

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Implications of the EU Withdrawal Agreement and the backstop for Northern Ireland](#), HC 1850

Wednesday 6 March 2019

Ordered by the House of Commons to be published on 6 March 2019.

[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Dr Andrew Murrison (Chair); Gregory Campbell; Maria Caulfield; John Grogan; Stephen Hepburn; Lady Hermon; Kate Hoey; Nigel Mills; Ian Paisley; Jim Shannon.

Questions 365 – 466

Witnesses

I: Rt Hon Sammy Wilson MP, Democratic Unionist Party.

II: Gerry Carroll MLA, People Before Profit.

III: Clare Bailey MLA, Green Party.

IV: Jim Allister MLA, Traditional Unionist Voice.

Examination of witness

Rt Hon Sammy Wilson MP.

Q365 **Chair:** Mr Wilson, it is a great pleasure to see you. You know the background to this. The idea is that, as part of our ongoing interest in the vexed issue of the day as far as it relates to Northern Ireland, we will be producing a series of reports over time. The evidence that we hear from this session and others, we hope, will be able to shed light on our deliberations and will hopefully be reflected in the reports when we write them. That is the background. Without further ado, I would invite you—in three minutes if you possibly could, because time is very short given the amount of Northern Ireland business we have in the House today—to give us a resumé of how you and your party view the current situation in relation to the border specifically.

Sammy Wilson: Thank you for the invitation to come along and outline the concerns we have. They have been well articulated in the House anyhow, but it is good to get them on the record in the Committee.

There are two things I want to say. First, on the withdrawal agreement itself, the withdrawal agreement has caused huge concern among the Unionist community. There is not as much concern among the business community as one would have thought, given the implications it has for business in Northern Ireland, but from the Unionist community's point of view, to have Northern Ireland isolated in the way in which the withdrawal agreement does, is very damaging to the Union.

First of all, we would be subject to rules made in Brussels for a wide range of activities in Northern Ireland without any opportunity to have an input into them and without the UK Government having an opportunity to have input into them, and we would find ourselves increasingly removed from laws that are made in Westminster and superseded by laws made in Brussels. We would, in effect, become an annex of Brussels. Secondly, in the future, as the Attorney General indicated, we would have to treat the rest of the United Kingdom as a third country when it came to trade. We are part of the country but would have to treat the major part of it—our major trading partner, by the way—as a third country. That would do damage to industry in Northern Ireland.

Thirdly, of course, it would put a border down the Irish Sea. The Chancellor has made it quite clear that it would place immense and costly administrative burdens on businesses in Northern Ireland either bringing goods from GB—it is our main market; 60% of our trade is with GB—or moving goods to GB. That is the first thing.

The second thing is the impact that this agreement will have on the Belfast agreement. The highlight has been that if we leave the EU, the Belfast agreement in some way is going to be diminished and is going to



affect community relations in Northern Ireland. The Belfast agreement does not actually say anything about the border between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic, but it does have a lot to say about the status of Northern Ireland as part of the United Kingdom. It cannot be changed except with the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. The withdrawal agreement certainly changes the constitutional status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the people of Northern Ireland. Therefore, if there is any threat to the Belfast agreement, it is in the withdrawal agreement and the impact that is likely to have on relations with Northern Ireland.

Q366 **Chair:** Except the Ulster Farmers' Union, the CBI, the FSB, the IoD and the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce seem to rather like the withdrawal agreement.

Sammy Wilson: I find that rather odd. Let us just take the Ulster Farmers' Union. If the Ulster Farmers' Union had read the agreement, they would actually find that state aid rules applying to Northern Ireland would mean, regardless of how the UK Government wished to support agriculture in Northern Ireland, the EU could cap that support in accordance with what they saw as the appropriate policy.

As far as businesses in Northern Ireland are concerned, I do find it very difficult to understand why any business in Northern Ireland, especially some of the major businesses who export all around the world, would wish to be excluded from UK trade deals in the future. Of course, under the withdrawal agreement, since we would remain part of the customs territory of the EU, we would therefore not be able to participate—indeed, the Attorney General makes this clear as well in his advice—in trade deals that the UK would enter into with other parts of the world and therefore would not have access to those markets.

From the consumers' point of view—I notice Northern Ireland retailers have supported the agreement as well—we could not benefit from any of the tariff reductions that the UK may negotiate with other parts of the world, so consumers would suffer as well.

Q367 **Mr Campbell:** Mr Wilson, you are very welcome. I want to follow up on what the Chair was alluding to. In terms of those groups—the Chair alluded to a number of them—who welcome, embrace or give a verdict in a positive sense on the withdrawal agreement, it seems to me that there is a view in Northern Ireland that many of the groups—those groups and others that did so—did so on the basis that they believe it is that or no deal, that it is that or nothing. Therefore, they did so not on the basis that they endorsed it as a good deal but that they could not see any other alternative.

Sammy Wilson: There are two things. First of all, I am not so sure that the leadership of those organisations reflects what their members would say on many occasions. There was an element of, "It is this or no deal," but I would argue that a no deal would be better than this deal. This deal,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

as I have said, draws a line between Northern Ireland and its main market in GB. It would have a costly administrative impact and it would exclude Northern Ireland from participating in any trade deals that the United Kingdom would do with the rest of the world.

Do not forget that we have major exporters in Northern Ireland. We are a small country so we do not have a really big local market and we supply 40% of the world's aircraft seats; we supply 40% of stone-crushing equipment in the world; we are a major exporter of aircraft parts. In my own constituency, Caterpillar exports generators all around the world, mostly to third-world countries. It is in the interests of major Northern Ireland firms to be able to participate in the worldwide trade deals that the United Kingdom would enter. For all those reasons, I think there was a bit of a kneejerk reaction from some of the business organisations. Had they given closer consideration to the proposal, they may have come to a different conclusion.

Q368 Lady Hermon: Thank you so much for coming here to give us your evidence; I was going to say "words of wisdom". First of all, can I just take you up on the assertion that somehow the Brexit deal the Prime Minister has negotiated undermines the constitutional position of Northern Ireland? Of course, it does not. It says within the withdrawal agreement that the consent principle of the Good Friday agreement is in fact guaranteed. It is actually in black and white on page 307.

Sammy, can we just tease something out? You have repeated what we have known all along about the party's stance. However, there were some changes indicated by your good self last week. This was 28 February. I am quoting here from the BBC. It was reported that you said that the backstop could be agreeable, provided it had a time limit. I am quoting what you actually said. You said, "The nature of the time limit would be very important. It cannot be a long time in the distance."

Sammy Wilson: Let me take you up first of all on the assurances we have been given in the withdrawal agreement—that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland cannot be changed and would not be changed. It is a fact that, if we find ourselves in a situation where laws that would cover 60% of economic activity in Northern Ireland are no longer made either here in London or in Belfast but in Brussels, and that is different from the rest of the United Kingdom, then constitutionally we are not in the same position as other parts of the United Kingdom; we are different from other parts of the United Kingdom. In effect, the focus of where law-making occurs for Northern Ireland would be outside the United Kingdom. The withdrawal agreement can use whatever words it wants. What you have to do is measure it against the facts, and the facts are that the withdrawal agreement makes it quite clear we would be part of the European customs territory and the rest of the United Kingdom would not be, and we would be subject to EU single market rules when the rest of the United Kingdom would not be. That deals with that bit.

Lady Hermon: I am sorry. The counter to that is that the constitutional



HOUSE OF COMMONS

position of Northern Ireland is guaranteed in the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which implemented the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. The future of Northern Ireland is in the hands of the people of Northern Ireland voting in a border poll. The constitutional status is not threatened or undermined by this deal. Move on to the second point, which is the timeframe.

Sammy Wilson: I do not want to emphasise the point, but since you have come back on it, let me just make it clear that if laws are made outside the United Kingdom for a part of the United Kingdom, that part of the United Kingdom has had its constitutional position changed by any definition. Therefore, the terms of the Good Friday agreement have been broken.

Let me come to the backstop arrangement. The question that was asked was, "Would the DUP accept the current withdrawal agreement?" I made it quite clear that, no, we would not. Secondly, I was asked, "What is the issue?" The issue is the separate backstop arrangement for Northern Ireland and the fact the United Kingdom could not get out of those arrangements without the assent of the EU. The point I was making was that, regardless of the mechanism, the outcome was important. The outcome was that no longer would the EU be able to dictate to the United Kingdom the arrangements that will persist between either the United Kingdom as a whole or Northern Ireland and the EU.

The way of doing that was to have an end date for the backstop. In effect—I am only telling you what the EU has said and what the Irish Government have said—once you do that, you have removed the backstop. The point I was making was that the backstop could be removed. If they did not want to have the withdrawal agreement totally destroyed, you could remove the backstop by imposing a time limit on it. That in effect has the same outcome. There is no backstop. That is what the EU has said.

Q369 **Lady Hermon:** How does the DUP feel about an enhanced arbitration mechanism to bring about an end to the backstop?

Sammy Wilson: That certainly is not a mechanism that we would accept, for two reasons. First, that leaves us in exactly the same position as the current withdrawal agreement does, where somebody else decides whether the United Kingdom can break out of the backstop or whether it stays in the backstop. Whether we decide to change or alter the backstop, or to alter any arrangements we have with the EU, should be a decision for this Parliament and this Government, not some independent panel of judges.

The second thing is that an arbitration panel could drag on its deliberations for years. We have seen that.

