

**Northern Ireland Assembly
Tuesday 25 September 2007**

**Private Members' Business
Republican Parade**

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Mr Speaker: The Business Committee has agreed to allow one hour and 30 minutes for the debate. The Member who is proposing the motion has 10 minutes to speak, and 10 minutes for the winding-up speech. All other Members who wish to speak will have five minutes. One amendment has been selected and published on the Marshalled List. The proposer of the amendment has 10 minutes in which to propose, and five minutes for the winding-up speech.

Mr McCausland: I beg to move

That this Assembly believes that Belfast City Centre should be a shared space; deplores the Sinn Féin sponsored parade to the City Hall on Sunday, 12th August 2007, which involved depictions of I.R.A. terrorists and participants carrying guns; and calls on the PSNI and the Parades Commission to ensure that this never happens again.

The demonstration in the centre of Belfast on Sunday, 12 August 2007 was one of the most disgraceful episodes that we have seen in the centre of our capital city in quite a long time. There were many paramilitary trappings about it, and it raises serious questions about the PSNI, the Parades Commission, and Sinn Féin. The national H-block committee submitted the application forms for three main parades and one small feeder parade — a north Belfast parade from Ardoyne, via the Cliftonville Road and the New Lodge Road; a west Belfast parade which came from Twinbrook; and an east Belfast parade from Short Strand, which travelled along East Bridge Street and May Street to the city centre.

The application forms which were submitted to the PSNI, by the organisers, listed the republican bands that were to take part in the parades — many of which were known for their paramilitary dress and symbolism. Some of the bands are named after IRA terrorists; for example, the Martin Hurson republican flute band, the Ed O'Brien republican flute band, and the Burns/Moley republican flute band. A whole series of bands is named after IRA terrorists. We do not have time today to list the crimes of which those terrorists are guilty.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr McCausland: Anyone, in my view, who is a member of the Irish Republican Army is a terrorist.

Mr Storey: Given Gerry Adams's continual problem with accepting the fact that he was a member of the IRA — something that he continually denies — and given the republican movement's continual denial of its 40-year sectarian campaign, does the Member agree that if a so-called "march for truth" were to be organised, that republicans would be the last people asked to do so, and that Gerry Adams would be the last person invited to speak at that event?

Mr McCausland: I agree entirely with the Member. Again, I point out that we do not have time today to list the crimes of some of those people after whom the bands are named, for example, the volunteer Sean McIlvenna republican flute band. McIlvenna was one of a group of IRA men who planted a 1,000 lb bomb that seriously injured a number of UDR soldiers.

My key point is that when those parades were notified to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the application forms were marked “non-contentious” — even though the names of the bands were known. The police would not have known about everything that was going to happen on the day. They would not have known that people were going to walk around the centre of Belfast carrying guns. They would not have known that people were going to walk around in masks and uniform. However, they would have known enough to know that there would be something very contentious and serious about those parades. Yet the police in both north and west Belfast marked the application form for the parades “non-contentious”. That raises a serious question about the operation and activities of the police in that regard — there was a dereliction of duty and a failure on their part. We have already taken that matter up with the Assistant Chief Constable.

When it then came to passing the forms on to the Parades Commission, the only form that was passed on was the one for the east Belfast parade. The Parades Commission looked at the form and said: “There is nothing contentious about that parade. We will place no conditions and no restrictions on it.” The commission made that decision even though it knew the names of the bands that would, potentially, take part in the east Belfast parade.

Thus, the PSNI failed in its handling of the matter. Those parade applications should have been marked “contentious”. All the applications should have been sent to the Parades Commission, and there should have been a determination on each of them. In the case of the east Belfast parade, there was a failure on the part of the Parades Commission. When the Parades Commission was subsequently presented with some of the footage, films and photographs of the parade, it was quite appalled by what it saw — as, indeed, were the police. So there are issues for the PSNI and the Parades Commission, and I want to leave it there because the motion:

“calls on the PSNI and the Parades Commission to ensure that this never happens again.”

I want to concentrate on the fact that there is an issue here for Sinn Féin. The whole parade was organised by the national H-block committee, but, it was, in fact, a Sinn Féin parade. The chairperson was Jennifer McCann, a Sinn Féin MLA, and the main speaker was Gerry Adams. So the chairperson was a convicted terrorist, and the speaker was an unconvicted terrorist.

Of course, there was a high class of steward: Sean Kelly, the Shankill bomber, was one of the stewards on the day. It is interesting to note that one of the organisers was none other than Sean “Spike” Murray. He organises a parade such as this, but, at the same time, has no difficulty with sitting on the parades review body. Moreover, he has no difficulty with complaining about Orange Order parades in west Belfast, while being involved in the organisation of a parade, the character of which I will come to shortly. It is abundantly clear that this was a Sinn Féin event — it was organised and fronted by members of Sinn Féin and members also of the IRA.

That brings me to the parade itself and the sort of thing that could be seen on the day. From the Maiden City, Londonderry, there was the Spirit of Freedom republican flute band. They brought two bass drums — with one drum, gunmen can be painted on only two sides, but with two drums, there are four sides on which to paint. They managed to get “tiocfaidh ár lá”, a tricolour and a masked gunman on one drum and two IRA masked terrorists with heavy machine guns on the other. That is the sort of thing that was depicted on the drums.

It could be said: “Well, we did not know what was going to happen on the day”, even though the bands’ websites clearly show the sort of paraphernalia that they regularly use, but it was not just a matter of the bands — there were, of course, the Sinn Féin banners. The south Armagh band, which is named after a number of IRA terrorists, was carrying a Sinn Féin banner. What was depicted on it? Once again, it was IRA gunmen. So the bands were carrying drums with depictions of gunmen, and so on, Sinn Féin members were carrying banners with similar depictions, people such as Sean Kelly were stewarding the march, and a masked man was walking through the city centre carrying a gun. We do not know whether it was a real gun or a

replica gun, because the police did not stop the man to ask him. That is why the word “gun” is used in the motion — because we simply do not know whether it was real or a replica.

