

MARTIN McGUINNESS, EDUCATION MINISTER. EVENING EXTRA. 4
SEPTEMBER 2001

MARTIN McGUINNESS

It is absolutely vital that this protest should end. It is absolutely vital that we bring it to an end and that we recognise that people with a key responsibility in helping to bring it to an end are political leaders of all descriptions. And I think political leaders have to raise their voices in defence of these innocent schoolchildren and their right to be educated free from intimidation. Whatever the wider concerns, it's wrong to draw schoolchildren into the issue and the protests should end and politicians, who have a key role to play, should play their part fully in bringing it to an end as quickly as possible. That said, young children have a basic right to travel to school without fear and to be educated in a safe environment, that is paramount. Now if there are other difficulties and problems, then we, as political leaders, have a responsibility to address those but those difficulties and problems cannot be held up as an excuse for this intolerable behaviour at the Ardoyne Road outside the Holy Cross School.

INTERVIEWER

Would you be concerned Minister that this situation could spread, that we could see disputes surround other children going to school in other parts of Belfast, in other towns, in other cities.

MARTIN McGUINNESS

Well I certainly hope that that will not be the case and I would be very, very surprised if other communities believed or recognised that this would be a productive way forward. I think we are dealing with this one particular situation at Holy Cross. The difficulties that are created there are not just affecting the Catholic children who go to that school, but also affecting the children from the Glenbryn Estate who go to Wheatfield Primary School, and I am as concerned about their education as I am about the children at Holy Cross. In fact I think that it is important to pay tribute to the teachers and school authorities involved in trying to sort this out and particularly the principals of both Holy Cross and Wheatfield schools for their efforts in dealing with the situation.

INTERVIEWER

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Evening Extra
Interview
Tuesday 4th Sept

There will be many within the loyalist and unionist family who will say that those are very fine words from the Education Minister, but they will say the reality on the ground is that this situation is being manipulated by members of Sinn Féin, and whether you like it or not, that is their perception and as thirty years of history in Northern Ireland have told us, perception is all.

MARTIN McGUINNESS

Well I don't accept that that is the case but if that is their perception then it is a perception that we have to deal with, and I think the only way to deal with that perception is to ensure that political leaders and community leaders engage in meaningful dialogue and discussions about the way forward. I think that republicans are more than willing along with the community to address the problems and difficulties that exist in that part of North Belfast and in fact have been to the forefront of calling for meaningful dialogue in the course of recent weeks and I do think that's important. I would be absolutely horrified and disgusted if republicans were involved in manipulating the situation and in fact I know that that is not the case.

INTERVIEWER

Even though people like Billy Hutchinson has said quite clearly that they have seen leading members of the republican community taunting loyalists yesterday and again today?

MARTIN McGUINNESS

Well, I mean, if Billy Hutchinson's saying that, I wasn't there so I don't know what was said in relation to what people were shouting at one another. I certainly do know that it is not in the interests of republicanism, certainly not in the interest of Sinn Féin and indeed, in my view, not in the interest of our entire community for this activity to be continuing. So what we need to do is rather than shouting at one another, if that is the case, we need to get together, we need to get into a room and we need to sort this out as a matter of urgency.

FRED COBAIN, DOORSTEP CASTLE BUILDINGS, 5.9.01

MEDIA

You just met the security minister. What happened?

FRED COBAIN

I think she is trying to talk to as many people in the community as she can to try and form a judgement in these things. I think everyone who has spoken to her has made it absolutely clear it is a matter for the communities to solve this. It is not going to be solved in its entirety by any security policies that the minister may come forward with.

MEDIA

What are you saying to people, say tomorrow morning, are you calling for the protest to be called off?

FRED COBAIN

I think now, I have to say this, the only way this is going to be solved is with the agreement of the two communities. We can't go on as we are going and there clearly has to be a resolution to this, but I think it is in everyone's interest, both the Protestant and community and the Roman Catholic community that we have a period of calm where people can actually discuss some of the issues that need to be discussed.

MEDIA

What about the political involvement with politicians, you say about local communities, what are the politicians going to be saying?

FRED COBAIN

Well I think the politicians are trying to work in the background to all of this. But it is important that the communities themselves feel comfortable with what they are doing. There is no sense in trying to parachute some solution in here because that is not going to work. The communities themselves have to be comfortable with what they are doing.

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MEDIA

Has she been talking about parachuting some solution in?

FRED COBAIN

No she hasn't been talking, that is what I am saying, she hasn't been saying that at all and I think it is important she doesn't do that. But what we need is, we need some breathing space where people can actually talk. And I think from the unionist perspective I think the sad thing about all of this is that the unionist community in there have genuine concerns and those genuine concerns are being lost in this whole mayhem. We need to extract them out and those concerns need to be addressed.

MEDIA

Calling off the protest tomorrow may give that breathing space.

FRED COBAIN

I don't know whether it will or not but ending the protests and getting into dialogue I think is in everyone's interest and I think the Protestant community want to do that too. But what the Protestant community are saying, there is a wide range of issues that we want to discuss and they have been saying that for the last 3-4 months and they need a guarantee that that is going to happen and I don't think anyone should shy away from that in the Catholic community. There are genuine concerns in here that have to be addressed.

MEDIA

Do you think though the protest is the way forward to address these concerns?

FRED COBAIN

Well think the protest is borne out of frustration. I think that over the summer there were supposed to be 9 or 10 weeks of dialogue and it didn't take place and Protestants in Glenbryn felt frustrated that those discussions didn't take place.

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MEDIA

Would you be advising them into taking some other tact then rather than the protest every morning and every afternoon?