Q370 **Lady Hermon:** If that is what the Attorney General Geoffrey Cox comes back with next week, what will happen?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sammy Wilson: We have made it very clear that there has to be an ability for a sovereign Parliament and a sovereign Government to make a decision about the future status of the United Kingdom as a whole in relation to the EU or part of the United Kingdom in relation to the EU.

Q371 **Lady Hermon:** Are you and your colleagues prepared to risk the consequences of a no--deal Brexit?

Sammy Wilson: If we finish up with no deal, it will be as a result of the intransigence of the EU. We have made it quite clear all along that we wish to have a deal, and indeed the Government have made it quite clear all along that they wish to have a deal, but they have to have a deal that has the support of the people in the House of Commons. If you finish up with a majority of 230 people—

Chair: I am going to have to hurry this along.

Sammy Wilson: If you finish up with a majority of 230 people saying, "This is a bad deal," then you really cannot expect the Government to simply cave in because the alternative is no deal.

Q372 **Lady Hermon:** I am sorry. This is a really serious issue. I am going to quote from the head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, a man of great stature and wisdom, David Sterling. Yesterday, he warned of the "grave" consequences of a no-deal Brexit. He said it could have a "profound and long lasting impact" on society in Northern Ireland. Is that the risk that the DUP is prepared to take with no deal?

Sammy Wilson: First, you have to look at the timing of this. This is a regurgitation of an earlier letter that he wrote. Secondly, I know civil servants should not get involved politically, but I have no doubt that this was written with a political motive, because he knew—

Chair: I am going to leave it at that, because we do need to move on. That is on the record. I doubt there is going to be agreement on this point.

Q373 **Ian Paisley:** It is good to see you here, Sammy. How did last week's actions by the Republic of Ireland make you feel, when they seized boats from Northern Ireland?

Sammy Wilson: This is the irony: we get the Government in the Republic saying that they do not wish to see a hard border, yet they threatened a hard border 5 miles up in the air when they said they were going to stop planes flying across the Republic of Ireland. Now they are imposing a hard border in the sea, where they have actually seized boats from Northern Ireland. This is the kind of one--sided nature we have to be very careful about in the future. On the one hand, the Irish want access to Northern Ireland waters for their boats, but they are quite happy to send gunboats—that is how hard the border is in the sea—to seize Northern Ireland boats that want to reciprocate and fish in their waters.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q374 **Ian Paisley:** What would you say to those people who make the claim that Brexit would make a united Ireland more likely?

Sammy Wilson: First, the people who are using it are using it as part of the scare tactics that we have found being employed, like we have from David Sterling in his letter.

Lady Hermon: It is not a scare tactic.

Sammy Wilson: It is a scare tactic, because, if you look at the studies that have been made about the impact of no deal—

Lady Hermon: He is head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

Sammy Wilson: I do not care if he is the head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service or if he is Santa Claus; it really does not matter. The fact of the matter is that he has got it wrong. Even the studies that have been done on the impact of no deal, apart from the Treasury one, show that the overall impact between now and 2030 is likely to be a reduction in GDP of around between 2% and 3%. It has been suggested, if there is be a fall by 2.2% over these 11 years, that if the Government decided to build another 30,000 houses per year, it would wipe out that impact on GDP.

On this idea that somehow or other there is economic catastrophe around the corner, there may well be an impact of no deal, but Government have fiscal and monetary measures with which to deal with it. Indeed, we have a good example of that. The Bank of England claimed that any negative impact that there may have been after the referendum vote was taken—this is how they explained why all the forecasts were wrong—was eliminated by the quantitative easing that they undertook. There are ways in which, if there is some short-term disruption, Governments can impact that.

Q375 **Ian Paisley:** Last week, Norway indicated that they had set aside billions of pounds to invest in the United Kingdom post-Brexit because of the opportunities. Do you believe that some of that could come to Northern Ireland?

Sammy Wilson: Norway's sovereign wealth fund has invested heavily in the United Kingdom as a whole. I have no doubt they have projects in Northern Ireland. Some of them are public projects; some of them are private investments. If there are worthy projects in Northern Ireland, there will be a good return on them, of course.

Q376 **Ian Paisley:** Finally, what do you think the Prime Minister means when she says she wants to see legally binding changes to the treaty agreement?

Sammy Wilson: I hope she means the same as we do. Namely, that the agreement will be changed so that it is not possible for the United Kingdom to be held inside the EU after we have decided to leave. Those legally binding changes, as far as I am concerned, have to ensure the EU



HOUSE OF COMMONS

cannot use the withdrawal agreement to keep us in the customs union or the single market, or to make Northern Ireland be treated differently.

Q377 **Ian Paisley:** So there would have to be changes in the treaty?

Sammy Wilson: It would have to be changes in the treaty, because the treaty itself is legally binding. If you are going to overcome the legally binding terms of the treaty at present, you have to have a change in the treaty.

Q378 **Kate Hoey:** You mentioned being surprised at how quickly the business community and the farmers came out and supported the agreement. Is there any truth to the suggestion that those leaders probably saw the withdrawal agreement before, perhaps, even Members in this House saw it? Was there some kind of approach to them to get them on board before it had even been formally published?

Sammy Wilson: They may have been given a précis of what was in the agreement, a précis that was designed to play down the bad parts of it and emphasise the parts the Government thought might be attractive to them and, indeed, skew it. The one thing I do know is that they did make the pronouncements before the 587-page document was actually available. They must have made them on the basis of a briefing they were given and, of course, no one should ever do that, especially when one party has an interest in ensuring that the briefing is skewed in a certain way.

Chair: Mr Wilson, I am terribly sorry. We have come to the end of our time.

Lady Hermon: I just have one more.

Chair: We really do have to crack on. Thank you so much for being with us. We are very grateful to you on this busy day for Northern Ireland.

Sammy Wilson: Thank you.

Examination of witness

Witness: Gerry Carroll MLA.

Q379 **Chair:** Good morning, Mr Carroll. Thank you for coming to see us, and thank you for stepping in to the No. 2 slot because No. 2 has not yet arrived. It is a pleasure to see you here. I wonder whether you might like to give us a quick three minutes on where you and your party see the current issue in relation to Northern Ireland and the border.

Gerry Carroll: Thanks, Chair. Thank you for the invitation. I and People Before Profit believe that, in this whole debate, discussion and indeed the negotiations around Brexit, the concerns of people in the north of Ireland



HOUSE OF COMMONS

and the concerns of the people that I represent in West Belfast in particular have been left firmly at the bottom of the pile.

We have witnessed a cavalier attitude shown by the Tory Government in their effort to do everything they can to ensure its backing from the DUP remains and it is kept in power. We have seen ignorant comments from Tory MPs in particular, who not understand the dangers and the reality of what a hard border would mean for people having to travel for work or to study. Such a dismissive attitude to the concerns about the re-erecting of borders and barriers is very concerning indeed to the people in the north. The freedom of movement to cross the border without any restrictions, without having to pass watchtowers or checkpoints, is something that should be protected absolutely. Any attempt to mess around with this is tantamount, in my view, Chair, to playing with fire. The people who do so will reap dangerous consequences.

In People Before Profit, we say that there will be no hard border on our watch. When it comes down to it, amidst all the moves and machinations, Brexit is ultimately a battle between two bullyboys, a battle between two imperial blocs. On one hand, you have the likes of Jacob Rees-Mogg and the old Etonians, who want to recreate the days of "Rule Britannia", whilst not giving a damn about ordinary people and not thinking twice about erecting more restrictions on the rights of people to move or work, not to mention welfare reform on top of that. Alongside that, you have the aspiration of the EU to create an empire of its own through PESCO, through committing member states to spend a lot more of its spending on military operations and eventually through the creation of a single European army, not to mention the fact they threatened that an economic time bomb would go off in Dublin if the banks were not bailed out.

Chair, in that context, People Before Profit will not be forced to stay with any of the two bullies. We choose neither London nor Brussels. We want to see a socialist Ireland, ultimately. Our representatives in Dáil Éireann just yesterday were seeking a cast-iron guarantee from the Taoiseach to ensure that there is no hard border. Unfortunately, the Government did not support that.

Today, Chair, I am here in my capacity as an MLA for West Belfast. I can tell you that the people of West Belfast do not trust anyone in the Tory establishment. This Brexit process has indeed sped up the deep crisis in the British state and opened up the question of a united Ireland. In People Before Profit, we welcome the chance to have the opportunity to discuss this and present our vision for a different type of Ireland. This is a conversation that is already happening on the airwaves and in the newspapers. It is not simply a process where all the Protestants are going to vote to remain within the UK and all the Catholics are naturally going to vote for a united Ireland. Things have become much more fluid than that. Despite a certain level of uncertainty remaining, I welcome the fact that we can have a sensible, adult conversation about the future of this



HOUSE OF COMMONS

island and also about what kind of state we want to live in. It is one that, in my view, should not be subservient to the corporations or elite.

Ultimately, to conclude, Chair, for us in People Before Profit, to ensure a hard border is not erected we cannot rely on the elites in London, Dublin or Brussels. In People Before Profit, our view is that the only way that is going to be prevented and stopped is through people power and mass action on the streets.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed for all that. That is absolutely fascinating.

