

Note of a meeting of Permanent Secretaries held in Mr Kidd's room, Stormont Castle at 5.00 pm on Thursday 5 May 1977

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Present:-

Mr Kidd

Mr Bell

Mr Finney

Mr Bloomfield

Mr Irvine

Mr Brooke

Mr Darwin

Mr Dugdale

Mr Roberts

Mr Palmer

1. General Situation

Mr Kidd reported on the general and continuing improvement in attendance at work. It was significant that the tanker drivers had decided to work normally tomorrow. The Ballylumford management and workforce had held a "confused" meeting this morning. The workers had seen the UUAC this afternoon and their meeting with the Secretary of State had just begun. The signs were reasonably hopeful that there might be an early end to the stoppage.

2. Harland and Wolff

Mr Kidd reported that Mr Tinkler had telephoned DMS to say that a number of cars in the Harland and Wolff had been damaged by vandals. It was suggested that DOC might consider making ex gratia payments to Harland and Wolff to cover the company's payments to employees for <sup>malicious</sup> damage to cars on Harland and Wolff premises. It was agreed that Commerce should urgently contact the company to explain the position and that the company should announce publicly that, as good employers they, the company, would be making good any such losses suffered by their employees. It was also suggested that Harland and Wolff might wish to look again to their own security arrangements. Mr Irvine left the meeting to convey these views to Commerce.

The question of compensation in relation to damage caused to employees' cars outside employers' premises was briefly discussed. As regards civil servants, it had been agreed that it would be within Departmental discretion to decide whether ex gratia payments should be made.

3. Larne Harbour

Mr Bloomfield reported that British Rail had seriously been considering re-running ships into Larne, but had been deterred because there were no visible signs of a security presence in the town. Pickets had managed to "get at" the harbour workforce before they had had the opportunity to convene a meeting, which would probably have resulted in a vote to return to work. The workforce might still, however, be prepared to brave the pickets, if they were confident that the security forces would back them up. It was confirmed that there was an Army presence in Larne.

4. Social Security

Mr Dugdale gave a brief sitrep. There would be no unemployment benefit paid to those signing on the Register this week until Thursday or Friday of next week. Local Offices were asking claimants some fairly pointed questions about their reasons for claiming benefit. DHSS would also be maintaining a hard line on supplementary benefit tomorrow; no benefit would be paid this weekend save in very exceptional circumstances, as the vast majority of supplementary benefit claimants would have their "lying week" to tide them over; others would have an entitlement to guarantee payments. DHSS were monitoring the volume of new claims to try to establish what proportion of new claims were directly attributable to voluntary closures of firms by employers. At present it appeared that there would be an excess of 10,000 new claims over and above the normal weekly intake (cf 200,000 new claims during the 1974 "UWC" strike). It was hoped to have some statistics tomorrow. DHSS were, however, dependent on other Departments, particularly Manpower Services and Commerce, to identify those firms which had closed because employers were supporting the strike. In these cases the liability for the financial support of the workforce should if possible be firmly placed on the employer; they should not be allowed to shelter behind the social security system. A reminder to such firms about their obligations under the guarantee payment provisions of the Industrial Relations legislation would be helpful.

Mr Finney pointed out that it would not be a simple matter to distinguish between firms which had closed in support of the strike and those which had closed for genuine reasons. The road haulage industry had already been pressing for assurances that they "would not lose out of the strike"

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because they had been unable to provide work for their staff. Firms were likely to resist making guarantee payments. The Industrial Relations legislation would moreover have no real immediate clout; the only recourse workers had in cases where firms were in breach of the law was to an industrial tribunal which would meet after the strike was over.

Mr Dugdale referred to the effects of the disruption to postal deliveries in Coleraine on the dissemination of social security benefits. There was a prospect, however, that the Coleraine postmen might return to work tomorrow.

5. Other points raised by Permanent Secretaries

- (i) Mr Bloomfield reported that the problem at the Killylane Water Station had been resolved satisfactorily after the Manager had spoken to the workforce. Water was once again being pumped from the station to Ballylumford.
- (ii) Mr Darwin referred to a petition which had been circulating in one Government Department by a group calling itself the Labour and Trade Union Liaison Group, (a Marxist fringe group), exhorting civil servants to call on ICTU to organise mass demonstrations throughout NI in opposition to the strike. Staff side had, however, effectively "killed" the petition.
- (iii) It was agreed that there was no reason at the moment why visitors from GB, who had been invited to speak at various Government sponsored functions, should not be encouraged to fulfil those engagements. The situation should of course be kept under review.
- (iv) It would not be prudent to be over-sanguine about an early ending to the stoppage. Intimidation was still widespread especially on building sites and at outside work operations generally. Farrons, the construction firm, had agreed that there are still real problems of intimidation on building sites. The UUAC and their supporters were likely to increase activity over the week-end; Monday morning would give a good indication of the way the strike was going.
- (v) Finally there was no doubt that many people in the community

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were in opposition to the strike because of the method used rather than the aims behind it. In general people placed more importance on a tightening of security rather than <sup>on</sup> the implementation of the Convention Report, though there was still some unease about the current political situation.

From:

- Mr Kidd
- Mr Finney
- Mr Moorfield
- Mr Irving
- Mr Brown
- Mr Darwin
- Mr Lyall
- Mr Roberts
- Mr Palmer

M. T. H. Maxwell

M T H MAXWELL

PS/Mr Kidd

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2. Barford and Wolff

Mr Kidd reported that Mr Tindler had telephoned the office that a number of cars in the garage had been damaged by vandals. It was suggested that the office should consider making ex gratia payments to Barford and Wolff to cover the company's payments to employees for damage to cars on Barford and Wolff premises. It was agreed that the company should urgently contact the garage to explain the position and that the company should announce publicly that it was a good employer.

- cc Those present
- PS/PUS
- Mr Pritchard
- Dr Quigley
- Mr Shimeld
- Mr Ford

The question of compensation in relation to damage to employees' cars outside employees' premises was briefly discussed. As regards civil servants, it was noted that it would be within managerial discretion to decide whether ex gratia payments should be made.

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