

At 4 00 pm on Thursday 23 May 1974 the Administration received a deputation from the Confederation of British Industry, the Engineering Employers' Union, the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Ulster Farmers' Union. The following were present:-

Chief Minister: Rt Hon Brian Faulkner DL
 Legal Minister: Mr Oliver J Napier LLB
 Minister of Agriculture: Mr Leslie J Morrell B AGr JP
 Minister of Commerce: Mr John Hume MA
 Minister of the Environment: Rt Hon Roy H Bradford BA
 Minister of Education: Rt Hon W Basil McIvor LLB Barrister-at-Law
 Minister of Finance: Rt Hon Herbert V Kirk BComm Sc FCA JP
 Minister of Health and Social Services: Mr Patrick J Devlin
 Minister of Housing, Local Government and Planning: Mr J Austin Currie BA
 Minister of Information: Mr John Lawson Baxter BA BComm LLM
 Minister of Manpower Services: Mr Robert G Cooper LLB
 Permanent Secretary, Office of the Executive: Mr K P Bloomfield
 Permanent Secretary, Department of Commerce: Mr W E Bell
 Permanent Secretary, Department of the Environment: Mr W G Malcolm
 Deputy Secretary, Office of the Executive: Mr P A Sythes
 Principal Private Secretary to the Chief Minister: Mr L S Duncan

Sir Robin Kinahan)
 Mr R D Rolston)
 Mr E H Bigg) CBI
 Mr P Foreman)
 Mr S Craigs)
 Mr N Tate)

Sir Ivan Ewart)
 Mr H M Gabbey) Chamber of Commerce
 Mr A E Gordon)
 Mr G L Auret)

Mr W Blease)
 Mr G Quigley)
 Mr B G Harkin) ICTU
 Mr N Kennedy)
 Mr J Cosby)
 Mr H Binks)
 Mr W Lindsay)

Mr W H Gilliland)
 Mr W McCahon) Ulster Farmers' Union
 Mr W H Robson)

Mr A Cormack)
 Mr R P Hind)
 Mr W Boole)
 Mr J Workman) Engineering Employers' Union
 Mr R J Hansen)
 Mr C Kirkpatrick)
 Mr D Duffin)
 Mr W Gamble)
 Mr W Orr)

The Chief Minister said that he regarded the present gathering as an ad hoc meeting consisting of representatives of the CBI, the EEU, ICTU, UFU and Chamber of Commerce. He welcomed the representatives and said he looked forward to hearing what they had to say.

Mr. Bleese on behalf of all the organisations present, thanked the Chief Minister for receiving the deputation. He explained that following Trade Union efforts to bring about a return to work, they considered that an approach should be made to the Secretary of State to see what could be done. In his attempts to take action via the Northern Ireland Office he had simply become caught up in the bureaucratic machine. He apologised for the unavoidable absence of a representative from the Small Shopkeepers' Union. As far as he was concerned they were all there to consider and review the present situation.

Sir Robin Kinahan said that the message from industry was loud and clear. "Will the Government not govern?" Police stood by while workers were being intimidated. There was no petrol, no power. It was essential that the men behind the disruption must be talked to. Firms had had to do so already in order to keep in business. This was not the way it should be.

The Chief Minister said the Executive was determined to govern and was ready to accept its responsibilities in that respect. However there was a grave security problem in the background. There was too the question of intimidation and worse. Security was not the Executive's responsibility and they had therefore to rely on the British Government. The Executive, as a body, had told the Secretary of State that it was ready to accept its full responsibility and had asked for the full support of the British Government to back that up. He would report any movement on this as soon as possible.

Mr Kernohan said that his organisation (the Engineering Employers' Union) was responsible for 40,000 workers engaged in the growth industry in the Province. They were becoming increasingly concerned at the situation. Irreparable damage was being done. The ability to control this country was running out of the hands of the Government and the ability to control workers was running out of the hands of the Trade Unions. A dialogue had to be started amongst all the interested parties with some spokesman from the Ulster Workers' Council. The situation was hardening hour by hour. There were many factories where there was no obstacle to a return to work. His people were having to decide now whether to close down their particular industry, or whether to tell clients that they should go elsewhere for components required for use in motor car factories, computers etc. What were they to do? They were seeking some guidance. In his view the only answer was to get everyone concerned together and to talk.

The Chief Minister reminded the meeting that the country was facing an insurrection. Those who suggested dealing with the perpetrators of our present trouble were in effect giving them recognition as a provisional government which was simply not on.