Nonetheless, that was clearly one of the most appalling parades that has taken place in Belfast in a very long time. At a time when others were seeking to improve the quality of parading, Sinn Féin, including “Spike” Murray of the parades review body, was busy organising a parade such as that in the centre of our capital city.

4.30 pm

I want to make just two more points, because I know that other Members want to address various aspects of that parade. There were folk in that parade who were carrying coffins and who were supposed to be the victims of collusion. That says something to me about the absolute hypocrisy of Sinn Féin. It had people there carrying coffins, but Sean Kelly put people in coffins. Other key figures who were there that day had been putting people in coffins for the past 30-odd years.

The parade was supposed to deal with collusion. Is there not something hypocritical about that, when it is quite clear, and becoming clearer every day, that there has been collusion between the security forces and the Irish Republican Army? People such as Denis Donaldson paid the price for that collusion. What about the others, however, who have yet to be uncovered?

Mr Storey: In this House.

Mr McCausland: Possibly. Who knows? But if it is the time for truth — a point which my colleague raised a few minutes ago — surely the onus is on those who organised and facilitated that parade to give us the truth. Maybe Gerry Adams, who oversaw the IRA in 1972, will tell us who was responsible for Bloody Friday. Maybe Martin McGuinness could tell us who was responsible for the crimes and the murders that were carried out by the IRA when he was in charge. There is a lot of truth that needs to be told, and instead of having a parade about it, Sinn Féin could do much, much more to uncover the truth by simply owning up and giving us the names of the terrorists in its ranks who perpetrated a campaign of murder for 30-odd years.

Mr A Maginness: I beg to move the following amendment: Leave out all after “Assembly” and insert

“believes that public spaces should be shared; deplores any parades that include depictions of terrorism; and calls on the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Parades Commission to ensure that parades are free from displays of paramilitarism, including banners, insignia and uniforms.”

This Back-Bench motion from the DUP is as hypocritical and as prejudiced as the march that it purports to criticise. It is an exercise in political therapy, the purpose of which is to comfort and reassure the DUP that the certainties of the old politics still exist. We have moved on, however, and Mr McCausland's party leader shares the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister with Martin McGuinness of Sinn Féin.

We now have a Sinn Féin/DUP Government, and it is important that the Back-Bench Members of the DUP realise that. They can produce political gimmicks and motions to make them feel happy and comfortable, give them a warm, orange glow in their tummies and make them believe that they are still in the trenches, but I am afraid that that day is gone. We now have an Administration in which the DUP is involved with other parties, but in which it primarily shares power with Sinn Féin. It is time for grown-up politics. It is time that people in this Chamber, and in particular the Back Benchers of the DUP, realised that there is a new dispensation.

Mr Campbell: The Member has used the term “Back-Bench motion” three times. He should understand that the motion has the unanimous support of all MLAs on the DUP Benches. Does

he accept that what he has said about what exists now and reminding people of their vicious, sectarian, murderous past are not mutually exclusive?

Mr A Maginness: The Member says that the motion has the unanimous support of the DUP. That might well be the case, but there are no Ministers here, and I doubt that any Minister will contribute to the debate. There is a strong element of phoney warfare in the Chamber. This sort of adventure, primarily by the Back-Bench Members of the DUP, is permitted in order to keep the troops happy and to keep their support base happy back at home. As we are in a transition period, the leadership of the party does not want the boat rocked, so it allows this sort of thing to happen. The sooner that the DUP wakens up to the fact that it is in coalition government, the better.

The motion is selective: only two years ago guns were brought out by paramilitaries during the September riots in Belfast, and very little criticism was heard from the DUP. In Belfast City Council, where I was a member, there was very little —

Mr Newton: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. That is totally inaccurate. As Alban knows —

Mr Speaker: That is not a valid point of order, I ask the Member to take his seat.

Mr A Maginness: As a result of the police action, members of the DUP, and other unionist parties, removed themselves from the district policing partnership (DPP) in Belfast. They did not show support for the police in difficult circumstances, and any criticism of the riots was superficial and restrained. Members of the DUP rarely criticise paramilitary displays and Orange marches that have paramilitary displays or associations. Anyone is free to check that through newspapers and television transcripts.

Selectivity is at the heart of the motion, not only on the part of the DUP but also on the part of Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin called the August parade a “march for truth”. However, Sinn Féin’s truth is a selective one. It calls for truth about the Army and the RUC. What about the truth about the IRA itself, people such as Stakeknife, the murder of Jean McConville, the Abercorn bombing and the deaths of the IRA men at Loughgall? Sinn Féin and the IRA do not want to get involved in those issues, because their approach is selective. Let us march for truth and find out the truth of what happened during the Troubles. We have nothing to hide; we want to see the truth. Members should unite to have a total truth recovery mechanism. All parties, in particular Sinn Féin, should support that.

Both the DUP and Sinn Féin are selective about the truth and criticising paramilitary activity. If a UDA demonstration had taken place, Sinn Féin would certainly have criticised it. If it had been a UVF or a DUP demonstration, Sinn Féin would have criticised it. Any form of paramilitary display is to be condemned. Gerry Adams referred to it as a piece of street theatre, but those who witnessed it and saw it on television did not see it like that.

They found it frightening and intimidating, and did not regard it as theatre.

