's discussion. We will seek a report from the Committee as to what exactly they propose to do.

Mr Séamus Kirk TD (Louth): I would like to take the opportunity at the outset to thank the Steering Committee for allowing this item on the agenda. I realise that it is contentious but, having listened to the contributions of the whole range of members here in attendance, there was a very constructive, balanced approach taken in relation to it.

There are a number of areas that by common consent we can agree on. I am sure somebody will interrupt me when I go through the areas where there appears to be a consensus of view.

The regular release of contaminants into the sea has a build-up effect. I think we can agree on that. The Chernobyl accident had catastrophic consequences. There are and there were serious health threats to the people living within a significant catchment area of Chernobyl - and indeed further afield as Matt Brennan mentioned. There are fanatical terrorists in the world. The happenings on 11 September proved that conclusively. I have no indication that they will not be in business at some date in the future. Security measures at Sellafield are unclear and they are not by any means reassuring. We have had breaches and there are clearly concerns there.

The implications of a nuclear accident are extremely serious and far reaching, not alone for the east coast of Ireland but clearly for the west coast of Britain and the immediate vicinity of Cumbria. Because of its location, Sellafield is clearly a threat to Ireland, particularly the east coast of Ireland and indeed the whole of Ireland itself.

The need for the MOX facility and its economic justification are in considerable doubt. That has come through in the debate and that has been the analysis that I have picked up along the way.

There is a serious lack of trust in the nuclear industry worldwide. It is not a question of Sellafield but generally speaking worldwide. There have been allegations of misinformation at different times in relation to it.

In case any false impression might be abroad simply because I will be a candidate in the east coast of Ireland constituency and I am, as it were, running with the ball on this issue, the other Deputies of other political parties have confirmed that this matter has long been on the agenda and there has been an intensification of interest in the subject in recent times. When the election is over next time in April, May, June or perhaps July the intensified interest in the subject will continue because the Irish people as a body are very seriously concerned.

Nuclear industry concerns are not confined to Ireland. Deputy Torode quite clearly confirmed the concerns that exist in Guernsey in relation to it.

I thought Peter Brooke's contribution was very balanced and very welcome. At the end of the day he did not come down on one side or the other. He clearly flagged up that there is going to be an ongoing debate about it and the jury is very much out on it.

With regard to Down's Syndrome and the clusters that we had in Dundalk which Brian O'Shea mentioned, while there is not conclusive evidence that the fire at Windscale in 1957 was a contributory factor there is clearly circumstantial suspicion in relation to it. While it may never be possible conclusively to pull the evidence together, that circumstantial suspicion still exists.

In my opinion, and particularly as far as this Body is concerned, this issue is going to be on the agenda in some form or another at the next Plenary and probably the Plenaries beyond that. Co-Chairman Michael O'Kennedy's suggestion that we seek professional analysis and that we get a more in-depth analysis and study and report on the subject for the Plenary would be a wise step.

I await the debate on the subject. The debate today has not convinced me that we do not have a serious problem and a serious threat. The danger of the 11 September catastrophe being repeated is very real and is of as much concern on the British side as it is on the Irish side. Quite clearly there is a mutual interest in ensuring that we address this at political level as quickly as possible.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Thank you very much for concluding the debate in the spirit in which you have done so, and I thank all those who have taken part on a very controversial subject where clearly there are very strong opinions on both sides. As I said at the beginning, the verbatim report will go to both sovereign governments and to the devolved Assemblies and the Scottish Parliament and

moreover, taking the points of order at the beginning of the debate, we will raise the issue which Paschal Mooney raised at the Steering Committee about the British-Irish Council.

Michael Mates would like to say a word or two in the usual spirit at the conclusion of our Plenary.

Mr Michael Mates MP (East Hampshire): First, I am sure I speak for us all when I thank Ian Pask and his team running the hotel who have looked after us very well indeed and given us an extremely good visit. I hope you enjoyed your dinner and the experience in the museum last night, for which Lord Montagu gets the thanks because it is a splendid place.

Our thanks go to the two lovely shorthand writers who have recorded everything you have said for posterity, quite a lot of it possibly superfluous (but never mind) and to Malcolm at the back, without whom we would not have been able to hear what anybody said. That may again have been a mixed blessing but thank you, Malcolm, for what you have done.

Penultimately, to you, Co-Chairmen, thank you for your usual good humour, and relaxed conduct of our affairs, allowing all sorts of out of order things to be said here and there provided they do not go on too long - except in the case of the Co-Chairmen.