Mr McCahon said that so far the meeting had been hearing about the plight of manufacturing industry - his Union represented the food industry. There were some 27,000 people self-employed on farms, and a further 25,000 hired workers on farms so that his organisation represented a total of about 50,000 persons. In the farming industry it would take years to build up losses of live stock. Products such as milk could not be kept and had to be thrown out. For these reasons they were suffering more than other industries. Losses on pork and eggs amounted to £1¹/₂m per week, the loss on milk amounted to £100,000 per day - and these were total losses. Beef was not quite as bad since cattle could be put to grass. He was earnestly seeking some way for the food processing industry to be maintained.

Mr Quigley said that the trade unions had tried to get a return to work. However they had badly underestimated the extent of intimidation. The issue had been lost not on Tuesday morning but on Monday morning owing to the widespread intimidation then. It was expecting far too much of people to come out in the circumstances. Threats had been issued to workers as to what might happen when they returned to their houses and these had been carried out in some instances!

Quigley stressed that the meeting should be quite clear about one thing viz that the Ulster Workers' Council was not only opposed to the terms of the Sunningdale Agreement; it was opposed to power-sharing and to the Executive. It would favour a return to the former discrimination in employment. He suspected that substantial numbers of people did want to work. His concern was that those who did want to work must be given the opportunity to do so. Everyone was aware of the fact that emergency powers had been taken by the Secretary of State. But what evidence was there of any use being made of these powers? Power supplies must be restored, roads cleared, and housing estates protected. If this involved a need for security forces then they must be provided. The UWC represented a vicious animal in our midst which must be dealt with otherwise there would be no end to the demands made of us, no end to the breakdown in our Province. Let there be no mistake about it. We would end up with a little Fascist state if these people were allowed to continue. It was impossible to talk to people who were holding a gun at one's head and this was the position. Resolute government was needed.

Mr Hume said that everyone had been referring to the difficulties in the industrial field. The Executive's view was that it did govern: they were quite firm about that. He had told the Secretary of State in clear language precisely what steps were required to carry out his responsibilities.

In reply to a question from Mr Blease the Chief Minister said that all steps had been taken by the Executive up to British Cabinet level.

Mr Binks described his own efforts to get to Tuesday morning's march. All roads had been blocked. He had tried for two hours to get through to Queen's Bridge. He saw many cars being turned back while the security forces did nothing. He had seen just how difficult it had been for workers to join the march. He felt that the BBC had grossly misrepresented the situation in its reporting. Many people would have been back to their work but for the "street dictators".

Mr Blease commented that they had had tremendous support from employers on the day of the marches.

The Chief Minister intervened at this point to ask all those present whether they felt that any progress had been made. If power supplies were restored could the workers get to their work?

Mr Kernohan said that it would depend on where one lived. Those in Republican areas, for example, would be perfectly alright. However the principal problems were fuel and power.

Mr Quigley emphasised that there must be considerably more security on the ground especially in the "closed" housing estates.

Mr Kennedy thought that the meeting was talking in a vacuum if the Government did not govern. He wanted to know why the petrol coupons so recently issued to all car owners could not be used now. The only place where one could obtain a permit was from the UWC. This was all wrong! As for talks he thought the meeting should be clear that Northern Ireland consisted of two communities and that one could not talk to one community without talking to the other. Both communities had gone outside the law and he suggested that there should be no talks with either. The Executive should govern or get out!

Sir Ivan Ewart said that the CBI view was that the restoration of power supplies and fuel would aid a return to work but it would not be the total answer. The holiday season was fast approaching and people would want their earnings so that for this reason too the restoration of power and fuel supplies would encourage a return to work. He thought the effects of intimidation might be weakening.

Harkin stressed that the meeting must not lose its nerve. If those present could not stand up to the UWC and their fellow travellers no one could. It was not the time to consider abandoning the Executive but on the contrary, time to pledge themselves to the Executive. He, whose political affiliations were well known to most of those present, had been disgusted with the British Labour Government's weakness. Indeed Mr Heath, in the course of a lunch time interview on BBC Radio that day, had said all the things that a Labour Government ought to have said. Mr Harkin urged the Executive to say to both Mr Wilson and Mr Rees that there was an insurrection here in Northern Ireland. They should be told that people in the streets are saying "Who is the Government here? If power and fuel supplies were restored people would see that something was being done.

Mr Morrell said that he fully supported the views expressed earlier by Mr McCahon. The solution lay in making available again power and fuel for transport. He was backing the Minister of Commerce in having these made available. The security power necessary to achieve this must be given by the British Government.

Mr Craig queried whether it was possible to govern in present circumstances.

The Chief Minister said that in issuing its statement of the previous evening, the Executive had tried to take away credibility from those who claimed that there was a threat to the country's constitution. The strikers were not complaining about working conditions in the power stations but about political matters. What political finesse could be used in dealing with them?

