The Price of My Soul - ***Chapter 12***

Foreword

THE PRICE OF MY SOUL is not a work of art, an autobiography, or a political manifesto. Readers who expect one or other of these things will no doubt class it as a failure. Let them. I'm not basically concerned with its success, financial or literary.

I have written this book in an attempt to explain how the complexity of economic, social, and political problems of Northern Ireland threw up the phenomenon of Bernadette Devlin.
I also want to tell the story of the protest movement which wrote Northern Ireland across the world's headlines in 1968 and 1969. Because it is an account of my own impressions, it may not always be objectively accurate. If I have misinterpreted the civil rights movement at any point, I apologize to my friends for it. In this movement, which is still struggling to free our people from the bonds of economic slavery, I am only one among hundreds of my generation. We were born into an unjust system; we are not prepared to grow old in it.
Finally, before I get submerged in all the Joans of Arc and Cassandras and the other fancy labels people stick on me, I want to put the real flesh-and-blood Bernadette Devlin on record.
The title has a family significance. My mother — whose life story was much more worthy of being recorded than mine — planned to write her autobiography under this title. Since she more than anyone was responsible for my attitude to life and its misery, I have taken the title of her unwritten book. For this I apologize only to the members of my family. THE PRICE OF MY SOUL refers not to the price for which I would be prepared to sell out, but rather to the price we all must pay in life to preserve our own integrity.

To gain that which is worth having, it may be necessary to lose everything else.

CHAPTER TWELVE

NO SOONER was the count complete than the Press descended on me. To protect my brother and sisters from the attentions of the Press, I was then staying at my aunt's home in the country, and on Friday, April 18th, 1969, the day after polling day, reporters and photographers settled round the house like swarming bees, demanding idiotic, phoney photographs of the MP sitting on a rug, surrounded by all her little cousins. They all took a fancy to the garden swing: everybody had to have photographs of 'the swinging MP' — about the most obvious pun that any second-rate newspaper could be depended on to think up. The Press were interested only in the gimmick publicity of the twenty-one-year-old female who makes it to be a Member of Parliament. Fair enough, I wasn't very professional in dealing with the Press, but they weren't prepared to be helpful. As far as they were concerned, I was a mass of flesh which had become public property and they were entitled, at any hour of the day or night, to interrupt anything I was doing. They couldn't understand why I refused to allow them to take photographs of the MP getting out of bed in the morning; or the MP eating boiled eggs for breakfast. None of them wanted to ask the basic questions which would show why the situation in Northern Ireland should produce a 'baby of Parliament'.

That was the state of play on Friday. The next day violence flared again in Derry. I was going to Derry myself, and heard the reports of violence on the radio: it was common news at the time. A civil rights march from Burntollet Bridge to Derry had been banned, and as a token protest some people sat down in the Street in the centre of the city. A few Paisleyites came out and the usual scuffles started. The police could easily have dealt with these disorders but their tactic, as ever, was to prevent clashes by beating the demonstrators off the streets. They charged the crowd, flourishing their batons, and the crowd fled in panic before them. Then somebody in the mass of people turned: this was how the real trouble started. 'Why are we running from the police?' somebody said, and at that everybody stopped dead, turned round, and started beating the police back up the street. The police were armed with batons, shields, riot helmets, and, of course, their revolvers. The people had nothing, but they were angry enough to make up for the lack of weapons and they terrified the police who turned and ran. When the people saw the police fleeing for the first time in Derry, it was just too much for them, and they seized anything they could get their hands on and beat

the police into the barracks. Then police reinforcements were brought into the city and the crowd, by this time trying to break into the barracks and slay all within, were driven off.

