



**BRITISH-IRISH INTER-
PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

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

TWENTY-NINTH PLENARY CONFERENCE

18 and 19 October 2004

Chepstow, Monmouthshire

OFFICIAL REPORT
(Final Revised Edition)

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Suggested amendments or corrections will be considered by the British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association. They should be sent to:

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to arrive no later than 3 December 2004

IN ATTENDANCE

CO-CHAIRMEN

Mr David Winnick MP
Mr Séamus Kirk TD (Acting)

MEMBERS AND ASSOCIATE MEMBERS

Mr Harry Barnes MP	The Lord Glentoran CBE DL	Senator Paschal Mooney
Senator Paul Bradford	Mr Dominic Grieve MP	Mr Arthur Morgan TD
Mr Johnny Brady TD	Mr John Griffiths AM	Senator Francie O'Brien
Rt Hon the Lord Brooke of Sutton Mandeville CH	Deputy Graham Guille	Mr William O'Brien MP
Senator Paul Coghlan	The Baroness Harris of Richmond	Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD
Dr Jerry Cowley TD	Senator Brian Hayes	Mr Ned O'Keeffe TD
Mr Bruce Crawford MSP	Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD	Mr Séamus Pattison TD
Mr Seymour Crawford TD	Mr Andy King MP	Mr Chris Ruane MP
Mr Tony Cunningham MP	Dr Dai Lloyd AM	Senator Brendan Ryan
Dr Jimmy Devins TD	Mr Elfyn Llwyd MP	Mr Joe Sherlock TD
Deputy Maurice Dubras	Rt Hon Andrew Mackay MP	The Lord Smith of Clifton
The Lord Dubs	Dr John Marek AM	The Lord Temple-Morris
Ms Helen Eadie MSP	Rt Hon Michael Mates MP	Mr Gareth Thomas MP
Mr John Ellis TD	Rt Hon Sir Brian Mawhinney MP	Deputy Mike Torode
Mr Jeff Ennis MP	Mrs Rosemary McKenna MP CBE	Mr Murray Tosh MSP
Senator Geraldine Feeney	Mr Michael McMahon MSP	Mr Robert Walter MP
Mr Donald J Gelling CBE MLC	Mr Kevin McNamara MP	Senator Mary White
Mr Mike German AM	Mr David Melding AM	Senator Diarmuid Wilson
Mr Jim Glennon TD		

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (FOR ALL OR PART OF PROCEEDINGS)

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Paul Murphy MP
The Minister for Health and Social Services, National Assembly for Wales, Ms Jane Hutt AM
The President of the Nordic Council, Mr Gabriel Romanus

STEERING COMMITTEE

<i>Co-Chairmen</i>	Mr David Winnick MP
<i>Members</i>	Mr Kevin McNamara MP Mr Séamus Kirk TD Mr Michael Mates MP Mr Jim O’Keeffe TD

OFFICIALS

<i>Joint Clerks</i>	Ms Alda Barry, British Clerk Mr John Hamilton, Irish Clerk
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<i>Clerks of the Devolved Institutions</i>	Ms Alison Dickie Mr Peter Kellam
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Committee Clerks to the Body

<i>Committee A: Sovereign Matters</i>	Ms Maeve Clery Mr Huw Yardley
<i>Committee B: European Affairs</i>	Mr Mike Clark Mr David Keating
<i>Committee C: Economic</i>	Ms Maeve Clery Mr Mike Hennessy
<i>Committee D: Environmental and Social</i>	Ms Audrey Nelson Mr David Keating
<i>Secretariat</i>	Mrs Veronica Carr Sir Michael Davies KCB Miss Amanda Hay Mrs Andrea Pull
<i>Media Adviser</i>	Mr Mike Burns
British-Irish Parliamentary Reporting Association reporting team for 29th Plenary Meeting	Dr Bronagh Allison Mr James Galbraith Dr Meinir Harris Mr Simon Tierney Ms Aoibhinn Treanor Ms Vivien Wilson

BRITISH-IRISH INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY

COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH NA BREATAINE AGUS NA HÉIREANN

TWENTY-NINTH PLENARY CONFERENCE

Monday 18 October 2004

The Body met at 9.37 am.

PLENARY BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): I have a few announcements to make, but, in welcoming you, I am sure that we all agree that we are delighted to be in Wales.

I remind everyone to turn off pagers, beepers, mobile phones and any other form of the latest technology that could interfere with our proceedings. Nor is it our practice for newspapers to be read, any more than it would be in our respective places of work. I also remind Members that the Body's proceedings do not attract parliamentary privilege.

No new Members have been appointed to the Body since the previous plenary. I take this opportunity to congratulate my former Co-Chairman Brendan Smith TD who has been appointed to Government, as well as former Members Tony Killeen TD and Conor Lenihan TD, who have also been made Ministers.

I shall read a letter from former Co-Chairman Smith, who, as I say, is now a Minister of State, to Séamus Kirk, the Acting Co-Chairman. He wrote:

“Dear Seamus

I wish to convey to you, Co-Chairman David and all your colleagues on the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body every good wishes for the 29th Plenary in Chepstow.

I am quite sure that you will have a successful meeting and that your deliberations will be fruitful. As a Member of the Body since 1993 and Co-Chairman since 2002 I have the fondest memories of politicians from different traditions and backgrounds working together in a very constructive and positive manner.

As has been said at our meetings there has been a very welcome improvement in relations between our Islands and between our Parliamentarians and the atmosphere that prevailed in the early years has changed so much for the better and for the benefit of all. The work of the Body has played a significant role in this process. I hope that in the near future the Body will be working again with its full membership from its constituent parliaments and assemblies.

It has been a great pleasure working as Co-Chairman with David Winnick, with all Members of the Steering Committee and with the full membership of the Body and I appreciate that co-operation and support. I commend the Joint Clerks and all the Secretariat for their first-class work over the years.

I regret that I am unable to attend in Chepstow due to Departmental commitments but I hope to meet with the Body at the next Plenary in Ireland in early Spring.

With kindest regards.”

I am sure that we should respond — or I should do so — and send him our congratulations on appointment to the Government.

Pending the appointment of a new Irish Co-Chairman, Mr Séamus Kirk TD will be Acting Co-Chairman for the session with your approval. That is unanimous, you see, Séamus.

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 responsibilities of Members for the whole of the session: from Ireland, Senator Paul Bradford, Senator Paul Coghlan, Senator Geraldine Feeney, Mr Ned O’Keeffe TD, Senator Mary White and Senator Diarmuid Wilson; from the United Kingdom, Mr Dominic Grieve MP, Baroness Harris of Richmond, Mr Andy King MP and Mr Gareth Thomas MP; from Scotland, Mr Bruce Crawford MSP, Ms Helen Eadie MSP and Mr Michael McMahon MSP; from the States of Jersey, Deputy Maurice Dubras; and from the States of Guernsey, Deputy Graham Guille.

I also inform Members that at the conclusion of item 4 there will be a group photograph for which we would like everyone to be present at 3.30 pm.

ADOPTION OF PROPOSED PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): The proposed Programme of Business has been duly circulated. I move that the proposed order of business be adopted.

Programme of Business agreed.

RECENT POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): The first item on the agenda — the debate on the political motion — will take most, if not all, of the morning.

Normally the majority of those present wish to speak, and while it is neither my intention nor Séamus's to apply a time limit at this stage, we urge earlier speakers not to speak for too long. Otherwise those who are reluctant to speak at the beginning of the proceedings may start to put their hands up at a rather late stage, and although we welcome those Members' contributions, a time limit may have to be introduced. Therefore a maximum time limit of six minutes is fair, and I may have to take action in the case of anyone who speaks for more than 20 minutes.

Mr Michael Mates MP: I beg to move

That the Body notes the recent talks held at Leeds Castle between Prime Minister Tony Blair, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and the parties; looks forward to the further discussions planned proving fruitful and to the restoration of the powers devolved under the Good Friday Agreement; notes the intensification of contacts by both Governments with all parties, including the recent meeting between the Democratic Unionist Party leadership and the Irish Government in London; believes that it is in the interests of all parties in Northern Ireland that the devolved institutions are revived as soon as possible; and urges all involved to work towards the furtherance of the peace process and the full implementation of the Agreement.

There seems to be a problem: all the microphones are on and will not go off.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): I am the last person to understand these matters, but the technical advice is that if everyone is quiet, the person who is speaking will be heard clearly. If there are any outstanding technical problems — and the technician is nodding — we will take appropriate action. We will see how things work out, but I hope that the technical problems will be overcome.

Mr Michael Mates MP: We have been here before, so I shall be brief. We have had another round of talks full of eastern promise that has not quite delivered the answer. That does not mean to say that we do not look forward to the planned further discussions "proving fruitful", as the motion states, because we do. If nothing else, it is good that people who have not talked before are talking. In particular, one may wish to note the visit of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) leadership to Dublin, which was a fairly large step in the right direction, and we acknowledge that since last year's election that party is now the larger of the two Unionist parties.

However, we still do not have an Assembly, and I can tell the Body that we are still missing an Assembly — my Northern Ireland committee is now doing the behind-the-scenes work that the Assembly Committees did. Although we are doing our best, quite obviously we do not do as well as would locally elected people in trying to fathom Government policy on education, health, social

welfare and other issues. The sooner we have the elected Members of the Assembly back doing their work, the better.

9.45 am

However, there are two major stumbling blocks: the continued existence of the IRA and the fact that paramilitaries on both sides are still endorsing vigilante groups in their communities. There is much less violence, but the level is still unacceptable with knee-cappings, shootings and beatings, and somehow we must get a grip on that problem. It is mostly for the IRA to say that the war is over and that it will not be involved in any form of military action ever again. If we could get over that hurdle, everything else that depends on that would follow.

It is so easy to say that there are faults on both sides but on the whole, since the Good Friday Agreement, the Government and the Irish Government have delivered what they promised — the prisoners are all released, and more concessions are being made to people on the run. Yet, behind all of that, aside from two important but largely symbolic destructions of weapons, the IRA has not moved. Until that happens, we will not make any more progress, so my fervent wish is that those who have contact or influence with the IRA will say: "Come on, get over this hurdle", and then we will all have peace and can get down to democratic politics.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): The Lord Peter Temple-Morris and the Lord Smith of Clifton have indicated their wish to speak. It would be helpful to the Chair if Members could indicate their wish to speak during the debate. I already have Paschal Mooney's name. Therefore when I call the next speaker, Lord Temple Morris, Members should indicate their wish to speak in the usual way. That would be helpful to the two Clerks, Séamus Kirk or myself.

The Lord Temple-Morris: Following Michael Mates's very succinct performance, might I say that I agree with him.

Before I come to the substance of my remarks, Co-Chairman, I welcome another appointment, because it was special to me. When I was Co-Chairman of this Body, Dermot Ahern was also Co-Chairman. He is one of the ablest people with whom I have ever had the privilege to work. We worked well together — we did a lot of media work together, and he performed all the tasks that are required of a Co-Chairman of this Body. On my behalf, and on behalf of everybody in the BIIPB, I congratulate him on his appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs. I am absolutely delighted with it, as I am with the other appointments that you mentioned.

There is a preliminary difficulty with this debate, which is that we do not know exactly how near we are to resolving them. All we get are ministerial statements about being frustratingly close to agreement, but we do not seem to get any more than frustratingly close. However, we can talk in general terms, which is what

Michael Mates has just done, and we can make some points, which I will do.

First, there is always talk about momentum being necessary to deliver this process — constant momentum, constant pressure. At the moment we do not have very much momentum; much seems to be happening, but nothing substantial appears to be going on. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) briefing that we all have gives a chronology of the past two years, and British colleagues will have gone through that. On reading it, one almost reaches the point of boredom because it contains so much repetition — meetings here, meetings there — yet it appears that nothing is really being achieved.

The danger arising from that is that the Governments could lose their concentration, and that should not be permitted to happen. It is vital for the progress of the delivery of peace for the island of Ireland and for Northern Ireland that the Governments keep up their pressure. In ensuring that they do, there is a role for this Body in keeping them up to the mark. Unless we get somewhere fairly soon, there is a danger that the constant meetings of the two Prime Ministers will not happen. It will go one stage down and start to slip, and I hope that the Secretary of State will recognise that.

Being more optimistic for a second, I shall briefly detail the plus points, because we must not forget those. The ceasefire is holding, and it is worth reminding colleagues that it is now 10 years since we returned from holiday in August 1994 to discover the initial ceasefire. We all remember the resumption of violence in 1996. That resumption was easily forecast, and it was due to a lack of momentum or a lack of Government response, particularly on the British side, for various reasons at that time. However, the lesson is there: there is constant danger of slipping backwards if we do not maintain the response and the concentration.

Taking the bulk period, those 10 years are fair evidence that both sides want peace. I must say — and I say it for Arthur Morgan's benefit in particular — that I very much accept the bona fides of the Republican side and, indeed, of the Unionist side. Adams and McGuinness have done their utmost to deliver, and indeed have delivered a lot, but, sadly, not quite enough up to now.

The Belfast Agreement or Good Friday Agreement is in place. The machinery of devolved government exists. That is all considerable progress, and progress has also been made in the negotiations; the statements after the Leeds Castle talks appear to be reasonably optimistic of eventual agreement.

Last but not least on the plus points — and this is a good thing, much as some of us feared it when it was developing — the main parties to the dispute, the DUP at one end and Sinn Féin at the other, are now effectively responsible for the resolution of the dispute. That is a good thing because we can get delivery from the parties

that matter. Rev Dr Ian Paisley's presence in Dublin was a very important step.

I re-emphasise Michael Mates's point that the main difficulty is achieving delivery from the parties that matter against a background of constitutional settlement and partnership in government — that is what this is all about. Against that background, there must be total decommissioning, an end to all paramilitary activity and a clear statement that the Republican conflict is over.

I appreciate the difficulty in delivering the IRA; I appreciate the efforts made by Adams, McGuinness and others. However, that must happen because, without it, it is impossible to bring the necessary pressure on Unionists on the other issues to secure a permanent delivery of peace against a background of constitutional settlement and partnership in government. Republicans cannot have it both ways. One cannot sit in Government armed to the teeth: it is just not on. The other matters will fall into place when we get that development, particularly the institutions, policing and the review of the Belfast Agreement; but decommissioning and its related issues are paramount to that happening.

Both sides have made big sacrifices. Republicans agreeing to operate constitutionally in the United Kingdom is a tremendous step, considering their history, as is Unionists agreeing in principle to share power with Republicans. A few years ago one would have thought that impossible, so we have come a long way. Each side must now be big enough to deliver on what they have agreed in principle, and both sides should deliver before it is too late. Things can always slip backwards, and that would be a great tragedy. It is high time that Northern Ireland and the island of Ireland had the permanent peace and security that it has deserved for so long.

The Lord Smith of Clifton: I will echo much of what Peter Temple-Morris said. I got in early because most of our speeches will be variations on a theme, so one might as well get in early and not be accused of too much repetition.

Time is running out, that has been said before, but, as Peter Temple-Morris said, there is a perceptible slackening in momentum, which is most unfortunate. We must not allow the excuse of an upcoming United Kingdom general election to hold things up. In these islands, there are always elections at different times, and they can always be used as an excuse for further procrastination, and that is not good enough. As Peter Temple-Morris said, Sinn Féin must finally and unequivocally sever links with the IRA, which should disarm and decommission. However, Sinn Féin has come a long way, and we must recognise that.

I am more worried about the Democratic Unionist Party. It must not use the present discussions as an opportunity to ratchet up its demands to amend the Belfast Agreement. There are signs that the DUP is trying to do that. It is part of the posturing that goes on in any political process,

but really we are beyond posturing. That cannot be allowed to hold things up too much.

There is a case for optimism. Extremes can do deals with each other. We must recall that De Gaulle dealt with Algeria, Nixon reintroduced China into the comity of nations, and Margaret Thatcher dealt with the Rhodesian problem, so it is possible that the DUP and Sinn Féin — who are now both the major players — will be able to do some sort of deal in their term.

Assembly Members cannot expect to be paid for ever. Before the last election, their mandates were becoming somewhat shop-soiled. They are almost a year into their renewed mandates. Unless they are doing the business, taxpayers will not look kindly on their continuing to draw their salaries, even though those salaries have had a token reduction. That must be pressed upon Assembly Members.

As Peter Temple-Morris said, further delay will reduce the level of direct prime ministerial involvement. The world has moved on. The 1990s saw a quite unprecedented amount of head-of-government concentration on the Province of Northern Ireland: A, B, C — Ahern, Blair and Clinton. That must never be forgotten. American interest has decreased, and global terrorism and so on have altered priorities so that Northern Ireland has dropped down the list of head-of-government concerns.

Patience also has its limits. One detects a certain degree of exasperation after the Leeds Castle talks, certainly on the British Government side. If momentum is to be regained, there will have to be results pretty soon. There will be plenty of goodwill if the Assembly can reconvene. There will be more goodwill if the Executive can get up and running, and even more goodwill if Ministers can genuinely share power rather than having silo ministerial views that do not spread into collective responsibility for the Government of Northern Ireland.

I am probably less optimistic than others. However, it will soon be crunch time, and unless the opportunity is seized, I suspect that there will not be devolved government for another generation.

10.00 am

Senator Paschal Mooney: In a debate such as this, early contributions are always difficult, and I accept Lord Smith's point of view. One wants to be careful not to be repetitive, because the debate on recent political developments forms the centrepiece of deliberations when the Body meets.

I feel more optimistic than pessimistic. I believe that the continuing choreography, which was initiated at Leeds Castle, will result in a historic resolution of the remaining difficulties between the two major parties in Northern Ireland, the DUP and Sinn Féin. It should also be remembered that many other dimensions are involved.

Irish Members will be acutely aware of the statement that the new Minister for Foreign Affairs made at the weekend, but that may not have percolated through to all the British media. The statement has created some political ripples in the south of the island. The Minister said that it is inevitable that Sinn Féin will enter Government in the Republic at some point in the future; he hopes that that is so. In the light of all the public statements on conflict resolution in Northern Ireland, it is extremely significant that an Irish Foreign Minister should make that statement at the time that he did; as politicians, we know that timing is everything. The underlying message is that we are moving towards closure.

I do not share many of the political policies of my friend and colleague Arthur Morgan, but I have nothing but the highest admiration for the Republican leadership, which has managed to maintain extraordinary discipline and cohesion among its membership while at the same time advancing the peace process to the point that it has reached today. That must be acknowledged, and I have no difficulty in doing that.

Furthermore, the wider issue of decommissioning is likely to be addressed in the short term. A little-reported comment made by the General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland indicates that there will be a significant reduction in troop levels in Northern Ireland. It is salutary to remind the Body that in excess of 15,000 British troops are stationed in Northern Ireland. In the context of the deployment in Iraq, that is probably the most significant deployment of British troops anywhere in the world. That is 10 years after a ceasefire, since which there has been no significant level of violence. From a Republican perspective, is it unreasonable to ask for decommissioning by the "other side"?

The security watchtowers, particularly those in south Armagh, are another issue. My friend and colleague Senator O'Brien, who is a member of this Body, recently complained in the Senate about the level of helicopter activity over a Gaelic football match. I thought that those days had long ended. Therefore when the balance sheet is for both sides totted up, it is not fair or objective just to emphasize what one side must do in that equation.

I am pleased by, and acknowledge, the rustle in the undergrowth on both sides as a result of what happened at Leeds Castle. However, it should be remembered — and Lord Smith touched on this — that the Good Friday Agreement in all of its parts is absolutely sacrosanct. It is the underlying and fundamental reason why we have achieved as much as we have over the past six years.

I am cautious about the DUP's post-decommissioning approach, because that party's members talk about the mechanics of government and about how the structure of the Assembly will function, and they seem to be attempting to change the rules. Again from a Republican perspective — and I speak as a Southern Republican — I have lived

long enough, have been living in the border area long enough, and am familiar enough with Stormont's history since 1922 to be somewhat cautious whenever a majority Unionist party starts tinkering with the mechanism. None of us in this Body wishes to see a return to majoritarian rule, which is distinct from the obvious emphasis on decommissioning.

I have no doubt whatsoever that the IRA will publicise an act of great significance in the coming weeks. Already there has been talk, which seems rather strange in one sense and historic in another, of the IRA becoming an old comrades' association. One can have opinions about that, but it is an indication of the debate and dialogue in the Republican movement. Minister Ahern's words at the weekend point positively to a political resolution.

I want to make a final point, because I may not get the opportunity during questions to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. It is incumbent on all parties, on the Governments, and — perhaps more so — on this Body to continue to monitor the peace process, such as it is.

Lord Temple-Morris commented on the need to maintain pressure. I also believe that the wider civic society must be involved and embrace the peace process in all of its dimensions. We speak as politicians; most of the major decisions are taken at governmental or senior ministerial level. However, outside that, there is a very vibrant, voluntary and civic society in both parts of the island.

At our recent Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, I had the pleasure of listening to representatives from Co-operation North. I have framed a question on this matter, which, from experience, I fear will not be reached today. Co-operation North asked for the establishment of a forum that would complement the North/South implementation bodies and the peace process. That forum would have a direct input and represent civic society.

As Members know, many North/South bodies fund community initiatives that are very welcome; for example, the International Fund for Ireland and the peace and reconciliation fund. Hundreds of millions of pounds have been spent benignly on both sides of the border. That has made a tremendous impact and improved the lives of people on both sides. However, it is not co-ordinated. If, for example, £1 million is given to a community initiative in Belfast and €1 million is given to a similar community initiative in Monaghan, neither side knows what the impact of that will be. Both sides are operating in a vacuum, and a more strategic approach to the spending of funding that is connected to the peace process is necessary. That is as important in improving the quality of life and the relationship between North and South as the political talks that are going on at a higher level.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: This British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body motion is timely. It states that, because of the meeting between the Democratic

Unionist Party leadership and the Irish Government in Dublin, the Body:

“believes that it is in the interests of all parties in Northern Ireland that the devolved institutions are revived as soon as possible; and urges all involved to work towards the furtherance of the peace process”.

I am rather disappointed that, this morning, prominent people on both sides are saying the same things that they were saying six or 12 months ago. I expected that we would have made more progress after seeing some media reports. I have a copy of a media report stating that Mr Ahern has claimed that the DUP is ready to share power with Sinn Féin. Two weeks ago, a Minister stated that Sinn Féin will be welcome in government. Something must have been said in the meantime to allow the media to print those reports. How is it that we are not advised about any progress? We all want that peace; we all want the Assembly to start up again, and I am fairly confident that it will. However, there should be more progress, and we at the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body should know more.

What amendments are required to the agreement to make progress possible? What plans do the British and Irish Governments have for presenting an alternative plan to implement as much of the Good Friday Agreement as possible should the parties fail to agree?

We are entitled to be told that. We came here hoping for great things. I was looking forward to a more positive response; I am a little disappointed. What is the current position on the agreement or on amendments to the agreement to bring about peace and the re-establishment of the institutions in the North?

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): You have addressed a somewhat rhetorical question to the Chair; however, it is to be hoped that you will have an opportunity, when the Secretary of State speaks later, to put a supplementary and to make your views known.

Senator Brendan Ryan: The last time I spoke here I responded too vigorously to Arthur Morgan, who spoke before me; I will be brief this time. If police raided the House of Commons with the same vigour that the RUC showed at Stormont, because they suspected that somebody was breaking the law, it would be regarded as a constitutional outrage. Similarly, were the Gardaí to raid Leinster House, I would regard that as a constitutional outrage.

One could be led to believe that the only problem that needs to be resolved is that of the IRA — and let me make it clear that I wish that the IRA would go away. Prominent people such as Jeffrey Donaldson talked about the need for a gesture. The difficulty is that one gesture is never enough; another one is always sought, and another after that. The real problem is to persuade the leadership —

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Brendan, could you speak directly into the microphone, please.

Senator Brendan Ryan: Sorry, Mr Co-Chairman, I am usually accused of speaking too loudly —

10.15 am

Senator Paschal Mooney: Or for too long.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): At least it is a change.

Senator Brendan Ryan: I would say to Paschal that I would not go down that road. I shall be brief.

It is too simplistic to see this as an exclusively Irish issue that is to do with the IRA. It is also about trust — there is a sense that efforts were made and that trust was broken.

It is time to move beyond what is, I suspect, around the corner. Various Taoisigh have appointed a succession of Senators who have deeply held Unionist convictions. They have been able to be Senators because they were not expected to swear any form of allegiance to the state, the Parliament or the Constitution. It is an anomaly that we are talking about reconciliation and an end to difficulties, yet the British Parliament expects elected representatives of Nationalists in Northern Ireland to take what is, in a modern democracy, a peculiarly antiquated oath of allegiance. It is not just an Irish problem; there are unresolved manifestations of Irish Nationalism that the British Parliament should address.

Mr Arthur Morgan TD: A Chathaoirleach, I am fairly confident that I will not be repetitive. I am not expecting the queue of Members who follow me to say that I have been; however, that has not stopped me in the past from having my say.

Poor old Michael Mates, unfortunately, could not resist having his mandatory go at Republicans. By blaming everything on the IRA, he ignored the fact that Republicans support the Good Friday Agreement and that the DUP is actively trying to dismantle it. Members will understand that I am pleased and confident that there will be a united Ireland before the Conservatives get back into office in Britain. We should not concentrate too much on fringe elements such as the Conservatives; we should deal with serious matters.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): The British Co-Chairman must remain impartial.

Mr Arthur Morgan TD: Everyone accepts that advances were made at Leeds Castle. The Governments accept that the package that was on the table there was advanced and realistic. I believe that it is game on. We are still inching towards a point at which the agreement is deliverable. It is important that the two Governments defend the Good Friday Agreement more robustly. They should not be tinkering around the edges, or trying to offer any unravelling of that agreement.

I have often said that this Body is at best just about treading water. It is almost mandatory for people such as

Michael Mates and the other British representatives to come here and have a go at Irish Republicans — including a small number of others and myself — though I welcome Brendan Ryan to the same territory. Imagine that — he is actually saying positive things about Irish Republicanism: progress can be made.

Weak as the Body currently is, we need the Northern parties here if we are to achieve any constructive work. East-west stuff is not a strong point for Republicans; it is not my number one priority, or a priority for Republicans, when attending meetings of the Body. However, I acknowledge that good work can be done. I have had that conversation with Members here, with regard to feasibility studies, tourism, and fisheries. There are many areas in which, collectively, all the representatives from the various Parliaments and administrative areas can deliver to taxpayers, but our work will be only marginal until we have everyone on board.

I hope that in the coming days we will be in a position, as Paschal said, to welcome a breakthrough in the situation in Ireland. Many thousands of people marched in London yesterday to bring the British troops home from Iraq. There are just over 8,000 soldiers in Iraq, and yet there is almost double that number in Ireland. I wonder whether the people marching in London yesterday were aware of the mathematics of the whole thing and of how many British troops there are in Ireland at the moment. It is lunacy what is going on in Ireland. People need to tell the British Government, and public representatives here present need to tell the British Government, to catch themselves on. Pouring thousands and thousands of armed soldiers into occupied Ireland, at a time when the place is relatively at peace — somebody justify that. Sin é; go raibh maith agat.

Mr Harry Barnes MP: Senator Ryan mentioned the House of Commons oath of allegiance. I have always favoured a situation in which that oath should be of such a nature that it would not bar people from taking their seats. I am glad that Arthur Morgan comes here from Sinn Féin, and I do not see why Gerry Adams and co should not, similarly, go to the Chamber of the House of Commons. I often want the opportunity to have a go at Gerry Adams and co, as I may do on occasions with Arthur Morgan, and it is a pleasure when they are present to respond. I believe in the dialectics of debate, and I would sooner have the dialectics of debate than the horrible dialectics of terrorism that have existed in the past, of which there are still certain residual elements.

I keep raising the idea a deal that would enable Sinn Féin and the DUP to attend the Commons and the Body respectively. For example, the fact that Unionists do not attend the Body mirrors the fact that the House of Commons Northern Ireland Grand Committee, of which I am a member, never goes to Northern Ireland for meetings, whereas the equivalent Welsh and Scottish Grand Committees do meet in those countries. The

block on that, to some extent, seems to come from the SDLP. Can some arrangement not be made to resolve those two issues, so that Ulster Unionists can come here and the Northern Ireland Grand Committee can go to Northern Ireland? There would have to be a concession from both sides.

Lord Temple-Morris said that the ceasefire is holding, and Senator Mooney stated that there is no significant level of violence. To some extent, that is correct, but much depends on how those points are used and what arguments are developed from them. It was always inevitable that there would be residual elements of violence in Northern Ireland, and those can only be highlighted. I tend to give examples of problems that are connected to the Provisional IRA, and that is maybe done because Sinn Féin is a significant element in the governance — or attempted governance — of Northern Ireland. However, cases arise on the so-called Loyalist side, and I shall refer to one that an individual who has access to the media through his articles in ‘Ireland on Sunday’ highlighted. He also has a column in ‘The Irish Times’. Many people do not have that sort of access to emphasise the problems that they have faced. The individual is David Adams, who was previously a Lisburn councillor as a member of the now-defunct Ulster Democratic Party. He and former party colleague Gary McMichael helped to negotiate the Loyalist ceasefire in October 1994. Mr Adams wrote an article for ‘Ireland on Sunday’ that highlighted the problems that he has experienced with the local UDA. He wrote that

“they carefully placed the pig’s head, stinking and dripping blood, on the front passenger seat”

of his wife’s car. He also wrote of subsequent threats directed at her; of the murder of their pet dog that was to be dumped in their garden, until someone at a later stage thought that it might not be good politics to do that; of people climbing on to their roof to block the chimney so that smoke backed into the house; of visitors to their home later having their cars destroyed; and of general threats received. One of Mr Adams’s perceived serious crimes was to become a member of the local District Policing Partnership, on which he has considerably furthered the Belfast Agreement’s cause. His article suggests that elements in the DUP were in cahoots with the paramilitary UDA. We all know that political parties have extremist elements that latch on to such organisations. Those problems must be carefully monitored in any party. We have difficulty in discussing these issues in our debates — it is like walking on eggshells.

[Fire alarm sounds].

Mr Michael Mates MP: Too inflammatory.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): I am not sure what that is all about.

A Member: Time is up.

Mr Harry Barnes MP: I thought that it was up to the Co-Chairman to decide when time is up.

I was concluding in any case. Those noises have caused my perorations to leave my head. However, we can use these opportunities to flag up areas in which there are actions and activities that are unacceptable in a democratic society, and we can say that intimidation and terrorist techniques are totally unacceptable. Points have been made about the number of troops in different areas, and analogies are being made with what is occurring in Iraq — maybe in a different way for some of us — and the Northern Ireland experience.

