

INTERVIEW WITH TOM CHEEVERS, APPRENTICE BOYS

INTERVIEWER

So controversy already for the new Secretary of State as Mo Mowlam finds herself under fire for warning Unionists that talks would continue without them and also for her meetings yesterday. Apprentice Boys are angry that the Secretary of State took time to meet residents' groups opposed to parades during her tour of the hotspots but ignored them. She did meet representatives from the Armagh County Orange Lodge on Tuesday night but the Apprentice Boys say the Secretary of State made no approach to them. Their Belfast spokesman, Tom Cheevers, is with me now.

No approach at all. You haven't spoken to the Secretary of State?

TOM CHEEVERS

No, not at all and we are very upset at the way she has went about things because there is a lot of talks going on at all levels throughout Northern Ireland trying to avoid the situation we had last year and we feel that she has upset some of those talks. I myself was contacted by a lot of moderate people from Protestant and Catholics last night from all over Belfast just to say to me "what's she doing here", its blown everything out of the water because she's given the credibility to those who are saying "no parades at all". What really we need is to make the moderate ground bigger and broader and stronger to push the extremists away to avoid situation like what happened last year and she has done the opposite.

INTERVIEWER

How would you suggest she might do that?

TOM CHEEVERS

Well she should have met people like ourselves first, other Catholic groups within those Nationalist areas where there is contentious routes and talked to those people first to see if she was doing something dangerous or something that could scupper any talks that were going on. But she didn't do that and she is driving this so called train right through everything we have built up so far.

INTERVIEWER

Your organisation has taken quite a kind of positive view, the last time I spoke to you, I think, was at Easter when you had decided that you weren't going to try and walk across the bridge on the Lower Ormeau Road. Is that maybe one reason why you might feel particularly aggrieved that here you are having done what people asked you to do and yet you are not being asked to go and talk to her?

**TOM CHEEVERS**

It's more important than that. It's important that we keep everybody on board and don't give those people who would not be prepared to accommodate other people's cultures a chance to rise to the top and that's what I think Dr Mowlam has done here. She's put us in a terrible position and she's talking about upholding law and order, in the Dunloy situation last week for instance there could have been a church service in the grounds of the Orange Hall which was invaded by a crowd. Now I happen to know that there was almost an agreement up there but once that crowd invaded the grounds of the Orange Hall people are saying you know we can't walk on the roads, we can't go to the church, now we can't even go to the Orange Hall. We are the one's that's walking away from confrontation as we did on Easter Monday and she can't even meet us.

**INTERVIEWER**

Despite all that do you feel that there are positive signs at all, do you think that these difficulties are going to subsume the whole movement that was taking place towards some sort of resolution?

**TOM CHEEVERS**

I think people in Northern Ireland really have to grow up a little bit because, you know, we have a lot of investment here from Koreans, Chinese, Japanese and you only look down the Golden Mile and you have Italian restaurants, Spanish, Greek etc and that's the sort of culture and society that the Apprentice Boys want to look forward to, one that is enriched by people's cultures, that people can join in and say yes I can watch that, I don't feel offended by it and that's what our society does have to work towards but there are people in both camps who think that anything different is inferior and they won't have anything to do with it, it's some sort of master race and we all have to work to rise about that. We have made positive steps but if they are not going to be recognised it makes it very difficult for us to go forward again.

**INTERVIEWER**

What about the Orange Order they did get to see Mo Mowlam do you think are they in a particularly difficult situation at the moment with the controversy which arose at the beginning of the week, do you think that Robert Saulters should go and meet, for instance, with the Garvaghy Road residents?

**TOM CHEEVERS**

Well I'm not a member of the Orange Order and it would be difficult for me to comment but my personal opinion our governing body met with residents of the Bogside last year, not the Bogside Residents Association, a sort of cross section of the community and it looked to me as though that was the way it was heading for the Garvaghy

Road. Obviously we have Apprentice Boys who have dual membership and through our organisation and we've been trying to bring them along with us and hope that they would take that into the Orange Order. You know it's not about giving up anything, it's about just recognising that we need to accommodate each other and we would have hoped that there could have been some movement there but for some reason it's broken down and we don't know why.

INTERVIEW WITH PETER ROBINSON

INTERVIEWER

Well the Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam, has warned in an interview last night that the settlement train would leave the station without Unionists if they backed out of the talks. Now it has angered the Unionist parties who are already unhappy about the Secretary of State's meetings with Nationalist residents' groups in Dunloy, Garvaghy and the Lower Ormeau yesterday. We are joined on the line by the DUP Deputy Leader, Peter Robinson.