From then on, sporadic street-fighting broke out in different parts of the city, and by the time I arrived at about ten o'clock in the evening, Derry was a battlefield. It was like coming into beleaguered Budapest: you had to negotiate the car round the piles of bricks and rubble and broken glass which were cluttering the roads. Every family in the Bogside, the Catholic slum ghetto of Derry, had left its home and was roaming the streets seeking whom it could devour. The police had arrived in their hundreds and pitched battles between the police and the Catholics were in progress. What had started as a clash between civil rights supporters and Paisleyites had developed into sheer faction fighting between the Catholics and the police, and to the people of the Bogside, the police were fighting on behalf of the Protestants. Like soldiers coming back from the war, the police retired from the fighting to Fountain Street, the Protestant slum ghetto, for tea, sandwiches, and recuperation. When they could, the Catholics wanted to get up Fountain Street and beat hell out of the Protestants, who — for all that they had started it — were terrified. Mary Holland, *The Observer* reporter, and Eamonn McCann were in the Protestant area, trying to reassure people and promising that if an attack came, they would bring out the civil rights movement in defence of the Protestants. At this point we decided to give the Bogsiders something to do which would take their minds off wrecking Derry and slaughtering policemen. We got them to build barricades across the streets leading into the Bogside, so keeping them in their own area. (Ironically enough, in view of my part in this action, I was later summoned to appear in court on four charges of inciting a mob to violence.) The barricades we built were very poor ones. They were built of planks and stones taken from a building site: a big mechanical digger on the site was found to be in working order, and we used it to lift loads of rubble, which were brought up to the barricades in this unwieldy contraption and dumped in the middle of the road. But the barricades, though high, had little base or substance, and in the end it took only one police truck to burst through them.

However, the barricade-building was not just occupational therapy for enraged Bogsiders. We weren't in favour of attacking the police or spreading wanton violence through the streets, but we also felt the police had no business coming into the Bogside terrorizing people, and we wanted to muster our forces to prevent them coming again. For this reason we suggested that nobody should throw stones across the barricades at the skirmishing parties of police who occasionally burst round a corner, hurled a few missiles, then retreated again. Instead we advocated piling up the stones so we would have plenty of ammunition when it was needed. At first it was hard to get people to agree to this defensive policy: their argument was roughly that dead policemen couldn't come into the Bogside, anyway, but gradually tempers cooled and feelings dropped as the barricades went up.

Meanwhile, the police were roaming round in totally undisciplined bands. A party of them went into one house, claiming to have seen someone run into it, and senselessly beat up everyone in the house. Others were going round saying, 'If you see Bernadette Devlin, get her!' and 'If you see Mary Holland, stone her to death!' For they don't like Mary Holland: she writes nasty things about them and takes it all down in shorthand when the police throw stones. But as the barricades neared completion, the police retreated, and people interpreted this as a certain amount of success. Coming up to midnight, there were only two more streets to barricade, and by this time nobody was any longer interested in going out to get anyone's blood. Some idiot had got up on the digger and was dangerously waltzing it in and out among the crowd, and people were good-naturedly dodging it and laughing, instead of getting on with the building.

Suddenly a boy yelled, 'My God, they're coming!' Everybody stopped dead. It was one of the most horrific sights I have ever seen. High above us, the city wall was lined with a great silent mass of black figures. Slowly the mass started to move, down through the walls, into the two roads still not barricaded, and when the two battalions of police met, they joined forces and started a stomp towards us, beating their shields with their batons and howling dreadfully, in the manner of savages trying to intimidate their foes. Before this everybody just fled. Trapped in our own barricades, the nearest place we could flee to was a recently built high block of flats. Through loudhailers we screamed to the people in the flats to open their doors to everyone but the police, and to the crowd not to panic but to

walk as quickly and calmly as possible to safety. I took refuge, along with some pressmen, in one of the flats, and once we were in, the tenant put all his furniture against the door.

Then the police trucks came, dozens and dozens of them, smashing down the barricades, and walling on through the Bogside like an invading army. There aren't many streetlights in the Bogside, but all the house lights were on and the lights in the High Flats. The roaming convoys of police vehicles travelled with headlights blazing, and the whole area was brightly and eerily lit when the police set fire to a builder's hut. The noise was terrible. Indoors everyone turne4 their radios on full blast, or played rebel songs at full volume on record-players, and people were singing the *Internationale* and 'We shall overcome'. Every time someone sneaked out of the High Flats to go home, the police made a dive at him, and tenants hurled down anything they had to let him make good his escape. But the will to hurt had gone: one bottle tossed from about the seventh storey just missed a policeman's nose, and the woman who threw it shook for about fifteen minutes afterwards, she was so upset at the thought she might have killed him. When eventually I left with my friends, the police didn't attempt to touch us, though we spat at them as we walked past. The next day, Sunday, with the police still occupying the Bogside, I left for Belfast. John Hume and Ivan Cooper, both civil rights leaders in Derry, got the whole population of the Bogside to evacuate, took this crowd of several thousand people up Creggan Hill, and told the police they had two hours to get out. If they weren't clear of the Bogside by then, the people were coming back in, and the police would be responsible for the consequences. The police stuck it out until about fifteen minutes before the end of the ultimatum. They then left.