One thing that must be written about with regard to the mood towards the Belfast Agreement is the role, for instance, that the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions played when it said that all were workers together and were not to be divided into communities. I am thankful that the same sort of thing is happening in Iraq, where people are saying that they are not to be divided into separate religious — or other — camps but are together with a common interest as far as their experiences of work and building a decent life for themselves are concerned.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Thank you, Mr Barnes. I am sorry for the interruption.

The Lord Glentoran: I have not proposed any amendments this time because I agree with everything in the motion. I do not find anything very much to argue with in it, so I shall start by supporting the motion in its entirety. However, we are probably less clear today than ever — certainly I am — about how close the political process is to achieving peace and reconciliation and the restoration of the Assembly. Be assured, colleagues: I really want to see the Assembly working again. I want the load on my desk to be considerably reduced and the Executive to get on with the work that we currently have to do for them.

Putting that aside, we must get through a very complex series of issues to get to the last stages. I am not completely convinced that either side or both sides are really committed to reaching agreement with each other. I like to think that they are, and I have believed for some time that Mitchel McLaughlin — whom I meet from time to time — and the Sinn Féin management would like to deliver the IRA and the completion of the peace process. I am not certain whether all of Ian Paisley’s team are ready for it yet. I hope that they are, and I certainly know that many of them are.

It is sad that there are no Unionists here. It is not for want of trying. Trevor Smith, many others in this room and I have attempted to persuade the Unionist management to send delegates to this Body. It is a great pity that they are not here.

It is also a great pity that Sinn Féin members have not taken their seats in Westminster. It would help to win confidence if the Sinn Féin MPs started to take part

in the democratic processes in the United Kingdom. However, more importantly, I would like to see them take their seats on the Northern Ireland Policing Board. Organised crime is one of the problems that we face in Northern Ireland, and a considerable amount of violence is tied up in that.

10.30 am

It is extremely difficult for the outsider to divide organised crime from terrorism, whether it be Loyalist or Republican terrorism. I would feel much more comfortable and confident in any agreement if Sinn Féin took a proactive role in helping the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and the authorities in Northern Ireland to conquer such crime rather than making it extremely difficult for the police to access certain parts of Belfast.

Those who have visited the peace line, Springvale and the housing estates in north Belfast will have a good understanding of the area. I recommend those visits to anyone who has not done them and who ever has the time. It is an extremely sensitive and difficult area, and many good citizens are doing their best on both sides of the line to build confidence in both communities. However, Sinn Féin and the Republican movement need to openly, positively and proactively join in the fight against crime, intimidation and the various forms of terrorism.

As far as the future is concerned, I am buoyed up by the review of public administration in Northern Ireland. The amount of money that is being wasted on administering Northern Ireland is absolutely ridiculous. The money that the Government have spent in the past few years on consultation, PR firms and goodness knows what — to say nothing of the duplication of administration and its incompetence — is bad, bad and very bad.

If the number of local authorities could be reduced to seven, as recommended at this stage in the review, and they are given the necessary powers — I said this in my maiden speech in the House of Lords eight years ago — to face up to their electorate, to deliver local planning, local policing and everything that local authorities in other parts of the Kingdom are expected to deliver, the electorate would start to learn again about voting for people who deliver, and not voting for people who are going to fight on one side of the border or the other.

If the review of public administration can be completed soon, it could form a sound basis for a new Assembly — perhaps a slimmed-down Assembly or the same one — to get back to work. However, I am keen, like everyone else here, to get some form of local Administration with locally elected politicians making decisions.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD: I also wish to congratulate my constituency colleague Brendan Smith — who did an excellent job as Co-Chairman of this Body — and Diarmuid Wilson and the others that you mentioned.

I support the motion proposed by the Steering Committee. I was interested to listen to Deputy Morgan — as I always am — when he said that it was “game on”. It brings me back to immediately after the election in Northern Ireland when the DUP and Sinn Féin became the prominent parties on both sides. At that stage, it was clear that there was nowhere else for them to go. They had achieved their goal, they had become the largest parties on the two extremes, and the Assembly was the only place in which they could improve their situation.

I have no doubt that both sides enjoyed their time in the Assembly and that their Members enjoyed serving as Ministers. The fact that Jeffrey Donaldson jumped ship when he saw an opportunity of getting a ministry with DUP — which he never would, had he remained with the Official Unionists — heartened and encouraged me to believe that there is a very good chance that things will happen.

The fact that Ian Paisley visited Government Buildings as the leader of the DUP and met the Taoiseach is also a major step forward and an indication that he understands what is needed in future. I, too, worry that the DUP will try to manipulate the Good Friday Agreement. However, I also worry about other elements that try to manipulate it. The agreement is simple and straightforward; had it been delivered in full, enormous steps forward would have been made long ago.

I was interested in Arthur Morgan’s comment about the need to defend the Good Friday Agreement. In defending it, we must deliver it. The release of prisoners was a difficult issue; so too is decommissioning. One has taken place; the other has not. There are many other issues in the agreement that both sides must finalise. Harry Barnes has highlighted anxieties about the UDA, and there are difficult situations behind the scenes. The longer it is before the Assembly is reorganised and is delivering, the more that that group will be involved in crime and intimidation. That is where the Northern Ireland Policing Board has a role to play, and Sinn Féin has a role to play on the Policing Board.

Parties do not get everything that they want: that is what democracy is all about. It is important that they accept the general good. Some Members have said that they admire and support the work of the leadership of Sinn Féin. I certainly support it: to admire it would be somewhat more difficult. I do not live in awe of Sinn Féin. I did, however, live in fear for many years, not just for my own safety but also for that of my relations and friends who live in border areas, simply because they were on the wrong side of the religious fence.

We have come a long way. The Body must do everything that it can to bring Unionists into it for open discussion. I feel much happier saying what I have to say to Arthur Morgan across the table rather than saying it behind his back. That is how we can learn from each

other. We must build trust. Since my late teens, I have been involved in cross-border activities in farm modernisation and in business. When I became involved in party politics I found that the divisions were most difficult to deal with and that it was hard to gain the trust from politicians from north of the border. Ordinary people from north of the border who had jobs worked with us all right, whether they were at co-op or farm level. However, at a political level, Unionists were not prepared to talk to us. If the Body can overcome the hurdle of bringing Unionists in, at least it will have gone some way towards achieving that trust.

I strongly believe that now is a momentous time. I do not underestimate the Taoiseach's comments that the DUP is ready to move. However, it will move only if there is movement on both sides. Let that be absolutely clear. I say that with all due respect to Arthur Morgan and Sinn Féin. Now there is a momentous opportunity to deliver on the Good Friday Agreement. We are not asking for any more or any less.

Make DUP members outcasts if they do not agree to work the Good Friday Agreement, but do not give them any more excuses. I believe that they will work it. It is in the best interests of the island of Ireland and of the two nations that we represent here today that the two parts of Ireland work together through the Assembly and the Dáil. If those institutions are worked properly, we might, through people, get a united Ireland, but we must first have a united people who can work and live together.

The sitting was suspended at 10.45 am and resumed at 11.14 am.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): The following Members are listed to speak: Mr Andrew Mackay; Senator Brian Hayes; Lord Dubs; Lord Brooke; Baroness Harris; Senator Paul Bradford; Senator Mary White; Senator Paul Coughlan; and Cecilia Keaveney.

Mr Arthur Morgan TD: May I object to such a long line of Conservatives speaking after my contribution?

Senator Brian Hayes: We have learnt that military tactics work.

Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD: Send for reinforcements.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): The Co-Chairman's responses are totally impartial, but only for two days, you will be pleased to learn.

11.15 am

Mr Andrew Mackay MP: I thank our friend Arthur Morgan, who immediately preceded me in the order of speakers — as part of a new minority, apparently. I say to Arthur that I am prepared to put quite a big wager — although it will not happen in our lifetimes — on there being more Sinn Féin Members in the Dáil than Tory MPs in the House of Commons.

On a more serious note, Seymour Crawford — and this has already been discussed — mentioned that the Body is still woefully incomplete, for the obvious reason that it has no Unionist Members. Successive Steering Committees have wrestled with that for a long time and have not been successful. That is not a criticism of you, Mr Co-Chairman, or your colleagues on the Steering Committee — it is a simple fact. The Body will not be fully effective and representative, and, as Seymour Crawford pointed out earlier, we shall not have proper dialogue when speaking to each other and disagreeing with each other in person — rather than behind each other's backs — until we have persuaded our Unionist friends to take their seats on the Body.

Excuse me if I am a little cynical, but we are always told that now is not the right time. Successive Secretaries of State have told successive Steering Committees, which have bought this hook, line and sinker, that it is never quite the right time and that the situation is all too delicate. When will it be the right time? I shall try to answer that by saying that with the ongoing talks, with Ian Paisley meeting the Taoiseach in Dublin and entering the Dáil, and with there being better dialogue than there has been in living memory, surely now is the right time. I ask the Steering Committee, and all who might have influence with Unionists, to redouble their efforts.

I return to a plea that I, and others, have made at previous conferences: the Body should meet in Northern Ireland. I am delighted that the Body has met in Wales and in different parts of England and Scotland. However, that pattern is incomplete if it does not meet in Northern Ireland. I hope that the next plenary that takes place in the United Kingdom is in Northern Ireland, and that our Unionist colleagues will attend.

The Body will meet in Donegal in March 2005. Donegal has such close links with Northern Ireland, therefore there is a real opportunity for, at the very least, an informal meeting with Unionists, or, better still, for Unionists to be present at the Body.

I urge the Steering Committee to redouble its efforts to ensure that Ulster Unionists are present. As long as they are not, the Body is incomplete.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Do you have a point of order, Mr Mates?

Mr Michael Mates MP: It is a point of information.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): From now on, Mr Mackay will be an ex officio member of the Steering Committee. It will certainly take on board what you have just said.

Mr Andrew Mackay MP: That is dangerous. You are trying to buy me off.

Mr Michael Mates MP: For completeness, I should report on behalf of the Steering Committee that there has been an exchange with the DUP on the matter. Its reply

was disappointingly negative. The Steering Committee is trying to approach the Unionist community. Mr Winnick will know that I have had many informal talks with David Trimble about that. However, the Steering Committee did make a more formal approach to the DUP and, I am afraid, received yet another brush-off. It is disappointing, but I am sure we should keep trying.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): I should say that the response from the DUP was not entirely negative. It did say that, due to the current negotiations, it did not feel able to make a presentation to the Body. It did not object in principle. The follow-up suggestion of an informal meeting did not come to anything, but at least there has been, for what it is worth, some dialogue between me and the DUP Chief Whip.

Senator Brian Hayes: Senator Mooney stated that he distinctly remembered what occurred in Stormont Governments from 1922 onwards. I am not old enough to remember that, unlike Senator Mooney, but I am aware of a certain footnote in our history involving a tentative agreement between Craig and Collins in 1921. Even at that stage Craig, who has since been portrayed in Irish history as an intransigent Unionist, accepted the notion that in any police force in Northern Ireland a significant number of recruits — if not half — must come from the Nationalist community. It is a pity that no progress has been made since 1921.

Arthur Morgan argued that Republicans support the Good Friday Agreement, therefore, I put it to him that implicit in supporting the agreement is support for the new dispensation on policing. I make that point forcibly to all concerned, because we have seen a new dispensation in Northern Ireland on policing. All sections of the community must support that, irrespective of the ongoing difficulties in the political process.

No one has referred to two significant reports that have been published by the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) since our last meeting. The first details the ongoing paramilitary paraphernalia in Northern Ireland concerning Sinn Féin and the PUP, both of which were fined as result of the IMC report. The second report deals with the British Government's commitments on demilitarisation. The IMC will be crucial for progress, because whatever the views of Sinn Féin about it, every fair-minded person views the IMC as independent: it does not come to the table with a particular view, and it says it as it is.

Why can the IMC's remit not be extended south of the border? In my constituency six weeks ago a gentleman spoke to me about a gentleman who had called at his house one night alleging to be from the IRA and wearing a balaclava and carrying firearms. He said that if my constituent did not stop a particular alleged activity, he would be shot. The Mitchell principles are clear not only on the absence of violence but also on removing the threat of violence. The threat of violence from paramilitary

political parties remains, so the IMC's role will be crucial in giving confidence to the process. It has also a job to do in identifying and documenting the new form of political intimidation that is going on within one political party south of the border in our jurisdiction.

Finally, I appeal to the SDLP and the UUP. There are rumours, substantiated by comments from both parties, that, if the agreement that we all hope for is formed in the North, the Assembly is up and running and the Executive re-established, both those parties may go into temporary opposition. That would be a great pity, because we need the SDLP and the UUP. Both have done more than any other party to be totally loyal to the agreement. It is a terrible indictment that, some six years after the agreement was forged, both are in relative decline. Being part of that Government, working the institutions and not being on the sidelines will strengthen them. I encourage them to be part of that Government, if and when we get agreement.

The Lord Dubs: First, I agree with Senator Brian Hayes's last comment on the SDLP and the Ulster Unionists when the institutions are restored. I hope that they will play a full part in them. All of us who have been around in politics for a while know that not being there when one can be and not taking responsibility in office when one can, weakens rather than strengthens one politically.

I also agree with the comments made about people who are absent today, that is, those who are not members of this Body. Some of us have had informal chats with the Unionists in the hope that they could be persuaded to come here, but other parties from Northern Ireland are also absent — I hope only temporarily. I wish that they were here in some ex officio capacity, because discussing Northern Ireland as much as we do without their presence and without their informal input contributes to a sense of weakness about the Body's discussions.

However, there are signs of hope. Comments have been made about the DUP's unwillingness to be here. On the other hand — and this is a parochial point — we had all of the four main parties, including the DUP, at a breakfast fringe meeting at the Labour Party conference. It was the first time that members of the DUP had come along, and they expressed the wish to come to future Labour Party conferences. That may or may not happen: I hope that it will. There is movement within the DUP, and it is important that we keep pushing them to come along.

I agree with the interesting point that Senator Paschal Mooney made about voluntary organisations working on a cross-border basis. That seems a good idea. Does it require more than an agreement by those organisations from Northern Ireland and the Republic to consent to get together to share their knowledge and experiences? Could that not happen anyway without a more formal process to put it into being?

I also agree with Senator Brendan Ryan about the oath of allegiance. We at Westminster could be more flexible

so that all those elected would feel able to play a full part. I would rather have them at Westminster, exposed to the discussions and the arguments, as Harry Barnes said, than absent. I would not have thought it beyond the wit of the Westminster Parliament to change the oath of allegiance in such a way that it would be acceptable to everyone without in any way weakening the principle of loyalty to parliamentary institutions.

I warned Arthur Morgan that I would have a go at him. He said that all Brits are the same. If we said that all the Irish were the same, he would be the first to take umbrage. We are certainly not all the same. There are as many differences on the British side as there are on the Irish side. I am sure that he said that only out of sheer badness and not out of any wish to make a serious comment. However, he knew what I was going to say, so he will not be surprised.

It is very hard to find new things to say about how the talks are going because we do not know what happened at Leeds Castle and we do not know about the further discussions. We have some inkling of them, but we do not know the details. I hope that there will be maximum pressure for progress because the two parties that are now crucial to this, the DUP and Sinn Féin, were the main beneficiaries in the Assembly elections, and it looks as though they will be the main beneficiaries in the coming general election. I hope that that will not deter those two parties from the need to make progress. Sitting back and saying that the status quo is OK is not the proper way forward. I hope that both parties will feel the need to make progress, and I hope that we will put the maximum pressure on them.

Having said that, I am aware that many of the parties at Stormont have a very limited margin for manoeuvre. I have heard leading members of Sinn Féin say that they can move only as fast as they can move their membership and that they cannot push that any further. The DUP has also made certain electoral commitments on the basis of which it improved its electoral position, and, again, it is no good for us to say that it should ignore those: it cannot. Therefore the scope for moving forward must take account of the limited margin for manoeuvre on the Nationalist side as well as the limited margin for manoeuvre on the Unionist side. However, that is not to say that that should be used as an excuse; we must understand that and hope that progress will be made.

Finally, as has been said already, timing will be difficult. No Prime Minister could put as much time into these issues as Tony Blair did after 1997, when for many months he devoted more time to that issue than anything else. There will be a general election next year, and the British presidency of the European Union begins in the second half of next year. It is absolutely crucial that those issues are resolved before the British general election — which means before March next year — otherwise matters will drag on and on and we will

have further similar debates at future BIIPB meetings without any progress. I hope that that resolution will happen.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Lord Brooke, to be followed by Baroness Harris.

I have been admiring your jacket, by the way, Lord Brooke.

11.30 am

The Lord Brooke: I propose to make a brief reference to it.

Very early in the debate Lord Smith spoke of repetition on these occasions. The best example of repetition is the Greek chorus in Greek tragedies: even if expressed in beautiful Greek verse, they do consistently state the obvious. One of the pleasures of these meetings is that, as each speaker is announced from the Chair, one can engage in guessing what he or she is going to say, and it is nothing like as easy as it sounds.

I have an academic association with King's College, London, which has a distinguished department of war studies. I discovered for the first time last week that Michael Collins was an alumnus of the College. In the context of war studies, I pick up Paschal Mooney's statement that there are 15,000 British troops in Northern Ireland. Given the Army's current overstretch around the world I do not think that that figure could logistically be correct. My understanding is that there are 11,000 troops and falling. Much more important is the plan of General Sir Mike Jackson — who was the brigadier in Belfast when I served in the Province — that if all goes well, that number will soon be down to 5,000, which is on a par with garrisons all around the United Kingdom.

I want to say a word about the slowness of political development. I said that I would allude to my costume, about which Arthur Morgan remarked in generous terms to me during the interval. Last night, when I saw Kevin McNamara — one of the lodestars of this Body who, I am sorry to say, has had to take to his bed — he asked me whether I had come straight from a cricket match. Americans can never understand how a game can last as long as cricket, but a cricket match is not a bad paradigm for the speed of action in the evolution of Northern Ireland's affairs.

When there was a change of government in the United Kingdom in 1951, Churchill immediately flew to Washington to reverse Atlee's decision that an American would command the western approaches to these islands; Churchill believed that a Brit should command them. There were no stenographers present at the meeting between Churchill and Truman, but Dean Acheson has recounted in outline what Churchill said. It was one of the great speeches of the world, and it is a tragedy that we do not have the text.

I am exceptionally fond of Dr Paisley as a human being, and I sincerely hope that his health holds out. Much has been made of a visit that he recently made to

Dublin, but in 1991 he had to secure the approval of his party to allow him to go to Dublin for talks that year. The speech to persuade his party therefore occurred 13 years ago. He received the assent of his party. I am told that it was a brilliant speech that contained a notable purple passage about the talks between Craig and Collins to which Senator Hayes referred. We must hope that there is an Acheson somewhere in the DUP who will at some stage give us an account of what Ian Paisley said on that occasion.

Despite what Joe Sherlock said, general elections are a fact of life, and they are a solid complication in Northern Ireland affairs. They are a bit like rain in these islands. As the man said, "If you can see the islands it is about to rain; if you cannot see them it is already raining." We must work our way round general elections just as we must work around rain in a cricket match.

My third observation is to those who said that it is disappointing that no news is coming out. In my view, no news is good news. De Gaulle and the conclusion of the affairs in Algeria have been mentioned. At the Evian peace talks all delegates were issued with a Volkswagen with skis on the roof-rack so that they could dash around looking like tourists and the media would not be able to work out who the delegates were. In the days of fixed exchange rates, journalists watched for signs of devaluation anywhere, but no finance minister would ever have indicated that devaluation was about to occur. In my view, silence is golden when dealing with today's case.

We have to have faith. That is based on how events have happened in the past and the time it has taken to get to where we are. Fifty-five years ago I was confirmed into the Church of England by the then Bishop of Salisbury. Salisbury Cathedral has the tallest spire in England, and possibly in Europe. The Bishop preached on faith. He explained that because the spire was being repaired the chief steeplejack brought him up the spire.

Planks ran round the spire, and a rope was attached to the stanchions on which the planks rested. When the steeplejack got the bishop there, the steeplejack said, "Now that I have got you here, bishop, there are one or two things that I want to say to you. If I were you, I would lean back against the spire." To the bishop's absolute horror, the steeplejack then leaned back against the rope. That image of faith has remained with me for the past 55 years. *[Laughter]*. I commend it to everyone.

I am delighted to be followed by Baroness Harris of Richmond, who is the first lady to speak in the debate. I hope that more women will speak before the debate is over.

Baroness Harris of Richmond: Thank you very much indeed.

Like Alf Dubs, I will start by making a statement about Arthur Morgan's statement, to which, as a Liberal Democrat, I take great exception. How dare he call me a Conservative! I expect an apology later.

Having listened carefully to the debate so far, I do not have anything particularly original to add, other than my surprise, and almost delight, to find that I largely agree with Robin Glentoran. We normally speak on entirely different sides of the fence. I am also delighted to pick up on the points made by Senator Brian Hayes, particularly about policing. I have been involved with policing for over 20 years, and it is my specialism.

Other people have referred to policing, and it is a key issue. One person's definition of terrorism can be entirely different to someone else's. Terrorism is evident in the continuing paramilitary violence — beatings, exiles, disruptive behaviour and links to organised and serious crime. That is connected to how policing is carried out in Northern Ireland.

I can reassure Robin, and others who might be interested, that every time I meet Sinn Féin representatives — and I try to meet them and listen to them when they come to Westminster — I raise the issue of their lack of involvement in the Police Service of Northern Ireland. It is absolutely essential that they are members of the Policing Board and play their full part, because only then can all sections of society in Northern Ireland become involved in policing and in how the community wants to be policed.

It may be the reason that we still have too many British soldiers — some would say — in Northern Ireland. I was appalled to hear that figure of a troop level of 15,000, and, like Peter Brooke, I would query it. It is certainly something that we need to examine.

I understand that members of the DUP are to talk to Loyalist paramilitary groups. It would be hypocritical if they did not talk to Sinn Féin. If they can share TV slots, as they have done recently, why not the Executive?

Senator Paul Bradford: It is nice to be back with the Body. I support the motion, as I am sure everyone does. I do not have anything particularly original to say. I agree with the vast majority of what has been said by previous speakers. The fact that there is such agreement in our thought processes indicates that we are not too far from a solution.

With regard to the Leeds Castle talks and the talks that are under way between the Governments and the parties, comments have been made that new formulas are being sought and that a way will be found. The Good Friday Agreement is the formula. We should not move away from the formula that was agreed by the parties and accepted by the people in a referendum. We should stick rigidly to it. We must continue to make that point. The Good Friday Agreement must be implemented in its entirety.

Over the years that I have been coming here there have been variations on a theme. Some 10 or 12 years ago we talked about the lack of dialogue; fortunately, we got over that hurdle and dialogue is now commonplace,

effective and working. The lack of trust was a serious problem on and between both islands, but, to a significant degree, we have jumped that hurdle as well. There is a little bit to go, but there is now a greater degree of trust between the players.

However, the lack of generosity is the one issue that stares us in the face. Every political party and side of the equation is guilty in that regard. In our search for a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland and for a permanent peace, the people should be our concern, but politics are taking over. The parties are not only looking for a solution in their own small-minded way, but people are also looking for victories and justification. We are all guilty of it. However, we must be more generous. It has been said that a Mandela figure or a Gandhi is missing in the current phase of our dialogue. We lack that generosity, and I hope that we can tackle that because it is not important who wins or loses politically; it is a question of a permanent peace on the island, and then we will all win.

Lord Brooke said that politics and elections inevitably and invariably come into the equation, and we must deal with that. However, we must be more generous in our dealings with our colleagues on all sides. We are trying to find retrospective justification for what happened 10, 15, 20, 50 years ago for the people living in today's Ireland or today's Britain. Those people want us to carve out a future in which everyone can live in peace, and I hope that we can all be a little more generous in our words and deeds.

Senator Mary White: I am honoured to participate for the first time in this intergovernmental body. I wish to respond to many issues that have been raised. I support the motion; however, I draw your attention to the last two or three lines in which the Steering Committee:

“urges all involved to work towards the furtherance of the peace process and the full implementation of the Agreement.”

11.45 am

Loyalist and Republican ex-prisoners are one aspect of the agreement on which there has been no delivery. As Members are aware, prisoners were released under the Belfast Agreement, and without the consent of the prisoners there would have been no agreement. However, sadly, the Governments have failed to recognise the importance of measures to facilitate the reintegration of prisoners into the community. Over 90% of Members will not have heard these figures before, but there are 15,000 Republican and 10,000 Loyalist ex-prisoners on the island. Some 250,000 people have been directly or indirectly affected by family members having been imprisoned during the 30 years of war in Northern Ireland. In many cases, people were imprisoned because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. There is absolutely no doubt about that.

Most of the people who were in prison would not have been involved, had it not been for the political instability in the North. They are not criminals. The people who were imprisoned during the conflict in the North do not see themselves as criminals. They see themselves as politicians — whether people in this room or in England, Wales or Westminster believe that — and I talk about both sides of the community, Loyalist and Republican.

For the past 10 years I have worked with Loyalist and Republican ex-prisoners. Some five years ago, I brought the Grand Master of the Orange Lodge to meet the Taoiseach, long before the Rev Dr Ian Paisley came, so I have been very supportive of both sides.

It is ironic — and hard to believe — that someone can be elected as an MLA or First Minister, but cannot get a job sweeping the floor at the city hall. He or she cannot get a licence to drive a taxi. Someone can become an elected official or a Minister, but because that person has a criminal record, he or she cannot take a job in the public sector in the North of Ireland. In the Republic of Ireland, many ex-prisoners have studied while in prison and have received doctorates but cannot get a job in the state sector. However, they can get jobs in the private sector. I could go on about that issue, but I simply wish to convey to Members from other legislatures that there has been no delivery on the aspect of the agreement that concerns Loyalist and Republican ex-prisoners, who are working intensively in their communities and who many call the “middle management” of the peace process.

I want Members to call for task forces to be set up by the Irish and British Governments to examine the inequalities that are faced by people who have completed their sentences, have been freed from prison, and who should be allowed to take up employment. I was asked to get involved in the case of a Republican ex-prisoner in the North who had applied for a job at a health board in the Republic of Ireland. The police had to establish whether he had a criminal record, which is the usual procedure for public sector jobs. The police confirmed that he had a record and, therefore, could not get the job. I took up his case, and he was given an apology. He was then allowed to apply for the job.

I am aware that most Members are not familiar with that issue. If one mentions ex-prisoners, people think that one is part of that group. I raise the matter because it is my number-one issue in the peace process. I have been involved in the peace process with both sides of the community since 1994, when Albert Reynolds was Taoiseach. Sir George Quigley, with whom most Members will be familiar, nominated me to the Senate; he has been a friend of mine for 20 years. I do not support one side over the other, contrary to what people might think. However, justice must be done for people who have served their time and who have been freed under the agreement. They should be allowed to take up employment and not be stopped by small-minded, bureaucratic prejudice.

Senator Paul Coghlan: I support the motion. Members are aware of what happened at Leeds Castle and in the further discussions. Certainly, contact has intensified, and, as everyone has mentioned, the DUP went to Dublin. That is hugely significant. The front page of today's 'Irish Independent' quotes the Taoiseach, who has said that he believes that the DUP is ready to share power with Sinn Féin. I am sure that if that is his view, it is also the view of Tony Blair and the British Government.

After the Leeds Castle talks and the further discussions that ensued, it is widely believed that there are three so-called sticking points: the method of election of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister; accountability in the Executive; and the way in which North/South bodies will develop and grow. I believe that the Body considers those problems to be surmountable, and I believe that the Republic's Department for Foreign Affairs and the Northern Ireland Office have already provided formulae that should prove acceptable. We sincerely hope that those formulae are put in place, that choreography is proceeding, and that P O'Neill will sign off for the last time. The trouble is that we do not yet know who his opposite number is, and whether he or she will be able to speak for the UDA, the UVF, the UFF and other Loyalist paramilitaries.

It is tremendous to note that development. We all welcome the DUP's undertaking to speak to the Loyalist paramilitaries, and please God that will bear fruit. I echo what my colleague Senator Paul Bradford said: we all hope that the spirit of generosity will continue to prevail in the talks.

Finally, I hope that there will be no further intransigence. Along with everyone else here, I hope that the Unionists will join us soon and that the Assembly will be up and running.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: I often start my contribution by saying that it feels like groundhog day, and this time is not too different, but I will have a go anyway. As usual I am being totally parochial, and in that context I may not repeat much of what others have said, but I will repeat utterly what I have said many times before.

In the last meeting, Lord Glentoran mentioned that a great deal of the Northern Ireland Select Committee work has to be done at Westminster. Several former Secretaries of State are in this room, and someone asked me earlier what I thought of the current one. Ultimately, I look forward to the day when there is no Secretary of State, when those issues can be dealt with locally and when the Northern Ireland Select Committee does not have to deal with what is going on in Northern Ireland.

The motion begins with the words "notes the recent talks". There are always recent talks, always further discussions and always hope for the restoration of powers. If I were to make a slight change to the motion, it would be to the part that states that

"it is in the interests of all parties in Northern Ireland that the devolved institutions are revived as soon as possible".

It is in the interests of all the parties on the island of Ireland that the devolved institutions be revived. As everyone knows I am from the north of the North, where, as in much of the north-west, the textile industry is in serious decline. The area suffers from a serious lack of infrastructure. With a threat that the railway line from Belfast might stop at Coleraine, it is almost like it was in the 1960s. At a time when everyone is talking about all-Ireland transport and one council is carrying out a North/South study on obstacles to all-Ireland transport networks, there is a threat over access to the north-west, when, in many respects, there is no access.

At the Body's last meeting six months ago John Spellar was a little peeved that I asked a question about road, rail and air infrastructure — I want all of those things. It is not unusual for people elsewhere to want decent roads, a decent rail service and an air service in and out of their location, whereas we are supposed to be happy with one or other of those. No matter how hard the Northern Ireland Select Committee, the Secretary of State or anyone else operating from Westminster work, they cannot provide solutions to problems, such as the lack of legislation for the Foyle Fisheries. In the meantime, anyone can come and lift our mussels and oysters. I talk about that every time I come here: it is groundhog day. Six months on, it is no different for me in Donegal, north of the North.

I wholeheartedly agree that the parties from the North should be here. I have said it before, and I say it again: if the wages had been stopped, the concentration of the mind might have started, and we might not, X number of years on, be discussing, debating and wondering among ourselves about something that we cannot solve.

We cannot solve it: the parties involved must solve it. The only thing that confuses me is the question of why the economic argument has not already won. People should realise that if they put their minds to it they will have a better economy and enjoy a better success rate.

I want gas to be piped from Belfast to Letterkenny; I want the M2 and the A5 roads to be improved; and I want Derry City Airport to get the investment and decisions that it needs. I am told that when the Executive is up and running those decisions can be made. Sorry, but we cannot wait any longer. We cannot wait for the Executive to get up and running — even though that may be in six months' time — although we welcome the recent talks and further discussions seeking the restoration of the Good Friday Agreement.

