

**BRITISH-IRISH  
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

**Forty-ninth Plenary Session**

**19-21 October 2014, Ashford, Kent**

**MEMBERSHIP OF THE  
BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

**Steering Committee**

**Co-Chairmen**

Mr Laurence ROBERTSON MP  
Mr Frank FEIGHAN TD

**Vice-Chairmen**

Rt Hon Paul MURPHY MP  
Mr Séamus KIRK TD  
Mr Aengus Ó SNODAIGH TD  
Mr Robert WALTER MP

**MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE**

**British Members**

Mr Laurence ROBERTSON MP, Co-Chair  
Viscount BRIDGEMAN  
Mr Oliver COLVILE MP  
Miss Rosie COOPER MP  
Baroness DOOCEY OBE  
Lord DUBS  
Lord GERMAN OBE  
Rt Hon Lord MAWHINNEY  
Rt Hon Paul MURPHY MP  
Mr Mark PRITCHARD MP  
Lord ROGAN  
Mr Andrew ROSINDELL MP  
Mr Chris RUANE MP  
Rt Hon Lord SHUTT of Greetland  
Lord SKELMERSDALE  
Mr Robert WALTER MP

**Welsh Assembly Members**

Mr David MELDING AM  
Mr John GRIFFITHS AM  
Mr William POWELL AM  
Mrs Joyce WATSON AM  
Mr Lindsay WHITTLE AM

**Tynwald Member & Associate**

The Hon Stephen RODAN SHK  
Mr Alex DOWNIE MLC

**Irish Members**

Mr Frank FEIGHAN TD  
Senator Paul BRADFORD  
Mr Joe CAREY TD  
Senator Paul COGHLAN  
Mr Seán CONLAN TD  
Mr Noel COONAN TD  
Mr Seán CROWE TD  
Senator Maurice CUMMINS  
Senator Imelda HENRY  
Senator Cáit KEANE  
Mr John LYONS TD  
Senator Mary MORAN  
Senator Paschal MOONEY  
Mr Patrick O'DONOVAN TD  
Mr Joe O'REILLY TD  
Mr John-Paul PHELAN TD  
Mr Arthur SPRING TD  
Mr Jack WALL TD  
Senator Jim WALSH

**Scottish Parliament Members**

Mr John SCOTT MSP  
Mr Willie COFFEY MSP  
Mr James DORNAN MSP  
Mr Gordon MacDONALD MSP  
Mr Michael McMAHON MSP

**Northern Ireland Assembly  
Members**

Mrs Judith COCHRANE MLA  
Mr Danny KINAHAN MLA

**States of Jersey Member**

Deputy John Le Fondré

Mr Sean ROGERS MLA  
Mr Jim WELLS MLA**States of Guernsey Member**

No representative

**OTHERS ATTENDING AS GUEST SPEAKERS**

|   |  |
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| <b>Professor Keith Jeffery,</b><br>School of History and Anthropology, Queen's<br>University, Belfast | <b>Dr Andrew Murrison MP</b><br>Minister of State for Northern Ireland |
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**OFFICIALS**

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| <b>Joint Clerks to the Assembly</b><br>Dr Robin James<br>Mr Paul Kelly | <b>Clerks of the Devolved Institutions</b><br>Mr Steven Bell<br>Ms Louise Close<br>Mr Robert Lloyd-Williams<br><br><b>Media Advisers</b><br>Mr Paul Hand (Oireachtas)<br>Ms Jessica Bridges Palmer (Westminster) |
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**COMMITTEE CLERKS TO THE ASSEMBLY**

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|---|--|
| <b>Committee A: Sovereign Matters</b><br>Ms Kate Tyrrell<br>Mr Marek Kubala                           | <b>Committee B: European Affairs</b><br>Mr John-Paul Flaherty<br>Ms Kate Tyrrell                               |
| <b>Committee C: Economic</b><br>Ms Betty Kehoe<br>Ms Judith Boyce                                     | <b>Committee D: Environmental and Social</b><br>Mr Chris Atkinson<br>Ms Betty Kehoe                            |
| <b>Irish and British Secretariats</b><br>Sir Michael Davies KCB<br>Mrs Amanda Healy<br>Ms Betty Kehoe | <b>Official Reporters</b><br>Mr Will Humpreys-Jones<br>Ms Coleesa Egan<br>Ms Claire Hall<br>Mr Richard Purnell |

# THE BRITISH-IRISH PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

## Official Report of the forty-ninth Meeting

Tuesday 21 October 2014

*The Assembly met at 9:31 am.*

### PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS AND CO-CHAIRS' INTRODUCTION

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Good morning. The Assembly is now in public session.

I have one or two brief announcements. First, I remind everyone to turn their pagers, beepers and mobile phones to silent, at least. Secondly, when Members are asked to contribute, they should clearly state their name and legislature. We have a problem with the recording equipment at the moment, so Members should speak as clearly as possible. I think that everything is being recorded manually at this point.

I remind Members that proceedings of the Assembly do not attract parliamentary privilege.

By way of a slight correction, you may have read references in the media to the "Association" but we are, of course, the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly. I want to make that clear.

It gives me great pleasure formally to congratulate our colleague Frank Feighan on his appointment as a new Irish Co-Chairman of the Assembly. He is up here on the platform. I also want to take the opportunity to express my great appreciation of his predecessor, Joe McHugh TD, who was recently promoted to be a Minister. He was a great help to me when I took over this role, and I am sure that the Assembly wishes him well in his future career and thanks him very much indeed for his contribution.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Thank you, Laurence. As you know, I have been a Member of the Assembly since 2009. I value greatly the friendships that the Assembly has helped me to build with Members of all Parliaments that are represented here. Laurence and I share a common vision of this Assembly. That vision certainly was encapsulated on our moving visit to Flanders yesterday. It was an occasion that serves to underline our deep and shared history. At commemorations such as yesterday's, we acknowledge how the history of Ireland and Britain has shaped us. It is an honour to assume the role of a Co-Chair of BIPA at such an event.

I met the Steering Committee on Sunday. I look forward greatly to working with it to advance the works and the aim of the Assembly.

I am pleased to join Laurence for this plenary session, which promises to be stimulating and engaging. Once again, I thank everyone for the support that I have been given over the past few years. I look forward to working with you.

Some new Members have joined the Assembly since the previous plenary session last March in Dublin, and it is my pleasure to welcome the following new Members, who have been appointed as full Members: from Ireland, Dinny McGinley TD and Senator Mary Moran.

I also inform the Assembly that, in accordance with rule 2A, the following associate Members have accepted the Steering Committee's invitation to assume the powers and responsibilities of Members for the whole of this session: Rosie Cooper MP, Rt Hon Lord Shutt of Greetland, Senator Paul Bradford, Joe Carey TD, James Dornan MSP, Gordon MacDonald MSP, and John Griffiths AM.

I would also like to acknowledge the sad passing of former Members Mr Jim Dobbin MP and David McClarty MLA.

We have also received apologies from a number of Members who are unable to attend. The British Members are: Lord Bew, Baroness Blood, Joe Benton MP, Conor Burns MP, Lord Empey, Paul Flynn MP, Baroness Harris of Richmond, Jack Lopresti MP, John Robertson MP and Jim Sheridan MP. The Irish Members are Séamus Kirk TD, Aengus Ó Snodaigh TD, Martin Heydon TD, Mattie McGrath TD and Senator John Crown. The Members from the devolved bodies and Crown dependencies are Mary Scanlon MSP, Alison McInnes MSP, Darren Millar AM, Barry McElduff MLA and Deputy Roger Perrot.

We congratulate the following former Members of the Assembly on being appointed to ministerial office in their various jurisdictions. First of all, I thank Joe McHugh TD, who is now Minister for State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. As a good friend of Joe's, I can tell the Assembly that, if you speak to him, he will respond to you only in Gaelige. His Irish has really improved. Ann Phelan TD is now Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. Jim Wells MLA is now Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety at the Northern Ireland Assembly, and we welcome him to the Assembly. I think that we should have a round of applause. *[Applause.]*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Members will have received a copy of the proposed programme of business. As you will see, we have quite a lot to get through. We will hear a number of Committee reports on various topics, starting with a progress report from Committee A on Sovereign Matters. The report will be given by the Committee's new Chairman, Senator Paul Coghlan. We will then hear reports on the heavy goods vehicle road user levy, and Travellers and the Roma.

Our first address this morning will be from Professor Keith Jeffery, who accompanied us on yesterday's very moving visit to Flanders. He will address the Assembly on the subject of Ireland and the First World War, after which he will take questions. We will then hear from Dr Andrew Murrison, Minister of State for Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister's special representative for the centenary commemoration of the First World War. On that point, because of the talks that are going on in Northern Ireland at the moment, I have had to apply some pressure to get a representative of the Northern Ireland Office to attend today and I therefore ask for a good turnout this afternoon, if possible.

I move formally that the adoption of programme of business be agreed to.

*Programme of Business agreed.*

## COMMITTEE REPORTS

### COMMITTEE A (SOVEREIGN MATTERS)

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** I now call on Senator Paul Coghlan to give the Assembly a progress report for Committee A. Congratulations, Paul, on your appointment.

**Senator Paul Coghlan:** I am glad to have the opportunity to present this progress report, but I want to start by saying how glad I am that I have accepted this appointment, and I take this opportunity to wish my predecessor Frank Feighan all good luck in his new role. I thank him for his hard work and the very fair approach that he took during his period as Chairman of the Committee. I wish him well in his promotion and look forward to taking forward the work that he started so well on the Committee.

I hope that Assembly Members found yesterday's visit to Flanders moving and poignant — indeed, I gather from what has been said that they did. The suggestion to visit the First World War battlefields was initially made by Committee A in its report on the decade of commemorations, which was endorsed by the Assembly. I thank the Steering Committee for taking forward the suggestion and the British secretariat for organising many of the logistics. It was a good example of a BIPA Committee having a positive impact on BIPA's work more broadly.

Members will remember that at the most recent plenary in Dublin the Assembly endorsed Committee A's report on the implementation of the Good Friday, Belfast and St Andrew's agreements. It was pleasing to me that the Assembly recognised the progress that had been achieved over the past 15 years and the need to avoid complacency and maintain momentum.

Since then, the Committee has started a new inquiry, which is into smuggling and cross-border police co-operation. I am sure that many public representatives across the island of Ireland are well accustomed to the economic and social impacts of smuggling in their local areas, be it in tobacco, fuel or other products. The Committee has not looked at smuggling since 2009, so we agreed that it was a good time to revisit the issue to see what progress the authorities had made.

More broadly, the inquiry will examine how the Police Service of Northern Ireland and An Garda Síochána, as well as the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government, work together, particularly in light of the devolution of policing and justice powers and the launch of the cross-border policing strategy in 2010.

We have already held two meetings for the new inquiry. In Belfast in June we met representatives from the petrol retail industry. It was useful for us to hear about the impact of smuggling on ordinary working people trying to make a living. We also met David Ford MLA, the Minister for Justice in the Northern Ireland Executive.

Our second meeting was in Dublin in September, when we met a range of witnesses, including retailers based south of the border; the chief executives of three border county councils, namely Monaghan, Donegal and Louth; representatives from the revenue commissioners; the interim Garda commissioner, Noirín O'Sullivan; and the Minister for Justice and Equality, Frances Fitzgerald TD.

The Committee has now gathered a good deal of evidence. We intend to hold further meetings in Belfast and London before preparing our report, as we have maybe half a dozen further witnesses to hear evidence from. I would like to thank all the members of Committee A for their assistance and commitment. They are all very dedicated and hard working. I look forward to working with them in the months ahead.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you very much, Paul. Does anyone wish to contribute? No. OK, we wish you well in your new position, Paul.

**Senator Paul Coghlan:** Thank you, Chair.

## **COMMITTEE B (EUROPEAN AFFAIRS)**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** We now come to the progress report from Committee B, including the presentation of a draft report, ‘The Impact of the HGV Road User Levy Act 2013 on the Free Movement of Goods on the Island of Ireland’. Robert Walter will give the Assembly an update on Committee B’s work.

**Mr Robert Walter MP:** Thank you very much indeed, Co-Chairman. What I would like to do, if I may, is give the plenary an update on work that the Committee is doing and then move on to consideration of the report, ‘The Impact of the HGV Road User Levy Act 2013 on the Free Movement of Goods on the Island of Ireland’.

I would like to say at the outset that the Committee has continued its inquiry into the European Investment Bank (EIB). At the Dublin plenary, I provided an update on our visit to the EIB, where we were informed of projects that have come to fruition. The Committee decided that we should visit one of the projects to see what lessons could be learned from international comparators. I said then that the Committee would visit Bilbao in Spain, where the bank has helped a number of initiatives to establish. That visit took place on 23 June. I did not participate in the visit, so I will leave it to one of the co-rapporteurs, Lord German — the other co-rapporteur is Seán Conlan — to update Members on the work that has been done in the inquiry, and I will give my report after that.

*9.45 am*

**Lord German OBE:** Thank you, Co-Chair. Three interesting factoids led us to consider how the EIB had been treated as an exemplar when we met it in Luxembourg. First, I will put into perspective the level of lending that the European Investment Bank has given to Ireland, the United Kingdom and Spain.

The EIB lent €10.66 billion to Spain last year, compared with €3.7 billion to the UK and €0.5 billion to Ireland. In the same year, one single project in Bilbao has had just under €0.5 billion of EIB funding for its high-speed rail network. It was interesting to look at the ways in which the authorities and companies were involved and used the funding.

The first lesson that I think we learned from our visit was about the level of co-ordination between the member state Government and regional government, and that between local authorities, businesses and local banks that were able to draw down the funding on behalf of

the EIB because they had a local base in the Basque country and could assist in development. There was an understanding of the joint project that everyone considered and signed up to. There was a clear sense of economic direction in the way in which the banks wanted to apply the funding. It was also clear that a large amount of funding was going into research and development, which is also crucial.

The second area is the size of EIB loans and whether they could be replaced by other loans or other forms of banking. The local banks in Bilbao told us that the issue for them is not about liquidity but about solvency. They are looking at the viability of projects rather than having access to funding. They said that funding was not necessarily a problem, although negotiating appropriate terms and conditions has always been tough for the EIB, which has not necessarily always had the most attractive of interest rates.

The third lesson was therefore that the local banks are now negotiating with the EIB on the level of interest rates that could be charged for EIB loans. The banks think that, by being able to act as a guarantor and stand between the EIB and the projects themselves, they might well be able to negotiate a better interest rate that will make them highly competitive again. It is not now a question of whether the banks can raise money or find money; it is about whether the projects are viable and the companies will remain solvent.

There are therefore some significant lessons to learn from Bilbao that I will feed in to my report.

**Mr Robert Walter MP:** Thank you very much. We hope to present the final version of our report on the EIB at the next plenary meeting in Dublin in February next year.

Co-Chairman, if I might, I will go on to talk briefly about the next report, about which we agreed the terms of reference at our meeting on Sunday. The Committee wanted to look at the rules that apply within the Schengen area and the common travel area between the UK and the Republic of Ireland, and to focus on the impact of those two different visa systems on tourism, business, labour and the education sector. We will seek to establish the advantages and disadvantages of not being a member of the Schengen area, consider how the common travel area could operate more effectively with the Schengen area, and determine what administrative and cost burdens are incurred through operating within two systems. The co-rapporteurs for the inquiry are Lord German and Aengus Ó Snodaigh and we hope that the report will be available by the end of next year. It will span a British general election, but we cannot completely stop our work for elections.

If I may, I will go on now to the report. At the Dublin plenary, the Committee decided to produce a follow-up to its 2010 report on a British and Irish regional economic space. The 2010 report assessed the mood in the European Union towards regional economic spaces, which was a direction of travel that was gaining widespread support. The report assessed whether the British and Irish isles were a suitable economic space and whether the United Kingdom Government, the Irish Government and the devolved Governments should pursue the concept as a policy priority.

The report did not recommend the creation of a British-Irish economic space, but it did conclude that common problems to the isles could be resolved through collaboration and co-operation. Our follow-up report focused on one area in which recent policy decisions went



against the aspiration of closer policy co-operation: the issue of EU cabotage rules and the road haulage industry.

The co-rapporteurs for the inquiry were Seán Conlan and Danny Kinahan MLA, who unfortunately are not here today. The report is entitled ‘The Impact of the HGV Road User Levy Act 2013 on the Free Movement of Goods on the Island of Ireland’. It was agreed at our Committee meeting on Sunday and is available to Members of the Assembly. It sets out the effect on the island of Ireland of the HGV road user levy.

The levy provides that all vehicles of a gross weight of 12 tons or more must pay a charge for using the UK’s roads. They can pay it daily, weekly, monthly or annually. The fees depend on the time covered and the weight of vehicle. The maximum charge for the largest vehicle is £10 per day. However, the levy has had a detrimental effect on hauliers who work across the Irish border.

The levy covers an extensive network of roads across the border, between Ireland and Northern Ireland, used daily by Irish and Northern Irish hauliers. For example, road hauliers from County Donegal travelling to Dublin port or other destinations invariably use the A5, without stopping in Northern Ireland. Similarly, Irish road hauliers, particularly those who operate in border counties, tend to drive into parts of Northern Ireland on roads other than the A5, particularly the A4-A509 route, often numerous times each day.

The levy will result in a net increase in costs for HGV operators from Ireland who use roads in Northern Ireland. Hauliers operating in the cross-border regions are concerned that the onerous levy will affect their ability to trade across the border and ultimately will result in a loss of employment in Ireland.

Our report recommends that the UK Secretary of State for Transport should reconsider the decision not to provide exemptions for Northern Ireland roads, particularly the A5. An exemption to the A5 would provide some comfort to Irish hauliers who travel to and from the north-west region.

Seán Conlan — who, as I said, unfortunately is not here — tabled an amendment to the report, which asked the Committee to also take into account the A1, A3, A6, A37 and A46. The Committee could not agree to that, as it was considered that exemptions on those roads would broaden the inquiry by drawing into question wider issues concerning the border road network. Danny Kinahan MLA suggested that those might include toll roads and vehicular services such as bus companies that trade across the border. We concluded that the two Governments should reconsider the decision not to provide exemptions for the A5 route, which would provide some comfort to Irish hauliers who travel to and from the north-west region.

Furthermore, we ask that in response to the report the two Governments set out how the levy complies with the European Union’s cabotage rules. The cabotage rules say:

*“hauliers may carry goods without restrictions from their country to another or between two Member States, even if these Member States are not their country of registration.*

*Hauliers are however still limited when they wish to go from one point to another in a Member State other than the one where they are registered. In this case, called cabotage,*

*hauliers are restricted to three transport operations in the seven days following an unloaded international carriage.”*

There are further concerns about the cabotage rules, such as:

*“Hauliers are not free to carry out transport operations freely, which can force hauliers to travel home or elsewhere with empty vehicles, or stop them from loading their vehicles in an optimal way and which creates efficiency losses.”*

We have asked the two Governments to respond to the report by setting out what they are doing to assist the haulage industry.