Q380 Maria Caulfield: I know Brexit is obviously dominating the headlines, but can I just take things closer to home in terms of the Assembly? There is no functioning Assembly at the moment. Here in Westminster we had to pass the budget Bill yesterday. Today we have more Northern Ireland legislation that is quite controversial. Ideally, a better place for those decisions to be taken is Northern Ireland. Can I ask what People Before Profit's response is to try to get that Assembly back up and running? As a party, is that something you are keen to do? We hear conflicting stories.

Gerry Carroll: There have been many discussions and negotiations about getting Stormont back together. For the most part, we have been excluded from them. There is an onus on the British Government—

Q381 Maria Caulfield: By who?

Gerry Carroll: In the space of three years, we have had one meeting with the Secretary of State. We have tried to set up more meetings and have more arrangements to discuss our perspective on it. Fundamentally, the views of parties like ourselves, smaller parties but parties that are very relevant and that have a unique take on questions in Belfast and beyond, are not being listened to.

From our perspective, there was a situation where for too long Stormont was denying basic rights to people, be that Irish language rights, be that marriage equality rights, be it abortion rights, be it rights around the right to benefits and the right to have a decent benefits system and the right to a fair and decent wage. All those things were neglected, and there was no action on those issues for a long time. When we saw the latest deal—it was in 2017—to try to get Stormont back together, even that deal, which did not really have much by way of concrete detail about confirming an Irish language Act was too much for the DUP to support.

I hear mixed messages on the ground. People are obviously fed up with politicians not being in Stormont and not doing what they are supposed to do in terms of being elected, but especially in West Belfast, where I am the elected representative, people are very concerned about the denial of rights. Any Stormont that is to be returned must, at the very bare minimum, respect the rights of those people who have been ignored for so long.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q382 **Maria Caulfield:** If there was a proposal to re--establish an Assembly of the willing, so the parties willing to get back around the table and willing to set up the Assembly again, would the People Before Profit party be willing to sit around the table?

Gerry Carroll: I have the concern that there are attempts to circumvent those issues that I have talked about: an Irish language Act, marriage equality, abortion rights and those kinds of issue. Obviously, it is an issue for the party as a whole, but I would not be prepared to join an Executive or to resurrect the Stormont Assembly if it continued to deny those people basic rights.

Q383 **Maria Caulfield:** I just have one quick follow-up on that. Here we are starting to scrutinise devolved matters such as health and education. We are hearing first-hand from teachers and health professionals that, because there is no Assembly, people in Northern Ireland are being left behind. As someone whose family came from a nationalist community—my grandfather did not have voting rights, for example—it is heart-breaking to see that those communities' elected representatives are either not coming here to take their seats or are not being represented in the Assembly. What is your feeling on that? There are people being denied representation because politicians simply cannot come together.

Gerry Carroll: People are being denied their basic rights; they are not being listened to. On the question of health and education, obviously there is a crisis. This Committee heard from a representative about that last week. There is a crisis in health. There are too many people on waiting lists, waiting for operations, waiting to get treated. That predated Stormont not sitting. Unless Stormont is going to reinvest and invest more in health and education, those issues are not going to be solved.

Q384 **Lady Hermon:** Do MLAs like yourself not feel some responsibility that, while there is not an Assembly, these issues are getting worse for people in Northern Ireland?

Gerry Carroll: I am a socialist MLA. I am one single socialist MLA. I am on the picket line defending the health service and defending schools. I do not feel any responsibility whatsoever for schools and hospitals being downgraded, cut back and restricted. I do not feel any responsibility whatsoever for that.

Q385 **Kate Hoey:** It is nice to see you. Let us get back to Brexit. If the withdrawal agreement does not go through and, by one means or another, we leave on WTO rules, who is going to put up the hard border?

Gerry Carroll: I have seen no clear evidence from the British Government that they would absolutely rule out a hard border. That has to be emphasised. In the last few days we saw the Taoiseach mention armed guards on the border. That is obviously very concerning and very worrying. Regardless of where it come from, be it Britain or the Republic of Ireland, our perspective in People Before Profit is that we do not want to see any hard border or any beefing up of that border, because it will



HOUSE OF COMMONS

change people's lives. It will make people's lives worse, and it is something we want to encourage not to happen. We implore for it not to happen. If it does happen, we are encouraging peaceful civil disobedience on the streets to stop that taking place.

Q386 **Kate Hoey:** But the common travel area will not change. People moving around are not going to be affected in the slightest by Brexit, are they?

Gerry Carroll: We do not know.

Q387 **Kate Hoey:** The common travel area was there long before we joined the—

Gerry Carroll: Indeed, but I am not one to trust the Tory Government, so I cannot take it for granted that there is going to be no attempts from London to try to protect and beef up that border.

Q388 **Kate Hoey:** Basically, you do not believe the British Government, the Irish Government or the European Union when they say they do not want a hard border and they are not going to put one up?

Gerry Carroll: We cannot rely on any of them, from our perspective and our position. My position and the position of People Before Profit is not to rely on any of the elites, like I say, in London, Dublin or Brussels. We want to ensure that it does not happen, but we cannot trust them. They are willing to go to any lengths to protect the single market or the Union with Northern Ireland. It could come from any of those different directions, and we would be very concerned that it could happen.

Q389 **Kate Hoey:** You do not really respect any politicians?

Gerry Carroll: I do not get the question, sorry.

Kate Hoey: You do not have any faith or any respect in any politicians of any party other than, presumably, your own?

Gerry Carroll: We can disagree, obviously, with many politicians, and I mostly do.

Kate Hoey: You do not believe them?

Gerry Carroll: If the question is whether I trust them, whether I trust the Tory Government, no, I do not.

Q390 **Ian Paisley:** Gerry, it is nice to meet you. I admire your scepticism, if nothing else. You believe in, and you articulated earlier your desire and ambition, which is legitimate enough, to see a socialist Ireland. Should that socialist Ireland be in or outside of the EU?

Gerry Carroll: Ultimately, we cannot have an Ireland that is beholden to any empire, be it the British empire or the burgeoning and growing EU empire. As I have said, there are growing Jacob Rees-Mogg elements within the British establishment that want to recreate the "Rule Britannia" of the British empire. Like I say, we also have attempts to create a single European army. We saw comments from Angela Merkel and Macron—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Q391 **Ian Paisley:** So you would want that socialist Ireland to be outside of the EU?

Gerry Carroll: Ultimately, yes.

Q392 **Ian Paisley:** That is a classical socialist position. It is a position articulated by Tony Benn and others. Have republicans and socialists in Northern Ireland who have campaigned for remain sold the pass on that issue?

Gerry Carroll: There is a very honourable critique of the European Union from the left. As you say, it was made by Tony Benn and others. He had a very strong critique of it for the denial of democracy and all the rest of it. I think that is the correct socialist position to take. Unfortunately, others did not take that position.

Q393 **Ian Paisley:** You are a man coming from west Belfast. Sinn Féin previously opposed the Lisbon and Maastricht treaties and the EU. Were you surprised when they decided to throw their lot in and campaign for remain?

Gerry Carroll: Not really, no, to be honest with you. In the 1980s and 1990s, the positions that were considered of the left moved more and more to the centre ground. In some ways, it surprised me and in some ways it did not.

Q394 **Ian Paisley:** Would the people of the Republic of Ireland be better placed if they had politicians and leaders in the Republic today, as it is currently constituted, to lead them out of the EU?

Gerry Carroll: Like I say, People Before Profit is a 32county party. We have TDs in Dáil Éireann, councillors in the south and obviously MLAs and councillors in the north. We need to look at this on an Ireland-wide basis and understand—

Q395 **Ian Paisley:** I accept your Ireland-wide analysis. It is fair. You have articulated the view that, if we were all one nation, your ideal would be that we would be outside the EU, because that is an imperial power. However, as it is currently constituted, should the Republic of Ireland try to remove itself from the EU also?

Gerry Carroll: Ultimately, if we are talking about having an Ireland that is not dominated by corporations or elites, it ultimately has to be one that is not dominated or ruled by Brussels.

Q396 **Lady Hermon:** Thank you very much indeed for coming here and giving us your evidence. I was very struck by the fact that you had a prepared statement, which you read into evidence earlier this morning. There are a number of striking statements, to put it mildly. However, you had obviously thought about them, because they were in the statement that you read out to us. Can I just ask you to elaborate a little? Towards the end, you said that a hard border would have dangerous consequences. What exactly did you mean by that?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Gerry Carroll: We saw reports in the media that a hard border could lead to an increase in violence. That is something I and People Before Profit would be totally, 100% opposed to.

Lady Hermon: This is violence from the New IRA, dissident republicans.

Gerry Carroll: Potentially, yes. It was all over reports in the BBC. I am sure you saw it yourself. It referenced that directly or indirectly. It is something that is very, very dangerous. Like I said, it is tantamount to playing with fire if people think they can erect more checkpoints, more customs points or more security on the border.

They are not my words; they are the words of others. It is going to have very grave consequences on people's lives, not just in that context, in that potentially very dangerous and serious context, but also in that people will be restricted in terms of their ability to move across the border. If they are from Donegal and they want to study in Derry or if they are in Derry and they want to go to Donegal, people's lives could be but should not be restricted by any potential creation or reinforcement of a hard border.

Q397 **Lady Hermon:** You would agree with the PSNI Chief Constable that a hard border would be seen as "fair game" for attack by violent dissident republicans?

Gerry Carroll: It could be, yes.

