



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

Reference Code:	2020/17/16
Creator(s):	Department of the Taoiseach
Accession Conditions:	Open
Copyright:	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

CONFIDENTIAL

CC PSM
McMullen, PLS
an above

Conversation with Brian Feeney, SDLP, North Belfast,
6 December 1990

He was fairly downbeat when I met him and spoke at some length of the need for Nationalists to see the Agreement having an effect on the ground. He commented that media publicity to the effect that we had not been properly consulted on the EPA Bill tended to bear out the nationalist perception that no matter what, the British instinctively down-play the nationalist agenda. He instanced the fact that five years on, there was still no sign of movement on even a minor issues like street names in Irish.

The SDLP in Belfast:

He was downbeat at the chances of the SDLP making further inroads into the Sinn Fein vote at future elections. In that regard he pointed to the recent local by-election in Coalisland and the earlier Westminster by-election in Upper Bann which, notwithstanding IRA mistakes etc, showed no real change in the Sinn Fein vote. For this reason, he was predictably pessimistic as to the SDLP's chances in winning the West Belfast seat at the next Westminster election.

He was critical of the party strategy aimed at capturing the seat. While he thought the new SDLP office in Andersonstown would have a beneficial effect on their vote, he felt that the overall strategy was being controlled by people with little knowledge of West Belfast. (In this I took him to be referring to SDLP General Secretary Patsy McGlone who has organised a special party committee to control the activities of their new office in West Belfast.) The latest move of this committee has been to hire a "political expert" from England to help in organising their campaign. Apparently this move is as a result of some prompting by the Lalor Foundation - the brainchild of a London-Irish businessman who has been pouring significant funds into the coffers of the SDLP over the past two years. Apparently one of these experts (Carly Brown) recently arrived in Belfast and is reported to have been somewhat heavy-handed and lacking in subtlety in her approach to some community groups in West Belfast. Feeney expects this strategy to rebound badly on the party in West Belfast. [I heard the same complaint from Alex Attwood some weeks ago.]

[Note: Feeney makes no secret of his deep antipathy to Joe Hendron and of his intention to make a major play for the nomination following what he considers to be Hendron's certain failure at the next election. Another figure in the Belfast organisation following the same strategy is Alex Attwood who,

I understand, recently turned down a request from Hendron to act as his director of elections. In the event that Hendron fares badly at the next election, it is safe to predict a major battle for the nomination between Attwood who has been assiduously courting the grassroots and featuring regularly in the local newspaper, the Andersonstown News; Alistair McDonnell who has launched his Phoenix Trust - an employment creating agency for West Belfast; and Feeney who has a very high media profile and has been elected chairman of the recently revived Belfast District Executive of the party.]

The Belfast District Executive of the SDLP, which has been moribund for the past 10 years, has been revived with the particular objective of compiling a coherent submission for the forthcoming review of constituencies. Feeney has been elected Chairman of the Executive. The general feeling is that Belfast may have one Westminster seat too many, though Feeney assumes that the Government will not want to reduce the number of seats for Belfast. For this reason, he expects that the boundaries of the existing Belfast constituencies may be expanded either north into Glengormley and/or east into Castlereagh. As part of this process it is likely that the boundary of the West Belfast Constituency will be redrawn. This could go either of two directions - either to encompass the Catholic working-class housing estates of Poleglass & Twinbrook which are presently part of Lisburn, or across the motorway to encompass areas of Balmoral. The first option (ie to include Poleglass & Twinbrook) will in Feeney's view "copper-fasten Gerry Adams' seat for ever and a day". The other option (ie to include Balmoral) would introduce a mixed middle-class area which would be to the advantage of the SDLP - "though it would play havoc with house prices in Balmoral".

Police Liaison:

The RUC have designated North Belfast and Omagh as areas for a pilot project on community relations. In both areas, the RUC have contacted local councillors and leaders of various community groups to take part in regular meetings with the local RUC Sub-Divisional Commander and senior officers in order to try to iron out local problems. Notwithstanding SDLP policy, he has agreed to take part in the exercise. As reported previously, he feels strongly that with the horrendous rate of sectarian assassinations in North Belfast, nationalists need some sort of effective policing and the RUC is the only police force available at present.

The local response to the RUC initiative has been predictably disappointing from the point of view of the RUC. The SDLP, Alliance and Workers Party Councillors have agreed to take part, though Unionist Councillors have refused (Feeney assumes because they would have to sit in the group with him). Two or

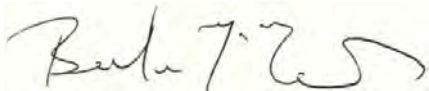
three community groups on the Protestant side have agreed to participate, though only one community group on the nationalist side was prepared to take the risk.

While Feeney appears to value opportunities to build relations with the police, he has not been particularly impressed with the progress on this initiative to date. He felt that no matter what, the RUC always tend to be over sensitive to Protestant concerns at the expense of the Catholics. He instanced the case of Loyalist painting of the kerbstones on Skegoneill Avenue. This is an area which has a significant Catholic population who not unnaturally feel intimidated by the amount of loyalist graffiti and painting of kerbstones in the area. Last year he waged a campaign against the Dept of the Environment (DOE) to have this graffiti cleaned. This year he approached the RUC through this new community relations framework. The response was to the effect that the RUC had checked locally and found that "not everyone objected to the painting". For this reason, they felt there was little they could do and suggested that Feeney again approach the DOE himself on the matter. Feeney commented that it was the same old story, the RUC were not prepared to stick their necks out on behalf of the Catholic minority living in that area - "once again nationalist concerns take second place to unionist concerns".

IPLO:

As reported previously (my report of 25 May refers) he is increasingly worried at the apparent growth of the IPLO in areas of West and North Belfast - notably Divis, Twinbrook, New Lodge and Lenadoon. The IPLO apparently draw their recruits from local criminals (hoods) who have banded together to protect themselves from the Provos. To date there has been no attempt by the Provos to take them on and, in fact, the Provos have used them on occasion to carry out the odd sectarian killing.

He understands from RUC contacts that the recent murder of a young Catholic man, Gary Campbell in Spamount Street in North Belfast, was not the work of the UVF as claimed, but rather the work of the IPLO. Campbell was apparently targeted after he beat up a prominent member of the IPLO (with the unusual name of O'Prey) in a bar in Belfast.



Brendan McMahon
Anglo-Irish Division
11 December 1990

cc A/Sec Gallagher
Counsellors A.I.
Secretariat
Box