

Meeting with Brid Rodgers

9 October 1996, Dublin

I had a brief meeting with Brid Rodgers yesterday afternoon. The meeting was primarily to discuss some upcoming vacancies on a number of public bodies but conversation inevitably turned towards this week's developments in Northern Ireland.

1. In the wake of the bombings in Lisburn, Ms. Rodgers was very pessimistic about the situation and was also unusually critical of what she saw as a lack of direction and consultation within her own party. The main points mentioned were:

The biggest problem for party members like herself is the absence of any type of serious discussion on the major issues.

If there is a party strategy on issues then it is rarely communicated to party members. (She evidenced the disclosure of IRA responsibility for the Lisburn bombings as an example; on Tuesday night a team from Newsnight approached her and she was forced to decline the interview because she was not aware of the party line).

The professional and slick use of the media by Sinn Féin puts the poor performance of the SDLP into sharp relief.

She herself has raised this issue of the perception of a "leadership vacuum" in their wider constituency with both John Hume and Seamus Mallon but no attempt has been made to redress the situation.

According to Ms. Rodgers these feelings are widely shared within the party. However because of the local, national and international status of John Hume, the current leadership is, and has been, "untouchable".

2. She mentioned that Mr. Hume had recently sounded her out on what would be the

likely reaction from inside the party should he decide not to contest the next Westminster election (his wife is in favour of this course of action). The gist of Ms. Rodgers' response was to the effect that while there would be disappointment there was also a general acceptance that the dual mandate is placing an intolerable burden on him. Mr. Hume agreed that Mark Durkan, with his support would have no problem in holding the Foyle seat albeit with a smaller majority. (Ms. Rodgers expects Patsy McGlone to take the Mid-Ulster nomination over Denis Haughey. She also expects McGlone to defeat William McCrea in the Westminster election).

3. We had a brief discussion on the Lisburn bombs and the likely political fall-out. Ms. Rodgers felt that the episode underlined the misgivings she and many of her colleagues had about the good-faith of Sinn Féin from the beginning of the process. She agreed that the risk was worth taking but feels that the SDLP had been very much used by Sinn Féin to their own advantage. Ms. Rodgers thought that Gerry Adams' failure to attend the late Pat McGeown's funeral because of "flight difficulties out of Frankfurt" had done more to undermine his personal standing in his constituency than the question of personal gain from his recent autobiography. She noted an increased pressure by the US on Sinn Féin as evidenced in Ambassador Kennedy-Smith's recent speech when she talked of (Sinn Féin's) 'betrayal' of among others, the US Administration. (At a recent reception in her residence the Ambassador had questioned Alex Attwood at length about his personal evaluation of Gerry Adams' integrity, sincerity etc. Mr. Attwood was surprised at the Ambassador's approach). Ms. Rodgers speculated as to what Sinn Féin would be willing to do to keep the American support on board.

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D. Hayes  
Anglo-Irish Division  
10 October, 1996

c.c. Secretary O hUiginn  
Joint Secretary  
Counsellors AI