That Sunday the wave of disorder spread to other parts of the country. A bomb explosion at the Silent Valley reservoir in the Mourne Mountains cut water supplies to Belfast and County Down; an electricity pylon near Armagh was sabotaged; and nine post offices, a bus station, and other buildings in Belfast were set on fire, some by petrol bombs. These acts of sabotage and violence were never pinned on anyone, but there are two very sophisticated schools of thought on who was responsible — at least for the attacks on water and electricity supplies. Where the two schools of thought differ is on which side of the Unionist movement they lay the blame. I thought for a time that these attacks were government inspired. They were the sort of thing the IRA could be depended on to do, and I supposed that the Government was trying to make a link in people's minds between the civil rights campaign and the Irish Republican Army. It also gave the Government an opportunity to call in the British Army without looking foolish. The odd thing was that the army was summoned to do guard duties, when the best part of the 10,000-strong force of reservist B-Specials was still uncalled-up and available. Could it be that the Government didn't trust its own police reservists?

The other theory was that the Paisleyites had done the sabotage to intimidate not the civil rights movement, but the Government. After his resignation, Captain O'Neill observed that dark and shadowy deeds had preceded all the important decisions made by his government over recent months; most likely these attacks were the work of extremists showing their strength and ensuring that the Government reacted in a proper manner. But the attacks on post offices were undoubtedly done, on the personal initiative of someone or other, as a favour to the civil rights movement. Post offices don't belong to the Northern Ireland authorities but to the Postmaster General in London, so an attack on them is one way to make your point in Westminster. Whoever was guilty no one was ever caught, and the amnesty proposed in May by the new Prime Minister, Major Chichester-Clark, covered all these doings, and the activities of the police in Derry, and my four summonses as well.

That the British Parliament should hold an emergency debate on Northern Ireland five days after my election was not entirely the unprompted product of events. On Monday, April 21st, the Home Secretary (Mr Callaghan) announced in the House of Commons that he had agreed to make army units available for guard duties at essential installations in Northern Ireland. On the heels of this announcement Paul Rose, an English Labour MP who is chairman of the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster, successfully demanded the debate at which, it was planned, I would speak. The debate was fixed for the following afternoon, some twenty-four hours later.

Meanwhile, back in Belfast, aware that something was happening in Westminster but ignorant of the details, I was carrying out my first activity as a Member of Parliament. This was to sit in on a dispute between the Ministry of Agriculture, Toome Eel Fisheries, and a number of fishermen who were my constituents. From this I went on to dinner with the chairman of the fishermen's association and their solicitor, and it wasn't until nearly midnight that I managed to make contact with London. The instructions were terse: 'Get over here.' I was in Belfast; all my belongings were in Cookstown; and I didn't have any money. The rest of that night was spent travelling home to Cookstown, raising the cash for my fare, and getting back to Belfast in time to catch the first plane. Then the plane was delayed: there was supposedly a bomb on it. We all got off, and while the plane was searched, I fell asleep. On board again, I used the minutes before take-off to scribble a few points on the back of a telegram as the basis of my speech. At London Airport, hordes of photographers and pressmen were waiting: it was the sort of thing you see on the television news — some unfortunate creature and the Press all huddling round. After the press conference, we came into London and stopped at the Irish Club in Eaton Square, where I was to stay. The members — and what a load of gombeen men they were — wanted to have a little victory celebration, but I couldn't wait for it. I had about two hours to have a bath, wash my hair, and find something clean to put on. The clothes I was wearing had been on demos, they weren't particularly clean, and they hadn't been off my back all night. But since I'd been whipped over to England so fast, I hadn't been able to get anything in Ireland and the obvious course was to go out and get it here. This, of course, was big news. Was I going down the Kings Road, centre-of-the-with-it-fashion industry, the Press inquired. 'Sure, anywhere,' I said, so they all went down the Kings Road, and I went down Piccadilly with two women reporters. We bought clothes and a hairbrush and make-up, and set off in a taxi for Westminster, with me putting on make-up as we went. I tried to use the taxi-mirror, but every time we turned a corner, I lost my face in it, and in the end one member of the Press held my head steady, while the other put the make-up on, so that I didn't end with the foundation tube down my throat. This done, we pulled up at St Stephen's Gate, and went into the House. There was no time to have first impressions, except that it was amusing to see policemen clearing the way instead of forming a cordon.

