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EXMIN 74/31

Copy No:

MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 27 MAY 1974 AT 4.45 PM IN
PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS, STORMONT

PRESENT:

Mr Faulkner (Chief Minister)
Mr Fitt (Deputy Chief Minister)
Mr Napier (Law Reform)
Mr Baxter (Information)
Mr Currie (Housing, Local Government and Planning)
Mr Hume (Commerce)
Mr Kirk (Finance)
Mr McIvor (Education)
Mr Morrell (Agriculture)

Mr K P Bloomfield)
Mr P A Sythes) Secretariat

Mr T M Roberts - Head of Press Services

A G E N D A

1. The Emergency Situation

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1. THE EMERGENCY SITUATION

The Minister of Commerce reported that three plants were working at Ballylumford and that talks were taking place with staff. If these failed it was hoped that senior staff could manage to keep one of the plants in operation. Gas supplies in the Belfast area were now cut off but minimum pressure, for safety reasons, was being maintained.

A message from Mr Elease was discussed and action was agreed on each of the points as follows:

- (a) Information Operations Room - the Minister of Information had already acted to get this going and to make use of local offices of the Department of Health and Social Services.
- (b) Hourly bulletins - to be put in hand in conjunction with the BBC.
- (c) Fire Brigade - special arrangements notified to Mr Kernohan of the Fire Service for allocation of petrol to essential maintenance staff.
- (d) Baby foods and diabetic foods - information to be put out to overcome local shortages.
- (e) Falls - takeover of food distribution by IRA. The Minister of Agriculture was asked to explore the possibility of counter action by his Department.

In further discussion Ministers were invited to refer to the Chief Minister any suggestion whereby Ministers who were not directly affected by the situation might be asked to help other Ministers who were.

The Chief Minister then referred to the oil plan and the need to ensure that continuous information should be given about it to the public, and that it should be continuously presented as the Executive's plan to ensure maintenance of an essential service, not as an instrument of strike-breaking. Messages were coming in from an increasing number of sources - employers, the Farmers' Union and influential people in all walks of life asking that there should be some communication with the strikers. He had just that morning attended the final part of a meeting of the Permanent Secretaries and had received a factual appraisal of the state of the services for which Departments were responsible.

It seemed to him in the light of the messages coming in and of the situation reports now available that the Executive needed to look ahead. If it became a choice

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between talking and allowing the economy of the Province to collapse the Executive could be forced to talk from a weaker position. It was his view that the Executive should consider the use of some independent body or person to establish the facts of the situation and the attitudes of the people involved.

There was further discussion during which Ministers generally supported the suggestion that some way should be found to communicate with the strikers. It was emphasised however that care would have to be taken to ensure that the Executive did not appear to be weakening the position taken by the Secretary of State, nor to be paving the way for the IRA to press successfully for talks with them.

The Secretary suggested a form of statement to be issued immediately by the Executive. With some amendments to meet the wishes of individual Ministers, this was agreed as follows:

The Northern Ireland Executive met this afternoon to consider the present situation.

The Executive received reports on the steps taken to implement their decision to establish under effective Government control a system for the storage and distribution of petrol and oil to essential users, and welcomed the strong support received from the UK Government in putting this system into effect. It was the clear duty of the Government to maintain and protect essential services.

Ministers noted with satisfaction the continued reiteration by the UK Government of its unswerving support for the system of power-sharing guaranteed by the Constitution Act. They stressed that - despite any false impression to the contrary - they and indeed the Parties represented in the Coalition were and always had been prepared to discuss any political matter within their competence with other elected representatives.

Any absence of dialogue between elected members of the Assembly was not to be laid at the Executive's door.

Office of the Executive
Stormont

30 May 1974

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