

## L15: KEVIN DONNELLY INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Interviewee: Kevin Donnelly [pseudonym]
Interviewer: Dr Fearghus Roulston
Interview summarisers: Dr Hilary White and Prof Liam Harte
The interview was recorded as a single audio file with no section breaks

L15: Kevin Donnelly	Start time: 00:00:00	Finish time: 01:55:04	Duration: 01:55:04	Brief description of content:
00:00–09:59	Born in 1955 in the Bogside area of Derry, where his father had a coal business. The eldest of seven children, he describes the Derry of his youth as ‘a wonderful place’. Recalls his time at Long Tower school and St Columb’s College. Explains that some of his classmates later became involved with the IRA. Remembers being in a pub with a friend, who later became an IRA hunger-striker and Sinn Féin MLA, on the ‘day the Troubles started’. Describes NI in the early 1970s as a place that was ‘sort of closing down’, which prompted him to leave.			
10:00–19:59	Explains that his parents were not really political, although both had family histories of political activism. Says resentment towards British soldiers ‘set in quite quickly’ in 1969-70 and claims that ‘dancehall punch-ups’ with soldiers were one of the major ‘trigger points to the Troubles in Derry’ in the early 1970s. Recalls ‘soldier dolls’ being tarred and feathered. Kevin was still living in Derry when Bloody Sunday happened in 1972. Admits that he often thought of joining the IRA, and that he would be asked ‘to do certain things’ as part of planned operations, but says he could not ‘make that leap’. Explains that his parents were devotional Catholics but that he now considers himself an atheist.			
20:00–29:59	States that his boyhood faith, coupled with ‘a fear of hurting people’, held him back from becoming more directly involved in the violence. Regards Operation Motorman in 1972 as the end of the ‘romantic period’ of the conflict, a time he associates with listening to Radio Free Derry. Recalls going across the border to socialise in places like Muff in Co. Donegal, which he describes as a ‘release valve’ for Derry. He started to think about leaving Derry and initially wanted to go to Dublin, but certain events, including ‘a row with a couple of IRA men’ and being beaten up in the city, made him want to leave Ireland altogether.			
30:00–39:59	States that he and one sister were the only family members to emigrate. Despite it being a ‘romantically interesting place’, the combined pressures of family life and militant republicanism made Derry a ‘quite unhealthy’ place to live. Recalls being stopped at army checkpoints, but this was not a ‘primary reason’ for him leaving. His social life included football matches, ‘dancing across the border’ and weekends away in places like Buncrana. Following Operation Motorman his animosity towards the army and RUC lessened because as a nationalist he felt ‘superior’ and ‘heroic’. His father continued to deliver coal to loyalist areas, which was another source of anxiety and wariness.			
40:00–49:59	Discussing his university options, he says QUB did not appeal because Belfast was also ‘closed down’; Coleraine was ruled out because there was ‘a wee bit of a boycott’ over the New University of Ulster not being sited in Derry; and Dublin seemed too ‘parochial’. England, conversely, ‘was the swinging place’. However, his parents, particularly his mother, did not want him to go to university, nor did she want him to leave NI. Despite this, he went to Hull to study economics and was excited to be leaving Derry, where ‘behaviours were heavily policed’.			

50:00–59:59	Hull seemed a very 'orderly' city, but he found the people 'standoffish', which made him homesick. However, he started to make friends with NI students at Endsleigh College, a Catholic teacher training college. He also made friends in the Labour and Communist parties, which introduced him to the 'English working-class way of life'. After a while he joined Clann na hÉireann, 'the political wing of the Stickies in England', which was, he says, anti-sectarian and 'trying to put across a different message in England to what people were hearing' about the Troubles. With friends, he organised a week of action for the conflicts in Ireland, Palestine and Vietnam respectively. This coincided with the 1974 Birmingham pub bombings, which led to them being beaten up and their posters torn down.
01:00:00–01:09:59	Explains that despite leaving Derry and that 'traumatic period' of his life behind, NI has been central to his subsequent political life. Recalls travelling back to NI regularly during the conflict to see family and friends. Says he was sometimes detained under the Prevention of Terrorist Act during those journeys. Suspects he was under surveillance because of his involvement with Clann and later with the Communist Party. Speaks of his interest in Chilean politics and how some Chilean academics settled in Hull in after the Pinochet coup in 1973.
01:10:00–01:19:59	Reveals that he married his first wife in Hull and they had a daughter in 1979, by which time he was a community worker in the city. They moved to Liverpool in 1983, but his wife felt unsettled there, so two years later they moved to Tottenham, where he again found people 'standoffish'. By now the Communist Party was starting to implode, so he joined the Labour Party in the late 1980s. He also made contact with Desmond Greaves and the Connolly Association in Liverpool and attended meetings of the Irish in Britain Representation Group.
01:20:00–01:29:59	Speaks of his daughter's affection for Derry. Despite still having family there, he says there was a period when Ireland 'faded into the background' for him, though his 'Irishness' and Irish accent remained strong. Notes how in the north of England 'people operate at a neighbourhood level', 'whereas in London it was very much about communities of interest'. Describes the Irish community in London as 'too big' to feel fully communal and found that the localism the culture didn't 'strike a chord' with him. Despite this, he 'made sure' his daughter attended Irish dancing lessons and he was actively involved with the community outreach work of the Haringey Irish Centre. Describes the lonely, pub-centred lives of many Irish labourers in London. He was also active in the Labour Party in Tottenham at this time. Reflecting on the NI peace process, he says Blair was 'the best thing that ever happened' to NI and describes himself as a Blairite.
01:30:00–01:39:59	Referring to the London bombings that coincided with the peace process, he says 'the operators' tended to be from the ROI, but blame would still be directed at those from NI. Talks about experiencing hostility from ROI people in London – 'it was almost like a racism' – which heightened his sense of outsidership. Says his family in Derry, who are 'not Sinn Féiners', were 'relieved' at the peace process, but also had a 'degree of scepticism'. Kevin was sceptical too, 'in the first instance about the motivations'. Says he owns an apartment in Donegal and might move there to live. He misses the communality in Ireland, but knows his 'roots' and 'networks' are now in England. Agrees that in Derry or Belfast one can still 'feel watched', and states that NI 'is still very much a place where people stake their ownership of places'.
01:40:00–01:49:59	He believes that English people 'leave things behind' more readily than those in NI. Feels that 'people in Derry particularly find it difficult to move on', which may be due to their 'different way of handling' conflict-related pain and trauma. Thinks that Derry has become 'a bit more socially liberal', yet emigration

	<p>continues because 'there's nothing to hold people there'. The city is still 'extremely divided' in his view and thinks little will change until Sinn Féin and other republicans 'apologise for what they did' and address their role in the 'sectarian war' 'in a meaningful way'. The fact that 'the Derry middle classes have fled across the border' doesn't help matters. He values the multiculturalism of England, especially since he now has a Jewish wife and a granddaughter who is 'mixed race Sri Lankan'. By contrast, Derry is still based around 'networks'.</p>
01:50:00–01:55:04	<p>Reiterates his enjoyment of being able to avail of London's cultural offerings. States that the 'biggest event' that made him decide to settle in England was the birth of his daughter, which coincided with the first hunger strike by republican prisoners in the Maze in 1979, and which made him think differently about his political involvement. Recalls a watershed moment when he turned down an invitation from a republican friend in Yorkshire 'to get involved in something heavily, heavy'. While part of him felt he was betraying his friend, 'on the other hand it was the right thing to do'. Ends by remarking that 'family settles, family settles and those sort of things'.</p>