It is a pleasure to present the report to the plenary. I know that a number of colleagues — particularly our Irish colleagues — have strong views on the matter. However, I suggest that, if the plenary wants to take this any further, it is a detailed matter of cross-border trade and, therefore, a North/South issue that should perhaps go to our Economic Affairs Committee rather than remain with the European Affairs Committee, which has given a broad overview of how it fits into the cabotage rules of the European Union.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you, Bob, for a comprehensive account of your report. I also thank all the Members who took part in its preparation. I will now take contributions from the floor.

**Mr Joe O'Reilly TD:** I thank Bob Walter, the chair of our Committee B, for an excellent presentation on the report. I attended our meeting on Sunday, and he has reflected accurately the views that were expressed at that meeting and more. That is appreciated.

I will speak briefly to the report in two capacities: first, as a member of Committee B and, secondly and most important, as the representative of a border constituency where the impact of the haulage levy is felt most. We have many indigenous small haulier businesses — in fact, one of our distinguished councillors, a local public representative who ran for office at the last general election, Councillor McVitty, who is a colleague of mine, has a small haulage firm of 14 lorries. We have a lot of small hauliers in our community, which provide important indigenous employment in an area that does not readily attract foreign direct investment and that would not have large indigenous interests outside food processing.

The small haulage sector is crucial in the area and, because the companies are small, their profit margins are very tight. The companies are small but their costs are high and, generally, they find the going tough. In fact, their survival was greatly at risk without any further imposition. As a representative of the area, therefore, I cannot stress strongly enough the real impact that the levy is having and how many jobs are at stake. I could list a number of haulage firms in my area. It is a really important sector in the area, and the firms are all small and on tight profit margins. In effect, they are all family businesses that are run with the family working in them and offering low wages, but they provide jobs for a few drivers.

The levy is totally prohibitive and is terminal for the hauliers in many cases. I therefore join Committee B's call for the two Governments to act bilaterally on the matter in general, and specifically in relation to the A5. I urge our Co-Chairmen and our secretariat to take the matter to every possible forum to get it resolved. It is a real issue for the people whom I represent, and I would be absolutely negligent if I did not intervene.

10.00 am

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you. We now have Jim Walsh.

**Senator Jim Walsh:** Thank you, Co-Chairman. I too welcome the report and I presume that it will be circulated to all Members who have an interest in it.

I would like to comment on two aspects of the report. One is in relation to Schengen. For a long time I have been a proponent of the idea that Ireland should be looking at joining the Schengen arrangement. I think it would serve us well and we are disadvantaged by not being in it. I hope that, when the Committee does further studies in relation to it, it might well go down that route. There is nothing to be gained by remaining outside of Schengen. That is my opinion.

Secondly, I want to comment on the HGV levy and the cabotage issue. I was in the haulage business for many years. It is a highly competitive business that is very price sensitive. These kind of impediments and added costs are a serious issue. Certainly on the island of Ireland, we should be looking at an all-Ireland economic model because it would be in the interests of people in the North and the South. We should not just be looking at one particular road. There should be free movement of goods and vehicles North and South.

However, it is not just a North/South issue. I remember a few years ago making representation for the haulage industry in relation to the east/west situation, particularly with regard to cabotage. Britain is used as a land bridge by many Irish hauliers going to the continent and doing their business there. The costs of the restrictions have impacted negatively on many of those companies. As a consequence, some of the stronger ones had to relocate part of their business to Britain. You might welcome that, Co-Chair, but from our point of view and from the point of view of employment in Ireland, that is not good. If we live in a free market, there should be some way that we can deal with the tax issue without having these levies on the movement of goods. It goes to the heart of having a competitive economy.

I certainly welcome the report; the Committee has done a good job. However, if the issue is to go to our Economic Affairs Committee, it should take up some of those issues and run with them to make sure that Governments respond properly.

I will finish on this. One of the things that I found when I went into the issue about three years ago was that, in this instance, the officials who we sent to Brussels, certainly from Ireland, were not equipped to deal with the technical complexities that were involved. They did not understand the haulage business and the ramifications of the decisions that were being made. That was all too apparent when I spoke with them. I think there is a case for us as politicians to make sure that, when we send people to European meetings, they are well equipped to understand the implications of the decisions that are being taken and that they act in the interests of the people that they are paid by.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you. There are copies of the report at the back of the room.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** Go raibh maith agat, Co-Chair. Thank you, Co-Chair.

I also want to depart from the subject and officially welcome the appointment of my friend and colleague, Deputy Feighan. I just want to wish him well and congratulate him on his appointment.

I am pleased that the report has been published and acted on by Committee B. My main interest in it is that, as a member of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Transport and Communications, this issue was first brought to my attention by a former Member of this Assembly, Andrew MacKinlay MP, when it was still going through the House of Commons. I initiated a debate within our Committee and our sister Committee in the Northern Ireland Assembly embarked on a similar discussion. This is just for context. The Irish Government was aware from an early stage of the difficulties surrounding the implementation of the levy.

I was somewhat taken aback to discover that, as the debate went on, the then Irish Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Leo Varadkar, in North/South area meetings, was pressing for an exemption for all roads in Northern Ireland. The impression that I got from the hauliers and haulage organisations who gave evidence to our Committee was that they would have been happy with an exemption for the A5, which runs along the spine of Northern Ireland.

In the event, as the report points out, only two roads were exempted. They are what used to be called euphemistically in the bad old days concession roads, which meander in and out of the border in two key areas that cover seven miles, as the report indicates. However, I was very disappointed that there was no move towards an acknowledgement of the A5. I support fully everything that was said by my friend and colleague Deputy Joe O'Reilly, who comes from my own part of the country. I understand perfectly everything that he said, because they are the arguments that we have sustained and put forward from our point of view.

It seems to me that this is a done deal, primarily because the British haulage industry is quite happy, from what I have read in the reports of the various debates, to support the legislation. I suppose that that is primarily because the British haulage industry has estimated that the cost will be budget neutral for it. I know that the argument has been put forward that because we have toll roads in the Republic of Ireland it is only fair and reasonable that the UK should have a similar charge. However, my understanding is that the genesis of, or catalyst for, the levy debate was primarily a focus on continental haulage companies rather than Irish ones and that we have suffered to some degree as a by-product of the decision to have a levy.

I am not sure what we can do about the levy, because it is now law. However, I would be interested to know whether Northern Ireland has a role in the devolution context that will allow it to stall the levy. My understanding is that Northern Ireland must pass legislation in order for the levy to be implemented, but I am not sure whether that has happened.

I want to add my voice to those voicing concern about the impact that the levy is having on primarily family-run haulage companies. I am not sure whether there has been any evidence about this since the legislation was passed, but the indications are that a number of companies have now re-registered in Northern Ireland in order to take advantage of the new rules.

Overall, I welcome Committee B's initiative on the issue as it is vitally important. It is the type of issue that the Assembly is suited to debate because of the effects in both islands. From the Irish side, we did as much as was humanly possible to get some sort of alleviation from the levy. However, legislation tends to be reviewed from time to time, so I would press

that we revisit the issue at some point, with the help of our Northern Ireland colleagues, who are equally exercised about the levy, to look at exempting the A5. The principle of exempting some roads has already been established. If I am correct, there is one motorway in the UK that has some sort of exemption. I think that there is one toll road in the UK and that it is exempted because of that fact.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you very much. I call Noel Coonan.

**Mr Noel Coonan TD:** Go raibh maith agat, Comhairle. Thank you, Co-Chairman. I take this opportunity to wish my colleague Frank Feighan the best of luck as Co-Chairman — don't be nervous, Frank; we are all behind you. *[Laughter.]*

I thank Mr Walter for a very comprehensive report on a subject that is extremely important, particularly to hauliers in the South of Ireland. The very title of the report 'The Impact of the HGV Road User Levy Act 2013 on the Free Movement of Goods on the Island of Ireland' prompts immediate discussion because there is no such thing as free movement of goods if we look at the levies that are being imposed and at the tolls issue, not just in Ireland but throughout Europe.

It is a very serious situation in the South of Ireland. As we speak, hauliers are beginning a protest outside the Parliament in Dublin for both today and tomorrow. They are very angry, with great justification. I am not going to go over what other people have said, but there is one point that I would like to make, which is that in my area in County Tipperary in the south of Ireland quite a number of hauliers have moved already. Some of them have moved to Northern Ireland or to the UK to register.

At the moment, a large haulage company which employs up to 100 people, namely Adare Transport, is in the process of moving to Bulgaria not only because of the levies that have been enforced but because of the road tax situation in the South of Ireland. If we compare the road tax in the South of Ireland with that on a haulier's vehicle in the North of Ireland, we find that, in the North, the tax is £750 while in the South the tax on the same vehicle is €3,000. That is an enormous difference.

I therefore welcome the Committee's report and support the call for immediate action. We must do something positive and urgent, because the issue is becoming very serious and will not be tolerated for very long.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you. As there are no more contributions, I ask Robert Walter to sum up.

**Mr Robert Walter MP:** Thank you very much, Co-Chairman, and I thank everyone who has contributed to the debate on the report. I will respond to a couple of the points that have been raised.

First, there are a number of minor exemptions to the charge that relate to some seven miles or 10km of very small roads that criss-cross the border. The principal issue — the one that is right in your face — is the case of the A5. It could be regarded as an internal route in the Republic of Ireland, even though it passes through Northern Ireland, and the Irish

Government has argued that given the contribution that it makes to the road's upkeep it begs special consideration.

Paschal Mooney made the point that UK hauliers were happy — in fact, more than happy — with this measure.

If I can speak for hauliers in my own constituency, I have to say that they have lobbied me for a number of years with regard to hauliers from France. Diesel is subsidised in France — or I should say that the tax on diesel is much lower than it is in the UK — and they were concerned that French hauliers could fill their tanks and perhaps even have extra tanks in order to do several cabotage jobs in the UK to the detriment of the British hauliers who had to pay the higher costs of diesel in the UK. This measure was in response to that kind of pressure elsewhere in the UK, particularly on the mainland of Britain.

I re-emphasise to the Assembly, through the Co-Chairman, the Committee's recommendations in its report, and I hope that the Assembly can support those recommendations and the report itself. At the end of the report, the Committee recommends that the UK Secretary of State for Transport reconsider the decision not to provide exemptions to Northern Ireland roads, particularly the A5. Furthermore, the Committee calls on both Governments, in responding to this report, to provide first of all an assessment of how the HGV road user levy is compatible with the EU cabotage rules and, secondly, to include details of how both Governments are assisting the haulage industry, not least by resolving the problems with the current cabotage rules as highlighted in the report. Thank you.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you very much. That was a very useful discussion. I ask that the plenary takes note of Committee B's report on the impact of the HGV Road User Levy Act 2013. Is that agreed?

*Question agreed.*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you very much. The clerks will arrange to send the report to the British and Irish Governments.

We have finished slightly early. Professor Keith Jeffery will address us at 10.30, and as we still have to do the one or two technical adjustments that I announced earlier, I suspend the Assembly until 10.30.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** I am very sorry for the intervention, Co-Chairman, but is it protocol for the Northern Ireland Assembly to receive a copy of the Committee's report?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** I am advised that it is.

**Mr John Scott MSP:** I am not certain of the implications of this report for Scotland, but would it also be appropriate for a copy to be sent to the Scottish Government?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** I am told that the report will be sent to both Governments and all the devolved Administrations. I suspend the meeting until 10.30.

*The sitting was suspended at 10.15 am and resumed at 10:30 am.*

## **ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR KEITH JEFFERY**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Perhaps we can reconvene. I apologise for the delay — we have just been sorting out the equipment. Thank you for your patience.

I am pleased to welcome Professor Keith Jeffery of Queen's University Belfast, who is here to give us a talk. Professor Jeffery is also the official historian of MI6. Professor Jeffery, thank you very much.

**Professor Keith Jeffery:** Thank you very much for inviting me to this special occasion. I think that we all agree that yesterday's experience was astonishing. We hope that the technology will work. When I sit on the appointment panel at Queen's University Belfast, we get people to do a PowerPoint presentation and I once suggested that we should make the PowerPoint break down in the middle of their presentation. This was thought to be cruel and unusual, but it separates the men from the boys, as it were.

At 7.28 on 1 July 1916, of course, everyone had faith in the technology and thought that the British guns would destroy the German trenches, but at 7.30 am, 7.31 am and thereafter they found that the technology had let them down. Technology does not solve everything.

We have to remember that the First World War was a technological war. We have seen a little glimpse of the results of industrialised mass slaughter. These were machine wars. A machine gun is a simple machine. It does not take much training to operate, but it has a hell of an effect. It is a product of the industrial revolution and the industrial age. The difference in many ways between the First World War and previous wars is simply the scale — the mass production of everything, including death.

I am going to talk generally about Ireland's engagement with the war, North and South, and afterwards make a few reflections on the commemoration issue. The first slide shows a book produced a few years ago. Some of you will be familiar with the Thomas Davis lectures, the RTE version of the Reith lectures — public service and doing good, with a historical bias.

This book 'Our War' is a tribute to the book designer's art. The title and the design of the book are political issues. The cover shows a green poppy, which is already an issue. Poppies have in the past been a very contentious issue. What does it mean to wear a poppy? Is it a political statement, is it simply an issue of commemoration, is it a personal statement as to families, or is it simply a badge that you buy to raise money for charities? It is all those things and more, so it is contentious.

John Horne, who edited the book, worried greatly about whether to give it that title. Is it our war? In what way is it our war? In some ways, it was a kind of coat-trailing title, to interrogate. It has a question mark after it, although it does not appear on the title page, as if to say, "In what way was it our war?" This was a war that, in the traditional interpretation on the nationalist side of Ireland, let us say, had nothing to do with Ireland's other narrative of the period, which is the determination to separate from the United Kingdom. In this traditional view, and certainly embedded in the political culture of the North and the Northern Ireland state, the war was all about unionism and loyalism and about cementing the union in one way or another.

The next picture shows a famous Irishman. Kitchener was born in Kerry, sort of accidentally, because his father bought some cheap land and had a farm there. You can wheel in the old Duke of Wellington statement. When people said to Kitchener, “You’re an Irishman”, he would say, “Well, if you’re born in a stable, it doesn’t necessarily mean you’re a horse”.

Kitchener’s call for volunteers — and we have seen the end result — was greeted and received with an extraordinary response in Ireland, as in other parts of the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe. I could give you an entire and rather tedious lecture on the numbers of Irishmen in the First World War, but people talk of something upwards of 210,000. People in the past have talked about 500,000, because that is the number on the Irish National War Memorial in Kilmainham, but that is almost certainly too many, as it includes every man who died fighting in an Irish regiment and we know that, certainly by the end of the war, many, many people who were not Irish-born or Irish at all had been drafted into Irish regiments. But of the 200,000-plus perhaps 140,000 or 150,000 joined up during the war. There were already 60,000 regulars and reservists, who were mobilised at the beginning of the war. Sometimes they get left out of the narrative — the guys who had already been in the British army. Of those, about 35,000 were killed, which was the greatest demographic catastrophe to hit Ireland since the famine — an enormous number and a sort of pestilence across the land.

Another way of looking at this figure of the number of men who joined up is to say that, by some calculations, between about a quarter and a third of all men of military age in Ireland joined up. That is an astonishing statistic and it was all through voluntary recruitment. Irish war memorials sometimes say, “Sacred to the memory of those who died willingly for their country”. English, Welsh and Scottish war memorials cannot and do not say that, because conscription was introduced in Great Britain in 1916 and a number of people might not have gone quite so willingly. There already is a difference between Ireland and the rest.

I am going to show you some figures. I will not test you on them and I will not dwell on them, but there is already a question about how many Catholics and how many Protestants there were. We should understand this as shorthand for nationalists and unionists, in one way or another — I do not have to describe it.

You will see from the slide that the largest numbers join up from Ulster and then from Leinster, with the smallest number from Connacht. You can explain this in various ways. One way of explaining it is that people in urban centres — people in cities — join up much more readily than do people in the countryside. Farmers do not have an awful lot of spare capacity, particularly if you are looking for soldiers and recruits at harvest time. The war begins at a moment when the countryside is as busy as ever. You do not have a floating population or the unemployed or people in part-time and temporary jobs, as you do in the cities. In Britain, which is urbanised, the recruiting responses in Birmingham or Newcastle, say, are completely different from the recruiting responses in Norfolk and Suffolk and in the rural areas in the south-west, such as Somerset or Devon.

*10.45 am*

The first thing to mention is that more Catholics/nationalists join up in the First World War than Protestants/unionists. That is something that already subverts the traditional view. By the way, these figures only go to February 1918. They were supplied to John Redmond and we do not have the figures after he died in February 1918, so they do not cover the whole



war. The figures make no sense unless you see them proportionally — how much are the unionist or Protestant and the Catholic communities responding? The slide shows the calculation: percentage of population first, followed by the percentage of recruits. In nine-county Ulster, 56% of the population are Protestant and 73% of the recruits are Protestant, so Protestants join up more willingly. That is quite interesting and understandable.

What I think is almost more interesting are the figures for Munster, for example, where the percentage figures for proportion of population and proportion of recruits are almost the same. In Munster, it makes no difference whether you are unionist or nationalist, Protestant or Catholic — these are a kind of shorthand, of course, which is not adequate on the detail.

In Leinster, oddly enough, Catholics, possibly nationalists, are more ready to join up than Protestants, possibly unionists. Again, we could discuss this for the whole lecture, but the point to make is that it is not as straightforward as people like to think — the easy assumptions that the red, white and blue blokes all join up, just like that, and the greener blokes do not join up.

We can discover another fact by looking at the response of the two paramilitary organisations, the Ulster Volunteer Force and the Irish Volunteers, which responded extraordinarily well in the early days of the war. If you are a Northern member of the Irish Volunteers, you are more likely to join up than a Protestant who is not a member of the Ulster Volunteer Force. The people who are more engaged with nationalism and have already begun to do military things are more likely to join up than not statistically. That is curious.

I was at an astonishing event on Monday of last week — our Irish friends will realise how astonishing it was. It was an evening for the Ulster Gaelic Athletic Association to commemorate Ulster GAA members who joined up in the First World War. It was a jaw-dropping event for an organisation that for 100 years had a ban on membership of the British forces of one sort or another but has suddenly recovered a huge number of these people. The great and the mighty of the GAA were all there.

