



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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5.3.1.  
This is an excellent report. AT

Meeting with Mr. Denis Haughey, SDLP

28 June 1988

Commenting on recent developments within Sinn Féin, including the papers delivered at the special party conference at the weekend which referred, inter alia, to "contradictions" within the movement, Mr. Haughey said that there was certainly an element of the crossroads about what was happening within Sinn Féin at the moment. The novelty value of life with an armalite in one hand and a ballot box in the other had worn very thin and Sinn Féin were discovering the painful lesson that clever slogans do not necessarily translate over the longer term into solid, vote-winning policies. He believed that Adams was under no illusions about the need for new directions and that he (Adams) personally was probably ready to go down the exclusively political road. The critical questions were (a) how far he could bring the movement with him and (b) if push came to shove whether he would be prepared to split the party. There were undoubtedly clear tensions between the traditionalist wing for whom the "armed struggle" was almost as sacred as (more sacred than?) the cause and the young "Belfast yuppie" element represented by people like O Muilleoir et al, who seemed to be more and more suggesting that the gun was now a political liability (or at least that there should be a greater awareness about the political implications of any military operation). There was also probably an element of resentment among the traditionalists that they who had borne the brunt of the struggle "in the ditches" should now be lectured to by young "whippersnappers" from Belfast who had not "dirtied their hands for the cause".

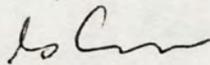
Regarding the leak to the "Irish News" of the recent internal Sinn Féin papers, he believed that there was almost certainly an element of going over the heads of the militarists involved. There was probably a feeling that by appealing directly to the people, a sufficient public momentum would be set in train which the opponents of change within the movement would be powerless to stop.

In reply to a question of mine about the implications for the SDLP of a greater and more exclusive emphasis on politics by Sinn Féin, he agreed that this would undoubtedly bring difficulties, politically, for his party. However, the benefits to the wider community outweighed this consideration and, in any case, he was confident that the increased "competition" would make for a tighter SDLP

organisation. In some ways they had had things too easy as a party and as a result they had suffered organisationally.

He personally subscribed to an observation made some years ago by David McKittrick that the British "Establishment" had decided in principle to leave Ireland "but in their own time". The major obstacle in the way of giving reality to that principle was IRA violence. A basic human reaction when somebody pushed you was to "dig in". He believed strongly that this was precisely the effect that the "armed struggle" had on the British Government, and that it was a sign of the Provos' political immaturity (childishness even) that they apparently had not yet learned that lesson.

Mr. Haughey welcomed the release of Sean Seamus O'Hara from Mountjoy Prison last week. He had personally campaigned for a number of years on Mr. O'Hara's behalf on the basis that his involvement in the affair in question had been at worst peripheral. He was grateful to the Minister for Justice for agreeing to Mr. O'Hara's release after serving a comparatively short period of his sentence (4 out of 10 years).



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30 June 1988

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