

## Dr. Brendan O'Regan Disk 14

**JH:** Could I just mention finally a name from that group of first staff in Shannon Development, Paul Quigley?

**BO'R:** Paul, Paul was really the king of the castle there and to a certain extent I have often regretted that I got so much publicity myself that he didn't get enough. But Paul was the manager of the Irish Management Institute. You have an interview, that I gave to Paul's successor. I don't know where you got that?

**JH:** Ivor Kenny

**BO'R:** Ivor Kenny, that was the best interview I got, I think. Paul was a management man and he and I got on very well but there was a period when I felt that we had achieved what we were set up to do and we should do something else that no other organisation was capable of doing and that was to accept a from the Government a second commitment and that was to Donegal, to do in Donegal what we had done in the Shannon area. My object was related to what I felt was Ireland greatest problem - lack of understanding between the Protestants in the North and the Catholics in the South. And I felt that if we were involved up there, right on their border showing that we had a new outlook, that we weren't the Catholic Irish, not efficient and so on. But we were a different kind and I held a meeting of the board in... and I held it deliberately where there had been an IRA meeting with the Church of Ireland... my memory now isn't ..

**JH:** in Feakle.

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**BO'R:** In Feakle, yes in Feakle. So, I brought the board to Feakle to the place where the IRA and the church people in the north had met and I discussed with them this, I said: "look we have done what we were told to do which was to stop Shannon being eliminated and it's not going to go back now. The industrial zone and the town are all going and Bunratty is going. But we had a very well-trained group of people and we could take a third of them now and send them to Donegal. And we should propose that, send them to Donegal to do what we have done here, vis-a-vis the rental cottages, all the outward things that we have done to make it clear that Ireland is on the up, upbeat. And it will help enormously the political situation". And the board agreed 'yes'. But I mean I hadn't worked hard enough on the management to get the management to agree on it and of course it was a huge uproot of some members and their families would have to go to Donegal. (laughs) We didn't get it agreed anyway. One particular minister took steps to make sure that we didn't get it agreed outside the board. I still think that what we have learned in Shannon could be of value and, of course, we started about the same time anyway Co-operation North which has done it and Co-Operation north has you know twenty thousand young people who have been moved from North to the South and so on. The situation that Co-operation North has brought about an NGO and I am really satisfied that what we have learned in Shannon, through that NGO which I believed played a major part in bringing about the Good Friday Agreement, is capable of being used in a new way to make sure the GF agreement works. I think it also tells us that if War, which is really a most horrible thing now with the weapons that are available, is to be stopped that it has to be stopped by using a lot of same methods

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as have been used by Co-operation North where we have had fifty-sixty people working on friendship and understanding between North and South where we've had for many months Protestant and Catholic board working under Co-Operation north to find out how we can get rid of the stupidity that exists in not making a go of living together on the island.

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I was really just brainstorming with the Board and the executives on that occasion and I wanted to do it in Feakle because the Protestant Clergy had a meeting with the IRA there and I just wanted to underline the importance of that particular problem and that all state organisations should be involved in trying to solve it and I felt that Shannon because it was the world's first free airport ever could play a special role in it and could focus attention on the Irish history at aviation levels that would be valuable for Shannon and would get people to realise that we were involved in a struggle which was of world value for the world related to getting rid of war as it is referred to in this particular book here, that reference to the fact that unless we find a way of getting rid of it then it will get rid of us.

As is said here: [reads]such reversal and recruitment have been summarised in a cryptic formula by Brendan O'Regan.

I had set up at Shannon itself the Centre for International Co-operation quite a way back during the cold war. I was really drawing attention to the fact that Shannon, because it was an international centre, could do something, not just about the Irish conflict but about the world conflict.