This was one sentence in a long interview in which, from Newsnight last night on BBC 2, in which she stressed the need for the co-operation of all parties and the need to give people hope rather than say we are going to lose one party or another at this stage, so how significant is that one sentence?

PETER ROBINSON

Well it was one sentence and one did get the impression that she wasn't entirely in control of the interview but there has been a bit of an impression that we have as a Secretary of State, someone who's a bit of a loose cannon, and I think that can be very dangerous in Northern Ireland terms. It is such a preposterous proposition that the majority community could be left behind, I mean that isn't simply a case of the train moving off she has actually got not a train but a coach and horses and she's driving it right through Labour's claimed policy of consent. You can't have consent and leave Unionists behind.

INTERVIEWER

But you do, you are suggesting there that you feel that what she said in that one sentence was hardly a deliberate fully expanded policy position and you would gather that, would you, even from the way she expressed it?

PETER ROBINSON

Well I got the impression from the interview that she was under pressure searching for words and answers. You've got somebody who isn't into office very long, perhaps isn't in control of the arguments as well as she might be and therefore giving the impression, I hope, that we are a forgiving people in Northern Ireland. She does have the opportunity to clarify her statement and make it very clear that she did not intend to say what was conveyed to the viewers last night. I hope she takes that early opportunity for if she doesn't then I think she heads for very great problems. She has been giving the impression since she arrived in Northern Ireland that she is favouring the Nationalist community. She needs to make sure that, particularly in our present circumstances, that

she is seen as being somebody that all of our community can have confidence in, not just one section of the community and the people around Garvaghy Road and the Ormeau Road in particular.

**INTERVIEWER**

Are there any circumstances in which you would negotiate with Sinn Fein?

**PETER ROBINSON**

There are no circumstances because I don't believe Sinn Fein is a bona fide political party. Sinn Fein is the front organisation for a terrorist group, a terrorist group who will from time to time call phoney ceasefires in order to extract concessions but have no long-term decision ever in mind of ending violence permanently.

**INTERVIEWER**

So it's not a question in the circumstances in which they would be in talks of them moving on without you, you would have removed yourselves from the talks, would you?

**PETER ROBINSON**

Well you can't have talks, I mean if the train is empty the schedulers will take it off they simply won't allow the train to leave the station unless it has adequate passengers on board. I mean it's a ludicrous proposition that you could have a talks process on the future of Northern Ireland and Unionists would not be there.

**INTERVIEWER**

Yes people could see that point, on the other hand they could also say well can any one party have a veto over all of this?

**PETER ROBINSON**

Well I think a lot of people will look at how Mo Mowlam and indeed past Governments have been prepared to turn themselves inside out, wait undue periods of time in the hope that they might get Sinn Fein on board and then we have a Secretary of State who, at the the click of a finger, says unless the Unionists are there the train is moving off. That certainly wasn't the way that they have been treating the Nationalist community.

ANDREW HUNTER MP SPEAKING ON 'GOOD MORNING ULSTER', THURSDAY 22 MAY 1997

We are joined now by Andrew Hunter who is Chairman of the Conservative Back Bench Committee on Northern Ireland.

**Interviewer:**

Mr Hunter Good Morning. This is one phrase in an interview in which as we have heard she stressed the need for co-operation of all parties, the need to give people hope rather than saying we're sure to lose somebody now. So how significant is that one phrase?

**Mr Hunter**

Well if the Secretary of State meant what she said, the consequences are fearful because in one phrase she tore up the Downing Street Declaration. The Downing Street Declaration is essentially a manifestation expression of the principle of consent and what she is saying, what she said briefly was that there could be a process and ultimately an agreement which left behind the Unionist majority. Now that proposition is manifestly absurd.

**Interviewer:**

Well you say if she meant what she said. This must sound to people as if a hardly deliberate fully expanded policy position. I mean even the way it was expressed that people who study the syntax of these things will look at what she said. It will leave the train without the Unionists. They will say well it was actually not completely expressed even the very thought.

**Mr Hunter**

Well indeed so and I think probably she did not mean what she said but I think it's very unfortunate indeed if we have a Secretary of State who speaks carelessly because the situation in Northern Ireland which is scarcely safe, is sensitive, delicate, precarious and it is irresponsible for words that are not meant to be said.

