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IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

SECRET

29 January 1986

The new SDLP member

Dear Assistant Secretary

As you know Seamus Mallon took his seat in the House of Commons on Monday 27 January following his election last week. He was escorted into the Chamber to make the affirmation by John Hume and Alf Dubs (Labour) at a most dramatic moment as Question Time ended and a packed House waited for the three hour debate on the leak of the Solicitor General's letter to open.

That evening, accompanied by Richard Ryan and Ted Smyth, I hosted a private informal dinner for Mallon which was attended also by John Hume, some members of Mallon's family living here, and various members of the SDLP who had come to London for the occasion. These included Frank Feeley, Mark Durkin, (from Hume's Office in Derry who had been lent to manage Mallon's campaign) Joe Lenny and Dr Joe Stewart.

In view of the meeting between the SDLP and the Government which, I understand, is now fixed for Friday next, it may be of interest to report on some points which emerged from discussion at table. You might perhaps wish to consider whether to keep this report restricted if it is to be circulated.

While the evening was a convivial one the considerable differences of outlook and approach between John Hume and Seamus Mallon came out quite clearly in discussion. An argument developed between them in which Hume spoke of the ambivalence of Northern nationalists about Irish unity - they want it but they know that the time is not ripe for it and the concept of unity is more important as a factor what he called ~~in~~ the tribal conflict than in itself. He also emphasised ~~the~~ the importance of the East/West dimension and argued that the links and the travel between Derry and Glasgow, far greater than Derry's contact with the West of Ireland or with Dublin.

Mallon on the other hand disagreed with this and spoke of the desire for Irish unity as a deep motivating force North and South of the border. He also challenged Hume's view that Irish unity, of necessity, would have to be a very long-term prospect.

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Mallon sees the Anglo-Irish Agreement as a kind of last throw by constitutional Irish nationalism. If it does not succeed - and success for him will be determined by its ability to "deliver" in particular hard cases and in complaints on behalf of his constituents which he raises - the outlook is bleak indeed. Hume dissented from this view and saw the Agreement as a new beginning rather than a last opportunity. He argued that a substantial number of Northern Catholics would never support violence in any circumstances; and I understood him to agree when someone across the table argued at one point that if the Agreement were to fail there would, some day, be "another Sunningdale" or "another Agreement".

These differences of outlook are no doubt known to you. What may prove perhaps to be of somewhat more interest was the evidence of a certain difference of view on what the leaders of the SDLP should now do. Hume was very much inclined to say that they now had a choice - they could either "play it safe" and say and do things to satisfy their supporters and maintain their vote; or they could try to reach out to the Unionists in an endeavour to resolve the fundamental historic problem. He strongly favoured the latter course; and he wanted to do it sooner rather than later, before rather than after, the marching season. He spoke of nominations to the Police Authority, and when someone else at table spoke of the danger that anyone nominated might be shot, Hume's reply was that in that case they would have to shoot him too. Mallon did agree with Hume that the SDLP leadership would have to be courageous vis-a-vis their followers and supporters but he has a different and rather longer time-table in mind. He does not think that much could be done before the marching season; and his immediate focus was on the conditional nature of the support he had got from many voters. They were prepared to give the Agreement and the Conference a chance but it would have to deliver on their concerns and complaints.

Mallon's constituency organisation plans

Mallon is understandably elated at his win and determined to make the most of it. He is well aware that if he spends too much time in his constituency he will lose out in the House of Commons and vice-versa; and he is determined so to organise himself as to avoid this dilemma. He plans to have two full-time offices in his constituency - each with a full time secretary/typist to attend to correspondence and he would have an agent or manager who would commute between the two. He aims to free himself from the daily burden of correspondence while ensuring that it is dealt with quickly and efficiently. He is also determined to "cultivate" his constituency on a continuing basis and not just at election times. He has already begun a round of "thank-you" visits to houses which he canvassed - although, granted the numbers involved, this will take a long time to complete. He sees problems about the money which will be needed to fund an efficient constituency organisation of the kind he is determined to run in order to consolidate his support but he intends to press ahead with the organisation in any case and hopes to find some way to raise the money.

