

3rd October 2020

Forwards

“It takes courage to push things forward.”

Mo Mowlam, The Guardian 1998

Mo Mowlam, MP for Redcar, was the Labour Government’s Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from 1997 to 1999. Her time there saw the signing of the historic Good Friday Peace agreement in 1998. Mo Mowlam had a personal charisma and a reputation for plain speaking, which made her one of the most popular Labour politicians of the era. When Tony Blair mentioned her in a speech in the 1998 Labour Party Conference, she received a standing ovation. The worlds of politics and of a compassionate and right society were the poorer for her passing in 2001.

Mo Mowlam was a woman of courage. She knew that the troubles in Northern Ireland over many years required a different approach. Things needed to be pushed forward, towards a peaceful settlement. But, as she said herself in the quote above, it took courage to do that, and not just for her alone, for her courage inspired courageous decisions in others.

When Macaulay wrote about Horatius in *Lays of Ancient Rome*, he perfectly analysed and encapsulated the human condition.

*Was none who would be foremost to lead such dire attack;
But those behind cried ‘Forward’, and those before cried ‘Back’.*

In any enterprise, there are some who will resist moving forward. They may be fearful of change, or, even more, of defeat. They may not cry “Back”, but instead shout, “Stay! Don’t move! Hold to what we have! Keep things as they always were!” But for progress to be achieved someone – such as the charismatic Mo Mowlam – has to be courageous enough to cry “Forward!” and to move us on to make a difference.

C S Lewis is reputed to have said:

*Courage is not simply one of the virtues
but the form of every virtue at the testing point.*

Such a virtue, at any testing point, will take us into a new beginning. Thanks, Mo, for reminding us that it works!

A prayer for today

Lord, give me courage to push forward, and to resist those who won’t. Amen.

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