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December 1980

Dear Assistant Secretary

I enclose herewith a note on Seamus Mallon's visit to London.

The principal points made by Mallon in his conversations here were that the hunger strike in the Maze prison has both security and political effects and the good offices of the Cardinal could still be used to diffuse the situation. On the political front the main point he made was that the failure of the Atkins initiative pointed to a need to include Dublin in any future initiative.

Mallon came in contact with a broad cross section of British political and official opinion. It seemed to him that there was an acceptance here that the Dublin aspect was important but there was equally a pessimism about the <sup>means</sup> results of bringing Dublin into any negotiations. The views of Tom Arnold, Parliamentary Private Secretary to Humphrey Atkins, are particularly apposite but we would, I think, feel that Arnold was here speaking for himself and not for any group in the Conservative Party.

On the whole I feel that Mallon's visit has been worthwhile and I can agree with the many recommendations made to Mallon that he visit London as frequently as possible.

Yours sincerely

Eamon Kennedy  
Ambassador

Encl:

Assistant Secretary Neligan  
Department of Foreign Affairs

Note

What follows is a note of what was said by Seamus Mallon of the SDLP during lunch with the Ambassador on 1 December. Mallon is in London to meet with a cross section of politicians, journalists and British officials. Mallon's conversations with these persons are also reported upon beneath.

Mallon considers that the consequences of the hunger strike in the Maze Prison could be very serious and he has put this view to those whom he has met here. Firstly, it is having a polarising effect on the community, particularly in rural areas. This will have an effect on security. Secondly, it is creating a platform through which the Provisional IRA could obtain the sort of political support they have failed to obtain in the past. It could lead to a decrease in political support for the SDLP. Mallon believes that Bernadette McAliskey is being used by the Provisionals in their efforts to create a political movement out of the hunger strike protest. Thirdly, Mallon felt it important that the good offices of Cardinal O Fiaich remain open to mediation in this matter. He said that he does have an influence with the minority community, at least on those outside the prisons if not within. Mallon also felt that at least two of the hunger strikers, Hughes and McKearney were determined to die unless they got what they were asking for, namely political status. His information, however, was that the IRA outside had planned and directed the hunger strike and that it was not true to suggest the initiative and decisions came from inside.

During his visit here Mallon met with Michael Mates M.P., Tom Pendry M.P., Brian Mawhinney M.P., and with the Conservative Backbench Committee on Northern Ireland. He also met with a number of officials including John Marshall, David Chesterton and Michael Moriarity of the Northern Ireland Office, and Michael Newington of the Foreign Office. Among the journalists whom he met were Malcolm Rutherford of the Financial Times, Geoffrey Taylor of the Guardian and Brenday<sup>y</sup> Maddox of the Economist.

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Mates said that in the absence of any movement towards devolved government there would be great pressure from the Conservative backbenchers for an increase in the powers of local government, as per the Conservative election manifesto, and that while his proposals for a consultative assembly might not be ideal, they could serve to counteract the desire of the right wing of the Party for the implementation of the manifesto. He did not feel that a constitutional conference involving the Dublin and Westminster Governments as well as the Northern Ireland parties was feasible at present and he did not think that the Government here would even consider such a conference. A consultative assembly would be of assistance to the Irish Government as it was the only way in which forward movement could be made on a British Irish link. He thought that a progression to full devolution of powers would be very speedy once a consultative assembly had been established because such an assembly could only fall or develop quickly. As he has previously stressed to the Embassy, Mates said that a consultative assembly was very much in the minds of both the Government and the Northern Ireland Office. Mates said that there was substantial sympathy on the Conservative backbenches with the Official Unionist position that there should be a move towards considerably greater local government powers. He added that even in April and May there was great pressure within the Party to end the Atkins initiative and to move back to the manifesto position.

On the hunger strike Mates' view was that four of the seven strikers might come off the hunger strike if there were concessions less than political status. He thought, however, that three of them would continue with their strike unless political status were granted.

Mates recognised the importance of the role of the Irish Government and he had no doubt that they "had to be kept happy" in whatever moves the British Government decided to take. He thought that Thatcher would now go for an immediate initiative, most likely in the area of adjustments to the local government set up or towards a consultative assembly. Mallon's view was that Mates was not one of those who would exclude the Irish Government from decisions on Northern Ireland but that he cannot see any way in which the Irish Government can be included without first getting an assembly in Northern Ireland.

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Tom Pendry, the junior Labour spokesman on Northern Ireland, was sympathetic to the position of the SDLP. He was emphatic that the present British Government line would get nowhere. He told Mallon that he was very unhappy with the policies being followed by the Labour Party spokesman on Northern Ireland, Brynmor John, and that he would wish to see a change of spokesman. Mallon thought that this was unrealistic and that Pendry might try, and probably succeed, to become a junior spokesman on some area other than Northern Ireland.

