

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code:	2021/51/449
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.

Parades

Confidential

Sec. State Mo Mowlam's Meetings with Resident Groups

Lower Ormeau

1. The Secretary of State met with six members of the Lower Ormeau Concerned Community at the LORAG office. She was accompanied byAdam Ingram and a light security detail. The meeting lasted about 45 minutes. Mo Mowlam was very much in listening mode and, as Michael Goodman of the LOCC told me, did not say much more than she said later to the press. Her primary emphasis was on direct dialogue (interestingly, she assured them that she did not think they were a Sinn Féin front). The LOCC pointed out that they have for the last five years being trying without much success to engage the local Ballynafeigh Orange Lodge in dialogue. Among their other concerns was the need to avoid the kind of heavy handed and at times brutal policing which was imposed on the Lower Ormeau community when loyalist parades were pushed through. The LOCC said that the Secretary of State had to make a political decision on the parades issue and that any independent fair observer would ban parades there. They had yet to have a formal meeting with the Parades Commission. They were concerned that members of the Commission were not sympathetic and that it was a cosmetic exercise. Mowlam said that she would be concerned if the LOCC refused to deal with the Parades Commission.

2. Goodman said that he believed that the Secretary of State was making a genuine attempt to listen. She was "disarmingly down to earth" and "didn't behave like a Secretary of State", feet on the table, mug of tea in hand. [I detected a sense that Mo Mowlam confuses republicans, probably as much as she disorientates unionists; unlike Mayhew - over-bearing, arrogant, patronising, with just a whiff of idiocy- Mowlam is not easily recognised or characterised as the enemy.]

3. When the meeting ended, Mowlam met and chatted with the mother of one of the five victims of the Sean Graham bookies massacre in 1992 (subsequent loyalist taunting about this during a parade sparked the formation of the LOCC and local opposition to parades there.)

©DFA/2021/51/449

Dunloy

4. Mo Mowlam's meeting with the residents of Dunloy came when the village was particularly despondent. While she said little, they felt that she was there to listen and the mere fact of her presence was encouraging. Tony Shivers, who has taken a lead in the village on the parades issue, said that her visit showed them some respect. They told her that the village had never played the numbers game; if they had, they could have packed out the village with supporters. They said that if the RUC checked their videos, they would discover that much of the loyalist crowd there last Sunday were of the rent-a-mob variety (and included such trouble makers as Pauline Gilmore). The RUC should have faced them down from the outset. If it had been left to local loyalists, the crowd would have been much reduced. They told the Secretary of State that their main disappointment was with the RUC.

Garvaghy Road

5. Breandán MacCionnaith was elected as a Portadown councillor with a total vote of 1,493 votes. Fellow resident and running mate Joe Duffy was also elected with 312 votes. This, he believes, should end the issue of whether he does or does not represent the views of the Garvaghy residents. As regards his meeting with the Secretary of State, he was concerned that the Secretary of State "was too good to be wholesome". The "friendly thing about her" meant that everyone took to her but he feared that she would use this to compel the Garvaghy residents to allow a partial parade down the road. Given her popularity, the residents of the road might well find themselves isolated if they objected. According to MacCionnaith, she hinted that the decision would be hers. At the same time, she said that any decision she would make would be conditioned by the fact that on the day matters were decided at an operational level by the RUC - "back to square one", as he commented. She was challenged on this with references to the police's determination during the miners' strike to stop thousands of them moving around England. She was also challenged to restate her view, given earlier this year to them, that the Garvaghy Road issue was "black and white" and that there was no role for the Parade Commission. She confirmed that it was still in her view "black and white" but added that there was a need for dialogue and accommodation. (Incidentally, prior to her meeting

©DFA/2021/51/449

with the Garvaghy Road residents, she met with the family of Robert Hamill who died following a sectarian beating in Portadown.)

Comment

6. Alex Attwood asked me yesterday what Mo Mowlam was up to meeting resident groups on the eve of polling. He was clearly upset by the prospect of Sinn Féin gains at the local elections, particularly in West Belfast and indicated that the Secretary of State's tour was unhelpful to the SDLP. (A comment reportedly made by Adams yesterday that it was too soon to count the SDLP out had incensed Attwood. Adams, he said, had promised three times to outpoll the SDLP and had failed to do so yet.) I said that one of the resident groups had made the point that she had met them before becoming Secretary of State and had promised to do so in office. As for timing, I speculated that she might have wanted to be in a position to speak with authority on the parades issue while in Washington.

7. After some general speculative conversation about new Labour's intentions, it was clear that Attwood was at least to some extent uncertain and disorientated by the actions, if not the style, of the new Secretary of State and what that portends. The ease with which she has met with resident groups, including MacCionnaith, and the ready official engagement with Sinn Féin have apparently troubled Attwood. He insisted that the Shinners were not about to declare a cease-fire, certainly this side of the general election and probably not this side of the marching season. He had spoken after the Westminster elections of his deep sense that the nationalist torch was being passed; he instinctively felt that nationalists in Northern Ireland were content that the SDLP had done the necessary over the last twenty five years but that it was now time to let Sinn Féin take nationalism through "the next phase" as he put. Even if the final figures of votes cast and seats held or won by the SDLP were good, that would not quell his sense that the "fault lines" were there and that time may be against the SDLP.

Eamonn McKee
Security Section
23 May 1997

PST, PSS
S/S Ó hUiginn
Counsellors A-I Section
Messrs. Teahon, Donlon & Dalton
Ambassadors London & Washington
Joint Secretary
BOX L

©DFA/2021/51/449