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news from Labour

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

SPEECH BY MARJORIE MOWLAM MP SHADOW NORTHERN IRELAND SECRETARY

**GIVEN IN RESPONSE TO THE NORTHERN IRELAND STATEMENT
IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 15TH JULY 1996**

Labour 

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Will he not consider some of the suggestions that have been put forward for an independent commission to address matters like:

- guidelines for the conduct of parades which respect tradition but eliminate intimidation and triumphalism;
- helping to ensure decisions about the routing of parades are fair and consistent;
- the effectiveness of the existing law in relation to parades.

By this, we are not arguing that operational matters in relation to the marches should be taken out of the hands of the police - nor do we want to undermine existing mediation efforts.

But urgent steps do need to be taken.

Will the Secretary of State tell the House, when we can expect the details of his review? When will it begin? What will be its status and when will it report? These are important questions to which the people of Northern Ireland will want an answer today.

On the broader political level, we welcome the Secretary of State's announcement that he will meet with Irish Foreign Minister Dick Spring this week.

Working together, the two governments have given the impetus to the search for peace. They must set the example by co-operating now if they expect the parties in Northern Ireland to climb over their anger and frustration too.

For our part, we on this side of the House have maintained a bi-partisan approach based on the two Governments endorsement of the principles and proposals outlined in the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the Downing Street Declaration and the Joint Framework Document. Our support has sometimes been critical but, I hope, always constructive. What I say this afternoon is entirely in that spirit.

Madam Speaker,

It would greatly help if everybody involved in this disastrous situation would acknowledge their part in its creation and stand up and take their share of the blame.

Those who threatened force to achieve their ends, those who failed to act in advance and those - among whom I include myself - who failed to press their case for early action to sufficient effect.

Many parallels have been drawn with the events of 1969. If we can learn anything from all the violence and the deaths of the intervening years it is that we must all have the courage to do what is necessary so we don't live our history over again.

Nothing can excuse the violence and destruction that has occurred over the last week. In the interests of peace - which the people of Northern Ireland are crying out for - it must stop. We congratulate and support those who have exercised restraint and encourage others to do the same.

None of us should underestimate the seriousness of the situation in Northern Ireland today. A peace process which was already in serious difficulties has been dealt a mighty blow. It now requires a very real effort on everyone's part if it is going to be rescued.

We congratulate the Police in London for the discovery of bomb making equipment this morning. Quality intelligence and assiduous investigation are the terrorists' worst enemy.

We totally condemn the callous bombing of the Killyhevlin Hotel in Enniskillen. I am appalled that the people of that beautiful town, who have suffered so much, should be made to suffer again. It shows simply the boundless cowardice of the bombers.

We condemn too the atrocious violence and rioting across Northern Ireland. We offer our condolences to the family and friends of the two men who lost their lives.

Security and vigilance are necessary to protect people. And, as with all policing matters, they can only operate effectively with consent.

Does the Secretary of State accept that the rule of law is paramount and that the confidence of both communities in the institutions responsible for enforcing the rule of law is essential?

On the events of last week, will he acknowledge that the police were put in an impossible situation at Portadown and that their resources were overstretched by a co-ordinated show of hostile activity across Northern Ireland?

Will he now acknowledge to the House today - what he refused to condemn last week - that, in the words of the Chief Constable of the RUC, "the consent to comply with the rule of law did not exist with the Portadown Orange Lodge. They were not encouraged to do so by constitutional politicians and they should have done."?

We commend those residents of the Garvaghy Road, whom I met and spoke to last week, along with the police, the church leaders and some in the Unionist tradition who over weeks and months made determined efforts to reach agreement.

But does the Secretary of State accept that it is his responsibility to set the political framework within which local negotiations can take place with a hope of success?

And does he accept that his own failure to act - as we and many others have been urging him for many months - in a pro-active way to help resolve disputes over contentious parades makes him partly responsible for the failure to reach a local agreement?

The Secretary of State has announced today a review with details and terms of reference to follow. Does he not understand that such an unspecific announcement of a general review is not the most helpful.