

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

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Meeting with Mr. Paddy Duffy, 27 September 1983

When I asked Mr. Duffy if I could call on him he responded by asking why should I want to see him saying "Sure I'm out of all that now". The conversation we had in Dungannon on 27th September gave the lie to his initial reaction. It is true that he has ceased working actively for the SDLP but he remains a member and his interest in politics is as great as ever.

Mr. Duffy says that John Hume drove both Michael Canavan and himself out of active party membership because they had publicly disagreed with him saying that the SDLP should not contest the Assembly elections. He was pessimistic about SDLP prospects. He maintains they have become a middle class introspective group composed of doctors, solicitors and teachers who are out of touch with the grass roots. They are not organised in the housing estates and are unresponsive to working class needs. He was critical of Denis Haughey and Austin Currie. He blamed the former's direct condemnation of the motives of the Provisionals for the poor SDLP performance in Mid-Ulster in the Westminster election. He said that if Seamus Mallon leaves the party or retires from active politics, and he did not wish to imply that Mallon was considering any such course of action, the party would collapse. He thought the SDLP are fooling themselves if they think that they have support from the young.

The SDLP should, according to Mr. Duffy, concentrate on community work and on the opportunities provided by the new Government agencies. The Local Enterprise Development Units (LEDU) and other Agencies offer assistance to persons trying to set up small businesses. Catholics are increasingly taking advantage of such opportunities and are providing employment for others. Mr. Duffy said he himself is heavily involved in encouraging people to participate and benefit from what is available (as are Sinn Féin and some of the local Catholic clergy). So far he claimed the SDLP have neglected this area.

Mr. Duffy claims, as do others I have spoken to recently, that there has been a real improvement in the position of Catholics relative to that of their Protestant neighbours, at least in the West of Northern Ireland. Good housing, since the establishment of the Housing Executive, is open to them. He noticed that the number of planning applications for housing from Catholics in many of the local council areas now for the first time exceeds those from Protestants. This he interprets as indicative of a definite shift in relative economic terms. Since the passing of the 1947 Education Act, which provides for free education, there has not only been a growth in the number of Catholic professional persons, teachers, doctors, etc. There has also been a growth in the number of Catholic businessmen and entrepreneurs, so that the Catholic Community is becoming more active economically. In the meanwhile in recent years a good number of what Mr. Duffy calls the liberal Protestants have emigrated. The reality is that he sees a definite shift in the relative economic positions of Catholics and Protestants. He claimed that Protestants recognise this shift and gave an example of a part time U.D.R. man, whom he was defending in a civil case, telling him that the U.D.R. were becoming disgruntled because they were taxed on their earnings while his Catholic neighbours were moonlighting tax free.

Mr. Duffy described Mr. Hume's position as dominated by a wish to reconcile nationalists and unionists, Catholics and Protestants. He thinks Mr. Hume misguided. He sees no evidence that Protestants want reconciliation. He does not think that Dublin should drop its claim to the North. Nationalists would be opposed to this and it would not result in any softening of the unionist position. Nor does he think that there is any more hope now for joint sovereignty than there was when it was first floated by the SDLP in 1972. In his view Irish Government policies should concentrate on cross border economic cooperation.

Loyalists see clear advantage to themselves in this and will cooperate. Two areas which could be of major advantage would be agriculture, where the interests of Northern farmers frequently coincide with those of Southern farmers and are different from those of British farmers, and engineering. In the meantime the position of the Catholics will continue to improve and their growing power within the community will be reflected in political power within Northern Ireland though he wasn't prepared to spell out exactly how this might take shape.

Mr. Duffy said the escape from the Maze will boost Provisional morale. He considers the supergrass phenomenon to be a travesty of justice which will not be abandoned until one of the supergrasses retracts his evidence. He thinks the Provisionals remain very strong and is convinced the IRA could start up a campaign whenever they wish. They will remain until such stage as the nationalists take power in Northern Ireland. INLA he sees as a anarchic group. He said that McGlinchy, who is wanted both North and South, has engaged himself with the RUC. Recently a constituent in Cookstown whose car had been hijacked contacted Mr. Duffy telling him that the hijackers had told him to tell the RUC that McGlinchy and Hughes had struck again. When Mr. Duffy so informed the RUC the response was "not again".

Mr. Duffy claimed reports of Sinn Féin personation at the last election had been greatly exaggerated. He would put the total at no more than a few thousand. He said they are aiming at the 1985 local government elections. (He expects John Hume will win the European Parliament election though with a reduced majority) If PSF succeed in persuading nationalists, who previously abstained to vote, as they had done in the Westminster election then it is possible that there could be nationalist majorities not only in Derry, as there is now, but in Strabane, Dungannon, Cookstown, Magherafelt and Armagh. [If this were to be the case there could be major political implications for the SDLP].

*Dóic*

D. Ó Ceallaigh  
29 September 1983

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