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Ambassador,

What follows are rough notes of a meeting I had last night with Austin Currie and Seamus Mallon of the SDLP, whom Gerry Fitt had asked me to meet.

Both Currie and Mallon were clearly dissatisfied with the results of their trip to London. They said that they had put their point of view forcibly to Callaghan at the meeting on the 8th February. They had also left the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Mr Mason, and the Home Secretary, Mr Rees, (both of whom they met over a drink in a bar in the House of Commons on the 9th) in no doubt as to their views on the present situation. ~~However,~~ They said that they had received no <sup>indications</sup> ~~assurances~~ that the Government intended to change its present policy in any way. It was their view that there would be no new initiative taken by the British in Northern Ireland until after the next General Election.

While Currie said that he would be willing to consider meeting Mrs Thatcher, if the latter requested a meeting with the SDLP, Mallon said he would not come back to London to meet Mrs Thatcher and that in view of the failure of this visit he would try to make sure that no SDLP party delegation would return here. The policy followed by the SDLP over the last four or five years had, he felt, not produced the desired results. It was time therefore for them to examine their future policy. In the present situation there was a real danger that the SDLP would lose much of its support in Northern Ireland and that support for the Provisionals would increase within the minority community. Because of this the SDLP must "look to their backs" rather than continue to try influencing the British Government by persuasion. The SDLP must, he felt, take action in Northern Ireland which would force the British Government to take more notice of the position of the minority.

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Currie said that he was becoming convinced that the British Government was only prepared to act positively in Northern Ireland when security was seriously threatened by bombs, killings etc. He felt that while the British Government and the Opposition have not enunciated the concept of "an acceptable level of violence" the stage has nonetheless been reached where the (present) level of violence would appear to be acceptable both to the Government and to the Opposition.

During the course of the evening it became clear that both Mallon and Currie are worried that the SDLP is losing support in Northern Ireland. They both continued to snipe at one another throughout the evening but nonetheless left me with the overall impression that the unity of the party would take precedence over their personal feelings. On learning by phone that John Hume was in Northern Ireland they both became quite critical of him for his failure to arrive in London for the present talks.

Dre

Daithi O Ceallaigh

10 February, 1978