Mallon's view was that it had become evident in the election canvass where SDLP Councillors were working hard and where they were not; and

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where they had sought a personal position rather than working for the good of the party in a wholehearted way. He implied that those Councillors who had not played their part would be dropped for the future.

Approach to the House of Commons

As to his approach to Westminster, he is both elated at the opportunities it offers and extremely wary of being "socialised" into the system there. He recalled the way in which he had come to detest (sic) the place over a three year effort at "lobbying" there. He responded positively enough however to our suggestions that it would be wise not to be tagged as a "one issue" member, as the Unionists had been to their detriment; We also suggested that it should be possible both to be outspoken insofar as he wished to do so and to win friends and a certain influence by being available frequently around the House and by informal contacts. He thinks, however that he is, by temperament, not very gifted in the latter respect unlike John Hume. (The truth is that, in large part through lack of time because of his other preoccupations, Hume has been notably less successful at this in Westminster than for example in Strasbourg).

Maiden Speech

Initially in discussion at table Mallon had said that he was anxious to get in his maiden speech as soon as possible - ideally even tomorrow - so that he could be in a position to ask questions if for example one of his constituents were killed in an incident with the security forces. Hume advised strongly against this, saying that it would be a waste of a good opportunity for public attention for Mallon to latch on to some debate in the next few days as an occasion to make a maiden speech beginning with a brief perfunctory reference to the topic actually under debate. The speech would get no coverage in this way. Far better to wait for a few weeks - since the Unionists were almost certain to put down a motion and this would provide a far better opportunity for a speech which would gain real attention. In any case, Hume advised, it was not a good idea to put down oral questions; - he said he does not do so himself although he makes good use of written questions. It was much better in case of an incident of the kind which Mallon had referred, to issue a statement about it than to seek to raise a question in the House.

Mallon came round to agreeing with this advice although he demurred at the point made by someone else who said that to delay a few weeks would allow him to "get the feel of the place" - a phrase which suggested the beginning of a process of absorption by the system.

Other ^{points} ~~permits~~ of interest

I should perhaps add a brief reference to some other points of interest which emerged in the course of discussion. There was a general view that Gerry Adams is losing support in Belfast. Unwisely for himself he has publicly raised too many issues on which he is unable to "deliver" in response to representations made to him. Hume felt in general that the

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SDLP could and should have made much more in their campaign of the ineffectiveness of Sinn Fein's absentee representation." Mallon - much too optimistically I thought - saw a good chance ahead for the SDLP to win seats in several other constituencies including West Belfast, South Down and Fermanagh-Tyrone.

Hume told me that Owen Carron of Sinn Fein had "skipped bail" in the recent court case against him because of certain things that might emerge if the case came to trial which could discredit Sinn Fein. This however had had a very negative affect for many of the prisoners families since they know that Carron's failure to turn up for the case means that it is less likely that compassionate leave will be allowed to prisoners in future. (Hume remarked that releases over the Christmas period had in fact produced quite an effect on the ground among the families of those released).

I mentioned to Hume (and to Mallon) at one point, simply in order to deny it, the allegation made by Ken Maginnis in a Radio Eireann interview which I had heard earlier in the evening. (Maginnis as you will be aware, alleged that "selective internment" North and South, is now being seriously contemplated within the framework of the Anglo-Irish Ministerial Conference. Maginnis also stated that the only reason why internment had not gone ahead was because the UDA/UVF had not so far been seen to be engaged in actions which would warrant action against them). Hume accounted for this story as a well meant attempt by Maginnis to warn the UDA of the dangers of any kind of violent action on their part.

I am not altogether sure whether I should go into some of the detail of the forgoing in a report such as the present but I thought nevertheless that it might be useful to do so in preparation for Friday's meeting between the SDLP and the Government. I do so however on the understanding that you will treat the report with suitable discretion in circulation since I am sure that neither Hume nor Mallon would appreciate having their views and their differences reported and commented on in the way that I have done above.

Yours sincerely



Noel Dorr
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