

IN CONFIDENCE

NORTHERN IRELAND ECONOMIC COUNCIL

Minutes of the First Meeting of the Reconstituted Northern Ireland Economic Council  
held on Monday 14 September 1970 at 10.30 am in Room 17 Parliament Buildings, Stormont.

PRESENT:

The Prime Minister (for part of the meeting)	-	Major The Rt Hon J D Chichester-Clark
The Minister of Commerce	-	The Rt Hon Roy Bradford (Chairman)
Mr J S Agate		
Mr R Allen		
Mr A Barr		
Mr J H Binks		
Mr W J Blease		
Professor D J Bradley		
Mr G E Cameron		
Mr R Campbell		
Mr M Eitel		
Mr P F Foreman		
Mr J Grew		
Mr B G Harkin		
Mr J A Kennedy		
Senator N Kennedy		
Mr T McAteer		
Mr S McGonagle		
Mr J T O'Brien		
Mr A C Brooke	(Assessor) -	Ministry of Commerce
Mr F T Mais	(Assessor) -	Ministry of Commerce
Dr A T Park	(Assessor) -	Economic Section
Dr W G H Quigley	(Assessor) -	Ministry of Health and Social Services
Mr R J Browne	(Secretary) -	Ministry of Commerce
Mr A A Getty	-	Ministry of Commerce
Mr A E Luke	-	Ministry of Commerce

INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed members to the meeting and personally introduced each member.

He went on to say that, following the meeting, members would be the guests of the Prime Minister for lunch.

At the request of the Chairman the Prime Minister then addressed the meeting.

In his opening remarks the Prime Minister emphasised the importance which he and his colleagues in the Government attached to the work of the Council and he underlined



its key role in the economic development of the Province and expressed the Government's appreciation of the work it had already carried out.

In welcoming the 14 new members he expressed his belief that with its enlarged and widely representative membership the Council was now more than ever equipped to advise the Government in its implementation of the Development Programme.

He also thanked the members who were continuing their service with the Council, thus providing valuable background experience and continuity with the work of the previous Council. He went on to say that although the events of recent months has made the job harder and our planning under the Development Programme must involve a large element of faith, it was the intention of the Government, with the full support of the UK Government, to press on with the Programme as fast as humanly possible.

The Prime Minister left the meeting at this point.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Messrs Hamilton and Hull and Professor Wilson.

2. PROCEDURE FOR COUNCIL BUSINESS

The Council considered the detailed recommendations for reconstitution, copies of which had been circulated. The Chairman stated that these were all accepted, with the reservation that the Prime Minister would not necessarily act as Chairman during his attendance at Council meetings. It might be more appropriate for him to attend for specific items.

It was agreed that the regular assessors to the Council should continue to be Dr Quigley and Dr Park, in addition to the Ministry of Commerce representatives, with representatives of other Departments being available as required.



It was also agreed that the arrangements for Council Reports (item 11 of the recommendations) should be referred to the GPC.

Turning to the appointment of the GPC, the Chairman suggested that membership should be about 8 or 9 - ie about the same size as previously - with the possibility of increasing this if required. This was agreed after discussion. The Chairman then explained that, to assist the Council in selecting the Committee, soundings had been taken by the Secretariat and that he understood the following members were prepared to serve if invited:

Mr Agate  
Mr Barr  
Mr Blease  
Mr Foreman  
Mr Grew  
Senator Kennedy  
Mr McAteer  
Mr O'Brien

Professor Wilson was also willing to serve but would be unable to attend every meeting.

Mr Blease proposed, supported by Mr Eitel that these members should form the GPC and this was agreed. The Chairman confirmed that the Ministry's Permanent Secretary Mr A C Brooke would, as requested, act as Chairman.

In further discussion on the operation of the Council and GPC it was confirmed that members would be speaking as individuals, although their experience and standing outside the Council would also enable them on appropriate occasions to represent the views of their particular industry or interest. The Trade Union members confirmed that they too would be expressing individual opinions except on special matters closely concerned with Trade Union policy.