I must give Members an update on my car ferry, because that is part of my story. Six hundred and sixty thousand passengers have used it in two years. We put the infrastructure in place, and it is being used, and that is a more tangible sign of peace and reconciliation than

many other things. Let politics become local, let us make decisions locally, and let the people who can make those decisions have their heads knocked together: we must do whatever is necessary to achieve success. Ultimately, it is in the interests of all the parties on the island of Ireland to have the devolved structures back in place. Paschal said that he remembered 1920 — I did not think he was that old. Whatever the inequalities, whatever the inequities, if it comes down to people having to sort out their differences amongst themselves, they will overcome many of the hiccups and bumps, but we are too far away from a decision being made. When people start writing “Dear John” letters and trying to work out answers to their own questions, we will have real success. Go raibh maith agat.

12.00 pm

Mr Chris Ruane MP: Much has been said about the fears that we are losing momentum, that we are slipping backwards and that time is running out. I want to concentrate on momentum. There is a feeling of *déjà vu* in this room. We seem to be saying the same things today as we said six months, 12 months and 18 months ago. It is time for a new momentum. I was encouraged and pleased to hear Arthur Morgan say that something is in the pipeline, and I await the announcement in the next two weeks.

We have the political momentum with the Governments and the political parties, and — as has been mentioned before — momentum in civil society, the Churches, voluntary organisations, trade unions and schools. Momentum is being maintained in schools, but more could be done to enhance that. As an example, a delegation of children from a Gaelic-speaking school in the North came to my home town of Rhyl to visit a Welsh-speaking school — the school that my daughter, Seren, attends. That is the way forward and the way to build bonds, especially with young people. When those 10- and 11-year-olds came to Rhyl they raised religious issues. My daughter came home and asked me if she was a Roman Catholic. She is a Roman Catholic, and she attends Mass every week. Those were the type of questions raised by the young people from Northern Ireland, and those are the issues on their minds. When young people visit Wales and the rest of the UK and find that those children are no different to them, bonds will be built.

The Government gave virtually no help to create that partnership. There are certain amounts of money that can be allocated to schools in the North and the South, but the east-west connections are not so easy to make. The trip to Rhyl was funded almost entirely by the children. More could be done to maintain the momentum in civil society, and the financial help should be available. We should spread best practice, we should celebrate such successes, and we should build on those — whether it be with the Churches, the trade unions or the schools.

There is a feeling of stalemate on the political side. There is a backlog — a dam — that I hope is about to be broken with the announcement that Arthur Morgan spoke of. When that dam is broken and we regain momentum, I hope that the momentum is maintained, and that we do not get stuck in another rut for a further six, 12 or 18 months.

Much action could be taken; for example, movement could be made on the issue of watchtowers. However, it must be made clear that the agreement is sacrosanct. It cannot be undermined; if there is any hint of that, trust will nosedive. Momentum has been maintained through the DUP’s visit to the Irish Government.

Decommissioning and a declaration that the war is over are crucial. If the long-term aims of Sinn Féin are to have a united Ireland, which is an aim that I share, and — a view that I do not necessarily share — to become the party of Government in the South in the next 15 to 20 years, which I am sure it would like to be, it must start winning hearts and minds. We have had 30 years of war in the North, and many people have been hurt on both sides. Sinn Féin must realise that, if its aims are for people to vote for a united Ireland and for the party to take its place in Government in the Dáil, it is in the party’s economic and political interests in the North to win hearts and minds. Sinn Féin cannot simply rely on the demographic argument that, in 15 or 20 years, there will be a Catholic majority. People in the North of Ireland must become fully involved in the political process, and the gun must be buried for ever.

Mr Dominic Grieve MP: I did not intend to participate in the debate, but Senator Mary White’s contribution livened up the proceedings. Although previously agreeable, the proceedings have not touched the nub of the issue. I was interested in Senator White’s comments about the difficulties of rehabilitation for those who had been involved in terrorist — or, at least, criminal — activities. I am interested in domestic English law and politics. Rehabilitation in Britain, as, I am sure, is the case in the Republic of Ireland, is extraordinarily difficult. If someone commits a crime in Britain, the stigma attached will often last for the rest of that person’s life. Although he or she may be able to obtain menial employment, the moment that any position of responsibility is attained, the stigma will catch up with the person. That is a serious failing of our criminal justice system, and that bothers me.

Part of the problem with the Northern Ireland peace process is that the acceptance of responsibility — the essential precursor to the catharsis of reconciliation — has come extraordinarily grudgingly. Four, five, six years ago, I had hoped that we would be moving faster. The people in whose greatest interest it is that rehabilitation occurs are precisely those about whom Senator White talked. They must get on with their lives and must make a constructive contribution to the community in which they live. We have not come far enough in achieving this.

South Africa had a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but that is not necessarily required in Northern Ireland. As we move down this road, much more can be done. The failure to reconcile makes me worry about the peace process. An attitude prevails that we are coasting gently along to a point at which the parties will reach agreement, but the underlying grudgingness is troubling. The only way to resolve that is to have a degree of reconciliation in the process, rather than it being a series of manoeuvres for political advantage. I do not know how that can be achieved, but if anything is lacking in the peace process at present, it is reconciliation. If we could achieve that, the type of problem that Senator White has raised is something that could be resolved, to the community's great profit. I am conscious, through the UK's domestic agenda, that the problem is real.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): I have Ned O'Keefe. Or is it Jim? Ned O'Keefe.

Mr Ned O'Keefe TD: This is only my second meeting. I sit beside Jim O'Keefe. For the information of the audience, the O'Keefes were chieftains of Munster many generations ago.

I first want to pick up on something that Senator Mary White said. We live in an age of equality, and I was very much taken aback to find that there were 25,000 people in our country who had been caught up in the struggle and the problems of society and who can be deprived of work. Many have good educational backgrounds, have studied and have come through. That is an issue that we must address, because we have a war situation, if we like to make it that. It is timely, and I congratulate her on raising that issue on her first day here.

Let us look at the agreement in the context of the success of the economies of both the North and the South of Ireland. Going back to 1997 or thereabouts, enormous potential has developed, especially since the Good Friday Agreement was signed. We have seen the growth of our economy, and that can only be attributed to the success of that agreement. We had the industrial North and the agricultural South. That was the history of it. Now we have a very prosperous island on both sides of the border, and we have peace in our land.

I do not want to develop this very much here, but we can look at Iraq and the weapons of mass destruction. The satellite system failed to pick them up, and both Governments in the Western World were misled on the weapons of mass destruction. At the end of the day, we have had apologies from great parliamentarians right across the world on what happened: there were no weapons there.

We continue to be bogged down in the whole area of decommissioning. The guns have been silenced on both sides. We have peace in the land, as I have said. We have Sinn Féin people in Dáil Éireann participating in democratic politics, which they would not have done decades

ago. We have a problem in the House of Commons, where the oath of allegiance is difficult, as has been said. We are now bogged down in the decommissioning process.

Brian Hayes made a point about the Independent Monitoring Commission. That is the only item on the agenda of the Good Friday Agreement that bogs down that successful agreement. Why can we not work towards some compromise in that area that will bring about the fullness of the agreement, that will bring about the full participation of the politicians in Northern Ireland in government, that will bring full and committed peace to the land, and that will continue the prosperity that we are enjoying?

I believe that we can work around this, because there has been a lot of compromise. A lot of things have happened that we never thought would happen in our time. Dr Paisley has come to Dublin to Government Buildings. He is a very affable man and most enjoyable. I have had the pleasure of meeting him on a few occasions. He recognises that our Taoiseach and Dáil Éireann have made major progress.

I say here today, in this very important assembly, that the decommissioning process has to be looked at in a very practical way. Are there guns there? Is there Semtex there? Are we just hyping up the decommissioning issue? Are we destroying the efforts of those organisations and the democratic system by pushing it as far as we are pushing it? As I sit here and read the agreement, that is the only item that is there. So, are there guns there? Are they not there? Do we have a satellite system in place for recognising and identifying weapons, as went so wrong in the Iraq situation? With those remarks, that is my thumbs up. Of course, I fully support the motion and the efforts of the organisation.

Mrs Rosemary McKenna MP: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am not speaking just to break up the O'Keefes, or to help the Chairman out; I am speaking because it is important to say that we are moving forward.

My first recollection of a visit to Ireland was as an eight-year-old girl, when my father, who I thought was all-powerful, took his family to a Belfast hotel for breakfast. I suddenly realised that this big, strong man was afraid.

He was afraid because we were travelling through the North on our way to Donegal, and that stuck with me. That does not happen now as there is freedom of movement between the rest of the United Kingdom and Ireland, and that is wonderful. However, my family, who have grown up in the past 30 years, have missed a huge part of their heritage because that fear was in me as well, and I was afraid to travel to my father's roots. We are now able to travel with great freedom of movement, so we have moved forward, and we continue to move forward. I am more hopeful than many here today. I recognise the changes and have seen the improvements.

The vast majority of people in the North now have great freedom of movement and economic prosperity, which were absent for many years. You just have to look at Belfast city to see what a great city it is and how much young people are enjoying life there. However, we must also remember that there are two communities in the North, particularly in Belfast, who still live in fear and on whom the gangsters prey. Until we as a community and as politicians find a solution to that fear, we will not have fully achieved our goal.

I visited both communities in Belfast where it is obvious that they are still afraid to move out of their communities and to let their children go to colleges and universities. They still want to remain in small enclaves because they feel safe there, so there is still work to be done there. The rest of us in the United Kingdom must also remember the other aspect.

12.15 pm

In the interests of all organisations in this room, particularly the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, we should encourage the Northern Ireland Assembly to get up and running because it is part of the devolution programme and part of the progress of real devolution in the United Kingdom.

I look forward to the day when there is a Secretary of State for devolved government. After the next general election, I suspect that there may be a Secretary of State for devolved government, but that will only be for Scotland, Wales and perhaps London. I would dearly love to see a Secretary of State for devolved government that also included Northern Ireland, with no necessity for a Secretary of State for each area. That is my hope for the next couple of months. It is achievable, and we will get there with the goodwill of everybody here and round the table.

Mr John Griffiths AM: Several contributions have displayed people's frustrations with the difficult situation that faces, primarily, the North of Ireland. We all share those frustrations, and they confront us at every meeting. However, many of us were struck, as Dominic Grieve mentioned, by what Senator Mary White said. There is a real problem affecting tens of thousands of people and their families — people who were perhaps in the wrong place at the wrong time and other people who, for political reasons, got caught up in the situation. Those people have a great deal to offer. Here is a real practical problem that this Body could, perhaps, highlight and, hopefully, get resolved. If this Body can highlight such practical problems and play a part in bringing solutions to them, it is a very real indication of the added value that this Body could bring to the difficult problems that sometimes seem almost intractable.

If we were to focus on important practical problems, such as those that Mary White highlighted, and play a part in resolving them, it would be a very important role

for this Body to develop further. As well as rightly concentrating on the general situation, we could perhaps increasingly focus on such problems. In doing so, through dealing with specific problems, we could improve the generality as well. I am sure that Mary's powerful contribution today will have struck everyone here as forcefully as it struck Dominic and me. Therefore it would be great if we could use that as an example of real added value for this Body.

In Britain, the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 deals with the general problems that Mr Grieve mentioned so that those who commit crimes can find their way back into a constructive role for themselves, their families and society in general. Surely it is not beyond the wit of the Governments in the North and South of Ireland to try to deal with that situation by a general extension of the principles of legislation such as the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. I believe that they could concentrate fruitfully on finding a practical way forward.

I agree with Mrs McKenna that all the devolved bodies in the UK have a direct interest in seeing the Northern Ireland Assembly up and running again. Part of the new, devolved reality in the UK is that the devolved bodies work together, learn from one another, spread best practice and co-operate in many ways. Having one of the devolved bodies in suspension does not help the others. The sooner the Northern Ireland Assembly is up and running again, the better.

Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD: I believe that we are on the verge of a breakthrough in Northern Ireland. I hope, and to some extent expect, to see such an agreement before the end of the month. Michael Mates opened the debate by saying that we have been here before. I do not fully agree with that; the situation is different now.

All the work that has gone on in the background since the Good Friday Agreement was signed six years ago has made some progress, although in some instances it has been two steps forward and one step back. Generally, however, it has been a path of progress. There is now an outline of a comprehensive agreement on all matters. That certainly gives great grounds for hope, provided that the parties can break through their political pain barriers and go for the line. There is a great sense of hope. I believe that the job is virtually finished.

The meetings in Lancaster House and in Leeds Castle bore fruit. At Lancaster House the two Governments identified four outstanding issues. As Michael Mates said, the end of paramilitary activity is number one, followed by decommissioning, stability of the political institutions and policing. A lot of progress resulted from the Leeds Castle talks. Unfortunately, however, no agreement was reached, particularly on the political institutions. To be blunt, it would be a tragedy if the failure to bridge the remaining gaps frustrated the wider object of an end to IRA and Loyalist paramilitarism and

the definitive removal, once and for all, of arms from Northern Ireland politics.

It is fair to say that we have introduced many new perspectives, and, as far as possible, repetition was avoided. When he opened the debate, Michael Mates acknowledged the benefit of the active involvement of the DUP. That is a new and positive dimension to the situation. It is probably the factor that will help others to bring the present round of discussions to a successful conclusion. Peter Temple-Morris said that that is frustratingly close, and everyone will remain frustrated until it is reached. He made the obvious point that in constitutional government one cannot sit down with people who are armed to the teeth. That is the bottom line.

I do not question anybody who is reluctant so to do. When Lord Smith was talking about time running out, he raised the interesting question of money and whether Assembly Members can continue to expect payment. He received interesting support from Cecilia Keaveney, and the question of money may come into play in the event that the current round of discussions does not reach a successful conclusion.

As ever, Paschal Mooney is optimistic. He mentioned Dermot Ahern's remarks on the inevitability of Sinn Féin entering government in the Republic. On that score, however, I note that the Taoiseach yesterday was steadfastly refusing to speculate on the possibility of Fianna Fáil going into power with Sinn Féin, saying that this would arise only in the context of normal politics in the years to come — presumably 2007. Paschal also referred to the 15,000 British troops in Northern Ireland. Lord Brooke, who is most accurate on such matters, was able to reduce that figure to 11,000 straight away and to indicate that that is on its way down to 5,000.

Joe Sherlock expected more progress, as do we all. Brendan Ryan must have been taking note of Oscar Wilde and resisted the temptation of waiting to come in after Arthur Morgan. He got in ahead of Arthur and spoke about the oath of allegiance in the House of Commons and other interesting matters.

Arthur Morgan, having exchanged pleasantries with the Conservatives, said that he felt that the game was on, we were inching forward and that a solution is deliverable. We all agree with that message. He said that the Northern parties were needed at BIIPB conferences. I strongly endorse that view, as do many other Members. Over the years many efforts have been made to bring the Ulster Unionist Party here. We have had "surrogate" speakers on its behalf but no formal representation. The reaction and the responses of the DUP have been more positive than Members have suggested. Like others, I have had some discussions with DUP members, and they are genuinely interested in participating in the Body. The fact that they are not here today is explainable and justifiable. I accept the DUP's point that because

serious negotiations are taking place, it is not in a position to commit to attending a meeting. However, it has made an informal offer to meet Members of the Body. Good outcomes will emerge from such discussions, and I anticipate, and look forward to, seeing members of the DUP attending meetings of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body or possibly a body that may be relabelled but that would be much the same. After the main issues have been settled, there may be scope for such discussions.

Harry Barnes also pushed the need for the attendance of Unionists at BIIPB meetings. That was mirrored by the fact that, for some reason, the UK Northern Ireland Grand Committee does not go to Northern Ireland. I do not understand that, but that is a problem that may be resolved with an overall settlement.

Lord Glentoran did not table an amendment this year, and that is progress in itself. *[Laughter]*. He is not as optimistic as other Members, and he raised a couple of interesting points about Sinn Féin not taking its seats in the House of Commons and its non-involvement with the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I do not mind what Sinn Féin does about the House of Commons; that is its own business and is not relevant to the central issue.

I agree fully with Lord Glentoran that Sinn Féin should be involved and take its place on the Northern Ireland Policing Board. If Sinn Féin is to be a fully constitutional party it is absolutely essential that it supports the institutions of law and order, and the fact that Sinn Féin is not on the Northern Ireland Policing Board sends its own message.

Seymour Crawford brought his own particular perspective from Monaghan, and, as a member of the minority religion in the Republic, he highlighted the sense of insecurity that he and his co-religionists have suffered over the years of the Northern troubles.

12.30 pm

Andrew Mackay raised a point that we have discussed before: that of the Body meeting in Northern Ireland. I absolutely agree; it is about time that the Body met in Northern Ireland. I hope, following the resolution of issues over the coming weeks, that that may be put on the Steering Committee's agenda for, possibly, the next meeting of the Body after Bundoran.

Brian Hayes talked about the work of the IMC and the absolute need for an end to paramilitary violence and vigilantism. Let us be blunt about it, vigilantism is in evidence in many parts of the island of Ireland, and it constitutes a new form of political intimidation in the Republic that has been endemic in Northern Ireland for many years. That issue must be tackled, and all political parties must ensure that they have no hand, act or part in, or support for, such activity — direct or indirect. If they do not, they will have to be exposed in every way possible until they accept that approach.

Brian Hayes also mentioned the reported possibility of the SDLP and the UUP going into opposition. I agree that it would be a pity that those parties that have done so much over the years, and that have been so steadfast in their support for the Good Friday Agreement, should now decide to go into opposition. We are in a situation in which the two parties that have not been as supportive are now the majority parties in their respective communities and will be in power. Lord Dubs agrees fully with that approach and hopes that they will be on the Executive.

Lord Dubs raised the question of timing, and we all need to reflect on that. There is a window of opportunity. There is no doubt that the UK will go into general election mode relatively soon, and that is not an atmosphere in which one can expect the undivided attention of the people who must necessarily focus on the issue — in particular the Prime Minister and the chief Ministers. The parties in Northern Ireland will be gearing up for the hustings, and in that sort of atmosphere one cannot expect any degree of moderate sanity in coming to a conclusion about the outstanding issues on the agreement.

I agree entirely with Lord Dubs that timing is an issue. The business must be done now, and the Body should support that message.

Lord Brooke gave his usual witty contribution. If for nothing else, I would come to the meetings of this Body just to listen to him. However, there were some very serious pearls of wisdom behind the witty presentation, whether from the cricket pitch or Salisbury Cathedral. I suppose the message that I got from Lord Brooke is to have faith, and that is probably something that all of us who are interested in Northern Ireland must have at this stage.

Baroness Harris, like other Members, wanted to distance herself from the Conservatives; I shall not comment on that. From her experience of policing, she focused on the problems that arise from paramilitary violence, including beatings and intimidation. That will have to be confronted to greater effect in the future.

Paul Bradford mentioned the need for generosity; again, that speaks for itself. Mary White spoke of prisoners; I did not realise that there were so many ex-prisoners — 15,000 on the Republican side and 10,000 on the Loyalist side — who need to be reintegrated into society.

Paul Coghlan addressed some of the remaining outstanding problems that need to be settled. He called for us to send a clear message to P O'Neill; I hope that we all endorse that. The message is that it is time to hand in the gun; time to get off the pitch; time to accept your P45. There is no further need to hear from P O'Neill and those with whom he is associated.

Cecilia Keaveney made a contribution as a parochially proud Donegal person, in the Tip O'Neill mode. Nobody can ever doubt where Cecilia comes from, or her huge interest in her own area. She always talks sense, but never misses the opportunity to promote Donegal and the car ferry.

Chris Ruane gave a Welsh view and addressed an interesting dimension concerning young people and the importance of influencing them from an early age. He also mentioned Government funding for those who wish to achieve that objective. Like others, he believes that the agreement is sacrosanct.

Dominic Grieve had an interesting meeting of minds with Mary White and Paul Bradford. Paul spoke of the need for generosity, and Dominic was concerned about an underlying grudgingness, which, I think, is the same concept on either side.

Ned properly reminded Members that the O'Keeffes were chieftains of Munster, and spoke of weapons of mass destruction, although there are some in his own party who believe that he is a one-man weapon of mass destruction. He mentioned the need for compromise on decommissioning; I do not believe that there is any room for compromise on this issue. The Good Friday Agreement was signed six years ago. All participants absolutely confirmed their intention to work constructively and in good faith with the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning and to use any influence that they might have to achieve the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms within two years — that was six years ago. There can be no compromise on that: let there be an end to all guns.

Rosemary McKenna raised an interesting point regarding Paul Murphy and his job. She looked forward to the day when there would be no need for a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. That work involved could be merged into a single ministry for all the devolved assemblies.

John Griffiths summed up the view that the institutions should be up and running, the sooner the better. I agree with that. I hope that by the time we meet in Bundoran that that will be the case.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Mr O'Keeffe, thank you very much indeed for that summing-up of the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body notes the recent talks held at Leeds Castle between Prime Minister Tony Blair, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern and the parties; looks forward to the further discussions planned proving fruitful and to the restoration of the powers devolved under the Good Friday Agreement; notes the intensification of contacts by both Governments with all parties, including the recent meeting between the Democratic Unionist Party leadership and the Irish Government in Dublin; believes that it is in the interests of all parties in Northern Ireland that the devolved institutions are revived as soon as possible; and urges all involved to work towards the furtherance of the peace process and the full implementation of the Agreement.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): I am going to suspend the sitting until 2.30 pm, not 2.15 pm, as has been suggested by one or two people. We have a pretty crowded agenda, so please make sure that you are sitting here ready to proceed at 2.30 pm. Thank you.

The sitting was suspended at 12.40 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 2.33 pm.

RELATIONS WITH THE NORDIC COUNCIL

Mr Murray Tosh MSP: I beg to move

That the Body takes note of the response of the Steering Committee to the Report of Committee B (European Committee) on Relations with the Nordic Council {Doc No 101}.

On 25 November 2002, at the end of a debate on the Nordic Council held during the Manchester plenary, the Body passed this resolution:

That the Body congratulates the Nordic Council on its 50th anniversary; notes the benefit that the Council has brought to the peoples, regions and nations of the Nordic area in terms of social, political and economic cooperation; and believes that links between the Body and the Nordic Council should be developed.

That splendid body of people, Committee B — the European Affairs Committee — charged itself thereafter with developing that approved motion into a set of specific proposals deriving from its investigation into: first, what the Body could learn from the Nordic Council; secondly, whether any Nordic Council practices could be adapted for our use; and thirdly, how we could develop our links with the Nordic Council. Committee B's report was debated at the Inchydoney plenary earlier this year, its recommendations were referred to the Steering Committee for consideration, and the Committee duly discussed those recommendations when it met in Dublin on 29 June.

The Steering Committee has five principal responses to make to Committee B's recommendations. The first is that Committee B noted that the ministerial input to our plenaries is quite different from the level and scope of ministerial involvement and responsiveness at the Nordic Council's sessions. It also noted that ministerial involvement here is restricted to our sessions on the Northern Ireland security position, and that it revolves around the visits by the Secretary of State and the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Without wishing to downplay the significance of Northern Ireland and security issues, Committee B wanted to find ways of extending ministerial involvement into other areas of discussion and possible co-operation. The Steering Committee's response is that it accepts the desirability of discussing a wide range of topics over and above the central and dominant issue of Northern Ireland. That is particularly true in the context of addressing the interests of the devolved bodies and the Crown dependencies, which have been Members of the Body since 2001.

The Steering Committee now has a formal practice of allocating a debating slot in each plenary session to a topic

that has come from the devolved bodies or the Crown dependencies. At tomorrow's plenary we will debate the topic of smoking in public places, which was put on the agenda at the initiative of the National Assembly for Wales.

The Steering Committee has greater difficulty responding to encouraging United Kingdom and Irish Ministers to discuss matters that are within their wider competence and beyond Northern Ireland issues. That is essentially the same issue as Committee B's second recommendation, which is that the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach should attend our plenary sessions. The Steering Committee agrees that that should happen. It has attempted to achieve that in the past, and it will continue to promote attaining that in future.

The Steering Committee clearly cannot implement recommendations that will depend upon political and policy decisions that are within the competence of the United Kingdom and Irish Governments.

Committee B's third recommendation is to reorganise the Body's plenaries along the lines of the Nordic Council's sessions. The Nordic Council has a formal decision-making session each year in the autumn, and in the spring there is a special session that is more akin to a themed conference. Committee B's recommendation is that if we followed this model, the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach could attend the more traditional plenary Body in our usual mould. Other Ministers could be invited as necessary to attend the themed conferences, which could take place alternately with the traditional plenaries. The Steering Committee's response to that was to discuss it carefully.

The view was that, in so far as it provided a mechanism to promote ministerial involvement, particularly that of the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach at plenary sessions, the recommendation had much to commend it. However, as with previous recommendations, the difficulty is that the Body cannot command that: it can only request that Ministers attend the plenary sessions.

The Steering Committee's view was that to proceed without agreement from the Prime Minister and the Taoiseach that they and other relevant Ministers attend BIIPB conferences would risk the loss of the rhythm that the Body has. For example, would a themed conference be attractive unless Ministers are present to participate, respond to questions and discuss issues? Would the attendance level suffer? The Steering Committee is mindful of the present difficulties in securing good attendance on the second day of the plenary. We were not confident that, were a two- or three-day themed plenary held, we would secure the same level of attendance as on day one. The Steering Committee's view is that that is a positive recommendation with which it can agree. However, we can only make progress on it if the attitude of the British and Irish Governments to ministerial and prime-ministerial involvement in the Body's deliberations changes.

Committee B's fourth recommendation is for better and closer co-operation between the Body and the British-Irish Council. The Steering Committee agrees with and accepts that recommendation as an aspiration. The Co-Chairman wrote to the Secretary of State and the Minister for Foreign Affairs to express that view. Members are aware that the respective Governments are unwilling to amend current practice. The specific request that the Body should have observer status at the British-Irish Council was declined when last raised. Although the Steering Committee is positive about that recommendation, it does not have the power to deliver it.

The final set of recommendations from Committee B was that the Nordic Council be given observer status at the Body and that relations should also be developed with the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council (BICC). The Steering Committee's response is that it is

"in favour of encouraging all appropriate inter-parliamentary relations."

Fortunately, at least in that regard, it is capable of responding to those recommendations on its own authority, and it will recommend to the Body that the Nordic Council be given observer status and that the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council's position be kept under review. To that end, a delegation from the Nordic Council is present. Its president, Mr Romanus, will address the Body later.

The Steering Committee considers Committee B's report to be thorough, wide-ranging and thought-provoking. There is relatively little in the report that the Steering Committee can implement on its own authority, or that the Body can do to implement change in those areas in which radical departure has been suggested, given that those relate to the interrelationship of the Governments and Ministers with the Body.

Those ideas should remain on the table, and they should be part of any reassessment of the role of the Body and the British-Irish Council should there be significant political breakthroughs on Northern Ireland and security issues. It is hoped that a stage will come in our deliberations when Northern Ireland will no longer dominate the agenda as it has in the past and when the Body will consider the political, economic, social and environmental issues that are of ongoing concern to the people of these islands. When that day comes, and when the British and Irish Governments discuss the future existence and work of the Body, there is much in the Nordic Council's methods, and in Committee B's recommendations on how the Body might use it as an example that the Body could use as a basis. With the co-operation of the respective Governments, the Body could transform its working relationship with those Governments and refocus its activities towards the sort of objectives that have informed the Nordic Council's discussions and political priorities.

The Steering Committee is positive about Committee B's report. In so far as it can deliver the report's recommendations, it will do so. I refer specifically to delivering observer status to the Nordic Council, which the Steering Committee is delighted to endorse and hopes to resolve soon.

Baroness Harris of Richmond: As a member of the splendid subcommittee and having attended several of its meetings at which the report was discussed, I am delighted to be here and to thank the Steering Committee for its very positive response to that report, which was encouraging.

I want to speak briefly about the fifth recommendation. I am sure that everyone involved with the report and with this Body is delighted that the Nordic Council will be granted observer status. However, I am slightly disappointed that the Baltic Council and the BICC have not been afforded that status as well. I am still not sure why that decision was made and what led to the conclusion that just at the moment it be kept under review, because there are good working relationships between all three bodies. I hope that we will speedily come to the conclusion that this Body needs to be more inclusive and, in the spirit of working together and because it would be very beneficial to the area as a whole, ensure that the Baltic Council and the BICC are brought on board as soon as possible.

2.45 pm

Senator Paschal Mooney: My intervention will be brief. I want to commend the enthusiasm of my colleague Baroness Harris and thank Murray Tosh.

My input, as in other committees, has been wide-ranging, but I have focused on the relationship, as detailed in recommendation 4, between this Body and the British-Irish Council. I am sure that Members are familiar with the responses that have been circulated and that are largely negative. I must record my deep disappointment at that. I cannot understand why, in an era of reconciliation and deeper communications between various institutions not only on these islands but across Europe, the British-Irish Council should see itself as being somehow so elitist that it does not wish to have any links whatsoever with this Body. The Civil Service tone of the response also surprised and disappointed me — it was as though there was not even any political input to any serious consideration given. If I sound somewhat trenchant in my criticism, that is because I firmly believe that the future of this Body is tied up with a closer and deeper integration with all strands at institutional level between the two islands, east-west and north-south.

It is not right, and I suggest no longer acceptable, that the British-Irish Council should operate in a separate stratosphere on matters of mutual interest to these two islands and the surrounding islands. We should pursue with great vigour that aspect of the recommendation, notwithstanding the negative response received. It

behoves this Body to focus on that, because our future is tied up with it. The Steering Committee itself made the point in its response that, if one looks at web sites, one can see that this Body overlaps on themes and subject matters that have been discussed at the British-Irish Council. Those seem to be circulated internally between the various institutions and participants, and yet this Body, even before I sat on it, has engaged in serious in-depth studies of matters of mutual interest across a wide range of subjects from tourism to transport links and many others.

Without overemphasising the point, I strongly urge the Steering Committee, and by extension this Body, to continue its strongest possible representations to the relevant parties in the British-Irish Council to ensure that there is a link similar to what many Members have seen currently operating, effortlessly and without difficulty, between the Nordic Council, the Baltic Council and the Benelux countries.

Mr Bruce Crawford MSP: I wish to respond to the comments made by Baroness Harris. On reading the papers, it is not clear to me either why the BICC in particular has been excluded, especially as recommendation 7 states that

“we have little doubt that, in due course, the BICC will also be designated a “Special Guest”.”

I realise that that refers particularly to the Nordic Council, and we are delighted to have it on board, but the paper discusses other issues. Not only does it not say why the BICC should not be allowed, but there is no timescale for the review period. I would have thought that the Body could have at least put a timescale for when the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council and the Nordic Council might be reviewed.

