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Conversation with Mr. Paddy Devlin M.P. - Sunday 13th December 1970

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Mr. Devlin's main preoccupation is with the investigation by the Public Accounts Committee of the Northern Distress Relief Fund. He was one of the three trustees of the bank account in Clones. The other two were Mr. Paddy Kennedy M.P. and Mr. Paddy McRory, a solicitor and businessman.

Mr. Devlin said that in the period up to Mr. Blaney's Letterkenny speech (6th November 1969) he had signed three or four cheques at the request of Mr. Kennedy. None of the cheques exceeded £2,000 in value. The total sum with which Mr. Devlin had direct contact would, therefore, not have been more than seven or eight thousand pounds.

At the point in time at which he had signed these cheques he had believed that the money was being used for relief of distress. However, immediately following the Letterkenny speech Mr. Devlin had been asked to make a statement in support of Mr. Blaney. He had refused to do so saying that he would not be bought by anyone, and thereafter was squeezed out of any connection with the Clones account.

It was not until during the arms trial in Dublin that he had first heard of the Baggot Street account. He knew nothing about it although he had heard rumours and he had had no connection whatever with it.

Mr. Devlin feels reasonably satisfied that the monies with which he had been involved were probably spent properly. In this connection he feels that [redacted] could give useful information to the PAC.

[redacted] is known to me. He is a member of the Regular (Cathal Goulding) IRA and a member of the Belfast Central Citizens Defence Committee. He claims to control the Lower Falls Road area on behalf of the Goulding IRA and claims also to have risked life and limb on many occasions to prevent trouble being created in that area by the provisional IRA. It is well-known that the Goulding IRA changed the tactics of the IRA from violence to peaceful protest in recent years and this has been one of the causes of the split in the IRA and the creation of [redacted] Sinn Féin and its (provisional but now official) IRA.

In assessing [redacted] attitudes it is necessary to take the above into account and to conclude that [redacted] has and had no connection with Mr. Blaney.

Mr. Devlin believes that [redacted] knows where some of the original sums expended from the Clones Street Account may have gone and that [redacted] might be prepared to give evidence to the PAC on this. After November 1969 moneys from the Fund appear to have dried up so far as the Lower Falls Road area is concerned and began to be expended in other areas of Belfast for other than relief purposes.

Mr. Devlin blames Mr. Paddy Kennedy for this and considers that Mr. Kennedy sold himself completely to Mr. Blaney and allowed himself to be used for the purpose of diverting the relief funds to the purchase of violence and the instruments of violence. In this respect Mr. Kennedy worked with the Kelly brothers who probably distributed the cash in Belfast.

I say say that I have come across the track of the Kelly brothers previously in Belfast but, as a common condition of life there is to tell lies about everybody else, I have been reluctant to come to any personal conclusions or even to report on the things told to me as they might simply have been gross slanders. In my contact work in the North I have moved very gradually from one source to another and, in fact, have kept my sources separate. For reasons of prudence I have consciously kept away altogether from two groups i.e. the Bernadette Devlin/Ramon McCann etc. group and the Provisional Republican group. In the former case I saw no point in having discussions with people who might very well have used even a simple contact in some public manner against the Government here. In the latter case I have had serious suspicions for a long time as to their connections in the 26 Counties.

As I conceived it my job to make overall political assessments I also tended to keep away from information relating to what I knew to be mini-groups however loud they shouted. Nevertheless it is impossible not to hear a great deal about them and to come to some assessment of their importance.

In the circumstances I feel I should say that in my opinion [redacted] had a direct connection with Mr. Paddy Kennedy and, [redacted] and [redacted] with brothers of [redacted] living in Belfast, one of whom lives in or near to the New Lodge Road area. This group has control of a number of people in that area and in other parts of Belfast including *Anderson* an element in Ballymurphy and one in Andersonstown. I am satisfied and have been satisfied for a long time that this group created riot situations on instructions from elsewhere. I am satisfied that the purpose of these situations was two-fold -

- 1) to demonstrate that the Taoiseach's policies were wrong and
- 2) to create a situation in which the Taoiseach would be forced to act in a manner contrary to his general policy.

I am also satisfied that this group is highly unrepresentative of general opinion even among the minority in Belfast. There may be a few among them who act out of idealism but I believe that most of them were paid to create trouble. I doubt very much that this particular group has much connection with [redacted] Sinn Féin which, until recently, called itself the Provisional Sinn Féin and is the political arm of what was called until recently the Provisional IRA.

It appears that in the past two or three months the funds of this group have been substantially reduced and their capacity for serious trouble-making may also, therefore, have been reduced. However, their capacity to intimidate certain small areas in Belfast remains.

I have given the above personal assessment in order to enable some assessment to be made of what Mr. Devlin told me. We know, of course, that during the pogrom in Belfast in August 1969 Mr. Devlin applied here for arms. At that time his position, I think we might concede, was not unreasonable as the B Specials and the Shankill Road mob were in the process of burning out the Falls Road area. How long Mr. Devlin might have continued to hold that position is something I do not know. In his previous history he had been connected with the Regular IRA and spent some years in detention. Recently he claimed before the Scarman Tribunal that he had come to the conclusion some years ago that political methods were better than violent methods for securing his aims. In furtherance of this he had joined the MILP some years ago and became an M.P. representing that Party. His conversion to peaceful methods, therefore, would appear to have been a genuine one. He is now a member of the SDLP which is committed to non-violence.

I have no evidence which associates him at any stage with what has been described to me as [REDACTED] Although he was made a trustee of the Clones Account, when he was asked to support Mr. Blaney's Letterkenny speech he refused. During last winter he concentrated mainly on the re-building of Bombay Street.

I am, therefore, inclined to believe him when he says that he had nothing to do with spending money for the purchase of arms or of the services of violent people. He obviously wishes to be separated in the public mind from the other two trustees one of whom at least was involved with improper use of the Relief Fund in Mr. Devlin's opinion.

Although this Department has not been involved in any way with the Relief Fund I felt that I owed it to Mr. Devlin to listen to him on this subject and to report on what he said.

S.S. 16.12.70.