

CONFIDENTIAL

EXMIN 74/24

Copy No:

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD AT PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, STORMONT, ON  
MONDAY, 20 MAY 1974 AT 11 15 AM

PRESENT: Mr Faulkner (Chief Minister)  
Mr Fitt (Deputy Chief Minister) (for items 2, 3 and 4)  
Mr Napier (Law Reform)  
Mr Baxter (Information)  
Mr Bradford (Environment)  
Mr Currie (Housing, Local Government and Planning)  
Mr Devlin (Health and Social Services) (for items 2, 3 and 4)  
Mr Hume (Commerce)  
Mr Kirk (Finance)  
Mr McIvor (Education) (for items 2, 3 and 4)  
Mr Morrell (Agriculture)  
Mr I Cooper (Community Relations) (for items 2, 3 and 4)  
Mr R Cooper (Manpower Services)  
Major Hall-Thompson (Chief Whip)  
Mr McGrady (Executive Planning and Co-ordination)

Mr K P Bloomfield )  
Mr P A Sythes ) Secretariat

Mr T M Roberts - Head of Press Services

Dr M Hayes for item 1

A G E N D A

1. Situation Reports
2. Statement by Secretary of State
3. Social Security Benefits - payment of flat rate
4. Sunningdale - Council of Ireland

CONFIDENTIAL

# CONFIDENTIAL

## 1. SITUATION REPORTS

At the invitation of the Chief Minister, Dr Hayes outlined the present situation regarding electricity supplies, health and social services, water supply, sewage disposal and road blocks. In the event of a complete breakdown of power supply essential services could be maintained for 2 to 4 days without serious danger to public health but at some risk to life among the elderly and the sick.

Ministers were generally agreed that alarming as the situation was it would be wise not to attempt to enter into any deal with the strikers but to support the trade unions and, as an Executive, to try to reach agreement on Sunningdale, as a matter of the gravest urgency.

(The meeting adjourned at 12 15 pm and reassembled at 2 30 pm when the Secretary of State accompanied by Mr Frank Cooper and Mr Martin Reid were received.)

## 2. STATEMENT BY SECRETARY OF STATE

The Chief Minister welcomed the Secretary of State and invited him to speak to the Executive.

The Secretary of State read a statement which was to be made by the Minister of State at Westminster that afternoon at 3 30 pm. He went on to explain the background - the road blocks, extra troops on the way and more held in readiness. He reaffirmed that the British Government were prepared to stand firm in support of the Executive. He regarded Sunningdale as a package varying in importance to the different parties. He aimed to make an announcement on law enforcement on Thursday, 23 May summarising the Report, giving the Government's views and promising urgent legislation. He also intended to make a statement on cross-border security. In that sense he would be dealing with one part of Sunningdale. He asked therefore that the Executive should, as a matter of extreme urgency, deal with their part. He also asked that whatever the Executive agreed it was prepared to do when Sunningdale came into being, should be announced immediately. If an announcement were to be delayed it would be seen, when it did appear, as a victory for others. He hoped to assemble the various parts of Sunningdale during the following fortnight. He asked that there should be no disclosure of these intentions.

(The Secretary of State, Mr Cooper and Mr Martin then left the meeting.)

3. SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS - PAYMENT OF FLAT RATE

The Minister of Health and Social Services explained the problems caused by the flood of new applications for benefit accentuated by shortages of staff because of inability to get to their offices. He asked for approval to introduce whatever legislation was required to enable flat rate payments.

Decided that the Minister of Health and Social Services should be authorised to introduce whatever legislation was necessary, whether by regulation or Measure, or both, to enable flat rate payments of social benefits to be made while the emergency lasted.

4. SUNNINGDALE - COUNCIL OF IRELAND

Ministers discussed at length the merits and demerits of proceeding urgently to reach agreement and make an announcement. On the one hand it was argued that any agreement and announcement now would be seen as the direct result of pressure by the Ulster Workers Council. Against this it was argued that the Executive had already discussed the points in great detail during the course of several meetings, had now before it a report from the Sub-Committee and should be moving to decisions. It was also argued that support for the strike was based on a false understanding of Sunningdale. Once this had been removed by a clear agreed statement from the Executive support for the strikers would diminish. On this basis Ministers then considered the report from the Sub-Committee.

At the Chief Minister's request the Secretary summarised the agreements so far. These were:-

- (a) that Sunningdale should be implemented in two phases, the first being to appoint a Council of Ministers, and the second to come into effect only after a Test of Opinion of the Northern Ireland electorate which would be the results of the next general election for the Assembly due in 1977/78;
- (b) that the wording of paragraph 2 of the Sub-Committee's report (EXMEMO 89/74) would be the basis for the Council of Ministers.

Before consideration of the social and economic matters to be dealt with by the Council of Ministers, attention was given to the form of Secretariat which would service the Council. After discussion it was agreed that the

# CONFIDENTIAL

following wording should be adopted:

"For the purpose of servicing meetings of the Council of Ministers and for the efficient discharge of its business, it shall appoint staff on secondment from the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government."

Ministers envisaged meetings taking place at alternate venues North and South, and staff disposed accordingly.

(At this point the meeting adjourned until 5 pm to enable up-to-date reports on the strike situation to be received by Ministers from their Departments.)

On reassembling Ministers considered the list of social and economic matters to be dealt with by the Council of Ministers. It was agreed that the general headings, with amendments, should be used for the purposes of the formal agreement, and that the detailed paragraphs, with amendments, should be used for amplification and explanation.

It was also agreed that the Council of Ministers would be given responsibilities for human rights and policing, as set out in paragraphs 11 and 15 of the Communique, and that the remaining steps towards implementation of the Communique should be taken in Phase 2.

During further discussion the question of harmonisation was raised and it was accepted that this concept would flow naturally from the work of the Council of Ministers.

The Secretariat was instructed to prepare a paper, urgently, embodying the agreements reached, for final approval at a meeting the following day at 12 noon.

Office of the Executive  
Stormont

23 May 1974