Q398 **Lady Hermon:** You also said—this is the other statement that I just want you to elaborate on, because it sounded a little bit like a threat; let us see what you really meant by it—that Brexit could result in a hard border and could result in "mass action on the streets". Do you want to read that bit back again? I am quoting you directly.

Gerry Carroll: I mean it directly. It is not just my view that it is going to happen. The head of Cooperation Ireland's exact quote was that there would be civil disobedience if there is no deal and potentially a hard border. I have no doubt about it. Whether I say it or not, if there are restrictions on the freedom of movement of people in the north to the south or the south to the north, there is going to be civil disobedience on the streets; there is going to be protest. Just to clarify, from our perspective, we want that to be peaceful. We want that to be people coming out in a "people power"-type festival or atmosphere, where people are taking to the streets and saying, "We will not accept this," and not violent in any way, shape or form.

Q399 **Lady Hermon:** Do you expect the civil disobedience that you are talking about to be confined to the border area, or are you talking about elsewhere?

Gerry Carroll: I would imagine it would be across the island. I cannot predict it, but, speaking to people north and south, people in Derry, Dublin, across the south and across the north, I would imagine it would



HOUSE OF COMMONS

not be just in the border area; it would be right across the island. People do not want to go back to the days when they were restricted, when they had checkpoints and when they could not move freely across the border. I have no doubt in my mind. If there is any attempt to restrict that, there will be large numbers of people out on the streets to defy it.

Q400 Lady Hermon: Is that your party policy? You have indicated that you have members who sit in the Dáil Éireann and on councils in the Republic of Ireland, and you will hopefully sit, one of these days, again in the Assembly, when it is functioning again. Will you be calling on people to do this?

Gerry Carroll: Absolutely, we will be calling for people to take to the streets peacefully and protest against any erection of a hard border.

Lady Hermon: I am trying to absorb that. Let us hope we can avoid all of that.

Gerry Carroll: Indeed.

Q401 Lady Hermon: Let us avoid a no-deal Brexit, and let us avoid a hard border at all costs. You also mentioned—and again I am quoting from what you said earlier—that Brexit has opened up the question, in your words, of a united Ireland. Why do you say that?

Gerry Carroll: First, like I said in my statement, it is all over the news. Pretty much every day or every other day, it is in the newspapers. Even people I am speaking to who are from traditionally Unionist backgrounds, if you want to use that sort of terminology, are looking at the possibility of a united Ireland. It is for different reasons. They think London is denying them what they see as their rights, be it as European citizens or people who support the European Union, or generally that sort of cavalier attitude the Tory Government have taken to people in West Belfast and across the north. We held a meeting recently in Queen's University on the issue of Brexit and a united Ireland, and there were over 150 people there.

Q402 Lady Hermon: Was that a mixed audience?

Gerry Carroll: It was a mixed panel. The panel was ourselves and there were Unionists on it. I am assuming the audience was mixed as well. You would not have had that two, three, four or five years ago. It would not have been that sort of capacity. It is a live debate. It is something that is happening. From our perspective, we want it conducted in a way that does not just mean that a certain community will vote a certain way and another community will vote a certain way. It has opened up the possibility of talking about a different type of Ireland. In our view, that should be one that respects women's rights, refugees and all the people in society who are downtrodden and oppressed. It is a debate that is already happening.

Q403 Lady Hermon: In your estimation, Brexit has been very divisive and polarising. Has it liberated people to think differently? You are suggesting



it has.

Gerry Carroll: What the Tories are doing is a mess. I said in my statement that there is a lot of uncertainty and a lot of fear. That is real. There is a possibility of having a conversation, like I said, about politics across the island. That is that one, while the other stuff that has come alongside it is not.

Q404 **Mr Campbell:** Gerry, you are very welcome. Obviously, we come from different backgrounds, but in your introductory remarks you talked about the fact you represent communities who passionately believe they are being denied a series of rights. It is very good to come into contact with me as an elected representative, who represents people who feel exactly the same way and have done so for generations: they are denied the right to live, passport rights, job rights and a whole series of other rights. That is a good interaction.

But in your introductory remarks, you talked about this issue about a hard border. I wrote down carefully what you said. You talked about the concept of watchtowers and checkpoints. Am I right in assuming that that phrase was used in the context of a possible hard border? Is that what you would construe as being a hard border?

Gerry Carroll: It could be that. It could be more guards. It could be armed guards. It could be more officials on the border. It could be a range of different things, but that could also be what a hard border could be as well.

Q405 **Mr Campbell:** I do not want to be pejorative here, but everybody we have heard from and that we have heard of and watched and listened to and read, whether it is Michel Barnier, Donald Tusk, Leo Varadkar, Theresa May or the parties in Northern Ireland, everybody everywhere that I have read of has said that there is not going to be what you fear is going to happen.

Gerry Carroll: I said in my previous comments that I, frankly, would not trust the Tory Government and I would not trust the elites in Brussels. This week we saw attempts to have armed guards from the south on the border as well. We are opposed to any attempts to put any more personnel, checkpoints, guards or police on the border, because it restricts people's rights to move freely. Wherever it could potentially come from, we are opposed to it, no matter what.

Q406 **Mr Campbell:** If there is no intention to have that—and there does not appear to be from anyone anywhere, apart from a media-inspired campaign and some politicians piggybacking on that—why would people believe this nonsense about watchtowers and checkpoints? There are not going to be any. Why do people believe that there might be?

Gerry Carroll: Potentially there could be. We hear talk, as your colleague said previously, about the issue of a hard border. Leo Varadkar said previously, just two days ago, that they were going to look at putting armed guards on the border. You are saying it is coming from nowhere,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

which is not correct. I am assuming that the point you are trying to make is that you are claiming or you can give a cast-iron guarantee that it is not going to come from the British Government. Is that what you are saying?

Q407 Mr Campbell: The Taoiseach has been very clear on this all along. Whenever there have been rumours about special provision being made among the Revenue Commissioners, he said, "No, there are not." Then there was a leaked report that the Irish Army had done a whole series of estimates of how many border crossings there were around the border. Did that mean there would be a move towards infrastructure? He said, "No, there is no question of that. We are not going to do that." He has repeatedly said that, as has everyone else.

Gerry Carroll: Also, like I said, two days ago there is talk of him saying or a statement from the Dáil Éireann, anyway, saying that there are going to be armed personnel on the border. There was also a meeting in Davos three weeks ago where he was telling the rich and the wealthy of the world that there indeed might have to be patrols on the border as well. It could happen. Can you give me a guarantee that it is not going to come from the Tory Government? Potentially, that could happen to maintain their relationship and their Government with yourselves.

Q408 Mr Campbell: I do not know that anybody is in the territory of guarantees. I am more in the territory of dismissing it as a ludicrous proposition that could not work and that nobody is prepared to implement. Let us say you had these watchtowers and checkpoints that somebody from somewhere is going to implement, and personnel recruited from somewhere that nobody seems to know about. Have you been on the border much in the past few years?

Gerry Carroll: I have travelled regularly from Belfast to Dublin, yes.

Q409 Mr Campbell: I mean apart from the main routes, the main crossing points, so the 280 other crossing points.

Gerry Carroll: I have not been around the 280 crossing points.

Q410 Mr Campbell: I do not think anybody would suggest that this hard border would be constructed in such a way that all these crossing points would be manned. It would need thousands of individuals. Where are they going to come from? Has anybody suggested that to you?

Gerry Carroll: There is speculation about the potentiality of a hard border. Like I say, our position is that we are opposed to it. How that would work potentially or theoretically is not for me to say, because I am fundamentally opposed to it happening as well. Even if you are on a bus down to Dublin, people are stopped regularly on that bus, if they are perceived to be a refugee or a migrant.

Mr Campbell: That is now.

Gerry Carroll: That is happening now.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr Campbell: Yes, that is right, without any hard border.

Gerry Carroll: Yes, without any hard border. Potentially, could that happen again? Could it be increased? Could it be extended to people in the north? It is speculation. I do not have any guarantees, and you do not have any guarantees you can give me today. I would be opposed to any attempt to beef up that border or to have more checkpoints.

Mr Campbell: I will try to move on to the future now. If we got to a position, quite rapidly one hopes, that there was some kind of revised agreement, in terms of a withdrawal agreement, that allowed the UK, including Northern Ireland, to leave the EU, as they voted, what would your position then be? If on 29 March or a short time thereafter, the UK leaves under an agreement process and this mythical hard border disappears into the mists of time, from which it never should have emerged, what would your position then be, say, in a few months' time?

Gerry Carroll: You mean our position on a potential agreement that potentially might be agreed?

Q411 **Mr Campbell:** Say there was an agreement and the UK, including Northern, leaves the EU. What is your position then in relation to the border that it remains unchanged, as it is now?

Gerry Carroll: We are opposed to the border as is.

Mr Campbell: You are opposed even as it is at the moment?

Gerry Carroll: We do not want to see a border. We do not want to see people in Ireland divided north and south. We believe the border has done that. It was an undemocratic move to divide people in the north and the south. It created one state in the south that was dominated by conservative Catholicism and a state in the north that entrenched sectarianism. We want to see an end to that and a new dispensation, a new island and a new type of politics that is not dominated by corporations and the rich. We are opposed to any hard border, but we are also opposed to that division on the island of Ireland.

Q412 **Mr Campbell:** You would override the wishes of the majority of the people in Northern Ireland?

Gerry Carroll: No, we will have a democratic debate and a discussion on it.

