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Interviews with Seamus Twomey
First French television channel

February 1977

- Q. Mr. Twomey, how did you escape from Mountjoy Jail?
- A. Well, it's a bit embarrassing, but in a helicopter.
- Q. Did you plan your own escape?
- A. It was planned inside the Jail, yes, and it did, with some of our comrades in the Jail; the whole plans were made, laid and carried out with the help of our comrades on the outside.
- Q. So when you went outside what happened?
- A. Well, inside two hours we were at our destination where we lay low for approximately two or three weeks and then I began to move around again and get into business and back into action again.
- Q. What do you call "back into business"?
- A. Back into the war, directly into the war effort.
- Q. What has been your role and your responsibilities since?
- A. I have been in the leadership of the Republican Movement and have been directly involved in the war against England in the leadership context.
- Q. Are you the IRA Chief-of-Staff?
- A. Well, it has been said yes, and it has been again denied, but as I am in the leadership of the Republican Movement I don't think it would be correct to say whether I am or whether I am not Chief-of-Staff because the British Intelligence actually don't know who the Chief-of-Staff of the Republican Army is and we have no wish to grant them any intelligence as such.

Q. So you are moving from North to South and South to North?

A. Yes - keeping on the move continually so as not to let the authorities, the so-called authorities, on both sides of the border know where we are or where we are not and where I stay or where I don't stop.

Q. Were you nearly arrested at any time?

A. Oh yes. I've been many a time going through road-blocks on both sides of the border and been checked out and so forth and allowed to pass on. The credentials I carry are pretty good and stand up to the closest scrutiny.

Q. There have been explosions in Oxford Street in London. It has been told that this is the launching of a new campaign in Britain. Is that true?

A. That's correct. A campaign will be waged until British withdrawal from the North of Ireland. GHQ's active service units have carried those out. The operations that are carried out now in England will be continued.

Q. It means that this campaign of terror will not stop from your point of view?

A. We do not call it terrorism. We are fighting a war against the British armed forces who have occupied a part of our country. Therefore the only thing we can do is to fight them in our occupied six counties and on the British mainland. To us it's not acts of terror; it's acts of war carried out by our volunteers.

Q. Then it will last?

A. Yes it will last.

Q. I call it a campaign of terror because in London anybody and people who have nothing to do with Northern Ireland problems can be hurt or can die, even foreigners.

A. London is the capital of England, of Britain, if you wish. Britain is waging a war on the Irish people in the occupied north-east part of Ireland. Therefore all cities in England and all of the population of England are open to acts of war as the people in the north-east part of occupied Ireland are to British armed forces. The aggression carried out by British armed forces and the war effort carried out by them in north-east Ulster, we equally are at liberty to carry out operations against the British people as such too.

- Q. One Derry industrialist has been murdered on 2nd February. Do you claim this?
- A. Again, all industry and British industrialists are surely targets as carried out by us and we claim it, yes. Because they in their own source, they are here to suck the whole economy of Ireland back into England. They are taking and they are exploiting the Irish working-class people. In north-east Ulster the rate of wages is far lower in comparison to any country in Europe. As a matter of fact the wages paid by the British industrialists are so poor that it's even giving jobs £19, £20 or £30 below the average rate.
- Q. But it's not by killing the industrialists that you will get the unemployment level down?
- A. It is to bring home to the English people the exploitation of north-east Ulster by British occupation forces plus by the money they are drawing out of the country. This is always their cry, that they are pouring money into the country. They are not. They are taking more money and profits and scab labour which they are exploiting in the country at the present moment.
- Q. One gets the impression that the targets of the IRA are growing and growing every time?
- A. It all depends what targets. Everyone connected with British imperialism or people who are lending their support to the British war effort definitely are targets, yes.
- Q. In the past year the IRA has made no progress. Do you really think that you will be able ...
- A. That's a matter of discussion. I would debate whether it's made no progress. As a matter of fact we have made plenty of progress.
- Q. What do you call progress?
- A. If you listened to all British Premiers and British politicians - now they have come out with an exploit(?). 1977 is their year for victory. Don't forget from 1970 this has still been their same call. The progress that we have made is simply that we have abolished all hireling governments in the North, governments portrayed and projected by puppets. They have all been put away. Now the British Government is in such a fix they don't know ... We know that they want to withdraw from the North of Ireland but they've got themselves into such a fix that they don't know how they are going to withdraw out.

