

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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re Drumcree.

FOR: M BROWNE/EMBASSY, LONDON **FROM**: B Nolan

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Q&A session at Secretary of State's press conference

(Stormont Castle) following her statement on the Drumcree parade

Sunday am, 6 July 1997

Mowlam: The judgement of the Chief Constable was that the public safety of all people in Northern Ireland is better protected by this decision. I respect and support his judgement. The law must be upheld, but I want to make clear that the way ahead for the future is a new arrangement designed to make sure that the pain of these events can be put behind us for good. I know many in the nationalist community will be angered by this decision, it has been dictated by circumstances, I would have preferred it otherwise. Nevertheless, I appeal to all in the nationalist community to understand that overall public safety across Northern Ireland has to be the Chief Constable's concern. Your voice is not ignored, I understand your feelings and I will address them in legislating on this issue. I am only sorry that option was not open to us this summer.

Q. The residents community living in the Garvaghy Road have accused you of betraying them, what is your answer on that accusation?

A. I would say that what I wanted is what people across Northern Ireland want, which is, to have some kind of accommodation this year. I have worked Friday night, I was in an Orange Lodge with 200/150 Orangemen at midnight trying to get the

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argument across. I talked to the Garvaghy Road residents yesterday afternoon to see if there was any more chance of movement from the residents. Both me and Ronnie Flanagan have done all we could. No one has been betrayed.

Q. Secretary of State, isn't it worse than that in terms of nationalist feelings; it reinforces their belief that when it comes right down to it in Northern Ireland, where there is a big crisis, their rights are secondary to those of the Unionist and Loyalist community?

A. I have made clear all along that we are working to be sure that there are no second class citizens in Northern Ireland. The Chief Constable was faced with a decision that had to be taken in relation to public safety criteria. That is what he did and I support his decision. When you are faced, as we are faced, with two intransigent groups, neither of which is prepared to move, you have to make a decision for them because they are not prepared to move themselves. Faced with that, he took a decision in line with public safety to protect the majority, to protect the people in Northern Ireland, so that less lives would be lost. That is the decision he took and that is the decision I support.

Q. What are the implications of the Chief Constable's decision now, e.g., for the Lower Ormeau parade on 12 July?

A. In relation to future parades we will still have to take each parade as it comes and look at each one individually. But all I would say to people in those areas, look at Drumcree, look at what not getting local accommodation produces and please think very hard, show constraint and do what you can to ensure that this is not repeated elsewhere in Northern Ireland in the days and weeks ahead.

Q. Why did you go back on your word to make your decision known some days before today, and when did you really make the decision and when did the Chief Constable make the decision in conjunction with you? It was not this morning was it?

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A. In relation to going and seeing the Garvaghy Road residents and announcing the conclusion, I always wanted to do that and I wanted to do it as early as possible and I wanted to do it in person, absolutely what I have said to them. The decision since the proximity talks, and all through this week when we have been trying to get things moving, we have been negotiating right up to this morning and then clearly it was not possible for me to do that. But I phoned the residents yesterday and told them I did not think that would be possible.

In response to your second question which is when was the decision taken, we have been in discussions with Mr Flanagan and the GOC for many days and we did not make a decision until this morning. That is the case.

Q. What is going to be your excuse next year when you are faced with the same situation where you are potentially going to have to seal off the whole area to get the Orangemen through? Last year it was because the Chief Constable couldn't face up to the fact of using live rounds, using the Army on the Orange people, this year it is the threat from Loyalist paramilitaries against the Catholics according to the Chief Constable, what is going to be the excuse next year?

A. It is not an excuse. Very clearly I have stated that we wanted accommodation, that the Chief Constable made his decision in view of the security information he was given in the interest of the people of Northern Ireland. There will not be excuses because we are dealing in fact here, and I have said very clearly what is needed next year is the North Commission that will actually have a broader set of criteria that will decide on this issue and we will not be left in the situation that we have this year.

Q. To your credit Secretary of State, and everybody out there knows that, you worked day and night, do you accept that you are a persona non grata now, on the Garvaghy Road and in other areas of Northern Ireland as a result of your decision?