So, the Feakle meetings (sic) with board and executives of Shannon Development which you mention in this letter, like today's

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discussions, was really only the beginning of a brainstorming that I intended to do with the board and executive. It was taken up too fast actually by both the executive and the board. That board agreed what I was suggesting should be done that we should concentrate on things that were only particular to Shannon so that Shannon would have a long-term job to do which would be of international significance, would be of world value and so on. That's what I was on at that stage but I was only going to Feakle to have a discussion on it because I felt that the fact that a Protestant clerical group should come down to a place like Feakle to talk to the IRA left us with a possibility that could be used at that stage. But, I didn't realise, I think, how much time the thing needed and I didn't get it done but I did draw attention to the fact that there was a difference of opinion between the management and myself and the difference was that we should stick to what we were doing and we were doing a good job on it and shouldn't shift off it, but I didn't mean that we would shift off it quickly or anything like that, but that we would study what to do about it and then when I saw that I was in a minority as far as the staff were concerned and the chief executive I decided that I was old enough then anyway to retire from the company and let somebody else do it and I would do what I thought I could do through Co-operation North and the Irish Peace Institute, and the Centre for International Co-operation, which were three NGOs, which I had set up anyway and I'm still convinced of that so that's ..... (Quotes from book) "your recollection of issues regarding future policy, views of the time on aid consultancy, village renewal and industrial development in a cross-border context in Donegal.

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Really, what that meant, what I was trying to do there was to bring some of the expertise which had brought the Midwest area up with hotels like Dromoland and the hotel at the airport and all the other developments that we had begun, including the six villages which we had restored to life and so on. I felt that we could get those done in Donegal fairly quickly with all the knowledge we had. And that it would be maybe half a dozen of our people would go up there and work there but that was a very difficult fast decision to make particularly for those who had families and all that so it didn't get the backing that I would have got for usual things.

**JH:** Had you sounded out political...say the government before that, that particular issue? Would you have had support from government sources or was that in advance of it.

**BO'R:** No, no that was in advance of it. That was just as it were a seeking of discussion on it. It was too fast; I should have done it slowly.

**JH:** You say it was too fast? That you hadn't worked enough to bring the staff around to your reasoning?

**BO'R:** I hadn't. But you see I was at that stage and I had just put the tie on, to kind-of explain to you, the tie I am wearing is a Unionist tie and its half Unionist and half Nationalist. It's the Christian symbol of the Trinity. It's the hand...I got to know my opposite number I was chairman of Bord Fáilte at the time and I got him to produce these and he produced about a thousand of them and I distributed them to

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various people down here on the basis that what we really need to do with Unionists is to work with them because they are part of us now anyway, and there is no reason why we shouldn't have some common symbol and this was the common symbol, this particular tie.

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The role of the IDA at the time and its relationship with Shannon Development, proposals to transfer all industrial promotion to the IDA, tourism to Bord Fáilte and the town to Clare County Council. I mean these were at just an exploratory meeting but they became an internal conflict within the company itself and I couldn't see any way getting out of the conflict except by pulling back myself. Reads: "The view of key stakeholders on these issues, opposition to your proposals" It was purely a brainstorming meeting as I saw it, nothing else but it became, as with most of my ideas, became very fixed after a while.

**JH:** Would you have felt that your colleagues, particularly the ones who would have opposed your new direction, would you have felt that they were entrenched, that they were a stick in the mud, that they had grown comfortable/satisfied?

**BO'R:** Yes, I did feel that., I felt that now we have a lot of money and we were not doing new things. I felt we wanted new things and that we had to find a way of creating the new things as well as that, of course, we had the conflict on our board. I mean the Chief Executive of the IDA was on our board. He was constantly pointing out to me to

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say it was ridiculous to have one region being served by this board; It's right that it should be doing the airport but it should be serving the region as well and the city of Limerick. I could see that it was wrong but anyway...and I could see I was going to be in a head-on conflict with the executive if I didn't. So that was the way I felt I could do it and I needed time anyway because I had set up Co-operation North. I was ... I can't remember how many things I was involved in... but I was very involved in the idea the Shannon zone should be duplicated all over the world on a big scale and I felt I had succeeded in doing it in China, in Taiwan and therefore it could be done if we had the executive power to give it all over the world.

**JH:** When you came to make your decision Dr. O'Regan, when you came to decide to step back from Shannon, you had been associated with Shannon for thirty years at that stage, your name had become almost synonymous with Shannon's success and you had become more than a were a national figure, you were an international figure, and when you decided then that the time had come to pull back? Was that very painful for you?

