

**Speech by Minister of State, Seán Haughey T.D. at the handing over ceremony of the papers of the late Charles J. Haughey to Dublin City University 3<sup>rd</sup>. February 2009.**

President von Prondzynski, distinguished visitors, ladies and gentlemen, it is indeed a great honour for me to say a few words on behalf of the family of the late Charles Haughey on the occasion of the official handing over of his papers to Dublin City University.

It was always my father's intention to find a suitable home for his papers. His family are happy with the choice of DCU for many reasons:

- It was his government which gave the former NIHE its university status and as Taoiseach he was closely associated with this decision;
- He was the first recipient of its Honorary Degree;
- The President of the College, Prof. Ferdinand von Prondzynski, approached him about the matter and he had many friends involved with the University such as Ged Pierse and the late Paddy Wright;
- and last but not least, the campus is located on Dublin's northside, close to his political heartland which he represented in Dáil Éireann for 35 years.

There is a wealth of material among his papers which will, in due course, keep historians and academics engaged for years to come. They encompass his long political career, his great breadth of interests and his various roles as parliamentarian, legislator and committed European.

To dismiss his entire contribution to the political, social, economic and cultural life of this country, as some commentators have attempted to do, on the basis of selected aspects of his personal finances is simply absurd. There are few areas of Irish life where his influence has not been apparent and it is our family's hope that, in time, these papers will be both the basis of, and the stimulus for, an objective assessment and appraisal of my father's contribution to the building of modern Ireland.

In the first instance, it is as a politician that many will remember my father. Historians will, no doubt, be interested in some of his handwritten musings about his own attitude to politics. The following comments were probably committed to paper in the later years of his life as he battled illness. "*I never broke my word in politics*" he has written and "*had always to keep in mind that I was running a country and not simply an economy*". He had also noted that he "*never made a decision or took any action that was not motivated totally by the public good in so far as I could judge it*". His motivation for wanting to be in power was to "*be able to use it for the benefit of the people*". In his papers too, you will find a note recording that in all his time in public life he was never late for a public or private appointment during his entire political career!

From what I have seen myself his papers present a fascinating overview of his life and the decades in which he was in politics. There is some detail of the involvement of his mother and father in the War of Independence in South Derry and their subsequent departure from the Six Counties in the early 1920s. It should be stressed however, that he considered that it was his upbringing on Dublin's northside which was the greatest influence in his formative years. He is on record, too, as saying that in the many practical day to day matters, World War Two impacted on his generation more so than anything which had gone before. He typified, as the official Fianna Fáil 1951

general election literature proclaimed, one of the ‘new guard’ – ready and willing to serve with the ‘old (guard)’.

His school and college career details have been well documented. He was always a scholarship boy much to the relief of his parents, especially his mother Sarah-Ann, who with a husband in poor health, had the task of raising seven children despite difficult, if not sometimes dire, financial circumstances. Perhaps less well known from this period is that after graduation from UCD he embarked on both accountancy and legal studies simultaneously. In 1949 he was called to the ‘Bar’ and in 1950 he was admitted as an Associate of the Chartered Institute of Accountants.

The early 1950s were a particularly busy period in his life. He married my mother, Maureen Lemass, in 1951 and had by this time also established an accountancy practice with his school friend, Harry Boland. His papers record his first involvement in Fianna Fáil at a national level in 1951 with documentary evidence of earlier involvement at local level in Dublin North East from 1948. As evident from his papers, it was as a member of the Organising Committee of the National Executive in the 1950s that gave him his first involvement with the wider units of the Fianna Fáil organisation countrywide – something which proved useful in later years in building a national profile within the party.

During this period he still had some time for other activities and served in the Local Defence Force, later the FCA, from 1941 to 1957 when he had to resign his commission following his election to Dáil Éireann. It was this period of his life which gave my father a great affection for the Defence Forces and indeed for the other institutions of State.

My father began his political career as a Dublin Corporation councillor in the 1950s. He never served as Lord Mayor – perhaps the only area where I can

say that my achievements have definitely surpassed his! He always expressed the view that an element of luck favoured his political career at the outset. He was selected as the Fianna Fáil candidate in the Dublin North East bye-election in 1956 following the death of Alfie Byrne. Although advised privately not to go forward in the contest as it was widely accepted that Alfie's son, Patrick was a shoe-in, my father considered that the resulting publicity and exposure as the sole Fianna Fáil candidate in the bye-election would raise his profile significantly within the constituency. This, he figured, must surely be of benefit if a general election quickly followed the bye-election. His reasoning proved correct, and although he was the runner-up, he was elected to Dáil Éireann within a year in the general election in 1957. The rest, as they say, is history!