Here is a slide that I like to use to talk about church and state in modern Ireland. It shows the Catholic Bishop of Cloyne and Father Frank Browne. Frank Browne is the famous photographer who was on the ‘Titanic’, happily only from Southampton to Cobh. He was offered a ticket to go across the Atlantic but, when he asked his uncle whether he could stay on the boat, his uncle said, “No, you come home now, boy”, so he survived and his photographs survived. He joins up and becomes a chaplain in the Irish Guards. Here, again, is an unexpected mix of Catholic Ireland and British army uniform in the First World War.

Why do people enlist? These are the most complicated things and, again, I will not spend a lot of time discussing them, but it is not straightforward. People are not enlisting for only one reason. This slide shows a recruiting pamphlet from early in the war. I used it for a cover of a book some years ago and the publisher was a wee bit anxious, as he thought it might restrict sales in Germany.

What happens in 1914, when the Germans invade Belgium and northern France, is that there are lots of atrocities. This is what happens at the margins of war and you get what were called “franc-tireurs” — armed civilians attacking the German troops. The Germans then took a terrible revenge on many of these people and burnt and destroyed Louvain University. That is what happens in war, but the point that is made on the back of the pamphlet is that if

gallant, little, defenceless, Catholic Belgium goes, gallant, little, defenceless, Catholic Ireland might be next in this terrible conquest by the Germans.

The next picture shows John Redmond inspecting his Irish Volunteers, of which he seized control in late 1913. Redmond represents constitutional nationalism in Ireland. He is the overwhelmingly supported leader of nationalist Ireland in 1914, at which point it seemed that he had achieved what nationalist Ireland had wanted since the mid-19th century: home rule. He has got home rule through Parliament. It reaches the statute book in September 1914 but is then postponed for the duration of the war. The war is not going to be very long; it will be over by Christmas. The moment home rule hits the statute book, Redmond says, “Irishmen, you can join up and support Ireland by fighting for that liberty, freedom and democracy that we have achieved in the Home Rule Bill”. He saw Ireland as a kind of parallel to the other British so-called dominions: Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Ireland would have an army corps, Ireland would be represented and Ireland would turn into a more semi-detached part of the British Empire. This of course did not take into account Northern unionists’ views of these matters, but it was his view at the time. His rhetoric — “We are fighting for freedom and democracy” — comes through after the war, as you can see in the way in which the war is commemorated on war memorials.

This slide shows the war memorial in Cork. It has been refurbished; it has been dollied up a bit, as so many Irish war memorials have been recently. It was erected in 1925 by the Cork Independent Ex-Servicemen’s Association. It does not say “freedom” or “King and country”; it says, “In memory of their comrades who fell in the Great War fighting for the freedom of small nations”. There is a whole agenda behind this: this was Cumann na nGaedheal, emerging after the treaty; it was one in the eye for the republicans. Those of you from Cork will know these strains better than I do.

Some people are going for really good reasons. Some are going because they want the job. Some are going because their pals are going. This picture shows a group of pals. It is the Aviva Stadium or Lansdowne Road before the stand was improved. The man at the front is a guy called Browning, who is the president of the Irish Rugby Football Union. He said, “Sportsmen, this is going to be great sport. Off we go!”

I do not know whether you noticed that, at the front of the Peace Village, there is a little memorial to the Christmas truce. One feature of the truce was that they played football. There is a football in the memorial and the notion that other things went on in the war at the same time. The sporting metaphor is very important. In this picture, here they are on their way to the Curragh down Nassau Street, past the Kildare Street Club, as it was then. A lot of work has been done on this recently.

Here is a book on the 6th Connaught Rangers; these are nationalists from west Belfast. People have been recovering this history over the past 10 years or so. Nearly every family in Ireland somewhere has a relative involved. The war reached parts that other wars did not reach — it reaches everyone. An extraordinary amount of work is now being done, even in the nationalist North. The GAA meeting last week was a demonstration of that.

Then there were, of course, unionists who fought for the union and what they perceived as their political destination. They could not resist joining up — “Your country needs you”. They said, “Well, our country is the United Kingdom”. They would respond in a different

way to Kitchener's call at the beginning. This slide shows Edward Carson looking at the Ulster Volunteers.

The next picture shows an interesting postcard that I picked up at a postcard fair. It says, "ye thocht Oi was going to be a thraitor". This card was posted from Ballykinler Barracks in County Down, which was where part of the Ulster Division trained. It was posted by an Ulster Division man who survived the war. I had thought, looking with hindsight through the prism of 1916, that this was about Catholic nationalists being traitors, but I am not so sure now. The Ulster Volunteer Force had armed themselves with guns from Germany. A phrase used about them was that they were "the Kaiser's Ulster friends". Certainly, the Liberal Government made much of this, "These people are not proper loyalists; they are breaking the law; they are armed from Germany; we have to watch this". German arms were being supplied to the nationalists as well, of course, famously, the 'Asgard' brings guns into Howth in 1914. This is an English, or perhaps Belfast, postcard manufacturer.

The other thing that you notice about the war is its business opportunities. There are all these people who are going to exploit these events for profit. This postcard represents one of them. I went into a chocolate shop in Ypres last night and bought chocolate poppies. What is going on here? It just seemed to me the most grotesque manifestation of this — chocolate in the shape of British army helmets, when we had just been round the cemeteries. But there is that business gene, which leads people to do these things all the time. This postcard represents that. As I said, in 1914 it is not clear whether the cartoon figure is a unionist or a nationalist.

Where did these people go? We have been to Ypres, but of course they go to other places. The first of the Irish divisions to be raised in the war is the 10th (Irish) Division, which goes to Gallipoli, to Suvla Bay, in August 1915. Here is another picture of the Royal Irish Fusiliers. Gallipoli is a defeat. It is an attempt to turn the flank of the central powers, to knock Turkey out of the war and to open supply routes to Russia through the Black Sea. It is imaginative but it is a catastrophic failure. It is a huge part of the war in the history of Australia and New Zealand, because the ANZAC corps is there. ANZAC Day is part of the secular religion of Australia and New Zealand.

Violent and wartime events become stitched into the creation narratives of states and ANZAC is that for Australia and New Zealand. If the Ulster Division, rather than the 10th (Irish) Division, had gone to Gallipoli, it would not be the Somme that we would be thinking of so much; it would be Gallipoli and 25 April, when they first landed, or 7 August, when they landed at Suvla Bay. Yet on the nationalist side, it becomes a metaphor and indicator for the futile sacrifice and waste of lives, a hymn of failure: "We've sent our bravest and best out there and it's ended in defeat". The famous song, 'The Foggy Dew', written by a County Down clergyman, who became the Catholic Canon O'Neill, was supposedly inspired from witnessing the meeting of the First Dáil in January 1919. It is about the rebels in Dublin and has the resonant line, "'Twas better to die 'neath an Irish sky than at Suvla or Sud-Ei-Bar" — out there in the far Mediterranean. Part of the dynamic and the purchase that Gallipoli and those distant places that people had gone to had in the nationalist side — whether Australian nationalist or Irish nationalist — is this notion of a complete waste of people going far, far from home and dying to what point. We see that narrative and dynamic demonstrated in the cemeteries and memorials that we looked at yesterday.

*11.00 am*

They go even further. Not so long ago I was in Jerusalem, which I found a most dispiriting place. Jerusalem is not a place of tranquillity and reflection. The one tranquil place in east Jerusalem is the Mount Scopus cemetery, which is full of Irishmen. This slide shows the view from the cemetery. Again, these are English gardens; this is the same architectural structure as we saw in those cemeteries yesterday. Here is a picture of the grave of a guy from Newry, who reached the last year of the war. What took a guy from Newry, who may not have been any further than Belfast in his life, to here? It is not a lonely grave, sadly, but it is a grave in Palestine — more contested territory.

In Messines, we looked at the 16th (Irish) Division cross. There is another cross in Macedonia — troops were in Salonika in Greece in the Balkans, which is again contested territory. It is not visited as much. I have never been to the one in Macedonia, though I have ambitions to be there. What we have to remember about the Irish engagement in the war is its global reach. There are Irishmen not just in France but scattered across the world wherever the British imperial forces fought.

As we heard yesterday, the great and first battle for the two other new army divisions — the 16th (Irish) Division, which is the more nationalist division, “Redmond’s pets”, and the 36th (Ulster) Division, which was the Ulster Volunteer Force more or less transferred into the army — is the Somme. One of the great things about the British response to the war was that they had this war artists’ scheme. Two of the most important war artists appointed by the British Government were Irish: the Dublin-born Protestant William Orpen and the Belfast-born Catholic John Lavery. There is a nice balance there; the Community Relations Council could not have done any better. Orpen goes to France in 1917 and paints the Somme battlefield. You have to look pretty close at these beautiful, extraordinary images to find marks of the battlefield. A year on, the battlefield has recovered; nature has taken over and it is sun-washed. These are very moving and interesting pictures.

The Somme was this great titanic push. Again, it was part of a global strategy. There were supposed to be a series of co-ordinated offences in 1916 by the Russians, the French and the Italians — we sometimes forget the Italian front, but there are Irishmen in British war cemeteries on the Isonzo and the Piave in north-west Italy. It was meant to work very well, but the Germans offset it principally by attacking Verdun in France in February 1916.

A titanic Franco-German slogging match goes on. The French, who are supposed to take a major part in the Somme, cannot do so and they desperately ask the British to hurry up and launch the Somme offensive. It was launched famously — infamously, perhaps — on 1 July, which turns out to be the day with the greatest number of British war casualties in any single day: 50,000 men in a morning. Many of you have been to the Somme battlefield. What we saw in Ypres is replicated down there in many of the same kinds of ways.

At the start of the battle, it was thought to be a great triumph. Here is a postcard entitled ‘The Glorious First of July’. It shows a few German prisoners; everyone is very pleased. It seems astonishing, with the benefit of hindsight, that anyone could have thought that the 1 July was glorious in any sense at all. However, the job of the historian is not to belittle this but to try to explain it.

When we look back, we see that a lot of the narrative written about the Peace Tower, the Peace Village and the texts that accompany them is “Never again”: how could they have been so extraordinarily misguided to be involved in these terrible events? Yet a key thing about the

British forces — and the French, to a certain extent, although like the Germans they have some mutinies in 1917 — is their resilience right until the end of the war. Something is keeping them going. It is not just a soldier threatening to shoot someone in the back if they do not get out of the trenches, although that happens. There is a commitment to a cause, to comrades, to the group and to the endeavour that sustains these people.

Irish recruitment — I did not show you the graph — goes up in 1918. One of the explanations that we have for everyone joining up in 1914 is that they did not know what it was like. They thought that the war would be over by Christmas: “Let’s go, boys”. You can see the Dublin pals. This is a great adventure; it is a dangerous sports club; it is what young men do and it is validated by authority, unlike so much of what young men do. You can kind of write that off. But I am interested in those who join up not in 1914 but in 1915, 1916, 1917 and 1918, of whom there are tens of thousands still in Ireland: 10,500 Irishmen join up in the last four and a half months of the war. They have no illusions that this is a dangerous enterprise. There is plenty of work in Ireland. The last time Derry had full employment was in the First World War. War is good for business. The farmers are waxing very fat on the land supplying the British army. So this is not economic. Something else is making people join up even after four years of knowledge.

It is the job of the historian to try to explain that and to challenge the preconceptions and the easy explanations as to why people might have joined up or not. We need to think more about those 10,500. It is more jobs for historians, by the way — a job creation scheme. You are parliamentarians. I am in receipt of public money for doing what I like and I would like to thank you very much for that, but it is also important that we invest in people to research these things dispassionately, properly and away from party advantage of one sort or another, as it were.

History departments of universities are the custodians of the national memory, whether of England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales or anywhere else. I just want to put in a wee plug for us — not for me, as I am at the wrong end of the scale, but for my junior colleagues. They are brilliant and able people who can help us with our history.

The 36th (Ulster) Division go over the top on 1 July, a date written, as it were, in blood and in history as part of the Ulster unionist/loyalist commitment to a political ideal. Whether those guys who were engaged in 1 July were all thinking about the politics of it, whether they were just anxious to get the day over, whether they were fighting for their colleagues or whether it was an Orange-fest of some sort, because the original date of the Battle of the Boyne was 1 July — there are all sorts of mythical stories about people wearing their sashes, shouting “Remember 1690” and doing all these things, which may or may not have happened — it becomes a sacred date in the commemorative calendar of the time. Partly that is because of the costly nature of the endeavour.

The Somme lasts from July to November — it is a long, long battle — and in September the 16th (Irish) Division arrives. Here they are after a time at Guillemont, where one of the crosses exists. If you can see the picture closely, you will notice that a number of them are wearing German helmets — they have war trophies. I do not know that the Germans gave them up willingly. Perhaps in cupboards about Ireland there are still a few of these hanging about. An extraordinary thing that has been happening recently in the recovery of the war is that people are still finding boxes full of letters, diaries, mementos, war trophies and trench

art — the men used to make little geegaws out of bits of brass shell canisters and those sorts of things.

There is still history out there in individual families. That is happening across the United Kingdom. There is an extraordinary Imperial War Museum project called “Lives of the First World War”, which is crowdsourcing people to bring their memories and artefacts.

Here are a couple of pictures of Father Browne. When he was not chaplaining, he was taking some photographs. I think that this one is probably staged. One is of the Irish Guards in Wytschaete.

Of course, the war is not just happening here or there in France on the battlefield; the war happens everywhere. That is the nature of this global war. Here is a picture of the ‘Lusitania’, which was sunk in 1915 off the Old Head of Kinsale. A whole lot of Americans are killed and it is one of the factors that begin to dispose the Americans to coming into the war. Again, here is this narrative — it is a moral issue — about the Germans being beastly Huns who have to be stopped and defeated.

I was doing a talk in Newry not so long ago. There is a wonderful book ‘Newry’s War Dead’. Newry is a seaport and guys off to work on ships. The book reveals that there were five Newry men on the ‘Lusitania’. When ships go down, there tend to be networks, like the pals’ battalions. If a trawler sinks, there are always members of the same family affected. There is an extra resonance. We slightly miss the ships that are sunk. Two ships out of Newry are torpedoed in the Irish Sea during the First World War. The “Leinster”, the Holyhead mail boat, goes down in 1918 with the loss of over 500 lives. There is a lot going on round the seas, which again needs to be remembered.

‘Newry’s War Dead’ was put together as a proposal. The names were never put on the Newry War Memorial, so someone said, “Let’s put the names on the memorial”. A guy called Colin Moffett, who is a community relations officer, had done my course on Ireland in the Great War at the University of Ulster, so he is well trained — not, incidentally, by me. He came up with this wonderful idea of saying, “Let’s look expansively at Newry’s war dead”.

Sometimes the limits of the war dead are those who actually fought in the armed services and the five Newry men on the ‘Lusitania’ do not appear on the Commonwealth War Graves list, because they were not fighting in the navy; they were merchant seamen. Colin looked at both wars and found Newry people who were killed in the Blitz in London. It became an inclusive inquiry as to what war casualties are about. What begins as a kind of semi-unionist effort to commemorate, as it were, loyal Newry men who died in the war becomes much more of a communal thing. When the book is published, the Sinn Féin MP, Conor Murphy, turns up. This was 10 years ago and was quite astonishing at the time, although it has become much more regular now.

Here is a book about Armagh in the Great War, which tells us about the women. An entry in the index under “Women” is “Women and drink”. What is going on here? One innovation in the First World War are separation allowances — family payments to the dependants of soldiers who are away. Some women are for the first time getting money in their own hands with their family allowance. A lot of the male magistrate types thought, “Well, these women will just spend it on drink”. Some of course did spend it on drink; most did not. So you get a whole narrative about women.

Women get economic opportunities that were not there before. This slide shows women working in a tobacco factory in Cork, packing up cigarettes to send to the troops. Do they not know that smoking is bad for your health? But there you go. The next slide shows a munitions worker in Mackie's in Belfast, while this photograph is apparently of "separation women" in 1916 in Dublin, when the post offices — not just the GPO — were closed for a bit, so they gathered here. The stories of these people are ill recorded. They did not write letters home and they were not the sort of people who wrote their memoirs, but they, too, deserve our attention, to recover that experience of the war. Of course, they are the relatives and so often the bereaved. The war hits them hard.

Here we are, in the next slide, in Dublin 1916, "Ypres on the Liffey". We have been in Ypres, which was destroyed, and people drew this parallel, saying that this was another First World War battlefield. The authorities at the time thought that it was Berlin money doing it anyway, so it is just another battlefield opening up. The nature of the British response was such not just because they did not understand the dynamics of Irish political life and the dangers of creating martyrs when they executed the leaders; it was a function of the wartime circumstances. When you have an existential struggle in the continent of Europe, a little insect bite in Dublin is not going to bring the state down, but you stamp on it quick and you stamp on it hard, without thinking about the consequences, or even the unintended consequences, at the time. It is a function of the wartime circumstances. All your best men anyway are in France or London, so you find some unemployed general to sort out the Rising. Why is he unemployed? Because he is not top-notch. It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Now we get into commemoration and a few war memorials, just to finish up with. Most of the commemoration that we do now is sombre and reflective, but at the time not everybody was sombre and reflective. In Banbridge, there is a cheering soldier. He is not a sad or reflective soldier; he is going, "Hurray!" I do not know why he is doing this in Banbridge of all places — anthropologists will explain that, if they can. The point is that, in the 1920s, people are cheering for victory. We do not do that any more. It would be thought rather bad form if David Cameron said to Angela Merkel, "Haha, we beat you after all".

We have parked the issues of the war, but the historical reality is that people were cheering at the end of the war in a way that we do not do any more. We do not have Armistice Night dances any more, but they are having them in Cork right into the 1930s. We would go off to our ceremony and then have a good knees-up and drink. The ANZACs used to do that a lot more. We do not have the party any more; we have lost that historical reality of how people who were involved in the war responded to it.

*11.15 am*

This slide shows the memorial in Drogheda. It was quite frequently vandalised, with pots of paint thrown at it and all the rest, but it is now restored and used. It sits halfway between the railway station and the barracks. The reason for that, and this is the history of these places, is that every soldier who joined up in Drogheda went from the barracks to the railway station and passed that point. It is a site of memory.

This is a photograph of the Dungannon memorial. I use this one because there are three women on it. It is mostly a male exercise, but there are nurses who died as well; it does not just involve the women back home. The memorial tells us that a woman called Alicia Watt

died on 30 November 1918. That is after the Armistice, but the Commonwealth War Graves casualties count right through to the peace in 1919.