I have witnessed Orange marches passing the Ardoyne shops: is that supposed to be street theatre? Could someone describe such a march, with its terrible sectarian overtones, as street theatre? It certainly is not, and to describe the march for truth as street theatre is misrepresentative. It was triumphalist and intimidatory and, in effect, it perverted rather than discovered the truth. It was totally wrong.

Town centres, and indeed towns and villages, should be shared spaces. Society has no room for paramilitary displays or anything similar. People must genuinely share the open or common spaces, and no one should be selective in the condemnation of those who transgress. Everyone should be supportive of a shared society; part of that involves being tolerant of free expression. However, there are limits to the way in which people should express themselves. Those who go

out of their way to intimidate or express any form of paramilitarism do not serve the whole community well.

I propose the amendment, because it does away with the selectivity of the DUP motion, draws attention to the need for genuine sharing in society and condemns all forms of paramilitarism.

Ms J McCann: Go raibh maith agat. I oppose the motion and support the amendment.

Belfast city centre should be a shared space for everyone, including republicans and nationalists. I remember being part of a group of women, from Belfast and beyond, who gathered on international women's day, 8 March, in 1991. The RUC and the British Army prevented us from holding a rally at Belfast City Hall. We were not marching past the homes of loyalists or unionists who did not want us to be there. We were simply seeking the right to hold a rally at the City Hall to mark international women's day, but a military barricade prevented us from doing so. However, we returned time and time again and, on 25 July 1991, we were able to hold the rally at Belfast City Hall.

On 12 August 2007, I was proud to take part in the march and rally for truth at Belfast City Hall and honoured to be asked to chair it. It was organised to draw attention to collusion and British state violence, a policy that resulted in many thousands of victims being killed, injured or bereaved, and to highlight the administrative and institutional cover-up by the British Government and their state agencies. Many relatives who lost loved ones carried photographs of their dead relations that day and, as has been mentioned, there were several pieces of street theatre.

The street theatre portrayed armed RUC men, UDR men and British Army personnel who were linked to armed loyalists. There were also images of the Force Research Unit and former members of the British Cabinet to illustrate the extent and the level of the institutional state violence and collusion.

Today, it would have been more productive to discuss and advance the serious issues of collusion and truth to help all the families whose loved ones died as a result of the conflict.

4.45 pm

Collusion existed as long as the conflict itself. It was not the act of renegades or a few bad apples, as some people would have us believe: it was an integral element in the armoury of the British military, which was financed and sanctioned by successive British Governments. Collusion was at the very heart of British state policy in Ireland and was responsible for the deaths of hundreds and hundreds of Irish citizens. Their families have as much right to pursue the truth about the murder of their loved ones as anyone else. It has been argued by some today that there was republican collusion because there were British agents in the IRA. At the march, our party leader stated clearly that this dimension of British strategy should also be investigated.

I object, as do many relatives, to any notion that there is a hierarchy of victims and that some families are more entitled to the truth than others, or that some relatives are less deserving than others, simply because of the circumstances surrounding the deaths. No one should be treated as a second-class citizen. Over the years, there have been many examples of relatives and relatives' organisations being insulted and demonised by those who speak on behalf of political parties, because they dare to seek the truth about how their loved ones died. The dignity with which those families have conducted their campaign to uncover the truth, and the determination that they have shown when political representatives have attempted to trivialise that campaign by engaging in the politics of denial, must be commended.

In my constituency of West Belfast, the Power family's son Michael was gunned down in front of his young daughter as he travelled home from Sunday mass — a victim of collusion — and the Hanna family's daughter Philomena was shot dead at work. Those families and hundreds more

like them have every right to march for truth and to hold photographs of their loved ones at the City Hall. It is wrong to have a hierarchy of victims. Families of all victims of the conflict deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. We should not fear the truth. Those families are determined to pursue the truth, and Sinn Féin is determined to help them in that campaign, even though it may take a long time. If we are to build a society based on equality and respect for all, it is important to deal with the difficult issues —

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Ms J McCann: — and looking after the rights of all victims and their families in an inclusive way must be part of that. No one in the Chamber or outside should fear the truth.

Mr Kennedy: I thank the proposers of the motion for bringing this matter before the Assembly. The march for truth rally — as it was optimistically and euphemistically called — of Sunday 12 August had Sinn Féin's mucky paws all over it, both in promoting it and in attending it. The march was something of a fancy-dress party, but with menace. Individuals posed as IRA men — presumably no acting required there then — and there were other types of dressing up, described by one leading Sinn Féin MLA as "street theatre and pageantry". It was not so much a jamboree, as a ghoulish gathering. Some witnesses felt threatened by the actions of those involved in the parade, including a constituent of mine who is a leading campaigner on behalf of innocent victims. He was verbally abused by many so-called street artists.

It is interesting to compare the behaviour patterns of the organisers and protesters with a code of conduct handed down by that august body, the Parades Commission, in 2006. On behaviour, the code states that people should:

"behave with due regard for the rights, traditions and feelings of others in the vicinity;

refrain from using words or behaviour which could reasonably be perceived as being intentionally sectarian, provocative, threatening, abusive, insulting or lewd;"

On dress, the code states:

"No paramilitary-style clothing is to be worn at any time during a public procession."

On flags, the code states:

"Flags and other displays often have a legitimate historical significance, but in no circumstances should such items relating to a proscribed organisation be displayed."

Well done the Parades Commission. We can add to those flagrant abuses of the code of conduct, the charge that those present were simply engaged in the glorification of terrorism.

The march for truth is symptomatic of the hole that Sinn Féin has dug itself into over parades. Although the strategy of using political street protests against Loyal Order parades, which Sinn Féin developed in the late 1990s, was initially declared successful, it is now working disastrously against Sinn Féin. The genie is out of the lamp, and history confirms that it is hard — if not well nigh impossible — to get the genie back in.