It was Seán Lemass, who fifty years ago this year became Taoiseach for the first time, that appointed my father as Parliamentary Secretary to his constituency colleague, the Minister for Justice, Oscar Traynor T.D in 1960. Over the following two decades he served in the Ministries of Justice, Agriculture, Finance and in Health and Social Welfare. In each of these Departments he championed a legislative programme of social change and reform and showed a commitment to the less well-off and under-privileged.

One of the interesting aspects of my father's papers is the large volume of personal correspondence which he received throughout his long life. Much of this material might be classified as letters of support and encouragement and was received contemporaneously with, and perhaps in their own way, marking the major milestones in his political career. This material will be an excellent primary source for historians as an unsolicited commentary on all the major events in his political life. They will in time, no doubt, be usefully contrasted with other media coverage of the day.

In 1979, for example, a supporter and racing colleague wrote of his accession to the leadership of Fianna Fáil: - *'I offer you my respectful congratulations on the greatest political achievement I have ever seen. Unaided, from a standing start (or behind it), you built a personal team, showed your depth of strategic perception by taking a long view and working from within a great party, organised disparate elements and defeated a whole establishment'*.

His governments between 1987 and 1992 are widely credited with taking the decisions necessary for economic recovery. Another public figure, indeed one with a different political allegiance, wrote to him after the 1987 election: *'I wish your victory had been more complete, but I am sure you will have every success in steering the country on the road to recovery. Things can only improve from now on....I share your pride in this small but proud nation and I know that we are down to our Last Hero and (we) are all depending on you'*.

Social Partnership has attracted much public comment, no more so than in the last few weeks and it would be fair to say that this process is now at a crossroads. My father's views on its genesis and development and indeed its wider significance will be of interest. It was very much an initiative which he instigated and promoted - as I believe any reading of his papers will reveal. My father's thoughts on how Social Partnership came about will soon be published. He was somewhat bemused to hear various claims of credit for its initiation and was motivated to comment: *"Should any proof of its basic soundness be required it must surely be the number of individuals and bodies who have laid claim to its parenthood"*.

As a great admirer of Seán Lemass and his shedding of the old 'protectionist' policies, my father, too, always believed that a Taoiseach should take a leadership role in economic and social policy matters. It should be no surprise, therefore, that he established an Economic and Social Policy

Division within his own department shortly after becoming Taoiseach for the first time in 1979. The existence of this centralised approach would provide the mechanism whereby Social Partnership could be negotiated at the highest level.

He has provided details of where its precise origins lay. The first seeds of what would become Social Partnership began to germinate in his mind in 1982 following a discussion with West German Chancellor Schmidt at the European Summit in Brussels. Schmidt made some remarks about an upcoming weekend meeting with employers and trade unionists to reach agreement on pay and salary increases for the coming year, an event which he, Schmidt, considered as being his most important week-end in his annual political calendar. My father was immediately struck by the pragmatic, common sense approach of involving the social partners in this manner.

My father's minority government in 1982 has, I believe, not received the recognition it deserves, at least in the economic area. He was aware that corrective action in the public finances was possible only in the context of a balanced economic and fiscal plan with the support of the Social Partners. He proposed a comprehensive and balanced series of measures in the economic plan, *The Way Forward*. Despite some preliminary negotiations with the social partners during the drafting of this economic document, agreement was not reached on this occasion. Unfortunately his government lost power before this plan could be implemented but not before it had taken some difficult decisions. In a dramatic and decisive step, for example, it broke the public sector pay agreement and postponed already agreed pay increases.

In 1987 the incoming Fianna Fáil government returned to the strategy broadly outlined in 1982 to tackle '*the dire state of things*'. It committed itself to a new National Economic Plan to be negotiated with the social partners. Within seven months of taking office the government delivered on this commitment

and implemented in Ireland a new approach to economic management. In October of that year his government launched the first Social Partnership Programme, *The Programme for National Recovery (PNR)* which aimed at reducing government borrowing, initiating taxation reform, promoting greater social equity and advancing developmental employment measures. One of the central tenets common to the PNR and its successor, *The Programme for Economic and Social Progress* was a moderate pay policy accompanied by income tax reductions.