Last of all, and as always, our thanks to John Osborne and Amanda Hay who make everything run smoothly for us every time and whose contribution to these gatherings I think is absolutely enormous. Thank you very much.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): Thank you very much, Michael, for the tributes and certainly to Amanda Hay and John Osborne.

It would be inappropriate to depart without once again thanking Frank Cranmer for the contribution he has made as the British Clerk to the Body. We paid our tribute last night but let it be put formally here today that we are most grateful for all the work that you have put in together with Jim Mulkerrins. We shall certainly miss you though, some of us will see you back at work. I want to record our thanks for the contribution you have made to the success of this Body.

The British Co-Clerk: Thank you very much, Chairman.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick): May I wish everyone a very happy Christmas and New Year. We will be meeting again on 24 March 2002 in Dublin at Berkeley Court. I now declare closed the 23rd Plenary Session of this Body.

Resolved, That the Body do now adjourn.

The Session concluded at 12.25 pm.

WRITTEN ANSWERS

To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland...

Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin, Monaghan and Dundalk bombings

Dr Rory O'Hanlon TD (Cavan-Monaghan): Whether he has met Judge Barron of the Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin, Monaghan and Dundalk bombings; and whether he is satisfied that all relevant information in the possession of the British Government has now been provided to the Commission of Inquiry.

Dr John Reid: I have recently agreed to meet with Judge Barron to discuss the UK Government's response to his request for assistance in his Inquiry. These were horrific and terrible crimes and this Government has welcomed the current Inquiry which may help shed light on these events and also go at least some way to easing the pain of all those injured or bereaved. The Prime Minister has made clear that we will respond sympathetically to any request from the Inquiry. Some information has already been supplied by the Forensic Science Agency Northern Ireland and through Police Service for Northern Ireland-Garda channels.

North-South cooperation

Helen Jackson MP (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What prospects he sees for the acceleration of the elements of the Good Friday Agreement covering North-South cooperation.

Dr John Reid: The British Government wholeheartedly supports the principle of North-South cooperation, which is a central element of the Agreement. We have already implemented the all of the provisions contained in Strand Two of the Agreement for which the British Government has responsibility and so I do not believe we now have either the need or indeed the scope to accelerate any elements relating to North South Co-operation.

Decommissioning and demilitarisation

Lord Temple-Morris: If he will make a statement on the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons and explosives by all sides and on demilitarisation generally.

Dr John Reid: The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported on 23 October that it had witnessed a quantity of IRA arms being put beyond use according to the terms of the decommissioning schemes and regulations. However, in the interest of furthering the process of putting all arms beyond use, the Commission declined to provide further details.

All paramilitary groups should now build on this very significant progress. The Good Friday Agreement committed all participants to the total disarmament of all paramilitary organisations. This can only be achieved through the Decommissioning Commission.

On normalisation, the Government has made significant progress and is proceeding with the measures agreed at Weston Park. More still need to be done, and we will consider further normalisation measures as the security threat allows.

Review of elected representation

Mrs Margaret Ewing MSP (Moray): What involvement of devolved assemblies and parliaments will be included in any review of elected representation as agreed under the devolution legislation.

Dr John Reid: My Right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Scotland announced on 6 November her intention to consult on the size of the Scottish Parliament. The Scottish Parliament, any other devolved assembly, and any other interested body or individual will be free to offer views. The Government has an open mind on the matter and wants to hear what people think.

Belfast to Galway road

Mr Seymour Crawford TD (Cavan-Monaghan): Given that the Belfast to Galway road (N54/A3) is a major cross-border route, when he expects it to be restructured and, in particular, when he expects the accident reduction scheme be carried out; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dr John Reid: This is of course a matter for the Devolved Administration in Northern Ireland. However, the Regional Development Minister, Mr Peter Robinson, has advised that he currently has no plans to undertake a major upgrading of the entire A3 route.

His Department is however seeking resources from European Community funds under Interreg III to carry out an improvement scheme at Rabbit Island in County Fermanagh - the timing of the scheme is dependent on securing these necessary resources and assessing a number of other schemes on the A3 between Portadown and Armagh.

Voting system in the Northern Ireland Assembly

Mr Sean Neeson MLA (East Antrim): Whether the present voting system in the Northern Ireland Assembly should take account of those members who have designated themselves as 'Centre' or 'Other'.

Dr John Reid: I am aware that concerns have been expressed by a number of parties on this issue. I have consequently established a Review under Paragraph 36 of the Belfast Agreement to provide the Assembly parties with a forum in which to discuss this particular aspect of the voting system in the Assembly.

