

Note of a meeting of Permanent Secretaries held in Mr Kidd's room, Stormont Castle, at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 4 May 1977

Present:-

Mr Kidd

Mr Bell	Mr Bloomfield
Mr Brooke	Mr Finney
Mr Young	Mr Darwin
Mr Dugdale	Mr Roberts

Mr Palmer

1. Purpose of meetings

Mr Kidd explained that he intended to call Permanent Secretaries together at 5.00 pm each day during the present crisis, prior to the Secretary of State's security meeting with the GOC and Chief Constable at 6.00 pm. This would give Permanent Secretaries the opportunity to

- (a) receive as early as possible the 4.00 pm NIOR sitrep
- (b) feed in any information which they considered was pertinent to the sitrep
- (c) put forward and discuss ideas on the general handling of the strike.

2. Message to NIO and NICS staff

Mr Kidd reported that at PUS's midday security meeting it had been suggested that a message be sent from the PUS and the Head of the NICS to Departments expressing gratification at the turn out of staff and advising them not to heed uncorroborated rumours about travelling conditions and to work normal hours. The example set by civil servants to other workers was important. It was suggested that a message on these lines should be issued to staff by Permanent Secretaries individually, on receipt of a letter from Mr Kidd.

3. Junior Ministers

Mr Kidd relayed PUS's concern that Junior Ministers be kept fully informed by Permanent Secretaries of Departmental activities during the crisis.

4. Information Services

Mr Roberts reported on the generally favourable attitude of the public to the handling of news reports by Government spokesmen. Secretary of State was being fed regularly with news as background for his daily public statement on the strike. Junior Ministers would be brought into the picture as much as possible. On the industrial scene, the turn out of workers to factories was better today than yesterday, though some firms were still cautious about releasing specific turnout statistics.

5. Electricity

It was still uncertain whether the power workers at Ballylumford would come out in support of the strike.

6. Fuel

The position was delicate. Secretary of State was unwilling to accept a situation where the tanker drivers accepted orders from the UUAC rather than from their management. Such action on the drivers' part would in Secretary of State's judgement be sufficient cause for him to invoke the emergency proclamation.

Mr Palmer reported on the oil contingency plan. The plan was very basic and made allowance for petrol supplies to be delivered to 21 already identified garages throughout NI. Only $\frac{1}{4}$ of normal petrol supplies would be delivered and these would be earmarked for a very restricted list of essential users in the public sector; there would be little left over for the private motorist.

Permanent Secretaries expressed general concern about the consequences on staff attendance if the oil plan was put into effect. Mr Bell wondered whether the Secretary of State should not seek direct contact with groups of key workers who threatened strike action to stress to them that the consequences of their action would be their responsibility alone. Such an approach had proved successful during a previous threatened stoppage of work at Ballylumford. It was generally agreed that the longer the fuel crisis could be staved off, the better.

7. Other points raised by Permanent Secretaries

(i) Water Service

Mr Bloomfield reported that some operatives at the Killylane

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Water Station had valved off part of the supply to Ballylumford Power Station. There was, however, an alternative source of supply to Ballylumford and the advice given by the station manager was to "play it cool".

(ii) Cement

Mr Bell reported that Magheramorne Cement Works had closed and Cookstown might shortly follow suit. This would have serious repercussions on the construction industry, including public works operations at the Maze, Maghabery and Kilroot. The Federation of Building Trade Employers had reported that some firms had managed to redeploy workers, but they could not maintain this indefinitely without a resumption of cement supplies. Mr Bloomfield reported that some NIHE building sites had also closed.

(iii) Agriculture

Mr Young reported that the closure of Larne Harbour was having immediate and serious effects on the export of agricultural produce. Almost two-thirds of NI produce, much of it perishable, was routed through Larne. The possibilities of diverting traffic through Belfast and Larne were being examined.

8. In summary Mr Kidd concluded that the three major problems at present were electricity, fuel, intimidation. Day 1 of the strike had probably been a "bad" day from the Government's viewpoint, but day 2 had been much more encouraging.

M. T. H. Maxwell

M T H MAXWELL

PS/Mr Kidd

5 May 1977

/EMB

cc Those present

PS/PUS

Mr Pritchard

Mr Ford

Dr Quigley

Mr Shimeld

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