Q413 **Nigel Mills:** Mr Carroll, I am just checking that your main concern is about infrastructure at the border and checks there. You are not worried about random compliance processes for moving goods around, if you have to do them online or in a factory or something. That is not a concern to you?

Gerry Carroll: It would be a concern as well. I was speaking to a man in my constituency recently who is being told he has to have a green card to travel south. He is a businessman, and it is potentially going to cost him a lot of money to travel to the south. I would be concerned about that as



well, if people are being forced to have extra documentation and pay more to travel somewhere they very much travel freely as is.

Q414 **Nigel Mills:** You do not think you will get mass peaceful protests about there being too much customs compliance required? That sort of protest is about infrastructure at the border.

Gerry Carroll: It is hard to say. People do not want to see their lives disturbed as it is. Any more regulation, checkpoints or fees that people have to pay to travel the distance they are travelling now is something people do not want to see. Whether they will protest against that in big numbers or not, it is hard for me to predict or say, but people certainly do not want to see it.

Chair: Mr Carroll, thank you very much indeed for being with us today. We are very grateful for your evidence.

Examination of witness

Witness: Clare Bailey MLA.

Q415 **Chair:** Ms Bailey, good morning. Thank you very much indeed for coming to see us today. You probably got a flavour of what this session is about from sitting in the audience, but we are essentially engaged in a piece of work, as you would expect, to look at the border dimension of Brexit. This is an ongoing piece of work. It will be subject to a series of reports and I have no doubt that the evidence you give to us today will enlighten us and illuminate our proceedings. Can I invite you, for three minutes or so, just to give us a quite run-down on how you and your party see the current issues surrounding Brexit and the border?

Clare Bailey: The current issues are very real and very wide. It is really important for the Committee and for the Government here to understand that while we have had a 20-year peace process so far, I would argue that we have actually instead seen a political process over a peace process, and peace in Northern Ireland has not yet been realised.

The border issue that has been brought into focus through Brexit has to be understood in a very emotional and lived-experience context, wider than trade agreements or customs borders. It is in the living memory of people, and that is very easy to stir emotive images and memories for people. That is a very real concept that really needs to be understood. The debates that I have heard around the border so far have focused on trade and the moving of goods, but we have not heard very much about the moving of people and the freedom of people to travel, especially those border communities who do this on a daily basis.

The Good Friday agreement, or Belfast agreement if you prefer, is a legally binding, international treaty; Brexit was an advisory opinion poll.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

There is no legal basis for Brexit. It has to be understood as well that two devolved regions within the United Kingdom voted to remain, one being Northern Ireland and the other Scotland. The population is split almost down the middle, but what we are hearing is that we are going ahead with Brexit because the people spoke. The people are divided, really, and it depends on how you want to divvy up those numbers. For Northern Ireland, the region that voted to remain but that is facing the consequences of Brexit, they feel that they are being brought out against their will and this is contrary to the Good Friday agreement, which is a legally binding agreement.

It had brought up an awful lot of issues in terms of citizenship for people. There was the belief that it was set within the Good Friday agreement, in terms of people's constitutional or identity status, that they could be Irish, they could be British or they could be both. Many were happy with that, but since the border and Brexit has come on board, people are now starting to look at what that is.

I am hearing stories from my constituents. There is one family in which the mother was born in the Republic of Ireland, her partner is Bulgarian and their child was born in Northern Ireland. There are problems that they are having. The mother's mother is elderly and she has to travel regularly to look after her, but because she has lived and worked and owned property in Northern Ireland, she is being told that she no longer has proper full domiciliary rights in the Republic of Ireland and therefore is being prevented from accessing services, yet her daughter can still access free education and university in Scotland, and her husband, who is Bulgarian, has settled status. Within one family, that brings a lot of issues into play.

Another man in my constituency, who is married to a Spanish woman, whose children were born in Northern Ireland, phoned the Home Office to ask what would be the conditions for his children. He was told that they would have to apply for settled status. This was later revoked by the Home Office. They said that they were wrong and asked if the children had Northern Irish passports. There is an awful lot of confusion. There is a lot of misinformation. There are no concrete proposals coming out. We keep hearing what everybody does not want—they do not want a hard border; they do not want the worst outcomes—yet we are not hearing what will be agreed and what can get through this House.

The border issue is very real. We will be facing the worst impacts of Brexit if we are to face no deal. That looks ever more increasingly likely. I believe that the head of the civil service is going to be briefing all of the parties—I got a letter yesterday from him—to set out the consequences to Northern Ireland if we are to face no Brexit deal. It is very real and our position is that there should be no border in Ireland at all, because we have not yet realised peace.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

It is the responsibility of this Government and the Secretary of State to do everything possible to try to get the Assembly and an Executive formed, up and going, because to date no real effort has been made on that one at all. To have Brexit forced upon the people, when we have no say and no representation, is just a step too far.

Q416 Chair: Thank you. The customs union is a first-world hedge against cheap produce from the developing world. It exercises that through the tariffs and quotas. Clearly that has an impact upon poor people worldwide. Would you agree with that? If you do agree with it, presumably you are opposed to the customs union.

Clare Bailey: No, I do not oppose the customs union. I do not think that there should be any change in Northern Ireland. To make any changes in Northern Ireland, you are risking the stability. I will go back to the point that we have had a political process over a peace process. The people of Northern Ireland are feeling very disillusioned and very distrustful and mistrustful of this Government, because the Good Friday/Belfast agreement has not been fully implemented. To come and try to make changes for the conditions of people in Northern Ireland, whether that be taking us out of the customs union, the regulatory alignment, putting borders in place or restricting citizenship of the European Union, is not something that we should be pushing.

In terms of third-world countries, as you are calling them, or developing countries and poverty in those, we have poverty in Northern Ireland. We have so many people in Northern Ireland who are living under the basic living income. We have had so little investment in Northern Ireland. The investment that I am seeing being touted for Northern Ireland is not conducive to a stable economy. We need to be looking at our own people. A customs union needs to stay. We need access to those European markets. We need access to our neighbours to the south and the north. We need that free trade. We are so intrinsically linked that it is hard to see how you can take us away from that.

Q417 Chair: I see. It is clear that you are content that the European Union should continue to subjugate the world's poorest.

Clare Bailey: Those are your words, not mine.

Q418 Chair: That is the natural consequence of the customs union. Can I press you on another element of the European Union, which is of course permanent structured co-operation? Is your party for or against permanent structured co-operation?

Clare Bailey: In what context, sorry?

Chair: You know what permanent structured co-operation is?

Clare Bailey: No.

Chair: It is the creation of a European defence identity—that is to say a European Union army.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Clare Bailey: There is no European Union army that I am aware of, is there?

Q419 **Chair:** There is a European army in embryonic form. The proposal is that it should be expanded and that there should be a permanent command structure, which would presumably be something that your party would be opposed to.

Clare Bailey: Of course we would. We are a party of peace and non-violence.

Q420 **Jim Shannon:** Clare, it is nice to have you at the Committee along with all the other ones before and those to follow. I am very conscious of our time, so I will try to adhere to the timescale that the Chair has indicated. The Republic of Ireland does not want a hard border; the EU does not want a hard border; the United Kingdom Government do not want a hard border. Are you of the same opinion?

Clare Bailey: Of course.

Q421 **Jim Shannon:** If we are all agreed that we do not want a hard border, then when we leave the EU on 29 March, because that is what we are referring to, then there will be no need for anything more restrictive than what there has been before. Would that be right?

Clare Bailey: That is what we are all hoping to hear. We have not heard how that is going to be implemented. We have not heard how that is going to operate. We have not heard how that is going to be rolled out. We are hearing that nobody wants one; we are not hearing how that is going to be managed, and that is what the people need to hear.

Q422 **Jim Shannon:** The point I am trying to make, Clare, is that if all of those different Governments and institutions are saying that there is no need for a hard border, as they are, then their commitment to not having a hard border is apparent through the words that they have spoken. If that is the case, there should not be any worry for anyone for having untold restrictions on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in the future. The point I am trying to make is that if that is the case, then we should not have anything to fear from leaving the EU. Would that be right?

Clare Bailey: That is the question that this Government need to come forward and answer. If we are leaving the European Union, if we are coming out of the customs union, if we are going to set up with the World Trade Organisation or do deals with other countries around the world, then we have to check the movement of goods somewhere. We need to know what those arrangements are going to be. If it is not going to be a hard border, with a customs set-up, then we would like to hear from you what it is going to be.

Q423 **Jim Shannon:** We certainly, through the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, have had some indications of methodologies on doing the



movements. A quick example is in my constituency I have a fairly large agrifood sector. They have two factories in Northern Ireland and three factories in the Republic of Ireland. Their products cross the border three times. There are technical measures that record it as they cross the border. There is no reason why that could not be the methodology to continue as they do now for the future. The point I am really getting to, Clare, is that there is nothing to fear from leaving the EU if it does not affect the border situation as it is now. All the indications coming from everyone at this moment in time seem to be along those lines: that there is nothing to fear.

Clare Bailey: On the island of Ireland, if there is going to be difference for the agrifood sector, as you have identified already, there are serious concerns coming up from those within the sector and farmers as well. If we have to then allow the free movement across the island, if there are farms on the border, if there is produce, products, goods and services moving around freely, then it is going to have to be checked somewhere, because to leave the UK area and move into an EU area, it is going to have to be checked. Correct me if I am wrong.