Those questions came to my mind, and I hope that Baroness Harris, or some other Member, can answer them.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD): I assure the Member that that issue will be kept under review by the Steering Committee. It is not a matter of a decision being taken now; this issue will clearly have to be visited yet again. We have one proposal here today, and all the indications are that it will be accepted. The Steering Committee will be bearing in mind the applications of several people on this issue.

Dr Jimmy Devins TD: I support the recommendations. However, I want to focus on recommendation 3, which states that we might:

“consider a more radical way that the Body operates”.

We had a three-hour debate on Northern Ireland this morning, and that issue effectively takes up almost 50 per cent of our time. At the end of that debate, we all agreed on what should happen in Northern Ireland, but many Members simply stated the same viewpoint again and again. I certainly get the impression that things are moving, but we, as a Body, are somewhat outside the loop. I respectfully suggest, Mr Acting Co-Chairman, that there is a range of issues — such as social, environmental and health matters — that are

of immense importance to our constituents, but that we do not have the time to consider in great depth.

We are all members of national assemblies, and if we, as a Body, could come up with a single policy that we could then individually drive in our own Parliaments, we would be much more effective and, it is to be hoped, much more radical.

Mr Harry Barnes MP: I also want to comment on recommendation 3, and support the point that, to some extent, we are continuing the same discussion. We debate motions on Northern Ireland that are often fairly uncontentious, and nobody wants to oppose them very much. It is like an Adjournment Debate in the House of Commons, when Members just decide to discuss a topic. It is not wrong that we should continue to rake over the coals and express our ideas and develop them according to the current situation, but we all know where we stand.

Therefore a themed conference seems like a good idea. Could we not at least try that as a one-off experiment to see how it would operate? Granted, there are the difficulties about whether Ministers would involve themselves appropriately and how the conference would function and operate, but there is nothing wrong with planning a themed conference to get the idea off the ground. It could be pulled later if there were indications that it would not function; or, if it went ahead and was unsuccessful, those plans could be put on hold, but we could at least try to move in that direction.

With regard to the problem of the Body and the British-Irish Council, I wondered how much that relates to the problem of non-Unionist involvement with the Body’s activities.

Unionists may have reservations about being involved with us and may feel that there are still difficulties, but that does not apply to the British-Irish Council. They might mistakenly feel that we are a continuation of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and that they do not want links with that. There may be difficulties associated with the connections between the two bodies that may not be a problem for some of the other forces involved in the British-Irish Council. If we could crack the Unionist problem we may be able to crack those problems that are associated with the British-Irish Council and this Body.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD): We have noted your observation about the Steering Committee, and we will give it some consideration.

The Lord Brooke: I will make a brief intervention on the European dimension. In the 1980s, just before I went to Northern Ireland, I served for four years as the UK’s representative Minister on the Budget Council of what was then the European Community.

My fellow members were marvellously representative of the countries of the Community. The German representative was intensely German, the Greek intensely Greek, the Frenchman intensely French, and the best example was Jim O'Keeffe, who was strenuously Irish in our debates.

I wondered why central casting had delivered this series of people who were so remarkably representative of their countries. I concluded that we affected one another; after that, I polished up my understatements so that the other representatives would have the same impression of me. However, I was also conscious that in the Council debates, particularly with the complications of interpretation, we needed a universal cultural patois, comprehensible throughout the membership, to illustrate our points. One hundred and fifty years earlier, we would have used the Bible, but that had become wholly irrelevant as a universal patois by the end of the twentieth century. In our own countries we might have used television, but that did not have a universal relevance. I personally hit on Roman and Greek classical mythology and history as being potentially comprehensible across the Council, and that worked.

Northern Europe has its own mythology — some of it from these islands, but even more from Nordic mythology. That could produce instances to illustrate the point about the Steering Committee's being congenitally resistant to recommendations from other parts of the Body — albeit, I hasten to say, for good reasons. For cultural reasons I welcome the motion on the Nordic Council's promotion and advancement on the grounds that it will extend the cultural background in which we operate.

Mr Andrew Mackay MP: On behalf of the Body, I welcome our friends from the Nordic Council. My Committee greatly appreciates the help and assistance that Mr Emsis and his colleagues gave us during our inquiry. Their next visit here will be as observers, subject to the motion that has been moved by Murray Tosh. I thank Mr Emsis and his colleagues for coming; their assistance is appreciated.

I also thank Murray for the kind way in which he introduced the debate. We like to think that our discussions were thorough, wide-ranging and certainly thought-provoking. We also enjoyed ourselves hugely, and that is half the battle. Perhaps it was thought-provoking because we had good fun along the way. I wish to place on record how much I appreciated the help that I got from the rest of the Committee. We worked well as a team, and picked up a lot along the way, so I thank them very much.

3.00 pm

I underline what my friend Angela Harris said; we are deeply disappointed that the Baltic Assembly has been excluded. The Body will have noticed that we recommended the inclusion of the Nordic Council and the Baltic Assembly as observers, but not — to take up a point that Bruce Crawford raised — the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council. We did not

have a chance to meet that council. It does not have such close links with the Nordic Council, and we were happy to put that on the back burner. The Co-Chairman is right to say that we will keep that matter under review. Some time in the future, perhaps in the next couple of years, we ought to take another look, and my Committee will volunteer to do that.

We extended our remit to the Baltic Assembly and the Baltic Council simply because after speaking to our friends from the Nordic Council, it was clear that they have close links to the Baltic Assembly, and secondly, the Nordic Council has done a huge amount of good work. If there is one thing that the Nordic Council has achieved internationally over the past few years, as opposed to within their own framework, it was helping the former Soviet states to move towards democracy and to move towards membership of the European Union and membership of NATO, which has been approved.

We visited the Baltic Assembly headquarters in Riga, where we met a lot of Latvian colleagues. They will be slightly hurt, after our very positive meetings, that we have reached a position in which the Nordic Council, but not the Baltic Assembly, has observer status. I cannot quite understand why that conclusion has been reached. Even at this late hour, I like to think that the Steering Committee, before putting the question, might wish to include the Baltic Assembly.

I do not need to tell any of the politicians in this room that the historic, courageous steps forward that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have made have been tremendous. They need all of our help and continued support. The Russians are still out to cause some trouble in those countries; there are still attempts at destabilisation. Those countries are still fragile democracies, as we have seen from recent elections. We all glory in their membership of the European Union and, for those of us in NATO, we glory in their joining that organisation as well. We can help them, and I would like to think that they could have full observer status. I hope that we can come back to that shortly.

Senator Paschal Mooney raised the negative response to recommendation 4. I sense that the members of the Steering Committee are also rather upset about that negative response. Harry Barnes perhaps got it right in saying that the Unionist problem, to which I referred earlier — and do not worry, Co-Chairman, I shall not repeat that speech — is probably at the root of the problem. If that can be resolved, we can have a much closer relationship, with the British-Irish Council and this Body working together. The message that Paschal, Harry and myself are giving is that efforts should be redoubled to try to change the Ministers' minds. That is important.

Jimmy Devins summed up this morning's discussions pretty accurately. There was a sense of frustration; there was a sense that we were outside the loop. Peter Brooke

was probably right in his speech this morning when he said that silence probably means that progress is being made. Let us wait and see. That means that there is no role for us at the moment. Therefore to spend the entire morning on something about which we could not do much was not, even on this occasion, particularly therapeutic. This might be the opportunity to move on to other issues more extensively. I sense that that is something that the Steering Committee will support. At some point, Harry Barnes's idea of an experimental themed conference might be worth a try.

I conclude where I began with my criticism, in saying that the final speech, from Peter Brooke, mentioned the benefits of Nordic mythology. Peter could possibly endorse the idea that a Baltic mythology might be useful to this Body. I hope that we can reconsider including the Baltic Council as observers to our Body.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD):

Mr Mackay's points require a response. At the end of the report, we have the Steering Committee's response, which is that the Steering Committee is in favour of encouraging all appropriate interparliamentary relations; the immediate granting of observer status [*inaudible*] and that full observer status immediately be granted to the Nordic Council, and the position of the Baltic Assembly and the Benelux Interparliamentary Consultative Council be kept under review. The Steering Committee will actively review that.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): And we shall lock you in accordingly.

Mr Andrew Mackay MP: May I ask why our recommendation has not been accepted, and why the Steering Committee saw fit to include the Nordic Council for observer status, but then decided that the Baltic Assembly can only be reviewed? I cannot understand why. I sensed from the nods around the room and the "hear, hears" that a lot of colleagues cannot understand either.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): This Body was created, as we all know, for dialogue between our two sovereign countries. We accept entirely the Nordic Council. We have included the devolved institutions. We now want to accept the Nordic Council on the basis that we recommend, and we are being just a little cautious — not shutting the door to the Baltic Council by any means, but perhaps to give it a go for two years for the other position to settle down, and then be only too happy to look at the situation again. There is no dogmatism whatsoever on our part, no fierce opposition — far from it. It is just that we want to take things a little cautiously, bearing in mind the nature of the Body.

Mr Andrew Mackay MP: While not wishing to extend the debate unduly, I notice that we are ahead of time because not many colleagues sought your eye to speak, Mr Co-Chairman. Do you not think that the fact

that the Balts are struggling courageously and positively to a full democracy means that they need our links rather more now than waiting for a year or two? I have obviously missed something, that there is a point about waiting, but I cannot see what that point is. I repeat that our recommendations seem to be straightforward, and were very much based on the recommendations from our friends on the Nordic Council, and that is why we went to Riga to see for ourselves.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD):

Andrew, we listen to the points that have been made, and the Steering Committee has a positive attitude in relation to this issue. The next Steering Committee is due to meet in December when Murray Tosh will be our host in Edinburgh. If we could leave this issue until that Steering Committee meets, taking account of the fact that some people feel that that should be dealt with in a particular manner. We have a formal motion in relation to the Nordic Council, and it would be inappropriate to disrupt the process by introducing that motion to today's plenary.

We are cognisant of what you say in relation to the Baltics. The Steering Committee will meet in Edinburgh on 7 December, and I appeal to you to leave it until then, when it can be talked through in a more positive vein than perhaps has been the position to date.

Mr Andrew Mackay MP: Before accepting your kind invitation to go to Edinburgh, subject to diary commitments, I ask, as a point of order, if, presumably, it is now too late to have a manuscript amendment that we can vote on? I suspect that all of us want to support your motion, because we want our friends from the Nordic Council to be observers. To vote down the motion would be counter-productive to them, and I am certainly not going to do that.

I would like to prepare a manuscript amendment that would include the Baltic Assembly and on which colleagues could vote.

Baroness Harris of Richmond: I second that.

Mr Andrew Mackay MP: I appear to have a seconder.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD): I suggest that the Nordic Council representatives have been here as guests prior to coming here today. Perhaps we can consider the possibility of a similar arrangement in relation to the Baltics.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): If that is not a good compromise, what could be?

Mr Andrew Mackay MP: If you wish to look at them before they join the club, I can assure you that they are quite respectable and will not pinch the silver.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD): In the meantime, we will ask the Steering Committee on 6 December or 7 December to pursue the matter.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body takes note of the response of the Steering Committee to the Report of Committee B (European Committee) on Relations with the Nordic Council {Doc. No. 101}.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body invites the Nordic Council formally to assume observer status at its deliberations.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD):

Before we conclude the debate, it is appropriate that the representative and President of the Nordic Council, Mr Gabriel Romanus, has an opportunity to address the plenary.

The President of the Nordic Council (Mr Gabriel Romanus): On behalf of the Nordic Council, I thank the Body for its favourable decision. I feel honoured to be offered a place at the table of this distinguished Body. I look forward to close and fruitful co-operation that will mutually benefit our two bodies and the countries that we represent. In the wider Europe, of which we are all part, it is valuable to intensify personal contacts between elected politicians if we want to increase the influence of our countries — the British Isles, the Nordic countries and the Baltics — and also the influence of the political ideals that the Committee has observed that we have in common. As the modern term puts it, we are networking, and that is very productive.

Members have said much about what the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body can learn from the Nordic Council, but not so much has been said about what the Nordic Council can learn from the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. However, I can tell you a few things about that. At the Body's last plenary session in Cork, I said that I envied its debating style. It included lively and spontaneous contributions that are in contrast to our style, which is characterised by written speeches that put everyone who is not speaking to sleep. I hope that we will gradually move the Body's way, and I am looking forward to having representatives of the Body at our session in Stockholm at the beginning of November. I shall encourage our members to learn from the British-Irish style of debate. It is a long-term project, but already some steps have been taken.

I noticed that important business is conducted in the Body with a minimum of paperwork. If Members attend our session, they will see that we are considered to be a diligent paper mill that produces hundreds upon hundreds of pages. Therefore we can learn from the BIIPB how to be more efficient. We wish to see representatives from the Body at our session in November and hope that they will participate in our discussions.

We will have a round-table discussion on how to develop co-operation among Parliaments in northern Europe, bearing in mind our differing parliamentary practices. There

will also be plenary sessions, and we look forward to contributions from representatives of this Body. We also look forward to the visit from Committee B next week to study defence problems, and I am happy to host that event. There will be a conference in Oslo on energy problems in April, and I hope that the Body will be represented.

I thank colleagues for their openness, and I look forward to future discussions. There might be times when we will have differing opinions, but that is the purpose of discussion.

3.15 pm

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD):

Before I move to item 4, Amendment to Rules, I have a note from Mike Clark for all members of Committee B. The Committee will meet at 5.30 this evening in the Penhow Room on the second floor, and the meeting that was scheduled for tomorrow morning has been cancelled.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): We will not take that as a threat to the Steering Committee.

AMENDMENT TO RULES

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD):

I beg to move:

That the Amendment to the Rules (Questions Allocation) {Doc No 100} be made with immediate effect.

The purpose of the proposed change is to enable participating institutions to have an equal opportunity to receive oral answers from the Minister.

Under the present arrangements, questions submitted for oral answer at each plenary alternate between those submitted by Members of the Oireachtas, by Members of Westminster and collectively by Members of the devolved Assemblies.

The proposed change to rule 19 will have the effect that questions will alternate between those submitted by Members of the Oireachtas, by Members of Parliament, by Members of the Scottish Parliament, by Members of the National Assembly for Wales, by Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly and, collectively, by Members of the High Court of Tynwald, the States of Guernsey and the States of Jersey.

The purpose of the proposed change is to enable all participating institutions to have an equal opportunity to receive oral answers from the Minister or the Secretary of State.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Amendment to the Rules (Questions Allocation) {Doc No 100} be made with immediate effect.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD):

The session will now be suspended until 4.00 pm to allow a group photograph to be taken outside.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Forgive me, but I did not get an opportunity to say that I am sure the Body will agree that in the context of the opening remarks by the Co-Chairman David Winnick about the appointment of Dermot Ahern TD as Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, it should also consider sending congratulations and good wishes to former Members who have been promoted to positions in the Irish Government. They are Conor Lenihan TD, Tony Killeen TD and Brendan Smith TD. The Body should also extend its congratulations to Mr Alex Salmond, who is still an Associate Member, but who has — as Members will be aware — attended on many occasions. He has been elected leader of the Scottish National Party.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD): Is that a formal proposal?

Senator Paschal Mooney: Yes.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD): Do Members agree that the Body should send its con-

gratulations to former Members, Conor Lenihan TD, Tony Killeen TD and Brendan Smith TD, and to Associate Member, Alex Salmond?

Members indicated assent.

The sitting was suspended at 3.19 pm.

The sitting was resumed at 4.00 pm.

**ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY OF
STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND,
MR PAUL MURPHY MP**

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP):

We are delighted that Paul has come to address us today.

We debated the situation in the usual way this morning, and we are now looking forward to his speech, after which there will be an opportunity for questions. Some 22 have been tabled, and there are also supplementary questions, so we wish to make progress.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Paul Murphy MP): David, friends, it is good to be with you here in the St Pierre Hotel in Monmouthshire — not just the new county of Monmouthshire but the old county, of which I am very proud to have been a citizen since I was born all those years ago. I was born about a mile from Cwrt Bleddyn, which is where we are going this evening, and I hope that we will have a very pleasant time together. More interestingly, I am glad to be here on a Monday. It is very rare during term time that I can sleep in my own bed on a Monday evening. I will be doing that this evening, but when depends on how long we talk tonight.

In the nineteenth century, the place you are in was a great recipient of Irish immigrants, who came to this part of south Wales to work in the iron industry originally, as my great grandparents did — they came from County Cork and County Waterford. The immigrants later worked in the coal industry and also in the Cardiff docks. Therefore there was a very strong Irish influence in large parts of south Wales, including Myrthyr Tydvil, Cardiff and of course Newport and the valleys.

Interestingly too, only three miles from here lay the great Romano-British city of *Caer Went Venta Silurum*, and it is my firm belief as an historian and a Welshman with an Irish background that that was indeed the birthplace of Saint Patrick. When those Irish pirates came across in the Dark Ages they came up the Bristol Channel and took Saint Patrick from *Caer Went Venta Silurum*, and you know the story after that. We are in competition with parts of England, but do not believe a word of it — he was a Welshman who became an Irishman.

It is two years, almost to the day, since my predecessor, John Reid, suspended the Northern Ireland Assembly with great reluctance. That is not an anniversary that a democrat, still less a parliamentarian — and, after all, we are here today because we are parliamentarians — can mark with anything but regret and the deepest frustration. For those of us — and there are a number in this room — who

took part in the negotiations that led to the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the disappointment has been intense. Watching from the perspective of my other role as a Welsh Member of Parliament, which is interesting because devolution is flourishing not far from here, events in Belfast have been particularly sad. Within days of that suspension I became the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, which came as a bit of a shock to me. I began grappling with those problems at close quarters in just the same way as I had done three or four years earlier during the talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement.

The two years since suspension have brought significant changes to the political landscape of Northern Ireland. The election, which took place almost a year ago, and the time that has passed since I last addressed a meeting of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, have seen the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP — parties that played such critical roles in brokering the Good Friday Agreement — displaced as the leading voices of their respective communities. They still have an enormously important role to play — as do all the parties — but I can understand why that displacement was a bitter blow for them, and I understand their feelings of frustration. They might think that reasonableness damaged rather than enhanced their fortunes, and they are right in their belief that, without them, the Good Friday Agreement would not have been reached.

The smaller parties also suffered, although the Alliance Party and the PUP continue to play constructive roles beyond the numbers of Members that they have in the Assembly, and we miss the good sense and the refreshing perspective of the Women's Coalition. However, no one here needs to be reminded of the primacy of the electorate.

That is what politics, and democracy, are all about. All four major parties received clear mandates. The task of the British and Irish Governments in the past 11 months has been to respect and respond to those mandates while pursuing the vision of the Good Friday Agreement.

I wish to speak about the progress that has been made in recent months, much of it, incidentally, away from the glare of publicity. Before I do so, it is important to remind ourselves of the goal to which the two Governments' current efforts are directed. In so doing, I wish to pay particular tribute to my colleagues in the Irish Government. I consider myself fortunate to have Bertie Ahern, Brian Cowen and Dermot Ahern as friends as well as colleagues. More importantly, they are friends of the peace process, which will bring lasting peace to Northern Ireland.

We share a common and immediate goal. We want to see Northern Ireland's political representatives making the decisions that affect their constituents. The Body highlights the urgency of that task. Among the questions that have been tabled are sensible enquiries about local issues that concern thousands of people in Northern Ireland: free travel for pensioners on public transport;

improvements to the energy infrastructure; and the value of European structural funds after 2006. What is less sensible is that I — Member of Parliament for the south Wales constituency of Torfaen — should answer them. It makes no sense at all that a Welsh Member of Parliament and his ministerial colleagues, who are all from England, should answer questions about matters that affect the day-to-day lives of men, women and children in Northern Ireland.

At the beginning of a new century, with devolution entrenched in Wales and Scotland, and in prospect across the English regions, direct rule is simply not an acceptable solution. My Ministers and I cannot go on second-guessing the people of Northern Ireland on fundamental decisions such as the education of their children, investment in public services, new infrastructure, economic investment and the future of local government. It is becoming increasingly difficult for direct rule Ministers to work out how we should try to follow the programme for government that a new Executive would have established. Someone must govern Northern Ireland while we deal with those issues. However, direct rule is by far the second-, third- or fourth-best solution to what is best of all — people from Northern Ireland being locally accountable, being locally elected and taking decisions for people in Northern Ireland.

The institutions reflecting relationships between North and South, and east and west, cannot continue simply to tread water, as they do at present. The entire public sector in Northern Ireland requires reform through the review of public administration. Northern Ireland's home-grown politicians should be shaping those decisions: not to do so would be to fail this generation and the next.

Some argue that direct rule is a comfortable option. I expect that that is exaggerated. The truth is that Northern Ireland is forging ahead economically, socially and culturally. Although it is not waiting on devolution, I repeat that there is no question that it needs locally accountable politicians to guide that development, to capitalise on progress and to plan for the way ahead.

The signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 has ensured that those politicians will inherit a uniquely dynamic situation.

The unemployment figures for Northern Ireland were published last Wednesday: there is 4.7 % unemployment in Northern Ireland. That is a staggering figure compared to what it was for so many years. It is the lowest level ever recorded and is equal to the United Kingdom average. Unemployment has been falling since 1997, since the start of devolution and the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. In fact, since the signing of the agreement, employment in Northern Ireland has grown at double the rate of the rest of the United Kingdom. Those jobs are the product of peace and devolution.

So too is the growth in Northern Ireland's exports, which are up by a third since 1997. As a regional nation, Northern Ireland still outstrips the rest of the United Kingdom, and its manufacturing output is 25 % higher.

Whether we consider those figures or survey the construction that is shaping the great Belfast city skyline with new, landmark buildings, it is clear that compared to the past, Northern Ireland is booming. That others have noticed that perhaps accounts for the extraordinary increase in tourism in Northern Ireland. From the 1970s to the early 1990s just under 400,000 people visited Northern Ireland annually. Last year over two million people crossed the Atlantic or the Irish Sea, making Belfast the fourth most visited city in the United Kingdom. More people now visit Northern Ireland than live there. That remarkable statistic is because of what has happened over the past number of years. Last week, for example, the new direct flight between Belfast and New York was the seventh new international service announced this year. The world is beginning to know Northern Ireland not for its troubled past but for its beauty and energetic development. We have come far too far to risk all that. The people of Northern Ireland would not forgive the Governments and the parties if we jeopardised that progress.

For the past two days, I have been out and about in Northern Ireland meeting people at various religious services or events. I covered most of the waterfront, meeting Catholics, Presbyterians and Anglicans: I must meet the Methodists and the Baptists the next time I am in Northern Ireland. Interestingly, at all those events Protestants and Catholics worshipped and socialised together in a way that would never have been seen perhaps a decade ago. However, more interestingly in some ways, together they came to tell me that the progress in Northern Ireland is not because of what we as politicians do, although we have an important role, but that it stems from other groups. People are working together in all sorts of ways and are becoming a little impatient with us as politicians because they are making progress among themselves. My job requires me to spend an awful lot of time in offices, meeting rooms and conferences. Sometimes, therefore, it is good to get out and talk to people who are living very different everyday lives than they did in the past. Those people can tell us how they see things are progressing. However, if we are to protect those gains, devolution must go forward, and that means re-establishing trust. Trust is the issue, and it has been eroded over the past two years.

In a groundbreaking speech in Belfast on this very day two years ago, the Prime Minister described the root cause of that erosion of trust. While recognising the huge strides that Republicanism has made, he concluded that the continuing existence of the IRA had become not only an obstacle to Unionist participation in power-sharing institutions but that it also represented a break in the Republican movement's progress along the political

path to its own political success. He suggested that we had reached a fundamental turning point and that without acts of completion, whereby Republicanism made the final transition from violence to democratic politics, there could be little progress.

Two years on, I believe that that choice is on the point of being made. All of us who were at Leeds Castle in Kent — which, until some time ago, I thought was in Leeds — came away with two very clear impressions: first, that the leadership of Republicanism was sincere in its desire to address the IRA's paramilitary activity and the decommissioning of its weapons once and for all; and secondly, that the leadership of the Democratic Unionist Party was committed to operating the political power-sharing institutions in good faith if those acts of completion took place.

Members will understand if I do not go into any detail about recent discussions. However, I hope that they will agree that the attitudes that I have just outlined ought to be a basis for profound optimism. Of course, there is some way to go. Deep scepticism remains among Unionists that the IRA will cease activity and decommission its weapons fully and in a way that a layman can understand. There is equal scepticism among Republicans and Nationalists that the DUP will operate the political institutions, including the North/South elements, in a genuinely collective and corporate manner.

Anyone who understands Northern Ireland — and everyone here does — knows that trust will not be established overnight. It will grow; slowly sometimes painfully, but I believe that in the next two weeks both sides have the opportunity to take dramatic, decisive and unequivocal steps forward that will form the basis of a new relationship.

In building that relationship, I hope that we will be able to address the Loyalist organisations. Inevitably the focus has rested on Republican paramilitary groups because of Sinn Féin's participation in Government, but a settlement that ignores Loyalism will not benefit the community in Northern Ireland. If paramilitary organisations are serious about the political path and the end of violence, we will take them very seriously indeed and will encourage that process at every opportunity.

Paramilitary organisations, from whatever quarter, must realise that the people of Northern Ireland will not tolerate paramilitary crimes being treated differently from what is sometimes termed "ordinary" crime, because there is no difference. When people in the North and South of Ireland voted overwhelmingly in the referendum they voted for such treatment of crime. They also voted for decommissioning, the end of violence, and all of the other things for which the Good Friday Agreement stood. That is important and is enshrined in what the people themselves decided to do when they voted in 1998.

The two Governments will continue to play their parts in that process, but, in truth, we cannot force the establishment of trust. We cannot compel people to work together: we cannot force them into a Government, Executive, or Administration if they do not want to do it. That, like the government of Northern Ireland, can be achieved only by the political parties themselves.

Like all Members, I look forward to the day when bodies such as the BIIPB will include representatives of every party in the Northern Ireland Assembly. I hope to witness energetic and lively debates about the key issues that affect the lives of their constituents and of people across these islands. That fundamental political change is within our grasp. The finishing line is in sight. This is an unusual race, and unless everyone wins, there are no winners at all.

4.15 pm

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Thank you, Paul, for that inspiring and optimistic speech.

Oral Answers to Questions

Sellafield

1. **Mr Séamus Pattison TD:** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether, having regard to the safety issues involved, steps will be taken to accelerate the rate of vitrification of the highly active liquid waste that is stored at the Sellafield plant to reduce the amount of waste stored in advance of the 2015 deadline that the UK Health and Safety Nuclear Installations Inspectorate set.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Paul Murphy MP): It is a mixed bunch of questions. Some are extremely interesting, and I will spend longer on some than on others. If Members will forgive me, I shall read the answer to this question, as it is a technical question on an important issue.

British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) has developed a strategy aimed at meeting Health and Safety Executive requirements of highly active liquor stock reductions. Earlier this year, the Health and Safety Executive consented to operate for a third vitrification line, marking the end of the commissioning process for that line.

To date this year, the vitrification plants have produced 230 containers, with the plant showing an improvement over previous years' performance. BNFL is confident that improvements will be sustained and hopes to achieve further reduction of the highly active liquor by increasing the rate of vitrification.

Although throughput performance has, in the past, been below expected levels due to technical problems with the vitrification waste plant, the addition of the third vitrification line has brought additional capacity.

I hope that Members understand that; it sounds reasonable to me.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP) As long as you understand it, Paul.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I have never been very good at science.

Mr Séamus Pattison TD: The deadline is 2015. Does the Secretary of State expect the process to be completed before that deadline?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The Health and Safety Executive will, if necessary, use its regulatory powers to require BNFL to reduce buffer stocks by 2015. I cannot state whether the process will be completed earlier than that; if possible, it will be. The date that I have been given by our experts is 2015.

Police Service of Northern Ireland

2. **Mr Jeff Ennis MP** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made by the

Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) in becoming more representative of the local communities.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The Patten Report envisaged a police service that is representative of and supported by the community that it serves. In order to reach that goal, the Independent Commission recommended fifty-fifty recruitment as an exceptional increase to try to provide a more representative police service in a reasonable time.

In 1998, when Patten conducted his investigation, only 8.3% of regular officers were from the Roman Catholic community. Today, that figure stands at just under 16%, with 1,522 recruits having been selected for appointment on a fifty-fifty basis. Almost 36% of applications have been received from Catholics, and 36% from females.

The goal is to increase Catholic representation to 30% before 2010–11. We are on target to reach that goal.

Mr Jeff Ennis MP: I thank the Secretary of State for his reply. There is no doubt that progress is being made.

I was privileged to meet the Chief Constable a few months ago with several of my parliamentary Labour Party colleagues. He endorsed the Secretary of State's point that more recruits are being brought in from the Catholic community. However, most recruits are coming from the middle classes rather than the working classes of both communities. Will the Secretary of State inform the Body what initiatives are being taken to recruit more officers from the working class in Northern Ireland? Progress must be made on that.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I agree; there should be as wide a catchment as possible to deal with those issues. Greater recruitment from working-class areas could come about if Sinn Féin joined the Policing Board and recruitment was encouraged in Republican areas. Appointments from working-class areas would then increase.

We need more women PSNI members. The low appointment figure is a common phenomenon throughout Europe. The PSNI is doing its best to get into areas in which, traditionally, people have not joined the police force.

Ultimately, we must consider the big picture. When I returned to Northern Ireland two years ago, having been away for three years, the change that had occurred in the police service was staggering. The biggest change for me was what had happened in the police.

The recruitment of young men and women from the Catholic and Protestant communities is an enormously important development. Incidentally, some of those recruits, particularly Catholics, have been subject to quite appalling intimidation, which is completely unforgivable. I take my hat off to those who carry on when they have been intimidated, not only members of the police force but members of the district policing partnerships.

British-Irish Council

3. **Dr John Marek AM** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will update the Body on the work of the British-Irish Council.

6. **Mr David Melding AM** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the forward work plan of the British-Irish Council.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: With permission, I will take questions 3 and 6 together, in the House of Commons way, because they are more or less the same.

The British-Irish Council is currently working on eight areas: misuse of drugs; the environment; indigenous, minority and lesser-used languages; the knowledge economy; social inclusion; telemedicine; tourism; and transport. That is just an outline of the Council's work; it does much more than that. Details of the work being undertaken can be found on the Council's web site and in its report published in July 2004, and that is also available on the web site. The British-Irish Council will consider its forward work plan at the forthcoming summit meeting, which will be held in Guernsey. The latest information will be given in the communiqué issued afterwards. The Council has eight members. Individual members take the lead in sectoral areas, including forward work planning. That is where we are at the moment.

Dr John Marek AM: As part of the British-Irish Council's continuing programme of work, will Mr Murphy give it positive encouragement to strengthen its links with the Body?

