



## An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

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Confidential

17 January, 1991.

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Mr. Dermot Gallagher,  
Assistant Secretary,  
Department of Foreign Affairs,  
Dublin.

Some reflections on the new Prime Minister

Dear Assistant Secretary,

At a dinner which I attended this week there were a number of MPs who were active on John Major's behalf in the leadership campaign. Some of their observations and anecdotes throw further light on the background and personality of the new Prime Minister.

Political skills

He is described as "a politician's politician" who both as a Whip and as Chief Secretary to the Treasury was adept at carrying his colleagues with him. It was noted, for example, that he was the only Chief Secretary to the Treasury who, in getting Ministers to agree their annual estimates, never had to resort to the Star Chamber. He made it his business to know exactly what the Ministers coming to him wanted. He would disarm them by making two or three unimportant concessions. It was only when they had left his room that Ministers would realise that the Treasury line had been firmly held on all the points that mattered. Few colleagues on either side of the House actively dislike him.

The party had its "warriors and healers" and Major very definitely fell into the latter category. After Thatcher this was what the party needed most. This did not deter him, however, from reshuffling the Cabinet to suit himself. His shrewdest personnel moves were in the Whip's Office, where he had appointed his ablest and staunchest ally Richard Ryder as Chief Whip, and the party machine, both of which he had firmly secured.

Political outlook

According to those close to him his time as a local councillor with Lambeth Borough Council was politically the most important formative period for him. The Council was controlled by a small group of socially enlightened Tories and this was the period when Major as Chairman of the Housing Committee won praise from the Labour opposition, including Ken Livingstone, for his radical housing programmes.

He had secured the nomination for Huntingdon against a traditional upper class Tory who had in addition, a foreign title styling himself the Marquis of Douro. The constituency association was apparently divided between Major's supporters - the majority of whom were young professionals like him who had moved to the country from South London and the established residents. He told friends afterwards that the sweetest part of his victory was "beating the stuffed shirt Marquis". Apparently there was a residue of bitterness for some time afterwards with one particularly public snub for Major when the local conservative agent's wife refused to dance with him at the annual association dinner.

He has over the years established a well earned reputation as an assiduous and well organised constituency MP, ensuring that any constituent who writes to him receives a prompt holding reply and a full response in an acceptable time limit.

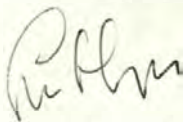
#### Personal characteristics

He is known as a workaholic. As a Minister he worked very long hours. He applies the same rigour to his one hobby - cricket - on occasion boring colleagues with his ability to recite endless cricket trivia. His capacity to play the game was greatly curtailed after a serious injury following a car accident in Nigeria when he was on a business trip for the Standard Chartered Bank and narrowly missed losing a leg. To a lesser extent, he shares his wife's interest in opera enjoying Puccini in particular. His wife is an important influence in his life and already those working with him have come to regard her as a strong independent minded woman. Reference was made to "Private Eye's" lampooning of his dull public image - the boring man in the grey suit. The feeling among those who knew him best however was that he would resist strongly any attempts to package him for public consumption.

It is said that there are three biographies of him currently in preparation. The most authoritative of these, due out this summer, is likely to be by Ed Pearce, currently writing for the Guardian and Evening Standard who has the blessing and cooperation of the Prime Minister. None of them however are likely to unearth any hidden colourful dimension or startling facts about Major's personal or political life. Much has been made of his unorthodox upbringing which conveniently distracts attention from the steady predictability of his adult life - sixteen years as a bank executive and an unremarkable if successful climb up the political ladder through local politics.

There is a sense however that his greatest strength may very well lie in his low key ordinariness and his ability to lower the temperature of political debate after the skillness and divisiveness of the Thatcher years - an asset which may prove particularly valuable in leading the country through the crisis in the Gulf.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Joe Hayes', written in a cursive style.

Joe Hayes  
Counsellor