My sponsors, Paul Rose and Gerry Fitt, took me off for lunch in the Members' dining-room. More stupid questions from the Press: 'Did you enjoy your lunch?' I said something to the effect that it was no worse than the students' union food, and this remark was evidently picked up by the catering manager. A few days later I received a little letter: they endeavoured to provide a satisfactory service for all Members — particularly for those of delicate taste. That put me in my place. After that we went into the Whips' Office and had the wee rehearsal of bowing and pacing. You walk into the Chamber, up to the bar, and bow; five paces and you bow again; five more paces and another bow. You go forward to the Clerk, take the oath, and sign your name. Five paces and a bow to the Speaker. You shake hands with the Speaker. Then you go out the back door, all the way round, in another door, and sit down. So we went through this wee procedure, and it was great fun. When it came to the real thing, my sponsors had bigger legs and bigger feet than I had, and I took great big paces to make sure there were only five of them, not six or seven, and that we all arrived at the same spot at the same moment to bow in unison. The whole attitude of the House was, 'Well, well, well! Look who's here!' Shaking hands with me, the Speaker said, 'It is out of order for Members of the House to be jealous,' and it was all very friendly and very frivolous: the Mother of Parliaments welcomes anybody in.

The Speaker was very helpful. He told me to wait for him when I went out the back door, then came out to say that I should simply stand up when I wanted to speak. So we went in, and the debate opened. Paul Rose was the first to speak, then Robin Chichester-Clark, the Westminster Member for Derry, got up with his 'I was in the Bogside...' I wonder how many times Robin Chichester-Clark was in the Bogside before he toured it by car the day after the riots. He went on to say that the civil rights leaders, sincere as they were, had created a monster over which they had no longer any control and that the movement might have been respectable one day but we were now a lot of hoodlums and anarchists and Trotskyists and republicans.

I made my maiden speech after Chichester-Clark, and I didn't need my notes because everything I detested about the system was written in his Tory face. It was a bitter speech, but it wasn't in my own analysis of it a good speech. It merely stated that the situation was medieval, and that there was no longer anything to be gained from Westminster discussing it: the time for Westminster's discussion and Westminster's action had almost passed, and all they could do was decide which side of the House was going to take the blame for Northern Ireland.

The House thought it was delightful. Great stuff! Great sincerity! Which showed the House up for what it was. Somebody said something they really meant, without clothing it in non-offensive language, without the formality of neatly typing it out and underlining the bits that were to be emphasized, and everyone said, 'hear, hear!' The Press were just the same. The Press had built me up so much on the baby of Parliament, swinging MP, guess-whose-birthday-it-is-today angle that they couldn't in consideration of their own sales turn round and condemn the speech. I made a scathing attack on Unionism and the whole British landlord invasion of Ireland, but even the Tory papers carried it. They'd got themselves into the position where they didn't expect me to make the kind of speech I made, and nobody, including me, thought I would have to make it so soon. Since then, since I've not been an exemplary Member of Parliament, the Press in general have decided that I'm not the sort of well-mannered person the Victorians used to produce, and it would be better to say as little about me as possible. You know, she's got MP after her name, and she has no respect for it. She takes herself in among the workers and the unemployed and the squatters and the gypsies. A self-respecting Member of Parliament does nothing other than talk about these people in the House of Commons. They have discovered that their little child of Parliament is a monster who doesn't care about their Parliament, or their parliamentary system, or their parliamentary formalities, or their parliamentary parties. When you look at the Labour benches and think, 'Some of them must have got there honestly,' you wonder what happened to them, and your constant watch is that it doesn't happen to you. Some of them warn you against becoming part of the system: the poor idiots that call themselves the Left warn you against the Right; but they are all tarred with the one brush — Parliament is what matters and the trouble about the workers on the factory floor is that they don't really understand. Not that you can expect them to understand: they're not MPs, they haven't gone through the Order Papers, they don't read *Hansard* daily to find out what somebody did, in fact, say in Parliament, they never get on any Select Committees. What could they know about running the country? Running the country is a game you play with the people on the other side of the House: a Tory MP stands up and asks the Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity (Mrs Castle) what she intends to do about industrial relations, so that the Conservative Party can build its policy — could we please know your move on the board so we can work out our own strategy? And up jumps a Labour MP saying in effect, 'If we build our structure properly, the Tories won't be able to build on top of it.' Meanwhile, the workers sit around wondering what's going on.

