

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Taoiseach

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Discussion with Séamus Mallon, 8 January 2000

1. Séamus Mallon called to me at home on Saturday for a detailed discussion of a range of issues.

Oireachtas representation

2. Mallon asked about the current state of play on the question of Northern representation in the Oireachtas. He mentioned that Hugh Logue in his office had been in direct contact with Brian Lenihan but that this was a Logue solo-run. He (Mallon) would prefer to deal with the issue personally, given its sensitivity.

3. I took Mallon in general terms through my understanding of the present state of thinking on the issue. I also made the point that Trimble's worries related in particular (a) to the prospect of an automatic entitlement to seats in the Dáil for Westminster MPs and Assembly Members, and (b) to the possibility of a Sinn Féin member simultaneously being a Government Minister, North and South. These ideas were simply not on the radar screen and, having consulted us, the British had written formally to Trimble to this effect (text of British draft attached).

4. I also advised Mallon that there was no prospect at this time of extending voting in Presidential elections, or on referenda, to Northern Ireland. Mallon was reasonably reassured by all the above. However, he still seems concerned that any move in the near future on Oireachtas representation could become what he called a "totem pole" issue, with a capacity to impact negatively on the political situation

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in the North. He asked that we stay closely in touch on the matter.

Decommissioning

5. Mallon emphasised that Trimble needed something of substance from Republicans if he was going to be able to survive the February meeting of the UUC. There was no point in people fooling themselves that words would be enough.

Trimble/Mallon relationship

6. Mallon said that the relationship between Trimble and himself was now significantly better. However, Trimble had a problem with the quality of his staff, where only David Lavery was preforming well. As a result, too many minor (but time-consuming) issues were being referred directly to Trimble for decision. Mallon added that Trimble is conscious of the problem and has said to one or two people that Mallon has the much more effective team.

7. Mallon also mentioned that Trimble and some of his party would be seeing Tony Blair within a week or so to discuss what Trimble called "political issues". The presumption is that Trimble wishes to raise decommissioning and perhaps one or two other sensitive issues.

8. Asked about how the Executive was working, Mallon said it was too early to draw conclusions. At present, given the absence of the DUP, they couldn't even consider having a vote on an issue. He added that one problem which could arise down the road was the absence of any mechanism for resolving a tied vote. Interestingly, Mallon envisaged such a situation arising not on a major economic

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or social proposal, but on some small but very symbolic issue.

Alex Attwood

9. As we know, Alex Attwood had been selected by Séamus Mallon for a junior Ministerial post but had declined (there are two Junior Ministers at present, one SDLP and one UUP - Denis Haughey and Dermot Nesbitt). The background is that Attwood has been neglecting his Solicitor's practice for some time due to pressure of political and constituency work and, as a result and following complaints to the Solicitors' Association, a formal investigation is underway. In the circumstances (and while there is no question of anything more being involved than briefs not being attended to in time), Attwood, very honourably, told Mallon that it would be unwise to appoint him.

John Hume

10. Mallon would strongly support a move by the Government to honour Hume's unique contribution to the Peace Process.

North/South Boards

11. In a deal with Trimble, Mallon has now secured the nomination of the North/South Tourism Council for the SDLP, in return for the UUP taking the vice-chairs of the Foyle and Trade Boards. Mallon asked if we could suggest some quality people for the Tourism Council - he said he had already done his party and constituency duties in the appointments to the other Boards!

Visits

12. Mallon is going to Rome shortly to take up an invitation to visit the Pope

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(organised through an American contact). He is also travelling in the near future to West Palm Beach in Florida for the annual Irish-American Fund Dinner. (He will be the guest of Pat Rooney, who owns racecourses both in Florida and in New York State, and is a brother of Dan, owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers. The Rooney ancestors come from near Newry and the brothers have been active in the Newry-Pittsburgh economic link-up).

Call on Taoiseach

13. Mallon said he would very much like to call on the Taoiseach in the near future to review issues across the board. I said I would get back to him as soon as possible on this.

Dermot Gallagher
11 January 2000

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