In the era of a bright and shared future for all, we are left with the ugly and unattractive expressions of republican street theatre and with gridlock —

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

Mr Kennedy: Yes, but briefly.

Mr McCausland: Will the Member agree that Sinn Féin has made no attempt to defend itself against the accusations of paramilitary symbolism?

Mr Speaker: A Member who gives way and who has spoken for less than five minutes has an extra minute added on.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you for your kindness, Mr Speaker; you are a very generous man.

We are left with the ugly and unattractive expressions of republican street theatre, in addition to gridlock and impasse at important locations such as the Garvaghy Road in Portadown, where it is abundantly clear that Sinn Féin has lost control locally of key individuals.

Sinn Féin needs urgently to rethink how its protests affect its public image and to try to find an urgent resolution to the issue of Drumcree, which — if left unresolved — will continue to fester and eat away at political stability in Northern Ireland. I support the motion.

Mrs Long: It is convention to thank Members for bringing matters to the Floor for debate. However, on this occasion I will refrain from doing so, as I suspect — judging by the contributions so far — that it is unlikely to be an edifying, uplifting, or enlightening episode. That judgement is based on my experience of similar debates in Belfast City Hall, which are the political equivalent of poking a dog with a stick — more designed for a reaction than delivering progress. Such baiting across the Chamber does the Assembly very little justice, and more importantly does no justice to the community outside.

Depictions or glorification of any illegal paramilitary or terrorist activity are deplorable, and I have no difficulty in stating that. Therefore I have no difficulty with the wording of the motion, except that it is an attempt to deal with a complex issue on a purely selective basis. Selectivity on parades or the past is neither helpful nor constructive; it is more likely to damage than advance the prospects for a peaceful future.

It is good practice during a debate to respond to comments from other Members, but again I will refrain from doing that as it would not be productive. I will try to focus on the wording of the motion and the amendment, which refer to the responsibility of the Parades Commission and the PSNI. The primary responsibility for the tone and conduct of any parade lies with the organisers, whether they are political groups, Loyal Orders or any other grouping. Organisers must show respect not just to those involved in a parade but to those who are not. The rights to assemble, march and demonstrate are not unqualified — they must be exercised responsibly and with respect.

Both the motion and the amendment refer to shared space. If we really want to create stability in Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland, we need to share more than just space.

We must share a commitment to work together for a better future. That requires people to be measured in how — not whether — they raise issues in the Chamber or outside it. If Members in the Chamber — and people outside it — want to find ways of inflaming tension through provocative displays and parades or through provocative debates in the Chamber, we can do that. However, the question is not whether we can, but whether we should.

For the sake of the community, Members must focus on trying to move things forward, rather than back. If we are going to debate the difficult issues, let us do so in a productive and constructive manner, rather than the manner in which we are doing it today, and the manner in which it was done in August. I support the amendment.

Mr Newton: It will come as no surprise that I support the motion. I am surprised at the attitude of the SDLP in tabling the amendment, because a similar — almost exactly the same — motion was debated in Belfast City Council some months ago, when the SDLP did not take part in the debate

or vote on it; its members abstained. That suggests — as one of my colleagues said — that the SDLP is selective in how it approaches issues.

In proposing the amendment, Alban Maginness said that there was a need for grown-up politics in the House, and I agree with him. However, he misled the House through his comments about the attitude of unionist members of district policing partnerships to the very serious rioting that happened two years ago in north Belfast, and which spread to the east of the city. At one stage, 700 young men and women were rioting on the Albertbridge Road. He referred to unionists vacating their seats on the DPPs, and commented that that was a negative reaction.

Had that not happened, I believe that the rioting would have been worse, because the withdrawals from the DPPs acted as a steam valve releasing pressure. After the unionists vacated their seats, intensive work was done with the police to resolve the situation, and the conditions were created in which the unionist community felt comfortable and elected representatives were prepared to, again, play a positive role in DPPs.

Senior Sinn Féin figures have mentioned street theatre, but that is similar to how Michael Stone described his actions when he attempted to enter this Building, and I do not think that anyone regarded his actions as street theatre.

Mrs Long spoke on behalf of the Alliance Party in the debate. It is not so long ago that an incident occurred at a bonfire site in the east of the city, when masked men appeared at an event that was supported by Belfast City Council. There was extensive debate in the Belfast City Council chamber as to whether that activity on the eleventh night — by men dressed in paramilitary uniform — should be condemned. Ultimately, the community was condemned because the Alliance Party was involved in removing funding for the Twelfth celebration bonfire for the subsequent year. One cannot have it both ways.

5.00 pm

There never was a march for truth. If ever an event was misnamed, it was that march into the centre of Belfast. The march was riddled with duplicity and deceit. When Gerry Adams spoke about truth, there was only one truth he was concerned with. He failed to mention the hundreds of innocent Roman Catholic people who were murdered by the IRA; the thousands of innocent people who were injured by republican thugs, and the millions of pounds worth of damage that the republican campaign did to the economy of Northern Ireland. He did not make one mention of the businessmen who were contributing, and would have continued contributing through inward investment, but who were driven away from the doors of the job-creation agencies of Northern Ireland.

One would expect those with a unionist perspective to view the march as a shameful event, but even neutral observers — foreigners visiting Northern Ireland — were concerned at the presence of some of the people to whom my colleague Nelson McCausland referred. The real purpose of the rally was to assuage the concerns of Sinn Féin followers who are finding it difficult to live with the political realities of today

Mr Molloy: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. First, the House should consider the issue in a cool and collected way. Although the motion may not be welcomed as one of the more beneficial aspects of debating in the Chamber, and while there are probably better things that we could do, it is useful in helping Members to focus on the difficult issues and how those can be managed in the future.