At the end of the war the Spanish flu hits the population, which is already a bit weakened, so she may have been a victim of that. She has a brother who was killed in action on the Somme, not in 1916 but in 1918. There is a family tragedy multiplied by the proximity to the end of the war.

This slide shows Enniskillen. Enniskillen has a special place. In 1987, there was the Remembrance Day bombing. We are so far beyond that now in Ireland that it is almost impossible to recover a circumstance in which as it were rational people would think it appropriate to attack a Remembrance Day ceremony, but it happened. It happens because the issues involved in these things are so important, vital and visceral to people. You cannot just write it off and say, “These are mad people”. They are not mad people. What they produce is madness, but that is a different issue, in my view. This act prompts the beginnings of a sea change in the response to the war of, as it were, independent Ireland, where there has been a huge recovery and acceptance of the part of independent Ireland in the war.

The First World War, with its commemoration, tragedy, bereavement and suffering, can reach out beyond our Irish sectional, denominational, political, religious and social differences and disagreements. As we research and move beyond the headline stories, we discover individual family narratives across the island. We find that for all our differences — serious, important and continuing as they may be in some quarters — we share a kind of common humanity and experience, even and especially in the face of something so terrible as the First World War.

If you want to know more, there is a very important book that I can draw your attention to. I have a mortgage to pay off.

This last slide shows another William Orpen painting, ‘The Thinker on the Butte de Warlencourt’. It is of a reflective soldier. What is he thinking of? He is thinking of the tragedy of the war and the future. I will stop there.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Professor Jeffery, that was a magnificent presentation about Ireland in the Great War. It was absolutely fascinating and very much complements what we saw yesterday. We have about 10 minutes left for questions and comments.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** Thank you, Co-Chair. I would like to compliment Keith on his outstanding presentation. He is obviously very much on top of the subject. I am just curious about one aspect. He talks about the underlying agendas that were being pursued in both nationalist Ireland and unionist Ireland throughout the war. I remember meeting the chap who founded the Royal Dublin Fusiliers Association, Tom Burke.

**Professor Keith Jeffery:** Tom Burke, yes. A very good man.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** Tom was an outstanding individual. He formed that commemorative association in the mid-1990s and that was followed by the formation of the Connaught Rangers Association, with which the Co-Chair, Frank Feighan, and I were engaged — Frank still is — primarily to focus on the activities of both regiments during the war as well as on the relatives and those who appreciate Irish history. Tom told me — this is



going back some time now — that he wanted to establish a rapport with Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland associations, so he went to the Somme museum.

**Professor Keith Jeffery:** Yes, the Somme Heritage Centre in Newtownards.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** He was looking for help and advice and he said that initially the people there were very helpful, welcoming and embracing. However, he said that as he became more active and more engaged, revealing more and more about the contribution that Catholic/nationalist Ireland made, which had been buried, he noticed not a resentment but a pulling back, on the basis that Ulster owns the First World War and the Somme. Has that attitude changed? Is there a recognition across the island of, as you said in your closing remarks, the all-embracing nature of the war and these experiences? I am just curious, as I am surprised that he would have received that attitude.

**Professor Keith Jeffery:** There are still jealousies and possessiveness about these things. These are sacred and important events for individuals and communities. I would see an equal and opposite potential reaction if I — and I have had this criticism — said that the 1916 Rising had to be seen in the bigger context of the war. This is not an indigenous Irish thing; it is more than that. There will be nationalists and republicans who say, “Nonsense. This is ourselves alone — literally.” By asserting that, you are touching on part of the political DNA of independent Ireland. The same happens with the Somme and the North. The political DNA of the North is stitched into this memory of huge and willing sacrifice for an idea. As I say, when you look at what was happening on the day, it might be very different, but myths have a strength of their own.

At the moment, you cannot move in Belfast for nationalists finding great-grandfathers in the war and producing them like rabbits out of the hat. I do not want to be too jocular, as these are not jocular things, but you have to laugh a bit. I have come across a feeling in the harder loyalist parts of Belfast saying, “Not only have the bastards won, but they’ve stolen our war as well”. This is about a kind of visceral attachment to these events, which illustrates how important they are. They are about lethal violence; they are about people dying and killing for political objectives. You do not do that trivially. You step gingerly into these minefields.

I was at Verdun in February. There is a huge French ossuary, with 130,000 remains, in a place called Douaumont. No one has any idea how many French and how many Germans are in that building. It was built by the Bishop of Verdun as a private initiative. People paid to have their lost son, husband or brother commemorated on it. For years and years, Germans had come along and asked whether they could participate. They were told, “No. This is French. This is us. Ils ne passeront pas. This is about the freedom of France”. That was until this February. I was there quite by chance when the very first German was being commemorated. I was there on the Saturday and saw the German flag and the French flag. I did not go to the ceremony on the Sunday, but the local newspaper on the Monday was full of all the sorts of thing that we saw yesterday: “He was called Hans. He was called Jacques. They were two brothers from each side who died together. We will never go to war again”. Down the line, some retired mayor said, “This is outrageous. This traduces the memory of our brave French soldiers, who fought for French freedom. We will not have this”. I thought, “They’re good haters here”. The dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone rose before me. There are people who are so engaged with these events that they will not hear an alternative story. That is the reality. We cannot nice them out of it. We just have to chip away at it and say, “Actually, it’s not as simple as that”.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Keith, thank you very much for a very informative and interesting conversation. I am going to ask a “What if?” question, which is probably unfair. When you had 100,000 Ulster Volunteers arming, training and manoeuvring and 150,000 Irish Volunteers arming, training and manoeuvring, if the World War had not broken out, what do you think would have been the eventualities of that kind of manoeuvring?

**Professor Keith Jeffery:** That is a terrific question. It is really tricky. When you look at British history in the summer of 1914, no one is interested in Sarajevo or Germany: “There is some kind of trouble in the Balkans. What’s all this?” Instead, people are terrified about civil war. They are having a conference in Buckingham Palace and the King is doing this and that. All the way through the July crisis, there is a concentration on Ireland. On 3 or 4 August, Edward Grey says in Parliament, “We are facing war. This is terrible. It is a gloomy picture, but the one bright spot is Ireland”.

Both Redmond and Carson had said that they would stop their fighting for the bigger issue. The generally accepted narrative is that civil war in Ireland is avoided because of the larger conflagration. My sense is that it is not so much avoidance as postponement and that what does happen is a variant of what might have happened, except that the dynamics have changed a bit.

Those who are prepared to use violence in pursuit of political objectives come out partially in 1916 but then in 1919 to 1921, as well as those on the other side, in the establishment of the Northern state, which is based on armed force as much as anything else. I have seen it argued that it is a good job that the war happened and that one of the benign outcomes of the war was that it prevented Ireland from having a civil war at the time, but that was at a considerable cost. A cost-benefit analysis would be tricky.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you. We are almost out of time. Four more people want to ask questions, so perhaps we could be brief, please.

**Lord Rogan:** I would like to comment on what Senator Paschal Mooney said. I am a vice-patron of the Somme Association. The *raison d’être* of the association — it was the reason why we set it up — was that we were conscious that the 36th (Ulster) Division was getting all the credit and the 10th and 16th had been wiped from history. I was surprised that your colleague got that impression from us; it certainly is not what is intended. We are continuing with that. Just last week, it was announced that a Roman Catholic who had been awarded the Victoria Cross and who had been buried in a pauper’s grave would be recognised and that we would make a memorial to him. We are carrying on that tradition. We want to recognise the sacrifice from all parts of the island of Ireland and not just from loyal Ulster.

**Professor Keith Jeffery:** I have nothing to add to that.

*11.30 am*

**Viscount Bridgeman:** You talked about the wave of support for Redmond in 1914. What was the degree of scepticism and suspicion that the British Government intended to treat this as unfinished business? After all, an unspecified number of counties in Northern Ireland were going to be excluded. What was the scepticism that this would in fact be kicked into the long grass, whether or not the war came?

**Professor Keith Jeffery:** The problem with any settlement or arrangement for home rule was the North — whether there would be a county option and whether that would be six counties or nine counties. One proposal on the table in the summer of 1914 was a six-year one, but Carson said, “We don’t want a six-year stay of execution. This is not good enough”. There was a kicking for touch on that. I think that everyone heaved a great sigh of relief at the one bright spot at the beginning of August.

Interestingly, in that period between the summer of 1914 and the spring of 1916, there is a sign of change in attitude to Redmond. A leading article in the ‘Daily Telegraph’, which then as now was not a newspaper particularly sympathetic to Irish nationalism, said, “We’ve always regarded these Irish nationalists as a wee bit iffy, but after their contribution to the war effort, we’re going to have to regard them differently and inevitably we’ll have to fix this up”.

The Rising in 1916 shifts the goalposts in all sorts of different ways, but there is a potential moment in 1915 where there might have been lost opportunities, such as when Redmond refused to join the coalition Government’s Cabinet. On the other hand, we are back into “If only” and counterfactuals. Those are great parlour games late night in the pub, but these things did not happen and, in the end, we must not spend too much time saying “If only”.

**Mr Joe O’Reilly TD:** Briefly, given the constraints of time, I will make a quick observation. We have had an extraordinary two days. I think that yesterday was truly memorable and that today’s lecture was extraordinarily interesting and will excite us into further reading and research in this area. On a happy note, I want to congratulate my friend and colleague Deputy Feighan on his appointment as Co-Chair.

I have two brief questions. First, what input did the Roman Catholic clergy and leadership have in influencing people to go to save Catholic Belgium? To what degree was that a factor? Have you evidence around that? We should read the book, of course. Secondly, how important was urban poverty — the tenements of Dublin?

**Professor Keith Jeffery:** On the first question, quite a lot of work has been done on the Church. As you might expect, there is not a simple answer. Some bishops are more sympathetic. It also matters when you are posing the question. In 1914, there is a great shock and there is, generally speaking, an assumption that the war is a good thing and that Belgium is worth protecting. In particular, there is that narrative of Catholic Belgium.

By the end of the war, it is rather different and cracks are opening up in the unity of the hierarchy. The older bishops are more conservative, as is always the way, I suppose. A lot of younger priests get involved in the anti-conscription campaign in 1918, which puts different stresses on. But the Church is pretty establishment and conservative in 1914. Although it is not on the recruiting platforms, it is not saying, “Don’t join up”.

Urban poverty is deeply interesting. Everyone believes that hunger is the best and most powerful recruiting sergeant. It may well be that in peacetime that is the case, but we can statistically demonstrate that, in the autumn of 1914, it is not the case. The most vigorous recruiting occurs in Belfast from among skilled workers who have jobs and who are members of either the Ulster Volunteer Force or the Irish Volunteers.

The single most powerful dynamic for people joining up are networks or collectivities — people who work together. There are different motivations for joining up — again, this is not simple — which reinforce each other. It is completely irrational and counter-intuitive. The people whom you think are the most unlikely to join up join up in the largest numbers. We know this statistically from the autumn of 1914. That is not to say that economics is irrelevant — we know that it is not irrelevant — but there is no rational economic decision in the war to join up and to fight in what might be a rather dangerous exercise.

On the other hand, a lot of industries go on short time in August 1914, particularly luxury industries. The painting and decorating trades are laying people off. The Irish linen industry is high end and does not do cheap goods; it is not like Lancashire cotton — I apologise to anyone from Lancashire. Irish linen is a luxury and people stop buying it: “We don’t need another tablecloth. There’s a war on and we can make do”. Harland and Wolff does not do cheap and cheerful boats; it is at the expensive, luxury end of the market. Suddenly, it is also going on short time, because people are ringing up or sending signals saying, “I think we’ll just postpone our new liner for a bit. These are difficult times. There’s a war on”. Just at the moment when Kitchener and everyone are saying, “There’s a war so you should do this”, a whole lot of people are being put on short time, so they think, “OK, this will do”.

So there might be a connection, but not necessarily in the ways that you think. That is not to say that there are not poverty-stricken guys saying, “I’ll join up to be a soldier as well”. They exist, too, but there are a lot of other ones.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you. This will have to be the last question.

**Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP:** I add my voice of congratulations on the very good lecture, which I think underpinned the significance of yesterday. At Messines cemetery yesterday, I sought out somebody from my constituency in south Wales from the Welsh Regiment. His name was Durkin. Next door but one was another Irish name, Ryan, again from the Welsh Regiment. I wonder whether these new, bright historians to whom you referred could find a project in looking at how the diaspora in Britain — the Irishmen or perhaps sons of Irishmen — joined up, what regiments they went to and what part they played in the Great War.

**Professor Keith Jeffery:** What a terrific idea. Some things of those sorts are being done. There is a wonderful book by Catriona Pennell called ‘A Kingdom United’, in which she looks at the response to the war across the United Kingdom and not just Ireland. She did her PhD at Trinity, but she is an English person working at the University of Exeter in Cornwall, so there is a kind of Celtic edge to this.

She has looked to a certain extent at pockets of the Irish diaspora — you get the Tyneside Irish and the Liverpool Irish coming through. But we still have to do the Welsh Irish. That sounds a wonderful mix — even better than either/or. The centenary is encouraging, as it promotes precisely these sorts of local community investigations, which we can then put together to get the bigger picture. We have all seen this happening; we are all involved. It all ought to be encouraged — the more of it the better.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** I now need to bring this fascinating session to a close. In doing so, I thank Professor Jeffery very much indeed for his marvellous presentation.

## **BRITISH AND IRISH ECONOMY**

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** We will have a political debate on the British and Irish economy. The Irish and British economies have been through tough times of late and as our economies emerge from the financial crisis this Assembly will continue to provide a valuable forum for exchanges on fostering trade, enterprise and commerce. Trade between the UK and Ireland is worth approximately €1 billion per week and supports, by some estimates, around 400,000 jobs on both sides of the Irish Sea. I am acutely aware that Britain and Ireland must continue to work very closely together at commercial and trade levels to overcome the economic challenges facing our countries.

I look forward to hearing Members' contributions in this area. I am inviting contributions from the floor. Jack Wall will, I think, lead off.

**Mr Jack Wall TD:** Co-Chairs, I am pleased we are having a political debate today on the Irish and British economy. Both our countries have been through difficult times, economically, and the financial crisis has had a deep impact on all our people. However, the news is beginning to improve in our countries and today's debate offers an opportunity to debate upon and to share information on the improvements in our economic fortunes that we are beginning to see.

In Ireland the news is getting better. We are, I believe, on our way to economic recovery. In the second quarter of 2014, our GDP grew at a rate of 7.7%, the highest growth achieved in many years. Economic growth of 4.6% is forecast for this year, 2014.

Our growth has been export driven — export levels are at an all-time high, even higher than the pre-crisis peak. Most importantly of all, for our people and families, our unemployment level, though still too high, and we accept that, is falling. Some 61,000 additional jobs were created in Ireland in 2013. Unemployment fell to 11.1% in September 2014 from the truly horrendous peak of 15.1% in 2012. All of this is positive news.

Of course, we are not out of woods, yet, I believe, however, an end is in sight to the last few years of economic darkness. Our economic relations with Great Britain, remains strong and vibrant. As the Co-Chair said, trade between our two countries is worth more than an astounding €1 billion per week. The importance of trade is particularly significant for the Irish food and drink sector. Tourism is also a significant market.

The UK remains the largest export destination for Irish food and drink accounting for 42% of exports in 2013. This equates to €4.1 billion which is a 9% increase on 2012. The main drivers of this increase are in the dairy products, beef and prepared foods area. Provisional figures for the first quarter in 2014 show a growth of 5% compared with the first quarter in 2013. Given our proximity, it is no surprise that Ireland is the UK's largest export market in the food and drink sector. Total food and non-alcoholic drink exports to Ireland in the first half of 2014 remained static but amounted to £1.582 billion.

Tourism is another growth area. Visitor numbers from Great Britain to Ireland increased by 5.6% between 2012 and 2013 and indications are that this trend is set to continue for 2014. In fact the Dublin-London air route is the second busiest international corridor in the world as 3.6 million passengers jetted between the capital cities in 2013.

11.45 am

The latest figures for the period June to August 2014 show an increase of 3.5% on the same period last year with visitor numbers from the UK reaching 910,500. This is an increase of 9% for the first eight months of 2014. This represents almost 42% of the total number of visitors during that period. During the state visit, Tourism Ireland and VisitBritain announced a new agreement to boost tourist numbers from long-haul markets such as China and India. This agreement will be of major significance to the tourist trade in both our countries.

The UK economy is also continuing to grow and the growth forecast for this year is 3%. To my mind, Co-Chairs, this represents a very positive story for these islands. I look forward to hearing the views of other Members on their respective economies and how they see positive developments as their economies begin to move on following the years of austerity.

**Mrs Joyce Watson AM:** Co-Chair, first, I have to say I am disappointed that I did not know the subject of the debate. I very much would have liked to have been prepared to take part and to have been able to demonstrate through supported evidence what is happening in the economy in Wales, Ireland and England. I cannot do that now. All I can talk about are the things I know.

The one thing I do know about a recovering economy is that the statistics do not tell the true story and that people who are supposedly gaining and benefiting from the improved economy, the people who are at the bottom of the pay scale do not feel there is any real benefit to them. When we look at the headline figures on increases in the number of people employed, we see an increase in part-time work, in zero hour contracts. I do not really feel that those people would agree that the economy is benefiting them.

When we look at the disparities in the jobs and who is gaining access to those jobs, again we see a gender divide. We certainly see a gender divide in traditional sectors such as the construction industry, in which 1% of females make up the total workforce. When we look at gender segregation in the employment market, we see thankfully that males are now taking up opportunities in nursing but the same is not true when we look at females coming out of gender specific roles into the male gender specific roles.

I feel somewhat limited, as I would have loved to have made a contribution to the debate on the economy. In the Welsh Assembly we have just completed a report on tourism and what it means for the economy. We looked at Ireland in that context, but I cannot recall everything — my memory will not serve me that well. What I am really saying is that this could have been a good opportunity for me to be fully engaged in this debate, had I had the opportunity to do so.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Thank you Joyce for bringing that to our attention and we will pass it on to the secretariat. I call Mr David Melding.

**Mr David Melding AM:** It is very important to concentrate on key sectors and I will deal with housing. I do not know very much about how the housing situation in the Republic of Ireland has shaped up during the recession because I know there had been a great housing boom.

Our problem in the UK is generally a shortage of housing. I think it presses particularly on younger people. It is now very difficult for young people, even in professional jobs to have access to a family home, whether they want to buy or rent that home, unless they have family wealth behind them. I think it is a great problem when people in their thirties who are raising families are locked out of adequate housing. In former times in the UK we were building two or two and a half times the number of houses that we are now building. That is an absolutely staggering difference.

