

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES****IRELAND**

<b>Reference Code:</b>	2001/8/15
<b>Title:</b>	Copy report [by E Gallagher, Department of External Affairs] on discussions with Gerry Fitt MP on the Northern Ireland relief fund and the general situation in Northern Ireland.
<b>Creation Date(s):</b>	13 December, 1970
<b>Level of description:</b>	Item
<b>Extent and medium:</b>	4 pages
<b>Creator(s):</b>	Department of the Taoiseach
<b>Access Conditions:</b>	Open
<b>Copyright:</b>	National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

Conversation with Mr. Gerry Fitt M.P. - 13th December 1970

2001/8/15 (2)

This had been suggested by Mr. Paddy Devlin M.P. as he felt that Mr. Fitt would like to have an opportunity of letting his views be known privately on a number of matters to the Government here.

I visited Mr. Fitt at his home on Sunday evening 13th December and spent over two hours with him. I raised no topics myself as I wished to see the order of importance he attached to things and did not want to spoil the opportunity by asking leading questions.

Mr. Fitt's first concern is the examination by the Public Accounts Committee of the Northern Distress Relief Fund. He has two major concerns. They are -

- (1) Mr. Devlin's situation. He told me that Mr. Devlin is utterly honest although, as is well-known, excitable and given to talking off the top of his head. Mr. Fitt is quite sure, in his own mind, that Mr. Devlin acted properly in the circumstances that existed and that no blame should be attached to him for any misuse of the Fund by others.

I am giving in a separate note further details on this given to me by Mr. Devlin in another conversation.

According to both Fitt and Devlin, in separate discussions, the cleavage in regard to the use of the funds became evident immediately after Mr. Blaney's speech in Letterkenny on November 6th, 1969. Mr. Fitt was asked to issue a statement supporting Mr. Blaney but refused to do so. Mr. Devlin was also asked to issue a statement supporting Mr. Blaney and also refused to do so. Thereafter he was squeezed out of the handling of the Clones Bank Account and knows no more about it.

Mr. Fitt said that the misuse of the Fund was both obvious and tragic in Belfast since about January of this year. Thugs and layabouts from the New Lodge Road area, personally known to him since his childhood, were clearly in receipt of Irish money and, in his opinion, were employed to stir up trouble at will. The area is in Mr. Fitt's Stormont constituency - the Dock constituency. In the initial stages he could not understand what was happening but later it became clear to him that certain riots were connected with certain situations in Dublin. The line of command, so far as he could discover, was from Mr. Blaney to Mr. Paddy Kennedy M.P. at the political level and through the Kelly brothers at the strong-arm level. The Kellys originally came from the New Lodge Road area and one of them moved back into it a year ago and is now in charge of what Mr. Fitt described as

\_\_\_\_\_ in that area. Mr. Fitt has a low opinion of all these people and believes that they have set back progress at political level to a substantial degree. It has become noticeable to him, however, that funds have been less freely available since about two months ago and he is hopeful that this may stop



the contrived rioting. The people paid from these funds earlier are now returning to the Labour Exchanges. Until recently the explanation for giving them money was that they were liable to arrest if they left the area and had to be supported. This was never true, in Mr. Fitt's opinion, but it may be used as an excuse in relation to an examination of how the funds were expended;

- (ii) Mr. Fitt, who was the mentor of Paddy Kennedy and brought him into politics in the Republican Labour Party, has now definitely parted company with him. He retains a certain personal sympathy with Kennedy whom he regards as an immature personality. He believes that Kennedy is completely in Mr. Blaney's pocket. On this subject he said to me that he might have retained some respect for Mr. Blaney if he had had any reason at all to believe or could have persuaded himself to believe that Mr. Blaney had a genuine concern for the minority in the North. All the events of the past year, including the cynical destruction of Paddy Kennedy as a politician and as a person, convince him that Mr. Blaney's interests lay elsewhere and he has nothing good to say of him. He does not understand Mr. Haughey's role. He feels that Mr. Haughey was pushed gradually into an impossible position by Mr. Blaney in the expectation that the Taoiseach would not dare to touch Mr. Blaney if he also had to take on Mr. Haughey. Given all the circumstances Mr. Fitt hopes that the Public Accounts Committee will make a thorough examination of the Fund and let the chips fall where they may. As noted earlier Mr. Fitt is satisfied that Mr. Devlin acted with propriety and he is not afraid of a full investigation. Quite clearly he separates Mr. Devlin from the other trustees. In regard to Mr. Paddy MacRory, the third trustee, Mr. Fitt has a certain sympathy as he feels that he was also led into something he did not fully appreciate at the time. He is a solicitor and risks, among other things, being disbarred.

When I asked Mr. Fitt whether he was concerned that other innocent people might be hurt by the disclosure of their names he said that he doubted this but, even if it happened, the important thing to his mind is to expose the posturings of Mr. Kennedy and the Kelly brothers who have led many people astray and have caused death and suffering in ghetto areas of Belfast and are still involved in doing so.

He added that he understood that several people had been approached in recent days to sign receipts for parts of the Fund in order to conceal what was really done with them. He himself was approached indirectly and refused. He also understands that consideration has been given by Mr. Kennedy and others to making an approach to Mr. Garret Fitzgerald in the hope of persuading him "to go easy" but, knowing Garret Fitzgerald's reputation, he had no doubt that this would fail if indeed it is even attempted.