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A. I will hope that in the days and weeks ahead, if what you says is the case, I do not know, but if that is the case I will continue to work to rebuild the trust and confidence, not in me, whether they believe in me is actually irrelevant, it is between themselves that is important. I can only, as Mr Flanagan can, talk to the two sides to try and get them to accommodate, but in the end it is up to them.

Q. You cannot be serious when you say that the North Commission or the Parades Commission is going to be a resolution to this problem, who do you think you are kidding saying that sort of thing?

A. Well, all I can say to you is that I do not see why we should go through what we have gone through this year. One advantage of the Parade Commission is it will start and have a full year. There are advantages to a change in structure and that will help. But the point I am making to you is we will continue to do all we can, but in the end it is the people on both side that have to accommodate, it is not something that we, I cannot force people to accommodate each other.

Q. Secretary of State can you just tell us any more about these paramilitary reprisals against Catholics if the march had been banned that the Chief Constable referred to?

A. It is difficult for me to do so, he has got the information in relation to on both sides and, as he said in his short speech earlier, that it is a problem with groups, extremes on both sides of manipulating the situation. But I think it would be best to leave it to him to talk in more detail.

Q. What is your message today to Orangemen who believe 'might is right' they have got their way, what is your message to the Portadown District Lodge today?

A. My message to them is that strict conditions have been put on the march and that if those are not adhered to, the Parades Commission will be looking at that and that any triumphalism or any aspect of behaviour like that would just create serious problems

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and make a difficulty for them with the Parades Commission in the following year. I have to say to them that the right to march is there and one that has to be operated, it is a basic right, but at the same time it has responsibilities with it. And I hope they are fully aware of those, and in months to come realise that the way forward is to talk to both sides, the two sides have to talk. That is the best way to go.

Q. Last year the RUC was criticised by a number of international human rights groups with the number of plastic bullets that were fired. Now we saw plastic bullets also fired last night during the rioting, are you satisfied that the RUC is in total control of the situation?

A. Yes, I am convinced that they are in total control. No one likes to see plastic bullets used and in compared to other forms of crowd control in other countries there is no ideal set of solutions. What I would like to see is a situation where plastic bullets are not necessary and that is why we have got to fight for an accommodation in future years.

Q. You talked about how difficult the decision was to take. Part of the problem was that there were different views even within what could be described as the authorities in this matter. There are reports from both Unionist, Loyalist and nationalist circles that there was a big difference of opinion, which is why this decision was taken so late, between the various elements involved - yourself, your advisers, the Chief Constable. Some people wanted this march to go down, some people did not, what do you make of those reports.

A. I make of them as I did much during the week when I was told I had made up my mind different ways all the time. I think partly because we were still trying to get some kind of accommodation, to get a re-routing, or to get a decision that meant it did not go down, with the Orange Order that as a result press speculation and individual speculation was rife. Can I assure you that there was no difference. All we wanted to

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do was get the best decision in line with public safety that we could and we left it so late in an attempt to try and hope in the end that common sense would prevail.

Q. What would the involvement of Westminster and the Prime Minister in taking the decision to let the march go down?

A. The Prime Minister was kept informed over the days. He showed a great deal of interest in this, as you see by his own statements in the press, and he continued to talks to me all the time about what the best decision would be.

Q. What was his decision?

A. He made clear to me in discussions what he would like, yes.

Q. Some say that the remarks made by the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, earlier in the week were unhelpful, do you think they were unhelpful?

A. I think sometimes they are perceived by people in the Unionist community to be unhelpful, yes. I mean, the quotes in your papers make that absolutely clear. But I think that the Taoiseach states it very clearly that he obviously has his own views, but he would support us in the conclusions that we reached, and we appreciate that, because it is sometimes difficult in terms of domestic politics, and I think he has been fully supportive throughout, so I appreciate his comments.

Q. That is not entirely true, the Irish Government have already expressed their deep disappointment in your decision. What is the effects on Anglo-Irish relations?

A. I have seen the comments of deep disappointment which have been expressed by the Irish, I fully comprehend that they are deeply disappointed. I have no trouble with that at all, but so am I, so is Mr Flanagan. Nobody wanted to make this decision. So I think it will obviously have caused concern but I have no doubt that when we see

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them on Tuesday in the talks process that any doubts will be discussed and the situation will return to normal.

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