

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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AN RÚNAÍOCHT IDIR-RIALTASACH
NA BREATAINE-NA hEIREANN
BÉAL FEIRSTE

BRITISH-IRISH
INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECRETARIAT
BELFAST

Confidential

Meeting with Hugh Logue, SDLP Adviser
(14 June 2000)

1. I had lunch yesterday with Hugh Logue, adviser to Deputy First Minister Seamus Mallon. He indicated that Executive affairs had made him more busy in the last two weeks than at any stage since he had joined Mallon's office. Despite his expectation when I last met him that he would be returning to Brussels this summer, he has just renewed his contract to stay in the Deputy First Minister's office for another year from next August. His main areas of responsibility currently are North/South economic cooperation and British-Irish issues.

2. Logue said that Seamus Mallon is currently tied up heavily with the Policing Bill which is going through the Committee stage at Westminister. Apart from the obvious need to 'get it right' so as to ensure that the Bill will provide a suitable Police Service for Northern Ireland, there is a widespread feeling that the issue can - as a collateral bonus - help to restore the SDLP's standing at a time when Sinn Féin is seen to be chipping away steadily at the main nationalist party's electoral base. In the same context, Logue wondered if Sinn Féin's abstentionist policy at Westminister would survive the next election.

3. In this regard, Logue confirmed that there was a worry within the SDLP about the prospects for the party's performance at the next Westminster election. He said that the Mid-Ulster seat had been handed to Martin McGuinness in 1997 due to poor groundwork by the local SDLP candidate (Denis Haughey). He feared that the same could happen next time round in the West Tyrone and Fermanagh/South Tyrone constituencies. He pointed to the

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evident dynamism of Sinn Féin constituency workers and election campaigners who reminded him of his younger days in the SDLP party machine at the time of the civil rights movement.

4. Other points of interest which emerged during the course of our conversation included:

- He indicated that the relationship between Mallon and David Trimble had improved considerably in recent weeks and he believed that the partnership would prove to be effective and successful in the longer term. His own relationship with Trimble's principal private secretary, David Lavery, was also good. Lavery was clearly a "clever political animal with his finger in every pie" who had proved himself to be indispensable to Trimble and who operated with great effectiveness. Despite some impressions to the contrary, however, he was not a doctrinaire unionist and Logue had always found him easy to cooperate with. Mallon's own private secretary, Peter Maye, was from a similar unionist background but did not express strong political views at any time and had proved very helpful at all times to Logue and his colleagues.

- Relationships in general within the Executive also appeared to be good at present. There was an evident unity of purpose, not least in relation to the attempts to counteract the abstentionist tactics of the two DUP Ministers, Peter Robinson and Nigel Dodds. Logue confirmed that it was Trimble's intention to take personal responsibility for transport in the North/South context so that a sectoral meeting in that area could finally take place. Likewise, if either Robinson or Dodds failed to turn up at other important events for which they were scheduled, the plan was that their responsibilities would gradually be stripped away and handed over to other Ministers.

- Logue did not know what was likely to happen in regard to the DUP's proposed exclusion motion against Sinn Féin in the Assembly. He wondered if, after all, they might be having difficulty in collecting the 30 votes that they needed to have the motion tabled. Alternatively, he thought it was also possible that Robinson and Dodds did not in fact wish to resign their portfolios (which they had promised to do if they failed - as they would - to get 60% of the unionist vote on the issue) and that they were therefore postponing the whole question until after the Assembly took its summer

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recess on 7th July.

- While the Executive as a whole was currently performing with commendable efficiency, Logue expressed the view that the two junior Ministers, Denis Haughey and Dermot Nesbitt, did not seem to know what they were currently supposed to be doing. They had been given by the Executive two distinct areas of responsibility - equality issues and economic policy - but they did not seem to be satisfied with these and appeared to want something more overtly political and "exciting". Nevertheless the working relationship between Haughey and Nesbitt was in fact excellent - and this was of great importance in enabling them to carry out their joint functions effectively - even if they both seemed to object to being referred to as "junior" Ministers.

5. We agreed that we would keep in touch over the summer months. Logue agreed that the current marching season had the potential for serious disturbances but he was hopeful that Mallon and other members of the Executive and the Assembly would not on a practical level be drawn too closely into the issue.

Niall Holohan
15 June 2000

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