What we need to do is use land more effectively and to use more brownfield sites, and think about ways of generating energy savings in new buildings. There is a lot of potential for innovation and in the past in the UK, housing was seen as a means to get vitality into the economy. It is also probably the best multiplier of any economic activity. There are many gains, in that a local labour force is employed and generally materials tend not to be imported. I think it would send a signal to younger people that those of us in our fifties who are in comfortable homes take this aspiration seriously.

I would also like to see across Great Britain and in Ireland work to encourage enterprise among young people. There are many ways in which we can do this by making it easier to set up businesses. The transformation we have had in technology, in many fields in digital technology has vastly reduced the barriers to entry to setting up new businesses. People will not be able to take advantage of this if they find that their only option if they do not have much money behind them is to seek very traditional jobs, often in the public sector. There is nothing wrong with going into the public sector but we need more young people to think in terms of developing new enterprises and in particular in areas such as south Wales and I am sure this is true in parts of the Republic and in Northern Ireland.

In areas where there has been fairly low wealth creation, we need to see the maximum gain in future. I think universities and the further and higher education sector are the key players in giving people the opportunities so that when they are developing their skills they are also receiving effective advice and training on how to establish businesses. Many successful businesses require a small team, where people come together. People meet during those points of serendipity, which you often get in a university type environment or during the first phase of a business development in business parks and the like.

These are just two suggestions to try to counter this move we have had in which many people are feeling more and more distant from politics, especially as it is traditionally mediated by the parties that have a responsibility for government. There is a significant flank opening out of people with more populist intentions coming up with very cheap councils of perfection that we all know could not be brought into effect once one is in government.

There is a great truth that we are not always identifying the real needs of younger people, in terms of their need for housing and economic opportunities. Thank you.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** Go raibh maith agat, Co-Chair. For the benefit of our colleagues, we received a briefing note on the bilateral economic relations with the UK. The importance of trade with the UK is particularly significant for Irish food and drink producers and accounted for more than 40% of our exports from indigenous companies in 2013.

Ireland is an important market for British exports – we are the UK's fifth largest export market after the US, Germany, France and the Netherlands. A recent report by HSBC

indicated that Ireland was the UK's fourth most important export destination in 2013 and predicts that by 2030 Ireland will be in third place, ahead of China. The value of the services and goods from the UK imported into Ireland amounted to £10.2 billion in 2012.

Ireland's main exports to the UK are meat, pharmaceutical products, computer services, transport services and insurance services. While our main imports from the UK are petroleum, petroleum products and related materials. That is rather interesting as I would have thought that it might have been in other areas, such as food imports.

I share Mrs Joyce Watson's view on statistics. Despite the fact that there has been an indication, at the very least, of a turnaround in the Irish economic fortunes from the spring of this year it is not manifesting itself on the ground or as Harold Wilson famously put it the pound in your pocket. That is not a political point. I think all political parties would subscribe to that view. It is a challenge for both Governments, in light of the improved economic situation in the UK and the improving situation in Ireland, to address how ordinary people can feel the benefits of what the statistics are indicating. Perhaps it is too early in the day to say that.

I suggest also that the main reason for the change in our fortunes — relatively small but very welcome — is the attractive exchange rate with our two main trading partners, the UK and the United States. Trade with the Eurozone comes third. Because of the exchange rate of the euro versus sterling and the dollar our exports are now much more competitive than they have been in recent years.

There is an indication of stagnation in the Eurozone economies, particularly in Germany which is a very real concern, not just for Ireland but for Britain as well. I hope the fiscal policy being pursued by the German Government will loosen the purse strings and release more money into their economy. I was reading last week that there are serious infrastructural deficits in the German economy. I found that surprising but it is a fact of life. They have been tightening their purse string for so long, since the early noughties, that there is a need for a change. Perhaps that is something that at bilateral level the UK and Irish Governments can pursue the type of economic drive within the framework of the European Union.

I wish to raise an issue in the context of the statistics that relates to the importance of trade with the UK being particularly significant for Irish food and drink producers. The UK remains the largest export destination for Irish food and drink accounting for 42% of our exports last year, equating to more than €4 billion, which is a 9% increase. The main drivers of this increase are in the dairy products, beef and prepared food areas.

I am not sure whether this Assembly can be helpful in this regard but there has been a serious depression in cattle prices in the past 12 to 18 months. Farmers are really struggling. The price of weanlings and the cost of feeding them has risen to such an extent that some farmers are selling them at a loss. There was a falling off, although there are recent indications that there might be a return, of the buyers from Northern Ireland in the beef market in the South, primarily because of an ongoing controversy over the origins of Irish beef.

In the past six to nine months, the Irish Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine signed an agreement with the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development in the North on joint labelling, where they agreed that the country of origin will be "Ireland" for products from North and South that are exported to Britain. This is being done on the basis that the UK



consumer does not make a distinction between beef from the South or from Northern Ireland as they see it as Irish beef.

*Noon*

However, while most of the supermarket chains in the UK have embraced this concept, which has been a considerable help to the Irish beef sector, the major supermarket outlet, Tesco, has refused to accept it. I am not sure whether this Assembly can do anything but I felt I had an opportunity to raise the issue in the context of this debate. I know that my colleagues in all parties and none are very familiar with this because it has been an ongoing controversy for the past 12 to 18 months. I do not know whether this Assembly can recommend something or acknowledge it, but I would be interested in what other Irish contributors have to say. Tesco plays a pivotal role in the distribution of Irish meat products to UK consumers. The most recent indications are that while it is fully aware of the pressure that has been brought to bear, it has yet to make a decision to accept the country of origin as agreed by the Agriculture Ministers, North and South.

I want to put this item on the record. I know the Co-Chair will be very familiar with this issue.

**Deputy John Le Fondré:** Thank you Co-Chair. I am John Le Fondré from the States of Jersey. I thought it might be appropriate, given the nature of the subject today, to refer to the contribution of the smaller jurisdictions represented in this room, namely the Crown Dependencies. Any examples I give in my contribution will be particularly relevant to Jersey but obviously they can be scaled up with the contributions of the Isle of Man and Guernsey as well.

In Jersey we are starting to see a gradual improvement in matters relating to the economy although we are still very cautious because we are not seeing it across the board. Obviously the UK looks to be doing much better but we all remain very cautious as to where Europe will end up.

People may wonder about the relevance of very small jurisdictions to their countries. I learned a little bit yesterday. We have significant English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish and Northern Irish communities in Jersey and I learned far more about the links of Scotland and Southern Ireland during one of the contributions on the visit. We obviously share the same constitutional status as Guernsey and the Isle of Man.

Members will probably be aware that Jersey's main industry is financial services, which represents more than 40% of our economy. We have always been of the view that this is important not only to Jersey but to the whole of the UK. That was backed up by a very recent independent study by Capital Economics which found that Jersey alone contributes €9 billion to the UK economy; supports up to 180,000 jobs and also that Jersey is the source of foreign investment to the tune of £0.5 trillion into the UK economy. The interesting fact about that particular number is that the report that we commissioned, indicated that over 80% of that investment into the UK economy would be at risk of leaving the sterling zone if Jersey did not exist or provide the services it does. I think that is quite relevant because it does demonstrate — I use Jersey as an example — that the Crown Dependencies as a whole perform a very active and hopefully welcome role to maintaining the British economy.

We obviously are therefore proud of our international finance centre. We consider that we provide a very safe, secure and first class service to clients across the world. We also recognise jointly our responsibilities and are committed to working with international organisations such as the OECD, the EU, the US and UK in the fight against tax evasion and financial crime. We are certainly of the view that such illegal activity has no place in Jersey or in any other Crown Dependencies as I am sure Members will be delighted to learn. Let me give an update as to where we are at the moment with [*Inaudible.*] early adopters of the Common Reporting Standard. That has been recognised at the highest political levels.

I would like to add one call as well. When Members talk about financial services and the agenda for transparency, it might be worth mentioning that perhaps some focus also needs to be granted to ensuring that other jurisdictions — and I will use Delaware in the US as an example — need to be brought up to the same level of regulation and compliance in order to advance the agenda of transparency. I do not know if that is something that Members as a whole could take on board.

We have other strands to our economy. Like Ireland, tourism is important to us. Agriculture is also important. Anybody involved in the agriculture industry will hopefully recognise the Jersey cow and the Jersey Royal. The UK market is particularly important but we are making inroads into Asia.

I hope that helps to assist some Members in recognising the contribution that we, as smaller jurisdictions, make to the wider economy of the UK. I hope we acknowledge that the strong links between all of us will serve us well in the future. Thank you, Sir.

**Senator Cáit Keane:** Deputy John Le Fondré mentioned the Jersey cow and the Jersey Royal. In this regard, it would be topical to refer to the climate change regulation and how it will affect the Jersey cow. We in Ireland will have to consider the impact of that regulation. That is not what I will speak about today, but it is an important subject.

Ireland has come out of a recession and is now rated one of the best growth countries in Europe. When one considers the situation in the UK, Europe and America, one sees the downside of growth. Probably the most important sentence in the briefing document on Bilateral Economic Relations with the UK refers to:

*"a risk of Euro Zone countries slipping back into recession."*

During a period of high growth one must be aware of that.

I agree with the other speakers who, in referring to Ireland's growth, stated that Europe is asking why this is happening in Ireland. We were able to reach our Budget targets without having to make an additional cut of €2 billion, as initially expected. It is important, however, that people from all sectors of society benefit. As Mrs Joyce Watson mentioned at the start of the debate, people who are supposedly gaining from the improved economy do not feel there is any real benefit to them. They need to see the benefit in their pockets and I hope that is the message that goes out loud and clear from today's proceedings.

Obviously, the best way to lift people out of poverty is to provide jobs. I note from the briefing document that continued growth in employment in the UK economy in the second quarter resulted in 74,000 extra jobs. There has been a significant increase in the number of jobs created in Ireland in the past year.

My main point relates to the Bitcoin. Could this be considered as an item for the agenda of the debate on economic matters? We have all discussed the euro currency, but the Bitcoin has a 3000% growth rate right around the world. Trading in the Bitcoin is growing in America. If this online virtual currency could destabilise the banks and the banks land us in the trouble we were in before, we should have a debate it. I think the Bitcoin will link all countries.

Yesterday, I saw that the major economic forum in Asia, which is now the largest business forum, had a conference on the Bitcoin. I think one or two European countries have introduced regulation on it but I know that neither Ireland nor the UK have done so. When one sees a 3000% growth in its use and Argos announced a couple of days ago that it will start trading in it, we should consider how it will affect our countries. I would like to have a discussion on the Bitcoin so that we can be more informed about it.

**Mr John Scott MSP:** Thank you, Co-Chair. I would like to make a small contribution. I congratulate Ireland and the UK on the recovering economy. It is worth noting that unemployment in the UK is around 6% at present and in Scotland is around the 6% to 7% figure.

I do not entirely share Mrs Joyce Watson's completely gloomy perspective about the situation in Britain. However, like Jack Wall I would like to note the successful part of the Scottish economy, which is that food and drink exports from Scotland are now £13 billion and it may be of interest to Members that our whisky exports are more than £3 billion to £4 billion and growing.

I also had the pleasure of meeting the Agriculture Commissioner designate, Phil Hogan. I think he will do a lot to reassure Paschal Mooney because I was very impressed by his attitude towards future reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. I think he will be a good friend to Britain, Scotland and indeed Ireland in that regard.

At the last meeting of the Assembly the Irish Government and Ryanair announced the abolition of airport passenger duty, APD. I would be interested to know — and somebody might tell us during the winding up session — if the replacement income that Michael O'Leary promised to the Irish Government is materialising. It may be too early to say, of course, since it was only abolished in April. It would be fair to say on behalf of my colleagues that all parties in Scotland would like to see this tax at least reduced or indeed abolished.

Like other Members I am very concerned about the slowdown of the European economies as both Senators Paschal Mooney and Cáit Keane have mentioned and the effect this may have on the Irish and indeed the British economies as well as on our Scottish economy. I am also particularly concerned about the apparent lack of push from the central banks in EU member states and their inability to stimulate the European Economy as they had promised. I think that is an issue of great concern.

I welcome the Irish Government's decision last week in the Budget to close the double Irish loophole, which I think will result in large corporations paying more tax. That is much to be welcomed in the UK and in Europe and it will provide a lead to other countries in terms of reducing tax avoidance or even tax evasion.

**Mr Willie Coffey MSP:** Thank you very much Co-Chair. The employment rate in Scotland is already higher than that in the UK and has been for a wee while, in particular among women. In contrast to this, what we are also seeing is a significant increase in child poverty. I wonder what kind of economic interventions are taking place that appear to be improving the economy and making things slightly better but are causing such great increases in child poverty?

We are facing the prospect of 100,000 extra children in Scotland being driven into poverty by economic policies being set by the Government. I do not want to make that point too political but there has to be a discussion at some point about the economic interventions we can achieve to help our economies which at the same time appear to be causing greater rises in child poverty. In Scotland, some 100,000 families are getting help from the Scottish Welfare Fund to buy basic goods such as food. The rise in the number of food banks in Scotland is incredible and I would like to hear if that is the case in Ireland and in other parts of the UK.

Co-Chair, if this Assembly is looking at economic interventions could we pay particular attention to the impact these measures might have in reducing child poverty in our various jurisdictions.

**Mr Michael McMahon MSP:** Thank you, Co-Chair. I will follow on from the point made by my colleague, Willie Coffey. We have seen the statistics on Scotland that he has commented on. He raised the point more as a question, posing the question to all the Members of the Assembly: what can we do about it? What if the evidence is already there?

I am the convenor of the Welfare Reform Committee in the Scottish Parliament and I have seen evidence of the increase in food banks. We have worked extensively along with some academic research about the causes behind it. The problem is not entirely down to unemployment and people having no income but to the number of people in work on low income. The number at work living in poverty has increased quite alarmingly. We have been hearing evidence from people who have suggested to us that what we have to do is ensure that companies who employ people pay them a living wage. Companies are increasing the rates of employment but are doing so on the basis of zero hour contracts and people ostensibly are in employment but do not do much work. They work when an employer takes them on to do that job of work and they rely on benefits for the rest of the time.

*12.15 pm*

Those people are not counted on the unemployment statistics but are counted in the poverty statistics. The answer is to ensure that when employers take on employees they pay them a living wage and a rate at which they can afford to feed their families. We must ensure also that employers do not exploit people to the extent that they can hire staff and use them at their whim by over-working them on some occasions but leaving them without work when the company cannot use them in order to make profits.

Yes, Willie Coffey was right to pose these questions, but some of the answers are already there and what we have to do is find the willingness among the Governments to ensure that people are employed and that the living wage is the standard by which we assess whether

somebody is a good employer. We must try to ensure that people who are in work do not depend on benefits.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Thank you, Michael. Does anybody else wish to contribute?

**Mrs Joyce Watson AM:** May I make one comment? I wish to follow on from a comment in my initial contribution. The Welsh Assembly is a living wage employer. It might be worth considering the rates of pay within our jurisdictions particularly in the public sector in the areas we control. We are talking about not just raising the GDP but raising people's wealth. It might be an area we could all sign up to and progress.

Perhaps running alongside that we could also look at how we count people in or out of work. We thought we understood all of the statistics we were examining. When we were counting people as unemployed we thought it meant the number of people who were not actually working, but now we know that counting mechanism have changed, so that people who are in training or in education are excluded from those numbers.

I would like to see that we get a reality check. I love statistics because one can use them any way one likes. We know that is what is going on. A reality check would tell us what is really happening to people in society.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Thank you, Joyce. Before we suspend for lunch, I wish to record my appreciation for our former Irish clerk, Ms Sinéad Quinn. I thank her most sincerely for her contribution to this Assembly. She has moved to Mayo in the west of Ireland.

I thank all our support staff in Kent for making this plenary run so smoothly. I thank also the Committee clerks, the media and the debates office staff for their assistance.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** May I join in the expression of thanks to Sinéad. At this point, may I pay tribute and thank the people who helped put the conference together, in particular those who put yesterday's programme together, Dr Robin James, Mrs Amanda Healy and Sir Michael Davies who have worked tirelessly on it. I think Members will agree that yesterday had the potential to go very wrong because of the number of people involved and the number of calls we had to make. Through their dedication and hard work, everybody would agree that it worked out very well.

I would also like to thank the spouses, partners and other observers who attended yesterday and who have attended today. They are very welcome. I thank them very much. I think Mr Wells would like to comment.

**Mr Jim Wells MLA:** I am not allowed, because of my new position, to comment on anything, but I think my officials at Stormont will not go mad if I thank everybody. My wife, who has come with me to most plenaries, and I have had a wonderful time during the past seven years. I was the first Unionist ever to set foot at a meeting of this august organisation, and did so with fear and trepidation. Many of my colleagues thought I would not get back alive because it was a fearsome and a worrying organisation, exercising vast powers. Perhaps that is not exactly a fair description of BIPA.

I arrived in Newcastle and was the only Unionist because Ken Maginnis, the other Ulster Unionist, was in Newcastle, County Down wondering where everybody was. Instead of going to Newcastle upon Tyne he had gone to Newcastle, County Down, which of course is a very important place. He has never been allowed to live that down.

In the intervening period we have seen significant changes in BIPA. I will never forget the meeting in Douglas on the Isle of Man, where our many colleagues from one political party in the Irish Republic, which I am not allowed to name, realised that their political fate had been sealed and they would not be back. It was very sad to say goodbye to a very large number of those Members, some of whom I have never seen since and then to welcome a completely new raft of Members from another political party that I am not allowed to name, who have joined us and it has taken a bit of time to get to know them.

I have found this an extremely beneficial organisation. I would hope to return to it someday. I have no doubt that I will return to the backbenches, where I have been for the previous 20 years. In fact, I was 20 years at Stormont yesterday, the vast majority of that time spent as an obscure backbencher. As Enoch Powell once observed, all political careers end in tears. I suspect that may happen to me as well. If that is the case, I certainly will be first in the queue to come back as a Member of this organisation like the august Rt Hon Paul Murphy MP who held an ever higher position as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland but came back to BIPA. That is what I intend to do.

I thank you one and all. It has been an absolute privilege to be a Member of this organisation. You have not scared me one iota. The vast power that BIPA exercises has been done in a very subtle form, so subtle at times I begin to wonder. I have found BIPA to be a great organisation. I have met many new friends. I have met scores of people from the Irish Republic through this organisation whom I had never met before. If somebody had told me ten years ago that I would ever set foot in the Dáil, I would have said, impossible, but now with no problem at all I can give you a private guided tour of it, I have been there that often. That is an indication of how the relationship has developed.