I find it impossible, outside the Chamber, to tell from what they say who is in the Labour Party and who is in the Tory Party. Sometimes there's an indication in the style of dress. There are about three styles of dress: the Tory in the smart tailored suit, running about the stuffy, dusty, dark, dank Houses of Parliament with a little buttonhole; the bourgeois Labour Party man who's got a good, well-cut, off-the-peg suit, and who is the real professional politician; and the big, ordinary workers' MP, with the coat hanging off him who's against Harold Wilson on principle. Everybody's for and against things on the basis of who else is for or against them. The division bell rings, and people run in, scuttle out of every hole, even out of taxis: gangway! the MP's coming! and in they all go, through the right door. How do they *know* the right door? How can they in conscience, having heard nothing of the debate, go and vote according to their party?

They really have forgotten what goes on outside. The only ordinary people they ever meet are by appointment in the Strangers' Bar. I have challenged one or two of them on forgetting where they come from, and they say, 'Not at all! We have Labour Party meetings in our constituencies!' But most people who vote in an election aren't party members; they just live ordinary lives. They don't count. It's the people who come to meetings who are important, and you spend your whole life making excuses to them for the kind of policies you carry out. You brainwash them so that, at the next election, they'll go out and canvass for you.. No matter what you believe in, you have to weigh it against the prospect of losing votes when the next election comes up; and better that you sacrifice your principles than you let a Tory in, for, as everybody knows, an unprincipled Labour man is better than a principled Tory. Half the time one feels that the Tories are more honest: at least they are open about their views on the place of the working class; but the Labour Party, whose attitude is exactly the same, cover it up with the claim, 'We are the party of the workers.' And none of them really has a clue what he's doing.

Nothing really matters! Parliament is just a friendly club. One man said to me, 'We're all friends here — no politics outside the Chamber.' This actually happened! And for me it summed up Westminster. One or two Members make a point of attending a working man's club, but all the rest go to the same club and the same parties with the same friends. Their big word in conversation with me is 'sincerity'. We, the biggest phonies in the business, love sincerity. It's *so* refreshing! Makes us think of when we were young! How, by the way, are you settling down? Remember when I came into the House myself: Awfully difficult when you come in at a by-election. *I* came in at a by-election.. . And you feel like saying, 'I wish to God you'd go out at a by-election.' Some of them are indulgent about my running up the stairs and whistling in the corridors, but there's a general feeling that I ought to have more respect for the dignity of Parliament; ought not to be impatient with the pomp and ceremony and time wasted for 'Hats off, strangers! Here comes the Speaker!' I always think of *Lord of the Flies* when they trot in with the Mace: 'I've got the conch,' there's no doubt about it.

You get more sense from the policeman at the door than from the Members of Parliament, and you learn more from him about how to work the system. The wee man on the door will tell you how to escape people, how Mr Greenwood or Mr Somebody Else avoids the people who come looking for them. He'll tell you, I don't know why you bother to see people that come. Everybody else here ducks and hides They all forget. Once they're in here, they all forget.'
What I should do, according to the accepted view, is be a good child of Parliament, sit down and study the parliamentary methods, ask questions of the Prime Minister and be satisfied with the answers. I did have a try at asking Harold Wilson a question: he had said that the explosions in Northern Ireland made it impracticable to repeal the Special Powers Act, and I put it to him that if common law couldn't deal with illegal explosions in Northern Ireland, he had better extend the Act to the rest of Britain and make sure that England, Scotland, and Wales were protected against possible explosions in the future. 'I hope,' says Harold, 'the honourable Lady Member will discourage any such practices on this side of the Irish Sea.' Then he toddled out of the House. Since he'd failed to answer my point, I got up to toddle after him and nail him in the corridor, but was stopped by my colleagues: 'You can't treat the Prime Minister like that!' As far as I was concerned, old silver-haired, silver-tongued Harold was no better and no worse than I was, and his being Prime Minister was no excuse to waffle his way through the House of Commons, breaking promises as he went. In this sort of situation, there is not much I can do at Westminster for my constituents and Northern Ireland. All I can hope to achieve is to keep Northern Ireland's predicament as much before public attention as possible — and for that you get better results at workers' meetings than in the gentlemanly, all-friends-together club of the House of Commons.

