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16 January 1991

Mr. Dermot Gallagher
Assistant Secretary
Anglo-Irish Division

Dear Assistant Secretary

A conversation with Seamus Mallon

The following are some points of interest which arose in a conversation which I had with Seamus Mallon at Westminster yesterday. Joe Hayes had a similar conversation with him earlier in the day.

Brooke initiative

- Mallon made no secret of his intense annoyance with Hume for having agreed to see Mawhinney last weekend. He understood that there had been plans for Mawhinney to see the Irish Government as well. He hoped that the Government would not agree to this. I assured him that there had been no meeting with Mawhinney.
- Mallon is upset with Hume not only because Mawhinney's involvement in the process has now been enhanced but also because Hume, on behalf of the party, accepted a British Government paper from Mawhinney. Mallon has a copy of the document in question (though he claims that, on principle, he has not read it).
- Against this background, Mallon is in a sour mood about this afternoon's meeting between the SDLP and Brooke. He plans to confine his own participation in it to raising South Armagh security issues with the Secretary of State.

The Caraher killing

- Mallon was in a bleak mood about the situation in South Armagh following the Caraher killing. He described it as worse than anything he has experienced since the hunger-strike period of the

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early eighties. The reputation of the security forces has sunk to a new low and Sinn Fein's position has been greatly reinforced.

- Mallon's private belief is that "something was indeed going on" on the day concerned, prior to the shooting. There was some objective basis, he suspected, for the soldiers' interest in the Carahers. What subsequently occurred, however, amounted unquestionably to unlawful killing by the soldiers.

EPA

- Mallon was very grateful for the assistance he has received from the Department in relation to the EPA Bill and his own interventions at the Committee stage.
- He was scathing about Labour's performance in the Committee. He detects a distinct desire on the part of Kevin McNamara and Jim Marshall to be cooperative on this Bill (perhaps with an eye to an early Labour Government which would have to operate the EPA). In characteristic form, he sees himself as the only true defender of the nationalist interest.

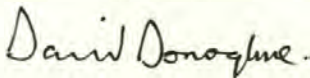
His own prospects

- Mallon believes that his own survival at the next general election (which he expects later this year) has been jeopardized by two recent developments.
- First, Sinn Fein's position in the constituency has been considerably strengthened by the deterioration of the situation in South Armagh (not only the Caraher killing but also increased Army harassment generally). Second, he fears that the Armagh Four controversy will damage him in the eyes of moderate, middle-class voters at the other end of the political spectrum. He has consistently held that the Four are guilty. He cannot, and will not, change his position on the case. If the current doubts continue to grow, he will face a serious credibility problem. In this context, Mallon hoped that the Irish Government would resist any pressure to add its voice to those who have questioned the verdict.
- Mallon's assessment is that the combined effect of these two developments may be to deprive him of roughly 4,000 votes which he needs in order to secure reelection. (Comment: It is worth mentioning that fear of losing his Westminster seat is a recurring theme with Mallon and depends on his mood swings; he was equally pessimistic at different times prior to the two last general elections).

Hume

- Finally, Mallon voiced a suspicion that Hume will not stand at the next election but will stand down in favour of Mark Durkan. If, however, Hume plans to stay on as party leader without being a MP, Mallon will register strong opposition.
- Mallon also believes that Hume's interest in the Brooke initiative is limited and that he is ultimately far more interested in achieving a breakthrough in the talks process which he initiated with Sinn Fein.

Yours sincerely



David Donoghue
Press and Information Officer