I agree with the idea that the Assembly believes that Belfast city centre should be a shared space. Having taken part in the civil rights marches 40 years ago, I share the idea that town centres should be shared spaces that are open to everyone. On many occasions, I was battered out of town centres, such as in Dungannon, by the RUC.

Mr Storey: Given the fact that the Member is admitting that he was in the civil rights movement and was engaged in other things, would he tell the House if he was ever a member of the IRA?

Mr Speaker: The Member may take an extra minute.

Mr Molloy: Thank you for the extra minute. The shared space that the civil rights movement tried to create in Dungannon but was battered out of, led to the situation in which we were trying to gain political control.

The imagery used in the motion is that of RUC men, UDR men, those involved in undercover operations in collusion with loyalist paramilitaries, and the Glenanne gang. All of those were very clearly identified. In some cases, they were in makeshift RUC and UDR land rovers. If that is the DUP's impression of terrorists, then it is what we have seen for the past 30 years on the Falls Road. I am surprised that the DUP is so annoyed at seeing the imagery of the British Army back on the Falls Road. Surely, that should not annoy unionists.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Molloy: No, I will not give way again.

The parade was about the truth. If Mr Storey and others are calling on the British Government to tell the truth about collusion, and the activities of the British Army and the RUC in undercover operations, I am quite willing to go along with the DUP and demand that same explanation. The march was about the victims of state violence and collusion, who have come through the past 30 to 40 years of conflict, coming on to the street to hear the truth exposed. They wanted the truth about what happened to their loved ones, and that applies to RUC victims, UDR victims and loyalist victims, because Gerry Adams addressed all the victims and said that he wanted truth for all victims. He was not selective.

The families wanted to know why their loved ones were victims; why they were shot; why they were murdered, and why they were murdered by the Glenanne gang. There was a person who wanted to know the role of the British Army, the British Government, the Irish Government and the gardaí in the collusion with the Glenanne gang over the Dublin/Monaghan bombings.

As so many people seem to have been observing the parade, it might have been worthwhile if they had actually listened to what was being said. Perhaps it reflects more on them that they did not.

Street theatre has an important role to play. We should lighten up a bit. The shared future in Belfast and other city and town centres should mean a shared future for everyone, in which everyone can present their case.

Pageantry contains violence. The Scarva sham fight involves violence, with men fighting with swords and pretending to kill one another. Is that not an example of violence? Is that not the same situation? The families of victims from the murder triangle on the march were looking to discover the truth about RUC men who were involved in collusion with loyalist paramilitaries in that area.

Yes, I want to see the truth come out, and for it to be dealt with. Mr Kennedy talked about fancy dress. Many nationalists and republicans perceive some of the activities in which he is involved, such as band parades, to be just a bit of fancy dress. Everyone's perception of what others do is very much an issue of fancy dress, and perhaps Mr Kennedy knows more about fancy dress than I do.

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Molloy: Perhaps when he is talking to —

Mr Kennedy: Will the Member give way?

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member should not persist.

Mr Molloy: When he is talking to the South Down Defenders and beating the drum along with them — he can only beat one drum at a time, I know — he should take into account the imagery that he sends out to the nationalist community.

I welcome the comparison that Mr Maginness from the SDLP drew between the IRA and the British Army during the conflict between the Irish Republican Army and the British Government. Unionists must be careful in their attempts to demoralise by simply calling all the victims “those who were involved in terrorism”. That is their way of dealing with the situation. Unionists should look at how the image of calling the IRA volunteers “terrorists” comes across in other parts of the world.

I am open to the idea that prison wardens, the RUC, the British Army and others were let down and betrayed by the Government that they thought they were supporting, and that the Government ran away and abandoned them. I accept that unionists want to know the truth about all that, and I support them in that. However, instead of complaining about the fact that a march was taking place in Belfast on 12 August 2007 — three days after the anniversary of internment — people came out demanding to know the truth of what happened, and I welcome that. Go raibh maith agat.

Lord Browne: As a humble Back-Bencher, I support the motion that stands in my name and in the name of my three party colleagues. Rather than be perceived as a provocative attempt to stir up tension or ill feeling, I hope that the motion will be seen as a measured and appropriate reflection of the horror and disgust that rightfully emerged following the Sinn Féin-sponsored so-called march for truth.

Terrorism has no place in our society, nor has the petty glorification of the sordid deeds of our past, especially if that glorification is an attempt to shore up Sinn Féin support among an outdated, defeated bunch of despots and retired revolutionaries. The parade was a pathetic, unwarranted and unnecessarily hostile display — *[Interruption.]*

Mr Speaker: Order.

Lord Browne: — of the worst elements in our society, and one that the Chamber should unite against today. Unfortunately, although some may have seen the dangers attached to such a parade, those in the Parades Commission and the PSNI seemed to be oblivious to the divisive effect that such a display could have. If one were to trawl through the Parades Commission website, one would see that almost every parade that is organised by the Loyal Orders that enters any shared space in Belfast, or potentially passes by a predominately nationalist area, is marked “contentious”. In contrast, the only parade marked “contentious” on 12 August was the national H-Block committee feeder parade from my constituency of East Belfast. That was despite the fact that each of the parades contained well known IRA-associated bands. As we have heard, those bands had images of terrorists, criminals and murderers on their drum skins.

The fact that the Parades Commission failed even to consider the potential contention that such elements could cause raises serious questions about its capability and impartiality on such matters. Thank goodness that we now have a strategic review of parades and, it is to be hoped, a more appropriate method of dealing with every public procession in Northern Ireland.

The Parades Commission cannot prohibit parades or circumvent human rights; however, it can use its powers to restrict a parade to the same effect — it does so in the unionist community all the time. For it to not even recognise the need to consider restrictions for every section of that parade, apart from the contingent from the Short Strand, is as inexcusable as it is inexplicable.

