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Conversation with Seamus Mallon

I met Seamus Mallon briefly in Newry on 29 March 1988. Mallon said he had understood from Hume that Hume would speak to McGrady and Hendron before last Wednesday's talks with Sinn Fein. In Mallon's view the omission of Hendron and McGrady from the talks was effectively a demotion for them.

He is concerned about the rift between Hume and McGrady and did not think it would heal easily ("pride has set in"). He was also concerned that McGrady's views could gain support in his (Mallon's) own constituency and he was making a special point of returning for a Newry District Executive SDLP meeting that evening to head off trouble.

In regard to continuation of the talks, Mallon is of the view that "the card must now be played out" although he expresses neither optimism nor pessimism about the likely result. He noted that Adams behaved at Wednesday's meeting like a man under intense pressure. Mallon had expected him to lie back and assess the SDLP, but instead he had spoken constantly and obsessively about the present situation.

Congressman Joe Kennedy will be visiting Mallon in South Armagh next Tuesday and going on from there to Derry. Mallon proposes to take him on a tour of South Armagh's "Berlin wall" of observation posts. He may have him take a leaf from his uncle's book and announce, "Ich bin ein Crossmaglenner!"

In anticipation of the talks with the Secretary of State to be held that afternoon, Mallon has said publicly on Radio Ulster on 25 March, what he has been saying privately for some time, i.e., "if we are going to talk about devolution let's talk about real devolution". When Denis Murray asked if he would relish the opportunity to take responsibility for security in Northern Ireland, Mallon indicated he would not shirk it

and went on to say that the Anglo-Irish Agreement had operated in terms of policing on "the peripheral issues . . . the acceptability of the police service (means) having policing which is indigenous to the community, policemen who live in the community, who are part of that community and who have the support of that community... let's get to the heart of the problem".



Declan O'Donovan,
29 March 1988.

c.c. Mr. Gallagher
Counsellors
Section
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