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EXMIN 74/27

Copy No:

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 22 MAY 1974 IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, STORMONT, AT 5 30 PM

PRESENT: Mr Fitt (Chairman)
Mr Napier (Law Reform)
Mr Hume (Commerce)
Mr Baxter (Information)
Mr Morrell (Agriculture)
Mr Kirk (Finance)
Mr McIvor (Education)
Mr Bradford (Environment)
Mr Currie (Housing, Local Government and Planning)

Mr Faulkner (joined the meeting at 6 15 pm)

Mr K P Bloomfield) Secretariat
Mr P A Sythes)

Mr T M Roberts - Head of Press Services

A G E N D A

1. The Oil Contingency Plan
2. Situation Report by the Minister of Agriculture
3. Joint Standing Committee of Ministers

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1. The Oil Contingency Plan

The Minister of Commerce spoke to his paper which he had earlier that day circulated to Ministers by hand. The plan was based on the one produced in 1972 and adapted to the present situation. Its aim was to requisition the main source of supply, in the Harbour Estate, and to ensure availability to certain classes of essential users, partly by bulk supply to large scale users such as hospitals, medical and welfare services, food processing plants and water and sewerage installations and partly by requisition of and distribution to twenty-one garages throughout the Province. The possibility of a need to requisition the oil depot at Londonderry could also arise and there was a risk of consequential effects on gas supplies in Belfast, since workers would need to pass through requisitioned property in the Harbour Estate to reach their work, and might not be willing to go through Army lines. A further consequential risk was a complete withdrawal of labour from the power stations.

The Army were of the view that the plan was feasible provided that the necessary troops were made available, legal implications were examined and the possibility of sabotage was considered.

There was a lengthy discussion in which Ministers considered further consequentials such as the attitude of water and sewerage workers, the supply of money to banks and post offices, the effect on food processing, agriculture, milk supply etc and the general chain-reaction throughout the country leading to a situation in which the Army by having to divide its attention between the maintenance of essential life-support services and the discharge of its security tasks, could not adequately carry out either.

Opinion was generally in favour of putting forward the plan as a firm proposal of the Executive on the grounds that government could not be allowed to slip into the hands of the strikers. It was recognised that the Secretary of State had to be given all the information available so that he could decide if and to what extent he was able to provide the backing necessary to enable the Executive to exercise its civil powers.

Decided that the plan

- (a) should be adopted in principle as the clear policy of the Executive; and
- (b) submitted to the Secretary of State by the Minister of Commerce immediately with the object of seeking his full backing.

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2. SITUATION REPORT BY THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE

An up-to-date appraisal of the effects of the strike on agricultural production was circulated by the Minister of Agriculture for the information of his colleagues.

3. JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

The Chief Minister reported that he had received immediate and willing acceptance by the Secretary of State of the Executive's request for a Ministerial Committee (EXMIN 74/25/2 paragraphs (b) and (c)) and that the first meeting would take place the following morning, 23 May, in Stormont Castle at 10 45 am.

Office of the Executive
Stormont

28 May 1974