### 3. DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 1970-75

The Chairman referred members to their copies of the Development Programme and Government White Paper which had been circulated and expressed the hope



that the Council, with the wide variety of experience which the members could bring to bear on the economic problems of Northern Ireland, would again examine the Programme in depth and its implementation during the five-year period. Decisions would have to be taken on the precise way in which the Council would maintain contact with the Programme's progress but members should be aware that the official Steering Group which would be co-ordinating and supervising the Programme within the Government machine was now in operation under the chairmanship of Mr Holden, Permanent Secretary to the Ministry of Finance.

The Chairman suggested that there should be close contact between the Steering Group and the Council and assumed that the Council would wish to receive regular reports on progress in the main sectors covered by the Programme and that it would from time to time select particular aspects for special study. Subject to the views of the members he felt it must be left to the General Purposes Committee to make a start on the selection of study items.

The following points were made during the discussion which followed the Chairman's opening remarks:-

- (i) The Trade Union members felt that the Development Programme and the Government White Paper were rather vague in the terms used and that targets were not too clear since they had been woven into the text. It was suggested that there should be a clear statement of the Government's intentions.
- (ii) The Council should produce two graphs showing the differential between the objectives of the Development Programme and the actual progress being made. Reports on this differential could be brief and pertinent.



- (iii) Members were anxious to know whether the Government Statement on the Programme represented Government policy.
- (iv) It was desirable to avoid misleading the public into thinking that the new jobs created were additional - to some extent they would be replacing continuing losses in existing employment.
- (v) The Trade Union members questioned the meaning of paragraph 10 of the Government White Paper regarding the possibility of releasing Sydenham airfield for industry. They expressed concern that in view of the unique position occupied by Sydenham the Government should not consider taking any action which might reduce the labour force already employed in the existing industries there.
- (vi) Reference was made to an assurance given by the previous chairman of the Council regarding the future of Sydenham airport and the Trade Union members asked that the Council should be consulted before the Government takes any steps to release Sydenham airport for industrial or urban development.
- (vii) In answer to a question about the need for separate Government departments for employment and training Dr Quigley said that this had first been recommended in the Wilson Report early in 1965 and that recently changes in the Ministry of Health and Social Services had resulted in the creation of three separate Divisions namely
1. Health Services, 2. Insurance and Miscellaneous Management etc and
  3. Manpower, Industrial Relations and Training which in effect achieved the administrative arrangements implied in the Wilson recommendation: Chapter 15 of the Development Programme 1970-75 referred favourably to the new arrangements.
- (viii) The Trade Union members expressed the desire for representation on or at least consultation about, the LEDU area panels to be appointed.



(ix) It was suggested that Northern Ireland might be losing some useful employment opportunities in the field of decentralisation of UK Government offices. Reference was made to the transfer of the Central Records Office to Newcastle-on-Tyne and Post Office Headquarters to Glasgow. It was agreed that the Secretariat would try to secure information on the record of jobs in Northern Ireland provided directly by UK Government Departments and any other relevant data and the GPC would look into the position and report to the Council.

(x) The Trade Union members referred to the desirability of attracting Government Sponsored research projects to Northern Ireland. This view was supported by Professor Bradley.

Commenting on the above points the Chairman explained that while the Government was guided by its consultants policy was open to adjustment and modification as the Programme evolved. Mr Brooke made the point that there was an established procedure for putting the Council's views to the Government and he emphasised the confidentiality of reports from Government Departments to the Council. Continuing his comments on the points made during the discussion the Chairman said that while it was difficult to predict the extent to which we could make inroads into the persistently high unemployment figure he was reasonably confident that the drift from the declining sectors would be, at least partly, stemmed. Members would appreciate that economic conditions in Great Britain had a direct bearing on the conditions in the Province.

