

NOTE OF A MEETING BETWEEN THE PUS AND NICS PERMANENT SECRETARIES HELD IN STORMONT HOUSE AT 10.00 am on TUESDAY 10 MAY 1977

<u>Present:</u> PUS	Mr J Finney	<u>Apologies:</u> Mr A A Pritchard
Mr R H Kidd	Mr J F Irvine	Mr B D Palmer
Mr W E Bell	Mr S F R Martin	
Mr R H A Blackburn	Dr W G H Quigley	
Mr K P Bloomfield	Mr K R Shimeld	
Mr A C Brooke	Mr J A Young	
Mr N Dugdale		

### 1. Strike Situation:

- (i) Referring to the current strike situation the PUS said that the two overriding impressions of the previous few days had been -
- (a) the high level of cohesion organisationally, not only within the Government machine, but also on the part of the police and army;
  - (b) the Secretary of State's standing as a result of his clear cut and firm policy; it was evident that he was coming out of the affair extremely well.
- (ii) The strike situation had also seen the shift of emphasis away from the army to the police. This was the first major manifestation of the new lead role for the RUC, with the army in a supportive capacity. The independence of the RUC had been a crucial factor in the current situation and it was unfortunate that the impression was held - quite wrongly - that the force had received political directions and was therefore seen to be under the direction of the Secretary of State. Such a reading of the situation was very far removed from actual practice.
- (iii) Looking to the future the PUS said that Government (in common with the bulk of the population) conceded that the main point of the strike was difficult to challenge, but that the method was unacceptable. It would therefore be necessary to keep on saying that the Secretary of State recognised that the security situation was far from perfect and in the aftermath of the strike to consider how the general public could be reassured on security policy. The second part of the Action Council's demand (for restoration of a regional parliament)

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had been overshadowed by the security issue, but there was no doubt that this demand would come up again. It would doubtless be raised in the promised round of talks with the political parties, following the local government elections.

- (iv) The PUS stressed the importance of learning the lessons of the strike both in organisational and policy terms and of giving further thought to the very serious question of intimidation, which had shown itself to be a major factor in the continuing strike situation.
- (v) In a short general discussion of the situation the following were some of the points made -
- (a) There was a suggestion abroad that more offences could be created for dealing with intimidation. Mr Martin considered that there was a grey area here, involving the 1926 and 1973 Acts, which he thought might profitably have been investigated following the 1974 strike.
- (b) The blocking of roads was illegal and the current blockages in Newtownards and Ballymena demanded strong and immediate action if the practice were not to snowball. It was questioned whether there was adequate coverage in law and whether the enforcement aspects were adequate. The PUS referred to the very firm action which had been taken by the police on road blocks and gave details of a major operation to be mounted by the RUC, with army support, on the Ballymena blockage. This would be a daylight operation with attendant publicity. There was no doubt that it would attract some criticism.
- (c) There was a danger that only the small fry were being pursued and that the bigger fish, those guilty of conspiracy, were slipping through the net.
- (d) It was questioned whether outsiders who, by their importunity, had sought to influence those workers at Ballylumford Power Station who had declared themselves against strike action, ought not to be apprehended promptly, since their action was tantamount to coercion aimed at bringing industry to a halt. If anything it was

