



written by Ed Moloney

Haughey risked his career in daring search for peace

It was, of course, Haughey's strong brand of nationalism that made him so acceptable to Sinn Féin president Gerry Adams and Belfast-based Redemptorist priest Fr Alec Reid, when, in 1986, they decided it was time to take the initiative they had begun four years earlier - an important step forward.

Although Haughey had begun his ministerial career in 1961 by dealing a death blow to the IRA's 1956-62 Border campaign, when he introduced military courts, by the mid to late 1980s his image had been entirely transformed.

The Arms Trial, with its implication that he had helped arm and finance the nascent Provos, meant that, his acquittal notwithstanding, he would forever more be shrouded in the same sulphurous fog that envelops physical force republicanism, while his comeback from subsequent political exile was achieved by banging the republican drum at Fianna Fail chicken dinners throughout the length and breadth of Ireland.

When Haughey succeeded Jack Lynch as Fianna Fáil leader and Taoiseach in 1979 he signalled an important break with Lynch's more accommodating approach to London and the unionists. At his very first Fianna Fail Ard Fheis, he declared the North to be "a failed political entity" and he followed this with a call on Britain to declare their interest in ultimate Irish unity.

His teapot diplomacy with Margaret Thatcher signalled a desire to bypass the unionists and laid the basis for the Anglo-Irish Agreement, while ideas and policies generated by Haughey and his adviser, Martin Mansergh, were adopted almost wholesale by Gerry Adams and Fr Reid and incorporated in the peace process.

Amongst these was a proposal that if the IRA ended its violence then Sinn Féin should be allowed to attend an all-Ireland conference at which nationalists and unionists would hammer out the institutional and constitutional arrangements for a new Ireland. Within this idea lay the germ of the peace process and the Good Friday agreement.

An indirect dialogue between Charles Haughey and Gerry Adams began in August 1986, a few months before Haughey was once again elected Taoiseach when the Redemptorist priest travelled to Kinsealy to lay out some of the ideas he and Adams had crafted as alternatives to the IRA's armed struggle.

This was not the first time the two men had communicated. In 1981 during the republican hunger strikes, they had exchanged messages via Pádraig O hAnnracháin,

de Valera's former private secretary. This time Fr Reid took on the job of go-between.

The high point of the diplomacy came in May 1987 when the then editor of the Irish Press, Tim Pat Coogan, delivered a 15-page, 7,000-word letter from Fr Reid to Haughey which outlined in detail the history of the Redemptorist priest's exchanges with the Sinn Féin leader and set out the terms Gerry Adams would accept for an IRA ceasefire.

It was an extraordinary and remarkable document that was the first open expression on Adams's behalf of his wish to end the IRA's violence for good. Fr Reid went further and told Haughey that, handled properly, the initiative could remove the gun from Irish nationalist politics forever.

Cardinal O Fiaich had endorsed the Adams-Reid process, the letter revealed, and furthermore the Catholic church would facilitate and host dialogue between Fianna Fail and Sinn Fein whose goal would be the creation of a pan-nationalist axis whose political clout would be sufficiently strong to persuade even the hardest of the IRA's hard men to lay down their guns and adopt political methods instead.



The letter also revealed that Adams was ready to ditch long-held republican bottom

lines. The British would not have to physically withdraw from Northern Ireland, but as long as they promised not to interfere or dictate an outcome, Sinn Fein would accept any settlement that resulted from negotiations between unionists and nationalists, even one that fell far short of Irish unity. If the British agreed, then the IRA would put down its guns, Fr Reid told Haughey.

The letter from Reid to Haughey essentially contained the blueprint for the peace process and while there was no obvious reason to doubt Adams's sincerity, continuing and escalating IRA violence (during 1987 and 1988, much of it fuelled by arms shipments from Libya, highlighted the worrying gap between Adams's words and actions on the streets. The Enniskillen Poppy Day bombing in 1987, for instance, very nearly derailed the entire process.

Haughey had taken a great risk in dealing with Adams, even at arm's length. Had details of this dialogue become public at this time there is little doubt that some, perhaps many, would have viewed it as an unholy alliance between the IRA and the man often accused of bringing the modern IRA into being and Haughey's political career might have been ruined.

So it was that when Adams asked for direct, face-to-face talks with Haughey, the Fianna Fail leader balked. Instead, it was suggested that the SDLP leader John Hume

should be approached and asked to join the process. Fr Reid wrote to Hume and he agreed, but both Gerry Adams and Charles Haughey agreed not to tell the SDLP leader of their earlier contacts. Both men feared that if others in the SDLP learned of their dialogue, it would be leaked to the media with disastrous consequences.

It turned out to be a master stroke. Hume became a buffer between the Provos and the Irish government and because of his long record of opposition to IRA violence, he brought the Good Housekeeping seal of approval to a process that otherwise might not have been received so warmly. The downside of the arrangement is that for a long Hume wrongly believed that he had initiated the peace process, although he secured later consolation in the form of the Nobel peace prize.

Within Ireland's foreign policy bureaucracy, Haughey would later be criticised for not taking the peace process the next step forward and for leaving that job to Albert Reynolds. This was a view shaped with the advantage of hindsight that understated the huge risk that Haughey, with his history, took in opening discussions with Gerry Adams at a time when the IRA was bombing and shooting all around it.

Haughey's contribution to the peace process is that he was the one who opened the door to Gerry Adams at a time when everyone else was slamming it in his face. Would Jack Lynch, Garret Fitzgerald, Albert Reynolds or Bertie Ahern have taken the same risk?