



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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*Mr. Hayes - meeting notes*  
*John*

**Meeting with Maurice Hayes, 6 November, 1995**

Taking up a Taoiseach's suggestion during an encounter at the Seamus Heaney Dinner, Maurice Hayes met me to discuss principally his direct experience of the Constitutional Convention. There may be interest in his overall views on the Convention idea as well as his thoughts on other matters.

- Hayes said that Trimble's Assembly proposal had been put forward as a means of 'parking with honour' the decommissioning issue in the interests of advancing the peace process to all-party dialogue phase. For that reason, he felt that the SDLP and Sinn Féin should not have been 'so hasty' in their dismissal of the idea. He qualified that by saying that he understands very well their concerns on this matter.
- I said that while the SDLP had rejected Trimble's proposal some time ago, I had the impression that Sinn Féin's reaction was more circumspect. However, the singling out by the British Government of the Convention idea in its released 'Building Blocks' document caused the Sinn Féin horse to bolt as well. It was wrong to show preference for the ideas coming from <sup>one</sup> tradition without balancing it with the positions of the other.
- Hayes said that he sees practical merit in the Convention model only in the context of resolving the decommissioning issue. It would be much better to have all-party negotiations without any sort of Convention being part of, or as a prelude to, such talks because it is, as he described it, 'a circuitous route to go'. If, however, the Convention idea had to be used, such matters as its structures, chairmanship and timeframe (around

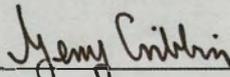
6 months) should be predetermined at the outset. At all costs, avoid any 'horseshoe shaped chamber' which, in the context of negotiations on a settlement, is inherently unsuitable for the task. But in the event that such a chamber proves unavoidable, it 'most certainly should not meet at Stormont', which holds far too much emotional attachment for Unionists and far too much emotional abhorrence for Nationalists.

- Hayes' calm factual but rather bleak account of his experience of the Constitutional Convention amounted essentially to a dismissal of that particular model for application in today's political context. He did however say at the end of our meeting that one positive outcome of the Convention experiment was that Bill Craig, while unwilling - indeed politically unable - to concede the principle of power-sharing, did nevertheless reach agreement with Paddy Devlin the idea of Coalition Government. Paisley however, by playing to the Convention's inherent weaknesses, wrecked whatever progress was being achieved.
  
- Regarding elections to precede settlement negotiations, Hayes perceives one advantage and one disadvantage. On the former, he said that Sinn Féin's contention to be already democratically-mandated is 'a bit thin'. He singled out Martin McGuinness as 'not being elected to anything'. [Note: With this line of argument, McGuinness could respond with a 'nobody ever made that a precondition for my talks with Michael Ancram']. The key disadvantage he sees with elections is that parties would partake on the basis of manifestos. While a clear basis for talks agreed at the outset would help to diminish their adverse effects, that alone cannot in practical terms eliminate them.

- On the SDLP, Hayes described the situation in the party as 'very sad'. Communication between the party's four MP's is very poor, adding that Eddie McGrady is most disillusioned. At an organisational level, the SDLP is a 'disaster' and he said that only Mark Durkan is tuned into the gravity of the situation. He reckons that Joe Hendron will certainly lose his seat to Gerry Adams at the next election, not because SDLP supporters will switch allegiance to Sinn Féin but because the latter (unlike the SDLP) will get all their voters out and from what he has seen, Sinn Féin's constituency operations in West Belfast are far superior.
  
- I asked if he envisaged that the SDLP would lose ground to Sinn Féin in other constituencies. There is that fear in some SDLP circles he said, but their concerns were somewhat exaggerated. In that regard, he referred again to Mark Durkan whom he obviously holds in very high regard. Durkan is in the wrong constituency and is too far constrained by the presence of Hume in Derry. Young persons of his calibre should be out front for the SDLP.
  
- With regard to the Unionist parties, Hayes said that the DUP are losing ground to the UUP since Trimble's election. He can foresee the day when the DUP will be truly 'a party of Reverends'. The UDP and PUP were not making any real inroads into the DUP or UUP heartlands. They have to first overcome 'the strange Protestant working class culture' of 'who are these new wee boys anyway' before they can establish themselves outside their present strongholds. He estimated that their potential share of the vote stands at a maximum of 3% to 4% at present.

They will have to become 'constituency wise' too - putting an unknown to stand in the recent Newtownabbey election was 'politically daft'.

- When I asked if research funds should be made available to Northern Ireland's political parties when talks on a settlement get under way, he responded positively. Such funds were available during the Constitutional Convention era (circa. £7,000) but the demand was very poor. Hayes was of the view however that such would not be the case again. He added that it is not merely a question of the necessary research resources being made available to each party but adequate administrative resources are required as well.
- I mentioned that the Taoiseach had met Clive Soley on Friday last. In the best spirit of traditional advice given to an aspiring Will beneficiary, Hayes said that 'we should keep well in with him'. He will be Number Two at the NIO in the event of a Labour victory.
- As an interesting aside, Hayes told me that the Convention period was the only time in his life during which he kept a Diary. It will be published some time after all the key players of that period have passed away and he kindly offered to let me read it at his home in Belfast some time. Regarding Bill Craig, he is still alive but since the fall of the Convention, he has been an 'invisible man' and to Hayes' knowledge, he has engaged in his legal practice for years.

  
10 November, 1995