This is not a political point. Relationships between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic and between the Irish Republic and the rest of the UK and the islands have never ever been better. Everybody is agreed on that. I think BIPA has played a major role in that success because we have brought all the devolved powers together and we realise we are very similar. Our aims in life are identical. We do not spend most of our time trying to take over the powers and jurisdiction of the other.

We all aim towards achieving the common good. That level of understanding has meant that in terms of international relationships between all the organisations here, goodwill and peace have broken out big time. I do not think that will ever be reversed. I no longer see people such as Joe O'Reilly and Joe McHugh and people like them as vague mythical creatures plotting our downfall. I see them as very human people with wives and families. That has to be a good thing.

I leave BIPA with many fond memories but, as they say in all the best movies, I have not gone away, you know.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you very much Jim. Thank you for your very valuable contribution to BIPA during the past few years. We, of course, wish you well in your career as a Minister.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** Co-Chair, would it be in order to make a brief response to Jim's speech?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Yes.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** I wish to respond to Jim's excellent farewell speech. I congratulate him on his elevation. He was a Member of BIPA when the focus of this body was to encourage the Ulster Unionists to become part of this body which they had refused to join for a long time.

Jim deserves great credit and I can remember being present at the plenary in Kerry when his party leader and First Minister arrived with a delegation for the first time ever. As Jim put it in his eloquent way, they discovered that the Members of this body did not have horns and that it was essentially about the common good. Jim's involvement, in particular as he represents the majority party of Unionism in the Northern Ireland Assembly, has been a very valuable and significant contribution. It is important that this is put on the record of this plenary.

I wish him well. He will be a very hard act to follow but I am sure the experience he has gained on this body and the influence he commands within his own party will ensure there will be continuing active participation by DUP and by the wider Ulster Unionist community in this body's activities in the future. Well done, Jim.

**Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you very much. I am sure we all agree. I see that Joe O'Reilly has indicated.

**Mr Joe O'Reilly TD:** I wish to be associated with the congratulations to Jim. I am a neighbour and I have travelled to a number of places and met Jim and his family. I had a media call when he made his speech. I am sorry that I missed it but I heard in the background that he made an excellent speech. I congratulate him.

**The Lord Dubs:** Thank you, Co-Chair. May I say as Chair of Committee D, Jim has been a valuable member of that Committee and I would like to be associated with the tributes. What I say to him is, "Join Committee D and you will become a Minister."

*[Laughter.]*

I am really grateful for the contribution that Jim has made. We have had our discussions and our disagreements, which were healthy, but we shall miss you, Jim. I hope you will stay as a health Minister for a long time, I do not want you back but if you stop being a Minister please come back soon. I thank him for what he has done.

**Some Members:** Hear, hear.

**Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** I think that summarises it. Thank you very much.

May I remind Members that we have a very important address from the Northern Ireland Minister at 2:00 pm. I ask everyone to be back in his place by then. That will be followed by two Committee reports.

*The sitting was suspended at 12.26 pm and resumed at 2.30 pm.*

## ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** I welcome you all back. On a procedural issue, we are going to take the report of Committee D before that of Committee C, at 3:00 pm.

I am very pleased now to welcome Dr Andrew Murrison MP, the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. I invite you, Andrew, to address the Assembly. Dr Murrison is also the Prime Minister's special representative for the centenary commemoration of the First World War. When the Under-Secretary has concluded, I will be inviting questions from the floor.

**Dr Andrew Murrison MP:** Co-Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much indeed for the invitation to speak today. I would like to convey the Secretary of State's apologies for not being able to join you. As you know very well, things are very busy in Belfast at the moment and the cross-party talks are pretty well all-consuming.

I would also like to add my own apologies, because I had hoped very much to be able to join you in Flanders. I understand your day yesterday was busy but very useful. It certainly would have been of huge interest to me, since, as Mr Feighan very kindly mentioned, I am also the Prime Minister's special representative for the centenary commemoration of the Great War. In January, Eamon Gilmore said:

*"The First World War in Ireland was seen for many years as a divisive part of our troubled legacy. And because of this, there was a tendency to avoid any interrogation of Irish involvement. However, we have learnt that contending with the past, as we have done over a number years in relation to Ireland's role and contribution, has brought with it great opportunities to recognise in our reflections on the war our common humanity, our common cause, and our common heritage."*

I very much agree with those sentiments.

Northern Ireland is featuring particularly heavily on political radars this week. Besides the talks process in Belfast, which is the subject of intensive ministerial effort, and your own proceedings here, there are three Northern Ireland debates in the Commons tomorrow and one in the Lords.

Let me say how happy I am to be participating in this particular institution. I know something of your history, dating back to the early 1990s, and I have some appreciation of the contribution you have made over that time in fostering understanding across the Irish sea,



and indeed among all parts of the British devolved system. We do value the work of the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly, and I appreciate the role this institution has played in building relations and trust between the UK and Ireland over the last 20 years or so.

The work of your four Committees has served to inform debate on a range of issues, such as renewable energy, the EU presidency, the environment, social matters and, of course, the implementation of the Belfast and St Andrew's Agreements in Northern Ireland. As it happens, I have copies and have noted the recommendations, which will of course be central to the talks under way in Belfast; I can assure you of that. Also extremely important is the informal side of your work, bringing together parliamentarians from different institutions and traditions to identify points of common interests and of misunderstanding.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the just over four months since I joined the Northern Ireland Office, I have had the opportunity to meet Northern Ireland's political leaders and those with a particular interest in the political settlement in Northern Ireland. Most obviously, I have heard about political disagreement, but looking back to the state of Northern Ireland when I first came to political consciousness of it, I find more striking the extraordinary amount of progress that there has been in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Belfast Agreement.

People of my generation — my age — from Great Britain grew up at a time when Northern Ireland was on the television night after night for all the wrong reasons. It is sometimes difficult to get over the stereotype, the image that was implanted in our minds in the late 1960s and the 1970s, but that is happening and it is vital that it is, because when people come to make investment decisions, decisions on where to put their capital, which is vital to boosting the prosperity of Northern Ireland, they will remember what it was like, and they need to be informed in no uncertain terms that Northern Ireland has completely changed and has changed for all time. A new image needs to be created in the minds of those decision makers, but every time an incident is reported, it just reaffirms the old stereotypes that people of my generation still have in the back of their head, and that is not terribly useful.

The remaining challenges are profound and I will say something about them, but first it is worth highlighting how far Northern Ireland has come. Only a decade ago, few would have imagined that Northern Ireland would play host to such prestigious events as the G8 summit, the UK City of Culture, the MTV European music awards, the World Police and Fire Games and the Giro d'Italia cycle race — indeed, few would have imagined that the Northern Ireland Assembly would have completed its first term headed by representatives of the late Ian Paisley's party and Gerry Adams, let alone be over halfway through its second. For all the criticism that they might attract, the Northern Ireland Executive can cite a number of weighty achievements, not least of which is their continued success in bringing foreign direct investment to Northern Ireland. With prosperity comes peace, but there can be no prosperity without peace.

I believe the future is bright. Belfast is now the second most popular city in the UK for inward investment. That is an incredible achievement. Northern Ireland in particular has a lively and growing arts and creative industries sector, with the world's most popular TV programme being filmed there, showing off some truly stunning landscapes.

It is a testament to the strength of the various agreements that we now have a political settlement that, although far from perfect, has enabled Northern Ireland to prosper and flourish in ways that at one time were nothing more than an aspiration — a dream. With that in mind, I again affirm this Government's commitment to the agreements and institutions that they helped ultimately to bring about. There is no reason at all why anyone should doubt that, but at times people appear to do so, so I affirm our commitment to them.

That was the glass half full bit. It would be naive of me to diagnose the political situation in Northern Ireland as being in rude health. Several challenges remain — indeed, some of them are set out in your report. They are challenges that might see the Executive fail an annual health check, and some threaten their long-term survival.

I know that some have accused the Government of taking their eye off the ball in Northern Ireland, disengaging from the process, or not doing enough to prevent the current impasse. Let me be clear: this Government are and always have been very closely engaged and committed on Northern Ireland issues, but that must manifest itself in quite a different way now that we have a devolved system discharging the great majority of Government responsibilities in Northern Ireland. We have to work with Northern Ireland's elected leaders, on whom the principal responsibility now rests. It is ultimately for them to agree the way forward. We actively champion the political settlement, but the pressing need above all is for Northern Ireland's political leaders to get on with the job of making it work for the people of Northern Ireland.

The Government and the Executive are more closely engaged than ever before. That was made clear, for example, through the economic pact that we signed in June last year — a unique initiative reflecting the Government's determination to ensure that we do all we can for Northern Ireland's economic renewal, as well as making every effort to favour the work of developing a shared future. That commitment to Northern Ireland was backed up by the Prime Minister's initiative in bringing the G8 to Northern Ireland, which required imagination and a certain amount of courage. Lough Erne in Ireland was not the most obvious place to bring the world's economic leaders, but it was an enormous success on its own terms, as well as delivering for Northern Ireland, raising its profile and dispelling some of the negative stereotypes that I mentioned earlier. One spin-off later in the year was a successful investment conference, at which the Prime Minister also presided.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the institutions are not working as well as they should, which is affecting public confidence in their ability to deliver. Two issues above all are now contributing to near-deadlock at Stormont, and both are in urgent need of resolution. One is welfare reform: a modern, dynamic economy requires a welfare system that rewards work, rather than the system we inherited from our predecessors, which too often traps people in poverty and dependency. At the heart of the Government's reforms is the principle that work should always pay and that no one at home on benefits should be better off than those who go out to work. The best way to lift people out of poverty is to support them into work, with all the opportunities that work provides. The Government have agreed important flexibilities, for example on the spare room subsidy, to reflect Northern Ireland's specific circumstances, but we have gone as far as we can go.

As we here all know, the devolution settlement gives Northern Ireland the option to go it alone and break parity with the rest of the UK, but that choice comes with consequences, including the long-term economic and social damage caused by clinging to a broken system that has spiralled out of control and that fails too many of the people it is intended to help. It also comes with financial consequences, with welfare absorbing ever more of the Executive's Budget, to the disadvantage of Northern Ireland's hospitals, schools, policing and transport. The recent round of reductions is proving painful enough, not least because implementing in-year cuts at short notice makes them far harder to deliver through efficiency and inevitably increases the impact on front-line services.

The cost of taking over an aging IT system from the Department for Work and Pensions would be substantial and the cost of replacing it would, I believe, have a devastating financial impact across all other areas of spending for the Executive. I strongly urge nationalists to think again and to allow the reforms to go ahead for the two reasons I have set out, as well as for a third one. I believe that the parties are sincere in wanting the Executive to deliver effectively and improve life for the people of Northern Ireland, but there can be no doubt that a continuing Budget wrangle over welfare will significantly impair the Executive's ability. It is poisoning the parties' efforts to work together, make decisions and get stuff done.

It is not just nationalists' refusal to implement welfare reform that is holding us back; we also urgently need Unionists to tackle the legacy issues that can so often embitter community relations and damage the political relationships that are crucial to making the devolved institutions work. Disputes over flags, parades and the past are consuming increasing amounts of time and resources, especially when they spill out on to the streets, or threaten to do so. I fully appreciate how difficult these issues are — the roots of some of them date back centuries — but there would be huge benefits for Northern Ireland if a way could be found to make progress on them. Crucially, this will provide a chance to develop a balanced, transparent and accountable approach to the past that has objectivity and historical accuracy as a golden thread running through all its work and that puts the interests of victims at its heart.

*2.15 pm*

These issues are at the centre of the talks process in Belfast. Of course, other important issues are also being discussed in relation to institutions and the implementation of the agreements. We need a resolution on those issues that permits politics to get back to delivering on key issues for the future of Northern Ireland. The leaders of today will betray the future and fail to honour the past if no progress is made in their time.

In the second decade of the 21st century, people in Northern Ireland — just like anywhere else — look to their political system to deliver on everyday issues such as health, schools and jobs. In an increasingly devolved UK, solutions have to come from devolved Administrations. In so many respects, Northern Ireland has led the way through the force of circumstances, but nevertheless it has done so. I think Northern Ireland can be proud of its achievements, and history will ultimately judge it well for that level of leadership, but the UK Government can, and do, have a role in persuading, facilitating and doing all we can to see real change delivered to secure a shared future for Northern Ireland. That is why the time is now right to convene a new round of cross-party talks to seek a way forward on the

outstanding issues so that, working together, we do all that we can to lift the blockages that are preventing the Executive from delivering the efficient and effective government that the people of Northern Ireland want and so richly deserve.

Those talks commenced in Belfast last week, and I am pleased to report that they have got off to a largely positive start. I believe that the parties recognise the magnitude of the task ahead, but I also believe that they are ready and willing to make the process work. The talks are focused on the main challenges facing the parties: finance, budgets, welfare, legacy issues, institutions and the implementation of the agreements. Of course, it is right that there is a place at the table for the Irish Government, in accordance with established practice, respecting the three-stranded division of responsibilities.

That brings me to the state of relations between Britain and Ireland. The past year has seen yet another landmark for UK-Irish relations as a whole, with the outstandingly successful state visit of President Higgins in April. There were many highlights during that week, which saw the streets of Windsor bedecked with Union flags and Irish tricolours in honour of Her Majesty's very special house guests. The most remarkable occasion was the Northern Ireland-themed reception at Windsor castle, which brought together people from across these islands and from all traditions. Few occasions could have demonstrated more clearly the difficult journeys that so many have travelled over the past 20 years.

The journey of UK-Irish reconciliation, friendship and co-operation has been strikingly illustrated over recent months by our initiatives to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the Great War. This Assembly, from its early days as the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body, has been central to that wholly positive and beneficial deepening of the relationship. That spirit of reconciliation will continue with the Irish Government, for the first time, laying a wreath at our annual service of remembrance at the Cenotaph in Whitehall this year.

We still have a journey ahead of us if we are to see the full implementation of the agreements and the realisation of our collective vision of a truly stable, peaceful and prosperous Northern Ireland. Be in no doubt: the Government will continue to press on with the implementation of the agreements, to strive to overcome the bitter legacies of the past, to build a healthier economy, and to secure a better and brighter future for Northern Ireland. We are determined to see that job through. We rely on you to follow and comment on our progress, to pull us up if we appear to stumble, to advise us based on the decades of experience from the politics in all parts of these islands that is drawn together in meetings like this, and even to cheer us on if we appear to be doing the right thing.

I will leave the last word to Tom Kettle, the Irish nationalist politician, poet and British soldier who famously said of the Great War:

*“Used with the wisdom which is sown in tears and blood, this tragedy of Europe may be and must be the prologue to the two reconciliations of which all statesmen have dreamed, the reconciliation of Protestant Ulster with Ireland, and the reconciliation of Ireland with Great Britain.”*

Sadly, Lieutenant Kettle's death while leading his men in the successful capture of the village of Ginchy on the Somme in 1916, and the wholesale sowing of blood he referred to, did not, in the years following the war, promote the cause of reconciliation in which he so fervently believed. However, 100 years on, what a magnificent tribute it would be to him and to all those who fought with him from these islands to proceed in a manner commensurate with the spirit of those two reconciliations. Thank you.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Thank you, Minister. I now invite contributions from the floor.

**Viscount Bridgeman:** I thank the Minister for coming and talking to us, and for the contribution he made. I am well aware that the thorny subject of fuel smuggling is a devolved matter, but it is very important that the Secretary of State and the Department are aware of this problem, which is being addressed by a Committee here.

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs is not devolved, so there is a particular interest, but this is a serious problem. I gather, from the Republic's side, that increasing interest is being taken by HMRC and the Garda, and it is very important that this difficult and scandalous subject is resolved. I am not quite sure what the Serious Organised Crime Agency's remit is in Northern Ireland, but I am sure that its presence in the negotiations would be appreciated.

**Dr Andrew Murrison MP:** I anticipated such a question, and I share your concerns. I think that the same question was posed to Theresa Villiers when she was here a year ago.

**Viscount Bridgeman:** It certainly was.

**Dr Andrew Murrison MP:** I certainly agree with you. The Police Service of Northern Ireland is completely focused on the need to reduce smuggling and, indeed, fuel laundering. The activity underpins a lot of things that go on in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. In the Northern Ireland context, the worry is particularly the funding stream that it may provide to various forms of dissident activity, which is distinctly unhelpful.

You asked about SOCA and its successor, the National Crime Agency. The NCA does have a remit in Northern Ireland, but — controversially — it is not comprehensive, although that might change. It does, however, have some responsibility in relation to border issues and smuggling, and it is engaged. I would like the NCA to be able to fulfil its functions comprehensively, as it does in England and Wales, as that would be useful for addressing organised crime across the piece. At the moment, Northern Ireland does not have the benefit of that, but it would be extraordinarily helpful if it did, for a whole raft of reasons. The Republic has been extremely helpful in addressing this, and I think that it perceives this as a threat that is common to both countries. I know that the Garda and PSNI co-operate extremely closely on all forms of smuggling, laundering and all the rest of it. I hope that that is helpful.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Before I bring in Senator Bradford, do any other Members wish to contribute on this theme?

**Mr Joe O'Reilly TD:** Thank you, Chair. This topic is extremely important to the area I represent, so I want to join the questioner in emphasising its importance. My understanding is that, through scientific advance, a dye has been found that is making diesel laundering very difficult, and that now the latest problem is what they call “petrol stretching”. That involves putting kerosene into petrol, which does huge damage to cars and engines. Not enough is being done at a policing level, and it behoves the Governments on both sides to deal with that. Ultimately, the obvious solution lies in a harmonisation of duties and taxes.

Would you respond specifically to the assertion, which is widely made to me and one in which I truthfully believe, that there is not enough commitment in the policing exercise and that it is inadequate? Secondly, would you comment on the harmonisation of taxes?

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Before you go in there, Minister, may I be helpful? During the work on this report, we met many agencies and people across Northern Ireland, and across the island of Ireland. Wherever you have a border, in time-honoured tradition, there will always be some form of smuggling or whatever, but I am heartened to find that there is now — I am trying to think of the right word — a marker for diesel, which has been very successful. Diesel laundering looks as though it is coming to an end, but petrol stretching is another issue.

We met so many different groups. One group was going round offering lottery tickets to retailers, but there were no prizes for those lotteries. We are learning a lot all the time. This is an issue, but a lot of work has been done.

**Dr Andrew Murrison MP:** I take all those points on board, and that about the marker is very important. My understanding, too, is that that is making it far more difficult, although not impossible, to launder fuel. You mentioned whether the police regard this as a priority; the truth is that they do. PSNI has a great deal on its plate, but it views this as an issue because smuggling is a crime, and it underpins a lot of activity in relation to security that PSNI is engaged in tackling. So, for two reasons, it regards this issue as a priority.

