

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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S19003  
(Indexed)W. Shalvey  
W. EllisMeeting with Seamus Mallon, 20 May 1985

I met, at my request, with Seamus Mallon yesterday in Armagh. Mallon was a little tired after the recent local government election campaign and was preparing to go off for a few days fishing in Co. Mayo. Among the points he made were the following: -

- It is now clear that circumstances have changed within the nationalist community. The election results clearly show the extent of that change. In these changed circumstances, the package being negotiated by the Irish Government with the British would be insufficient to meet nationalist concerns and to deal effectively with alienation.
- That package would only be sufficient if it included the disbandment of the UDR and far reaching changes in police structures, which would not leave the police solely under British control.
- He does not expect the current negotiations to produce agreement between the two Governments. The British are not in his view willing to be forthcoming on the elements which have already been presented to them. He is now profoundly pessimistic about the talks.
- He believes the Government should break off the talks and do so sooner rather than later.
- The Government should then concentrate their efforts on an international anti-British campaign and should set about the establishment of an all-Ireland political institution.

- He repeated that a mistake was made in allowing the New Ireland Forum to be disbanded (and he blamed the steering group of the four leaders). The Forum should be reconstituted in some way and consideration should be given to offering the Presidency of the institution (as distinct from the working chairmanship) to Tip O'Neill. This would provide simultaneously for both a 32 county forum and an international dimension.
  
- He now believes there is a core Sinn Fein vote which is not going to disappear. The support for Sinn Fein, evident now in three successive elections, will only disappear in the event of very far reaching changes of a much more radical nature than those under discussion.
  
- It may be that the only policy to be followed now is one of Brits out (making very clear that British in the circumstances means the British Army and Administration).

#### Local Government Elections

- It is not possible for the SDLP to formulate a policy for dealing with Sinn Fein which would be viable in all 17 district councils on which Sinn Fein now have elected representatives. The circumstances differ from district council to district council. Even if the SDLP leadership could agree on a policy he does not think they could enforce it on all their local councillors.
  
- The district councils are expected to meet on the first Monday in June (3 June). He intends to adopt the following principles in dealing with the issues on Armagh Council:
  - 1) all elected representatives should be treated properly and justly as befits their elected status;

- 2) no elector should be disenfranchised i.e. that a person who voted Sinn Fein should not be denied their representation;
- 3) nationalists should give nothing gratuitously to the unionists.

- When I teased him out on this he said he could envisage situations where on some councils the SDLP councillors would vote for a Sinn Fein Chairman in order to deny the chair to the unionists. The quid pro quo from Sinn Fein would depend on the skilfulness of the local SDLP representatives. In some councils, e.g., Magerafelt where there is a nationalist majority evenly split between SDLP and Sinn Fein, he could envisage an SDLP Chairman one year and a Sinn Fein Chairman another year.
- He thought that in councils where nationalist representatives have a majority and where Sinn Fein is the largest nationalist party, e.g. Fermanagh, he would expect the SDLP representatives to vote Sinn Fein into office. If they denied that to Sinn Fein the SDLP would only lose further support. He would hope for similar support from Sinn Fein in Councils, e.g. South Down, where the SDLP were in the lead. But if that support were not forthcoming from Sinn Fein so be it.
- Nationalist voters clearly indicated that they want their representatives to co-operate on local councils. SDLP votes transferred to Sinn Fein ensuring their election in some areas. In others the opposite happened. The vote cannot be interpreted in any other way. Mallon would expect that nationalist councillors who refuse to co-operate with each other will lose support at the next elections.

- From a non-exhaustive examination of the results Mallon felt that the SDLP did well or didn't do badly there they had hard working people on the ground.
  
- Some seats were unnecessarily lost by the SDLP. In Armagh town where Sinn Fein got one seat, Pat Brannigan could have ensured another SDLP seat at DUP expense, had he canvassed a middle class mixed area. The SDLP lost two seats in Kilkeel and Warrenpoint to Sinn Fein. He blamed McGrady and O'Donoghue for this because while the seats are on Newry-Mourne Council, the area is in McGrady's South Down Westminster constituency. (McGrady thought they had been lost because of very poor candidates).
  
