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SECRET

Meeting with Seamus Mallon, 21 November 1985

I met with Seamus Mallon in Dundalk last night for about an hour and a half. Among the main points he made were the following:

- The reaction to the Anglo-Irish Agreement among nationalists in Northern Ireland is very supportive and encouraging. People who live in his home town of Market Hill and who are active Sinn Fein supporters have gone out of their way to congratulate him in particular, the SDLP and the Irish Government for what has been achieved. A similarly encouraging attitude is widespread on our side of the border.
- The reaction of unionists in the Market Hill and Armagh areas is very restrained. There is very little evidence of any widespread and deep support for the position being taken by the unionist leaders. (This local reaction is not without significance because Mallon's home town of Market Hill is in the heart of Protestant Armagh which is traditionally a very strong unionist area. His views are echoed by information which has come to us from bankers in Northern Ireland that unionists in banking circles are very calm and do not share the fears expressed by the unionist leaders.)
- On devolution, Mallon said that he favours a strong public statement by the SDLP that they are prepared to enter into negotiations with the unionist parties to achieve devolution on the basis of executive power-sharing. Once that has been achieved the SDLP would be prepared to fight elections to a devolved Assembly on that basis.

- Mallon is in favour of those SDLP members with seats in the Assembly entering the Assembly and taking whatever is due to them. Though he didn't say so the implication is that he would not expect them to participate in the Assembly.

- He has given some thought as to how the SDLP could best organise itself with a view to making an input into the Anglo-Irish arrangements. He intends to propose to the meeting of the constituency reps on Saturday and Sunday next the following outline.
 - (1) Spokesmen should be appointed in the various areas whose job would be to provide an input to the Secretariat in terms of individual cases as they arise and also to draw up policy. Thus if there is a complaint about a UDR patrol that complaint should firstly be conveyed to the SDLP spokesman who will himself convey it to the Irish Government side. Mallon believes this would have the advantage that the SDLP spokesman would be able to monitor the extent of a problem, monitor the success or otherwise of the Irish side in having the issue redressed and, be enabled to have sufficient case history to form policy. Thus at the end of a year or so the relevant SDLP spokesman would be able to say whether or not the Agreement is working satisfactorily in a particular area.

 - (2) All matters would be channelled either through the relevant spokesman or alternatively through the local constituency rep. Mallon would prefer the former.

 - (3) The number of spokesmen who presently exist in the party would need to be increased because some of the areas of present responsibility are too wide for one man to cover under the new arrangements, particularly if there is no devolution.

(4) The four SDLP leaders, Hume, himself, Hendron and McGrady should continue to operate as before in terms of guiding the party and maintaining contact with Governments.

(5) The relevant spokesmen will probably need some sort of assistance. He didn't define this but I think what he had in mind was the provision of research assistance and so on as envisaged by the National Democratic Institute.

- He said that he would meet me early next week to tell me how the party decides to work out the arrangements necessary for its contribution to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

- He is convinced that the treatment meted out to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he visited Belfast City Hall yesterday has been very much to the disadvantage of unionists. He also noted that the protection provided for the Secretary of State by the RUC was less than what the Secretary of State might have expected.

- He said that if the unionists resigned their Westminster seats the SDLP will fight Newry/Armagh, South Down, Fermanagh and mid-Ulster. He thought they had a very good chance of winning Newry/Armagh with himself as candidate. They understand that the convention is that the party which previously held the seat can indicate when an election should be held. However Mallon hoped that that is not the legal position. (He may be correct here because whilst it is normal that in the event of the death of an MP the party of which he was a member can indicate when they want a by-election this may not hold true when a member resigns his seat.) They would hope, and Hume is teasing this out in the House of Commons this

week that if the unionists resign their seats the British Government, with the support of the opposition, will designate which Northern Ireland seats should be fought for first. He has mentioned to Peter Archer, whom he met on 19 November, that it would be strongly to the advantage of all democratic parties if the writ could first be run in Newry/Armagh. This is the area where the SDLP have the greatest chance of taking advantage of their current strong position vis-a-vis Sinn Fein. If they could win Newry/Armagh they might then have a good chance of winning South Down and would certainly have a good opportunity of severely denting Sinn Fein in Fermanagh/South Tyrone and in mid-Ulster. He knows that this argument would not wash with the unionists but he feels there is a good chance it may convince both the Conservatives and the Labour party.

Comment: Mr. Mallon was in extraordinarily buoyant humour. He is firmly of the belief that the Anglo-Irish Agreement has given the SDLP a very strong edge over Sinn Fein and that it can be made to work to the continued advantage of the SDLP. He is impressed by the resoluteness of the British Government and was very appreciative of the stand taken by the Irish Government over the last week, especially by the conciliatory tone adopted by Government spokesmen in the Dail debate. There is no doubt in my mind but that Mallon wants to use the new opportunities to the utmost advantage.

Daithi O'Ceallaigh

21 November, 1985

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