**Interviewer:**

Well she says that we have got to build trust and confidence, she emphasised that.

**Mr Hunter**

Of course she did. But I am aware as you must be and your listeners will be that these are sensitive issues and that the very proposition that a train could leave without Unionists on board is one that will cause immense alarm and concern.

**Interviewer:**

There are choices thought aren't there for everybody. If Sinn Fein at some point enter the talks, the Government having satisfied itself about the ceasefire in word and deed, what should Unionists do in your view?

**Mr Hunter**

My hope and I think the hope of everyone that there will be a ceasefire, a genuine ceasefire, that Sinn Fein one day perhaps will take part in these talks but we are a million miles from that at the moment. There is not the slightest indication of it and Sinn Fein will face a major credibility problem when or if a ceasefire is declared. That's not what's on the agenda at the moment.

**Interviewer:**

Yes but the Government, the thing is the credibility problem is there, the Government says there is a credibility that needs to be established but the Government will be the ones to decide that and if the Government decides to its satisfaction that Sinn Fein can come into the talks Unionists might still have problems. What should they do in that situation?

**Mr Hunter**

But the Government is not the entity which decides. There must be confidence on the part of all those around the negotiating table. What we cannot have is an imposed agreement and that is what is implicit in, as you acknowledge by your questioning, in a great deal of what Mo Mowlam was saying last night. The agreement cannot be imposed by London, certainly not by Dublin. It can only emerge from the parties around the negotiating table.

**Interviewer:**

And you are satisfied that she has acknowledged that in her comments in that interview are you?

**Mr Hunter**

Well I think we want clarification as the great phrase goes. I thought her interview last night on Newsnight was appalling in that she introduced ideas that clearly are unacceptable and we don't want a Secretary of State who speaks carelessly.

**Interviewer:**

Just a final point. To come back to this situation in which Sinn Fein would be in the talks, what would you want Unionists to do at that point?

**Mr Hunter**

If there is not a genuine ceasefire, by word and deed, Sinn Fein/IRA does not establish a genuine commitment to peace and democracy, then as they come in through one door so true democrats rightly will go out through the other door.

**Interviewer:**

Andrew Hunter, thank you very much.

BBC RADIO 4

22.5.97

INTERVIEW WITH SECRETARY OF STATE, MO MOWLAM

INTERVIEWER

Now those talks yesterday, the cynics might say all they achieved was to upset the unionists, didn't do any thing.

SOS

If one was to adopt the ... approach I am sure that is the case. But in the end we have argued as most people throughout Northern Ireland is that we want the talks process to continue, as fast as possible. But it is better if those talks are inclusive, if it includes not just the constitutional parties that are there now but also if we can get an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire and of true commitment in words and deeds from the IRA to permit Sinn Fein into those talks that is what we want to see. We said no one is going to have a veto on that, but we want to have a go at seeing if that is possible and that is what we are doing and I didn't attend the talks, because it is only clarification between officials and Sinn Fein and those who participated across the board said it was informative and constructive and they have agreed in principle to meet again very soon.

INTERVIEWER

Which means that there has to be more clarification right?

SOS

That's right.

INTERVIEWER

And what are you clarifying?

SOS

Well, what we need to know from them is the chances and the possibilities and when an unequivocal ceasefire will come and what that looks like and what words and deeds look like and their commitment to the democratic principles. And what words they will use, if that ceasefire is on the table and we have our proposals that we have put forward in the past and they need some clarification of those. That is what it is about. Things as you know John in Northern Ireland are never simple words, are never easily they all have a number of different meanings and that is what it is about.

INTERVIEWER

Well indeed. Now whenever we talk to Sinn Fein, to Martin

McGuinness or Gerry Adams and ask him about the ceasefire, they say well you just ask the IRA about that. Nothing to do with us. Is that the kind of thing you get from them as well?

SOS

I don't know because I wasn't.....

INTERVIEWER

No but you talk to.....

SOS

..... talk to civil servants but obviously that is their central argument and their central line but I'm sure that pressure can be put on and encouragement could be made and that's one of the reasons why I want to go to the United States today to see what support and help the American Government can give us in encouraging Sinn Fein and the IRA along that course because that's been in my view a helpful role they've played in the past.

INTERVIEWER

Well indeed but then it broke down didn't it, so even if you got the right sort of words again this time there's no guarantee it wouldn't break down again is there?

