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**Title:** Report by John Swift, Department of Foreign Affairs, regarding a meeting with a group of residents of Ardoyne, Belfast, discussing their concerns, mainly relating to intimidation by the Irish Republican Army and the British army.

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Miss Gough

IRA GRA file

Points arising out of meeting with Ardoyne Group,  
led by T. Lovett and M. McLoughlin.

26th May 1973

1. In their outlook and background, these Ardoyne residents were undoubtedly different from those whom the Minister met on his April visit to Belfast. Some of the group, though not all, actually welcomed the presence of the Paratroopers in the Ardoyne, because they are more effective than other regiments in controlling the IRA. All present saw IRA terror, intimidation and control as at least as bad as that of the Army. (This is the same point made by Dr. Philbin in his speech reported today in which he speaks about "secret armies campaigning ruthlessly against a whole range of human rights and liberties - the right to move about without fear of impediment, the right to a home and a place to earn a livelihood; the right of freedom from extortion and robbery, the right to public services and amenities that are common to all civilised people, the right to be immune from personal injury, the right to free speech, the right to live.") They made the point that moderates like themselves, having different views on many topics, being untrained in the use of information media and having a less emotional and one-sided approach to political problems, find it difficult to achieve adequate publicity. The purpose of their visit was to convey what they considered a more representative (and thus, more moderate) range of opinion to the Minister than had been conveyed to him last month.

2. The most basic problem arising out of the group's visit is to determine how representative of Ardoyne opinion they might be. They are not a formal association or committee; their chief, if not their only point of contact between themselves, is the Monday night confraternity at Holy Cross, directed by Fr. Aquinas. When this point was made to Mr. Lovett, he answered confidently that the group

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had most of their opinions in common with at least 80 per cent of Ardoyne residents; he referred to the IRA poll already mentioned by Mr. McLoughlin (of which it had been said that only 800 signatures could be organised on an anti-paratrooper petition out of a locality of approximately 8,000 adults); he saw this as the same moderate opinion, given in the recent Fortnight poll as 85 per cent of the total population supporting the White Paper proposals and preparing to make them work. Roughly similar statistics have, of course, been quoted since Rose as a measure of that proportion of the population which disapproves of the use of violence for political ends in any circumstances. It appears to be nevertheless true that as circumstances change, so does this point of view. Mr. Adams made the point that some more bad behaviour by the Paratroopers could, in fact, lead to a resuscitation of pro-IRA feeling; the group felt that some of the "facts" generally publicised (numbers at the anti-paratrooper march of 19th April, 3,000?- 2,000?- 500?, were at variance with reality). In so far as the representative nature of groups poses an immediate problem for the Minister in deciding whom he should meet, presumably the problem will be solved by the local district elections and the Assembly elections.

3. Some members of the group are obviously prone to self-criticism. They have a fair realisation that there is little Dublin can do to help without being counter-productive; similarly, they realise the necessity for moderates like themselves to make their voices heard. In so far as this necessity operates inside the ghettos, in criticism of the IRA, physical and moral courage amounting to foolhardiness will be required. Mr. McLoughlin mentioned that one of his groups had received an offer from Major Cox of the Paratroopers to help in any desirable way with the old-age pensioners; although this offer was seen as a breakthrough in some ways, he had no doubt in his mind that the offer had to be refused. This incident, as much as any other, indicates the inconclusive views and relative lack of weight of such moderate groupings.

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4. Arising from the meeting, it was agreed that the Ardoyne representatives should draw up lists of the following:-

- (a) shootings or/<sup>other</sup> incidents of violence by Protestants which were obviously ignored by the Army;
- (b) specific "hard" instances of intimidation on the part of the IRA, in all its forms;
- (c) areas where their truth was different from that normally reported, because it rested on a different acceptance of fact - IRA poll, numbers on marches, etc.

Mr. Donlon will be speaking to Billy Adams in Belfast early this week; I would hope to meet either McLoughlin or Lovett (if he is in Belfast) either at the end of this week or early next week. The group mentioned that their preferred organs of publicity are (1) Belfast Telegraph, (2) Radio side of RTE, (3) Irish News.

5. The value of meeting a number of people like these is that it gives us a more balanced view of the variety of outlooks on the Catholic side in Northern Ireland. It is difficult to accept their "facts" as any more valid or deserving of belief than those of others; their representative character, as indicated above, is subject to some doubts. Nevertheless, the articulation of their views does give us a different perspective, perhaps subconsciously, and it may provide a valuable corrective for other sources. Mr. Lovett sees the Ardoyne representatives as an embryonic peace group, similar to the group he is connected with in the Creggan. We should obviously do as much as we can to help a strong peace movement emerge in the Ardoyne; it is hard to see, however, what more we can do to help it emerge other than meeting its representatives, guaranteeing them access to Ministers, etc. A more direct involvement runs the risk of damaging the cause we wish to help.

John Swift

28 Mar 1973.