**BO'R:** I don't think it was really because I saw great possibilities that could be brought about by the Shannon Free Zone, and that ...you see I was still catering comptroller (sic) for it, I had 500 as Chairman of the Development company and I had a situation in regard to the Sales and Catering, in that I had I don't know about 20,000 (sic) something about that, but I had a lot less than I could have had any way. I had given up.. they had put 25% of profits into my .... They didn't think we'd make any profits; they didn't know about duty-free the duty-

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free whiskey coming up and all that kind of stuff. So, I was...anyway, I didn't think it was very important that I was stepping down really.

**JH:** Did you seek advice at the time?

**BO'R:** I didn't actually.

Reads: "A few key stakeholders on these issues, opposition to your proposals, Paul Quigley and other executives."

Well Paul and I always remained good friends and other executives, I shocked them alright but it didn't do any harm, I can tell you that.

**JH:** When you say you shocked them? Shocked them out of their....

**BO'R:** Yes, that what we were doing was absolutely right. I didn't think it had what Shannon needs now, for instance, a new thinking to survive into the future

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**BO'R:** Reads; between Keating and other ministers...

Keating was very supportive of us and his department, we were very well looked after, both Sales and Catering and the development company, by the civil servants.

You ask (Reads) "what factors fueled your decision to stand down as Chairman".

Well you can see the dilemma I was in

Reads: "What were your feelings about making such a decision?

Did you seek advice, if so from whom, was it sound advice?"



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I didn't think it was that important to be frank with you. Because I was involved anyway in the big things that I wanted to be involved which was the Northern Ireland situation.

(Reads) "You moved to new areas of interest, new challenges, east/west peace, north/south relations in Ireland, renewed interest in development aid for the third world, your Trócaire involvement."

But, I am sure, you've probably got it from other sources, what we did in regard to the third world, we were engaged in a tremendous development in regard to the third world and we were in that instance trying to push it out to others and we had set up an organisation of state interests to enable ... what did we call it?

**CO'C:** DEVCO and then there was the IDI. You were chairman of DEVCO?

**BO'R:** I was, I was, but I have never wanted to stick on to jobs that somebody else could do, you know and I think that what the IDI eventually were doing, was... I don't know how well it's doing now and DEVCO did a lot of good... anyway and then people like you and Tom Dunne and others have done a lot of good worldwide too. So, I felt that Shannon was a kind of a feeding ground for the power of ideas. There is in this, and you know I may have read it before, but I read it this morning anyway, its role of leadership, it's here. This man knew what he was doing. I noticed I had it turned on there before. But he is writing stuff that is of enormous importance I think and it has to do with the brain of man and the fact that we are given an imagination, which is really the creative part of God which is passed

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on to us to produce situations amongst... through our own brain and through others. You will find that's it's there from then on from 173(reads book). And when I read it this morning, I decided to look up this one as well I'll read this one at the same time. And I realised that Patrick Hederman is the same kind of person as myself. And I mean this stuff is so powerful, now particularly that what he writes about is capable of being done by a group of smart people.

**CO'C:** Maybe you might read one or two of the paragraphs into the tape?

**BO'R:** Well you should look at it anyway, you should look at it anyway.

**JH:** What do you feel is the most important part there that you are looking at?

**BO'R :** (reads) "It was a measure of O'Regan's dominant personality and ability to sell ideas that the SFADCO board accepted his 1977 proposal to change his remit from the government which would take the company out of industrial development and into things closer to his interests, but it was a vindication of the executive's realism that Minister O'Malley rejected these proposals, giving the company a new and stronger industrial remit. Two general points can be made about this story of leadership in SFADCO. The first point is that the experience does highlight the issue of individual personality and leadership in development. We will look more closely at this point now.

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Role of leadership. O'Regan's style came very close to that of the charismatic leader in the sociology literature. Anyway, he knows what....

The example of Brendan O'Regan would suggest that charismatic leadership has a potential role to play in development

Now, what I think that ... what you're doing and what is being done here in this kind of stuff gives the new Shannon team coming in a wonderful opportunity to lay claim to experience in doing something exceptional and the exceptional thing is this, is what he is talking about.

He by the way produced a very erudite book. Name of it doesn't come to me now.