On the future of Sydenham airport the Chairman assured members that the Government would make no move on Sydenham



without the fullest regard for the employment which was dependent upon the airport. Hewas also concerned that the future potential of the central airfield for Civil Aviation should be fully considered.

The Chairman outlined the progress which had been made on the setting up of the new LEDU organisation which he hoped would be in full operation from 1 November. The Secretariat would prepare a paper for the GPC.

#### 4. ECONOMIC SITUATION

The Chairman explained that this was a regular Council Agenda item to allow discussion on the current economic situation. It was usual to start by considering the latest unemployment position and details of the unemployment figures for July and August 1970 had already been circulated to members. Unemployment had risen sharply in July and the rise continued in August. In August the position was also slightly worse as compared with the same time a year ago. However, it was too early to draw any definite conclusions. Dr Park commented that more recent figures would soon be available but that in general the rise seemed to be reflecting a UK trend rather than any particular Northern Ireland condition.

The Chairman referred to his forthcoming meeting with the Minister of Technology on 16 September and assured members that he would keep the Northern Ireland case to the forefront.

Members expressed their concern on the lack of opportunities for school leavers and young people, and suggested that this was a problem which should be tackled with determination.



Dr Quigley commented that there were a number of proposals in the Development Programme on this aspect which he listed as follows:-

- (a) Parity of opportunities with Great Britain in apprentice training;
- (b) Training for young persons at other than the apprentice level; and
- (c) A scheme whereby persons at any age might be attached to companies capable of providing training for them.

The Ministry of Health and Social Services would of course maintain contact with the Council on these points.

The Trade Union members expressed the hope that the number of unfilled vacancies compared with persons unemployed would be reversed and that the Council would clearly state what could be done to achieve this objective. It was agreed that the Council's Press statement on the meeting should refer to the importance of finding work for young people in the Province.

5. ITEMS TO BE REFERRED FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Introducing this item the Chairman explained that the Secretariat had listed the papers which would require study by the GPC including some which had been held over at the last meeting of the previous Council.

The following points were made in discussion:-

- (i) The Trade Union members enquired whether the engineering capital expenditure figure in paper EC/145 included the workshops of Harland & Wolff and Short Bros & Harland. It was thought that they did but the Secretariat undertook to check this point.
- (ii) The Trade Union members expressed concern about the decline in engineering investment.
- (iii) Some doubt was cast on the accuracy of the forecasts of Capital expenditure in manufacturing industry. Mr Mais said that officials



had some reservations about these figures because a change in the intentions of even one large company could seriously upset the estimates. However, Mr Blease felt that it would be preferable to continue submitting these figures to the Council.

- (iv) Professor Bradley asked the Chairman if he could use his visit to the Minister of Technology as an opportunity to request a higher share of research and development projects which could be channelled into industry in Northern Ireland.
- (v) Mr Eitel mentioned that the linen firms were facing the problem of automation and importation of goods from abroad. The industry was striving to see how best they could meet the changing demands of their markets and to become more competitive while retaining the "Irish Textile image".
- (vi) The Trade Union members were anxious to see more investment in the housing programme but unfortunately the new buildings investment figure indicated some slackness in the industry. Mr Brooke, taking up this point, said that he had received a letter from Professor Wilson asking that the Council should look at capital expenditure generally and the housing programme in particular.
- (vii) Commenting on the State Enterprise introductory paper Mr Harkin expressed the hope that it did not intend to suggest that the examination of the structure of the Pigs Marketing Board would be an adequate method of gauging the potential for state enterprises in Northern Ireland.

## 6. OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman invited members to contact the Secretary if they were interested in attending the MDS Conference at Newcastle. He said that at the time of the meeting the Council had been allocated four places. Two of these had been taken



up by Senator Kennedy and Mr Barr and he asked members to contact the Secretary if they were interested in attending the Conference. He referred to the fact that at least two of the members had already made their own arrangements to attend the Conference.

7. PRESS STATEMENT

The attached statement was agreed after discussion.

