



An Chartlann Náisiúnta **National Archives**

Reference Code: 2020/17/57

Creator(s): Department of the Taoiseach

Accession Conditions: Open

Copyright: National Archives, Ireland.
May only be reproduced with
the written permission of the
Director of the National
Archives.

AMBASÁID NA hÉIREANN, LONDAIN



IRISH EMBASSY, LONDON

17, GROSVENOR PLACE,
SW1X 7HR
Telephone: 01 235 2171
TELEX: 916104

Confidential

20 November 1990

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

Dear Assistant Secretary

A conversation with Seamus Mallon

Mr Hayes and I had dinner with Seamus Mallon last night.

He gave the following account of the SDLP's meeting with the Secretary of State yesterday.

The meeting had been arranged hastily on Sunday in contacts which Danny McNeill of the NIO had with Hume, Mallon, McGrady and Hendron at the SDLP party conference. As he may already have indicated to you, Mallon was unhappy with the pressure applied by the NIO for this meeting. He believes strongly that the SDLP should meet the Irish Government in advance of and after each meeting it has with Brooke. The SDLP should be free to consult the Irish Government and Mallon has no hesitation about saying this to the NIO. The circumstances in which this meeting was arranged left the SDLP with no opportunity to prepare for it with Dublin and Mallon was aggrieved by this.

It was clear to Mallon that Brooke's purpose at this meeting was to try to drive a wedge between the SDLP and the Irish Government on the outstanding difficulties. He began by asking what the SDLP's negotiating position would be if talks were indeed to get underway; in particular, he wished to know what concessions the SDLP might be prepared to make to the Unionists during the internal talks. Mallon's description of the SDLP's response to this was that "we told him to mind his own business".

Brooke's second question concerned the relative importance attached by the SDLP to (a) the "substantial progress" difficulty; and (b) the question of how the Unionist representatives at the talks should be designated. In reply, the SDLP said that these were two quite separate

issues. Hume reiterated in strong terms the SDLP's objections to the "substantial progress" stipulation. On the second point, Mallon's private view (expressed to us over dinner) is that this is not a major obstacle. What is important is that the parties should get to the point at which they agree that talks will take place. Once they reach this point, the exact designation of delegations should not be an insuperable problem. ("They can call themselves whatever they like as far as I'm concerned"). From Mallon's account of the meeting, however, it would appear that Hume reiterated the concerns which the SDLP has previously voiced to Brooke on this subject.

Mallon spoke with particular vehemence of Brian Mawhinney's contribution to the meeting. Mawhinney, it appears, tried to suggest that, by insisting that the Unionists could not make "substantial progress" a precondition for the North/South talks, the SDLP were themselves introducing a precondition, i.e., they will not agree to talks until this problem has been removed. Mallon resented this suggestion and the exchanges thereafter were heated.

Brooke mentioned at the outset that he would be seeing the Taoiseach at the opening of the Ballinamore-Ballyconnell canal next week. He made no further reference to this. In the same connection, Mallon told us that, at the party conference last weekend, he was approached by several journalists who appeared to him to have been "given a line" by the NIO on the potential relevance of next week's meeting to the Brooke initiative.

At yesterday's meeting, Brooke thanked Hume for the favourable references in his party conference speech to his own speech of 9 November. In Mallon's view, Brooke's speech was timed to some extent in order to be helpful to Hume (whose party conference would follow a week later).

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer