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Conversation with Seamus Mallon, M.P.

W. Anley
28/11

I had two brief conversations with Seamus Mallon on 25 January. Among the points he made were the following:


- He is delighted with the election outcome, not just with his own result but also with the party's performance in the other three constituencies.
- McGrady got the best vote available under present circumstances . With Powell likely to retire before the next general election, the South Down seat will be "there for the taking" next time round. Despite being dismissed as an unknown, Colton performed remarkably well in Mid-Ulster and repaid the confidence placed in him. Currie also did much better than people expected in Fermanagh - South Tyrone.
- The clear swing to the SDLP in all four constituencies means, if applied to the North as a whole, that the SDLP's share of the total nationalist vote is now around 75% (as opposed to Sinn Fein's 25%).
- The size of the nationalist turnout in the Newry-Armagh by-election was the crucial factor in his own victory. Using outside election workers in preference to local people (whom Mallon does not rate highly), the SDLP put the notoriously apathetic Newry housing estates under considerable pressure in the three days prior to the

election. This included the distribution of separate leaflets both on the eve of, and on the actual day of, the election which bluntly reminded residents (with the name of the estate specified in each instance) that, if they did not get out and vote, Mallon would lose. The result was that the turnout from some estates exceeded the 70% mark. Even a traditionally hardline Provo area like Camlough (near Newry), which Mallon canvassed intensively at the outset of the campaign, produced a turnout of some 78% (as against 64% in 1983). The average nationalist turnout in the constituency as a whole was around 75%, with the townland of Derrynoose, near Keady, scoring highest (93%).

- Nicholson's failure to get out the full Unionist vote helped as well. (News of this late on Thursday was the first signal of possible success). In addition, Mallon reckons that most of the 1500 or so 'Alliance-type' votes probably came his way.
- The decline in the Sinn Fein vote was probably due in part to the success of the anti-personation laws introduced since the last election.
- It is essential that the efficient party organisation which has been put in place in Newry be maintained, not least because of the possibility of a general election earlier than expected. In the latter respect, Mallon reflected wryly on the fact that, his previous terms as, respectively, Assemblyman and Senator had not lasted very long and that, bearing this record in mind, his days as an M.P. were perhaps already numbered!

- Hume has advised Mallon that he should make his first Westminster appearance today (27 January).

- Mallon confirmed that he will continue to be his party's spokesman on justice and security.

PP- 

David Donoghue
27 January 1986.

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