Consider the flip side for a moment. When any reference is made during Loyal Order parades to the historical UVF or the sacrifice of the 36th Division at the Somme, members of Sinn Féin wax lyrical about the sensitivities of the victims of the Troubles and the potential for adverse community relations.

Mr Spratt: Will the Member agree that difficulties within republicanism as a result of recent Sinn Féin U-turns have obviously panicked that party into portraying itself as hard line in order to quell discontent? Sinn Féin has entered the Assembly, gleefully administers British rule, accepts the British judicial system and has pledged its support for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Lord Browne: I thank the Member for South Belfast for that contribution. This parade was simply an attempt to shore up Sinn Féin's support.

When the highly professional Ulster Volunteer Flute Band from east Belfast took part in a private function in Belfast City Hall on 11 July, as part of the Orange Order's Orangefest celebration, the Member for West Belfast Paul Maskey did everything in his power to ensure that the event did not proceed. He continues to raise the matter in the council, describing it as an unacceptable event in the shared space of the City Hall. However, when masked men in paramilitary uniforms took to the streets of Belfast city centre in some misplaced search for the truth, his brother the Member for South Belfast refused to see any problem.

As Members have heard, Sinn Féin regards the whole parade as street theatre — something that everyone could enjoy. To contrast such a gratuitous display with a thoughtful stage drama such as 'Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme' beggars belief.

If Belfast City Hall cannot accommodate a skilled flute band in a private function which commemorates the sacrifice of those who offered us the freedoms of association and speech that Sinn Féin so easily abuses, Belfast's city streets certainly should not play host to masked gun-toting terrorists and the supporters of a wicked and intolerable past.

I commend the motion to the House, and I hope that Members send a clear, unamended message to those who have yet to move on that the glorification of terrorism is not — and will not be — acceptable in our society.

Mr O'Dowd: Go raibh maith agat, a Cheann Comhairle. This motion, whatever the intention, is a complete and utter waste of time. Members have no power over the Parades Commission. I thought that the DUP, and members of the Orange Order within the DUP, did not talk to the Parades Commission. I am delighted to hear that they are now engaging with it. The Parades Commission is not at the top of my Christmas card list either, but I am glad to see the engagement. If members of the DUP have issues relating to that parade, they must bring them to the Parades Commission. There is no point in bringing those issues to this Chamber.

Mr McCausland: Will the Member give way?

Mr O'Dowd: I will not.

We have no powers over the PSNI — because, apparently, the DUP is not ready. In any case, members of the DUP went to the PSNI and lodged a complaint. No one, to the best of my knowledge, has been questioned about any offence at that parade, and it is worth noting that no arrests were made on the day, even though thousands upon thousands of people were on the streets. The number of PSNI officers required to marshal the parade was minimal, and none of

them was wearing body armour or riot gear — just short-sleeved shirts on a nice Sunday afternoon, watching the parade pass. The DUP has made its complaint to the PSNI — the PSNI can deal with it.

It is also worth noting that there has been no ministerial response. What is the point of tabling a motion in an Assembly that has no powers to deal with the issues raised? Alban Maginness has suggested reasons why the motion was tabled, and I agree with most of them.

5.15 pm

Perhaps the media attention that followed the debate in Belfast City Council excited some of my colleagues on the opposite Benches. It took four Members from Belfast to sign the motion, some of whom represent the most deprived wards in Belfast. However, I will return to that issue.

The proposers of the motion felt so strongly that the most important thing that happened during the summer was a peaceful parade that they wanted to debate it twice. They could have debated the attempted murder of a police officer on 21 July — but no, loyalists were responsible for that. They could have debated rioting in Bangor, during which there was an attempt to murder PSNI officers — but no, they will not debate that. They could have debated the statement by a senior Ulster Defence Association member that loyalists would no longer marshal Orange Order parades — but no, they will not debate that either.

Mr Kennedy: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Are Members allowed to engage in what might be called Chamber theatre during a debate?

Mr Speaker: I am aware that some Members have been using visual aids in the Chamber. It is not right to use visual aids in the Chamber at any time.

Mr Kennedy: Apologise.

Mr O'Dowd: Nelson has a folder full of photographs.

Mr Speaker: Let me be clear; the rule applies to all Members.

Mr O'Dowd: I had better not crumple my last piece of paper in case I offend sensitive Members. The proposers of the motion could also debate loyalist bonfires. The names of young Catholic children who died of heart attacks and other ailments were attached to a bonfire. When the father of one of the children removed them, his house was attacked by a loyalist mob — but no, they will not discuss that issue either. Instead, they choose to debate a peaceful parade through the streets of Belfast for no other reason than to gain some headlines. However, I suspect that the media might be as bored with this matter as everyone else is.

Do the proposers from North and East Belfast have nothing better to do with their time? Do they honestly believe that their constituents sent them here to discuss this issue? North Belfast has some of the most deprived wards in Ireland. Such levels of unemployment and deprivation must be rectified, and the Assembly is charged with rectifying them. That is something that we can deal with.

In East Belfast, the heart of manufacturing industry —

Mr Storey: Youse bombed it.

Mr Speaker: Order. The Member has the Floor.

Mr O'Dowd: — the manufacturing industry has collapsed. Would Members not better spend their time doing something about that? I know that Sammy Wilson skips between east Belfast and

Larne. Larne has its own problems. Is there nothing going on in Larne that would be a better subject for debate in the Assembly?

No decision can result from this debate; there will be no ministerial response. If Members are serious about wanting a result, it will not happen today.

