



An Chartlann Náisiúnta National Archives

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Meeting with Mr. Terry Carlin, Northern Ireland Officer, ICTU

I met with Mr. Carlin in Belfast on Tuesday, 25 February. Carlin at the time of speaking was resigned to the one day strike taking place in Northern Ireland on Monday next. Carlin had been in contact with a number of his trade union colleagues and his office would be putting a out low key statement on Monday stating their opposition to the strike. The statement would be in keeping with the ICTU stance on previous strikes. Carlin anticipated that his office would get the usual 'hassle' and reactions from certain elements in the Unionist camp following the publication of the statement. Among the other points Carlin made during our discussion were:

The power workers in Ballylungford had a meeting in Larne last week, Carlin had learned at first hand from one of the shop stewards who attended the meeting that there was no great enthusiasm from the power workers to become involved in a prolonged stoppage. The mood of the workers in Ballylungford was that they felt they had been exploited during the 1974 and 1977 strikes and indeed one of the leaders then, who was still prominent, (whom Carlin did not name) was adopting a much more cautious approach now. In essence what the power workers wanted was for the politicians to carry some of the responsibility on this occasion and they the power workers did not want to be made the scapegoats again. The power workers had, Carlin understood, put it to the politicians that the latter should be in the front line on this occasion.

Carlin attributed the less militant line by the power workers on this occasion to the overall economic situation. Workers were unwilling to sacrifice wages, even one day, as salaries had not kept pace with inflation. Industrial wage earners felt they were penalised while the politicians continued to draw their full salaries. Carlin also felt that the British Government had been successful in getting across to the Northern Ireland population the heavy subsidisation which

Northern Ireland receives from the British Exchequer, This together with the meagre increase in welfare payments meant workers were no longer willing to put their jobs on the line for the politicians. On this occasion also it was more difficult to achieve success as what Paisley and Molyneaux were calling for was the scrapping of the Anglo-Irish Agreement and workers were realistic enough to know that the British Government would not capitulate to demands of the Unionist politicians - also no real alternative or solution was being put forward to replace the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

It was noticeable also in Carlin's opinion that while workers in Harland & Wolff were to the forefront in militancy in 1974 and 1975 they were much more conservative in their support for stoppages on this occasion. In the recent demonstration to Maryfield Carlin mentioned that the workers in the shipyard were only prepared to go and protest during lunchtime but they were not willing to lose a full day's pay. Workers in the yard were also conscious not to jeopardise a British defence ministry contract of £200 million which Harland & Wolff stood a good chance to win. The workers had clearly understood "the signals" from the British Government regarding the order and were therefore slow to put their future job prospects at risk. Carlin contrasted the mood at Harland & Wolff with that at Shorts Engineering Plant, He felt the mood was much more militant at Shorts and attributed this to a more sectarian workforce and management. Also the workers in Shorts were much more conscious of their political leanings given the successive investigations and adverse publicity which the company had undergone on the instigation of the Fair Employment Agency.

On the speculated transfer of Mackey's Engineering Works from Springfield Road to Woodvale, Carlin mentioned that no approach had been made to the Unions involved. Carlin's attitude was that if Mackeys had to consolidate their plants at any one location it should be at their major point of

operation, although against the Springfield Road site was that it probably would be easier to restructure from a modern plant.

On a longer term protest strategy by the Unionists, Carlin felt that it would be difficult to achieve more than three to four one day stoppages. He did not see an all out strike being called for, as such a call would meet with resistance from both management and the shop floor. Workers realised that Thatcher had spent £6 billion defeating the miners and her determination not to be intimidated at any cost was well known and consequently the feedback he was getting from shop stewards was that workers did not want to be led into a blind alleyway by the politicians with no escape route. Carlin added that as much as the trade union movement detested Thatcher, she was the only one who "could deliver" the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Carlin was appreciative of the way in which the proposed extension of trade union legislation by legislative Order from Britain to Northern Ireland was handled by this Department and the Department of Labour. He reiterated, however, that it was of "paramount" importance that it should not leak out that the British sought our views through the Intergovernmental Conference on the proposed Order.

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Brendan Scannell,
27 February 1986.

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