

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code:	2021/51/201
Creator(s):	Department of Foreign Affairs
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

news from Labour

ISSUED BY THE LABOUR PARTY MEDIA OFFICE

Chief media spokesperson: David Hill
John Smith House, 150 Walworth Road, London SE17 1JT. Direct lines (0171) 277 3393/4/5/6/7. Switchboard (0171) 701 1234. Night line (0171) 277 3393

30 January 1997
EMBARGO: 15.30 HRS

SPEECH BY DR MARJORIE MOWLAM MP SHADOW NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY

ON THE REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF PARADES AND MARCHES

Labour

All news releases are issued on a check against delivery basis and any portion of the speech not actually delivered should be regarded as private and confidential

©DFA/2021/51/201

Madam Speaker,

May I thank the Secretary of State for his statement today.

And thanks to the authors - Dr Peter North, Father Oliver Crilly and the Very Reverend John Dunlop - and their staff for this thorough and useful report.

It addresses issues of great significance which in the end require politicians to make political judgements.

At heart, this issue is about the rule of law.

We believe that the rule of law is paramount and we hope all parties in the House will join us in fully supporting the rule of law.

The review conducted by Dr Peter North and his colleagues, was demanded by the events at Drumcree last year when, as the RUC former Chief Constable said, "the consent to comply with the rule of law did not exist".

Last summer the police were put in an impossible situation.

This House has a duty to do all we can to prevent such a situation to arising again.

The security forces in Northern Ireland enforce the will of this House with day to day courage and determination. We should not ask them to play piggy in the middle.

In August, we saw a glimmer of hope when - as a result of a clear Government decision alongside local efforts by the Hon Member for Foyle and Mr Alistair Simpson of the Apprentice Boys - the tensions of the situation were effectively contained.

Madam Speaker we must keep this problem in proportion.

Of the many hundreds of parades that occurred last year only a very small handful created problems.

Every effort must be made to ensure that wherever possible local agreement is reached through discussion and mediation - as the report acknowledges.

Only where those efforts are exhausted should other, more formal mechanisms, be employed.

To those who say the recommendations of this report could breach their fundamental rights,

I say this.

The right to march is a fundamental human right which we support and which is fully supported by this report

©DFA/2021/51/201

I quote, "The right to peaceful free assembly should be protected".

But, as my Hon Friend, the Leader of the Opposition would say, all rights carry responsibilities.

The responsibility in this case is to take account of the likely effect exercising your right to march may have on relationships with other parts of the community.

Madam Speaker,

The cost of the events of last Summer - in terms of the loss of life and the loss of trust - cannot be counted.

The financial costs can.

The RUC estimate an extra £13 million in their costs alone.

It is a price still being paid by everyone in Northern Ireland in terms of lost opportunities, lost investment and lost hope.

This report is no panacea.

And there are areas where further examination - either by the Government or by a Commission - is clearly asked for - like the content of a Code of Conduct or the length of the period of notice for parades.

Will the Secretary of State enter into immediate discussion with us and others so that by the end of February there is consensus and continued bipartisanship about the areas that can be put in place either legislatively or administratively immediately in March so that any Government can be better prepared for the 1997 marching season.

I agree with the Secretary of State, it is important to get this right - we will just be storing up trouble for the years ahead if we don't. But unless we act on the guts of the report, the staged approach recommended by the Secretary of State will be undermined.

The members of the review team, after thoroughly examining the views of all interested parties have recommended that, on balance, what is central is that an independent commission should be created, that it should be not an advisory body, but its conclusions should have the force of law - subject of course to appeal and review.

We support the recommendation and would like the Secretary of State to explain to the House why he feels that further consultations are necessary on this point?

What views will he seek that have not already been sought by the Reviewers? And further, why does he think that - in just eight weeks - he will be able to improve on the conclusions that those conducting this review reached over five months?

©DFA/2021/51/201
IRISH EMBASSY --->00 353 1 4754505
30/01 '97 18:28

Will he clarify further why he feels that a Commission would be taking over the powers of the RUC? My understanding from the Report is that the RUC would both retain the power to ask for any decision to be reviewed by the Secretary of State as well as maintaining operational flexibility.

Madam Speaker,

We have been constructively critical and tried to make positive suggestions on this issue for over 18 months urging the Secretary of State to take further action.

We are not in the business of casting blame, but of accepting responsibility.

We have co-operated successfully with the Government throughout the past 18 months - most recently over the decommissioning Bill - and we will continue to give bi-partisan support over the search for peace in Northern Ireland.

We offer the Secretary of State our full support again now for the legislation we urge him to bring forward based on this report.

ENDS

©DFA/2021/51/201

30/01 '97 18:29 IRISH EMBASSY --->00 353 1 4754505 PG 02