

NOTE OF MEETING HELD AT STORMONT ON 28 AUGUST 1986

SUBJECT: INTIMIDATION OF CONTRACTORS: IN PARTICULAR THE FIRM OF WESTON CONTRACTORS LIMITED

Attending: Mr F R Rodgers )  
Mr R Thomas )DOE  
Mr K Maginnis MP  
Councillor R Ferguson (Solicitor to Weston Contractors)

1. Mr Ferguson began by giving the following background information. He said that the firm of Weston Contractors had 2 main Housing Executive contracts - a new-build contract on the Shankill Road, Belfast, and a rehabilitation contract at Brooke Street, Dungannon. The workforce is normally about 70 of which up to 80% are Roman Catholics. Following the murder of a catholic worker going to the Shankill Road site all the catholic workers were refusing to work at either site because of alleged intimidation. No work had been done on either site since early July and the firm now had serious financial problems.
2. Both Mr Maginnis and he had met Housing Executive officials on Friday 22 August. Mr Ferguson had said that it might be possible for the firm to find alternative acceptable workers but that this would involve much higher costs. They were particularly concerned about the Shankill Road site and had sought the agreement of the Housing Executive to re-negotiate that contract. The Housing Executive had refused and had issued a "14 day notice" for each of the contracts saying that work had ceased without good cause and requiring the company to resume work within the specified period. Mr Ferguson said that the company was taking legal advice and would challenge the Housing Executive's statement that work had ceased without good cause.
3. Mr Ferguson said that he believed the company was owed some £130,000 by the Housing Executive for work already carried out on the Shankill Road site and he asked if anything could be done to expedite that payment. He said that if Weston Contractors does have to go into liquidation other associated companies owned by the firm would also be in danger because of the knock-on effect. Mr Ferguson also expressed concern that the company had been apparently suspended from the Housing Executive's tender list since he understood that it had been in the running for a substantial Housing Executive contract at Londonderry.
4. Mr Maginnis expressed concern about the intimidation of contractors generally. He was hoping that at the very least the Housing Executive could be persuaded to terminate the Shankill Road contract without penalty because of the intimidation suffered by this company. As far as Brooke Street, Dungannon was concerned work had only just started and there was no heavy investment yet by the company. Mr Maginnis said that he would use his position as a public representative to try and get increased security forces protection for workers and to persuade the Housing Executive to screen off the site. Although the workers still had to be persuaded to return he was confident that suitable arrangements could be made. Like Mr Ferguson

he stressed that the main concern was over the Shankill Road site on which they hoped for the earliest possible conclusions.

5. Mr Rodgers explained that decisions on the future of these contracts were a matter for the Housing Executive. However, he expressed a view that it was unrealistic for the firm to expect to re-negotiate the Shankill Road contract. He said that while one must have sympathy with any firm facing intimidation there were no easy answers and many difficult implications, for example, other companies who were in difficulties for whatever reason might seek to escape from contracts using similar grounds - genuine or otherwise.
6. Mr Rodgers said that it was important for the firm to reply quickly to the 14 day notices. The firm should, he said, also supply the Housing Executive with as much information as they could about their current financial position in order to assist the Housing Executive in deciding whether the company could be considered for future contracts. Mr Rodgers said that he would take up with the Housing Executive the question of any outstanding monies on the Shankill Road site although he indicated that from a recent telephone conversation with the Housing Executive there were no such monies outstanding.
7. Mr Ferguson said that he would arrange a meeting with the company's accountants shortly and would have prepared an up-to-date financial statement which Mr Rodgers said should be sent direct to the Housing Executive with the company's statement of the grounds on which they believe that they had good cause for ceasing work on the 2 contracts in question.

Rf.

R THOMAS

1 September 1986