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): And so say all of us.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Yes is the answer to that. Essentially, the British-Irish Council is a body that is made up of Governments and Administrations, not Parliaments. David and I have been corresponding on Mr Melding's behalf on this issue for some time. The importance of the Body, as part of the Good Friday Agreement, cannot be underestimated. Strand three of the agreement — which I used to chair with Liz O'Donnell — was very important for all issues that are covered, one of which was the importance of having parliamentary links for these islands. This is the only body that covers those parliamentary links. The talks at Stormont some weeks ago dealt with the strengthening of the North/South parliamentary body and east-west links, including a desire on the part of all the parties that the secretariat of the British-Irish Council be strengthened.

The relationship between a parliamentary body and a Government body must be considered in the context of the restoration of the institutions. The BIIPB is important; Members of the Body play an important part, but they also need to complement the work of the Governments.

We will need to deal seriously with interrelationships over the next number of weeks.

Mr David Melding AM: Can the future of EU structural funds profitably be examined? Given the Commission's proposals, it seems likely that there are areas of common concern.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Both Governments have roles to play to ensure that we get the best possible deal. A later question deals specifically with structural funding. Here in Wales, we have to deal with Objective 1 funding, for example, and we can compare notes with other parts of the United Kingdom, Ireland and elsewhere — places that have had longer experience of structural funds. Nothing but good can come from comparing best practice, particularly in the administration of structural funds. It is one thing to obtain structural funds but quite another to administer and spend that money. There are lessons to be learned, and it will be a useful addition to that agenda. However, some Administrations that are part of the British-Irish Council are not members of the European Union.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): The Secretary of State and I have corresponded on the issue of recognition of the Body. Noting what he has said, I hope that further consideration will be given because there is no parliamentary accountability whatsoever.

The Steering Committee, on behalf of the Body, gets the impression, that the British-Irish Council is pursuing policies as though we did not exist. I recognise some of the problems that have just been outlined, but I hope that that can be taken on board both by Irish colleagues and on the British side.

4.30 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Yes, we are strongly of the view that this Body plays an important role, albeit with an obvious gap at the moment, namely, the absence of Northern Ireland's Unionist parties. I hope that any future settlement in Northern Ireland that addresses all three strands of the agreement — particularly strand three — will include Unionist recognition of these bodies. The Body would then indeed be completely representative, which at the moment it is not because the Unionist parties have chosen not to take part. It would be much fuller with the Unionist parties, and that is on my mind.

The Ulster Canal

4. **Mr Seymour Crawford TD** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made towards the reopening of the Ulster Canal; whether it is his assessment that this project is truly cross-border; what assessment he has made of the tourism and economic benefits that it would bring to the border counties Cavan, Monaghan, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Armagh; and whether he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Waterways Ireland completed an updated feasibility study and economic appraisal on the possible reopening of the Ulster canal. At the moment those studies are with the two Governments, and no decision has yet been taken. The canal covers a 45-mile route that is shared almost fifty-fifty between the two jurisdictions. The project would be truly cross-border, as would the cost. The economic appraisal indicates that it is not viable in purely monetary terms, but I recognise that restoration would bring wider economic and social benefits to the border region.

I am also aware that the Blackwater regional partnership has recently secured funding from INTERREG to undertake a socio-economic study to quantify those wider benefits. I am conscious of the issue; the reports are with us, and we are looking at them at the moment.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD: Thank you, Secretary of State. I reiterate that that is one of the few truly cross-border projects that can be seen to be supported by all parties, both North and South of the border. Will the Secretary of State explain why his own Department of Finance and Personnel officials were so negative towards a recent INTERREG request, which, I understand, was turned down, but has been reassessed? INTERREG and other cross-border funding is surely essential.

The aim of that project was to complete a portion of the canal from Lough Erne to Clones, which would have cost about €25 million. The INTERREG request was for just €4.5 million. Private individuals were prepared to give £1 million sterling.

Can the Secretary of State assure us that, when the appeal goes in, the civil servants who are involved will at least be positive towards it? It is one of the few projects that can truly be said to be cross-border and cross-community.

Secondly, in his statement, the Secretary of State emphasised the importance of the tourist industry and said that Belfast was the single most important tourist destination. If we are really sincere about the border regions, surely we must create activities that will attract tourism to Fermanagh, Tyrone, Cavan, Monaghan and that whole area. I thank the Secretary of State for his interest, but it needs an enormous push at present.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: No one disagrees in principle with the concept that any development along those lines in that part of Ireland should be supported. Everyone accepts the tourist and economic potential of the border areas. I was down in Fermanagh, on the lake, not so very long ago, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself. I can see why it is such an attractive area.

I take the point about the civil servants. I can tell you, they would not have done that when I was Minister of State in charge of finance in Northern Ireland. I shall

have a word with one of my colleagues and see what has happened on that.

I suspect that finance ministries the world over are rather similar, and I expect that my Irish colleagues have a similar tale to tell. Now that Brian Cowen has gone to the Department of Finance, I will have a word with him when next I see him and see whether he can donate a few euros.

Ultimately, the decision on full development will be a financial one, and will depend upon where it lies among other priorities. Work must be done to continue looking at the potential of tourism, and it must not be forgotten. If we can attract private money to encourage tourism, all the better — perhaps that is the best way ahead. The two Governments are examining the reports, and they are well aware of the tourist potential that waterways have in Ireland as a whole.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I wish to support my colleague Seymour Crawford and to remind the Secretary of State that those of us from the border counties have been down this road before. One of his distinguished predecessors Peter Brooke, who is a member of our Body, will have a strong memory of the debate on the development of what was known as the Ballyconnell-Ballinamore canal, now known worldwide as the Shannon-Erne canal. That is like a jigsaw along the border, and the Ulster canal is the final piece.

I take the point about financial constraints. However, if my memory serves me right, that was also the argument that was used at the time prior to that canal's development. It required, and indeed received, a very powerful push from the then Taoiseach, Charles Haughey, who decided not to take the advice of his civil servants. That development was also led on the Southern side by the then head of the Anglo-Irish section, and current Secretary-General of the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin, Dermot Gallagher, who comes from that region — from my own county, in fact.

All of those parties, with Peter Brooke, decided that if the financial nature of the project had not been rational, they would not have proceeded. However, they did proceed, and the Secretary of State, having been to Fermanagh, will be familiar with the tremendous benefits and advantages that the Shannon-Erne canal has brought to what was an entirely depressed region stretching across several counties on both sides of the border.

I say all of that to add backbone to the view that the Secretary of State obviously holds, which is that this issue is important. In fact, I suggest that it is essential in the context of conflict resolution along the border.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I take the Member's point. In fact, in a way, I am a border county man myself — we are in a border county between Wales and England. I will have a word with Peter Brooke to

see whether he has any tricks up his sleeve and to see how we can address this issue. He too is a border man in many ways. His grandfather, if I recall, lived in Llanwern, just up the road.

The Lord Brooke: My grandfather retired to Llanwern, but he was in fact the vicar of Caerwent, to which you made a reference earlier in the proceedings.

A Member: The Member is related to Saint Patrick.

The Lord Brooke: I must declare that I have a retrospective interest in the Ballyconnell canal. My family lived in County Cavan for 150 years.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Beat that one.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That I cannot do. County Cork is a long way from there.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Could we transplant the Secretary of State's family to the border counties?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: This is exactly the sort of decision that a Northern Ireland Assembly Executive should take. While I very much understand the importance of the issue to tourism and to the border counties, whatever decision I take, people will say that a Welshman is making it. We always have to prioritise; if we have this, we do not have something else.

We must ensure that everyone understands the importance of the issue to border counties and to the general business of tourism. The matter cannot simply be wished away. Obviously, it is an issue that Governments must consider with regard to resources. Members have heard what I have said. Development in that area, particularly that on the water, is an important issue. I will see what the officials have to say to me. Peter and I can have a chat afterwards, and I will see what he thinks.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD: I thank the Secretary of State for being so positive, but an inland waterways group will spearhead this matter. However, that group is considered unsuitable at EU level for that type of project, and I find that very difficult to understand. I urge the Secretary of State to ensure that every possible aspect of the matter is considered in a structured way.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: My officials have noted the detailed points that the Member has made, and I shall go back and talk to people in the relevant Departments.

[A copy of a letter from Ms Angela Smith MP, Minister with responsibility for Culture, Arts and Leisure, is appended – see page 63].

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): You got quite a bit out of that, Mr Crawford.

Integrated education in Northern Ireland

5. **Mr Harry Barnes MP** asked the Secretary of State whether he will make a statement on the role of integrated education in Northern Ireland in reducing segregation and improving community relations.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: At present just over 5% of pupils in Northern Ireland attend integrated schools, be they grant-maintained or transformed. With the exception of Hazelwood College and Hazelwood Integrated Primary School in north Belfast, all of the existing schools are located in mixed communities. In such circumstances the impact of the integrated sector will be more limited.

Mr Harry Barnes MP: Children who are from either a 90% Protestant or 90% Catholic background attend most schools, and that has great costs in economic and social terms. Given that the need for integrated education is part of the Good Friday Agreement, will the Government take a more proactive role in their funding strategy so that the integrated education sector can meet parents' increasing needs? Seven hundred children were unable to attend an integrated school although their parents were keen for them to do so. Would it not be beneficial if the programme for integrated education were to be initiated more fully in the two teacher training colleges in Northern Ireland?

4.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: In the latter case, it is a matter for the colleges to come to some agreement on the issue. The Good Friday Agreement recommended integrated education, and I encourage it myself. However, parents cannot be compelled to send their children to integrated schools, if they choose so not to do. In 2004 — 05, 298 parents nominated an integrated school as the first choice for their child, but those children did not obtain a place — 55 in primary and 243 in secondary. Of those 298 children who failed to obtain their first preference for placement at an integrated school, 208 had applied to four schools, which had reached their physical capacity. As with all popular schools, regardless of type, it is not possible to provide places for all the children who wish to attend. We certainly should encourage the integrated school movement; Mo Mowlam, one of my predecessors, was in Northern Ireland the week before last doing just that.

At the same time, however, we must ensure that pupils in state — mainly Protestant — schools and pupils in Catholic schools understand what the other's tradition is about, and it is important that the curriculum helps them to do that. There could also be more joint activities between schools.

Further education in Northern Ireland is a good example of Protestants and Catholics joining together — religion is not an issue. However, one must tread warily because

ultimately education is a question of parental choice. We want to do our best to provide that choice and opportunity for parents who want their children to attend integrated schools. I pay tribute to the teachers and others in those schools for the work that they have done.

Sir Brian Mawhinney MP: I must declare an interest, as I was the Minister who put integrated education on the statute book.

I doubt that anybody would argue that, of anything that has occurred in Northern Ireland in the past 15 years, the community has come together most effectively for integrated schools. The community has driven integrated education, not the politicians.

On talking to the people who are responsible for the organisations that promote and set up integrated schools, one sees that they are pleased that the Government are now funding more than 50 integrated schools — I made sure that the Government had to fund them — but they all complain about the Government's lack of enthusiasm for the integrated sector.

The Secretary of State's answer, if I may say so, was exactly the sort of nonsense that I used to have written for me and that I ignored. I would like him to ignore what is written for him because, in respect of fundamental change in cross-community relations in the future of Northern Ireland, politicians will get more credit for supporting parents who wish their children to be educated in schools that give equal weight to both traditions than they will for probably any other thing. Would it be possible for the Government to sound just a little bit more enthusiastic about integrated schools and to do something in line with that enthusiasm?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I am sorry that my answer sounded like nonsense: I cannot help my tone. However, youngsters can be brought up together, thus obviously providing enormous benefits to people from both traditions in understanding each other, particularly because — and people sometimes do not realise this — they can follow their own religious beliefs within the school structure of the integrated system, and that is important.

However, that is not the only way in which we can ensure that progress is made. That is why I repeat that, in the state sector and the Catholic sector, a great deal of work must be done in the 90% of schools that Harry Barnes talked about to understand each other and to share teaching, classes and experiences — not only on the sporting field, but academically and educationally. If only 5% of pupils are in integrated education, 95% are not, and we must do something about that.

The Lord Dubs: What the Secretary of State has just said is welcome news to those of us who agree with what Brian Mawhinney said about the importance of integrated education. Is it not a fact that, when asked,

the vast majority of parents in Northern Ireland said that they would choose an integrated school for their children if one were available, and that every integrated school in Northern Ireland is a success story, which cannot be said of other schools? Is it not also a fact that, although segregated schools can teach children what life is like in the other community, nothing beats sitting together in the same classroom for enabling children to understand each other and for preventing the other community being demonised? Does the Secretary of State therefore accept that, although of course there are other priorities — and perhaps a Northern Ireland Minister could be dealing with this in a few weeks — it is easier for politicians to sign up to more integrated schools if there is public pressure? The Secretary of State could take the lead in creating that public pressure.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The survey that was quoted in Harry's early day motion in the House the other day showed, I think, that roughly 52% of people questioned said that they did not send their children to an integrated school because there was not one in the area. Undoubtedly, the integrated school movement would argue that if there were more integrated schools, more people would go to them. There are 55 at the moment, 19 of which are secondary schools. That is a good start, but it is nothing like the numbers of the other schools — the Catholic schools and the state schools. However, people will learn by example. If people know what is happening in integrated schools, and they like what is happening, the sector will continue to grow. I am certainly in favour of that. Therefore I accept the general points that Lord Dubs, Brian Mawhinney and Harry Barnes made about what people can learn in that system.

Sometimes it is too easy to say that segregated schools have caused all of Northern Ireland's troubles. People say to me that Northern Ireland has had 30 years of trouble because children go to segregated schools. Those schools may well have been a factor, but they are not the only one. It may have been a factor in people's lack of understanding. As we all know, if one lives in Northern Ireland, from the cradle to the grave one might never set eyes on somebody from the other tradition or talk to them, not only in school, but in work, the pub, church or the leisure centre. That is because of the polarisation of society — certainly in Belfast, but elsewhere as well. How we overcome that is the key.

School certainly is an important factor. I was a teacher for 17 years so I know, and everybody else knows, that the way to deal with intolerance is to tackle it when children are young, and sometimes very young, because often they are not intolerant of each other at that age. It is only when they get older that that happens. Therefore an integrated school system that tries — wisely — to overcome that intolerance is to be welcomed by everyone in Government and elsewhere.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: Go raibh maith agat. As Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Arts, Sport, Tourism, Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs in the Houses of the Oireachtas, I ask the Secretary of State whether he agrees that, in reducing segregation and improving community relations — as is part of the question — the arts have a natural role to play? Quite an investment in the arts has been made in schools in Northern Ireland compared with in the Republic. Do schools work together, perhaps even on a cross-border basis, to exploit what is a natural opportunity, and thus deal with personal development issues, as well as with cultural, religious and other differences in pupils' social backgrounds?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Education has a huge role to play at every level, whether that be in primary schools or universities. Our enjoyment of artistic endeavours and culture in its widest form can sometimes have the opposite effect to that intended. However, the work of agencies and Departments in Northern Ireland, particularly at grass-roots level, is very encouraging. We want to see community relations become enriched, as they should be, in every aspect of education, including culture and the arts.

Mr Andrew Mackay MP: It is reasonable for the Secretary of State to say that many forms of polarisation have bedevilled life in Northern Ireland, but surely integrated schools is the one issue that he, and all of us, can deal with the most quickly. It is a matter of some regret that 298 children have been unable to go to the integrated schools of their choice, but all in the Body who so passionately support integrated schools would like to think that the Secretary of State is doing more to ensure that every child could attend an integrated school. I leave him with the thought that if that is now the number that have failed to get in, will other more timid parents not even apply if they think that the path is stony and difficult?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That figure of 298 spreads across Northern Ireland: I repeat that 208 of those 298 pupils had applied to four of the 55 integrated schools, and those four schools were already oversubscribed. Therefore the problem is that a small number of integrated schools are oversubscribed as opposed to there being an overall problem in obtaining an integrated education. The general point is that there would be merit in doing more to extend the system and in giving all parents the opportunity to send their child to an integrated school. However, the other point that I was trying to make, and I am not sure whether it came across, is that — although it is important to encourage integrated education — with 95% of children not going to integrated schools, it is also important to the Government, and, it is to be hoped, to the Assembly Executive, that much be done to ensure that tolerance is taught as a tradition in Catholic and state schools. Were that not to happen, that would also worry me: someone brought up in a one-sided

tradition from the cradle to the grave has no contact with the other tradition. In fact, it is at school level that that is seen.

As I have already said, integration is not an issue at further-education level in Northern Ireland — that is integrated education. I shall certainly convey the Body's message to Minister of Education Barry Gardiner about the importance that it places on the work of integrated schools in Northern Ireland and about how important it is — above all else — for every child, Catholic or Protestant, to be taught to understand that intolerance is no longer tolerable.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Barry Gardiner may want to send a note for the Steering Committee to consider.

[A copy of a letter from Mr Barry Gardiner MP, Minister with responsibility for Education, is appended — see page 62].

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: That is a good idea.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): You will presumably take questions 7 and 8 together. If you work on the basis that you have already given the answer, I can proceed straight to the supplementary question.

Northern Ireland peace process

7. **Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD** asked the Secretary of State whether he will give an up-to-date report on political developments in Northern Ireland.

8. **Mr Michael Mates MP** asked the Secretary of State whether he will make a statement on the peace process.

Mr Jim O'Keeffe TD: I am truly encouraged by the Secretary of State's report on the peace process. I really hope that his profound optimism is justified. He can take a combined message from the Body that it wishes him every success in completing the negotiations in the coming weeks.

The Joint Declaration made by the British and Irish Governments in April 2003 stated that all:

“Ongoing paramilitary activity, sectarian violence, and criminality masquerading as a political cause”

had to end. What is the current situation with regard to punishment beatings, intimidation, sectarian violence, smuggling, drugs, prostitution and general criminal activity that is linked to paramilitaries?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I do not want to pre-empt what will be in the Independent Monitoring Commission's report in a couple of weeks' time. It is due to report every six months on precisely those issues. Members will be able to read its next report soon. There is, however, no question that Republican and Loyalist paramilitary groups are still linked to criminal

activities. That is regrettable. In many ways, it is a leftover from the past 30 years and is to the detriment of everybody in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force has done good work to try to counter such activities. As some Members will know, the Assets Recovery Agency recently recovered from Loyalists a large amount of money that had been gained from criminal activity. They cannot now pocket that money. Incidentally, we have been given a good example by the Irish equivalent of the agency. Although those activities continue, I hope that when the next report emerges, it will be seen that there has been a reduction in their number. We must wait and see.

During the past number of years, the number of “punishment beatings” — as they are euphemistically called — has not decreased. A year or two ago, the number increased. However, there has not been the same number of killings that there was in the past. That is to be applauded. The IRA is still on ceasefire. It is often said that a visit to Belfast today is a very different experience from what it would have been 10 years ago. However, that does not mean that organised crime in Northern Ireland should not be taken very seriously. People who are involved in such activities must be dealt with as criminals, as they would be in any other civilised state.

5.00 pm

Mr Michael Mates MP: Using the remarks that Mr Murphy made in his comprehensive speech that any settlement had to be spelt out in terms that a layman could understand, how would he define for a layman an “act of completion”, first, in what is said by the IRA and, secondly, in what is done by the IRA?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: “What is done” refers to decommissioning. That is an important part of any deal and carries the confidence of the community in Northern Ireland, so that people are aware that it has happened and are confident that the process will continue. It is part of the Good Friday Agreement and should have happened a long time ago. I have also mentioned the equally important issue of decommissioning and an end to Loyalist paramilitary activities. An end to paramilitary activity, as it is defined in the Joint Declaration, means an end to surveillance, to targeting, to procurement and to so-called punishment beatings, knee-cappings, and all the rest of it. All of those activities must stop.

The words must be such that people will be convinced that the war is over, that the militant sides of Republicanism and Loyalism are finished, that the way ahead is the political way, and that that is how it will be in the future. It is not about what convinces me, although that is part of it: it is about what convinces the parties and the people of Northern Ireland that they are on the right road. Members know as well as anyone that the world has changed dramatically in the 10 years since 1994.

However, it has not changed enough to give the people in Northern Ireland sufficient confidence to work together in Government.

There can be no political resolution in Northern Ireland until paramilitarism and decommissioning are resolved. The issues on which Michael Mates questioned me are not the only ones on the table, but they are hugely important. We are dealing with them, and I hope that they can be resolved in the weeks ahead.

Senator Brian Hayes: Some months ago, the Secretary of State began a process of consultation on how the victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland could establish a model not unlike the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. What are his conclusions from that consultation, and is he considering any such initiatives that would allow the victims of terrorism to confront the information at the state’s disposal and bring closure on those matters?

The Secretary of State has recently seen reports, as we all have, on the possibility that the SDLP and the UUP may decide not to participate in the new Government, if and when it is established. Will the Secretary of State give the Body his assessment of that?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The Prime Minister asked me to look at ways to deal with the past, and when I was in South Africa I saw many fascinating and meaningful developments. One cannot necessarily take what happened in South Africa and apply it to Northern Ireland as though it were a single, absolutely relevant, issue. We can, however, take on board some ideas from South Africa.

For example, people in South Africa found a great deal of merit in being able to tell their stories in all kinds of ways, whether on film, in a museum, in a book or whatever. Telling one’s story is very important to people in South Africa, as it is to people in Northern Ireland. Of course, Northern Ireland is much smaller and much more close-knit, with between 1.5 million people and 2 million people; there are 45 million people in South Africa. Though the size of the countries is different, the trauma nevertheless is equal.

As to what the Government will do, I have had a number of private consultative meetings, mainly with experts in the field. I plan to make those consultations public, probably after Christmas, so that people in Northern Ireland can make up their own minds as to the best way forward. It is a tricky and hugely sensitive issue, but we cannot run away from it. It involves the unsolved killings of hundreds of policemen, people who have disappeared or been exiled, victims — Catholic and Protestant, Nationalist and Unionist — who have died or been injured over the years. At the end of the day, people in Northern Ireland must decide themselves how best to deal with that, but we cannot run away from it because it is important.

The second question was whether the SDLP and the UUP would go into opposition. Obviously, it is a matter for those parties to decide to do what they think best. My view is that the agreement is best worked if all of those parties that are entitled to take seats in the Executive actually take them. That is what was engineered, and, during the run-up to that election, people voted for that. In the particular type of Executive operating in Northern Ireland, ministries are gained automatically through the d'Hondt system, based on the number of seats held in the Assembly. The resulting automaticity in that mandatory coalition is a very good solution to a difficult problem.

In the end, that is for those two parties to decide. I hope that any deal or necessary accommodation or solution will be so far-reaching that the UUP and the SDLP will be able to take their seats in a Northern Ireland Executive. Members of both parties performed well as Ministers before, and I hope that they will return, but it is for them to decide.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): I see that the IRA issued an apology last week about the murder of a boy of 14 or 15 years of age.

A Member: That is helpful.

Inter-island transport links

9. **Dr Dai Lloyd AM** asked the Secretary of State to make a statement on the prospects for improved inter-island transport links.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Air and sea ferry services in the United Kingdom are provided on a commercial basis, with operators free to choose where they operate to and from.

The Government do not intervene in that marketplace unless such services are the only means of transport for people seeking essential services, such as lifeline services from the Scottish Highlands and Islands to the mainland, where public support may be justified under a public service obligation. In Wales, such matters are the remit of the Welsh Assembly Government.

Dr Dai Lloyd AM: Diolch am yr ateb hwnnw.

As Mr Murphy said earlier, Belfast is an increasingly popular destination. Do central government have a role in facilitating improved links between the North of Ireland and Wales?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: There is a role for Government in encouraging and facilitating improved links, although not necessarily in providing them. I suspect that there is no need for that in this age of cheap air travel. I find that the routes between Wales and Northern Ireland, and especially the services to Belfast, are very different from what they were a few years ago. When I was Minister of State there was nowhere near the amount of traffic between both places as there

is now, and that is to be welcomed. I suspect that people use the Pembroke/Rosslare ferry and then travel on to Northern Ireland.

Both the international airport and the city airport in Belfast have important links with the rest of the country, and that is also welcome. A working group is looking at the future of the City of Derry Airport, as it covers Donegal and other parts of the Republic.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: I am sorry to come back to this, but I want to pick up on the Secretary of State's last point.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I thought that that might happen.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: I would be sacked if I did not.

The City of Derry Airport has been expanding its routes and recently announced a direct flight from Derry to Alicante. About 49% of the passengers using the Dublin to Derry flight are from Donegal; therefore it is as much a link into the north-west for us as it is for anybody else. Given that, a serious threat will be posed in the next few months, if not years, because the airlines operating the route must use bigger planes, and so they must have a bigger runway. I appreciate that a working group has been established, but sometimes when I hear "working group", I think of something that will keep going for ever and ever.

Is it proper to leave City of Derry Airport to its own devices? It could close just as quickly as expand, and an expansion would be a political decision. Similarly, the train links from Coleraine to Belfast seem OK, and yet, politically, a decision must be taken to ensure that west of Coleraine continues to exist. We can then get our trans-European routes into Wales and everywhere else — like the Skeoge Road from Donegal through Derry and into Belfast.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I am aware of the problems with the rail links and air travel to the north-west of Northern Ireland and to the north-west of Ireland generally, and that is why I decided to set up a working group. It is important that all the partners in economic and tourism development in the north-west of Ireland get together and present their cases to one another. That group has been pretty effective in its work so far. It has representatives from local authorities and from the British and Irish Governments, but representatives from local industry and commerce are also considering the matter. It is one of the issues that would best be dealt with by a local Administration rather than by me or by my Ministers.

However, we must accept that if there are bigger planes there must be a bigger runway, and we must find a way to deal with that. The welcome and telling argument is that the north-west is now developing in tourism and commerce generally, and the working relationship between

the two Governments for that part of the island of Ireland is very important indeed.

I support the local authorities on both sides of the border operating together, and also the two Governments operating together. I do not wish to comment on the working group's findings because it has still to reach a conclusion, which I hope will happen soon.

My Colleague John Spellar is studying the railway situation. The problem with all railways is that not enough people use them. It is a chicken-and-egg situation: everybody wants to use the railways but not enough people wish to do so to make them a viable proposition. The Belfast to Derry line goes through some of the most naturally beautiful areas in Ireland. It is something that we are examining until, I hope, eventually the Executive will decide one way or another.

5.15 pm

Asylum Seekers

10. **Senator Brendan Ryan** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the current procedures for dealing with asylum seekers who travel from the UK to Ireland; and what assessment he has made of these procedures as being reasonable and fair from a humanitarian viewpoint.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 — the “Dublin II” Regulation— establishes the criteria and mechanisms for determining the member state that is responsible for examining an asylum application that a third-country national has lodged in one of the member states. In other words, it provides an agreed framework to determine which member state is responsible for consideration of asylum claims made in the EU where applicants have travelled between states.

In accordance with article 3 of the protocol, the United Kingdom and Ireland gave notice of their wish to take part in the adoption and application of that Regulation. Consequently the provisions of the “Dublin II” Regulation, which entered into force on 1 September 2003, establish the procedures for dealing with asylum seekers who travel between the United Kingdom and Ireland. The “Dublin II” Regulation specifically includes provisions that deal with unaccompanied minors and the reunification of the nuclear family. An additional humanitarian clause allows member states to accept responsibility for cases either in order to bring together family members with other dependent relatives or for other humanitarian reasons. The two Governments work effectively together on that issue.

Senator Brendan Ryan: Is the Secretary of State happy that the way in which the two Governments work together is humane, or is it another manifestation of the

determination to keep asylum seekers out of our islands by every means available?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The two Governments work well together. There is a special relationship between these islands in the common travel area, which is unique in the European Union. It is important to recognise that and that we work together effectively because of that link. Whatever people's feelings about asylum seekers are — and there are different views — as far as Ireland and the United Kingdom are concerned, it makes no sense at all for the two Governments to work against each other.

Senator Brendan Ryan: Is the Secretary of State satisfied that the way in which the two Governments are working together is consistent with a reasonable level of humanity? Anecdotally, one hears stories that may be true, but we do not know how representative those stories are.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: As far as I know, the two Governments are working within a humanitarian framework, and they act properly together. It is also important to close legal loopholes and to prevent abuse of asylum procedures. The difficulty that we face, as natural liberal democracies, in dealing with people who are genuinely seeking asylum from persecution is that some people abuse the system. It is not in any country's interest to see that happen. That is why it is important that the two countries work together.

Dr Jerry Cowley TD: I want to put a human face on this issue. Olivia Nday Ishimiye is a Burundi Tutu. She arrived in Ireland on 28 November 2003 from the UK. She first sought asylum in the UK, where she had exhausted the asylum claims and appeals system, and from where she feared that she would be sent back to Burundi. She recounted the murders of her parents and her 10-year-old son, her own rape and imprisonment, and the disappearance of her husband. On 8 July 2004, Olivia was deported from Ireland back to the UK under the Dublin Regulation because her case was already being processed there. On 7 July 2004, in the dead of night, emigration officers took Olivia and her two children, aged five and seven. They were given one hour to pack their bags, were rushed off on a four-hour journey and then took a lonely flight with strangers to London.

The people of Kiltimagh, where she ended up, followed her all the way to London, and they have maintained a vigil since then to support her in her ordeal. A threat of deportation to Burundi is hanging over her, and she is scared stiff, despite the appalling circumstances that make up her case. Some asylum seekers, if they are in the rare position that we can document their case, might be OK, but who can do that?

The more difficult the case, the more appalling the case, the harder it is to prove the story; and that is Olivia's situation. Asylum seekers are always questioned, and good evidence is maybe not always taken into account.

Ireland is known as “Ireland of the welcomes”. Why should a system remain that treats people in this inhuman way?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: It would not be right for me to comment on an individual case, certainly not in another jurisdiction. The Member has raised a particular case, and that can be taken up through our officials with the relevant Departments. Clearly, if something is wrong, it is for those respective Departments and Governments to try to deal with. There are examples of people who abuse the asylum system; as there are many examples of people who do not and who generally use our two countries as a proper home base for fleeing from persecution. I cannot talk about an individual case of which I am not aware.

My general view is that the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland are traditionally liberal democracies, with a good record of dealing with people who flee persecution. We work together on this issue, as we do on many issues, but I cannot comment on an individual case.

Dr Jerry Cowley TD: I hope that that case can be looked at, Secretary of State. Thank you.

Mr Robert Walter MP: Has any assessment been made of differences in the criteria applied by the immigration authorities in the two jurisdictions on looking at asylum applications? If that has revealed significant differences, is that a cause for concern, and is any action being taken to redress it?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I cannot answer in detail, but the two Governments are presently discussing those bilateral arrangements. Clearly, the idea is that we would overcome such difficulties in those discussions. I am sure that my officials will take note of what the Member has said.