The debate and the parade are really about collusion, and about the importation of guns to loyalist paramilitaries by the British state. Those guns are now pointing at the unionist community. Those same guns are being used in the loyalist feud and have killed more than 25 Protestants since the DUP came to power. What is the DUP doing about that? Can we debate that?

If we ever reach the truth, as my colleague Francie Molloy said, the truth about the origin of those weapons will come out; the truth about why they are still being held will come out, and they will no longer be pointed at the unionist community. Is that not an important issue?

Mr Speaker: The Member's time is almost up.

Mr O'Dowd: I support the amendment.

Mr Attwood: In taking part in the debate, I am mindful of Naomi Long's health warning: what progress will come from it? I will try to answer that question.

Although I do not support the motion, I do not agree with John O'Dowd's statement that it is an utter waste of time. Issues about victims and a shared society are the business of the Assembly, particularly the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, which is in the hands of the DUP and Sinn Féin. Mr O'Dowd was wrong to make that assertion, just as the DUP was wrong to make the assertions that are contained in the motion.

This debate should be about the issue of truth. Members should be discussing — and I hope that we will have the opportunity to do so soon — what Denis Bradley, Lord Eames and others are currently doing in respect of dealing with the past. They carry a very difficult and heavy burden.

The SDLP fears that, if Members do not get their heads round the issue of the truth of the past, it will come back in our faces. There are elements in unionism who do not want the truth about the RUC to come out. There are also elements in the British Establishment who do not want the truth about MI5 and the British Army to come out, and there are definitely elements in loyalism and republicanism who do not want the truth of what they did for 35 years to come out.

If those elements in the British system, unionism, republicanism and loyalism converge at the same time, for the same end — namely, that they do not want the truth of their past to come out — Lord Eames and Denis Bradley will be ill served, and the community will be ill served by the fact that the truth will be buried. That is a realistic and possible scenario. We know that, because the IRA and the British Government conspired and colluded to bring about that outcome two and a half years ago in their proposals regarding the on-the-runs and state killings. That was an attempt to bury the truth of the past.

Jennifer McCann said that no one should be treated as a second-class citizen. It was her party and the British Government who worked together to create a system of justice that was second class in respect of dealing with the on-the-runs and state killings. Therefore, if Jennifer McCann wants to talk about no one being treated as a second-class citizen, her party should not produce, for people in the North, a second-class system of justice regarding the on-the-runs and state killings.

In one way I welcome the debate, because it appears that elements in the DUP recognise that good authority in the North needs to be upheld. That is implicit in the statement calling on the PSNI and the Parades Commission to ensure that the type of parade that took place on 12

August 2007 never happens again. That statement, for what it is worth, attempts to ensure that good authority in the North is upheld. I hope that the DUP will follow through with that by recognising, and urging everybody to recognise, the authority of the current Parades Commission.

There is an ongoing review of the future of parades. That review is in real danger of trying to replace the architecture that exists around parades at the moment with another version of political fixes between the big political parties in the North. My sense is that the review will report to the Assembly, and to the Office of the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, that if Members think that the Parades Commission is not good enough, the authority regarding parades should be addressed by the politicians working together. That is a recipe for conflict and chaos in the future.

I urge the DUP to view the Parades Commission in a new light and recognise that that body has good authority, regardless of the differences that there have been in the past. The DUP should embrace the Parades Commission now, rather than try to create some political fix, through the Ashdown review, regarding parades in the future.

I also urge the Ulster Unionists to accept the amendment. The reason why it should be accepted is that Alban Maginness has outlined the right principles, to do the right thing, at the right time for the Assembly as regards elements of that obnoxious parade organised by republicans last August in this city.

Mr S Wilson: The Alliance Party has accused the DUP of proposing the motion only because we wanted to poke the dog with a stick. I assure the Member for East Belfast Naomi Long that it is not a case of poking the dog with a stick — the motion was designed to bash the dog on the head.

Unfortunately, and for far too long, Sinn Féin has been allowed to get away with hypocrisy, double standards and lecturing —

Mr Molloy: Will the Member give way?

Mr S Wilson: I will not give way now but I might later.

For too long, Sinn Féin has been able to lecture everyone else about standards of parading, about what others should do, and about respecting other people. However, when Sinn Féin Members are put to the test, they totally ignore the sensitivities of people whose relatives were killed by terrorists in the past 30 years. As Mr Kennedy, a Member for Newry and Armagh, pointed out in his excellent speech, Sinn Féin totally ignores the strictures of the Parades Commission, which it elevates and to which it runs on occasion in order to have restrictions placed on unionist and loyalist parades across Northern Ireland. The motion is timely, not just because Back-Benchers want to let off a bit of steam, but because this is a real issue and because Sinn Féin's hypocrisy must be addressed.

Members have heard lame excuses from Sinn Féin today. The party tells unionist Members that they should not worry about the parade; and asks why they are dancing about in agitation; and deems it only a piece of street theatre, or, as Mr Kennedy pointed out, a Sinn Féin fancy-dress party. Sinn Féin claims that it was only acting out what had happened in the past — Sinn Féin actors were dressed up as members of the RUC, the UDR, the British Army, and IRA terrorists. Next, we will hear that Sinn Féin is going to the Arts Council for a grant, or even demanding an Oscar for those who acted. Mr Kennedy said to me that he knew who was acting out the part of the IRA informer who was colluding: he was the boy who won the Brit award in the whole show. *[Laughter.]*

We are being sold the line that we should be pleased that Sinn Féin is bringing street theatre into Belfast city centre on a sunny Sunday afternoon. However, had an Orange parade been marching down the Newtownards Road or the Albertbridge Road with even so much as a flag depicting the symbol of a paramilitary organisation, Sinn Féin agitators from Short Strand would have been down to the Parades Commission and round at Mountpottinger police station whingeing for the next year to ensure that that parade is never allowed again.

