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The Peace Movement

1. This brief note outlines
 - (a) the origin, objectives, activities and future plans of the Movement
 - (b) the attitude of the Irish Government to the Movement.

2. Origin. There were two previous women's peace campaigns, neither of which made much progress. In late 1971, Women Together campaigned forcefully yet ineffectively for peace. They held a few vigils and rallies, but faded almost to nothing in 1973. A similar fate befell a "charismatic group" of five working-class Derry women which, in 1972, gathered 13,000 signatures on a petition for peace; as with Women Together, after a few dramatic moves, they faded into insignificance. The current Peace Movement developed almost spontaneously from the reaction of women in Andersonstown, Belfast, to the deaths of the three Maguire children, who were killed by a runaway Provisional IRA car on 10 August 1976. It had started on 9 August 1976, when a group of women in Twinbrook, south-west Belfast, took to the streets in an effort to stop hijacking of vehicles and rioting in their estate. On the deaths of the Maguire children on the following day, the defence of Twinbrook became a secondary issue; the pursuit of peace became the primary objective.

3. Objectives. The main aim of the Movement is the achievement of peace in Northern Ireland; it is felt that this can best be achieved through concentration on communication among individuals of differing traditions; in this broad sense, it is hoped to encourage the energies of para-militaries into more constructive, non-violent channels. The leaders of the Movement hope to concentrate attention on what they see as the real problems of Northern Ireland: unemployment, housing and the general economic and social situation.

4. Activities. The activities of the Movement can be grouped under (i) mass demonstrations and (ii) publication of a fortnightly magazine "Peace by Peace". Demonstrations have already been held in various centres throughout Ireland and in London, with average attendance circling 15,000.

5. Future plans. A lengthy policy statement was issued by the Movement on 17 November. The statement says that the next stage of the campaign will involve members of the Movement examining, with other Northern Ireland groups, "the constitutional and political implications of the creation of a distinct, united and reconciled Northern Irish community". In the shorter term, i.e. within the next six to eight weeks, the Movement is to convene two conferences. At the first, members of the Movement will discuss with representatives of various other peace groups, including Pax Christi and Witness for Peace, how best their various activities can be co-ordinated. At the other, the leaders will discuss with leaders of community organisations and centres how the Movement and these organisations can work towards broadly similar goals, avoiding parallel or competing development.

The statement also indicated that two demonstrations are planned for the Christmas period - one in Armagh on 18 December and the second in Belfast city centre on 1 January 1977.

6. Attitude of the Irish Government. On 5 October 1976, the Minister for Foreign Affairs said in a US television interview that the Irish Government supported the Peace Movement "to the hilt". The Minister added that "we have had no contact with them. That is its strength". On the previous day, the Minister had said that the Movement had created potentially improved conditions for political progress towards the objective of power-sharing self-government.

The public attitude of the Government can be described, perhaps, as one of benevolent neutrality. The offices of the Department in Great Britain, the US and elsewhere are, of course, available to assist the Peace Movement in any appropriate way.