Mallon's session with Brian Mawhinney, the Conservative M.P. for Peterborough, consisted essentially of a question and answer session in which Mawhinney asked the questions. Mallon told him that the SDLP position on partnership is the same as two years ago, namely that they want partnership within Northern Ireland and partnership within the island of Ireland. He stressed that, despite the offer which the SDLP had made within the framework of the Atkins conference for a partnership Government, without an Irish dimension being raised for 10 years, there had been no movement by the Unionists. Mawhinney admitted this was a reasonable move forward on the part of the SDLP. On the Maze protest Mallon said that the SDLP are prepared to use their influence to diffuse the situation and that the protest is making life difficult for all the political parties. Mawhinney thought that the SDLP were, in reality, a Fianna Fail branch in Northern Ireland which Mallon denied. He said that the present position of the Irish Government was at this stage very dangerous but that if the SDLP were willing to negotiate purely in a Northern Ireland context, that is without any change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, he thought that there might be room for movement. Mallon opposed this strongly pointing out that the OUP had not even bothered to participate in the Stkns talks even though the Irish dimension was ruled out. Mawhinney also said, as has been previously reported to the Department, that he was totally opposed to an assembly in Northern Ireland which would be purely consultative and that he would oppose, in public, any steps taken towards such an assembly. Mallon told us that this was his position, too. How, he asked, would it be possible for the SDLP to go to its Electorate and generate support for such an assembly after all they had been through?

Mallon met the Conservative Backbench Committee on Northern Ireland. The meeting was poorly attended and was dominated by Ivor Stanbrook, the Pro-Unionist M.P. for Orpington. Also present at the meeting were Thomas Arnold, M.P. for Hazel Grove, Cheshire, who is the Parliamentary Private Secretary to Humphrey Atkins, and Michael Morris, M.P. for Northampton South, who is the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the junior Northern Ireland ministers. Both Arnold and Morris spoke separately and privately with Mallon after the meeting.

Arnold said that in the light of the failure of the Atkins initiative he now had no doubt that the approach of the SDLP had been the right one. He thought that the whole issue of Northern Ireland "would have to be taken apart and put together on a different plane. The green dimension would have to come to the fore". Morris apologised to Mallon for Stanbrook's behaviour and said he thought that Mallon should visit London as often as possible.

Mallon had three meetings with British officials. His overall impression from these meetings was that they no longer question why the context should be broadened to include Dublin. Their question was how. This represented a striking change on their position even only months ago. The fate of the Atkins initiative had brought about new attitudes and fresh thinking.

John Marshall, the Deputy Head of the INO and David Chesterton, who was the main drafter of the consultative documents, accept that the Atkins initiative has failed. They believe that a consultative assembly could not work without the support of the SDLP. They stressed to Mallon that the existence of a forum in Northern Ireland might make easier progress in other directions specifically on North South relations. Mallon said that his view was the opposite. He thought that his official interlocutors were not pushing very hard for a consultative assembly. Marshall said that option 2 in the second British consultative document would have given considerable power to the SDLP. He gave Mallon the impression that they are prepared to go quite far to meet the wishes of the Government in Dublin if this can be reconciled with an acceptance by Dublin that Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom until such time as a majority there desire a constitutional change. They questioned Mallon closely

on the SDLP position following its recent annual conference, particularly on what the SDLP might have in mind when they talk about federalism.

Moriarity of the NIO said that he thought the local government option would not be accepted by the British Government. On the hunger strike they were open to making adjustments but Mallon thought it unlikely they would do so unless the strikers first come off the hunger strike. Mallon stressed, with Moriarity as with others, that they should not, at this stage, dismiss the possibility of using the good offices of Cardinal Ó Fiaich.

Mallon found Newington of the Foreign Office very negative. Newington does not see any way in which a quadripartite conference would be agreed to by the British or acceptable to the Unionists. It was time the Taoiseach explained more clearly what exactly he wanted and how far he was prepared to go, to which Mallon replied that surely it was up to the United Kingdom to make its long-term views known first. Newington said he could not see how there could be changes in the North South relations until such time as there was a devolved administration in Northern Ireland. He warned Mallon that the long range projections on Northern Ireland of the Dublin Government were not to the benefit of the SDLP, which Mallon denied and Newington added that if he were a Unionist he would have nothing to do with the Taoiseach's plans.

Among the journalists whom Mallon met were Malcolm Rutherford, political editor of the Financial Times, Geoffrey Taylor, leader writer on the Guardian, and Brenday Maddox of the Economist. Rutherford mentioned that he was hoping to go to Northern Ireland following the expected meeting between the Taoiseach and Mrs Thatcher.

Later this week Mallon will meet with the Labour backbench committee on Northern Ireland, with Brynmor John, with the Liberal spokesman, Stephen Ross and with a group of London-based foreign journalists.

*Daithí Ó Ceallaigh*

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2 December, 1980.