It is right that the House should debate the motion —

Mrs Long: Will the Member give way?

Mr S Wilson: I am more than happy to give way now.

Mrs Long: Will the Member clarify that he does not defend the display of loyalist paramilitary symbols in Orange Order parades? One might be confused about that, given the terms in which he has spoken.

Mr S Wilson: I never gave the impression that I would defend such a thing. However, since the Member wants clarification, I would not defend it. I made that clear.

However, it seems that the standards that apply on the other side of the Chamber do not apply to this side. It appears that we should be prepared somehow to accept Sinn Féin behaving in such a way in Belfast city centre, regardless of the offence that it causes and regardless of the message that it sends out.

I am touched at Sinn Féin's concern for the working-class people of east Belfast, north Belfast and Larne. Mind you, that does not stop some of its agitators in front-line areas of north Belfast. This morning, I drove down the Limestone Road to avoid the traffic jams and saw the large number of houses that have their windows blocked and roofs destroyed. They were good houses that might have been used to meet the housing shortage in north Belfast, but they were destroyed because republican agitators do not care too much about the living conditions of poor working-class Protestants who live in that area; rather, they torture them nightly.

We are told that Sinn Féin is concerned that we are wasting time in the debate and failing to debate issues that affect directly people in north, west or south Belfast or Larne.

5.30 pm

The fact is that this issue affects those people — and Sinn Féin's attitude to republican violence affects those people. In the Assembly, Members debate many issues over which they have no control but on which they want to give their views. Recently, Sinn Féin Members tabled a motion on tax-raising powers, which rest with Westminster. Nevertheless, the Assembly wanted to inform the Government at Westminster of its views. Equally, today's debate gives Members an opportunity to inform the police and the Parades Commission of their thoughts and what they believe needs to be done about provocative parades. The debate is not a waste of time: it raises a legitimate issue and is acceptable to the Assembly.

The reason that Sinn Féin Members did not want the debate to take place was that the only excuse they could give was that the parade was a piece of theatre and not a coat-trailing exercise through the centre of Belfast. Sinn Féin Members cannot answer the charge that their attitude towards unionist parades is hypocritical, or that they claim to support non-violence but still hanker after those who committed violence for the past 30 years. This debate is an embarrassment to them, and all they can do is have the brass neck to stand up and make paltry excuses.

Mr O'Dowd: During my contribution, I said we would not resolve the issue in here today. There is one way to resolve the issue: those who are concerned about the parade could sit down with the

organisers and thrash out the issues in order to work towards having a parade, with concerns addressed, for next year.

Mr S Wilson: I thank the Member for his intervention. However, I do not think that there is much to discuss in order to fix the situation. The issues have been examined already: bands with drum skins depicting gunmen, and gunmen marching down the street in full regalia. Those types of things could be addressed easily and without people on either side sitting down together. The point of having the Assembly debate is that republicans can hear unionist concerns first-hand.

The Parades Commission knows what it has to do, and the police know what they have to do. It is important that the issues have been raised during the debate so that we do not have a repeat of the situation.

In closing, the DUP does not believe that the SDLP amendment is necessary. Other Members and I have made it clear that what we say about the parade in question applies to other parades as well. The motion relates to a specific event that occurred over the summer period. The problem with the SDLP's approach is that while they are prepared to condemn with words what they have seen Sinn Féin do in Belfast city centre on 12 August, they are not prepared to march through the lobbies to condemn it. Therefore, their motion is an attempt to run away.

In tabling the amendment, SDLP Members are running away from their responsibility to point the finger of blame at people who involved themselves in an obscene march on 12 August.

Question put, That the amendment be made.

The Assembly divided: Ayes 31; Noes 41.

AYES

Mr Attwood, Mrs M Bradley, Mr P J Bradley, Mr Brady, Mr Brolly, Mr Burns, Mr Butler, Mr W Clarke, Mr Dallat, Mr Durkan, Dr Farry, Mr Ford, Mr Gallagher, Mrs D Kelly, Ms Lo, Mrs Long, Mr A Maginness, Mr P Maskey, Ms J McCann, Mr McCartney, Mr McElduff, Mr McGlone, Mr McHugh, Mr Molloy, Mr Neeson, Ms Ní Chuilín, Mr O'Dowd, Mr O'Loan, Mr P Ramsey, Ms S Ramsey, Ms Ritchie.

Tellers for the Ayes: Mr P J Bradley and Mr O'Loan.

NOES

Mr Armstrong, Mr Beggs, Mr Bresland, Lord Browne, Mr Buchanan, Mr Campbell, Mr T Clarke, Mr Craig, Mr Dodds, Mr Donaldson, Mr Easton, Mr Elliott, Sir Reg Empey, Mrs Foster, Mr Gardiner, Mr Hamilton, Mr Hilditch, Mr Irwin, Mr Kennedy, Mr McCausland, Mr B McCrea, Mr I McCrea, Dr W McCrea, Mr McFarland, Miss McIlveen, Mr McNarry, Mr McQuillan, Lord Morrow, Mr Newton, Mr Paisley Jnr, Mr Poots, Mr G Robinson, Mr P Robinson, Mr Ross, Mr Shannon, Mr Simpson, Mr Spratt, Mr Storey, Mr Weir, Mr Wells, Mr S Wilson.

Tellers for the Noes: Miss McIlveen and Mr Spratt.

Question accordingly negated.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved:

That this Assembly believes that Belfast City Centre should be a shared space; deplores the Sinn Féin sponsored parade to the City Hall on Sunday, 12th August 2007, which involved depictions

of I.R.A terrorists and participants carrying guns; and calls on the PSNI and the Parades Commission to ensure that this never happens again.