



An Chartlann Náisiúnta
National Archives

Reference Code: 2021/44/151

Creator(s): Department of Foreign Affairs

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland.
May only be reproduced with
the written permission of the
Director of the National
Archives.

ConfidentialMeeting with Denis Haughey, Cookstown, 7 March 1990.Talks

1. Mr. Haughey referred to his participation in a recent seminar in Washington which was also attended by Peter Robinson and Ken Maginnis. He had a number of interesting discussions with both - Robinson in particular - during the course of his visit. Robinson told him that some time ago the late Harold McCusker and he had considered making an approach to the Unionist community, setting out an analysis of where Unionism stood, different to that of the party leaders. They concluded, however, that Molyneaux and Paisley would have rounded on them and that the initiative would have failed. In the circumstances, they decided against moving at that time.
2. Mr. Haughey felt that Robinson was anxious to do business; he (Robinson) believed, however, that the kind of exercise he had been engaged in over the last six months or so (more conciliatory noises on the nature of a settlement etc) could not be continued indefinitely and that if no breakthrough had been achieved by the Autumn or thereabouts he would be forced to "melt back into the tribe".
3. Mr. Haughey was depressed about the extent to which the "tribal imperative" ruled the actions of the Unionist leadership. There was a deep-seated fear of facing their own community with any message other than the stock, not-an-inch line. He saw nobody (not even Robinson) on the horizon who could break that circle, certainly not in the immediate future.
4. For that reason, he was very sceptical that Brooke's exercise was leading anywhere. There was always the possibility that a negotiating process, once it commenced, would develop its own momentum which, once underway, would be difficult to halt. However, he felt that while such an

argument might have validity in a "normal" society, very different circumstances obtained in Northern Ireland. The reality was that the Unionist leadership was far more influenced by the fear of failure and rejection by its own community than it was by the prize of a political breakthrough.

5. He said that the SDLP approach was that they were prepared to enter talks at any time but that they had a responsibility to ensure that all the pieces pointing to a successful conclusion of a negotiation process were in place before embarking on such a course. That was why John Hume placed such emphasis on the need, in the first instance, for a dialogue about the "problems" before going on to discuss "solutions". The SDLP judgement was that all the pieces were not in place at present and nothing that Brooke nor the Unionists had said so far had convinced them otherwise. He said that he had reminded Robinson and Maginnis in Washington that what was involved was no mere academic exercise. He instanced the security area - "I told them that if we are to get into negotiations about control and reform of the security forces we will be putting our lives on the line. I'm prepared to put my life on the line but before I do so I want to make damn sure that we're all serious about what we're about and can deliver".
6. He felt that there was little or no evidence that the Unionist leadership had that capacity to "deliver". He pointed to the reality in the many Councils - including his own area, Cookstown - where Unionists had control. How could nationalists, on the basis of such evidence, be expected to "buy" that the Unionist leadership could "sell" a cross-community deal to its own people - even if it wanted to in the first place (a very large "if")?
7. Mr. Haughey said that he had also pointed out to Robinson

and Maginnis that it was all very well to be talking about the "financial autonomy" of any devolved administration but in doing so they had better think through the full implications of such an argument - "Do you really believe that we can seriously say to the British 'we want total control of our own financial affairs but leave your purse on the mantelpiece'?"!

8. Mr Haughey said that he was looking forward to Thursday's meeting with the Government, which he felt was important in the context of ensuring the continuation of the close and effective co-operation between both sides to date. There were undoubtedly forces who would welcome wedges between the SDLP and the Government and it was important to make sure that no succour was given to them.
9. Mid-Ulster Candidacy
Mr. Haughey was pleased at his recent, unanimous re-selection as the SDLP candidate for Mid-Ulster at the next Westminster election. The seat is held at present by the DUP's William McCrea. Overall, however, there is a narrow Nationalist majority in the constituency. Within the Nationalist community Sinn Féin had for several years headed the SDLP. However, Mr. Haughey overtook them in 1987 and with the continuing decline in Sinn Féin's support he is hopeful that the Nationalist community can be convinced that the SDLP now has the best hope of taking back the seat from the DUP. He believes that he has an "outside chance" of taking the seat at the next election but hopes that if that does not materialise he will at least be in a sufficiently strong position after it to ensure the seat on the following occasion.
10. Cookstown by-election
Mr. Haughey is hopeful that the SDLP candidate, Francis Rocks, can win the by-election in Cookstown on 29 March (the

by-election was caused by the death of a DUP Councillor). If the SDLP do succeed in taking the seat it will bring the Nationalist/Unionist breakdown in Cookstown Council to 8:8. This would be a very significant breakthrough, given the history of the Council which has been dominated in recent years by a hard line DUP faction led by Alan Kane. Mr. Haughey said that the party is putting a big effort into the campaign and highlighting the significance of victory for the SDLP.

Doc
T. O' Connor

6 March, 1990.

cc Mr. Gallagher, Counsellors, Secretariat, Section, Box.