Q424 **Jim Shannon:** I am not just suggesting this; there is a factual, evidential base that this is coming from. The CEO of Lakeland Dairies, Michael Hanley—he is the man at the top of the tree—says that when we leave the EU we will deal with that system as it is; nothing will change. There will be an administrative methodology put in place to ensure that the products can cross the border. Again, it goes back to the point that we can always have a reason for saying “no” to something, but when we have solutions the solutions have to be accepted as well. There are solutions.

By the way, just for the record, I am a member of the Ulster Farmers’ Union. They certainly do not speak for me, nor do they speak for my neighbours either, just to have that on record. Of course, many of us are Brexiteers and feel that leaving would be for the best. What we are saying is that we can do all these things and they can happen. When the people in charge of companies who would be in the middle of any difficulties, if there were any difficulties, say there is nothing to fear from it, then I would suggest to you that there is nothing to fear from it.

Clare Bailey: The other big dairies that you are talking about are setting up factories and premises on both sides of the border now, so that they will be able to continue doing their business. That is really unfair, when you start to go not to the top but to the bottom, to the farmers who do not have the huge industry behind them, who are not at the top of the tree. Think of the ones at the bottom of the tree. They will neither be able to afford nor survive any extra cost coming on to their business.

Jim Shannon: With due respect, Lakeland Dairies represents somewhere in excess of 200 farming families across the whole of Northern Ireland. Their employment goes even beyond that, to as much as maybe 500 or 600. Be under no illusions that the CEO speaks for a firm. He is not



HOUSE OF COMMONS

speaking for himself at the top of tree in a warm office. He is speaking because he knows how that system works and he is also speaking for all those dairymen who put their milk into his products. There are lots of positives and there are ways of doing things; that is the point I am coming to.

Q425 Lady Hermon: Thank you very much indeed, Clare, for coming this morning. Clare, in your evidence you sounded very critical of the preparations, or perhaps I should say the lack of preparations, for EU citizens who are living and have lived for a considerable period of time in Northern Ireland, have integrated in Northern Ireland and have worked in Northern Ireland. What more would you like to see done by the civil service in Northern Ireland, and indeed by the Home Office?

Clare Bailey: I would like to see real, proper, practical information coming before them. We are sitting here just a few weeks from the exit date. This is people's lives that we are talking about. I had a friend who left Northern Ireland last Thursday. Her mother and herself have been living, working and studying in Northern Ireland for a considerable length of time, but they could not get any straight answers. They decided that this was not the place for them and they left last Thursday. This is not an isolated incident. They just cannot get proper information and therefore cannot plan for their futures. We are weeks away from this.

When they contact the Home Office, for example, the Home Office is very confused in the evidence and the information that it is giving out. It still talks about a Northern Irish passport, for example. This is not okay. On top of that, we are having people with families, with children in schools, with jobs, with property and with mortgages, who do not know where they are going to be in a few weeks, because information has not been given to them.

Q426 Lady Hermon: The problem is with the Home Office and the lack of information and understanding about the basic facts in Northern Ireland?

Clare Bailey: That is one issue, certainly. The Home Office does not deal with me as an MLA. The Home Office will always tell me to refer to an MP. Even if I contact the Home Office and try to get information on behalf of people, I am shut down from accessing information from them as well.

Lady Hermon: That is ridiculous.

Clare Bailey: It has always been.

Q427 Lady Hermon: That is ridiculous. What about local information from the Departments. Surely to goodness meetings have been organised. I am aware that meetings have been organised in Queen's to talk about EU rights. Have you been able to attend those? Were those helpful?

Clare Bailey: Many organisations, charities and people working within those sectors or for those communities are doing as much as they can to get out there, but it goes back to the point that we still do not have any agreed outcome. We still do not know what is happening at the other side



HOUSE OF COMMONS

of 29 March. Therefore, we can only give supposition and we can only give hypotheticals. We can tell people to prepare for everything but we do not know what is actually coming. That is a huge burden to be putting on an individual and a huge cost as well.

Q428 Lady Hermon: Yes, so what are you calling for in particular? Is it better information from the Home Office?

Clare Bailey: Decisions need to be made, yes. We cannot wait until D-day. We need people to be ready.

Lady Hermon: That is as a matter of urgency?

Clare Bailey: Yes.

Q429 Lady Hermon: You also said something in your evidence, and I listened very carefully to how you described it. You said that the border issue has to be understood in a very emotional context, that it stirs memories and emotions. It does stir memories and emotions for a great many people. In terms of the people you speak for, the people you are speaking with, is it an anxiety that they have, that we are going to go back to the bad old days of the Troubles?

Clare Bailey: There are myriad conversations, thoughts and memories being provoked, but it comes right down to the very daily practical things for people who live in the border regions, people whose land or farms or work business, school and family life cross that border several times. For some people, it is 20 times a day, if you are going from home to work to schools to shops. It comes to that very practical aspect. Others can be very resilient and resistant to a border, but it is everything in between as well, to be honest. It is a whole raft of things.

Again, it is the lack of clarity and the fact that there is a very strong opposition to the fact that the Good Friday agreement, or the Belfast agreement, had not been realised over 20 years. We are still struggling to have the full implementation of that while we are facing the impact of Brexit, which is not a legally binding referendum.

Lady Hermon: In your view.

Q430 Ian Paisley: Clare, did I hear you right? At the end of your introduction, I wrote down that you said, "There should be no border at all in Ireland." That is your position.

Clare Bailey: Yes.

Q431 Ian Paisley: Do you accept that is completely contrary to the Belfast agreement?

Clare Bailey: If Brexit is going to be bringing the border—

Q432 Ian Paisley: No, the position that there should be no border at all in Ireland; that is completely contrary to the Belfast agreement.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Clare Bailey: We have a seamless one. Correct me then. We would like to maintain a seamless border then. I will change that.

Q433 **Ian Paisley:** We have a de facto border and a de jure border. There is a real border in Ireland. We have a customs border in terms of our currency and in terms of our VAT and our trade relationship. There is a de facto border.

Clare Bailey: I change my words to, "There should be no hardening of the existing border."

Q434 **Ian Paisley:** Okay, because that would have changed things quite dramatically. In the absence of an Assembly, how should Northern Ireland's voice be represented in what is left of the current negotiations and perhaps in future negotiations on the issue to do with Europe and Northern Ireland?

Clare Bailey: That is a great question, because Brexit is going to be decided here, at Westminster, where your party are the only party—outside of Lady Sylvia Hermon, who is an independent—that takes their seats. We have Sinn Féin elected and they do not take their seats, so we do not have a voice either.

Q435 **Ian Paisley:** Do you think Sinn Féin should be here to take their seats?

Clare Bailey: I am not here to speak for Sinn Féin. Please do not ask me those questions. You can ask them directly.

Q436 **Ian Paisley:** They will not come. I must say thank you for coming, because they will not come to even answer questions like these.

Clare Bailey: Thank you for the invite, because it is more than I have ever had from the Northern Ireland Office or the Secretary of State as well. That causes a problem.

Ian Paisley: That is three "thank yous". I am overwhelmed with "thank yous".

Clare Bailey: It would be good if maybe the Secretary of State would engage in Northern Ireland, maybe be present and hear voices from right across the elected spectrum in Northern Ireland. That would be a really good, positive start to hearing what our input for Brexit would be.

Q437 **Ian Paisley:** Obviously, ideally, if the Assembly was up and running, that voice could be heard at local level in terms of the myriad voices that are represented from Northern Ireland. Are you hopeful that the Assembly will be back this year?

Clare Bailey: Absolutely not.

Q438 **Ian Paisley:** Paul Bew, one of the authors and advisers to David Trimble in terms of the Belfast agreement, takes the opposite view to you in terms of the interpretation of the withdrawal agreement that Theresa May brought forward. He said that is the thing that actually undermines the



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Belfast agreement, not Brexit. He spelt it out very clearly: because it changed the status of Northern Ireland, because Europe would be imposing rules and changes on Northern Ireland that we would have no say in, whilst currently, in terms of the Belfast agreement, we do have a say on all of those things. Do you accept his interpretation?

Clare Bailey: I believe that Lord Trimble is to test that in court. Correct me if I am wrong on that one again. I await the court outcome on that one. Again, I go back to what I said: Brexit is not conducive to the Good Friday agreement in any way, shape or form. They cannot co-exist and we would like to see the full implementation of the legally binding international treaty that is the Belfast/Good Friday agreement. Our position is that the withdrawal agreement with the protocol for Northern Ireland and the backstop is the best of the worst outcomes that we could have hoped for.

Q439 **Mr Campbell:** You talked, Clare, about the issue of the hardening of the border. Do you accept or believe some of these wilder stories about what it might constitute? We have read about them, even though everybody denies that there are going to be any structures on the border. The Taoiseach has done that; the Prime Minister has done it; Europe has done it; everybody has done it. There still seems to be this ongoing recurrent theme that there could be a hard border. What is your view?

Clare Bailey: My view is that I would like yourselves and this Government to come forward and tell us how that will be. We are not hearing any information. If there is no deal—we are weeks away from 29 March; no agreement has been made and the legal deadlines are rapidly passing; every debate that comes up is a U-turn somewhere; everybody is changing their position—it is very hard for me to sit and tell you what the reaction from those in Ireland, north or south, is going to be. What we need is information.