The trouble in those early weeks was that I wasn't just an MP, however ineffective, but a phenomenon: I was the big international story. Which is a very time-taking and soul-destroying thing to be. If Michael Farrell had been elected, he would just have been an MP, getting on with the job within the limits of the possible, whereas I was not only failing to do anything for the people of Mid-Ulster; I was failing to do anything for God knows who else as well. Masses of mail came in, most of it from other people's constituents, saying their own MP didn't care about them and would I take up their cause? They sent me their pension claims, and their wage claims, and their property problems, and their divorce cases, in the hope that I could sort it all out. They came in deputations to the House of Commons, and if they couldn't find their own Member, they sent for Bernadette Devlin, their mediator with the gods: she can go where we can't, she can get round all the corners and find him for us. In theory it's easy enough to say their problems aren't my problems, but what do you do when you're face to face with someone in trouble? When, probably, you know perfectly well that the pig they're looking for is in the Strangers' Bar. You go trotting in and say, 'There's a gentleman who seems very anxious to see you,' and to woo him out into the open, you give the impression it's a rich donor, when all you've got is a wee cloth-capped paddy hoping to see his MP. The Members of Parliament don't like that: it's interfering in constituencies that aren't my business. I wrote to the Right Honourable Iain Macleod inviting him to a meeting for the gypsies. Back came his reply: 'Thank you for inviting me to a meeting in my own constituency.' This was supposed to snub me, make me feel: 'Oh, I shouldn't have done that. That's the kind of thing that isn't done.' Perhaps the strategy is to organize meetings in his constituency and *not* invite him.

As for the Press, they weren't the slightest bit interested in the fact that I was (a) human, and *(b)* meant to be doing a job in London. In the end they went off me, but to begin with I had to change hotels every night, because the Press kept finding out where I was. And not only were they inside the hotel when I got up in the morning, but they were all fighting over my bedroom door: I wakened to the din of squabbling photographers, and when I opened the door they all fell in. 'Get out, you're getting no photographs!' I shouted. 'Now, now, now,' they soothed. 'Just five minutes.' But at the end of five minutes would they go away? Not on your life. Nobody wanted to be first to go in case something happened when he'd gone. So they all followed me into the street, milling around and knocking people down; and ordinary citizens got annoyed: they don't mind one way or another about Bernadette Devlin, but they are annoyed when a load of hoodlums with cameras walk all over them to take stupid exclusive pictures of her —'Bernadette Devlin sucks an ice-cream: the hot-head MP cools off.'

Then Mary Holland and her husband took me in, but the Press had no respect for these people who were kind enough to protect me from the world. Bit by bit they discovered the phone number and they would ring up at two, three, four in the morning, saying, 'I wouldn't ring you, only it's urgent — is Miss Devlin expecting trouble in Ulster next weekend?' And I became their Gypsy Rose Lee, fortune-teller of Northern Ireland. A sort of harem of journalists, British and foreign, trotted round about two feet behind me. 'I'll see you at four o'clock,' I said: 'I've already got appointments at one o'clock, two o'clock, and three o'clock. I'll see you at four.' But they stayed with me, just to make sure. The chap I was supposed to see at one was already there at twelve, as were the chaps I was supposed to see at two, three, and four. So I come out, say I'm going to lunch, will be back as agreed at one PM. All four decide to lunch with me, and all four try to get in my taxi. I tell them to pay for their own taxis, which they don't like. Then we all descend on some unfortunate wee man who runs a restaurant and all my attendant journalists want to sit at the next table and write down what I eat. They're not interested in politics: 'We don't want the political article,' they say. 'Everyone's done the political article. We want the *real* Bernadette Devlin.' So they write down what I eat. If ever I was to get saying something on Northern Ireland, I had to force it on them. All they cared about was how, in these days of student riots, does it feel to be a student in the Establishment? Or alternatively, the girl from the bog makes good. Then came the demands for television interviews, and I spent my days scrambling from one television studio to another. 'Why don't you say "no"?' people asked. I *did* say no, but it was a totally ineffective thing to say. The wee man in the House of Commons that deals with telephone messages was just on one constant run, up and down the stairs, with messages from the same people. 'Please ring Mr Idiot,' would come in at two-thirty; 'Please ring Mr Idiot,' would come in at two-forty-five. When I said no, it just meant this particular demand went round to the back of the queue to be put all over again.

