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Meeting with Seamus Mallon, 20 December, 1985

I met Seamus Mallon in his home on 20 December. Among the points which he made were the following:

- Regarding the Kirkpatrick trial verdict, he hopes that the hunger-strike can be brought to an end with an indication from the British authorities that the hearing of the appeal will be "hurried up". The matter is posing a conflict of loyalties for him. On the one hand, he has known and liked Mrs. Power (mother of Thomas Power) for a long time. He has taken an interest in her son's case because he feels that it constitutes a blatant miscarriage of justice and he has promised to visit him this weekend. (Power has been implicated by five "supergrasses" to date but the evidence presented has been most unimpressive). On the other hand, he is close to an Armagh family who have had a son murdered by someone who was later implicated on "supergrass" evidence and who would undoubtedly be offended if he were to condemn the practice absolutely.

Mallon seemed relatively relaxed about the hunger-strike and not unduly perturbed by the consequences which it could have for the forthcoming by-elections. He certainly did not seem to perceive any significant threat to his own electoral prospects.

- As may be expected, the focus of Mallon's attention at present is his election campaign in Newry-Armagh (though he has yet to be formally selected as the SDLP's candidate). It will be an uphill struggle and he is not at all certain of victory. He is irritated, in fact,

that the party leader recently predicted a victory. "I'm going in there with all I've got, but I'm not placing any bets". He reckons that to win he will need to improve on his 1983 performance by about 4,000 votes (i.e., the margin of roughly 2,000 votes by which he fell short last time and the additional 1,000 -1,500 votes which he expects his Official Unionist rival, Jim Nicholson, will pick up on this occasion). Mallon believes that the Sinn Fein candidate, McAllister, will not do as well as in 1983 (thanks to improved SDLP organisation and the introduction of stricter safeguards against personation). Recalling the loud cheer from Sinn Fein which greeted the OUP victory in 1983, he is determined that "I will never again allow that to happen to me".

- Mallon's approach to the by-election will be to ask nationalist voters whether they are content to be represented by a Unionist at Westminster. He will try to avoid the skirmishes with Sinn Fein which characterised the last campaign and to concentrate instead on attacking his Unionist opponent's lacklustre record. As the Agreement is still only in its infancy, he does not intend to base his campaign on it but hopes nonetheless "to be carried on the wings of the Agreement" to success. A public meeting to discuss the Agreement, to be addressed by Hume, will be held on 15 January and will hopefully attract useful publicity.
- Mallon is expecting "the dirtiest campaign ever" from both the Unionists and Sinn Fein (e.g., intimidation at the polling stations), as an SDLP victory would be unwelcome to both. We discussed in detail a number of organisational problems he faces at present, e.g., incomplete electoral registers, difficulties in obtaining sufficient supplies of registration forms, politically tainted presiding officers, discrimination in the siting

of electoral offices and polling stations in the employment of election staff, the likelihood of widespread personation by both Unionist and Sinn Fein voters, etc. Particular problems exist in Newry where, despite the very high proportion of nationalist voters, there is usually a low turnout (the result of poor local leadership and the political apathy which characterises many of the depressed estates in the area).

- In relation to South Down, it is not a foregone conclusion that McGrady will be selected. Irrespective of the candidate, an SDLP victory there is doubtful. Powell is a formidable opponent with a good record on local issues. In Fermanagh-Tyrone, the SDLP candidate will be either Rosemary Flanagan or Austin Currie (though the latter has "some political liabilities"). The SDLP badly needs new faces in Fermanagh-Tyrone who can exploit the potential which Mallon believes to be there. He considers that Adrian Colton, one of the SDLP's talented younger members, would make a strong candidate on a future occasion. The candidate in Mid-Ulster will probably be Denis Haughey, who is, however, unlikely to make headway against Sinn Fein's Seamus Kerr (the Chairman of Omagh District Council who will probably be selected instead of Danny Morrison). This is another constituency where the SDLP needs a new face.
- Mallon referred also to the situation in Belfast (which he had described to a party meeting the night before as a "disaster area"). The SDLP has been weakened in Belfast, in his view, by endless internecine feuds, with the result that very little has been done to make inroads on Sinn Fein's support in West Belfast. In view of his popularity and across-the-board appeal, Joe Hendron would be the man to do this but he has neglected local party organisation.

- Looking to the future, Mallon commented that "hume and I will not go on forever" and the party will depend for its survival on the energy and enthusiasm of some of the younger members: Mark Durkan, Adrian Colton, Alec Attwood and John Kennedy. He singled out Kennedy in particular as "a man with leadership potential".
- The list of SDLP spokesmen has not yet been finalised by Hume. Mallon told me confidentially that there are difficulties in relation to two Assemblymen, Hugh Logue and Paschal O'Hare. Hume is still pondering the role to be offered to Logue (who is based in Brussels). He intends to offer the spokesmanship on legal affairs to O'Hare, though whether the latter (whose resignation over the Agreement has been rumoured) will accept is another matter. If he does not, Mallon will promote into this spokesmanship one of a small sub-group on security policy which he has recently established and which includes Alban Maginness, Alec Attwood and Adrian Colton.
- Mallon handed me reports on a number of incidents (including one in which he was himself stopped by the UDR) for transmission to the Secretariat. I drew his attention to a remark by Deputy Gerry Collins in the Dail this week that, according to Seamus Mallon, UDR harassment has been on the increase since the Agreement was signed. Mallon denied having said this; rather, he made the comment that the UDR are "flexing their muscles" at present in an effort to show that they will not be dictated to by the Anglo-Irish Intergovernmental Conference.

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