Senator Paschal Mooney: I was not going to intervene on this, but it might surprise some of our UK Members to know of the co-operation between the Irish and British authorities as a result of their historic and common travel area. For example, a UK immigration officer has been stationed at Dublin airport, where he has been assisting. That was not widely known until it was reported in the Irish media some weeks back. Is the Secretary of State aware of the concerns that originate from surveys that indicate that a large number of illegal immigrants, as distinct from asylum seekers, cross the border, having originated in Third World countries? They arrive in the UK on tourist visas and immediately dispatch themselves to Belfast, arriving by ferry and coming down through a rather porous border.

I raise that not to give any sense that I am overly critical. I am more concerned about the legitimate rights of those asylum seekers who, as the Secretary of State has pointed out, legitimately look for asylum in both jurisdictions as a result of fleeing persecution, as distinct from those who are, effectively, economic immigrants.

That opens up a wider issue, but my main point is to see whether the Secretary of State is aware of the concerns. Can he give any indication of whether steps are being taken to monitor the flow of illegal immigrants across the North/South border?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I am not aware of that, but I shall ensure that someone is. If it is an issue, we shall deal with it. I can imagine that in any international border within the European Union it is a possibility. We shall certainly look at it.

[A copy of a letter from Mr Des Browne MP, Minister of State for Citizenship, Immigration and Nationality, is appended - see page 65].

Leeds Castle Talks

11. **The Lord Dubs** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the outcome of the talks at Leeds Castle.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Colleagues, time is running out. Apparently, we must be out of the room by 5.30 pm. I shall obey that guidance.

The Lord Dubs: Given the Secretary of State’s full statement, and his answers to questions 7 and 8, may I withdraw my question?

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: Would question 21 not be the same as Lord Dubs’s question?

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Lord Dubs has withdrawn his question. In all fairness, if you want to make a comment, Joe, perhaps the Secretary of State will reply, or we will go immediately to Helen Eadie’s question, which is the last one.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: With respect, we have listened to questions, and speeches have been made. There has been little progress. What are the outstanding issues to be resolved? What plans do the British and Irish Governments have for presenting a plan to implement as much of the Good Friday Agreement as possible?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The outstanding issue is trust and how we resolve that. I have talked at some length about how we deal with that. As for other aspects of the Good Friday Agreement, we will proceed with those, whether they are economic and social issues, equality or human rights. As Governments we are bound to do that, and we will do our best to proceed.

Mr Joe Sherlock TD: The Secretary of State said in his opening statement that something was imminent. Is he saying that an agreement has been reached and that we will shortly hear a statement from both Governments?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I sincerely hope that that is the case, but you cannot expect me to go into detail today, because we are still discussing the details. We emerged from Leeds Castle with a positive

idea that things were going in the right direction. We have not yet completed work on the details, because issues such as how the institutions work have not been resolved, and we are working on them at the moment. I am reasonably hopeful that we are getting there.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP):

Question 12 will be the last question.

Organised crime

12. **Ms Helen Eadie MSP** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in tackling cross-border organised crime.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The Police Service of Northern Ireland and An Garda Síochána have jointly carried out a detailed analysis of the scale and the nature of cross-border organised crime, and last month they published the first joint cross-border organised crime threat assessment. Formal mechanisms for ongoing liaison between the two police forces are already in place, to develop a strategic and co-ordinated operational response and jointly to focus resources on those areas of criminality identified in that joint assessment.

Ms Helen Eadie MSP: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. Are there lessons to be learned from what has been achieved that might be applied elsewhere in the United Kingdom?

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Yes; one area that could be properly examined is the British-Irish Council, which we discussed earlier. The way in which organised crime has been dealt with on the island of Ireland can give some examples of best practice. Of course, there is a difference between Scotland and England, or Wales and England, because on the island of Ireland there are two sovereign Governments and two separate jurisdictions.

The good news is that the two sovereign Governments, albeit on the same geographical island, are working towards the resolution of organised crime in a special way. Members might not think that that is particularly remarkable, but when we look back over the years, co-operation has not been as good as it could have been between the two police forces. Today, it is admirable, and it is cause for great praise for both bodies.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD):

That concludes Question Time with the Secretary of State, and it falls to me to thank him for coming to our plenary here in Chepstow. We were delighted to have him, and delighted with the cautious optimism that he reflected.

We earnestly hope that the Assembly will be re-established fairly soon. It has been a tortuous path, but the unemployment statistics for Northern Ireland that he quoted in his speech demonstrate the progress that has been made over recent years. We know that the re-establishment of the Assembly will accelerate economic

growth in Northern Ireland, to the benefit of both communities. Thank you, Secretary of State.

[Applause].

5.30 pm

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Thank you very much.

Adjourned at 5.31 pm.

Tuesday 19 October 2004

The sitting resumed at 10.02 am.

PLENARY BUSINESS

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP):

Members, I have been informed that the microphone system has been revised, which is interesting news. You should now switch your microphones on when you wish to speak, which makes sense to me, and off when you have finished.

The first item of today's business is the debate on smoking in public places. I am very pleased indeed to welcome onto the platform Ms Jane Hutt, the Minister for Health and Social Services in the Welsh Assembly. We are delighted that you could come along, and I hope that you will enjoy our debate.

In a moment I shall ask Dai Lloyd to move the motion. I shall then call on the Minister to speak. I hope, depending on the number of Members who wish to speak, to conclude at about 11.00 am. Dr Jimmy Devins TD will wind up the debate.

SMOKING IN PUBLIC PLACES

Dr Dai Lloyd AM: I beg to move

That the Body notes the introduction in Ireland and Norway of legislation to prohibit smoking in the workplace as examples for consideration by governments.

Diolch yn fawr, Gadeirydd. It gives me great pleasure to open this debate. In passing, I also note that this is the first debate nominated by the National Assembly for Wales to this august Body.

It is not for the first time that we in Wales look to Ireland for inspiration regarding legislation on smoking, as in so many other spheres. In 2003, the first National Assembly for Wales debated banning smoking in public buildings, with all-party support. Unfortunately, at the moment, the National Assembly for Wales lacks the powers to make that resolution a reality.

An all-party ad hoc Committee, of which I am the Plaid Cymru member, has been formed in the present Assembly. Its remit is to consider banning smoking in public places by taking evidence from such august organisations as the British Medical Association (BMA), Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), Freedom Organisation for the Right to Enjoy Smoking Tobacco (FOREST), various manufacturers of ventilation systems and the unions. The idea is to

garner a definitive body of evidence and to push for powers and the ability for Wales to act in this sphere.

I come at this from my background in health. I am a GP entering my twenty-first year of duty in that post. Smoking causes 7,000 deaths every year in Wales; that is our contribution to the 120,000 deaths annually in the United Kingdom from smoking-related diseases. This debate is not about banning smoking itself, only smoking in public buildings and, particularly, in the workplace. So the debate is really about passive smoking — environmental smoke, or breathing other people's smoke — and its effects on health.

It is important to note that passive smoking causes lung cancer and ischaemic heart disease in people who do not smoke, by virtue of breathing in other people's smoke. More than 50 medical studies confirm that fact. Passive smoking causes 30 deaths a year in Wales alone. That is our contribution to the 1,000 deaths in the United Kingdom that are caused by passive smoking.

That figure is not huge when compared to the figures for mortality caused by smoking, but it is significant to non-smokers who have made the decision not to inhale smoke and to those who work in bars and restaurants. The fundamental issue is that non-smokers get smokers' diseases by breathing other people's smoke. The problem is addressed by banning smoking in enclosed public buildings. Such regulation works and is acceptable in other countries. I am sure that we shall hear more about the Irish experience of the smoking ban, which was introduced earlier this year.

Where smoking in public buildings is banned, people find it easier to give up. Over 100,000 New Yorkers have stopped smoking in the year since the ban was instituted there, and tobacco sales in Ireland have declined since the ban was put in force. I shall leave it to colleagues to quantify that.

It is sometimes said that all that is needed is effective ventilation, but unfortunately that simply removes the visible smoke and its smell, while the colourless and odourless toxic element of environmental tobacco smoke remains. Therefore dozens of carcinogens remain after even the most comprehensive ventilation that is available today has been employed. Those elements cause lung cancer, ischaemic heart disease and other health problems. The voluntary non-smoking code is patently not working, as there are over 3,000 pubs in Wales and only a handful of them are smoke free.

In conclusion, it is fair to note that society's attitudes to smoking are changing. Non-smokers have become the majority, and therefore priorities must be skewed towards them. Think about it. After all, inhaling other people's smoke gives non-smokers all those nasty diseases that smoking causes. Passive smoking kills. I contend that imposing a smoking ban is not about a nanny state, civil liberties or the Government fussing.

There is a difference. If someone drinks alcohol next to me, as some of you were doing last night —

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: I distance myself from that remark.

A Member: Scandalous.

Dr Dai Lloyd AM: I shall not name names.

A Member: It would be a long speech.

Dr Dai Lloyd AM: If someone drinks alcohol next to me they will not cause me to have an alcohol-related disease. If a person eats chocolate next to me they will not cause me to have a chocolate-related disease. However, if someone smokes next to me there is a quantifiable risk that that can cause me to contract a smoking-related illness. That is the fundamental difference. That applies in the workplace and in all public buildings.

I greatly welcome the debate and note the introduction of such legislation in Ireland and Norway, where significant health initiatives are being taken to address the annual slaughter of people by the effects of tobacco. Diolch yn fawr, Gadeirydd.

The Minister for Health and Social Services (Ms Jane Hutt AM): Diolch yn fawr. Members and distinguished guests, it is a great pleasure to be with you today. This is the first time since devolution that a plenary session of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body has been held in Wales. Croeso i gymru. I am pleased to welcome you on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government. I believe that the First Minister, Rhodri Morgan, was with you last night. I hope that the twenty-ninth plenary session of the Body has been successful and productive.

I thank you for the opportunity to address the Body on this morning's motion — the consideration of the introduction of legislation to prohibit smoking in the workplace. As Minister for Health and Social Services, I congratulate my colleague from the National Assembly for Wales for proposing a motion that is close to my heart.

It is widely recognised that tobacco use is the major preventable cause of illness and premature death in today's world. In recent years — as Dr Lloyd described — reviews of research findings on the effects of second-hand smoke have been carried out by such eminent bodies as the United Kingdom Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health, the British Medical Association and the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). Those reviews have concluded that clear health risks to non-smokers exist as a result of exposure to carcinogens and other toxic compounds that are present in second-hand smoke.

Research has identified causal links between passive smoking and lung cancer, heart disease, and conditions such as asthma and chronic bronchitis. There is a risk of low birth weight, and other major effects on children include cot death, asthma and other chronic respiratory

symptoms. In short, second-hand smoke is a serious public health risk.

No single measure is sufficient to reduce the prevalence of smoking. A comprehensive approach that involves a range of complementary actions is required. In the United Kingdom, many of those measures are now in place, in line with the strategy set out in the Government's 1998 White Paper 'Smoking Kills'. A comprehensive ban on tobacco promotion and advertising came into effect in February 2003, and a policy of high taxation on tobacco products has been followed in line with the evidence that that is effective in lowering tobacco consumption. There are bigger, starker warnings on cigarette packets.

The Government of the National Assembly for Wales has supported the UK-wide initiatives, but we are also implementing a programme of initiatives to reduce smoking in Wales. We target prevention messages at young people through initiatives such as Smokebugs clubs for primary-school children and the smoke-free class competition in secondary schools. We know that peer pressure is most effective, so we are piloting approaches to help adolescents to stop smoking, and we share our experience with other European countries through an EU-funded project. We also provide advice and support through an all-Wales helpline to smokers who want to give up. Media advertising and local smoking-cessation services that the National Health Service delivers support that action.

A great deal has been done to prevent and to stop smoking. It is the view of the National Assembly for Wales that action to reduce smoking must focus on extending smoke-free environments. A campaign has been launched to highlight the risk that second-hand smoke poses for children, and we are considering action to promote smoke-free public places.

10.15 am

Public-opinion surveys in Wales and in the rest of the United Kingdom inform us that most smokers — as well as non-smokers — support the extension of restrictions on smoking in public places. Some progress has already been made in extending smoke-free provision. I am pleased that the first smoke-free pub — a Brains pub — is in my constituency, the Vale of Glamorgan. Dan-yr-Ogof caves in Swansea also proudly announced that they were a smoke-free area. It did not make sense to have cigarette ends floating around in the caves during educational visits.

Smoking in the workplace is of particular concern, not only for workers in the leisure and hospitality industries, but for those across the public and private sectors. The National Assembly for Wales is supporting smoke-free pilot days in Carmarthen as part of Health Challenge Wales, and we want to see progress of that kind across Wales.

It is estimated that comprehensive bans on smoking in the workplace could reduce the prevalence of smoking in England and Wales from its present level of 27% to 23%. Moreover, evidence shows that restrictions on smoking help ex-smokers to remain non-smokers.

The introduction in Ireland of a ban on smoking in the workplace has generated a great deal of interest and debate throughout the United Kingdom, and Wales is no exception. We look forward to hearing Irish Members' comments on the ban. We are also fortunate to be able to draw on the experiences of the representatives from the Nordic Council. I hope that our friends from Ireland and Norway will share their insights into some of the factors that influenced the introduction of legislation — factors such as leadership, support from other stakeholders, the time frame required, enforcement issues and the need for public education.

As Dr Lloyd has said, for us in Wales, powers to ban smoking are currently a matter for the UK Government and are not devolved to the Assembly. However, the Assembly Government has indicated that it is committed in principle to seeking powers to ban smoking in public places in Wales. In January 2003, as Dai Lloyd said, an all-party motion in the Assembly voted in favour of calling upon the UK Government to bring forward a Bill to give the Assembly those powers, and we have expressed our support for the spirit of the private Member's Bill, introduced in Westminster by Ilora Finlay, Baroness of Llandaff, seeking those powers for the Assembly Government.

Earlier this year the Assembly voted to establish an ad hoc Committee on smoking in public places, with a remit to consider current evidence on the health risks of second-hand smoke and the economic impact of restrictions on smoking in public places. It will examine views emerging in Scotland, where public consultation is taking place, and in England, as well as the experiences of other countries where smoking bans have been introduced. Our Committee has issued a consultation document seeking views from individuals and organisations in Wales and it hears oral evidence from key stakeholders. Its report to the Assembly on its conclusions is due in May 2005.

Evidence from other countries shows that increased public awareness of the issues involved is an important prerequisite for the successful introduction of restrictions, and I am confident that the Committee's work and findings will play an important role in making the Welsh public better informed about the health risks of second-hand smoke. The Committee's conclusions will shape the Assembly Government's future stance on this issue.

I thank the Body again for the invitation to address it this morning. I very much look forward to listening to the debate on this very important question for the health of the people of Wales. Diolch yn fawr.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Thank you very much, Ms Hutt. That should be a very useful pointer for our continued debate.

Mr David Melding AM: The mass consumption of cigarettes will stand out as one of the most remarkable marketing achievements — and a bad one — of the twentieth century. It is there with convincing us to drink great quantities of sugary fizzy drinks or to eat cardboard-type breakfast cereal. Social historians will look at this and be very curious indeed. Certainly, when Walter Raleigh returned from the New World with tobacco it was not in the form of a packet of Woodbines. The reason I say this is that we need an aggressive strategy to reduce the consumption of all tobacco products and of cigarettes in particular. There is nothing neutral about this. The sale of cigarettes increased vastly during the First World War and since then has been a major health hazard. We must bear that in mind. Smoke is not a natural part of the environment and, certainly before the First World War, it would have been very rare in enclosed public places.

For most of us the imposition of cigarette smoke has been a dramatic curtailment of our individual rights. I remember attending the cinema as a child and, even when children's films were shown, adults were smoking. That was regarded as completely normal then, and yet we now know that it has probably damaged, to some extent, the health of a generation.

A very firm policy is appropriate; however, we need an effective evidence base of not only the clinical evidence about the effects of passive smoking — although that evidence is growing and compelling — but also evidence of how measures, such as those pursued in Ireland, are working. It is on that evidence that sound public policy is to be based.

Three quarters of us do not smoke. The proportion of the population that does smoke is declining. Public policy must be based on what such an overwhelming majority wants, although I concede that a majority of the British public would not vote for a ban at the moment. However, as evidence and knowledge increase, that may very well change. The very least we should do is to watch with great interest what is happening in Ireland.

Finally, I want to say that smokers deserve understanding and compassion. Of course, they have the right to continue smoking if that is their informed wish, but we should do anything we can to reduce the addictive aspect of their decision. Products are now available that seem to help people in the first couple of months of kicking the habit. However, we need to send a positive message to smokers. They should not be condemned in all of this; in many ways, they are the greatest victims of all.

The Lord Dubs: I congratulate the National Assembly for Wales for raising this issue and the Welsh Minister of Health and Social Security for her interesting and

persuasive assessment of how she would like the policy to move forward. Above all, I congratulate the Republic and Norway for having shown an initiative that sceptics said would not work. The sceptics said that they would not dare do it and that they would not get away with it, but, my God, they have got away with it and it has been successful. The sceptics have said for years that any moves to reduce smoking would not work. They said that it could not be banned on trains or aircraft, but that has been done. The big issue now is places of work.

In today's 'Times', there is an article about a leaked study by the Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health. The article quotes the report as saying that:

"the chances of contracting lung cancer and heart disease rise by about a quarter after contact with second-hand smoke."

I have not seen the leaked report; nevertheless, it is in line with all other evidence about the dangers of passive smoking. I agree that if one goes into a smoky pub for ten minutes to have a pint and then leaves, one will not be subjected to that much smoke, unless one does it twice a day, but what about the people who work in those places?

I was talking to someone in a café in London where smoking is permitted, and I said that it must stop and that the law must change. He said that he very much hoped so, because he has to work in that atmosphere all day long. There was no good in my telling him to get another job, because that would have been arrogant and patronising. No one can say that, but what must be said is that people are entitled to protection at work on health and safety grounds. We owe it to those people to provide a safe atmosphere. We do not allow unsafe practices on building sites or elsewhere; we try to stamp out unsafe practices, so why should we be complacent about people who are subjected, day in and day out, to something at work that evidence suggests is dangerous?

I do not have the statistics in front of me, but the majority of smokers in the Republic welcome the ban. I disagree with Mr Melding's comment; I believe that the majority of people in Britain would support a ban on smoking in public places. The civil liberties argument has been put to me, but I do not go along with that. People have a choice; they do not have to go into those areas, but what about the civil liberties of non-smokers? Why should we be subjected to the health-damaging effect of a practice that is easily moved from a building to somewhere else? People do not have to smoke in those places, but we often have to be there, as do the workers.

There is another factor. It is not just about serious damage to health. Talk to one of the many people who suffer from asthma: they will tell you that they cannot stay in a smoky atmosphere at all, not because of lung cancer or heart disease, but because they are liable to have an asthma attack there and then, because of the smoke to which they are subjected.

Finally, I shall widen the debate slightly because the motion allows me to do so. As the Welsh Minister said, there is evidence that high rates of duty on cigarettes reduces the number of cigarettes that are bought. The ban on smoking in pubs has had that effect in the Republic anyway, but there is also the effect of high rates of duty. The trouble is that, within the European Union, not all countries have the same rate of duty. I do not know what the rate of duty is in the Republic — and it is not for a Brit to tell the Republic what to do — but could I just sow a seed? If the rate of duty was raised to the British level, it might be a further weapon in trying to reduce the level of smoking.

Of course the tobacco lobby will be after us; of course the tobacco lobby will say that the civil liberties of smokers have been displaced. Let us ignore that and acknowledge our obligation to those who work in those industries and to non-smokers. We should take the Republic's example and extend the ban into our own countries.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: Go raibh maith agat. I had the fortunate — or unfortunate — position to be the Convenor of the Health Committee in the last Dáil session. We considered the smoking issue ad nauseam, taking in most sides, all sides, and sides that were not sides at all. Over three solid years we travelled to places such as Florida, where the big settlement was made, to Canada and to various other locations in order to widen the brief before making our report. Lord Dubs's last comment was the recommendation of many people: keep raising the price of tobacco. Putting serious levies on it will act as a deterrent.

As Convenor of the Committee, I was delighted that the Minister — against the odds — accepted many of the Committee's recommendations. Everyone had said that a smoking ban would never work in Ireland, of all places, as it was renowned for smoky bars and plenty of alcohol. I recently met an Australian at a social event, and he said that the Australians had tinkered with the issue, but that Ireland had just gone for it. He thought that Micheál Martin should have received the Nobel Prize for leading the way in making one of the biggest decisions to have a major impact on health in the world. That may sound over the top, but it is based on fact.

In Ireland, 70% of people do not smoke. Of the 30% who do, 70% want to give up, which leaves a small number of people who do not want to give up, perhaps because smoking is an addiction. Even if they wanted to give it up, their chances of doing so are limited. One comment we heard as we researched the subject was that the 7,000 people who died each year were almost the lucky ones. That sounds a terrible way to put it, but people forget, for example, stroke or amputation, and that smoking-related illnesses do not give a nice, clean-cut death, but a slow, harrowing death.

For me, it is simple. A report that was leaked yesterday emphasised that passive smoking can be as harmful as active smoking. Once that is acknowledged, we have no choice in the matter, because if people ignore the advice from practically every medical source that smoking is bad for you, then litigation is the only way to go. We can consider liberal philosophies and talk about the right to smoke, the right not to smoke, and the right to clean air. Yesterday, we could have discussed the right to march or not to march, or the right to free roads. However, litigation will start; it has already started in other countries. It is only a matter of time before the Government either do something about it or are taken to court for ignoring the health risks to the people and to workers.

10.30 am

In Ireland, people thought that we were joking about a smoking ban because of the revenue that Government received from tobacco — and that was significantly down in the first six months in 2004. Idealistically, the Minister is looking forward to a time, not this year or next, but in 20 years' time when hospitals will not be full of people with smoking-related illnesses. There will always be those who have the strange philosophy that some way of killing people is needed so that they do not live to 120 or more and there will be too many people in the world.

From my comments, you will see that we considered the issue from many different perspectives. Tobacco sales are down. Ventilation does not work because it gets rid of the smoke, but not the chemicals. Some of the pubs in Ireland could have provided a room for smokers, who could have come out to get their own drinks. That would have overcome the problem of the barman or woman going in to serve them. There was, however, an equality issue; for example, in a town with three pubs, one pub might already have an additional room, another might not be able to provide one, and the third might be able to build on a room. It was preferable to ban smoking on all premises so that no one could say that he or she had been hard done by. Everyone was treated equally.

People who are not familiar with the smoking ban sometimes ask, "Who polices the ban?", claiming that the ban cannot be policed. I give you a simple example. In a remote part of my constituency there is a pub-cum-grocery-cum-half-a-dozen other things; it has an average of three customers on a weekday evening. It does not have a huge turnover. On the night that the ban was introduced, someone smoked a cigarette in the bar, and on the following morning an environmental health officer paid a visit to the premises. This bar is as remote as it gets, so I thought that the environmental health officer was really on the ball to be visiting the bar so soon. However, it transpired that a customer had reported

smoking on the premises. Who polices the ban? The customers police the ban.

I think that I speak for most of the Irish delegation when I say that, subconsciously, we have become used to the clean air and notice a difference when we come over here. We all got up on Monday morning and wondered what the stink in our bedrooms was: our clothes were stinking of smoke. Most of the Irish delegation have made similar observations. That highlights the fact that we have been "brainwashed" into thinking that the smoking ban is a good idea.

There should be alternatives to smoking and access to those. We are not great at providing them, but nicotine patches and so on should be available in vending machines in toilets, just as are toothpaste and other items.

If people want to give up smoking, they have the right to be supported in that choice. There are issues in Ireland, and there is no point in pretending otherwise. Some women feel a bit "obvious" or embarrassed at having to stand outside a pub to smoke their cigarette and then go inside again. I recognise the problem, but it affects only a small number of people, and politics is supposed to be about the greater good. Although we can be sympathetic and empathise with such problems, the smoking ban has been much more positive than negative.

I could talk about the smoking ban for about three days — as one of the Clerks knows well — because we studied it to death before anything happened. However, I suggest that other countries do not study it to death; we have done that. Just do what Ireland did, and you will have no regrets. Go raibh maith agat.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Four Members wish to speak before Dr Jimmy Devins makes his winding-up speech. I would like to conclude this debate by 11.00 am, when we could have a short break. After that there will be an important debate on waste management, which has all kinds of environmental implications. Therefore I ask those Members who speak to make their contribution relatively short.

The President of the Nordic Council (Mr Gabriel Romanus): Thank you, Mr Co-Chairman, for giving me a chance to give a short report from the Nordic countries.

Norway has legislation on smoking, and Sweden's law will come into effect on 1 July 2005. The Swedish legislation was adopted by an 85% majority of the Parliament and is a typically Swedish compromise legislation. It allows for a restaurant to have a smoke room; people can smoke in that room, but no food is permitted. Therefore it is somewhat different from a total ban. Next year, perhaps, I might be able to report on the experience of this compromise solution.

The Government hesitated for quite a while before proposing this legislation, but they gained some courage

when an opinion poll found that a large majority of the public was in favour of banning smoking in restaurants.

We expect the ban to have a positive effect on the restaurant trade. Restaurant turnover in New York has increased by 10% since the smoking ban was introduced; new guests are going to restaurants that they had previously avoided as the air was polluted. When smoke-free airlines were first proposed, many people argued that it would be impossible to implement and that smoking should be permitted on, at least, intercontinental flights. We now know that it is possible to fly across the ocean without smoking. Interestingly, Scandinavian Airlines reported that the health of cabin crews has improved since smoking was banned on aeroplanes.

Smoking bans will lead to positive effects on restaurant turnover and the health of restaurant workers. Moreover, a ban will produce greater happiness for customers who enjoy tasting their food — the price of food is rising in most countries, and it is nice to be able to enjoy a good meal without feeling that it tastes of tobacco.

Deputy Mike Torode: For many years, Guernsey's tobacco excise rates were among the lowest in Europe. The rates were so low that they were used to promote tourism: "Come to Guernsey for your cheap cigarettes, tobacco, cigars and alcohol". One consequence was that we had some of the highest rates of smoking-related deaths and serious illnesses in the British Isles.

In the early 1970s, one brave Member took a private Member's motion to Guernsey's States to ban smoking in cinemas. A smoking ban on buses followed. Later, smoking by the driver and the passengers was banned in taxis.

That trend slowed down until six years ago, when a massive campaign was initiated to decrease smoking, particularly among the young. A resolution was passed at a Budget meeting that, apart from the normal retail price index increase, tobacco duty would be increased by 10% a year for six years. That has subsequently been extended. The additional revenue was used to support anti-smoking projects.

There were strong objections, and the old arguments were used: that the real targets were those people with limited incomes; that old-age pensioners may have had the habit for many years and could not give up; that children will always find the money for cigarettes somewhere, even if they have to steal from their mother's handbag. However, the policy has started to work. Consumption of tobacco products has declined.

Among young people, women tend to be the heaviest smokers. We have a programme called "Smoke Busters" that targets young people through schools and the media. Moreover, the additional revenue has enabled us to provide free nicotine patches and counselling to anybody that wants to give up smoking, regardless of age.

Last year there was an attempt to ban smoking in all places where food was served, whether restaurants or pubs. I am ashamed to say that, having cast an eye over their shoulder to an imminent general election, various politicians bottled out at the last moment. There was a good, old-fashioned fudge: restaurants would have both smoking and non-smoking areas that would be adequately signposted. The snag is that the smoke cannot read. That policy is an abject failure.

There will be another attempt in the near future to introduce a smoking ban in all public places. Many commercial entities already lead the way. You can tell that most office blocks in St Peter Port have smoking bans inside, because they do not place ashtrays outside for their employees, and the pavements are littered with cigarette butts from 9.00 am until they go home at 5.30 pm.

Senator Geraldine Feeney: I shall be brief because much of what I wished to say has been said already. We in Ireland have had the smoking ban for seven months, and it feels as though it has been in place for ever. As the saying goes, the ban has truly been the best thing since sliced bread.

I am sure that when it was introduced last February and March, some members saw the TV coverage. We had never before seen the number of television crews from all over the world that converged on Dublin for the two days of that launch. There is certainly no doubt that Minister Martin was a hero.

There is a certain amount of satisfaction and a little bit of glee, as an Irish woman, to be in Wales telling British parliamentarians, "Do what we do. We know best."

The Lord Dubs: Hear, hear.

Senator Geraldine Feeney: The biggest opponents of the ban in Ireland, for obvious reasons, were vintners. No matter where we met them, we were juking them, running up corridors and closing doors, not wanting to be caught. However, now more than 85% of the population are in favour and they are dead chuffed that it has happened. A majority of smokers were and are in favour of the ban. Several have said that they are smoking half of what they did before the ban, and quite a large percentage have stopped smoking completely.

I smile when I look at my colleague, Senator Brian Hayes, because he said in our Chamber that there had been an increase in street fighting, and that accident and emergency consultants were a little bit worried because they were treating more broken noses and jaws. However, they must have treated them all, because that has abated. It has practically stopped. The rows are still there, but the participants are not as badly damaged.

10.45 am

Cecilia Keaveney said that women did not like to have to go out of the restaurant or the pub on a Saturday

night to have a cigarette. Some women that I have been talking to likened themselves to the oldest profession in the world, and they were not happy about that. Ireland made a mistake; we did not have structures in place to accommodate smokers. Perhaps a shelter was put up, but there was no heater in it; there were no proper seats and no ashtrays. Perhaps others could be proactive and put most of that in place in advance. As other people have said, it is the way to go; it will be the only show in town.

Another huge plus was that it was an all-party decision, and the whole medical community backed it. The turning point was the debate on 'The Late, Late Show', which has a large number of viewers on Friday nights. All the related bodies were brought into the studio, including those that were opposed to the ban. Those in favour won the debate hands down. I say: stop thinking, get a move on, and do it.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Thank you. There are two more contributors before I call Dr Jimmy Devins TD to wind up.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD: I welcome the opportunity to say a few words on this important issue. I was one of the few who raised this matter at a previous plenary in the form of a written question. I had hoped that the smoking ban could have — and still think should have — been introduced on an all-Ireland basis.

Tourism is administered on an all-Ireland basis, as are waterways. The smoking ban should have been treated in the same way to avoid problems in the border region. As a border Deputy, I admit that it did not cause as many problems as we originally thought. We thought that we would lose a lot of custom to Northern Ireland, but it has not been that bad.

Cecilia Keaveney mentioned a case in Donegal. Twelve months ago, I was at a wedding in Canada. When two of my party started smoking in the bar, it was not the bar person or the bar owner, but the other customers in the bar who quickly told them to put out or get out, and they knew that they had no choice. It is not as big a problem as some have made it out to be.

I would not necessarily agree with my colleague Cecilia Keaveney that we should present Micheál Martin TD with a Nobel Prize, because there are many other reasons why he should not get one.

However, he did a good job in dealing with the smoking issue but, as Geraldine Feeney said, he received total cross-party support. There were a few in her party who caused more problems than the Opposition did, but that is normal. If the ban on smoking in public places is to be brought into the UK, it is important that there is all-party support — that makes things much easier.

