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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON.

17 Grosvenor Place

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15 September 1981

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Dear Assistant Secretary

The Department will wish to be aware that Seamus Mallon called on me last Friday when he was in London. What follows is based on what he said both to me and to other officers in the Embassy.

Mallon's visit was a personal one in connection with his decision to give up teaching and to develop a career in insurance. He has done this, he said, so as to allow him more time to devote to politics. It is, I feel of interest, that he is doing this when the SDLP's future political fortunes are seen by some as being under threat from others within the minority Community in Northern Ireland and is an indication that he feels he has a political future.

Mallon mentioned that the SDLP are holding a meeting next weekend to examine what changes they should make in the light of the Carron victory in the Fermanagh-South Tyrone bye-election. He expected there would be about forty persons at that meeting, including party spokesmen and officers of constituency associations. Mallon is of the view that the hunger strike and its consequences have shown up two main areas of weakness within the SDLP and that it is to these two issues - organisation and ideology - that the party should address itself at next weekend's meeting.

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The Fermanagh South-Tyrone by-election, and the general election in the Republic had shown the extraordinary good organisation of the Provisionals and their supporters. Mallon said that in the counties along the border, North and South, the Provisional organisation had been superior to that of their opponents, including Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil. As an example he said that in some areas North of the border the electorate had voted 100% for Carron. He estimated that Carron had at least 5,000 impersonated votes. He didn't say that impersonations were common in the Republic though he referred to large numbers of northern registered cars, with full complements of passengers, travelling south across the border on the day of our general election. He added that the Provisionals appear to have limitless funds at their disposal, far more than any other political party and that they partly use these funds to employ full time party personnel which is of great advantage to them. He thought in the light of this that the parties of nationalist hue including the Government and opposition parties in the Republic, if they are to defeat the Provisionals, must improve their organisation and their funding.

Secondly Mallon felt that it is impossible to deny that the Provisionals have made considerable gains recently in attracting people to their cause. This is partly because they can claim, and with some degree of accuracy, that the SDLP and others have failed to achieve anything and have not succeeded in moving to or even towards a solution to their problems. There has been a deep polarisation within the Northern community. There is an increasing belief within the minority community that the only solution is a 32-county independent Republic. In these circumstances the Provisionals claim that they are the only group which can achieve this goal and are telling the SDLP to stand aside.

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Mallon feels that if the SDLP is to maintain its support it must take the republican ground and verbalise this changing view within the population. They should say that there is no solution within Northern Ireland and have nothing to do with any kind of advisory council. The SDLP cannot go back to the past. If they are to win and keep the support of the minority community they must go forward. If they take this line they have a future. The hunger strike had made it impossible for them to fight in Fermanagh. Given this background and the personality problems in the constituency which are long standing, the maximum they could have polled would have been 12,000. Had this happened they would be in an even weaker position now. Mallon is satisfied, however, that once the hunger strike is out of the way they could regain the ground. He thought he could win the new South Armagh Westminster seat.

On the hunger strike Mallon said efforts should be made to try to separate those relatives who are sympathetic to ending the strike from those who are not.

I mentioned to him that Owen Carron and a group of approximately 100 relatives will be in London from 17th - 20th September and that the Armagh-H-Block Committee had asked if I would receive a representative group from among these relatives. I also told him that I hadn't any instructions as of now but that I thought, in view of previous decisions by the Government, that they would not be received at the Embassy.

Mallon said that if it were of any value, he would look into the matter to see if there were any less hardline relatives among the group whom he could take to see me before the arrival in London of the main group and thereby defuse the situation. I didn't dissuade him from this. In this

connection he mentioned his experience with the Quinn relatives which had ended in their agreeing to save his life. The relatives had asked for a meeting with Mallon to see if there was anything he could do. He had with very considerable difficulty got them into see an official of the NIO after which meeting those relatives who didn't want to interfere with Quinn's decision to die were more convinced that they were right. He then brought them to see the Provisionals and the relatives were so appalled at the callousness of the latter that they changed their minds and ended Quinn's hunger strike. Mallon saw this as an example of the sort of positive influence which could be brought to bear.

If Mallon comes forward with a proposal to visit the Embassy with some of the relatives it might be of use to receive them. It would, at worse, help to defuse any problems we might have during the relatives' visit to London and at best might help in ending the strike of one or more of the hunger strikers. However, as time is running out and as we haven't heard any more from Mallon, it would now seem unlikely that this will materialise.

Yours sincerely,
Eamon Kennedy

Eamon Kennedy
Ambassador

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