Once I got a message in the House of Commons: 'Caller in United States to speak to Miss Devlin.' I lifted the receiver and somebody down the other end of the line said without further preamble, 'You are now on our morning show!' 'What the hell's your morning show, and who are you?' I said. There were titters from the other end. 'That's a good answer from a frank person!' said my unseen stranger, and I realized that half America was probably listening in. Another time I was asked to ring the international operator: a call from America had been booked and paid for. Thinking it had to be important, if a call halfway round the world had been paid for, I rang the operator, and got routed through to Mrs Typical Yank, who says, 'Well! Ah just wanted to get speaking to the real Bernadette Devlin!' And that's all she wanted to say! Then she puts her family on to say 'Hallo!' It was the biggest circus in creation, as far as I could see.

The messages were many and varied, but above all they were many. 'I'm sure you're busy, but would you please write us a 5,000-word article?' Invitations poured in to tour America on the Irish circuit, the Irish-American circuit, the Negro civil rights circuit, the university circuit —as though I was a travelling show. One invitation asked me to drop in on New Zealand and open an ecumenical meeting. Another one wanted me to pop over to Paris for half an hour and talk to a women's emancipation movement, or something. Somebody else thought I could give a boost to international relations if I said a few words in a foreign language on Japanese television. And so the letters piled up, from Turkey, and Pakistan, and points east and west from Siberia to New South Wales — places which can't have

the remotest interest in Northern Ireland and probably don't know where it is. One I rather liked came from Vietnam: its opening words were, 'Hooray, hooray, hooray!'

Months after the by-election, I was still ploughing through a mountain of correspondence of some ten thousand letters and telegrams. Reactions to my sudden fame ranged from the Unionist Christopher Bland's view that I was Ireland's greatest national disaster since the famine; to the taxi-driver's comment as he delivered me at the House one day: only two honest people had ever entered it — myself and Guy Fawkes. The Reverend Ian Paisley coined a nice phrase for me — 'International Socialist Playgirl of the Year'. I got several threatening letters, most of which were too melodramatic to be taken seriously: 'Ten daggers are being sharpened for your back!' . . . or 'You Fenian scum! You and all your kind should be held under water till the bubbles come up!' They dream up the most terrible deaths for you, which you know are never going to happen because they are too ridiculous. Who is going to put ten daggers in your back when one would do? One letter did frighten me. It was well written and it didn't have this note of hysteria. It said, 'I hate you. I hate Hume. I hate Cooper. All three of you will be gunned down. Much as I hate you I don't want this to happen. But I have seen fifty new German revolvers and two thousand rounds of ammunition. This is no joke.

It is a serious warning of danger. Signed, Loyal Protestant Supporter.'
On the lighter side, I got proposals of marriage, mostly from military men who, in consideration of their physical fitness and stamina and so forth, believed they were master races in themselves. With their beauty and my brains, they suggested, we could get somewhere, and they sent references to persuade me. For the cranky letters, I opened a special file, and one which went straight into it read thus: 'Dear Madam, You are so beautifully evil that myself and my fellow witches in the South Down coven have decided to make you one of us.' On such-and-such a night they would invoke the Prince of Evil and, with the guts of a toad and the legs of a cock and so forth, would initiate me into the whole business. If ever I was to deviate from the path of evil, the consequences would be disastrous. Two weeks later the second 'communication', as they called it, arrived to say the initiation ceremony had gone off without a hitch, the Prince of Evil had duly turned up, and would from now on be ever at my side. 'He will always be with you,' I was promised. 'Perhaps in the nod of a strange priest, or the wave of an old man, the smile of a child, or the friendly brush of a big black dog.' This was wicked of them: of course, people recognize me and nod or wave, and I'm supposed to think, 'My God, I don't know that man! It must be the Prince of Evil.' And every time a big black dog appears — of which there are millions — I'm meant to conclude that the Prince of Evil is keeping an eye on me. The letter ended, 'This is the final communication you will receive from us unless you deviate from your work of evil.' Whether I've deviated or not, I've so far heard nothing more on the subject.