

(01) 478 0822



AN ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA  
Department of Foreign Affairs

BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH 2  
Dublin 2

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Comments by Mark Durkan (former SDLP Chairman and, Inside Politics, 20 July 1996)

**Interviewer:** How serious a gaffe by Sir Patrick was that?

**Durkan:** I think it was a very, very serious gaffe, even within the terms of his own agenda, it was obviously a serious gaffe because he has spent the last week trying to pretend that nothing very significant happened last week, that it was just a very regrettable situation, that the RUC had had to take a particular operational decision and it was of no political matter of importance to him and therefore that was why it had been a matter of political indifference to him throughout; in the words of the Chief Constable, he had expressed no opinion apparently about anything to do with the issue. And what concerned nationalists last week was, we could read into what happened in Garvaghy, the import of the situation was, effectively, that if the Orange Order of Unionism decided to mobilise sectarian solidarity, and mobilise its strength, that it could defy whatever will was put to it, whether it was the will of the Chief Constable, whether it was the will of the British Government. Sir Patrick seemed to pretend that that wasn't really an issue. Then yesterday, or two days ago he blurted out exactly what was there and it was a gaffe in his own terms because he confirmed the import of Garvaghy in the eyes of nationalists but he did it in such a left-handed way where he was more or less almost giving a cue to people, well you can do this again and again and there's nothing we are going to do about it. When you compare what he said on Thursday with what he said last weekend, when we had violence on the streets and there was the Killyhevlin bomb, he talked then about violence and disorder being met with, and these were his words, "the utmost resolution", the utmost resolution, and people are left saying well, it's clear whenever the violence and disorder is coming from the Republican side and those in the nationalist community, it's going to be met with the utmost resolution, but on Thursday he's making it clear that if the Orange Order decides to mobilise violence, the British Government has to resign itself to it.

**Interviewer:** You're a member of Derry City Council, there's been a lot of work going on in Derry to try to present this notion of an inclusive city where both traditions are valued, the SDLP, the nationalist community generally, are by far the majority. We have a very, very awkward situation coming up when people are beginning to say that in terms of the nationalist community that the Apprentice boys should be kept out of this city. Isn't that going to cause even more trouble?

**Durkan:** In my view, yes, and I have tried to sound very strong concerns locally about the mood that is building up in relation to that march. I think we need to be very, very careful about trying to repeat the lessons of Drumcree in reverse which is almost the way it's being



talked about among people in Derry, and not just nationalists in Derry, but nationalists across the North. The fact is that the British Government and Sir Patrick Mayhew sent the signal last week and again by Sir Patrick Mayhew's remarks the other day, that as far as they're concerned it is par for the course to use mobilised numbers and local geography to secure a particular outcome to a contentious marching issue. So people are saying, if local geography and mobilised numbers could get a result one way in Garvaghy and in Lower Ormeau, then why shouldn't we use it to get the result the other way in Derry on the 10th August. The 10th of August is being talked about almost as a re-match or the latest test in the series and I have fundamental concerns about that, not just because of all the potential political repercussions and the destabilisation that that could bring but also just because of what it can do to Derry. I am very concerned about this idea of talking about the West Bank as though it is just one big nationalist area, there are Unionists who live on the West Bank, there's the Fountain Estate on the West Bank and just to say that people don't get into the West Bank, regardless, I think is wrong. If part of people's argument on the marching issue is, marches only go where they have consent, well I'm sure and quite clear the Fountain will tell us that the Apprentice boys parade has consent. If the argument in Garvaghy Road was not that people didn't want people to go to church, but that they should go back the way they came. Remember in Derry the church is St Colm's Cathedral and it's on the West Bank, people have no choice if they want to conduct the usual church service but to go to the West Bank to do it. So there are issues there. Also, there's the city centre question. Most rules and draft sets of principles for marches that I have seen that there is a difference between town centres and neighbourhood and residential areas including the draft set of rules drawn up by the Lower Ormeau residents. So, if we're to say well, people don't get into the West Bank, that's talking about the city centre in Derry as well.

**Interviewer:** But is it helpful at the same time though for what Unionists consider to be the hounding of the mayor Richard Dallas by the SDLP?

**Durkan:** We're trying to deal with the issues as they arise and I hope that Unionists can recognise that we in the SDLP are trying to be very fair and not rash about the marching issue as far as Derry is concerned. So let's just deal with the Derry situation and let's deal with first of all, in terms of marching, we want to avoid anything that just sucks us all into the quicksand of geo-sectarianism, that this mood of "let's talk about the West Bank" is doing. And I can understand the mood, I can understand all the temptations that are there, people want some sort of equaliser in that sense. But let's deal with the marching question as the marching questions; because whenever we are as we probably could be faced with a crisis in and around the marching issue on August 10th and the build up to August 10th, we're only going to solve it in terms of the marching issue, not on anything else. Now, as regards the question about the mayor and Richard Dallas, the SDLP could not have done other than register a vote of no confidence in Richard Dallas. Richard Dallas didn't just let himself down, he didn't just let us, who voted for him as mayor, down, he didn't just let the citizens down, he was bringing the policy of power-sharing into disrepute. If we had not sought to sanction him, it would have been very hard for us to sustain the policy of power sharing. We didn't vote no confidence in Richard Dallas because he was Unionist, we didn't vote no confidence in Richard Dallas because of his views on Garvaghy Road or



anything else, we voted no confidence in Richard Dallas he, as mayor, decided that it was more important for him to lend himself to disrupting and impairing the lives of citizens of Derry, rather than acting as Derry's first citizen.

**Interviewer:** There's a lot of talk obviously about the whole marching season, but by the same token the talks continue. Now the focus is on the marching season as opposed to the smaller focus that appears to be on the talks in terms of everyday conversation. Doesn't that suggest that that's where the real politics are though, that it's not at the talks, that it's on the streets.

**Durkan:** The fact is the talks process, no matter what is happening outside Castle Buildings, no matter what is happening anywhere, no matter what the problem is, we are going to need to talk. The SDLP has always been very clear, dialogue is the only way forward and we've been very clear no matter what the circumstances have been, that dialogue is still the only way forward, is still the only answer. That's one of the reasons why, in spite of all the pressures, all the provocations, that are there at the minute, the SDLP want to stay at the talks table, we want to make those talks work, not just on any terms or at any price but we want to make them work because we know where those processes come from, we know what this process has the capacity to do, it has the capacity to deliver, the people want it and therefore we want to keep faith with this process. We're not going to be budged out of it.