8. NEXT MEETING

There was some general discussion about the date of the next meeting and it was agreed that Monday was the most suitable day. Monday, 14 December was agreed and it was left open as to whether the meeting should be in the morning or afternoon. The Secretariat would consult the members for their views and would contact the members of the General Purposes Committee to arrange for its first meeting.

October 1970





Issued by the NORTHERN IRELAND INFORMATION SERVICE  
Stormont Castle, Belfast BT4 3ST. Telephone BELFAST 63011

# PRESS RELEASE

The re-constituted Northern Ireland Economic Council held its first meeting today, under the chairmanship of the Minister of Commerce, Mr Roy Bradford.

A special welcome was given to the 14 new members of the now 21-member Council by the Prime Minister who attended the opening of the meeting and expressed the Government's appreciation of the work carried out by the previous Council.

Since its formation the Council had played a key role in the economic development of Northern Ireland, he said, and would continue to do so. He felt confident that the Council would provide invaluable assistance to the Government in economic matters over the next five years.

In his introductory remarks the Chairman emphasised the importance of the work that lay ahead of the Council in the light of the implementation of the Development Programme.

While today's meeting was of an introductory nature with members familiarising themselves with the wide-ranging subjects they will be dealing with in the immediate future, a number of matters were considered. These included the election of a general purposes committee, an initial discussion on the general economic situation and the Development Programme.

The Council strongly endorsed the views expressed in the Consultant's Report that the implementation of the programme will require not only communal calm but a unity of purpose and a firm and resolute determination on the part of all the people to make the plans work.

Commenting on the unemployment situation the Council expressed particular concern on the lack of opportunities for young people and agreed that this was a problem to be tackled with determination.

Following the meeting the Council was entertained to lunch by the Prime Minister.

14 September 1970





*For Economic  
Council file  
please. Hc*

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# PRESS RELEASE

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MAJOR J D CHICHESTER-CLARK DL MP, AT A MEETING OF THE NORTHERN IRELAND ECONOMIC COUNCIL IN PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, STORMONT, ON MONDAY SEPTEMBER 14, 1970, AT 10 00 AM

I regret very much that I cannot stay for the whole of your meeting this morning but I was anxious to take the earliest opportunity of saying how much I and my colleagues appreciate the work of the Council.

I do not think there is any doubt in anyone's mind of the importance of the role which you are playing in the creation of the blueprints for the future of Northern Ireland. That role is not one which attracts headlines or wide publicity. But since the Council was established six years ago it has played an increasingly important part in our economic planning for the future.

There are many ways in which this Council has made its impact on our affairs - in its contributions to the preparation of the Development Programme, in its stimulus to the plans for the future development of Aldergrove Airport.

The Council's substantial contribution to economic development has already been acknowledged in the Government's statement on the Development Programme and I would like to underline again the Government's view that the Council should and will continue to hold its very important place in our affairs.

I would like particularly today to welcome those new members who are here as a consequence of the re-constitution of the Council. I am very pleased and encouraged that you are willing, in spite of your commitments, to give of your time and expertise to the work of the Council. To those of you who are continuing your service I would offer a special word of thanks. The carrying forward of your knowledge and experience of the Council's earlier work will provide the continuity which is a most important asset.

Your agreement to serve for a further term confirms in a practical and encouraging way your belief in the value of the Council's work.



With its new and enlarged membership I believe that the Council is now more than ever equipped to carry out its job of assisting the Government in the economic development programme. Economic development in Northern Ireland has always been a difficult task. We have had our disappointments and our setbacks. The events of recent months have made our job many times harder and it was indeed necessary in the Government Statement on the Development Programme to emphasise that our planning at the present time must involve a large element of faith that we will soon return to an ordered society in which industry and commerce can develop and expand with confidence. It is the firm intention of my colleagues and myself in the Government, with the full support of the United Kingdom Government, to press on on this basis with the economic development programme as fast as humanly possible. I do not see how any responsible person, whatever their political views, could wish otherwise.