

# NATIONAL ARCHIVES

## IRELAND



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Secret

Meeting with Mr. Terry Carlin of ICTU, 1 October 1985

I met with the Secretary of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in Belfast on 1 October. Carlin is, and has been for many years, very close to a wide range of trade unionists on both sides of the community, including hard line loyalists and republicans and, in my view, is better placed than anybody else to give an indication of feelings among workers, and especially among industrial workers.

I spoke to him at length about the possibility of a workers strike in the event of an Anglo-Irish agreement. It will be recalled that it was the Ulster Workers Strike, promoted by a combination of paramilitaries and politicians opposed to the Sunningdale Agreement, which brought an end to that Agreement and to the Northern Ireland executive in 1974. In 1977 a similar effort organised by the paramilitaries in association with Paisley failed. There have been at least two attempts to have day long total work stoppages, following the murders of Lord Mountbatten and of Robert Bradford M.P., both of which failed. Some unionist spokesmen are now threatening that if there is an Anglo-Irish agreement which involves a role for Dublin in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland they will resist with token work stoppages and if necessary with an all out workers strike.

Carlin said that he is extremely doubtful if there could be a repeat of what happened in 1974. He does not think the loyalists could mount an all-out general strike for the following reasons:-

- (1) The economic situation in Northern Ireland is very different to that which existed in 1974. Those who have jobs are determined to hold on to them and they recognise that a general strike would damage the economy and put a question mark over their jobs. One example is Standard Telephones. In 1974 they closed

down during the strike. At the moment union-management talks are going on which are designed to try to keep the factory open beyond 1987. Carlin is certain the workers there will not put those jobs into jeopardy by joining a general political strike. There are many similar examples.

- (2) A very large number of the "hard men" in the power stations and in Harland and Wolff, who had been central to the 1974 strike, have either retired or have taken redundancy. The hard men have not been replaced.
- (3) Parker, Harland and Wolff chairman and chief executive, would treat any potential striker very differently to the way they were treated in 1974. Carlin says he has no doubt that, in the event of a threatened strike, Parker would tell the workers that contracts would be lost and their jobs put in jeopardy. Carlin thinks Foreman in Shorts might well take a similar line.
- (4) Carlin believes that the main reason for the success of the 1974 strike and for the failure of that in 1977 was that in 1977 the then Northern Ireland Secretary, Roy Mason, was determined that it would not succeed whereas Wilson and Merlyn Rees lacked that determination and lacked a commitment to ensure that Sunningdale worked. Carlin believes that if Mrs. Thatcher reaches an agreement with the Irish Government she will not allow a workers strike to succeed.
- (5) The present RUC is a different force to that which existed in 1974. That was evident by 1977 after Mason had introduced changes in the RUC. On that occasion the RUC acting on information from various sources including himself showed a determination to keep the roads open so that those who wished to get to work could do so. He believes they would repeat this should there be another strike.

- (6) There is a feeling among the workers that the politicians let them down in 1977. Paisley said at that time that if the strike failed he would retire from politics. That hasn't happened. In addition the unionists campaigned in the district council elections last May asking for votes to enable them to smash Sinn Fein. There are many workers in the industrial sector who feel that the politicians should be allowed get on with that task.

Carlin told me that before and during the 1977 strike information had been fed to him which he gave to the RUC. This sometimes helped the RUC take preventative action before matters reached a head. Carlin was able to tell them where vehicles were being hijacked and what roads the loyalists intended to close off to prevent workers getting to work. The RUC in turn gave him guarantees which enabled him to issue statements saying workers would be protected. An example was bus crews. The RUC told him they would keep the roads open and do everything possible to protect the bus crews. Carlin used this publicly to encourage people to turn up for work. Eventually a bus driver was assassinated and the crews with drew their labour for two days until after the funeral. Carlin thanked them for their devotion to duty and issued a statement saying the best tribute workers could pay to the dead bus driver was to turn up for work while the buses were off. Work attendance increased. Following the funeral he brought shop stewards from various companies including Harland and Wolff to a meeting of the over 800 bus men who were balloting on whether to return to work. He thanked them for maintaining the service, said he would like them to go back to work but that he and the ICTU would understand and support whatever decision they made. They decided to return and the strike collapsed. He said he is determined to act in a similar way next time, and he is certain he can bring the trade union officials with him if another strike threatens.

For these reasons he thinks it most unlikely there will be a general stoppage as in 1974 but he would not entirely rule out

a 1977 type strike. He thinks stoppages in individual firms of a token nature for a day are more possible. He has had no hint whatever of a political strike, whereas in 1977 he had about 6 weeks notice, and was able to prepare. The absence of any feeling on the factory floor at this time would indicate to him that talk of a general strike is not, as of now, being taken seriously. His guess would be that if there is an Anglo-Irish agreement and if there is a unionist protest it is more likely to be of a political nature. Perhaps unionists would offer themselves for new elections. He thinks it unlikely that the OUP would become involved in widespread anti parliamentary activity.

Carlin said that the new Northern Ireland Secretary has impressed him with his knowledge of economic matters and with his ability to carry a meeting without reference to civil service briefs.

On Shorts Carlin said that the delay experienced by the Fair Employment Agency in publishing the figures and the report for recruitment in the period April-December 1984 is because Sir Philip Foreman has threatened to take the FEA to court if they publish their report which calls attention to the failure of Shorts to meet its commitments on discrimination in recruitment and which states that if Shorts don't improve the FEA will be obliged to withdraw its fair employment certificate. Carlin has since telephoned me to say that the FEA have decided to go ahead and publish, despite Foreman's threat, on Friday next. ICTU will also issue a statement.

*Dr.*

D. O Ceallaigh  
2 October 1985

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