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- a case of workers being pressurised for political ends. The PUS considered this a difficult legal area: it would be necessary to exempt the common run of ordinary industrial disputes and the offence would therefore be directed at cases where the action was taken for political ends. The particular instance might be looked upon as "peaceful persuasion". It was pointed out however that the person responsible (Mr Paisley) was associated with and had the support of the Protestant para-militaries and it was queried whether he ought not to be held for conspiracy. The PUS explained that this was a prosecution rather than a legal problem but that penalties for attempted coercion by outsiders of workers in industrial firms would have to be considered carefully.
- (vi) Other points mentioned were -
- (a) The need to identify the nature of the economic activity of the para-militaries and to proceed against it;
  - (b) The desirability of clearly identifying the para-militaries and of segregating them from other organisations;
  - (c) A very tough line against the Protestant strikers should be resisted, otherwise the question was bound to be asked why such action had not been taken earlier - against the IRA. If there had to be tough action then there had to be still tougher action against the IRA following the strike.
  - (d) Public opinion favoured the retention of the extra army units (MACM units apart) to deal with the IRA. If all 3,000 troops were to be pulled out at the end of the strike there would undoubtedly be a major outcry. The strikers at Larne Harbour, for instance, wished to see the return of the troops to the green areas.
  - (e) It was desirable that there should be no return to the 'no-talk' situation of the 1974 strike. The present strike was marked by the willingness of NIO Ministers to meet representatives of a wide variety of interests.
  - (f) The hope was expressed that when the strike came to an end there would be no question of a formula being devised to allow

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- (f) Mr Paisley "off the hook". It was suggested that Mr Paisley had a marked facility for finding his own way out of situations but that even if he were dislodged from his pinnacle, his followers would not be shaken and would continue to pursue his objectives. The PUS thought that Mr Paisley was less at home on security than on constitutional issues and that his judgement tended to be faulty on the former. It was noted that a motion had been tabled at Westminster seeking Mr Paisley's removal as an MP.
- (g) If Mr Paisley and the Action Council had called the strike on the security issue alone there would have been considerably more support for it. The inclusion of the demand for the return of a Stormont Parliament had taken away a lot of support.
- (h) Mr Martin urged that as regulations under the Act of 1926 are usually required at very short notice, a draft should always be available, if possible in proof print, and up-dated at regular intervals, say every six months. These regulations are drafted by his Office and it would be helpful if he were kept informed of decisions of the Emergency Committee affecting such regulations or received copies of the relevant papers. Regulations under the Emergency Provisions Act of 1973 are drafted by the Legal Advisers to the Home Office often after consultation with the NI draftsmen but as it was not always clear which offences should be included in regulations under the 1926 Act and which in regulations under the 1973 Act it would be desirable in the future to clarify precisely "who did what". Mr Kidd queried whether there were any provisions in the Emergency Regulations which might not be introduced into the existing law.

## 2. Any Other Business:

- (a) It was noted that NIO had made it known at local electoral officer level that the local government elections were to proceed as planned. In case of difficulty they had been asked to contact NIO for guidance. If for some reason it proved necessary to defer the elections, opinion was that legislation would not be necessary to give effect to such deferment.

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(b) It was agreed that if any member had comment or information on a political issue that such should be fed in to NIO. The contacts were - Mr Neilson, Mr Ford or Mr Pritchard.

3. Date of Next Meeting:

Tuesday 14 June at 9.20 am or earlier if, in the light of circumstances, this was desirable.

1. Strike Situation:

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(i) Referring to the current strike situation the PUS said that the two overriding impressions of the previous few days had been -

(a) the high level of subversion organisationally, not only within the Government machine, but also on the part of the police and army;

(b) the Secretary of State's standing as a result of his clear out and

Distribution:

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|---------------|---------------|
| PUS           | Mr Palmer     |
| Mr Kidd       | Mr Pritchard  |
| Mr Bell       | Dr Quigley    |
| Mr Blackburn  | Mr Shimeld    |
| Mr Bloomfield | Mr Young      |
| Mr Brooke     |               |
| Mr Dugdale    | Mr Janes      |
| Mr Finney     | Mr Waterfield |
| Mr Irvine     | Mr Parkes     |
| Mr Martin     |               |

Mr Ramsay (personal)

(ii) Looking to the future the PUS said that Government (in common with the bulk of the population) considered that the main point of the strike was difficult to challenge, but that the method was unacceptable. It would therefore be necessary to keep on saying that the Secretary of State recognised that the security situation was far from perfect and in the aftermath of the strike to consider how the general public could be reassured on security policy. The second part of the Action Council's demand (for restoration of a regional parliament)