SOS

The difficulty is to know, and this is what clearly worries and upsets not just the Unionist community but us too, is to know that it is a meaningful ceasefire and that is why we say it's not just the words which are important but the deeds too so that that trust can be restored. But I have to tell you that there's been a kind of feeling in Northern Ireland of hope and a belief that we are going to have another go and that among the people and the politicians is very strong and I think its incumbent upon us to try and do that.

INTERVIEWER

You say words and deed, by deed you mean what, the IRA no long, for instance, targeting people, that sort of thing?

SOS

That's right, that's exactly it. And obviously the strength of the words helps no end but those are the kind of things that we need to see before we can move forward on inclusive talks, but until these are made clear we are not going to the settlement train that you mentioned in the beginning, no party has a veto on that and we want to move that forward as quickly as possible rather than wait about whether Sinn Fein can come in or not. We would prefer they were there, there will be no unnecessary or undue delay if we get the

unequivocal ceasefire and the words and deeds but we intend to move this process forward.

**INTERVIEWER**

But the reality is, isn't it, that the talks, what on June 3rd they're due to begin again isn't it, the reality is that Sinn Fein is not going to be at that table isn't it?

**SOS**

On June 3rd I think you're right. I don't think there is a great possibility by June 3rd of the ceasefire and the commitment in words and deeds, I agree with you on that. But Senator Mitchell will be back who I think again, and I want to say this to the American administration has been a great help in the process to try and get the parties talking, and they made some progress and we hope that on June 3rd the other parties will continue to do that.

**INTERVIEWER**

Well did they make progress, it's hard to see where the progress was isn't it?

**SOS**

I know it's difficult to not be negative but they did agree rules of procedure, they did agree the outline of agenda, they did get working so yes it's not one mammoth step forward but it is progress was made and they were still talking and I hope that will continue on June 3rd with the determination that they are not going to hang about themselves.

**INTERVIEWER**

But it used to be your view, didn't it, that certainly the view of many in the Labour Party that the talks the whole process without the involvement of Sinn Fein really was pretty meaningless. That remains the case doesn't it?

**SOS**

It remains the case in so far as we would prefer the talks to be inclusive and we think they would be without violence on the streets on both sides, both Loyalist and IRA, that it would be a better and more valid peace settlement that would result. However the previous government tried for many months to achieve that, we are having a go too with our officials talking to Sinn Fein but Tony has said, and I support him and it's party policy, that we will not hang around, no one has got a veto, we are not going to let one group decide how fast we move in the future, that's why we are going to just keep going after June 3rd, whether Sinn Fein is there or not.

INTERVIEWER

You don't sound very optimistic if I may say so?

SOS

Well I am actually, I'm sorry it may be just this time of the morning but I am actually quite optimistic, you have to be in Northern Ireland, if you spent the time being depressed and believing you wouldn't move forward you would give up. But I do, I spend most of the week feeling it is possible and it is possible as a politician and you have to put the effort in because when you meet the people as we have done over the last two or three weeks their hope and desire for peace is just so strong that it's incumbent upon anybody in a political role to do all they can to realise that.

INTERVIEWER

And therefore you will continue or rather your officials at this stage will continue talking to Sinn Fein ad infinitum?

SOS

No we've said we will continue to talk but it won't be ad infinitum no we haven't set a time limit on it because that actually is a problem, if you've got hurdles, you create yourself hurdles you have then got to climb over them or you get up to them and they become more problematic, but we've made it very clear that it's not an infinitum process, the talks will start again on June 3rd, we would prefer that our discussions through officials with Sinn Fein move that we move that process forward and eventually they are included. But if they are not, if there is no movement then the train will go ahead.

**Peter Snow**

Earlier I spoke to Labour's Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, and asked her whether all this criticism of her by the Unionists meant that the honeymoon was over?

**Secretary of State:**

I think they were disappointed. I was disappointed in their response. They were worried that I was seeing certain residents' groups but in relation to the parades I believe we should talk across the board because it is only by talking we are going to move the process forward and I have to admit that part of their frustration and anger was my fault. I was meant to call the Unionist MPs last night and in the end I didn't get round to them all and so the failing was mine for which I have apologised.

**Peter Snow**

But why did you risk losing their goodwill by holding these talks, the talks that you held with Nationalists and the talks that your officials held with Sinn Fein on the day of the local elections in Northern Ireland?

