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7/112 1. Mr. Neill
2. Mr. Kinnear
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CONFIDENTIAL

Notes on conversation with Senator Seamus Mallon,

6 December 1982

Among matters discussed with Senator Mallon today were the SDLP's position vis à vis Sinn Fein, the Council for a new Ireland, and the parliamentary tier.

Senator Mallon considered the GLC Labour Party had upped the ante. It was a marvellous publicity coup for Sinn Fein, and if they were expelled at port or airport, so much the better for them.

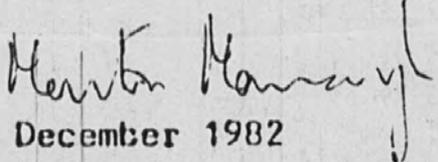
The SDLP faced severe difficulties with regard to the Westminster elections next year. Sinn Fein had virtually limitless financial resources. Their Assembly members were well paid, and the party was setting up advice centres everywhere. The SDLP would need to have something to show in a year's time, if they were to have a chance. Sinn Fein would probably take West Belfast and Fermanagh-South Tyrone, while the SDLP might get Derry and Armagh. There was talk in West Belfast that the Unionists and Alliance parties might back Gerry Fitt so as to push the SDLP into third place. Senator Mallon did not rate Dr. Hendron highly as a candidate, and thought he was over-cultivated by the Department of Foreign Affairs relative to other members of the SDLP.

Who else
are we
supposed
to talk
to
Belfast

Senator Mallon said that the creation of a public North-South forum was essential for the SDLP. Dr. FitzGerald

had indicated to John Hume that he favoured committees working informally inclusive of Unionists. In Mallon's opinion this was useless. However, Dr. FitzGerald might find it difficult to refuse a direct request from the SDLP. Mallon believed it would be difficult for the Council to produce agreed position papers in either the constitutional, economic or security fields. They would be open to the criticism, if they can be done in a united Ireland, why not do them now?

He expected the British following the change of Government here to make a strong push for the parliamentary tier. The SDLP's position was that it was not interested in a talking-shop, nor would it go into the Assembly as a condition of joining the parliamentary tier. If it were structured and had definite functions, then it could be considered. Apart from these considerations, there was another political difficulty. Sinn Fein would probably send someone into the parliamentary tier, with the consequence that the British Tories would walk out. The SDLP would not be party to excluding Sinn Fein from the parliamentary tier. For this reason also he preferred a Council for a New Ireland to the parliamentary tier.


6 December 1982