Q440 **Mr Campbell:** Everybody involved in the process, all the negotiators, has all sought to give reassurances, for whatever reason, that there will be no hardening of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic. That has been done in the context of no agreement. Varadkar, Theresa May and Barnier, through the past 18 months, have all kept repeating this ad nauseam: that there would not be any hardening of the border in the context of there still not being an agreement. Do you still think that there might be, despite what they have all said?

Clare Bailey: I would like to know how. I would like the information on how that would be maintained. If there are to be customs checks, for example, how is that going to be done? How will that be managed?

Q441 **Mr Campbell:** How would they do it in such a way that everybody could avoid them with ease?

Clare Bailey: And keep the border as seamless and transparent as it is. Yes, I would like to know how that is possible.



Q442 **Chair:** Clare, thank you ever so much for coming to see us today. We are grateful for the investment in time and effort you have put into our evidence session. You can always be sure, whoever is out there listening, that we will always listen to what you have to say. I hope you will come back to appear before us in the future. Thank you very much indeed.

Examination of witness

Witness: Jim Allister MLA.

Q443 **Chair:** Mr Allister, good morning and welcome to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. It is a pleasure to see you here. I would be grateful if you could give us a very quick three-minute run-down on how you and your party see the current situation in respect of Brexit and the border.

Jim Allister: You are very challenging, Mr Chairman. Thank you very much. My starting point is the democratic compulsion that we must leave. That is the decision. Therefore, I utterly deprecate the totally spurious and contrived arguments that have been raised to try to thwart us leaving.

When it comes to the issue of leaving as we are today, I am concerned about two threats. The first threat is the iniquitous backstop, because the backstop would detach Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom. The primary and constitutionally very significant way in which it does that is it takes Northern Ireland, or rather leaves Northern Ireland, alone within the UK, within the EU customs union. We legally, constitutionally, internationally are part of a customs union other than the customs union to which our nation belongs. That is utterly antithetical to the Union and is something that is meant to be so, I suspect.

Then of course, because we are also to stay for goods in the single market, it creates the second threat of an Irish Sea border, which is equally antithetical to the Union, because of what it means for goods that are our supply chain from GB. In 2016, £11 billion of goods came from GB to Northern Ireland, as opposed to £2 billion coming from the Republic to Northern Ireland, yet we are to create a regulatory border down the Irish Sea, courtesy of the backstop, which would cripple and hinder the economic development of Northern Ireland, diverge it away from the UK and align it with the customs territory of which it is a part. That, no doubt, is the game plan. The backstop is utterly toxic and it is not a question of its duration; it is a question of sovereignty. A backstop for one day is equally as unacceptable as a backstop for 10 years because of that.

My second area of concern is these fatuous arguments that have been raised about the threat of a hard border. What is a hard border? I find it astounding that we have a draft international agreement that willy-nilly



HOUSE OF COMMONS

uses the phrase “hard border” and never once defines it. In the protocol we make the commitment to avoid a hard border, but no one has ever, in the 500 pages, said what a hard border is. Surely that is the least to which we are entitled. That leaves scope, as has been fully exploited, for hysterical descriptions of a hard border.

You see it most frequently, if you see a television screen, talking about the border and then they simultaneously flash soldiers on the border. We never had soldiers on the border because of customs difference. We had soldiers on the border because of terrorism. That to me is totally disingenuous, because the whole notion of a hard border is built on a hoax. Who is going to build this border? Dublin says no and London says no, so who is providing it? Of course, in EU law the only one who could provide it or could be compelled to provide it is the Republic, because of their treaty obligation to maintain the EU’s border if it is in their territory. Are Mr Barnier and Mr Juncker going to make Mr Varadkar physically partition Ireland? If so, those who want to protest know who they should be protesting against when it comes to that.

The second utterly fatuous concern that is raised is that in some way this agreement breaches the Belfast agreement. It does no such thing. The Supreme Court has already said that there is nothing in the Belfast agreement to hinder Brexit. It does not impinge upon the Belfast agreement at all. The EU was not a party to the Belfast agreement. Membership of the EU is not a pre-condition to the Belfast agreement. All of the structures and institutions of the Belfast agreement, like them or dislike them, continue with or without UK membership of the EU. It is totally disingenuous to say that the threat that exists to the Belfast agreement comes from Brexit. It does not and that has coloured—deliberately, by many—the hysterical debate that there has been about Brexit. It has been a weapon used to try to thwart the far more important weapon: the decision of the people of the United Kingdom to leave the EU.

Q444 Kate Hoey: Welcome, Jim. You have said that you would be relaxed, although you have perhaps not used that word, about leaving on WTO terms. You have heard the reaction from so many people about chaos, jumping over the cliff, catastrophe and all of that. Would you just like to say to Northern Ireland business, and particularly Northern Ireland farmers, why a WTO arrangement is not catastrophic?

Jim Allister: A good deal is preferable, but leaving on world trade terms is by far preferable to what is on offer. I want to say something first of all to those who have whipped up to the hysteria. I identify the fact that they are largely the same people who whipped up the same hysteria when it was suggested that we would not join the euro. We had the same script from the same people and it all turned out to be utterly bogus. I believe it would be bogus.

There are two things. I am sure there would be many adjustments required on world trade terms; fair enough. I believe the first thing it



would be is a catalyst to bring the EU to the table. The EU has not in any serious sense been at the table. It has been playing the fool with the United Kingdom in these negotiations. The first thing that would bring it to the table in serious terms is no deal, because they, and particularly their frontline state the Republic of Ireland, would be the party that would find that most difficult.

I also say to our farmers that in the worst-case scenario—for example, that there are tariffs on agrifood goods—there is a point of that argument that is never expounded. It is the point of that argument that was ignored by the head of the civil service in Northern Ireland in his missive yesterday of hysteria about Brexit. The point that was ignored is that in those circumstances the effect would be a massive opportunity for the agrifood industry in Northern Ireland, because if the Republic of Ireland's imports to Northern Ireland were priced out of the market, as tariffs would price them out of the market, then there is a huge supply gap to be filled, which Northern Ireland is perfectly located and equipped to fill.

I believe that the opportunities of Brexit have been ignored and played down. Remember this: only 44% of the UK's trade is with the EU. The rest is with the rest of the world, a lot of it on world trade terms. It works. We trade with our biggest single partner, the United States, essentially on world trade terms. We trade around the world in that business. It is not some unheard of anathema. It is something that can work. It is not perfect, but it is better than being shut off as part of your own kingdom and ushered into a foreign arrangement.

Q445 Kate Hoey: The Permanent Secretary wrote that letter yesterday. Do you think it was right for a Permanent Secretary to write a very political letter, in a very divided country, over this issue?

Jim Allister: In the context in which he did it, no, for two reasons. First, I am still waiting to hear from the Permanent Secretary, if he wants to get into this territory, about what the threat to the Northern Ireland economy of an Irish Sea border would be. He has not produced a page on that, but he can produce multiple pages on the threat of Brexit. Why? Does that not speak to politics? I would have thought it does.

My second major criticism—and I have written to him this morning outlining these—is that he totally ignores the opportunities of Brexit. It was an unbalanced production, which reeks of politics in the circumstance where he has not presented the other side of the coin.

Q446 Ian Paisley: Jim, it is good to see you here. Thank you for your comments. In terms of those who are campaigning for an extension to article 50, do you believe that is a deliberate ploy to try to bring about the end of Brexit?

Jim Allister: For most of them, yes. The clue is in the identity of those who largely are promoting it, and their stance speaks to that. They see the situation that, legally, Parliament, in its sovereignty, decided that,



HOUSE OF COMMONS

come 29 March, we leave. It is not a conditional leaving in the Act. It is an unconditional leaving, which means we leave with or without a deal. Those who are petrified about our real, effective, prosperous Brexit want to upset the apple cart of leaving.

Q447 **Ian Paisley:** You say “most of them”. Do you believe that there are those who recognise that it might be a necessity for a short technical extension to get legislation through?

Jim Allister: If you had a proper deal well and done, and you needed a couple of extra weeks to dot the i’s, stroke the t’s and get it through this place, I do not think anyone would be throwing up their arms. People will certainly object, those who voted Brexit, if they see it as a device to thwart Brexit.

Q448 **Ian Paisley:** In your view, if there was an effort to bring about a second referendum in the UK about whether we should leave or remain, first of all, what do you think would actually happen to the body politic if that was allowed? Secondly, what would happen if it were to overturn the original views expressed by the people in 2016, which have not yet been implemented?

Jim Allister: I have a couple of points on that. First of all, it would be rightly interpreted as the political elite saying to the masses, “We know better than you. Now we are giving you another chance to do the right thing.” Of course, that is the pattern of the EU.

Ian Paisley: They have a track record.

Jim Allister: They have never had a second referendum anywhere other than to try to overturn a rejection. That is the first thing. The thing that bemuses me about this proposal for a second referendum is not only do they want a second referendum, but they want to keep off the ballot paper the option of a real leaving. They want the referendum to be something about, “Do you want Mrs May’s atrocious deal or do you want to remain?” The remain question has already been settled. It was settled in June 2016.

The question, actually, if we were going to be correct about it, would be, “Do you want Mrs May’s deal or do you want to leave on world trade terms?” To say that the remain option, if we are respecting the previous referendum—and they all tell us they do, though if they were respecting it that would not even be on the ballot paper—is the only option other than the deal is absolutely preposterous.