Three speakers whom I failed to identify spoke next. Their comments were as follows. 7

First speaker: He stated that the country was in an anarchistic situation and currently heading for economic suicide. The Province had gone back twenty years in the previous two weeks.

Second speaker: He felt that we must have power and fuel in order to illustrate that the Government was governing. However this would not bring the workers back. There was very considerable sympathy with the aims of the strikers if not with the methods. Were the British Government going to continue letting this go on?

Third speaker: He thought that not nearly enough capital had been made of the Executive's statement of the previous day. This should be spelt out clearly and often in order to "sell" it.

The Chief Minister said they were doing their utmost to do this.

Mr Hume said that the Secretary of State must take certain steps before he (Mr Hume) could proceed to make any Orders regarding use of fuel.

The Chief Minister told the meeting that he had spoken to Mr Rees at 3 20 pm that afternoon and had informed him of the need for action that day. He assured the meeting that the Executive had been dealing with the various issues involved since the previous weekend.

Mr Rolston said that there had seemed to be a feeling of no action and no urgency. If the present meeting succeeded in adding muscle to the Executive's efforts with the British Government, then indeed it would have been worthwhile.

Mr Kernohan said that he had come to the meeting from Stormont Castle where the talk with Mr Orme had been completely abortive. Action must be taken .

Mr Harkin demanded that an urgent message should go from the present meeting to the Secretary of State to the effect that the Executive should be given immediate authority to proceed.

The Chief Minister said he shared Mr Harkin's attitude. The Executive were all Ulstermen who wanted to live in a law abiding Ulster and not to submit to gangsterism. However they had to depend on the British Government for action on security matters. He had told the Secretary of State that the present meeting was coming up and the attitudes of those present had been just as he had told the Secretary of State they would be. He reminded the meeting that it was easier to say "Govern!" than to put it into effect. He undertook to convey the views of the meeting to Downing Street.

Mr McCahon felt there was a case for giving priority to production of food - even over industry. He would like the Executive to consider some means of giving priority to agriculture for power supplies.

Mr Hume said he would not sign any Orders about use of electricity without having control of electricity.

Mr Blease said that the meeting must bear the consequences of what was being asked for that day. They could only now pass the matter over to the Executive and therefore to the Westminster Government. Very important decisions would have to be taken and these might bear hard on us. The various interests represented at the present meeting must not fight each other about priorities as between agriculture and industry etc. There was a large enough strain on the security forces on account of the existence of the Provisional IRA and the UWC and those present should stand together. He thought that speakers generally had greatly underestimated the support for the workers' strike which had widened from extremists to more moderate Protestant opinion.

Mr Hind said that both Mr Rees and Mr Orme had issued most intransigent statements. Force could not put the situation right. It was possible to negotiate. If force were to be used then all would be lost - the Executive, the Council of Ireland and the industry of the country. In his experience of such situations one always had to talk.

The Chief Minister asked Mr Hinds to state precisely about what one could negotiate.

Mr Hind said that if a representative body could be brought together for discussions surely something could emerge?

The Chief Minister asked Mr Hind what could emerge from such a discussion.

Mr Hind replied that in his personal opinion the refusal to consider the holding of an earlier Assembly election was unreasonable so that something might be done there.

The Chief Minister said that Assembly elections had been held as recently as June last year. How could one justify another election now? We could not for one moment tolerate a situation where dictators could have elections at will. The Government could not yield on this issue. They had to say "No" and face the consequences.

Mr Kirkpatrick referred to the meeting with Mr Orme earlier in the afternoon. No flexibility had been forthcoming. This was not good government.

The Chief Minister said that he thought it should be pointed out that the Secretary of State had seen a deputation the previous Thursday which was representative of the extreme Protestant factions. They were invited back again on the Friday but no one turned up.

Sir Robin Kinahan urged the Chief Minister to publish the fact of the talks which the Secretary of State had had with these people.

Mr Hume said the strikers did not wish their elected representatives to speak for them.

Mr Devlin said that the country was dealing with a group of people who were trying nothing less than to effect a coup. The meeting had requested the Executive to govern. It would govern!

Mr Kernohan, referring to the considerable degree of lawlessness, deplored the small number of arrests which were taking place.

A final speaker interjected to pose the question whether it could be that people were supporting the UWC because it was the wagon that was rolling and no admonitory finger had been wagged at them.

The Chief Minister concluded the meeting by saying that he and his colleagues on the Executive had noted the views expressed. The matter was one mainly for the British Government. He could not take criticism there of the British Government - only of the Executive. The Executive would convey the meeting's views to the British Government.



B C LORETTO
24 May 1974