



# An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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AMBASAÍO NA RÉIREANN, LONDAIN



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22 September 1998

Mr. Dermot Gallagher  
Second Secretary  
Anglo-Irish Division  
Department of Foreign Affairs

Dear Secretary,

### Conversation with Seamus Mallon

Seamus Mallon invited me to his hotel for breakfast this morning. He attended a dinner last night at the American Embassy at which the other guests included prominent figures in the banking world as well as Margaret McDonagh, General Secretary of the Labour Party.

### The impasse on the formation of the Executive

Mallon said that commentators have not fully taken in the crisis with which the Agreement is faced. Things will go very seriously wrong if a solution is not found within two weeks. Trimble and Mallon must agree within that period on the departmental structure and present this to the Assembly, enabling the d'Hondt system to be applied and Ministers to be appointed. The Shadow Executive will then participate in the inaugural meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council.

### The Trimble scenario

Mallon said that David Trimble is likely to continue to push for an inaugural meeting of the North-South Ministerial Council at which the Northern side would be represented only by the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. Mallon does not believe it would be politically sustainable for himself to take part in such a meeting - or in the longer run to carry forward the Agreement without Sinn Féin. He urged strongly that we avoid being drawn into Trimble's way of thinking. I reassured him on this point on the basis of several recent conversations with the Department.

### Attitudes in the UUP

Mallon fears that public posturing on decommissioning by prominent UUP figures is designed among other things to strengthen UUP leverage on other issues. The SDLP are

reasonably placed for the inevitable horse trading on the work programme of the North-South Ministerial Council. On the other hand, Mallon is very wary of British government intentions concerning the North-South aspects of the Northern Ireland Bill. He does not rule out that Trimble will seek a significant concession from Blair in the area of the Assembly's input to the NSMC.

**Attitudes in the Republican movement**

Mallon's information is that the Provisional IRA are not contemplating a start to decommissioning until about one year from now. This does not in Mallon's view imply any question mark against the Republican leadership's commitment to the Good Friday Agreement. The leadership are determined to make it work.

**A way out**

Mallon and I discussed at some length the very real danger posed to the Agreement by the current stand-off. Mallon's thinking, as it eventually emerged, seemed to be as follows.

Decommissioning is at present "a weapon in the hands of the UUP". It would be better if it became "a weapon in the hands of Tony Blair". Blair could take it on himself to establish a link between decommissioning and actual devolution. This should be a political linkage established by the Prime Minister; it should not figure in the legislation.

*incl. the actual Executive with powers*

There is possibly a little flexibility as to the date when powers are devolved. There is not, however, unlimited flexibility. To wait until the report of the Patten Commission at the end of June or early July would place much too great a burden on the Shadow institutions.

The devolution/decommissioning link would only be viable in the context of serious pressure from ourselves on the Republican movement. In Mallon's view the Republican leadership is resolved to implement the Good Friday Agreement and would not be destabilised by such pressure.

**Meeting with Trimble**

Mallon is aware of Mr. Trimble's forthcoming meeting with the Taoiseach and hopes to see Trimble in Belfast today to warn him of the "hole he is digging for himself" on decommissioning.

Yours sincerely,

*Philip McDonagh*

Philip McDonagh  
Councillor