**Secretary of State:**

In relation to my talks with the residents' groups, I talked to the Orange last night and I will continue to talk. It is difficult, whether there is a general local election in Northern Ireland, I am in America for the next 2 days. Sometimes timetables don't work. We have got a very short timetable in the run-up to Drumcree now. We have about 6 weeks and I will continue to talk whether it is Friday, Saturday, Sunday, whatever day of the week because it is only by getting people to talk, seeing if there is a way we can get some mediation working in both the lower Ormeau and Drumcree we are going avoid another appalling carry-on in Northern Ireland which will benefit nobody.

**Peter Snow**

The security spokesman for the Unionist Party, Ken Maginnis, says it is not just a question of timing getting a bit muddled up, it's actually malicious timing to put it on the same day as the local elections.

**Secretary of State:**

Well I am sorry Ken Maginnis feels that because I can reassure him that without any doubt it was neither malicious or intended to create problems for anybody but we have made a commitment too. Tony Blair made it very specifically in Belfast last Friday, we want to give the process momentum, we want to move it ahead as quickly as possible.

**Peter Snow**

Are you apprehensive after the talks you have had about what might happen in the marching season?

**Secretary of State:**

Slightly yes because at the moment there is no mediation, no talks going on and a short timespan.

**Peter Snow**

Well what about your plans for mediation? What about your plans for this Commission which would be able to take an independent view of whether the march should go on or not. Is there any chance you will have that in place in time?

**Secretary of State:**

Well the Commission is there now Peter but the problem is that we are going to introduce some legislation. We won't get it through in time for the marches this year and in the end the kind of criminal acts and offences that we will put in the Act and will make legislation is the end of the process, if you've got there the whole process of trying to get compromise on the marches has not been achieved.

**Peter Snow**

If there is a build-up to what looks like a possible danger of violence at Drumcree again this year for example, will you be prepared to robustly put in troops to stop it as of course the Government didn't do last year?

**Secretary of State:**

Peter I will continue to avoid questions like that because if I sit here and say I'm going to put the Army in then what encouragement, what incentive is there to the groups on either side to sit down together or through a mediator and try and reach a compromise so that some respect is stored, some trust between the communities. For me to sit here and say "Army here we come" is no solution at all.

**Peter Snow**

Let me make quite clear what I was getting at. Are you prepared to make sure the rule of law is observed whichever side looks like disrupting it? And if you have to use troops to do that will you do it?

**Secretary of State:**

I have no trouble saying that I will uphold the rule of law in relation to the marches. It is the commitment I have given all along and however I have to do that I will do my best to achieve that. I have no difficulty with making that commitment. I fundamentally believe it is what will guide our policy.

**Peter Snow**

OK back to the talks with Sinn Fein. What is the clarification all about? What do you need to be clear about? What do they need to be clear about before talks can begin? You want a ceasefire. What do they need to know so desperately?

**Secretary of State:**

Well they have a number of questions in relation to the process that broke down, that we as a new Government will give our answers to, and as you well know in Northern Ireland nothing is a simple straightforward statement. We have said that what we want is an unequivocal restoration of the ceasefire before the peace process can go anywhere. We want a commitment to those democratic principles outlined in the Mitchell Report.

**Peter Snow**

When Sinn Fein say to you, as I am sure they must have done, sorry through your officials, 'when we come into the talks, if we do come into talks after there is a ceasefire that is acceptable to you', when they come into the talks 'suppose the Unionists walk out? Will you go ahead with us Sinn Fein and have talks about a settlement without the Unionists in the talks?'

**Secretary of State:**

We can paint different scenarios and your wonderfully negative about the different ones we can have but we have a long way to go and we have got to hold in as many parties as possible and if I start saying now "ah well if Sinn Fein come in we will lose the Unionists" that is the kind of negative approach.

**Peter Snow**

But you have said the opposite haven't you? You said the train is going to leave the station without Sinn Fein if necessary.

**Secretary of State:**

And it will leave the train without Unionists if they don't. I mean that is the state of play. However what we have got to do is you have got to build respect between the communities, you have got to build trust between the communities and you have got to build confidence between the communities. Now we will do our best over the days and weeks ahead to do that and if you can achieve that you can hold everybody in. We can sit here and say we are sure to lose somebody now. I am not prepared to do that. I am prepared to give people in Northern Ireland hope and a belief in a chance that there is a future that we will try our best

to deliver. We need the co-operation of all the parties in the democratic process to do that but we will do our best and that is what we ought to offer the people of Northern Ireland now.

Ends