

Note of a meeting of Permanent Secretaries held in Mr Kidd's room, Stormont Castle, at 5.00 pm on Wednesday 11 May 1977

Present:-

Mr Kidd

Mr Bloomfield	Mr Shimeld
Dr Quigley	Mr Slinger
Mr Finney	Mr Darling
Mr Young	Mr Roberts
Mr Irvine	Mr Palmer

1. General Situation

Citybus services would not be resumed until after the funeral of the murdered bus driver on Friday lunch-time. Departmental staff seemed to be finding ways and means of getting to work, despite the lack of public transport services. There were some stories of staff setting out for work at 4.30 am.

2. Larne Harbour

A few British Rail and Townsend Thorenson ferries had managed to sail in and out of the port today, though the dockers had not yet returned to work. British Rail wanted moderately low key publicity for their resumed service; sufficient to say that a restricted service had recommenced.

It was also reported that some union officials had been in contact with their opposite numbers in GB to see if NI services could be exempted from the Liverpool strike.

3. Social Security

A statement had been prepared for Lord Melchett. New claims since the beginning of the stoppage had peaked at 30,000 and there had been a declining trend in the daily intake since Wednesday and Thursday of last week. There were still doubts in some minds whether a statement should be made at all. Local Office staff would undoubtedly welcome a statement of support, in view of their "front line" position in the strike. Staff in other Departments were, however, under similar pressures.

4. Classification of Departmental Sitreps

It was agreed that in view of the sensitivity of the information which they conveyed it would probably be best to classify all sitreps at least "confidential". It was pointed out that classified material could not be transmitted on an "open" communication system such as the telecopier. This might slow down transmission of sitreps from outlying Departments.

5. "Tractorcades"

Mr Young reported that the GIS, through Mr Roberts, had been pressing DANI to persuade the UFU to issue another statement denying major involvement of the farming community in the recent tractor demonstrations. The President and General Secretary of the UFU were in Brussels, however, and no one was willing to take a decision in their absence. DANI had received reports for their County Executive Officers that:

- (i) 400-500 vehicles in total had been involved in the demonstrations out of an overall tractor population of 25,000 vehicles;
- (ii) they had been able to recognise only very few farmers actively participating in the demonstrations;
- (iii) the RUC had received many reports on tractors being stolen or commandeered; there was evidence that in some of the demonstrations eg at Toome contractors plant had been used in the blockade.

GIS would report the gist of this information to the media, without attributing the source. It was agreed that there might be much capital to be gained from this information.

6. Electricity

Dr Quigley reported that NIES were reasonably hopeful that the Ballylumford midnight shift would report tonight as usual, though anything could go wrong at any time. Mr Paisley was expected to visit Coolkeeragh shortly, but instructions had been issued by NIES that he was not to be given access to the station, nor was management to negotiate with him.

7. Oil/Petrol

The news of the death of the bus driver had been greeted with some despondency by the oil tanker drivers. DOC had offered to talk to a deputation of drivers to allay their fears.

8. Murder of Citybus Driver

Mr Slinger wondered whether public revulsion at the murder could be turned to advantage by personifying Mr Bradshaw not only as a murdered bus driver but as a representation of every NI worker who had asserted their right to work by ignoring the UUAC strike call. Might it not help to defuse the situation if Citybus and organisations such as CBI and NIC/ICTU were to offer a reward for the apprehension of the killers.

Mr Bloomfield agreed that it would be desirable to give the public the opportunity to underline their feelings about the murder of a worker in the normal execution of his duty by dramatising the situation in some way. It would be useful if the generalised expressions of goodwill already given by organisations like CBI and NIC/ICTU could be channelled through, say, a newspaper advertisement thanking workers for turning out for work, exhorting them to continue to assert their right to work in this way, and urging them to report to the RUC anyone who was interfering with that right to work. Government should not be seen to be associated with the advertisement. Mr Roberts agreed to take the idea on board.

9. Silver Jubilee

It was suggested that Departments might wish to re-examine their nominations for silver jubilee medals to determine whether some names should be withdrawn from the list because of "equivocal" conduct during the "strike". It was pointed out that it was unlikely that nominations withdrawn now could be replaced by other nominations.

10. Motivation of staff not in the "front line"

Mr Irvine reported that from his visits round the different parts of his Department he had found no evidence of lack of motivation in staff who were not directly involved in "strike" related work. It was agreed that Departments should keep a watchful eye on the shifts being worked by their staff.

cc Those present
PS/PUS
Mr Pritchard
Mr Bell
Mr Brooke
Mr Ford

M. T. H. Maxwell

M T H MAXWELL
PS/Mr Kidd

SECRET

BRIEFING LINES AT 10 30 12 MAY 1977

1. Secretary of State: Contrary to normal practice the S of S is remaining at Stormont Castle today instead of attending the normal weekly Cabinet Meeting. Nor will he be in the House this afternoon when NI is "tops" for Questions. He is remaining here to keep closely in touch with the situation as he has done throughout the period. The PQs at Westminster will be taken by Mr Concannon, Mr Carter and Mr Dunn. If anyone asks about the nature of the PQs refer them to Frank Woods who is in touch with NIO Press Office, London, about publicising the answers of selective ones.

2. Electricity: Today's line is that the shifts changed this morning as usual and everything on the supply front is normal. We don't go further than this unless asked specific questions, but in view of the fact that last night was to have been the deadline for the withdrawal of labour by some manual workers and also because of today's Irish Times story there may be queries. The following briefing points will help -
 - (a) there is sufficient plant operating to meet demand;
 - (b) the particular plant operated at any time is dependent on the availability of staff at the individual stations but plant is being operated and staff are being deployed in accordance with the terms of the management/trade union agreements;
 - (c) turnout of staff is satisfactory and is steadily returning to normal levels.

3. Unemployment Benefit: A self-explanatory news release has been sent out explaining, under Lord Melchett's name, the situation regarding claims for unemployment benefit in the current situation. Any follow-up queries will need delicate handling. The official answer should be obtained through Bob Burnett but it must NOT be given out without clearance by the duty Co-ordinator.

C F CORBETT