

SP(B) 31/97/12

NOTE OF A MEETING ON THE CIVIL ACTIVITIES OF PARAMILITARIES IN THE ARDOYNE HELD IN STORMONT HOUSE ON 28 FEBRUARY 1979.

<u>Present:</u> Mr Neilson (Chairman)	NIO
Mr Cadden	DOE Area Officer Service
Mr Clift	NIO
Mr Dunlop	CivRep HQ 39 Brigade
Mr Daniell	NIO
Mr Huckle	NIO
Mr Richards	HQNI
Major Pook	C Coy 1 D and D Flax Street Mill
Superintendent Gorman	Deputy Commander 'C' Division
Constable Hall	Flax Street Mill, Police Post
Constable Forster	'C' Division Community Relations Branch
Mr Leach (Secretary)	NIO

INTRODUCTION

1. The Chairman recalled that the group had been established in February 1978 to examine the civil activities of paramilitaries in the Ardoyne, and that at its last meeting on 15 June 1978 it had agreed a paper detailing the extent of the problem. The purpose of the present meeting was to review developments over the last eight months, and the most convenient way to do this would be to go first through the report agreed at the June meeting and consider whether its conclusions needed modification.

POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

2. The paper had suggested that PIRA's attempts to build up an alternative system of civil administration in the Ardoyne had largely failed to get off the ground, despite particular efforts in the "policing" sphere. Superintendent Gorman commented that attempts to broaden their "political" base in the Ardoyne continued to be unsuccessful. People in the area were increasingly resistant to paramilitary heavy-handedness and were more ready to talk to the RUC. Constable Hall noted that there had been no "punishments" in the Ardoyne over the last eight months outside the ranks of PIRA itself. Occasionally people were told to report to particular clubs to explain their conduct, but recipients of these invitations

invariably declined them, usually preferring to talk to the RUC instead, and had so far suffered no reprisals. As noted in the paper, PIRA had tried to strengthen its "policing" role by the creation of a unit based on married men, who while unwilling to engage in activities against the Security Forces would be prepared to act in a "disciplinary" role. However this unit had not materialised.

ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES: CLUBS

3. The June 1978 assessment had concluded that PIRA probably derived a total annual income of some £69,000 from the eight clubs in the Ardoyne, made up of protection payments and revenue from fruit machines. Constable Hall noted that profits from the fruit machines in all the clubs still went directly to PIRA, but that most of the clubs would now make no other form of payment. However in one or two clubs (in particular the Highfields, which had strong PIRA links) the entire profit would be siphoned off to the Provisional movement. In discussion the group agreed that clubs were still the principal source of Provisional revenue in the Ardoyne, and there was no evidence that the order of magnitude of the figures had declined significantly. It was noted in passing that the Highfields club was currently renovating and extending its property - it was questionable whether proper planning permission had been obtained. This would be checked on by Division 3(B).

TAXIS

4. It had been estimated in 1978 that the Provisionals had an interest in two taxi businesses in the Ardoyne, comprising 28 vehicles from which some £14,000 might be creamed off in a year. Constable Hall took the view that the number of taxis under PIRA control had diminished to fourteen or fifteen, since a number of drivers who resented paying a weekly levy to the Provisionals had moved on. Major Pook thought that there might in addition be several part-time taxi drivers paying the levy, but agreed that overall it was likely that Provisional revenues from taxis had diminished. In general discussion it was noted that the fact that the saloon-type taxis in the Ardoyne (and black taxis elsewhere in Belfast) seemed to operate with apparent impunity despite being unlicensed and untested tended to bring the law into disrepute. However the RUC (who had a number of files pending) were handicapped in taking firm action until a High Court ruling was handed down on the validity of the black taxis insurance. On the other hand the group noted that the taxis did provide a valued service to the community in some areas and would not be easy to oust.

GARAGES - SHOPS

5. It was noted that the garage in which PIRA had an interest had changed hands and now appeared to have gone legitimate. Contributions to Provisional finances from shops were still minimal.

BELTEX BUILDING SITE

6. Constable Hall commented that the majority of people employed on this site now appeared to be legitimate building workers who were not paying any levy to the Provisionals: the PIRA influence noted in the 1978 assessment seemed to have withered away.

GREEN CROSS

7. It was noted that there was little evidence that collections were now being made, even in clubs. Constable Hall observed that the Relatives Action Committee had little support in the Ardoyne, and demonstrations were attended by the same hard core of 20-30 people.

GENERAL

8. The Chairman noted that overall there appeared to be reason to suppose that there was an encouraging downward trend in the financial support which PIRA was obtaining in Ardoyne - this had been assessed in June 1978 at some £90,000 per annum, but the evidence of the meeting suggested that the level was probably rather lower now. In discussion the group agreed that the local population were now more willing to stand up to intimidation and talk to the Security Forces, especially in private. No community groups were now PIRA dominated although PIRA influence still existed in some. Superintendent Gorman commented that Constable Hall had now been reinforced at the Flax Street Mill post by two other policemen who were following his lead in getting involved in the affairs of the community.

9. The Chairman noted that in order to consolidate the progress evidently made in the process of normalisation in the Ardoyne, it was important that the civil agencies of Government should act quickly and sensitively to meet the genuine needs of the local population. Was this aspect satisfactory? and was the Area Officer system functioning effectively as the first line of response? In a wide-ranging discussion it was agreed that a number of advances had been made. There had, for example, been a concerted effort to repair street lighting, which was now quite

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adequate - though rubbish collections were still fairly sporadic. There were however still problem areas, like the clearance of rubble after demolition, where it was hard to pin the responsibility on a single agency. The Area Officer system was gaining ground, although the individual officer was naturally very dependent on the quality of back-up which he received. Now that the security situation was improving it was occasionally difficult to secure rapid action to cope with purely civil problems which might seem less dramatic. A principal offender in this respect was the Housing Executive maintenance division - NIHE after-hours emergency numbers sometimes turned out to be manned only by caretakers.

10. Summing up, the Chairman noted that the consensus of the meeting was that the situation in the Ardoyne - which had perhaps never been as serious as was originally believed - had improved significantly in the last eight months. To build on this progress Government needed to ensure that its civil agencies had the capacity to respond quickly and sensitively to the real needs of the local population. He invited the views of participants on the usefulness of further meetings, and it was agreed that the group should meet again in six months to review developments. The Chairman noted that he would brief his successor on the role and purpose of the group.

Stephen J. Leach

S J LEACH

12 March 1979

Distribution

Those present

PS/PUS (L & B)

PS/Sir R Kidd

Mr Hannigan

Mr K Bloomfield (DOE)

Mr Stephens

Mr Lane

Mr Parkes

Mr Marshall

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