The point was made about increasing the taxes on tobacco products, but it is not as simple as that. Cheap flights make it easy to fly to Spain, Portugal and other

countries and to bring back cheap cigarettes. Furthermore, certain groups are deeply involved in racketeering through tobacco smuggling and make massive amounts of money out of that. The only way to deal with that problem is to impose a ban and not try to make any back doors.

[Short part of speech lost due to recording difficulties]

...the man, who had been a Fine Gael councillor, said that if he had met me two weeks earlier he would have asked me to give Minister Martin a certain four-letter word. He said that he had since been to see his consultant, who, on reading the man's medical report, asked him why he had lied about not having smoked for 40 years. The man was around 70 years old and denied that he had smoked in all that time. The consultant again asked him to tell the truth, and when the councillor refused to change his story, the consultant asked him what kind of work he did. He replied that he had owned a hotel and looked after the bars. I rest my case. That man did not want me, as an Opposition Deputy, to cause any problem in bringing in a smoking ban. I am aware of the man's condition today and, unfortunately, it is not good. His consultant has told him that it is a direct result of the effects of passive smoking.

Senator Paschal Mooney: In a spirit of brevity, I take up Seymour Crawford's story for our British Colleagues. I am sure they will all remember with great affection the comedian, Roy Castle, who made it absolutely clear that the cancer he was dying from was a direct result of the effects of passive smoking while playing in pubs and cabaret venues throughout his career. He was not a smoker and campaigned about it until he died.

Over the last few months, I have read with great interest many of the letters published in the UK newspapers, and the amount of distortion conveyed from the Irish side is extraordinary as they carry on fighting, King Canute-like, against the smoking ban. To remove some of the cobwebs surrounding the issue, I must state that there are no thought police operating in the Republic. The Garda Síochána is not involved in enforcing compliance with the smoking ban, despite perceptions to the contrary in this country. The health and safety section of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment employs 40 or 50 inspectors; not enough to cover the land area of the Republic. As indicated earlier, it is increasingly customers and members of the general public, rather than owners or the health and safety inspectors, who are sounding the alert about non-compliance with the ban. The police are not involved at all. I have no doubt that when the debate comes to the Floor of your respective Houses, that one of the canards employed will be "Why should the police be involved in such matters?"

Compliance is almost total, as Members have heard, but there are exceptions. Newspapers love to sex up a story and will always highlight the little pub down in west Cork that has been secretly harbouring late-night smokers,

as distinct from late-night drinkers. There will always be stories like that.

There was a cause célèbre two or three months ago when a gentleman in Galway decided that he would publicly defy the ban, but he found that public sympathy was not on his side. If anything, it was the lack of public support for his position, rather than any legal enforcement, that eliminated that problem.

During the debate in Ireland, a US study emerged about a town in a small state in America, the name of which I cannot remember. Under a local ordinance a total smoking ban was initiated in the town council's administrative area. The ban was imposed on a homogenous group of people in one part of the state. They had their own hospital facilities, and therefore it was a perfect study group. Over the succeeding six to nine months, the rate of admissions for heart and stroke conditions dropped dramatically. Perhaps it could be argued that that was a temporary blip or an aberration, but interestingly — for reasons best known to themselves — the wise men and women of the town council decided to repeal the law, approximately nine months after they had brought it in, and the reverse happened in the succeeding six months. The rate of admissions for stroke and respiratory illnesses increased dramatically.

It will be argued that ventilation can solve the problem. You will find that those with the most powerful lobby will be the super pubs — the people with the resources to employ slick PR organisations. They will tell people that greater ventilation is the answer. It is not. It has been proved beyond doubt that — even with the most sophisticated ventilation technology — the polluted air is simply recycled within a confined space. That further canard has been raised several times and has been proved statistically to be false, from a health perspective. Do not be in any doubt: that argument will be used.

Furthermore, even if it had been accepted that ventilation made a difference, the wealthy pubs would have been able to afford the sophisticated advanced technology required, but the average village pub would not have been able to afford it. At the risk of repeating myself, there is no point in installing it because it does not work.

Finally, Cecilia Keaveney raised the matter of smoking areas outside pubs, and it is one area where we are only playing catch-up. Increasingly, patios are being provided with alfresco heating. I know it is hard to believe, given the perception of the Irish climate, but it is happening — particularly in the cities. Rather than people — particularly women — having to stand outside, heated patio areas are provided. It is happening more and more, but not all premises will have them.

I bring these points to your attention because they are the sort of issues that were raised regularly and — because of the manner in which the arguments were put

— they were considered to have some validity. However, they were all found to have feet of clay.

Dr Jimmy Devins TD: I am delighted to see the Welsh Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt, here today. It demonstrates the seriousness with which the Welsh Assembly is approaching this problem. I know that we are constrained by time, so I shall be brief.

I commend Dr Lloyd — who, like me, is a GP — for his opening remarks. He touched on all the salient points in the argument for introducing a ban on smoking in public places. He outlined all the reasons, particularly the medical evidence that shows that passive smoking causes death. Of that there is no doubt. Having looked at all the literature over several months, we in the Republic of Ireland have found that the overwhelming evidence — despite what some of the cigarette companies say — is that passive smoking causes not only cancer but many other serious illnesses.

Dr Lloyd also touched on the ineffectiveness of ventilation systems. In many ways, what we have been through is what Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom will go through over the next couple of months or years. The cigarette companies are incredibly powerful, and they have a huge amount of money. They will come at you in every way possible, frequently using pseudo-organisations as fronts for cigarette companies.

It is therefore important that a clear strategy is in place.

Some of the speakers touched on the importance in the Republic of the need for strong political leadership. It is interesting that everybody who has spoken favours a ban, but one politician — probably the Health Minister — must get out there and take the flak; and my goodness, the flak will come at him from all sides. Strong political leadership is the number one criterion.

On issues such as civil liberties, a point made by Dr Lloyd and touched on by Lord Dubs is that the greatest civil liberty is not to infringe on someone else's civil liberties. One person's smoking may inadvertently contribute to another's ill health and, possibly, to their death. That argument cannot be defended, but people will use it.

Many speakers, including Gabriel Romanus from the Nordic Council, mentioned smoking rooms. One great advantage in the Republic was that the union that represents bar workers was totally on our side on this argument, because it recognised that its workers were exposed to potential health dangers.

11.00 am

To have a designated smoking room still means that bar workers who use that room will be exposed to smoke. Although smoking rooms are a halfway house, they are not the answer.

One or two speakers from the Republic addressed the issue of smoking areas. In retrospect, we perhaps did not get that right. Some public houses do not have space to provide a smoking area. The Republic's legislation states that more than 50% of the room must be exposed to fresh air. In other words, there must not be more than two walls. Some pubs do not have that amount of space, with the result that people stand out on the street, unsheltered. That will be a difficulty coming into winter, and there will be some discontent.

The nanny state was mentioned. I argue that we must return to what the ban is really about — a public health issue. Medical history is littered with examples of people who stuck their head above the parapet over many years about various issues, only to be derided by the general public. They were ultimately shown to be correct. This issue is exactly the same.

I am unhappy with one or two aspects of the Irish legislation. The definition of "workplace" has been extended to include company cars. Technically, any company representative who smokes in his or her company car is breaking the law. Perhaps that could be examined, as it goes a bit too far.

Finally, do not give in. The smoking ban is really important. Two weeks ago, an all-party Committee from Westminster came to the Oireachtas with one or two people from Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). ASH is really trying to drive the campaign for a ban in the UK. If UK Members stick with them, they will win. Go raibh míle maith agat.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body notes the introduction in Ireland and Norway of legislation to prohibit smoking in the workplace as examples for consideration by governments.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Once again, I thank Jane Hutt for coming along. We have been having an informal debate about whether to have a break. We have come to the conclusion that we should have 10 minutes only; otherwise it will be impossible to conclude all our business. Thank you very much.

The sitting was suspended at 11.03 am.

The sitting was resumed at 11.18 am.

BUSINESS REPORTS FROM CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD): We now move to the business reports from the Chairmen of Committees. I remind colleagues that reports should be brief, not more than five minutes, and to the point, as we wish to move on to the substantive report from Committee D.

The Chairman of Committee A (Mr Jim O'Keefe TD): As announced in Inchydoney, Committee A followed up its intention to consider human rights, North and South, under the Good Friday Agreement. The Committee visited Belfast for a series of meetings earlier this month. It met the Chief Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission, Professor Brice Dickson, and several of the commissioners. We also spoke to senior staff and considered aspects of the Commission's work.

It is proper to mention that we were aware that the Commission had had a somewhat rocky existence and that there had been several resignations. We decided, therefore, that it was wise also to meet some former Commission members, Patrick Yu, Paddy Kelly and Frank McGuinness, to get a full picture of the background to the Commission and of the difficulties that it had faced.

We met John Spellar, who, as the Minister with responsibility for human rights, briefed us on the situation, particularly the recruitment process. Candidates have been shortlisted and interviews for the post of Chief Commissioner will begin shortly. The present Chief Commissioner's term of office ends next February. The Minister provided us with an insight into the role and function of the Commission, as this had concerned some Commissioners in the past. It was a worthwhile meeting, and we intend to continue our work in that area. We have provisionally arranged a meeting next month with the Irish Human Rights Commission, its President, Dr Maurice Manning, and his team. The Committee also intends to meet the Independent Monitoring Commission, perhaps in the new year.

Another issue, which arose out of the Secretary of State's report yesterday, is the publication of a consultation paper in January on a model of reconciliation in Northern Ireland; the intention being that Committee A will follow that up. It has since come to my attention that members of Committee D, which deals with education and social cohesion, have also expressed an interest in that report. Some aspects of the report may be relevant to Committee A, others to Committee D, and I see scope for conciliation between the respective positions before we embark on any further work.

The Vice-Chairman of Committee B (Mr Séamus Pattison TD): I shall be reporting to the Body this morning as Andrew Mackay had to leave the plenary early. Andrew has asked me to convey his apologies.

As part of its inquiry into future European security arrangements, Committee B will be in Stockholm next Sunday and Monday to meet Swedish parliamentarians, including our good friend Gabriel Romanus, and officials in the relevant policy areas. Unfortunately, several visits planned for the past six months had to be cancelled because of logistical and scheduling difficulties; it is hoped to catch up on these and to make further progress on the inquiry in coming months.

At its meeting yesterday evening, Committee B discussed the proposal from colleagues to establish a new inquiry to run concurrently with our inquiry on European security. The new inquiry would examine the procedures of present and proposed European funding programmes that support cross-border activities; that investigation would be conducted by a subcommittee of Committee B. Subject to the approval of the Steering Committee, it has been decided to proceed with this matter.

The Vice-Chairman of Committee C (Mr William O'Brien MP): Committee C met this morning and reiterated the proposals that it tabled last year. Committee C believes that we should examine the impact of European Union enlargement on agriculture, particularly on small farmers. Their welfare can affect enlargement, as most of the 10 member states that have been accepted into the European Union are agriculture-based, particularly Poland. That could have an effect on the welfare and economic well-being of some of the small farmers and family farms in the areas that we represent.

Enlargement will also have implications for the common agricultural policy (CAP) and for regional and structural funds. Committee C believes that to keep the Body up to date it should compile a report to highlight issues and problems that European Union enlargement could pose for our agriculture policies. We are also aware that many small farmers are experiencing economic difficulties. Most of them are on benefits, and it is important that we highlight that. We are taking action to take evidence from Ministers, from those who play a major part in the agriculture industry and from those involved with small farms and in smaller agriculture activities. We hope to report soon.

The Chairman of Committee D (Mr Kevin McNamara MP): Later, we will discuss our waste management report. Committee D has been engaged in two matters: the first was an inquiry into special educational needs, and in pursuing that we visited Belfast and Dublin. We will visit Edinburgh later this year and Barnsley in the new year. We will not be visiting Wales because two Select Committees of the National Assembly for Wales have just published reports on the issue and we do not

want to duplicate matters, but we will take their conclusions on board.

We have also reduced the scope of our inquiry and are looking specifically at the autism spectrum, including Asperger's syndrome. The Committee had intended to look at other aspects of special educational needs, including provision for gifted children and education between birth and the age of three, but we felt that that would be much too large, given our resources and the time available. Therefore we decided to confine the inquiry to autism because of the attention it is receiving in the Republic of Ireland and in some areas in Northern Ireland, and because of other related problems in the United Kingdom.

At the Inchydoney meeting, you might remember, there was a general discussion on truth and reconciliation, and it was suggested that some of the Committees might be interested.

Nobody volunteered, so Committee D looked into it and produced a paper, which is to be presented to the Body at the next plenary. Having listened to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland yesterday, Committee A has decided that it wishes to pursue the matter as well. I have had discussions with Deputy Jim O'Keeffe, and there seems to be no reason for an overlap. Committee A deals with sovereignty and security; Committee D deals with education, social cohesion and reconciliation. Given that Committees are engaged in that direction, it was something that we felt should be considered. We should have had the paper ready for this conference; unfortunately, the people who were helping me to draft it were very ill before our last Committee meeting. However, I am sure that we can work easily with Committee A without treading on each other's toes.

11.30 am

REPORT OF COMMITTEE D (CULTURE, EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENT): WASTE MANAGEMENT

The Chairman of Committee D (Mr Kevin McNamara MP): I beg to move

That the Body takes note of the report of Committee D - [Environment and Social Committee] - on Waste Management [Doc. No. 99] and the conclusions and recommendations of the report, which should be forwarded to both Governments and to the devolved Administrations for their observations.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD):

There are time considerations in this debate. It is intended that the debate will conclude at 12.25 pm, and at about 12.15 pm I propose to call Jim Glennon to wind up. In the meantime, there will be ample opportunity for Members' contributions.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: I do not intend to take up much time because, having regained my voice, I do not want to lose it again too quickly.

This has been a most interesting inquiry; it has touched on cross-party matters that arouse passions, particularly Nimby passions, and on the argument about incineration or, as it is now more euphemistically termed, "heat from waste", a wording that attempts to move away from some of the emotions associated with the issue.

Committee members visited Guernsey, the Isle of Man and Brussels. In Brussels, members spoke to representatives of the European Commission about the EU Directive. Guernsey and the Isle of Man are small island communities that face enormous waste problems — not as great, perhaps, as those faced by other member states, but great in comparison to the size of the islands. There is concern that landfill sites are running out.

We were particularly interested in how the Isle of Man and Guernsey had consulted their constituents. Massive public consultations were conducted, and all options were examined. Although many people favoured composting, it was no longer considered acceptable to export waste, except in the case of certain dangerous wastes that these small islands cannot deal with because they do not have the necessary facilities.

The problem of intensive education and public consultation is that decisions to go ahead with heat from waste sailed through — or that was the position. However, June's general election in Guernsey provided evidence of a different attitude towards the idea of energy from waste. I leave it to Deputy Mike Torode to explain. The infallible populace had spoken, and a young Member had introduced a Bill, but the matter seems to have been put back by about six months.

We found, when visiting the European Commission in Brussels, that waste management is co-determined by

the Commission and the Parliament. One of the major problems seems to have been that the Commission, in its original Directives, did not consult member Governments sufficiently and in some cases created targets that could not reasonably be reached, even with the goodwill of member states. Secondly, in drawing up its Directives, the Commission failed to take into consideration the facilities and the abilities of the member states to comply with them.

The Commission having proposed, it is up to the member state to dispose. The Commission has no real power to police how a state deals with its problems. In our report we look at how the member states have tried to deal with landfill, recycling, composting, incineration and export, and we also considered their strategies. Nearly all the states have set themselves targets in those matters; and in the Republic and Great Britain there is considerable public debate about the value of heat from waste. It is based on the fear of emissions from chimneys and the question of dioxins. Our colleague from the Isle of Man will tell us how they overcame that problem.

Dioxins are the main concern. In our recommendations, therefore, we ask that dioxins, which cause great public unease in every country, should be subject to further intensive research. Some people say that more dioxins come from a bonfire in the back garden than from any of the new incinerating plants, and that is a problem.

Finally, we looked at several important issues, but two stand out as examples of what can be done. The first is the Irish levy on plastic bags, which seems to have had a phenomenal effect. It has changed shopping habits and the nature of shopping bags in the Republic, although we have not seen the return of our grandmothers' baskets. There has certainly been a change in practice there. The question arises: how do we deal with rural plastic, such as those great pieces of black plastic wrapped round bales of hay? They are an eyesore, a danger to cattle, and an environmental problem. Having been brave on shopping bags, will the Irish Government take on the farmers, and thereby give us another example to follow?

The second interesting matter was the question of cars. How does one deal with a "dead" car? In Guernsey, it is taxed from the start, so that the cost of disposal is built into the price of the car. That seems to be a sensible way of dealing with the matter. Other countries, including my own, have made the rather silly suggestion that the cost of disposal should fall on the last user.

If a car has had half a dozen owners before the end of its life, the last user will probably be relatively impoverished, and the car may end up torched or abandoned. We should learn from practice in Guernsey where tax is included in the first purchase and is reflected in what is charged as the car changes hands until it is disposed of. At least the state has the money in hand to deal with the problem.

Colleagues will wish to speak about the conclusions of the report. I was interested to hear about the experiences

of Ireland, of Guernsey and of the Isle of Man; they dealt with a real problem: no land to dump waste and nowhere to export it. What do we do, and how do we deal with the health and safety issues?

The Lord Dubs: I have tabled a question at Westminster about a possible tax on plastic bags: one of the best ways to tackle waste is to create less of it.

During a conference of the British-Irish Association in Oxford a few weeks ago, some of our colleagues from Ireland looked out the window at somebody walking down the street with about six plastic shopping bags; they said that one would not see that in Ireland any more. They said that before they had those wretched plastic bags, they always took their own bags when they went shopping. That has stopped because it is easier to get four or five plastic bags to take your shopping home. It is bad for the environment; it is unnecessary, and the only way to tackle it is for the Government to impose a small tax. Italy has such a tax, and it works a treat. The only people who buy plastic bags there are foreigners who do not arrive properly equipped. We should learn a lesson from the experience of the Republic and say, "You have shown the way; let us do the same."

Senator Brendan Ryan: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh.

I welcome the report, which contains much worthwhile information. However, I am disappointed at the lack of elaboration on waste reduction — the issue just mentioned by Lord Dubs. To a degree, we are handing over the problem of waste to consumers. In many cases, consumers have no choice but to generate waste, because when they acquire anything — a car, a television or packages from purchases — they are left with the problem of disposing of the packaging waste created by manufacturers.

We had a problem with plastic bags until the introduction of the levy; it was a small price to pay. The levy was small, but it was the turning point that changed our habits. It focused our minds and we all — even scatter-brained people like me — remember to keep shopping bags in the back of the car. It just happens.

The report mentions that charging by volume or weight has reduced waste in Ireland. I am concerned that charging has reduced the amount of waste taken away by waste disposal services, but that an increasing quantity is being burned in people's fireplaces. What Kevin said is true: burning plastic generates dioxins, and probably more than an incinerator will generate. Simply making waste invisible or giving people incentives to dispose of it in other ways is not the way forward. We must place the onus on manufacturers and large retailers to encourage consumers to opt for less packaging.

Waste from packaging is a big problem in Ireland, as is construction waste. In other countries, construction waste is reused in foundations and in road construction.

In Ireland, until recently, most of it went straight to landfill sites. I have no objections to the report, but there must be considerably greater emphasis on the reduction of waste generated at source.

We are in danger of spending too much time thinking about how we can reuse and recycle. However, that assumes the generation of waste; we must move away from that assumption to find ways of reducing waste at source.

The Acting Co-Chairman (Mr Séamus Kirk TD): Nine Members have yet to speak, so I ask the Body to keep brevity in mind.

Mr William O'Brien MP: I welcome the report because it emphasises the problem that all communities face: waste and waste disposal. Reference was made to waste from packaging. In the 1990s, the European Commission introduced Regulations that set percentage targets of reclamation or reduction in waste for the manufacturers of certain packaging. Some manufacturers have a low percentage target that can be easily met; others, however, such as glass manufacturers, have higher percentage targets that are difficult to meet because much of their waste does not come back into the stream. Glass recycling is increasing, but there is still much to organise to ensure that companies recover more of the glass that they manufacture.

I visited a glass manufacturing works near my home; it has a super-modern glass recycling plant. However, I was told that within a 10-mile radius of the factory 20,000 tonnes of glass go to landfill every week because the responsibility for taking bottles and glass jars out of the system has not yet got through to the domestic customer. Kerb-side collection is one way of tackling that problem.

Paragraph 35 of the report refers to electrical and electronic equipment. The European Commission's Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive makes manufacturers responsible for reclaiming their products — fridges and washing machines — with a view to recycling.

On the domestic side there is a central clearing house; however, there are problems on the industrial side. Construction companies involved in the regeneration of buildings such as this one must remove all the electrical equipment, which might have been there for 25 or 30 years, and return it to the producer; however, in many instances that is not possible because the producer is no longer available. Therefore it is left to the contractor or the person who commissioned the contractor to dispose of the fittings. The industry has highlighted this problem regarding the WEEE Directive, and it must be addressed.

The report raises the matter of how the Commission arrives at its targets. The Commission registers targets for the member states to be implemented by their respective Governments; but no one knows how those targets are established. Where the report does refer to how targets

are achieved, it says that they are usually set behind closed doors and that no one knows exactly how the Commission arrives at them.

Even though I welcome the report, I appeal to the Committee to revisit the problem of waste and waste disposal and to consider some of the other issues that I have referred to: the WEEE Directive, targets, and the percentages of waste reclamation for packaging. Cornflakes, for example, come in a massive box that is only two thirds full. That kind of packaging could be reduced before the product goes on the market.

I ask the Committee to continue with this exercise to ensure that we press at all levels for more transparency on how targets are set and responsibilities allocated.

11.45 am

Everyone will be aware that there is a landfill tax in the United Kingdom. Waste that is put into landfill sites is taxed, and a percentage of that tax can be spent on environmental developments in the community where the landfill site is situated. At about £12 a tonne, the tax is very small, and there is a call for it to be increased to £30 or £35 a tonne to discourage people from putting waste into landfill sites.

I am looking forward to a further report on the introduction in the Republic of charging for domestic waste by weight. That will significantly affect the amount of waste that goes into landfill sites. I appeal to the Committee to revisit the matter so that new initiatives and developments can be reported on.

Mr Arthur Morgan TD: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. The report is a work of diplomatic excellence because I am totally opposed to incineration, and yet it leaves me in a position where I now almost support it. Page 6, recommendation 25, states:

“The Committee recommends that further research is carried out into the long-term effects of dioxins”.

That is my line; I love that. It finishes in the same tone:

“The Committee suggests that industry and governments should communicate more clearly the benefits of new technologies to the public”.

That quote is for a propaganda campaign. I welcome a propaganda campaign on incineration from the industry because, my goodness, it will give those of us opposed to incineration an opportunity to debate and contest it. The same idea is contained in paragraph 22 of the report, again recommending a public information campaign.

I should not let the opportunity pass to thank Mike Torode and our good friend Donald Gelling for their hospitality, the information, and the courtesy shown to us on our visits around the facilities on their islands. It was much appreciated.

Following on from the issue of the plastic bag levy, one of our biggest problems is packaging. We should

tax packaging at manufacturing level — at source level. We should have a sliding scale of taxation according to the recyclable value of the packaging. If people put their apples on a polyurethane tray and then wrap them with cling film, we should tax them to the skies; however, if they place plastic bags beside the apples so that people can choose, there would be zero tax on that. For that to be effective, it must happen right across Europe — not just in Britain or in Ireland — given the imports and exports between these islands and the rest of Europe.

Incineration is an absolutely dreadful option. The poisonous dioxins that are emitted during the process take several days to be analysed in a laboratory, and, to my knowledge, three days is the shortest time for analysis of a dioxin. Some tell us that systems can be fitted to the stacks of incinerators to monitor dioxins continuously; unfortunately that is not the case.

Those working in the incineration industry remind me powerfully of the experts from the tobacco industry. Everyone will remember that they were extremely strident and assertive in assuring us that smoking was safe and in castigating those of us who were opposed to smoking as loonies or leftwing loonies or whatever sort of loonies. I am happy to be one of whatever sort of loonies they may be.

Senator Brendan Ryan: Perhaps all three.

Mr Arthur Morgan TD: Possibly so.

The incineration process locks us into a very poor — and extremely expensive — waste management solution for a minimum of 25 to 30 years.

There is also the problem of bottom ash and fly ash. About 25% of what the process produces is bottom ash, which is difficult to dispose of. A further 7% is hazardous waste, which creates other problems and is extremely difficult to deal with. Make no mistake: if incineration is to be developed over recycling, the waste collection system must be geared towards putting waste such as plastic into incinerators to create the calorific value that is needed for the efficient burning of materials that have lower calorific values. Incineration is an easy option, but there are better options that should be developed.

Finally, more recycling technology must be developed in industry. There is no need for a company to recycle plastic in Ireland and one in Britain. Given communication and transport services between the two islands, recycling could be planned relatively efficiently. Administratively, it would be considerably more cost-efficient than those developments. Therefore although I commend the report, I do so with tongue in cheek, as I will have to fight some of the elements of it in due course. However, on balance, it is a good report, and I welcome it. Sin é. Go raibh maith agat.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Seven Members wish to speak before the winding-up speech. I in no way wish to appear like a sergeant major, having taken the Chair for a few moments only, but the Body is due to leave the room at 12.30 pm sharp. Various matters will arise at 12.15 pm. Therefore I plead with Members to keep their interventions short.

Mr Donald Gelling MLC: I thank the Chairman of Committee D for his compliments about his trip to the Isle of Man. I would like to think that Arthur was on the road to the Isle of Man rather than on the road to Damascus. We treated him well in order to convert him. I am glad that he supports the report.

The Isle of Man has a small model that can be applied to larger countries. The island's problem is that everything is in packaging because it all comes by boat, so we came up with the policy that the "polluter pays". In the Isle of Man, it costs £100 a tonne to dispose of waste on landfill sites if that waste will not go through its energy-from-waste incinerator. That concentrates people's minds. Just about everything is recycled now, such as material from old buildings that have been pulled down to create new sites. There is a good market for recycled stone.

After consultation on the incinerator, the decision was made — perhaps politically — just before the general election. The contract was awarded before the new House sat, and there have been no problems since. The energy-from-waste incinerator has been operating well for six months. However, as Arthur pointed out, it is not a cheap option. Like everywhere else, the Isle of Man has been getting rid of its waste on the cheap for many years. Indeed, previous Governments dumped waste in any hole they could find. The Isle of Man took an environmental decision to sort out its old landfill tips, which had been merely covered by soil. We have put £5.2 million into stabilising those tips in order to make them safe and acceptable.

The island's incinerator ended up costing £42 million, although the cost was initially estimated at £24 million. However, things change; and the target of environmental acceptance is forever moving.

We agreed with those lobbying against our idea of waste disposal that we would adhere to the targets and the demands of the European Commission.

The disposal of fallen animals, necessary because of the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease, is now carried out by putting them through our energy-from-waste incinerator. However, they must be treated beforehand. The idea that fallen animals can simply be put into a burner is not correct; they must first be dewatered and treated. Many extra costs have, therefore, contributed to the total cost of the incinerator.

The Isle of Man Government bought the energy-from-waste incinerator from the people who built it but

have awarded the contract for its running to them. The regulator is the environmental division of our local Government Department. Interestingly, when the Body met in the Isle of Man, Arthur Morgan crossed swords with our then Minister of Local Government and the Environment, who was a very boisterous lady. She did not realise what she was taking on when she criticised his knowledge of incineration, but we have since dismissed her and she now sits on the Back Benches.

[Laughter].

The person who led the environmental push against incineration is now the Minister of Local Government and the Environment and will be the regulator. I suggest that he is, therefore, a man who will keep a very close eye on monitoring. I repeat that there is more involved than simply installing an energy-from-waste incinerator; it entails much more, such as recycling. The Isle of Man recycles glass, but the cost of getting it off the island is so high that, to be honest, it is not worth it. The glass does, however, go into making bricks. After all, glass is made of sand, and so it can be ground down and used to make bricks. It is reused. However, one must be seen to be doing that as well; otherwise people will believe that everything goes into the burner and that there is no recycling and no reuse.

The Isle of Man sits in the middle of the Irish Sea, and its Government have made an agreement with Scotland and with the Republic of Ireland to pinch a little bit of their natural gas from the pipe that comes through our territorial waters. Now that that has been piped ashore, we have been able to do away with the old oil-engined generators and replace them with nice, clean gas turbines. There is a push to improve the environment on our island.

The energy-from-waste incinerator now produces 8% of the energy that the Isle of Man requires. That energy is now fed into the national grid, so the Isle of Man will be able to help the United Kingdom out this winter. When the United Kingdom runs short of electricity, it can rely on the Isle of Man, Sir.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Donald has just given us one or two useful political tips.

12.00 pm

Deputy Maurice Dubras: Monsieur le Président, thank you very much. I would like to take up some of the points made by other Members, but I will start by picking up on a comment from the President of the Nordic Council yesterday complimenting this Body's ability to minimise the amount of paper that it circulates. When I entered the States of Jersey Government and heard stories about how much paper one had to read and prepare, I decided to weigh all my official mail. In one year I collected 112 kilograms of paper in various forms. Accepting that politicians should take a lead, I am pleased

to say that as a group we have dramatically reduced that amount because of the Internet and because much more of our documentation is transmitted electronically now. I notice, however, that this hotel is not particularly helpful to our collective effort. I ordered one paper each day, and two were delivered. The second one is free, and that should be charged to the hotel.

My sons and other relatives from Canada and New Zealand are aghast at the waste that Jersey and the UK put into the system. We can certainly learn from other places.

I welcome the report. However, I was disappointed that it did not examine more closely the top two elements of the European waste hierarchy: prevention in the first place, a point made by Arthur Morgan and Donald Gelling; and waste minimisation. The island is very keen on the European proposal to expect automobile car manufacturers, and their equivalent, to take back their product at the end of its cycle.

There is a dilemma about whether to charge for the waste at the start or at the end. At present, purchasing a vehicle is taxed, but we are not minded to extend that because we expect the European Directive to come into force and we will attempt to comply with it. Charging a tax at the end is neither acceptable nor practicable because the value of the vehicle is so much less and would be almost the same as the charge for disposal.

Agricultural products were also mentioned; that is an issue for us because of our excellent Jersey Royal potato. In order to be competitive in the market, our fields are covered with thin films of plastic; these are recycled for at least two growing seasons, and, I am pleased to say, the Scottish industry takes the plastic back. However, it costs farmers about £160 a tonne to have it exported and recycled.

