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The Peace People and New Zealand

Following a visit by Miss Mairead Corrigan of the Peace People to New Zealand in February 1977 the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Mr. Robert Muldoon, announced that his country had agreed that for humanitarian reasons they should accept a limited number of young people who have been in detention because they have been associated with one or other of the violent groups in Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister said that he thought the numbers of individuals requesting entry to New Zealand under this category would be very small. He emphasised that he was not talking about people who had been convicted of terrorist activities but about people who had been in detention. He said that most of those involved would be young boys and that they would go to families in New Zealand who would look after them. The scheme would include both Catholics and Protestants. The Peace People would play a part in recommending individuals. Mr. Muldoon felt that it was a reasonable humanitarian gesture which would give those young people an opportunity to lead a normal life and also demonstrate the New Zealand Government's support for the principle that the Peace Movement is adopting as a means to a settlement in N.I.

Reactions to Mr. Muldoon's announcement were mixed. The opposition in New Zealand were concerned lest an intake of terrorists to New Zealand from Northern Ireland could create problems in New Zealand itself. Also New Zealand had its own internal problems with regard to illegal Pacific Islander immigrants against whom harsh measures are taken by the New Zealand Government. There was a feeling in at least one quarter that the Northern Ireland move was a calculated decision to show the New Zealand public that the Government could be humane in its attitude to immigrants. Mr. Talboys, the Foreign Minister, privately expressed worry at the decision regarding the ex detainees during a conversation with one of our Embassy's officials. He said that he had not been present when the decision had been taken. The announcement was criticised by Mr. James Molyneaux, leader of the Official Unionist MPs at Westminster. He said that the decision was causing a fair amount of resentment by giving preference to former paramilitary members over uninvolved people in Northern Ireland who were seeking to emigrate to New Zealand. (Mr. Molyneaux will be visiting New Zealand in September in his capacity as Grand Master of the Loyal Black Institution.)

In the course of an interview in London in June 1977, Mr. Muldoon was reported as saying that fringe members of paramilitary groups who seek refuge in New Zealand with the help of the Peace People would be immune from prosecution for offences in the North which came to light after emigrating; that applications from several former members of paramilitary organisations to settle in New Zealand were "in the pipeline" and that one person may already have arrived in New Zealand. Mr. Muldoon was critical of other countries for not giving similar facilities to former paramilitaries.

Mr. Muldoon visited Northern Ireland after his London meetings in June. In the course of his visit he confirmed that New Zealand would accept a number of former fringe members of Northern Ireland paramilitary groups.

There has never been anything definite on the actual number of people that New Zealand is prepared to accept but figures of between five and twenty four have been mentioned.

The Maguire family whose personal tragedy in the death of three of their children in August 1976 led to the formation of the Peace People, emigrated to New Zealand in June 1977.

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