Q449 **Ian Paisley:** Very briefly, Kate asked you about Mr Sterling’s letter. He mentioned in that, however, the detail of unemployment and the spectre of mass unemployment if there was a no-deal exit from the EU. At the minute, Northern Ireland has the highest levels of employment and the highest levels of inward investment ever. How did that point make you feel, when you read that issue about unemployment?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Jim Allister: It made me say to myself, "Is this really the head of our civil service, who should at his heart, and in every respect, have the interests of Northern Ireland foremost? Is this really our head of the civil service talking down the prospects of Northern Ireland if it dares to follow the national will of leaving the EU?" That is how it made me feel. It was wholly inappropriate.

Q450 **Kate Hoey:** Do you think he would have shown the letter to the Secretary of State before he sent it out?

Jim Allister: I do not know that, but if he did I suspect the Secretary of State, if she agreed to meet him, would have had no difficulty in endorsing it.

Q451 **Lady Hermon:** Thank you, Jim, for coming and being forthright—definitely forthright. I will not read back to you the words that you have used to describe the backstop, but I will ask you this. You have spent a lot of time talking about the backstop, and you know very well indeed that we will never actually get into the backstop unless we have a deal, and then we have the transition period.

Jim Allister: We will never get out of the backstop if we have a deal of this sort.

Q452 **Lady Hermon:** The Attorney General described the backstop as being as uncomfortable for the EU as for the UK.

Jim Allister: And he said there was no exit.

Q453 **Lady Hermon:** Let us go back, Jim. You have used all sorts of language to describe the backstop. No one is left any doubt of what you think about it. It will all become academic if we do not get a deal. MPs have been asked to vote next week on a series of consecutive days on a deal, no deal or an extension. You have talked about the backstop, as I say, at length. Are you really saying that you are comfortable that the United Kingdom leaves the EU without a deal?

Jim Allister: As opposed to Mrs May's deal, with the backstop, the answer is yes. I am not comfortable. I would have much preferred a proper agreement. I would have much preferred the British Government to have conducted a genuine, bona fide negotiation instead of rolling over every time, but we are where we are.

Q454 **Lady Hermon:** Thank you. I have got the words; that is exactly what I was about to say: we are where we are. MPs are being asked to vote next week on this deal, with whatever is going to come back from the Attorney General Geoffrey Cox's negotiations in Brussels about the backstop. In legislation, Brexit day is set for 29 March. That is not going to change. Are you really saying to the people of Northern Ireland that they would be infinitely better off without a deal come next week?

Jim Allister: I am saying to them they would be infinitely better off—



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Lady Hermon: There is no other deal. There is no other deal. There is no time for any other deal.

Jim Allister: The alternative was Mrs May's deal. They would be infinitely better off without Mrs May's deal. If that means that the Government have failed, because of EU belligerence, to improve that and the choice is to leave or to stay, then we leave.

Q455 **Lady Hermon:** So you are saying you are comfortable?

Jim Allister: I would not say I am comfortable. I would have much rather had a proper deal. I would have much rather that we had a Government that early on had prepared for leaving with no deal. Being where we are, if the choice was the backstop or no deal, then no deal is by far preferable.

Q456 **Lady Hermon:** We end up with no deal and you will know perfectly well that the Republic of Ireland remains within the EU, so that the border becomes an external border for the EU. There will be a hard border.

Jim Allister: Those are the key words—

Lady Hermon: Jim, let me ask the question, please. The Chief Constable of the PSNI, who has had a long, distinguished service both in the RUC and in the PSNI, has repeatedly and consistently said that we must not underestimate the threat from dissident republicans and the New IRA along the border. I will read to you what he said: that those who say the PSNI and others are "overplaying the border" and Brexit in policing terms are "simply wrong". Can you recognise the threat from dissident republicans if there is a hard border and no deal? Do you accept the analysis of the Chief Constable?

Jim Allister: I can accept a Chief Constable playing politics.

Lady Hermon: Please, Jim. Please do not.

Jim Allister: Let us deconstruct what he said. Is the Chief Constable, and are you endorsing it, really saying that we must cut our cloth on Brexit in order to pander to a terrorist threat, that in case someone would dare to take up the gun again, we must shape the situation so that there is no incentive? Have we really got to the point where we are building our politics and our international agreements on pandering to terrorism? We did it once. Once was enough.

Q457 **Lady Hermon:** I am absolutely refusing to allow you to say that the Chief Constable is playing politics. I absolutely refute that. That is an appalling thing for you to say about the present Chief Constable. I refute that entirely.

Jim Allister: He has been playing politics in embracing the anti-Brexit language of the anti-Brexiters and in talking up the threat from terrorism as a reason for not having a proper Brexit.

Q458 **Lady Hermon:** Jim, have you ever served in the police?



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Jim Allister: No, I have not.

Q459 **Lady Hermon:** You think that you are better qualified?

Jim Allister: You asked me for my view. I am entitled to express my view. You may not like my view but you asked for it.

Q460 **Lady Hermon:** I am asking you: do you think you are better qualified? You have clearly indicated that you are better qualified—

Jim Allister: I am not better qualified on security issues, no.

Q461 **Lady Hermon:** With the greatest respect then, surely the Chief Constable has a duty to warn about the policing implications of a hard border and no deal. He has a duty to do so.

Jim Allister: The first duty of the Chief Constable is to say, "Whatever the political arrangements, I will police them." That is his first duty.

Q462 **Lady Hermon:** We have a policing issue if there is going to be a hard border. You cannot ignore the fact that there will be a significant play by Sinn Féin, if there were ever to be a hardening of the border and no deal.

Jim Allister: What is a hardening of the border?

Lady Hermon: Any extra camera or any checks; there will have to be.

Jim Allister: We are going to pander to terrorism because of a few cameras?

Q463 **Lady Hermon:** Sorry, Jim; please let me finish the question. You are here as a witness. We are very grateful for you coming. The Assembly is not sitting. We are appreciative of you being here, but can I just finish the question? You will know as well as I do that Sinn Féin will use every single election. We have local council elections coming up very soon, and Assembly elections hopefully, when we have the Assembly up and running again, and of course general elections. Sinn Féin will undoubtedly exploit any hardening of the border to agitate for a border poll. Do you accept that? Do you accept how divisive a no-deal Brexit will be in Northern Ireland? Can you see that?

Jim Allister: No, I do not see it in those terms. I have no difficulty in accepting that Sinn Féin, being expert agitators and having no difficulty in the past in embracing the concept of terrorism, will certainly seek to exploit, but I do not accept for one minute that Unionist remainers will suddenly become republicans. I am sure I could use you as an example, if I dared. I am sure as a Unionist you would not be persuaded to be a republican by virtue of us leaving the EU.

Lady Hermon: I am a Unionist. Please do not make it personal.

Jim Allister: I was endorsing that view.

Lady Hermon: It is a personalised attack.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Jim Allister: I do not think that there are any Unionists who voted remain, no matter how enthusiastically, who suddenly, because of Brexit, will become republicans. Sinn Féin can agitate as they will for a border poll, but I do not believe, if there were one, it would change the outcome.

Q464 **Lady Hermon:** Do you think we will see a border poll in the next five years?

Jim Allister: No, but the real reason why nationalism, both in Scotland and in Ireland, is so agitated about Brexit is they can see that a prosperous United Kingdom as a result of a successful Brexit breeds prosperity for all of its people. Therefore, the appetite for nationalism wanes. That is why nationalism in Scotland and Ireland is so apoplectic about Brexit: because they fear the success of Brexit diminishing the appetite for nationalism.

Q465 **Lady Hermon:** Let us just put a date in the diary that, five years hence, you and I will have a conversation about the outcome of Brexit.

Jim Allister: Fair enough.

Q466 **Jim Shannon:** Jim, thank you for coming along and thanks for your thoughts today. They are very much my thoughts; I just wanted to let you know that. The Ulster Farmers' Union has taken a big stance and said that it represents the views of the Ulster Farmers' Union. This is my introduction. As a member of the Ulster Farmers' Union, I have a very different opinion. My neighbours have a very different opinion. In your thoughts and your discussions with the electorate across Northern Ireland, how representative is the Ulster Farmers' Union, at this moment, of its grassroots opinion?

I have a second question. If there should be any delay whatsoever in us leaving the EU, do you share the opinion that I have and many others have? I have thought about it long and I have discussed it with many other people. If this sovereign Parliament does not respect the views of the referendum, many people feel that potentially there will be a rise in the right wing politically across the whole of the United Kingdom and there will be a day of retribution for those Members who represent Brexiteer seats and do not represent the views of their electors. Those are my two questions.

Jim Allister: On the first one, yes, the farmers' union has foolishly got itself out of step with the predominant view in the farming community. I represent in the Assembly quite a farming constituency. I would be fairly confident that is the view in that constituency.

On the second point, any successful thwarting of Brexit will have generational impacts on two fronts. For many people, some of whom have not bothered to vote for years until they voted in the referendum, it will drive them back to saying, "What is the point? They just walk all over us. There is no point in voting." It will diminish turnout. Secondly, it will enhance the field for those who can play, some more appropriately than



HOUSE OF COMMONS

others, on the thwarting of Brexit by the political elite. It would be something that, for a generation or more, would sow a harvest that would not be pleasant to reap.

Chair: That is a good point on which to draw our proceedings to a conclusion. Mr Allister, thank you very much indeed for being with us here today. We have certainly enjoyed your evidence and we will reflect upon it. Thank you.