

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Meetings with Seamus Mallon, Joe Hendron and  
Jim Fitzpatrick, 5 February, 1985

I met separately in Northern Ireland with Mallon, Hendron and Fitzpatrick on 5 February. The main topic of conversation was the proposed meeting between John Hume and the IRA Army Council.

Mallon said that Hume's invitation to meet the IRA Army Council, made on radio on 31 January last, was not unexpected. He had been aware of Hume's general thinking on the matter for two or three weeks. Hume has also involved him in the matter since, asking Mallon to travel to Derry last Sunday morning, so that he could be with him as Hume responded to the various press enquiries. Mallon was with Hume listening and responding to the RTE One o'Clock radio programme. Among the points made by Mallon were:

- He fully supports Hume.
- He has no doubt that the vast majority of nationalists in Northern Ireland, of SDLP members and SDLP voters strongly support Hume's initiative. The only possible exceptions among the SDLP leadership are Eddie McGrady, and Senator Brid Rodgers.
- Hume's initiative has had positive results. It has "demolished" Gerry Adams, who is now seen in a secondary role to the IRA rather than as a party leader. Mallon is certain Adams is a member of the Army Council but he cannot attend a meeting with Hume, as his credibility would be entirely destroyed. Adams and Sinn Fein have been pushed off-side and their prominence diminished.

- Another positive result is that the SDLP talks with the unionists will not now take place in the immediate future. This is a matter of concern to Mallon who wanted and wants the Anglo-Irish Summit to take place before bilateral SDLP-unionist talks.
  
- A third positive result is that it has further emphasised the SDLP is now in the centre of the political stage in nationalist areas in Northern Ireland. He said that he was struck at the recent party conference that it is now accepted that the SDLP is a "straight nationalist" party and that there was no criticism from among the ranks nor from the leadership that this is so. He said the SDLP is now a nationalist party within the Irish nationalist tradition and not a party with a small "n" operating solely within the framework of Northern Ireland. He thinks Hume has caught the mood of the moment and that the SDLP will gain at the expense of Sinn Fein.
  
- Mallon believes that at some stage or another the Provisionals had to be confronted directly. He does not accept the view held by many in the South that there should be no contact with Sinn Fein. He mentioned in passing that he and members of the SDLP were aware of contacts in the South with Sinn Fein including arrangements on Galway Council, support for Fra Brown (Sinn Fein) from Brendan McGahan in Louth and he referred to a meeting which took place in Dublin in 1982 between the Minister for Communications (then in opposition) and members of the UDA.
  
- Mallon thinks the Hume meeting with the IRA Army Council will take place reasonably soon and he expects Sinn Fein and Adams will be the "losers".

- Mallon said he didn't agree with the views expressed by the Taoiseach on RTE. He was particularly unhappy with the statement that if the meeting took place within our jurisdiction and we knew of it it would be broken up.
- He was very critical of Ed Moloney of the Irish Times for his "pro Sinn Fein" reporting. He was also critical of Finnuola O'Connor's colour piece on the SDLP Conference.
- He does not know if definite arrangements have been made for the SDLP meeting with Hurd, but he thought it could be held this week or next, prior to the meeting of SDLP constituency reps (Assemblymen plus Chairman, Vice Chairman and Senator Brid Rodgers) to be held in Derry on the weekend of 15/17 February.
- He was very critical of SDLP fund raising in North America and clearly implied that all funds raised went to Hume.
- He attached significance to the editorial in the current issue of Fortnight which calls for the disbandment of the UDR. He said he understood why Governments could not call for its disbandment.
- Mallon said that he believed that in any political advances made in the coming months the Irish dimension must take precedence over power-sharing. It is the Anglo-Irish dimension which is important and not an internal arrangement. He wants an executive role in Belfast for the Irish Government. He does not see devolution as an essential element in such a package. He has serious doubts about the suggestions of Hurd that he would chose a local executive from among the parties.

- Mallon said that the SDLP appreciated the other dance of Ministers and other politicians from the Oireachtas at their recent Conference. They were particularly appreciative of and well disposed to the Tanaiste.

Joe Hendron was also supportive of Hume. His view is that once Sinn Fein offered to talk to the SDLP the SDLP had no choice but to accept or to outmanoeuvre them. They could not have refused to talk to them given they had accepted invitations from the unionist parties. It is well known that both unionist parties have sat down with the UDA. Among the other points made by Hendron were the following:-

- the SDLP is very supportive of Hume and the reaction in the nationalist community is very positive.
- the decision of the unionist parties not to meet the SDLP if Hume goes ahead with talks with the IRA Army Council is nothing more than the expected immediate reaction. He thinks they will change their minds. He hadn't in any event any expectations of movement from these talks.
- the Constituency Reps. had hoped to have had meetings with the Government and with the opposition as well as with Hurd prior to their weekend meeting in Derry. He does not now expect these meeting to take place.
- his only criticism of Hume's initiative is that as it had not been discussed beforehand by the Constituency Reps. It may lend credence to the view that the SDLP is a one man party.
- Hendron stressed that the views of Sinn Fein held by people North and South of the border are fundamentally different.

- He thinks that the IRA Army Council may refuse to go ahead with the talks and that there may be no meeting. If the meeting goes ahead he would not expect it to take place in the near future. He is not hopeful that the meeting will lead to a ceasefire.
- Adams has been damaged. He is now seen in the role of a messenger boy rather than the person in charge.
- He thinks the SDLP could hold most of their six seats in Belfast in the local elections. They could lose one seat in West Belfast, where the number of seats has been reduced to ten from twelve. They will have at least four seats overall and probably five. Sinn Fein could take about six seats, perhaps in some instances by Peoples Democracy joining Sinn Fein.
- He has decided to run in Lower Falls, where Sinn Fein is strong rather than Upper Falls, which is his best territory. In Lower Falls he will win a seat, Glending <sup>Bing</sup> (Alliance) will also take one, Sinn Fein will take two and he hopes the other will go to the Worker's Party. In Upper Falls the SDLP may take two seats (Mary Muldoon plus one other), in North Belfast Brian Feeney will be re-elected and probably Pascal O'Hare. He expects Paddy Devlin will lose his seat.

Jim Fitzpatrick, as I have reported previously, is convinced that the IRA wants "to go political". It is this conviction which explains his editorial of 4 February in which he wrote that 'the political influence is now the dominant element' in the Republican Movement adding that "there is almost an open acknowledgement that paramilitary action has only a limited role". (Copy attached). Among the other points he made were:-

- He believes that Sinn Fein should not be ostracised and would wish to see other parties, including the British,

talking to them.

- Sinn Fein are not as strong in electoral terms as they were. They are having difficulty in getting good candidates for the local government elections and Morrison's clear defeat at the hands of John Hume in the European election has impaired their morale.
- He believes Hume's invitation to meet the IRA Army Council was designed to avoid a meeting with Adams, from which Adams and Sinn Fein might gain.
- Hume told him that he thought the Taoiseach had gone a little "overboard" in his radio interview.
- Hume's invitation to the IRA Army Council was the right thing for him to do. He doesn't think that the Provisionals will have a propaganda advantage.
- He expects the unionists will talk to the SDLP and he places little emphasis on their refusal to talk to the SDLP if Hume meets the IRA Army Council.

*Dm*

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