- He was reasonably pleased with the SDLP performance in South Armagh, including Crossmaglen, Camlough and Keady, the latter place being within Armagh district council while the first two are in Newry-Mourne.
  
- Stressing that his views are preliminary ones he said that he thought the SDLP had not been very successful in getting out the SDLP vote. One reason may be that there are many 'prima donnas' who believe it is beneath them to present themselves for council elections. He mentioned Denis Haughey, Frenk Feeley and Austin Currie. Another reason could well have been the uncertainty surrounding the Anglo-Irish talks. Some SDLP supporters by their abstention were in effect withholding their judgement on these talks. He also thought that the reports from the US of an internal solution and the Hurd support of the UDR had done damage.
  
- The lesson for the SDLP is that it needs a much better organisation, both centrally and locally. He mentioned he hopes to have a staffed office soon. The present central organisation is weak as is the general secretary for whom a

replacement is required. This is a matter he intends to raise within the party.

- He was deeply critical of John Hume. He had not done the necessary work in Derry. He seemed to rely ever increasingly on 'strokes'. One such was the visit of the Taoiseach and the Minister which was seen by the electorate as an electoral ploy and which did good neither to the Government nor to the SDLP.
- Hume only visited four areas during the course of the campaign, Belfast, Newry-Mourne, South Down and Fermanagh. He was in these areas for a very short time, and Mallon had great difficulty in getting him into Newry-Mourne. Mallon himself, who unlike Hume was a candidate, had canvassed in North Antrim and in Fermanagh.
- He said there is a deep ground swell within the party against Hume, because of his distance from them. 'Hume has now disappeared for 10 days to the United States. He thinks there could well be severe criticism within the party of Hume's leadership while he is away.'
- One factor in Mallon's current view of Hume may be that Eamonn Hanna, the Party General Secretary, in consultation with Hume, but without either of them consulting the other leaders, took decisions about who would go on what TV/radio programmes dealing with the election results. Mallon was told of the arrangements made for him by a junior party official. He refused to participate at all despite later pleas by Hume. (McGrady had similar complaints).
- It may be that nationalist voters, when the time comes for the Westminster elections, may learn from the unionists and will maximise their vote. He thinks that in areas where Sinn Fein is strongest they will support the Sinn Fein candidate. He believes that Mid Ulster is lost and perhaps

Fermanagh, South Tyrone as well. In Armagh and South Down the opposite may well happen.

- He is very concerned about his own security. While I was in his house an eight foot high fence was being erected around his house. When he went to church last Sunday for his usual Mass it was surrounded on all sides by the British Army and soldiers occupied all the roads leading to it. He then thought that there may have been a threat to a Catholic member of the UDR who goes to the same Mass. When he told one of the officers that they were not to harass the mass goers he was told that he should consult higher authority. When he did so he was informed that the Army was there to protect him, that they had received a tip off that a loyalist group were out to assassinate him. He was a bit sheepish about having attacked the Army for being there. He said that many unionists had told him they would give him one of their preferences and that this tip off confirmed that some unionists had a regard for him.
- He thinks it is quite likely that loyalist elements could assassinate a Sinn Fein councillor. He fears that a savage retaliatory campaign could result. He thought that the IRA bomb which exploded that morning at Killeen, killing four police officers, was but the start of a new campaign.
- Despite his personal misgivings he feels he has no choice but to continue his public life because living as he does in a Protestant heartland provides a symbol for Catholics in similar positions who feel threatened. He also provides an alternative to the IRA for nationalists in a very strained area. He denied recent newspaper reports that he was interested in running in Co. Louth for election to the Dail.

*Du*  
Daithi O'Ceallaigh  
21 May 1985.

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