

Note of a meeting of Permanent Secretaries held in Mr Kidd's room, Stormont Castle at 5.00 pm on Monday 9 May 1977

Present:-

Mr Kidd

Mr Bell	Dr Quigley
Mr Dugdale	Mr Irvine
Mr Shimeld	Mr Brooke
Mr Bloomfield	Dr Jack
Mr Finney	Mr Roberts

1. General Situation

There were indications that support for the "strike" was continuing to dwindle. PUS would give his reading of the situation at his 10 o'clock meeting with Permanent Secretaries tomorrow.

2. Social Security

Local Offices were reporting normal traffic today, another indication that support for the strike was withering.

3. GTCs

Absenteeism of apprentices at Craigavon GTC stood at 25%, Dundonald GTC 50% and Ballymena GTC 40%. Some instructors had been threatened at Boucher Road and at Alfred Street one instructor had had his car windows smashed. One night watchman at Boucher Road had been assaulted by the Army in error. The general impression was that there was a general improvement in attendance over last week.

4. NIC/ICTU Conference on Wednesday 11 May

Mr Kidd reported that the Secretary of State might yet attend the conference and had asked for speech material. This might present an opportunity for him to ask NIC/ICTU to rethink their position on the Economic Council.

5. Disciplinary Action for Unauthorised Absences

Mr Bloomfield reported that some managers in the Water Service had been pressed by workers who had turned up for work not to pay those who had absented themselves, either because they had supported the strike or because they had alleged intimidation. The line taken by DOE had been that staff who had not turned up for work should be paid only if they could give management a valid reason for their absence and staff who had turned up only for part of the day should be paid only for hours worked.

Mr Shimeld reported that after the "strike" was over there would be a meeting of Departments to discuss disciplinary action for unauthorised absences. It was important that Departments took a consistent line on the problem. Allegations of intimidation by staff would have to be verified with the RUC.

Mr Dugdale said that DHSS local offices would be taking a strong line on claims for social security benefit. Benefit would be paid only to claimants whose firms had closed or whose allegations of intimidation could be corroborated by the RUC. Employers who had closed voluntarily because of the strike should be made aware of their liability for guarantee payments.

It was generally felt that District Councils would be likely to take an individual line over the discipline of "strikers". It would be legitimate, however for sponsoring Departments to give a steer on discipline to statutory bodies within their jurisdiction. While recognising that we would have to be careful about allegations of victimisation of "strikers" it was agreed that it would be better in this instance to err on the side of being tough, rather than being lenient.

6. Agriculture

Dr Jack reported that farmers had used the tractor demonstrations today to express their concern about security. Not all of the demonstrators in Ballymena were farmers; a number of protestors had "borrowed" tractors for the occasion. The Ulster Farmers Union had made a statement today disassociating themselves from the methods used by the UUAC.

7. Larne Harbour

British Rail were content to hold their hand until Wednesday. Larne dockers had voted this morning by a majority of 59 to 22 to meet Mr Concannon to seek further assurances on security. Mr Roberts reported on the Minister's meeting. The Minister had brought with him a letter from the Secretary of State to the deputation stressing his determination to tackle terrorism and repeating the assurances on security given to the Ballylumford power workers. The dockers would be reporting back to a meeting at 7.00 pm in Larne. The feeling was that if the majority view expressed by those attending the meeting was representative of those held in Larne, there was a reasonable prospect that the port would be re-opened.

8. Electricity

Dr Quigley reported that the system was producing 1,000 MW, which had been achieved by bringing in a 120 MW set at Ballylumford and with help from Coolkeeragh and Belfast. 66% of the manual staff had turned up for work today and overall there was an 83% turn out of all staff. NIES did not want these figures released; the line taken publicly was that at all stations plant was being manned and normal demand was being met. Difficulties had been experienced during the day with picketing at Coolkeeragh, intimidation of Belfast power workers and an explosion at a pylon in Grand Parade, Belfast. Ways of tackling the "telephone intimidation" problem were being examined. The position at Ballylumford would be influenced by events at GEC (Larne) where 200 more people turned out for work than on Friday and at Larne Harbour.

9. Public Information Room

It was agreed that the staff numbers manning the Information Room could be rundown if public demand for the service did not revive.

10. Construction Industry

Mr Bell reported that there were slight signs of improvement in the industry, though there were still some difficulties over delays in deliveries of cement. Some workers had resumed working at Magheramorne. The present shortages would compound the industry's difficulty with the normal seasonal cement famine in June.