Unfortunately, the Committee presented this report before the current public consultation on a new strategy for the island for the next 25 years. However, much as we would like to take advantage of the new alternative technologies, we must have something that is practical, reliable and affordable. To the disappointment of some Members, we will have to resort almost certainly to a new incinerator plant to replace the existing one, which has to be shut down by 2008. That is about to be decided. The intent, however, is to increase the energy from waste output from the present three megawatts to the order of eight with a net five or six, as with the Isle of Man, being redistributed on the island to supplement the nucleo-electricity that we get, very economically, through cables from France.

I hope that we can accept some of the findings of the report. I will take it back to my colleagues responsible for the new strategy and consultation, and we will compare it with the experience of our neighbours in Normandy. Some of our political colleagues would like us to export some of our household waste to Normandy. Opportunities are being explored there, but I believe that that is a fundamental

mistake; we should take care of ourselves and be pressured to minimise and prevent waste in the first place.

I look forward to further reports from, if not this Body, the British-Irish Council environment sectoral group, where this matter is also under discussion.

Senator Paschal Mooney: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh.

Like other Members, I welcome this report: it is an excellent piece of work and a good document, despite Arthur's genuinely grounded misgivings. However, listening to his hard-line attitude on incineration, I considered tearing up my own comments, which were a bit more liberal and moderate. I, and many others, still have an open mind on incineration.

Pages 3 and 4 of the report make for grim reading. I thought, somewhat naively, that we were moving rapidly towards, if not completion, then at least towards European strategic targets and objectives. However, reading the waste management targets, the background under these headings, and the response from the European Commission, I see that an enormous amount of work still has to be done.

There has been some resistance to a tax on waste in urban areas of Ireland. Politicians in Dublin have been sent to jail for opposing what they see as an unfair tax on waste. There are political and non-political lobby groups in Ireland that believe passionately that a tax on waste is an unfair extra tax. Those groups argue that since people already pay income tax and other taxes they should not have to pay a local authority charge for the disposal of waste. That is not an argument with which I agree, and the vast majority of the Irish people do not agree with it either. As a result of this agitation, the Government are moving rapidly to a weight-based charge as distinct from a fixed annual charge, which has proved to be unpopular, as other Members have said. The Government hope to have the scheme implemented nationwide by 2006, and it has already begun to show great benefits.

Some people felt that local authorities were using the rubbish tax to gather revenue instead of using it as a distinctly environmental initiative. That was unique to Ireland because, unlike the UK, we do not have property taxes on private properties. The revenue-generating powers of local authorities were diminished as a result of the abolition of rates on houses in the mid-1970s.

I agree with Brendan that the plastic bag levy has changed our practices. If it were introduced into the UK, and I know that the report recommends that it should be, the UK Government should pitch it higher than the symbolic 15 cent levy on plastic bags that has been in place in Ireland since its introduction some years ago. Anecdotal, as distinct from statistical, evidence suggests that people are slowly drifting back to using plastic bags. The multiple stores in Ireland, where the majority

of people shop, will invariably ask customers whether they want a plastic bag. The plastic bags are kept at the checkout; it is not as if they have been banished from shops in Ireland. As with the tax on tobacco, in order that the good work in this area continues, the tax should be pitched higher than in Ireland.

Despite advances in recycling, paper disposal remains a major problem. That may be to do with Ireland's economies of scale in that we may not produce enough paper to make recycling a commercially viable proposition. The out-going Minister for the Environment and Local Government was studying initiatives in that area; however, I did not see any reference to that in the report.

I support the points made in paragraph 22 about information on energy from waste. The report mentions this and highlights incineration technology.

The Member from Jersey discussed agriculture and potatoes. Ireland has not yet reached the Kyoto targets that were set in the mid-1990s partly because of the dramatic and unprecedented growth in its economy. One of the by-products is that the national cowherd is more than eight million. As a result of EU decoupling proposals, that figure will diminish in future; that in turn will reduce pollutants released into the air by cattle. A by-product of another EU policy on decoupling will enable Ireland to achieve the Kyoto targets.

I agree with those who say that the report is light on the question of packaging; a more proactive approach is needed. We should no longer accept unnecessary packaging — particularly on technological goods. Many will share my experience of going into a store to buy a computer chip of three or four inches only to find that it is in a plastic package with a cardboard back about two foot long. Such packaging should be penalised or outlawed. The Committee should return to the problem of packaging.

12.15 pm

Deputy Mike Torode: For many years, Guernsey used worked-out granite quarries for landfill. We had a productive granite industry and despite using several of those quarries as reservoirs, we were left with several into which we landfilled all our domestic refuse and much of our construction refuse. About 10 years ago, we became a little more enlightened about some of the effects of landfill, and we did a great deal to lessen the effects by insulation of methane extraction and so on.

However, we finished up with one major quarry, which has only about seven years of landfill life left. Therefore we generated reports over seven years. We used independent consultants, principally a company called Rambøll. Its consultants explored several options — in fact, just about everything that it was possible for us to do.

Guernsey, however, is a small, isolated community and, like the Isle of Man and Jersey, could not afford to adopt emerging technologies that had no proven track

record. Whatever we choose must work first time and must continue to work, which is why we chose an energy-from-waste plant at a capital cost of £72 million.

We were due to sign the contracts in the first week of July, but in April we had a general election. One of the newly elected Members, who had campaigned particularly on environmental matters, drummed up huge support for what is, in effect, a private Member's Bill. He took all 14 newly elected Members with him and several sitting Members who were unhappy with some aspects of energy from waste. The result is that the whole thing has been put on hold.

The States have been forced into fresh consultation and seeking fresh expertise. The panel comes from the highest professional areas of waste disposal; it is collecting fresh evidence as well as examining the evidence accrued over the past seven or eight years. The panel will report to the States by the turn of the year. I suspect that it will ratify the earlier decision that, for Guernsey, there really is no alternative to energy from waste.

I say that despite the fact that, over the years, we have tried hard to recycle. At great cost, we recycle almost all newsprint that comes into the island, because freight out of the island is hugely expensive. Glass is recycled; bins are provided at strategic drop-off points for bottles and jars; tyres are recycled by sending them to the UK for shredding, again at a high cost; all types of batteries are sent to the UK. Guernsey is bound by the Regulations of the Basel Convention on the disposal of general rubbish and household refuse. It is not practicable to ship all our waste out of the island; we must do something on the island.

We charge by the tonne for the disposal of domestic waste, and that has reduced the amount of waste. However, people have short memories; they just pay the extra coppers and grouse. We are heading towards £100 a tonne for the disposal of domestic refuse.

The Chairman of Committee D, Kevin McNamara, mentioned a car disposal cost. It is our intention to introduce an up-front cost; it is not yet in place, but it should be fairly soon. That measure should help, because at present the States pay to dispose of some 20 vehicles a week, at a cost of £70 or £80 a vehicle.

We offer a free disposal scheme to owners to stop them abandoning their vehicles in the countryside. Some people do not take the scheme up, and the police must retrieve the vehicles and dispose of them at the taxpayer's expense.

Nothing comes for nothing. I would love to see packaging reduced at source, but tax on packaging at source will not work. The man who sells you your cornflakes will not absorb the cost; he will put it on the price of the cornflakes. We, in the islands, are stuffed with whatever comes our way from outside. Everything that comes in

is packaged. We do not have bulk bags of cornflakes; we do not have bulk bags of anything. It is all packaged material and that means that we must get rid of it.

I hope that at the next plenary meeting in six months' time I can say that our energy-from-waste plant is under way. It will put more than 20% of our local electricity demand into the grid, and that will save us having to import more and more electricity from France, which we have done for some time; although we retain a fully independent back-up on the island in case anything happens to the French link. Those measures are an important part of our economy, and I hope to be able to give an update on them in six months' time.

Ms Cecilia Keaveney TD: A Chathaoirligh.

We have a problem with cars that have failed their MOT test and have been sold off for €40, €50, or €60. Car dealers were offering €1,000 to customers to trade in their cars to be dealt with. Mike Torode referred to a scheme that operates on his island. More could be done.

The Irish Government banned flyers left on cars when people go shopping. It was a huge issue, but the ban has proved as useful as the levy on plastic bags. People will use recycling facilities if they are put in place, but sometimes the recycling containers are not emptied and that can make an area look unsightly. Incentives should be offered to encourage people to recycle, especially when the recycling material is not valuable. Some material, glass, for example, goes through troughs where it is not valuable and nobody wants it. A subsidy or possibly a new product could solve that problem.

It is difficult to overcome public concerns about dioxins and their fears of mobile phones and phone masts. People do not realise that the mobile phone is the problem, not the mast. We have to prove the negative.

In Ireland we used to get 5p for returning a glass bottle to a shop. We should give children incentives: if they return a bottle or a can they should get a reward. That happened in support of a good cause when I was in primary school; the cans were brought back to retailers, and a wheelchair was sponsored after so many tonnes of cans were returned. Good causes that encourage children to minimise waste should not be underestimated.

The Green Schools programme is working well in Ireland, and it should be expanded. We should embarrass those who are prepared to dump waste anywhere. We talk about exposing people who dump waste, but we do not do enough about it. Some people drive into the countryside to leave a bed or fridge on a hillside instead of travelling half the distance to the waste station. We should exploit that more. Everything else has already been covered.

Go raibh maith agat.

Mr Johnny Brady TD: I agree with everything that has been said. The plastic bag levy in Ireland has been a tremendous success. We are considering putting a tax on

chewing gum and on fast food wrapping, which are a scourge in every country. Civic amenity centres are situated throughout the country and have been a great success. However, educating people to reduce, reuse and recycle is the big issue.

The manager of the County Meath environment committee has introduced awards for primary school children; they have been a tremendous success. It is something that should be encouraged in every school across our countries. It is important that young people are encouraged to reduce, reuse and recycle from an early age.

In the first three years of Ireland's waste management policy, which began in 1998, waste was reduced by 7.4%. There is still some way to go to increase that figure to 30% or 50%. I hope that that will happen.

The enormous number of illegal dumps is a serious problem in Ireland. They must be stamped out urgently.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD: Waste creates a great deal of hot air. It has generated much discussion. I am sorry that Deputy Morgan has left, because I was interested in his strong stance on incineration—

Senator Paschal Mooney: He had to check out.

Mr Seymour Crawford TD: That is OK. Given his background, it is interesting that he is worried about that particular issue.

I am conscious of the cost to our border county councils of dealing with waste from oil laundering; it is exported from the country but is dealt with, at enormous cost, by county councils.

I have no problem with Deputy Brady blowing the Irish trumpet over what we have done about plastic bags, but we cannot blow our trumpet on other issues. We export much of our waste to other countries. One outstanding example arose from the BSE crisis. Meat and bonemeal could not be used in feeds; it has been exported to Germany and to other countries to generate electricity at the minimum possible cost.

I am interested in the project that Donald Gelling and his group instigated in the Isle of Man; I am delighted to hear of its success. We hear a great deal of crap about what is happening in other countries. For instance, we were told that in Halifax, Canada, there was zero waste. When our county manager went there he saw that the waste had been minimised, but the final product was incinerated. Across the river in Prince Edward Island, with which Monaghan has close links, the first industry to be found is the energy-from-waste plant that has been in operation for years. Several years ago we visited Denmark and Holland, where we saw waste being taken out of landfills to be incinerated, as the damage caused by landfills was well known.

I have, perhaps, put more effort into this issue than most people because of Monaghan's problems with agricultural waste, which could be used in a biomass plant. When

our politicians went to Scotland to see a biomass plant, a reporter overheard one saying to another, "How are we going to tell people that the plant is so good?" The other replied, "Well, we certainly won't." — and they certainly did not.

In an attempt to stop the biomass plant in north Monaghan, a group of English experts was brought over to examine what could be done with the waste. We listened to them for two hours, and I asked them what UK farmers did with their poultry waste. After much thought, they said, "They put it into landfill." I then asked them how it was that four major power stations used poultry waste. The experts did not know about that — and they had come over to tell us how to deal with the problem.

It is a major problem. I congratulate the Committee on its report, but there is still a long way to go before the myths are dispelled. Many of those myths are to do with politics, but those of us who live on the land know the situation.

12.30 pm

Mr Jim Glennon TD: Go raibh maith agat, a Chathaoirligh. I am conscious of the clock, so I will be brief. I apologise on behalf of Senator Mary O'Rourke, the Vice-Chair of Committee D. I have been told that she has lost her voice; there is no truth in the rumour that it was mischievously hidden by some of her colleagues.

[Laughter].

The debate has been interesting, and I thank Members for their contributions. I noted especially the urgency that appears to be common among the islands, which, I expect, results from the immediacy of their problems. They have little opportunity to procrastinate. However, globally, and particularly in Ireland, the debate has been marked by much procrastination. Tonight, I am going to an important meeting in my constituency, North Dublin, where there are plans for a 650-acre landfill site for all the city's waste. Waste management is a major problem for all the islands, and I have been struck by the manner in which they have been forced to deal with the issue.

I want to thank, on behalf of Committee D, Mr Donald Gelling and Mr Graham Guille for their hospitality when we visited the Isle of Man and Guernsey respectively.

The mantra "reduce, reuse and recycle" was not phrased just to have a nice ring to it. There is definite prioritisation — and reduction must be the priority. People are patting themselves on the back because they have achieved a reduction in waste of 7.4% in four years. When refuse charges and free recycling were introduced in my constituency, within a year there was a 40% reduction in the amount of domestic waste being taken to landfill sites.

Reduction, without a shadow of a doubt, is the key; it is the most difficult to achieve, but it is the one that we must grapple with. Recycling has been well addressed, especially, as several Members pointed out, in primary schools where a generation is growing up with recycling as a priority in their day-to-day lives. Indeed, the adults are learning from the children and are put under pressure

by them to recycle. However, reduction is not easy, which is why it is such a challenge. We cannot rely on the next generation to have the right attitude to waste reduction in order to let us off the hook. We must emphasise reduction, reuse and recycling in that order.

On behalf of Committee D, I particularly want to thank our Chairman, Kevin McNamara, for the excellent manner in which he steered the Committee through the report; it has been a pleasure to work with him. The Body has, by no means, heard the last of the report. Several questions will be forwarded to the various Governments and Assemblies, and the Committee looks forward to their responses. There is a major opportunity for co-operation between the islands. Waste management is a problem that is shared by all of them, probably equally. The Body has a genuine opportunity to make a positive contribution to the future quality of life of the people of the islands. Go raibh maith agat arís.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That the Body takes note of the report of Committee D - [Environment and Social Committee] - on Waste Management [Doc. No. 99] and the conclusions and recommendations of the report, which should be forwarded to both Governments and to the devolved administrations for their observations.

Motion made:

That the Body do now adjourn. — [*Mr Kevin McNamara MP.*]

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: I will gallop through the Adjournment debate so that we are not evicted — a tripod is being assembled outside with a heavy beam on it to get rid of us all.

First, on behalf of the Body, I thank Wales for providing an excellent centre for our debates. We appreciate that the Minister for Health and Social Services from the National Assembly for Wales was able to talk to us about an issue that will not go away — smoking, bills of rights and who can do what, where and when.

I congratulate the hotel staff and the organisers, who have been especially helpful without being intrusive. Thank you to our organisers, particularly the Hansard reporters, who come here voluntarily to report our debate. I also thank our Clerks, the people who service our Committees, and the security staff. I was not able to be present at dinner last night, but I am told that it was a great success, probably because I was not there.

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): We will not go as far as that.

Mr Kevin McNamara MP: I was pleased to hear that it was a great success.

I make one little observation. I believe that there may be a general election some time soon in the Republic of Ireland. The value of this Body should be drawn to the attention of all aspiring candidates in the Republic because it appears that once one has been a Member of this Body, one can end up as Foreign Minister, Chancellor or in any other position. I am particularly pleased that our former Co-Chairman, Brendan Smith TD, and Conor Lenihan TD have been promoted. I am a little worried about Mr Lenihan being in foreign affairs; I do not know when Ireland is going to declare war on the United States, but that should be interesting. [*Laughter*].

Tony Killeen was also promoted, which is great.

Finally, Co-Chairman, thanks to you, and to Séamus Kirk who stood in so well for Brendan Smith, and to everyone concerned. If I have missed anyone out, I apologise.

[*Applause*].

The Co-Chairman (Mr David Winnick MP): Thank you. I have much pleasure in wishing you all the very best and in concluding the twenty-ninth Plenary of the Body. We shall next meet in March in Ireland.

Adjourned at 12.40 pm.

Written Answers to Questions

The following questions were not answered during Oral Answers to Questions on Monday 18 October owing to time constraints, and accordingly received a written answer:

Sports Stadium in Ireland

13. **Mr Johnny Brady TD** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration has been given to the possibility of an all-island dimension to the proposed new sports stadium development in Northern Ireland, and what consultation has taken place with the national governing bodies of the relevant sports south of the border with a view to ascertaining their possible use of the stadium.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Paul Murphy MP): The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) was invited to commission the preparation of a robust business plan to establish whether a multi-sports stadium for Northern Ireland – combining soccer, rugby and GAA — was, indeed, a viable option. Following the completion of the business planning exercise the SIB was asked last May to investigate site and funding options. I can confirm that, as part of those exercises, there have been ongoing discussions with the Ulster branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union and the Ulster Council of the Gaelic Athletic Association about the potential use by those sports. In addition, the SIB has held formal meetings with the Irish Rugby Football Union and the Football Association of Ireland regarding the possible use of the Stadium for international and all-island competitions.

On the runs

14. **Lord Smith of Clifton** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on discussions between the British and Irish Governments and the political parties on the on the runs and the return of those who were forcibly exiled.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The British and Irish Governments recognised at the talks at Weston Park in the summer of 2001 that the issue of terrorists on the run needed to be dealt with and made clear that they would take steps to do so. The British Government published in May 2003 proposals in relation to on the runs. However, the Government will contemplate steps on that issue only in the context of acts of completion.

The forced exile of individuals by paramilitaries must stop. The Government have repeatedly called, and will continue to call, on those with influence over the organisations responsible for intimidating individuals from their homes to end these unlawful exclusions.

European structural funds

15. **Mr Mike German AM** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on

the continuing value after 2006 of European structural funds to the development of cross-border co-operation.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The debate on the future of European structural and cohesion funds after 2006 is in its early stages. There are key issues, such as the overall size of the budget and the focus of the funds, that are yet to be resolved. I would expect Northern Ireland future EU funding levels to be considerably less than now because of EU enlargement and the relatively good economic performance of Northern Ireland and the border regions of Ireland in recent years. Both the United Kingdom and the European Commission support continuation of EU cross-border co-operation programmes, and I hope that Northern Ireland and the border regions of Ireland will benefit from such a programme after 2006.

Free travel for pensioners

16. **Mr Jerry Cowley TD** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with his Irish equivalent regarding reciprocal arrangements for the provision of free travel for pensioners on public transport services, with particular reference to older Irish emigrants returning to Ireland on holidays, in particular those older emigrants who are in receipt of partial Irish pension or a pre-1953 pension and whether he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: My right hon Friend the Minister of State for Northern Ireland met the Minister for Social and Family Affairs, on 20 September 2004, to discuss her proposals for all-Ireland concessionary travel. I understand that there have not been similar discussions with John Spellar's counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom. John Spellar is currently considering the proposals put forward at the meeting, which did not include specific eligibility criteria.

Co-operation Ireland

17. **Senator Paschal Mooney** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration he has given to the proposal from Co-operation Ireland to establish a forum representing local elected representatives and civic society to liaise with the North-South implementation bodies with a view to establishing a more inclusive dialogue in all parts of the island of Ireland; and whether he will discuss the matter with the Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Co-operation Ireland has not as yet submitted any proposals to the Government. I will of course be happy to consider any proposals that it cares to make in this regard.

Institutions established under the Good Friday Agreement

18. **Senator Brian Hayes** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the efforts made by the British and Irish Governments to

re-establish the institutions set up under the Good Friday Agreement.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I refer the Senator to the answer that I gave earlier to Mr Jim O’Keeffe TD, the right hon Member for East Hampshire and the Noble Lord, the Lord Dubs.

[See Oral Answers to questions, questions 7 and 8, page 35, and question 11, page 39].

Co-operation on immigration

19. **Mr Jim Glennon TD** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consideration has been given to the potential benefits of greater levels of co-operation between the British and Irish Governments in dealing with problems arising from immigration and of sharing experience in respect of racism and multiculturalism.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: The British and Irish Governments fully recognise the benefits of enhanced operational co-operation between the two countries in dealing with common immigration problems. Last year a group comprised of UK and Irish officials was established to examine the possible abuse of immigration and asylum processes through exploitation of the common travel area.

We see considerable benefits in sharing ideas on good practice with our EU partners, including Ireland. This already happens, for example through the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. United Kingdom and Irish Government officials working on race equality issues are in regular dialogue with one another on issues of common concern.

Good Friday Agreement

20. **Mr Arthur Morgan TD** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what aspects of the Good Friday Agreement the two Governments could proceed with and implement immediately in the light of the current political situation.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement continues. Police and criminal justice reform, for instance, are very well advanced. Much has been done on the security normalisation front too, but the Governments are clear

that the right enabling environment must prevail for the Joint Declaration security normalisation programme to begin. The rights and equality agenda is of course non-conditional, and that programme continues.

Leeds Castle talks

21. **Mr Joe Sherlock TD** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in resolving the outstanding issues from the Leeds Castle talks; what are the outstanding issues to be resolved; what is his assessment of the possibility of resolving those issues within the binding terms of the existing agreement, or of the amendments to the agreement required in order to make that possible; and what plans the British and Irish Governments have for presenting an alternative plan for implementing as much of the Good Friday Agreement as possible should the parties fail to agree.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: I refer you to the answer I gave earlier to Mr Jim O’Keeffe TD, the right hon Member for East Hampshire and the Noble Lord, the Lord Dubs.

[See Oral Answers to questions, questions 7 and 8, page 35, and question 11, page 39].

Infrastructural projects

22. **Cecilia Keaveney** asked the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will make a statement on the infrastructural projects in the North of Ireland, with particular reference to improving the transport of gas from Belfast to Letterkenny and the train and airport links from Belfast to Derry.

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland: A gas pipeline from Carrickfergus to Londonderry will be completed shortly. The Commission for Energy Regulation has appointed consultants to study the feasibility of extending gas supplies to Letterkenny. There are currently no commercial air links between Belfast and Londonderry. The Department for Regional Development has a programme of strategic road improvement schemes that is supportive of the regional transportation strategy and, over the three-year period to 2006, plans to invest £590 million on over 300 projects to upgrade water and sewerage services.

APPENDIX A

Letter from Mr Barry Gardiner MP, Minister with responsibility for Education

British-Irish Interparliamentary Body Secretariat
Committee Office
House Of Commons
London
SW1 0AA

17 November 2004

Dear Sir

At the recent Plenary session, Paul Murphy suggested that I should write to the Body outlining the detail of the Government's policy on integrated education in Northern Ireland. I am pleased now to write to fulfil that commitment.

The Government does not seek to impose any particular type of education in Northern Ireland. Rather, the Department of Education responds to parental demand where this does not involve unreasonable public expenditure. However, as members of the Body may be aware, the Department has a statutory duty to encourage and facilitate integrated education, which is defined as the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils. The Government takes this duty seriously and provides a level of funding to the integrated sector that is consistent with this duty. In addition to providing substantial mainstream funding for integrated schools, the Department also provides core funding to the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) to promote integrated education in the Province. The grant allocation for NICIE for the current financial year is £490k. The Department has also provided £3.55m to the Integrated Education Fund which supports new integrated schools in the period before they become eligible for Government funding, provides financial assistance for schools in other sectors which are transforming to integrated status and provides grants to schools in all sectors to promote a culture of tolerance.

In December 2000, the eligibility criteria for the funding of new integrated primary schools was reduced. Initial thresholds were reduced to Year one intakes of 15 pupils in Belfast and Londonderry and 12 pupils for new schools elsewhere. In 2001, the criteria for the establishment of new post-primary schools was reduced to a Year 8 intake of 50 pupils. As a result of these reductions, one new grant-maintained integrated primary school received Government funding in 2003 and a further three schools became eligible for grant-aid in 2004. In addition, one new post primary school became eligible for funding by the Department in September 2004.

In addition to the establishment of new grant-maintained integrated schools, existing schools from all sectors have the option of transforming to integrated status. This process can be initiated by parents or by the Board of Governors of a school and involves a secret ballot of all parents of registered pupils at a school. The capital costs associated with any new school are large. Taken together with the number of excess places in the education system in Northern Ireland, the Government is keen that the option to transform is explored as fully as possible where parental demand indicates a demand for integrated schooling. The Department of Education has produced a detailed information pack for schools wishing to explore the option of transformation. A copy of the pack was issued to all schools and is available on the Department's website.

At September 2004, there were 55 grant-aided integrated schools of which 16 have transformed to controlled integrated status.

I hope that this letter explains current policy on integrated education in Northern Ireland and reassures members of the Body of the Government's continued support of, and its commitment to, the growth of the sector.

Yours faithfully

Barry Gardiner MP
Minister with responsibility for Education

APPENDIX B

Letter from Ms Angela Smith MP, Minister with responsibility for Culture, Arts and Leisure

29 November 2004

COR180/2004

British-Irish Inter Parliamentary Body Secretariat
Committee Office
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A QAA



Department of
**Culture, Arts
and Leisure**

www.dcalni.gov.uk

AN ROINN

**Cultúr, Ealaíon
agus Fóillíochta**

MANNYSTRE O

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Following the recent meeting of the British-Irish Inter Parliamentary Body in Chepstow, Paul Murphy has asked me to write to you about HMG's position on the financial issues relating to the Ulster Canal. This is in response to the discussions on the question raised by Seymour Crawford, TD. There was a suggestion that insufficient consideration had been given to the potential benefits for the border counties of Cavan, Monaghan, Fermanagh, Tyrone and Armagh.

The Cross Border Body, Waterways Ireland, carried out an updated feasibility study on the Ulster Canal which indicates that restoration is technically feasible at a cost of around £89m in 2000 prices. An Economic Appraisal of the project was carried out by Consultants, PricewaterhouseCoopers in accordance with HM Treasury requirements. The Economic Appraisal indicates that the project is not viable in purely monetary terms in that the costs considerably outweigh the estimated monetary benefits. However, this assessment did not take account of the wider social and economic benefits for this disadvantaged border region which would be difficult to quantify with any degree of accuracy. I can assure you that we recognise that this project could provide a catalyst for regeneration of communities, towns and villages in the waterway corridor as well as making an important contribution to the tourism product on the island of Ireland. This is evident from the experience of the Shannon-Erne waterway where there is significant private sector investment and job creation in the area. I welcome the fact that the Blackwater Regional Partnership has recently secured funding from INTERREG to undertake a socio-economic study to try to quantify these wider benefits.

Waterways Ireland also commissioned a further piece of work to identify options available to finance the project from both public and private sources, including assessing its suitability for Public Private Partnership funding. This study suggested that it was most unlikely that the private sector would risk investing in the capital works required to re-open the waterway without significant commitment and investment of public funds. Considering the scale of the capital funding required and with other pressing priorities for public expenditure, it is difficult to see how this project can proceed at the present time.

I know there is disappointment that the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland's INTERREG application was rejected. This application was submitted to INTERREG IIIA, Measure 1.4 (Rural Development Initiative) in October 2003. As joint Implementing Agents for this Measure, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRGA) commissioned a feasibility study to provide further detail on the project proposed by IWAI.

The application and feasibility study were assessed in full by the Joint DARD/DCRGA Panel during September 2004 and rejection was recommended. The rejection was based on four major concerns, as follows:

- The absence of an overall framework for restoration of the entire canal
- Land ownership issues
- Appropriateness of a voluntary body to manage this type of major infrastructural project, and
- Feasibility of proposed budget and time frames.

Other concerns within the study included the costs and time involved in dealing with environmental impact, engineering difficulties and also a bridge, which would require raising in order to allow navigation from the restored section of canal in Northern Ireland to Lough Erne.

The decision of the Panel to reject the project was presented to the INTERREG IIIA Steering Committee in September and was upheld. DARD and DCRGA met with IWAI representatives during October 2004 to provide feedback on their application. The IWAI have requested a formal review of this rejection by the managing authority for the programme, the Special EU Programmes Body. This is scheduled to take place during November 2004.

I hope this explains our position more fully.



ANGELA SMITH MP

APPENDIX C

Letter from Mr Des Browne MP, Minister of State for Citizenship, Immigration and Nationality



Des Browne MP
MINISTER OF STATE
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The Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP
Secretary of State
Northern Ireland Office
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SW1P 4PN

02 DEC 2004

Thank you for your letter of 24 October about asylum seekers travelling to Ireland from the UK via Northern Ireland. I apologise for the delay in my reply.

As you know, the provisions of the Council Regulation (EC) No 343/2003 of 18 February 2003 (the "Dublin II" Regulation), which came into force from 1 September 2003, establish the procedural framework for dealing with asylum seekers who travel between the UK and Ireland. Unfortunately records of requests and transfers do not identify situations where individuals have travelled via Northern Ireland, but where either country identifies individuals as the responsibility of the other, the Dublin II Regulation now provides much tighter time-scales for requests and transfers than those provided by the original Dublin Convention. One of the key themes of Dublin II is to provide for more efficient working practices, so requests are now transmitted using secure electronic channels between administrations provided by "DubliNet". Evidence provided by the Eurodac fingerprint database also expedites the handling of cases based on fingerprint evidence.

A significant development in the context of the relationship between the UK and Ireland, under the Dublin II Regulation, is that Article 23 makes special provision for Member States to establish administrative arrangements on a bilateral basis to further increase effectiveness. These arrangements may relate to exchanges of liaison officers, the simplification of procedures or further shortening of time limits relating to the transmission and examination of requests. As a result an agreement between the UK and Ireland, to simplify procedures and reduce time limits, has been drafted and is under consideration. When finally agreed and implemented this will bring additional operational benefits to both countries in terms of identifying and transferring individuals that move across our borders by land, sea or air.

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BUILDING A SAFE, JUST AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

Although this draft agreement has not yet been finalised, the Immigration Service Third Country Unit (TCU), which deals with all Dublin II Regulation casework in the UK, has built up a good working relationship with the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner in Dublin. The relationship is maintained through meetings of TCU managers and IND policy officials with officials of the Refugee Applications Commissioner, the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Garda National Immigration Bureau.

In addition there are also meetings between senior officials about Operation Gull, an ongoing exercise by the UK Immigration Service to ascertain the number of illegal entrants and failed asylum seekers travelling through Northern Ireland. It was instigated as a result of intelligence which indicated that increased traffic had been diverted to the land border through Northern Ireland following the reintroduction of passport controls by the Irish on Common Travel Area (CTA) traffic at the air and seaports. The UK Government remains committed to this exercise and to working closely together with the Irish Government to help reduce immigration abuse in the CTA.

A copy of this letter is being sent to the BIIPB Secretariat, as you requested.



DES BROWNE