On the harmonisation of taxes, the debate at the moment is, of course, on corporation tax. A decision on that — this might come up later in questions, so perhaps I can pre-empt that — will be made in the autumn statement, which is in December, oddly enough. I would not want to prejudge what that decision might be but, of course, it could be seen as a form of harmonisation of taxes.

The other big one is air passenger duty. Some work has been done on that already, as you will be well aware, and I suppose the question then is whether it should be devolved further. That is primarily a matter for the Executive, of course, but I know that the Treasury would certainly be receptive to any requests that the Executive might wish to make, although that will involve the Azores rules, as well as looking at the possible effect on the block grant. These things are not to be done lightly and they would have significant financial implications, but nevertheless, in relation to the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland, it could be that the Executive take the view that some of these things are helpful for promoting the economy. If that were the case, I know that my colleague, George Osborne, would be more

than happy to look at them and see whether, in accordance with the rules that we are all bound by, we can do such a thing.

2.30 pm

**Senator Paul Bradford:** Welcome, Minister, and thank you for your contribution. I am glad that you reported that last week's talks commenced in a positive fashion. We cannot stress strongly enough the need for the talks to be very engaging and wide-ranging, as well as successful. We are here in the relative comfort zone of this part of Britain, well removed geographically from Northern Ireland and well removed historically from the difficult period of the '60s, '70s, and '80s. A dangerous comfortable complacency is setting in. Although we all fully appreciate and understand that there will be no going back to the difficult days of the 1970s, '80s and '90s, we have to be fearful that there is a strong undercurrent of difficulty across the streets of Northern Ireland.

A new, marginalised community has emerged. As two previously smaller, marginalised parties — Sinn Fein and the DUP — have become politically dominant, on the extremes of former paramilitary movements, there are people who are now not engaged in the political process, nor with politicians or media stars. They are deeply disillusioned, drawing the dole, and seeing no economic advancements or future. Unless and until we reach out to those people and show them that the peace process can work for them, there will be a ready-made community to return to times of strife. It is crucial that the Governments redouble their efforts in the current talks. It is everybody's fault and nobody's fault; there has been complacency and we are in a comfort zone that we need to draw ourselves out of. We have to look at the new marginalised communities and the whole economic framework in Northern Ireland, which is not positive for too many people. Unless economic progress matches the political progress, there is a dangerous spot creating a void that can be filled by a return to violence, so I welcome the political initiatives by the Governments.

Having been here before, I saw that a complacency set in perhaps three, four or five years into the aftermath of the original 1994 IRA ceasefire, and there was a belief that there was no going back to the bad old days. The same complacency could set in again, so the politicians will have to be very active. I wish Theresa Villiers, Charlie Flanagan and their teams well, but they have a major task. It is not just a question of sorting out the politics of the Assembly. It is about budgets, finance and all that, but in one sense that is only sorting out the politicians. Let us not forget that there is a community that is still far removed from politics and politicians, and that community must be very much at the centre of our talks and thoughts, otherwise we are creating a weak foundation for permanent peace and strong communities in Northern Ireland.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Minister, before you respond, I might bring in another two questions.

**Senator Paschal Mooney:** Thank you, Co-Chairman. I thank the Minister for his comprehensive and wide-ranging presentation, and I will be as brief as I can. I want to pick up on the theme raised by Senator Bradford, but I will perhaps come at it from a different perspective.

We in the South have been noticing, with growing concern, the potential threat to the continuing viability of the Northern Ireland Executive because of policy differences between the two major parties — Sinn Fein and the DUP — on a number of issues, not least social welfare reforms. I will be as blunt as I can: is there an awareness in the British Government that the pursuit of the welfare reforms, which are not exclusive to Northern Ireland, could threaten the future of the Executive, the Assembly, and the fundamentals of the peace process, if you continue to proceed along the lines of reducing the block grant, which will hit the most marginalised in Northern Ireland's society?

You talk about money being provided for schools, hospitals and so on. That is all fine and dandy but, as Senator Bradford pointed out, there is a growing marginalised society in Northern Ireland. There is no employment. It is all very well to say that you are going to introduce social welfare reforms and that people should be given every encouragement to work. I agree with that ideological theory, but are the British Government prepared to pursue this policy position and route, which could ultimately result in the collapse of the Executive? Do you see it in those terms? Perhaps you might elaborate a little on how you see the political consequences of the policy decisions taken in Westminster, which could have an adverse effect on a very fragile peace process. It might seem a settled question to outsiders, but it is far from settled.

**Senator Cáit Keane:** I am not sure which subject this will come under, but I presume it will be under “marginalised”. I had intended putting this to Minister Theresa Villiers — the question of the Belfast woman, Maria Cahill, who was on the ‘Spotlight’ programme. As a woman, it was the most pressing thing on my mind last week when I listened to the Northern Ireland talks.

Maria Cahill has put her case on television and the radio, but political figures have denied it. I spoke to Senator Moran, Senator Imelda Henry and other women yesterday about Maria Cahill's case. I note that the Assembly's Committee for Justice has invited the Minister for Justice, David Ford, to appear in front of it today in Northern Ireland. Paul Givan MLA said that the Committee would explore establishing a statutory inquiry into the allegations that Maria Cahill has made.

I know it is not your field and I might be putting you in the spotlight, but I am sure you are aware of the ‘Spotlight’ programme. I do not know whether you have any answers for me, but I am asking that we stand behind Paul Givan in his call for a statutory inquiry, and I want our Committee here to ask for that statutory inquiry. I could not say it better than he who said:

*“Everyone should be equal under the law and equally subject to the law but the allegations arising from the Maria Cahill case would suggest that some have tried to bring political influence to bear on the administration of justice. This is deeply worrying and...outrageous. A criminal act was alleged and it should be fully investigated, free from any interference.”*

As a woman and as a politician, I ask that we support Paul Givan. I think he is at the Health Committee today. I propose we support his call.



**Dr Andrew Murrison MP:** Perhaps I can address some of those points in order. First, Senator Bradford, I agree with you entirely. The key thing is to improve prosperity. I share your concerns about marginalised people and the potential that that gives for a deterioration in the security situation. We understand that people who are disaffected, unhappy and poor, and who see no future, are very often prey to the kinds of things that we have seen in Northern Ireland's past. That was why I said in my opening remarks that there cannot really be any peace — true peace that is long lasting and sustained — without prosperity.

To be fair, the Government and the Executive have understood this. You may recall the 'Building a prosperous and united community' paper that was issued in June last year and updated this year. It was quite a good blueprint for trying to address some of the challenges that Northern Ireland faces in improving its economy, and there are signs that it is working.

Predicted growth is 2.5%. Predicted growth in the Republic, to my delight, is in excess of that. Together, the UK and the Republic of Ireland appear to be top of the European league table, which is remarkable and to be welcomed. Jobs are being created in Northern Ireland. Inward investment is going up. All the signs are positive, but you are absolutely right to say that when you speak to community leaders, they will raise precisely the point that you so well articulated this afternoon. I do not think there should be any complacency, but equally we need to understand that the metrics and the optics are very positive in this regard. You go round Belfast and see evidence of that. The biggest sign of an upswing is, of course, the amount of construction going on, and you see that. I have to say it is palpable, but these are the early stages and that needs to be sustained.

Senator Mooney spoke about the fragility of the peace process and the need for growth, as well as his concern that the British Government do not fully understand the effects on the political process of social and welfare reform. Social protection in the Republic has, of course, come under severe pressure — indeed, some would say under more pressure than has been in the case in the United Kingdom. I also have to point out that, per capita, people in Northern Ireland have 27% more spent on them than my constituents in south-west England, for example.

I agree that every decision we make in Westminster has an impact, in relation to welfare reform, on Northern Ireland, and everything needs to be seen through a Northern Ireland prism if we are genuine about the peace process and about doing nothing that will harm or damage it. However, I would not accept the underlying thesis that welfare reform is bad for people in Northern Ireland. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that universal credit will be beneficial. That is why we are doing this — for goodness' sake, I cannot imagine why we would be doing this if it was not ultimately going to be good for people. We know that more people will be better off with universal credit than is currently the case. I therefore have to decline the underpinning thesis that you are making — that welfare reform in Northern Ireland is in some way going to kick or hit the poorest and most marginalised in society — as that simply is not the case.

On Senator Keane's question, I start getting slightly outside my comfort zone because, as you rightly say, these matters are of course devolved, very largely, and David Ford is considering all this at the moment. I certainly would not want to impose on areas that are his responsibility, not mine nor the Secretary of State's, but if I can reply in general terms to the

point that you made, without referring to the specific, there is a concern about investigations: the length of time they take and the sheer cost of them. What we fear very often is that there will be a failure to identify anything that adds to what we already know — in other words that after 10 years and £100 million spent on an investigation or statutory inquiry, we will not have added to the sum total of our understanding about what went on and, in particular, what to do about it. The general point about investigations is that this Government are reluctant to commit to them because they are not expedient, they are costly and they take so long. In terms of applying closure to many things at which investigations are aimed, it is difficult to see why people will want to wait 10 years for an answer and at such enormous cost, including opportunity cost.

*2.45 pm*

**Senator Jim Walsh:** I very much welcome the Minister's comments with regard to the cross-party talks, that the British Government are now committed to those talks, and that there is good focus on them. I also welcome the fact that the Irish Government also appear to be committed, certainly given Minister Flanagan's comments, even though the Taoiseach's comments have been more ambiguous. While I commend you on that, I think you have to be open to criticism for the failure of both Governments to give any support to the Haass talks at critical junctures, when it was obvious the process was likely to fail. I think that that was a missed opportunity.

The approach that you are taking seems to be the logical one, but it has been suggested to me by people in Northern Ireland that some of these issues will be easier to resolve than others. The indications seem to be that the Budget could probably be resolved, and maybe we would then move on to the social welfare issue. I agree fully with you when you say that work should always pay, and that this is absorbing quite a lot of resources and perhaps becoming a barrier to people taking employment. We have a similar situation in other jurisdictions as well.

How will you get over the difficulty? My understanding from people in the Assembly and the Executive is that the Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness, had come to an agreement with the First Minister about what needed to be done within the social welfare framework, but when he engaged further within the Sinn Fein party and with the leader, that agreement came off the table. The strong suspicion was that it failed simply because it may not have played out well for Sinn Fein in the Republic. These kinds of complications, when political party interests go ahead of the interests of the Province of Northern Ireland or indeed of our own country, need to be flushed out and pressure needs to be brought to bear on political parties in that regard.

At this stage of the peace process, it seems extraordinary that the flags and the parades have become such major issues. In relation to the parades, the statements made by Secretary of State Theresa Villiers only helped to undermine the Parades Commission towards the end of last year. Such comments are not helpful in bedding down a very fragile political and peace process within Northern Ireland.

In that regard, underlining all this is the legacy of sectarianism within the six counties of Northern Ireland. What specific initiatives are your Government taking to tackle sectarianism once and for all, so that it can be obviated as a source of a lot of the differences and difficulties that arise?

Let me move on to a different area. You probably saw the statement made yesterday by the republican prisoners in Roe House. I and others within the Oireachtas have taken an interest in this issue. We have met those republican prisoners and some loyalist prisoners; we have also met the various bodies and individuals involved, such as the Northern Ireland Office, the Secretary of State and the Justice Minister.

Something tends to happen when you deal with the various bodies. I do not know if you are familiar with the sport of handball. It is played against a wall, but sometimes people say, "It's like playing handball against a haystack — nothing comes back." There is also an element of ping-pong involved. When you go to David Ford, you are referred back to the NIO; if you go to the NIO, MI5 security becomes the difficulty. That does not inspire confidence among people such as myself, who encourage the republican movement and — let me say — want to see an end to the British presence in the North. However, it is up to those of us who are of that republican mindset to pursue that aim in a peaceful way, develop our strategies and get people to move away from what has been happening during the past 30 or 40 years, which is in the interests of nobody and certainly not in the interests of the two parts of Ireland, and as a consequence of which people have suffered enormously.

There is a need to address these issues with the republican prisoners, in particular. During the last number of years, we have talked about strip-searching, for example. That is a big bone of contention with republican prisoners. We were told at one stage, in the early part of our engagement, that measures would be taken that would obviate the need for strip-searching. Apparently, the equipment did not function as they had thought. In general, republican prisoners are not involved in drugs and the whole purpose of these strip searches is to find drugs. Also, people who are going out to hospital and who are handcuffed to prison officers, even as they are being examined by medical staff, are brought back to prison and then strip-searched. It is hard not to be convinced that that is done to denigrate them.

The problem with that is that they have extended family, and there are other members within the movement, who will use such situations to inflame the approach of the others. We need to learn from the way you operated in Northern Ireland in the past, and you need to leave those practices behind you, because some of what was done, particularly during the Thatcher years, actually only prolonged the campaign of violence.

I appeal to you to take a much more humane and different approach and to deal with issues such as control of movement and the isolation of prisoners, which we have come across, and to try to get to a situation where there is a prison authority that deals with the issues, rather than MI5 having its finger in the pie. I know of a Republican prisoner who is isolated, because they are trying to turn him into being a spy on their behalf. The prisoner knows that and the other prisoners know it. Such things do not serve to consolidate the peace process and get us to move on. I appeal for a peaceful approach to dealing with these issues, with our nationalist objective, in a manner that does not take us back to the bad old days, which would only in fact divide communities.

**Mr Seán Crowe TD:** Go raibh maith agat. I welcome the Deputy Minister. I suppose that it is right given the weekend that has just ended that we reflect on the whole area of the First World War and so on. The Minister started off by talking in terms of the North of Ireland, his generation and what he remembered in relation to things being in the news for the wrong reasons. I suppose that what he was talking about in historical terms was probably the idea of the one-party state for 50 years, discrimination in jobs and housing, gerrymandered electoral areas, people being treated like second-class citizens in their own land. That is where you are coming from in relation to that terrible past.

We collectively came together and came up with an agreement — the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement — that led to the St Andrews Agreement. Like everyone from that generation, we were excited. We said that it would bring in a new era to our relationship, which it has. I suppose that many people who were engaged in those talks did not believe that there could be a successful outcome. The message that we have in relation to the latest talks is that huge challenges are there, but they cannot be solved. I suppose that that is the lesson that we can learn from the past. Despite all the huge challenges, we have all moved a long way.

The difficulty that I see in relation to the current talks, which people have said have had a largely positive start, is that I would be coming from a different place. We had some Unionists talk in terms of not wanting to be in a photograph with an Irish Minister. Such a narrative could have happened 20 ago, but it is totally out of sync with what has happened over the past few years. I just thought that that in itself was negative image to be sent out across the island of Ireland, Britain and internationally.

There was some talk about it being right that the Irish Government were involved — I am paraphrasing here — but it is also necessary. It is not only necessary; they are entitled to be there as an equal partner to the process. There has been criticism from some saying that they have stepped back. The British Government have said that they have not been helpful in this process. It is a time when we all have to reflect on what we need to do.

The party that I represent, Sinn Féin, would confidently say that anything that we have ever signed up to, we have tried to deliver on. I cannot say the same about the two Governments and many of the other parties, but we are going into these talks to try to get some sort of conclusion. We want to move the situation on; the situation at the moment is not in the interests of anyone. It is right that people are concerned about what is happening not only in the Assembly, but outside.

In the South of Ireland, a number of us are involved in the Good Friday Implementation Committee — one of the Co-Chairs is involved in it — where we are trying to do a lot of positive outreach work in loyalist areas, nationalist areas, republican areas and so on. That is coming from the Southern Parliament — the Irish Parliament — but that type of work needs to continue and we all need to be involved in it. I would like to see this group involved in some of that if possible; maybe that is something that would be helpful.

To go back to the talks, I think there is huge potential for change if people want to see that happen. I hope that the two Governments and the parties have that view. I genuinely thought

that the start was bad; now people have settled down, discussions are going on. There are huge hurdles to follow through.

In my humble opinion, the Good Friday Agreement is based around the whole issue of equality and inclusivity, not exclusivity. We need to deliver that agenda for change. Some do not want to see that happen: they see change as negative or as a threat. We do not come from that position.

**Mr Patrick O'Donovan TD:** Following up on the previous speaker's remarks, I think language is a hugely important part of this process. I really welcome the remarks of Deputy Crowe, which I think sum up where a lot of people from the South of Ireland are coming from.

The acknowledgement of how language plays an important role is in stark contrast to some of the inflammatory comments made by a previous speaker — namely, Senator Walsh — who referred to party political interests and said that partisanship was a danger associated with this process. I agree with him, but in an earlier part of his contribution he contradicted that by having a partisan slight at the Taoiseach, which was an unhelpful remark.

I think that everyone knows that one thing that has never been done in the Republic, certainly in my lifetime, is that nobody has ever attempted to play the green card in the Oireachtas. Since the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, across all parties in the Oireachtas there has been by and large universal support for the work of the Government of the day and the green card has not been played. That sort of language is regrettable, and I think it is in stark contrast with some of the other contributions.

I agree with the remarks of Senator Mooney. This is perhaps through no fault of the British Government, and I certainly think that the Minister's remarks are very helpful and a breath of fresh air, but, Chairman, in the Sovereign Affairs Committee of this Assembly, which you chaired, both the Irish and British Members were really struck by the lack of understanding, particularly from the Northern Ireland Office in relation to what its role has been since 1998 and the need for it to have a defined role, especially going forward. In one of the last reports that we commissioned in that Committee, we found that the lack of basic understanding of the various agreements signed up to by the sovereign Governments, of the amendments made to them and of the difficulties there was staggering.

Certainly, the Northern Ireland Office has taken a hands-off approach to the Executive of Northern Ireland, with the result being that a number of issues have been allowed to fester for a long period of time and now we are in a situation of economic difficulty where tough decisions have to be made by democratically elected politicians. That is their job. That is what they are supposed to do, but they are being given a get-out-of-jail card — pardon the pun — for want of the fact that a number of issues have been left to linger by the Northern Ireland Office, I would contest, for a long time in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and now they are being given an out, because they have difficult decisions to take.

*3.00 pm*

They are essentially being given an out by virtue of the fact that since 1998, whether it is the Irish language, civil rights, a Bill of Rights, flags or parades — you name it — those issues were left, buried under the carpet, for want of the bigger prize. As the money kept flowing, the bigger prize seemed to gather momentum. Now the screw has been turned on the money and the people who have been elected to make the decision, with no opposition — it is the only Government that I know of anywhere in the world, bar the Holy See, where everybody is in government, and that is done for a very good reason — are, in my estimation, and I could be totally wrong, now looking for ways in which they can dodge their responsibilities for the people who elected them to make decisions in relation to economic issues, social welfare, housing and everything like that. They are now looking for an out for that. It goes back to the fact that their get-out-of-jail card, as I say, has been gifted to them by the Governments, and particularly, the Northern Ireland Office, I would contest.