In summary Mr. Fitt's position is that a most thorough investigation is justifiable and that careful distinctions should be made as between the trustees.

Mr. Fitt then discussed the Taoiseach's policy in relation to the North. He said that his own view was - and here I quote him exactly - "social justice will destroy unionism". He noted that the Taoiseach appeared to be working along the same lines. In this respect his reference to Major Chichester Clark in his UN speech was "clever politics". Mr. Fitt said that, as a socialist, he had little sympathy with the policies of Fianna Fail but, in regard to the North, he certainly hoped that the Taoiseach's policies would prevail.

He then went on to say that, so far as he was concerned, the Social Democrat and Labour Party would not formally link itself with the Irish Labour Party. His personal sympathies lie in that direction but his political view, as leader of the SDLP, is that it should always be in a position to liaise with the Government of the day in Dublin. He asked me to convey this, together with his other comments, to the Taoiseach.

On the MacRory Report he told me that he had just received information that the Stormont Cabinet is split on what should be the contents of a White Paper which is to be published next Thursday morning. He understands that Mr. Brian Faulkner is unhappy as not enough concessions are made to the right-wing. He understands (we also understand separately as is clear from our discussions at official level in London on 4th December) that PR will not be included in the local government package. His opinion is that PR will be recommended by the Crowther Commission on the Constitution for Stormont together with a doubling of the number of seats in Stormont. In this respect the SDLP will certainly demand multi-seat PR - as Mr. Fitt said, "the same system as you have in the Republic". This also is in accord with the views developed here and presented in London on more than one occasion. I promised to send Mr. Fitt some material on the PR system which would demonstrate that there is no such thing as single-seat PR which, he is afraid, the Unionists will try to put over. The general view of the SDLP on MacRory is that they will fight against any major deviation from it.

Mr. Fitt told me that he has good relations with Mr. Burroughs. The SDLP will prepare next week a number of names of suitable minority representatives for the Housing Council to be set up under the Housing Executive Act. The SDLP are reasonably satisfied with the result of the debates on that Act but "everything depends on how it is administered". Certainly the SDLP is now alive to the necessity for getting the right kind of minority representatives on public boards of this kind.

Mr. Fitt had gone through all these subjects, choosing his own order, before mentioning the Taoiseach's warning about the possibility of internment. On this subject he said that the Opposition in the North had great difficulty as detention without trial was a weapon frequently and ruthlessly used against the minority by the Unionist Government. He understood, as a person engaged in politics, that a Government cannot choose not to govern. If Mr. Lynch found himself in a position where he had to threaten internment so as to show extremist elements that they could not ride rough-shot over the Irish Government in pursuit of policies which greatly damaged the minority in the North and set back the possibilities of national reunification, Mr. Fitt thoroughly



sympathised. In his position however he could not say so publicly and might even have to express objections in principle. He certainly hoped that the Taoiseach would not actually have to carry out his threat and would be forced to criticise him if he did but in that case he would do so reluctantly and without putting his heart into it. He hoped that the Taoiseach would understand his position in this respect. He anticipated also that the SDLP would not take a party stand on the matter so as to avoid adding to the Taoiseach's troubles. If detentions are confined to the sort of people whom everyone knows are dangerous trouble-makers this would, of course, ease the situation but even in these circumstances no political leader of the minority in the North could endorse the action in view of their particular situation and the history of the use of the Special Powers Acts.

I thought it advisable to put it to Mr. Fitt that -

- (i) Governments here, irrespective of political party, have had recourse to detention in troubled times before and that in no case had any substantial argument been made that the detentions went beyond the minimum limits necessary or beyond the actual people self-admittedly engaged in violent activity. This put detention here in a very different category from detention without trial under the Special Powers Acts which were directed against potential leadership of one-third of the community in the North;
- (ii) Possibly the Taoiseach's statement of Friday 4th December had been mis-interpreted. While I had no special knowledge in the matter my interpretation was that the Taoiseach was saying, that given that the Government have set their face against violence North and South in a conscious determination to make possible the conditions which would lead to reunification by peaceful means in due time, any group of people who engaged in violence in defiance of that policy would pay for the consequences of their activities and, if normal legal procedure proved to be ineffective, as was the case in the past, the Government would not shrink from internment. If the Taoiseach's warning were read in that way it would not necessarily imply an imminent Proclamation and certainly would not justify charges that the Government were getting prepared to trample on all civil rights.

Mr. Fitt said that this latter argument explained the position more clearly to him than he had understood and left him in a happier frame of mind. I added that this was a purely personal interpretation and I had no knowledge of the kind on which the Taoiseach relied when he made his statement and did not wish to be taken as representing the Taoiseach's mind on this subject but I thought that the possibility that this is what the Taoiseach meant should not be ruled out.

When I was leaving, Mr. Fitt again thanked me for coming to see him and asked me to report his remarks on all the subjects mentioned to the Taoiseach. He hoped that we would keep in touch, in the discreet manner in which we had made contact, so that North and South would not get "out of phase" on matters of vital interest to the future of the country.