But it was...He said to me, I'll put an article in by you call it the Third Way, I had used the Third Way in some discussion with him and when I wrote it, he said to me it's not erudite enough for me or something like that. Well I said I'm not sure, you see. I can't write your stuff, but you write the erudition in the beginning and the end and here's the stuff for you to put in. So, the Third Way the first bit of it is written by him and the last bit of it is written by him, but three quarters of it is written by me. It is describing what I hope Shannon one day will do. It will describe to the world, maybe in an exhibition during the time we're running the Europe which is next year very quickly how Europe has brought peace to Europe the story could be told and how Ireland has brought about the Good Friday Agreement. So, I mean there's an extraordinary similarity between what we have done and in some place like Shannon it has to be done. And Shannon already has a hotel school which has been recognised by the

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University of Galway, it has a thousand hotel men, a lot of them in the Middle East, Far East, India, elsewhere who are running hotels and it has agreed that hoteliers, hotel managers should be educated in regard to how a hotel wherever it is, can be a centre for thinking how to maintain a world without war. Something like that is the kind of thing that Shannon is going to become famous for. I hope they're going to so badly need in the Midwest to hold onto it for employment in the Midwest that all kinds of possibilities... we have produced a paper on this which is....

**CO'C:** But, about the development aid, it seems that the most significant consequence of your advice was what happened in Taiwan? I know you visited there first in 1962 and you went there again in the '70s

**BO'R:** Yes, Tom Dunne, came with me,

**CO'C:** Maybe you could tell us a bit about the advice you gave and the implementation of what you told them to do?

**BO'R:** Yes, well they already knew about Shannon and they came and studied it, what we were doing. And you could see two or three Chinamen with notebooks there for several months. They were noting those who were going in and out and what was happening and so on and they used that to develop in Liuto. and...the other name (Kaohsiung) I can't remember but an industrial zone I mean 8 or 9 times bigger than what we have, the biggest in the Far East and they based it on the very same ideas as we had, that you had to build

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factories in advance of their requirement and you had to make them right for anybody who was coming in. As kind of an example, the first big factory that we got in there was exactly one that they were very interested in, that was Tom Holloway SPS which was making parts for space, the nuts and bolts that were going into space were coming out of Ireland. That was Tom Hollowell who ...he got a little brochure that we had put onboard aircraft he came down to see it and he I think Tom Dunne or Callanan were with me at the time and I think at this stage I had got a man in Quin to an artist's impression of what the zone would look like and what a town alongside it would look like, just a sketch really. He's a very good artist who lives in Quin and I showed it to Tom Hollowell and he said: "and who is going to run that operation?" well I said "the team are already there. They are the leaders of the restaurant who have produced the best airport restaurant in the world. Anybody can see that they are serving 24 hours a day, all the time. And they will make sure that whoever comes in here that they are kept right that they are not allowed to get into the mess that can happen very often when one moves". Something like that I said to him. "I'm in then" he said. There was no search or anything, no studies made or anything like that.

**CO'C:** But did you see any conflict between what was happening in Taiwan and what was happening in Shannon? Were they in competition with Shannon?

**BO'R:** I suppose they were, but I mean the world is such a huge competitive place I don't think we were getting as much as we could take if anything But in any case, I thought the fact that we could be

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related to happenings abroad, particularly in third world situations was in itself a requirement of every country to help those that were down. I could see that our poverty had come from the fact that Britain had stopped us really from industrialising by the laws that she had during the time that she was colonising us. And I feel that that's going to eventually be the thing that will remove hunger and poverty all over the world and war, will be universal wealth by manufacturing of some kind. I don't know exactly how it will be but it will be done, anyway, with machines.

**JH:** Do you think this globalisation, globalised economy will lead to that?

**BO'R:** There are dangers but there is a great lot of wisdom in the world that knows it is wrong and is trying to get it right, will get it right eventually and that we should play a major role in arriving at that situation. I'm just looking at your letter again. And I have written down here is "November 2003, 1970s". I mean, what we are looking back is over thirty-three years. Most of what we're talking is between thirty-three years ago and twenty years ago so you have caught me at a very difficult time for memory.

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### NOTES:

1. Speakers on disk:

BO'R: Brendan O'Regan

JH: John Heuston

CO'C: Cian O'Carroll

2. \*\*\*\*\* indicates breaks between tracks on the disk

3. This manuscript may contain errors in transcribing from the disk and in the interpretation of the spoken word. For external quotation the text above should be checked against the original recording.