If anything comes out of this, it is that the British Government especially has to reassert its role and has to define a role for the Northern Ireland Office. Certainly, in our engagement through the Co-Chair's chairmanship of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, I was aghast at how far removed from reality that institution is in relation to what is going on in Northern Ireland. I hope that there is a change, and I welcome the Minister's remarks. He has certainly got a very good understanding and he obviously has his finger on the pulse, but I would contrast that starkly to some of the representatives from that institution that we had the courtesy to meet in the recent past.

Chairman, I would worry that unless the British Government really reasserts itself to the principles that are laid out in the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, and does not allow things to sit on the back burner for 17 years, we are going to be in this position for a very long time.

**Senator Cáit Keane:** On the proposal I made that this Committee supports my call for support for the MLA, I want to tell Members that I have just been informed that I should put down a motion, because it would not be appropriate without notification. Having said that, I know that 10 years is a long time to wait for a statutory inquiry and it does cost money, but for Máiría Cahill, I would go along and I am sure that the Members here would go along as well. Any way we can find to help and support that woman, I think we should do. All I ask for today is that we could put that on the map. Maybe we could come back to discuss it at a later date.

**Dr Andrew Murrison:** Can I deal with these in no particular order? First, I welcome Deputy Crowe's positive outlook, which I share? We are where we are. I think we all owe it to the people of Northern Ireland and, indeed, to the rest of the British Isles to make the most of what we are currently dealing with at this time. That is not in any way to try to finesse or airbrush the past — goodness me, in a Northern Ireland context, that would be massively inappropriate — but we have to move forward, trying to build trust and confidence, because only by doing so are we going to make tomorrow better than the past, if that does not sound too Blairite and rhetorical.

Deputy O'Donovan fears that the Northern Ireland Office is too hands-off. The natural tendency for politicians is to interfere in anything they can get their hands on. It is actually quite difficult sometimes to be restrained. That is the nature of the beast, but the whole point of devolution is that you surrender some of your ability to do stuff. That does not just apply

to Northern Ireland, although for reasons I have talked about in my remarks, Northern Ireland has kind of led the way on that, but it is something that applies right across the British Isles right now. We are devolving things to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; that is the way it is going. The debate, of course, is what to do with England.

I think that, particularly post-2007, we need to be very careful about interfering. We have found that sometimes, in the recent past, there has been a distinct need to do that because at the end of the day, people need to have the confidence of a reasonably well-governed state and be able to live within a framework that is safe and secure and that pays the cheques at the end of the month. However, we need to have confidence in the Northern Ireland Executive. I am confident in it; I think it will work and that is the wish of the overwhelming majority of people in Northern Ireland. If the Northern Ireland Office was to constantly interfere in matters that are devolved, I think we would be showing a distinct lack of confidence in the ability of the Executive to run affairs in Northern Ireland in a way that we would wish them to do. Therefore, you will have to forgive me if I disagree with you in relation to the relatively light-touch way in which the Northern Ireland Office conducts its affairs. Those matters are devolved and that means the Executive taking responsibility; that is the deal. If we were to constantly interfere, I think we would be undermining the whole process.

Senator Walsh spoke about Haass. It is important to just point out that what we are doing at the moment in Belfast is not just springing afresh from nowhere. It builds on what has happened in the past in the sense that we are building on the Haass talks. I think he would be concerned if his efforts were null and void. They most certainly are not; this is a process, after all.

In terms of budgets and welfare, it is of course open to the Northern Ireland Executive to break parity if it wants to. It could do that, but, to date, it has been reluctant to do so. The situation has been assisted in the past few days by some facilities that have been extended by the Treasury that will make this year's Budget that much easier to square. However, it is not a blank cheque because with devolution comes fiscal responsibility, otherwise, again, devolution is simply not going to work.

On parades, the Parades Commission has primacy — let us be clear about that — which is clearly laid out, and it has been broadly supportive of what we have been trying to do. That is specifically in relation to north Belfast. It is important to understand that.

In terms of what happens in Maghaberry, again, I am afraid I am going to have to say that it is not right for me to comment on matters that are operationally independent of Westminster and the British Government. Those are matters perhaps better addressed to David Ford and the director of the Prison Service, and I will leave it at that.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Thank you very much, Minister, for taking the time to come here today and for your forthright participation in a very interesting debate. I wish you well in your work. Once again, thank you very much for coming in.

**The Co-Chairman (Laurence Robertson MP):** May I add my thanks to my colleague, Andrew Murrison, for coming today and for giving us such an informative speech? Thank you, Andrew.

## **PRESENTATION OF REPORT FROM COMMITTEE D (ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS) ON TRAVELLERS AND ROMA**

**The Co-Chairman (Laurence Robertson MP):** We will now move on and take a presentation of the report from Committee D (Environment and Social Affairs) on Travellers and Roma.

**Lord Dubs:** Thank you, Co-Chair, for enabling me to take this before Committee C. I am also grateful to the Chair of Committee D.

We started the inquiry in October 2013 and since then we have taken evidence in Dublin, Belfast, London and Edinburgh. We have also visited, in most of those places, Traveller sites and talked to the Travellers themselves, so we have seen what it is like on the ground.

I thank all members of the Committee for the hard work they put into the report, for being willing to put up with a lot of bullying from me, for working long days and for dealing with the inquiry in a detailed way. In particular, I thank Senator Maurice Cummins, the Vice-Chair, for his constant support and help in this process. I also thank Chris Atkinson, the Clerk, for battling with the difficulties and putting together what I think is a pretty good account of what the Committee was about.

This is probably the most difficult report I have ever been involved with because of the complexity of the issues. Of course, it is not a popular issue. Gypsies and Roma are deeply unpopular among some people in all our jurisdictions, and we have to deal with the difficulties as we face them. Let me give one example. A woman on a Traveller site in Dublin said, "With my name, with my accent, with my address, I simply can't get a job." That point was echoed by Travellers on other sites, in particular in east London. There is a real problem of discrimination against people.

It has been a complicated inquiry, and I am sure this will not be the last word on the subject. I hope we have pushed the debate along a bit, which is basically all we can do. We decided to look at both Irish Travellers and Roma. It is difficult to know whether that was right or not, but it made the problem more complicated for us. There are some similarities in attitudes to the two groups, but equally there are important differences. The question whether we should have put the two together is not straightforward, but we decided to do it and proceeded on that basis.

One of our key recommendations is that all the jurisdictions should co-operate on this issue. We even suggested that there should be a conference of all the jurisdictions to look at it. In particular, we are concerned that local authorities in all the jurisdictions should co-ordinate their practice on the provision of sites for Travellers.



Some shocking information came to us about the health of Travellers. For example, the life expectancy of a man who is a Traveller can be 15 years shorter than that of other people in the population, and for women it is 12 years shorter. Infant mortality is three to six times higher. Those are very disturbing figures indeed. However, we need more data about the range of services available to Travellers and Roma and their conditions. We are rather short of data, and there is no systematic collection of data to enable the proper monitoring of health outcomes and education, so that services can be sharpened up. We had reports from expectant mothers who found it difficult to get hold of emergency services and from Travellers who said GPs will not visit their sites — some will and some will not, so we have a mixed picture.

On housing, the vast majority of Travellers in the Republic of Ireland live in static situations — that is to say, they do not move about very much and, on the whole, they are in housing or static caravans. On the other hand, some Travellers in all the jurisdictions live statically for much of the year but travel for parts of the year. It is obvious that that poses difficulties for health support, housing and the education of children, which are hard problems to engage with.

We understand that there is a need for 3,000 to 5,000 more pitches in England, and we feel that some local authorities are not pulling their weight in providing accommodation, but it is difficult. We saw an expensive site on Monagh Road in Belfast, which cost quite a lot to provide housing per unit. We also heard of a woman in Dublin who moved away from her Traveller community but found living in social housing elsewhere in Dublin too difficult. The sense of isolation led her to go back to live with her parents.

*3.15 pm*

Another example we saw was of a site on which there are big houses for Travellers. However, the children of Travellers do not like moving away, so when they get married they put a caravan either beside or at the back of those big houses. We saw evidence of that in Dublin and elsewhere. That is a real problem because, with the best will in the world, if the local authority wants to provide better housing, but there is no more space on the site and the people do not want to move, there is an almost insoluble difficulty.

Putting caravans behind or next to big housing works for a while, but it does not last for ever. There comes a point when it will come to an end. So there is a real difficulty there, which it is quite hard to solve. That affects a minority of Travellers, but it is important for those who are caught in this particular situation.

As far as education is concerned, I have already said that there are difficulties as regards Travellers who are on the move. We saw, for example, in Pembrokeshire a very good example of a one-stop-shop model for Travellers and Roma, where they could get advice in one place which would help in terms of education and dealing with some of the consequences of moving. The one stop shop provided advice on a whole range of issues, not just education but also health care and child care, and it even provided literacy for parents.

We thought that when people were on the move, it was important that educational records could be easily transferred so that the area to which they move, where the children may go to the local school, has some background information as to what needs to be done. As regards Roma, we noticed in particular that there was a lack of language support for those children who do not speak English as a first language. We have found that the problem of the English language for Roma has caused their increasing isolation and their particular difficulties in the job market.

We feel that, notwithstanding the bad press that Roma get, some individual Roma perform impressively in education. We only wish that the media were not so hostile, and that they could describe good role models as success stories, rather than simply painting a negative picture. It is too much to hope that the press will change on that, but it is certainly important. However, educational achievement for Traveller children is not as good as it ought to be. They drop out of school early, and they do not go on to meet the sort of education that their abilities suggest they ought to receive. There is an issue there, and that is quite difficult.

There is the general question of discrimination, and there is quite serious discrimination against Travellers. Sometimes, the Traveller community bring some of this on themselves. We have heard stories of where they have moved on to sites — not proper sites — and caused trouble, where the sites were wanted for other purposes and there were difficulties there. Other Travellers, when we put the problem to them, said that people should be tough. They should not be soft about it; they should be tough with people. When they break the law, they should be firm with them. Well, that may be.

We heard of a story in Belfast where they had a site, and one of the leaders of one of the groups of Travellers would not allow anybody else on that site. Local Belfast officials were frustrated, and it was a difficult problem. Other Travellers said, “Don’t put up with it. Just be tough with them.” So there are problems, which need to be resolved, and there is no particular easy answer.

I will give you one other example of the difficulties. Some of the Travellers deal in scrap metal, and there are some quite tough laws in England about scrap metal to prevent theft. However, the consequence is that a Traveller in London who wants to deal in scrap metal has to get a licence. That is fair enough, but they have to get a licence for every one of the 32 London boroughs. I think that that is ridiculous, because it costs them money and it is a terribly complicated, bureaucratic process. We think that things like that could be simplified. Of course there should be licensing, but it could be across London boroughs and not separate for each one.

I have gone on too long. To conclude, I repeat that we think that there should be a joint conference between the various jurisdictions in Britain and Ireland to explore these issues and to use the support of representatives from the Traveller, Gypsy and Roma communities. We believe that pulling this together where there is good practice would be better than simply saying, “Please read our report.” We think that getting together would be much more dynamic. We would like to see access to health, housing and education as a basic right for everybody. We think that there should be multi-agency, region-wide and national approaches to these issues. We think that this issue should not be forgotten, and that Irish Travellers and

Roma ought to be high on the political agenda. They face enormous difficulties and discrimination in our society. I commend this report to the plenary.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you very much, Alf, for a full report and a very full account of your report. Would anyone like to contribute?

**Ms Joyce Watson AM:** I did take part and, yes, it was hard work. Sometimes it was not comfortable listening to all the evidence that we gathered. One thing that stayed with me from the evidence gathering was when there was a census. They were going to identify protected characteristics, and it was decided that one of the protected characteristics within that census was that people could identify themselves as a Traveller, a Gypsy or a Roma. One woman gave us real testament about how she had done that and how that had then worked against her. She had a degree; she was well educated. She was working very happily, but once she had identified herself with a particular protected identity in the census, she found that it was used against her and did not work in her favour. We would be doing her an injustice not to put that issue on the table. I support the call for a conference that truly examines the things that we do to try to help people and the real consequences of them: whether benefits are arrived at or denied consequently.

**Mr Seán Crowe TD:** The report highlighted a lot of the difficulties and challenges that we face. I suppose, as someone who has been involved in this — I am aware of the reports that have been done; not necessarily the three together, but certainly the one on Irish Travellers — the big concern is that those reports will be acted on. If there is a message at all here today, it is that we should act.

I am concerned that there were some areas where money was not spent, so there was unspent funding. That came up in part of the evidence. The money went back from the local authorities, and that is a scandal in itself. These people are clearly, as Lord Dubs has said, living in really bad conditions and their health is affected, yet we have a situation where funding in difficult times is being sent back to central Government because it is not being spent.

There are controversial elements of the report, but it is about how it has been framed. The report has been presented in a reasonable way and is based on the evidence we have been given. There might be controversy, particularly on the whole area of criminal activity, and we are conscious of that, but that was based on the evidence that we gathered at the weekend. The most important thing is that the different jurisdictions will, I hope, learn from best practice. That is one of the recommendations. What is working in one area should be replicated in other areas, and that is basically what the report is about. The other thing is that we act on our recommendations.

**Mr Jack Wall TD:** Co-Chair, I would like to congratulate the Committee and Lord Dubs on this report, which raises the important issue for rural Ireland of the Travelling community. I certainly support the view that we should have a conference. That should be the strongest possible recommendation from this plenary session. It would ensure that progress was made. We have made many reports over the years and there has been little action on them, but this is one report that can make a difference. That is what we are all about as public

representatives — that we make a difference. For the Travelling community, be they Roma or otherwise, there is a need for progress.

I have continually said that the one thing that makes a difference is education. That is certainly something that is difficult with the Travelling community. I know from my experience that the percentage of children who go to secondary education diminishes dramatically with the Travelling community. If we are to improve the circumstances of the various communities, one way we can do it is by ensuring that they have a proper education. In that way, they build the confidence in themselves to address some of the issues that torment them and others. There really is a need to move this on to the next stage, and the next stage is having the joint conference and seeing what mechanism we can provide there.

I really hope as well that this report is sent to the Department of Education and Skills in our instance, and to all the other educational agencies in the other groups, because at the end of the day, if we can educate these people — their needs, their entitlements, what they believe and what should happen — it would certainly be of major significance in relation to overcoming the problems that, unfortunately, so many endure at the present time.

**Senator Maurice Cummins:** I would like to compliment the Chairmen and, indeed, the secretariat for pulling together the report. As the Chairman mentioned, it was a very difficult one to bring together, but I think it genuinely reflects the concerns and issues that were put to us over a long time. Again, I would like to compliment the Chairmen and, as other speakers have stated, let us hope that the report will not now gather dust and that the relevant authorities will act on some of the recommendations that have been made in it.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you very much. If there are no more Members who wish to contribute, do you wish to respond briefly, Alf?

**Lord Dubs:** No. Just to say I take on board the remarks. I thank the Members who contributed to the discussion. I just hope, individually, in our Parliaments and Assemblies, we can push the Governments and Administrations to take action.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** I thank you, Alf, and everyone who has taken part in compiling this report. I now ask that the plenary take note of the report of Committee D on Travellers and Roma. If so, the report will be sent to the British and Irish Governments.

*Motion agreed.*

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Laurence Robertson MP):** We now move on to a progress report from Committee C (Economic), which will be presented by Jack Wall.

**Jack Wall TD:** At our 48th plenary session in Dublin in March this year, I reported that Committee C had undertaken a study into youth unemployment and progress up to that point. The Committee agreed to visit all BIPA jurisdictions in the course of its inquiry.

The first meeting of the inquiry was held in London on 24 February. The Committee held discussions with officials from the Department for Work and Pensions and representatives of the Centre for Economic and Social Inclusion and of the Institute for Public Policy Research.

Since the plenary session in March, the Committee has furthered its inquiry into this area. In June the Committee met in the National Assembly for Wales in Cardiff where it held discussions with Rathbone, a UK-wide voluntary youth sector organisation, the Deputy Minister for Skills and Technology, and Commerce Cymru, a grouping of business representative organisations in Wales.

The Committee visited the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone, a further education provider at the Coleg Gwent campus, which is a new campus situated in an area of 40% youth unemployment. Students there have access to a range of new specialist resources and facilities, including construction, science, technology, hair and beauty therapy, performing arts, media and IT. The delegation was briefed on the facilities there and a presentation was made by the Deputy Principal and Campus Director of the Blaenau Gwent Learning Zone.

The Committee intends to build on its work to date by holding two further meetings planned over the next six weeks, first in Plymouth on 30 November and 1 December, to include a visit to the City Deal, which is an agreement between the Government and the city to give the city control to make decisions to help businesses grow, to create economic growth and to decide how public money should be spent.

In many areas, including Plymouth, city deals are being used as a tool to focus on youth employment and as a testing ground to see if a local, co-ordinated approach to improving skills and job opportunities for young people can bear fruit. The Plymouth City Deal also seeks to capitalise on the city's marine technology industry, an aspect that we would also hope to explore to follow up on our recent inquiry into marine renewable energy.

*3.30 pm*

The second proposal relates to Belfast on 18 and 19 January to include meetings with Minister Farry, the Prince's Trust, NEETs Advisory Forum, Employment Service and potentially some employers. Our excellent officials Betty and Judith, to whom we are very grateful for their efforts, are also in the process of arranging meetings in Dublin, Glasgow and with the EU Commission in Brussels.

The Committee will aim to have a report completed at the earliest possible opportunity following completion of its work on this inquiry.

**The Co-Chairman (Laurence Robertson MP):** Thank you. Would anybody else like to contribute? OK. Well, I would just like to thank Jack for his update and his Committee for their work. We look forward to further progress reports.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Before we conclude, may I inform our Irish Members that the bus will leave the hotel at 5 pm sharp? I now call Senator Maurice Cummins to move the adjournment.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Senator Maurice Cummins:** Thank you, Co-Chairman. I formally move the adjournment and propose that we reconvene on 22 to 24 February in Dublin for our next session.

**The Co-Chairman (Mr Frank Feighan TD):** Thank you very much. I am delighted to be here at my first plenary as Co-Chair. I thank Laurence and all the staff for their assistance. It has been a very memorable plenary. Our visit yesterday to Flanders was very moving and powerful for all of us, cross-party and from the different Assemblies. Thanks very much and hope to see you in Dublin.

*Assembly adjourned at 3.33 pm*