Social Partnership has, for two decades, been an outstanding success and is an integral part of my late father's legacy. Its fruits are already documented elsewhere. Other measures taken by the 1987 government were also to prove significant. These included the establishment of the International Financial Services Centre which, in time, became a phenomenal success both in creating employment and more so in generating revenue. It would grow to account for almost 26,000 jobs, and establish Ireland as an international fund jurisdiction with more than 340 leading asset management companies managing 4,000 funds.

Radical changes were made to airline policies which led to lower access fares and the expansion of the tourist industry. In addition the National Treasury Management Agency was established to manage the National Debt and the development of Temple Bar initiated.

My father has acknowledged the important contribution of the trade union leadership in economic recovery: *“At this time of crisis, Ireland had the good fortune to have probably the most enlightened trade union leadership we ever had”*. They were not found wanting and took the *“difficult decisions that saw us through”*.

In relation to Northern Ireland my father's papers testify to his involvement in the early stages of the Peace process. On one occasion in the 1960s in Dáil Éireann he revealed that he had 52 first cousins living in the Six Counties. It always was for him his "*top political priority*". Within his papers his contacts with Fr. Reid are well documented. My father always spoke favourably of the Clonard priest's important contribution. With his northern background, it was no small wonder that my father received correspondence over the years from many northerners along the lines of this letter in 1987: "*we feel safe when you are in charge and (I) know that you will not stand idly by*".

Correspondence was received from the public until the day he passed away and indeed continued to be received by his family for many months after his funeral. If any single issue can be said to have dominated his correspondence in the latter years of his life it was undoubtedly the 'free travel scheme' which he himself had introduced as Minister for Finance – against the advice of senior civil servants at the time. As one wag put it cryptically, it allowed every old age pensioner '*the freedom of the city*' – the ability to come and go, to travel around at will – anywhere and anytime! It was undoubtedly revolutionary in its social impact when introduced in the late 1960s.

If there was one feature of Irish life which interested my father greatly and which featured intermittently in my late father's correspondence throughout his long career it was the arts and cultural issues in general. A public administrator wrote to my father after he resigned as Taoiseach in 1992: '*Through your steadfast support for the arts and your insistence that they receive proper funding, you have given back to the people of Ireland, a sense of pride in their heritage and their public institutions*'. An artist of some considerable repute summed up his contribution writing later in the 1990s: '*During times when few cared, your early perception has, I believe, been centrally responsible for the extra-ordinary resurgence we now see everywhere in Ireland*'. As Michael Viney has written, he was responsible for

instigating a *'virtual renaissance overnight'* effectively promoting *'the official imprimatur for creativity. The arts became respectable occupations, not just pastimes for layabouts and boozers'*.

His papers will provide insights into the man we, his family, and so many people throughout the country, loved and admired. I began by saying that many would recall him as a politician but for those of us who knew him personally he had so many interests which are reflected in his papers and books. He loved Ireland, its people and its rich cultural heritage, its history and its folklore, its arts and its architecture. He had a passion for horses and shooting and for sailing and appreciated the importance and value of the sea. It was probably this realisation which led him to declare the seas around Ireland as a 'Whale and Dolphin Sanctuary'. He admired master craftsman and promoted traditional crafts whenever he could going to great lengths to use local material or locally crafted furniture whenever possible.

He had a great respect for fauna and flora and loved horses and trees. He had a great interest in bee-keeping and tried his hand at deer-farming and at a little organic farming as in an earlier decade he had tried commercial egg production. He tried wind and solar energy long before it was fashionable to do so. I find it interesting today, almost nineteen years after the event, to remember that he designated his 1990 EU Presidency as a "Green Presidency". He was from his earliest days in politics always a committed European and his family were delighted that in later years he got to spend some vacation time in the warmer climate of the south of France, no doubt enjoying its food and wine also.

The inscription on my late father's headstone is taken from "The Grave" by another great Irishman, Thomas Davis:

*'He served his country and loved his kind'*.

It is our belief that future historians will find in my father's papers a long record of service in public life and a great love of Ireland and its people.

On behalf of the family I would like to thank the President of the University Ferdinand von Prondzynski for accepting my late father's collection of papers on behalf of Dublin City University. In addition I would also like to say how delighted our family are that an endowment fund has been established to support the creation of the Charles J. Haughey Access Scholarships and Doctoral Fellowships, and we are grateful to those who have helped to make this project a reality. We, his family, are particularly delighted about the provision of two, annual four year undergraduate scholarships for two students from the Northside Partnership Area.

It is a great pleasure for the Haughey family to handover the papers of my late father to DCU. We hope that they will prove of great interest to future historians and academics and we would like to wish them well with their endeavours and many hours of fruitful research.

Thank you very much.