- Q. Do you think you will be able to go on with your campaign in Britain for a long time?
- A. We can go on indefinitely with our campaign. People have asked us this question since we went into campaign from 1970. For seven years we have carried on this campaign and we are quite confident that we can carry it on for another seven
- Q. Don't you feel that some, maybe a growing number of people, in Northern Ireland are fed up with violence now and that ...
- A. ... it's not violence for six or seven years but for the best part of 800 years British violence has been in north-east Ulster and decade after decade many gallant Irishmen and Irish women have laid their lives down through British tryanny and British terrorism. To us seven years means nothing. It is only a fleeting second in the 800 years of British subjugation.
- Q. The Peace Movement - has it some success?
- A. The Peace Movement has no success. It's only success was the success of the so-called leadership of the Peace Movement on the Continent getting prizes and that awarded to them. It had no success, no success amongst the people. Didn't the women in Turf Lodge in the middle of Belfast chase them out? What success is there in that? What successes does one make to condemn one side and not condemn the other? They never have yet condemned British Army aggression. As a matter of fact they go to the Continent two or three days ago and told us that the thing is to join the RUC and that the British are decent people.

- Q. Do you really think that you could achieve a military victory? I don't think it would be possible, so what are your prospects of success?
- A. A military victory ... Well, it all depends on how you look at a military victory. After all, we have bogged the British Army down for seven years now, the flow of everything. They have tried all terror tactics, not against anyone else other than the civilian population in the ghetto areas in the North of Ireland. They have tried everything. They have tried wholesale; they have tried murder, they have tried bombing them out; they have their commos (commandos?) in on the sectarian murder raids, they have tried everything. I cannot say at the present time but they looked for a truce before. They were the people, not us. We didn't ask for a truce. They were the people who sent their emissaries looking for a truce from us.

- Q. Are there talks at the moment between the Republican Movement, as you would say, and the British Government?
- A. No. The Republican Movement broke off the talks because the British Government could not deliver anything they promised and could not keep their word on a lot of things they promised, in fact, on a terrible lot of things.
- Q. How would you welcome the independence of Northern Ireland?
- A. Independence in Northern Ireland is no good to us. We are looking for a united Ireland, not for a sectarian-based six county independent Northern Ireland. That is no good because simply and solely it would be putting back into power the people that we have already pushed out of power. That is, the English colonists in the North of Ireland. We have already put the English colonists out of power and by agreeing to a six county independent north-east Ulster, it would not be on the cards at all, because they would be the same people going back into power again.
- Q. What are the prospects for the IRA for the following months now?
- A. The prospects for the IRA for the following months are as they always have been, very good, very hard; we will escalate our war against the British both in the occupied six counties and on the British mainland.
- Q. And how do you see your life, personally speaking, in the future?
- A. As I've seen it for the last seven years, on the run and getting around as best as possible. My life is very simply that. It's nothing in comparison with the young volunteers who are fighting. After all, I have reared a family, a family of teenagers and so forth, but in comparison with the young volunteers who are doing the fighting, whose lives are on the line most of the time, who have missed the bloom of youth and everything that goes to youth, they are suffering more than any of the leadership or any of the older volunteers in the Republican Movement. The youth are doing the fighting and they are the people that are doing the suffering because, after all, most of my age-group have seen life, most of life, but it's the young people who are missing life.
- Q. By the way, given the work which the IRA are doing, is not it making the future more difficult for the reconciliation ...
- A. I can't understand that because after all, yourself being a Frenchman and perhaps not been born at the period or during the Second World War, you must realise that France then was occupied, what they called "Vichy" France, and this to us is exactly the same. The people in the North, in east Ulster who pay us, they are just the same in comparison as the Vichy France people were.

Q. But what will be the fate of the Protestants if you succeed?

A. There is no such thing as Protestant or Catholic. We are not fighting a sectarian war. Our war is for the unification of Ireland, guaranteed from Tone onwards, and from the Constitution that was based on 1916. Everyone in the country, it does not matter what they are, they are all citizens of Ireland. Sectarian bigotry has got nothing to do with us. We do not fight for it: to us there is no such thing as Catholic or Protestant, they are all Irish people.

Q. But the Dublin Government seems really soft on reunification?

A. Well, again you have different politicians such as Conor Cruise O'Brien and so forth playing politics with peoples' lives. They are the people that talk about Protestant and Catholic, we don't. We are fighting for the unification of our country.

Q. But this Peace Movement exists?

A. Well, it partially exists but no later than tonight, while this interview was being taken, the Peace Movement has split in the North. One of the leading members of the Peace Movement, Tom Conaty, has been sacked from the Peace Movement for the very fact that he dared to disagree with the leadership of the Peace Movement and he is one of the leading lights in the Upper Falls, Lower Falls and Andersonstown branch of the Peace Movement. So where does it go from there? After all, the Peace leaders have been built up by the British press and the British media. Nowhere only on the Continent and different parts, not in the hard ghetto areas of north-east Ulster, are they welcome. Outside that is where they get all their support from, on the Continent, particularly West Germany. I don't want to be too hard but the Germans have anything but a great tradition of freedom from anybody.