FRED COBAIN

I think that what the two communities should do is sit down and discuss their problems together. And I think everybody wants that. It is trying to find a way that resolves the differences and trying to overcome the differences that is going to ensure we don't have scenes like Holy Cross School somewhere else in North Belfast.

MEDIA

This morning did move things onto a different level didn't it? I mean blast bombing school children.

FRED COBAIN

Oh I. I mean it was horrific this morning and I don't think it serves anyone's interest what happened this morning and I don't think anybody is trying to defend that. But what we are trying to do is find a solution to this. And I have to say this, and I don't mean this in a derogatory way, it is fine for people sitting in the studios to give out easy solutions. Maybe if you lived in this area from you were 2 or 3 year old and lived there for the last 30 years you may have been on the protest lines this morning. I mean there are deeply held views in these areas. Protestants in these areas feel that there is an attempt to isolate them and remove them from these areas. I mean I think some of the remarks last night by Martin McGuinness were absolutely disgraceful. To try and insist that there wasn't a considered attempt to remove Protestants from these areas. I think it was laughable, his contribution put the solution back rather than brought it forward.

MEDIA

You are convinced that there is a move on to remove Protestants from these areas.

FRED COBAIN

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I think there is a systematic attempt to remove Protestants from these areas. There is no doubt, all you need to do is check with the police and see how many incidents happened on these interfaces on a nightly basis. And they are all not from the Protestant community. There are attacks continuously on Protestants who are living in these areas and there is no doubt, formulated by the Provisionals in these areas, everybody knows that. For Martin McGuinness to say there is an odd attack by an odd Catholic is just laughable.

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Mark — this is the intro. to which
Fred Cobain refers... Jim 5/9

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MARTIN McGUINNESS, NEWSNIGHT – 4 SEPTEMBER 2001

INTERVIEWER

I spoke to the Northern Ireland Education Minister, Martin McGuinness, and asked him whether it would make more sense for the children to take an alternative route to the school.

MARTIN McGUINNESS

Well I think to do that is to put the focus on the parents and innocent children and that's a mistake. The focus needs to be on the protest which is taking place, the fact that that protest is a sectarian protest, that it is being directed at innocent children, 4, 5, 6, 7 years of age and their parents, and that there is a responsibility on all political leaders to call on the people who are protesting to stop this type of activity. If they have grievances, if they have difficulties, certainly let's get into dialogue and discussion about that, and I'm certainly one of those people who's all for that, but under no circumstances should we allow a situation to continue where children are treated in this disgraceful fashion.

INTERVIEWER

You're a father, though. Would you have taken a 4 or 5-year old through that corridor of hatred, which is the only way you can really describe it?

MARTIN McGUINNESS

Well I live in Derry City and the situation in Derry City is much different from the situation in North Belfast. I don't know what I would have done if I had have lived my last 50 years in North Belfast. So I think that to put the focus on the parents and on the children is to make a serious blunder. The reality is that there is a responsibility on the protesters to recognise that they've made a serious mistake, and I think the fact that there were reduced numbers there this morning certainly shows that some of them recognise that they've made a serious mistake. These pictures are being shown right throughout the world, in Australia, in Japan, in the USA, in Europe and in Africa. And it's not a good news story from a loyalist/unionist perspective and that's why I think it's all the more reason why unionist political leaders should step out in defence

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of these innocent children and make it absolutely clear to the protesters that what they're doing is absolutely wrong.

INTERVIEWER

Do you recognise that the Protestant residents of the Glenbryn Estate do have a grievance?

MARTIN McGUINNESS

Well I mean I don't live in the area, but I know that there have been accusation and counter-accusation over the course of the summer period and I do know that if you look at, for example, what has been happening throughout the six counties over the course of the recent time, there have been something like 200 pipe bomb attacks on Catholic houses. Every day there's a new attack on Catholics. Everyday there are new threats and intimidation.

INTERVIEWER

But do you recognise, I think it's quite interesting because here you are and you are talking entirely about the Catholic community when you talk about the attacks. Do you recognise there has also been intimidatory attacks on Protestants.

MARTIN McGUINNESS

Well if that has been the case, then we have a duty to sort that out, just as unionist political leaders have to face up to the fact that there are ongoing attacks, a very vicious campaign, being carried out against the Catholic community right across the whole of the North. I think ..

INTERVIEWER

That may be, but Martin McGuinness, I'm talking to you as the Education Minister in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and you must know, if you know so much about attacks on Catholics, you must also know about attacks on Protestants and yet you seem to shy away from addressing that.

MARTIN McGUINNESS

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No I don't shy away from addressing it. What I am saying is that we within Sinn Fein, for example, and I'm not now speaking as the Education Minister, are prepared to face up to whatever challenge is out there in relation to bringing communities together, bringing community representatives together on all sides to face up to and address and resolve the difficulties which are out there.

INTERVIEWER

So you do acknowledge there is wrong-doing on both sides?

MARTIN McGUINNESS

What I do accept is that the Catholic community have been subjected to a vitriolic campaign of threat, intimidation and murder over the course of many, many months and we all know that if we were to analyse this further, that this is related to the refusal of unionist political leaders, for example, to fully implement the Good Friday Agreement, their resistance to change and the fact that they have instilled within many sections of the unionist community an opposition to political change in our society and, of course, whenever

INTERVIEWER

Do you accept that there is wrong-doing on both sides? I mean I'm just asking, do you accept

MARTIN McGUINNESS

Well what I'm saying is that whenever we see a situation develop where the manifestation then of unionist opposition or loyalist opposition to political change is violence inflicted on the nationalist community. There may be individual Catholics who decide that they think the sensible way is to attack those people. If you're asking me are they being attacked by the IRA, is the IRA and Sinn Fein involved in a concerted campaign of retaliation against the Protestant people, the unionist people, my answer is categorically no.

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