Holy Cross Primary School

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD (Donegal North-East): Whether the children of Holy Cross School in North Belfast have gained from the Good Friday Agreement to date; and if he will make a statement on the status of the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

Dr John Reid: The Belfast Agreement has brought tangible benefits to *every* part of Northern Ireland and to *every* section of the community. The success of the joint initiative by the First and Deputy First Minister in helping to bring this dispute to an end is a vivid illustration of the very real benefits offered by the Belfast Agreement and the devolution settlement in particular.

Cooperation between Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Members of the Oireachtas in the border counties

Mr John Ellis TD (Sligo-Leitrim): What plans there are to improve cooperation between Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Members of the Oireachtas in the border counties; and if he will make a statement.

Dr John Reid: The British Government has no plans or proposals for enhanced co-operation along the lines suggested by Mr Ellis.

Punishment beatings

Mr Brian O'Shea TD (Waterford): How many punishment beatings have been carried out in Northern Ireland in each of the past three years and so far in 2001; how many in each case were carried out by Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries respectively; how many convictions were obtained in relation to these punishment beatings; what steps are being taken to reduce and eliminate punishment beatings; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dr John Reid: Paramilitary assaults remain a blight on Northern Ireland society. Both Loyalists and Republicans are guilty of these barbaric acts. The Police do investigate all attacks but, it is often difficult to get prosecutions as victims of these appalling crimes are usually reluctant to cooperate with any investigation.

The information requested is detailed in the attached table:

NUMBER OF CASUALTIES AS A RESULT OF PARAMILITARY STYLE ATTACKS

	Loyalist	Republican	Total
1998	89	55	144
1999	90	44	134
2000	78	54	132
2001 (to 22 Nov)	81	46	127

Threats to the Peace Process from Loyalist and Republican dissidents

Mr Brian Hayes TD (Dublin South-West): Whether the British and Irish Governments are considering further legislation or actions to counter the threat that is posed to the Peace Process from Loyalist and Republican dissidents; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dr John Reid: At this time, the British Government has no plans to introduce further legislation specifically to counter the dissident threat. The Government is in the process of passing an Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Bill and the majority of that Bill's provisions will apply to terrorism, regardless of its source. For example, the Bill improves upon the existing powers available to the police in the United Kingdom to investigate terrorist finance offences. With the introduction of this new legislation, the Government believes it has the right legislative strategy. But we will continue to keep this under review.

"The disappeared"

Mr Austin Currie TD (Dublin West): To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, if he will exert the maximum pressure to ensure the return of the bodies of "the disappeared" to their relatives and that those banished from Northern Ireland by paramilitary organisations should be allowed to return and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dr John Reid: I will of course continue to use my influence, and I call on all others who have influence to do likewise, to encourage anyone who might have information on the location of the bodies of "the disappeared" to pass it to the Commission. Only in this way can the misery endured by the families for so long be eased.

I also call on those responsible for intimidating individuals from their homes to end these unlawful exclusions. The Government has consistently condemned all acts of intimidation. There can be no justification for any group in Northern Ireland to override the right of all citizens to freely choose their place of residence and I urge those political parties which have influence on paramilitary groups to make every effort to ensure that all who have been exiled can return safely to their homes.

Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin, Monaghan and Dundalk bombings

Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD (Kerry North): If he will ensure that the UK Government will furnish all relevant information and papers held by it to the Independent Commission of Inquiry into the Dublin, Monaghan and Dundalk bombing atrocities.

Dr John Reid: All relevant Departments are undertaking an exhaustive and, unfortunately, extremely time consuming manual search of a number of old,

incomplete and often disorganised files. When this search is complete, I will be in a position to respond to Judge Barron's request for assistance in his Inquiry.

Dublin and Monaghan bombings

Senator Joe Costello: What proposals he has for resolving the difficulties being experienced by the families and friends of those who died in the Dublin and Monaghan bombings in 1974 in pursuing their enquiries; and, if in the context of the Good Friday Agreement and cross-border co-operation, he can give an assurance that there will be full co-operation on the matter between the Northern Ireland authorities and the new Police Service of Northern Ireland and their counterparts in the Republic.

Dr John Reid: These were horrific and terrible crimes and the Government has condemned them utterly. We welcome the Inquiry headed by Mr Justice Henry Barron. I hope that the Inquiry will help to ease the pain of those injured or bereaved and assist the healing process. All relevant Departments are undertaking an exhaustive and, unfortunately, extremely time consuming manual search of a number of old, incomplete and often disorganised files. When this search is complete, I will be in a position to respond to Judge Barron's request for assistance in his Inquiry.

The Police Service for Northern Ireland have already responded to Judge Barron's request for assistance through the usual PSNI-Garda channels, as has the Forensic Science Agency.