Gerry still tipped for Ray MacSharry job

JERRY COLLINS TO

Name: James Gerard Collins
Born: Abbeyfeale, October 1938
Address: The Hill, Abbeyfeale
Education: Abbeyfeale, Ballyfin and TD (BA)
Occupations: FF asst. gen. sec., teacher, TD, parliamentary secretary, cabinet minister.
Married: Hillary Teasen
First elected: 1987 in succession to his father James (TD 1948-87).
Posts held:
1989-70 Parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Industry and Commerce and the Minister for Gaeltacht Affairs
1970-73 Minister for Posts and Telegraphs
1970-91 Minister for Justice
1982 Minister for Foreign Affairs
1987-89 Minister for Justice (as) 1988-91 Minister for Foreign Affairs and co-chair of the Anglo Irish Conference
1991 President of the EC Council of Foreign Ministers.
Has been:
Chairman of the joint Oireachtas committee on EC legislation
Deputy Speaker on Foreign Affairs, Agriculture and on Justice
Member, New Ireland Forum
Limerick county councillor 1974-

If Gerard Collins becomes our next EC commissioner, in succession to Ray MacSharry, Limerick will have an amazing high representation in Europe.

We already have Ireland's sole judge of the European Court of Justice John Murray, former attorney general.
And we have three FFs - Pat Cox, John Collins and Paddy Lane (neither Waterford nor Kerry have any, and Cork had just one).

Des O'Malley is a member of the EC Council of Industry Ministers.

Gerard Collins' chances of getting the €120,000 p.a. (after tax) commissionship are improved by a number of favourable influences, quite apart from his personal suitability for the position.

- Firstly, there is the fact that Fianna Fáil are a racing certainty to retain their seat in the ensuing by-election. The party had never dropped below 50 per cent of the Limerick West vote. The lowest it fell to was in the general election of 1987, when it achieved two votes above half of all votes cast - and in the face of a complicated opposition lineup of three FG and a PD.

- Secondly, there is the fact that Mr Collins in Brussells would have the effect of removing from the domestic political scene a man who is seen as one of the main foes of dissent within the party. He himself is not actively seeking to become the alternative leader, but there are those who perceive him in that way.

- If Albert Reynolds can become Taoiseach having already been backed to the back benches.

- Mr Collins is perceived to be the most eminent of those Haughey administration who were dispossessed by Mr Reynolds, considerably ahead of people such as Michael O'Kennedy, Rory O'Hanlon, Ray Burke, etc.

- Graciously, there is the status of national prestige. Gerard Collins would probably be offered a vice presidencies of the Commission, owing to his previous role as international impresario.

Our first commissioner, Paddy Hillery was made vice president of the commission in honour of our accession.

Dick Burke was made vice president too, but only in the final days of his second commissionship as recognition of his years of service at the Berlaymont.

Neither Michael O'Kennedy, Peter Sutherland nor Ray MacSharry have been vice presidents.

And Mr Collins would almost certainly be offered a high-profile portfolio, such as Internal Market or Budget. If, that is, the Agriculture and Forestry brief were not available (the chances are that Agriculture will be available, as most countries are presumed to re-nominate the existing member in what is expected to be a mere two-year term, if Maastricht goes through).

Finally, it is the fact that there are no shortages of successors to Mr Collins in Limerick West in the by-election which his departure would necessitate (or in a general election, should that be called instead).

It is possible that a member of his own extended family might offer. Failing this, there are any number of experienced county councillors to take his place.

Remember, Limerick West has had none the two Fianna Fáil faces representing it since 1969 - fully 23 years without a change. And as both Mr Collins and Mr Noonan are still well under 60, there would be no reason to expect any change in that position for another two or three elections.

Against him, however, is the fact that relations between himself and the present Taoiseach were souring by his emotional televised plea to Mr Reynolds not to "sear the party apart".

Telling it like it is - the straight-talking man from Abbeyfeale.

Also against him is the fact that Pidraig Flynn was co-ordinator of the Reynolds campaign for leadership, and is seen as deserving the Brussells position, should he be asked.

The other assumed contenders for the position at this stage are:

- Pidraig Flynn, from Mayo West, where Fianna Fáil usually have a comfortable 50 per cent plus. No great international background, apart from his work at the Anglo Irish Conference, is in Justice now, and has been at Environment, at Trade, Commerce and Tourism, at Gaeltacht, and was been junior at Transport and Power.

- Mary O'Rourke, from Longford-Westmeath, the Taoiseach's own constituency. The FF vote approached 60 per cent at times. Is junior at Industry and Commerce, and has held Education.

- Måre Geoghegan-Quinn is from Galway West, where FF gets less than 40 per cent of the vote since Bobby Molloy went over to the PDs. Currently in Transport and Communications, she has also held cabinet rank at Gaeltacht. But it is at junior ministerial rank that she shines, and at which her reputation in matters European was made.

She was charged with co-ordination of EC affairs under the last two Haughey administrations, and prepared the groundwork for the Irish EC presidency.

She represented the country at a variety of EC councils of ministers. Her Dáil seat could easily be lost, however.