

Paul

E.R.

Ref: NIOM (81) 6th Meeting

NOTE OF A MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY, 30 OCTOBER 1981
IN THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

Present: Mr Marshall - Chairman

Mr Blelloch
Mr Angel
Mr Burns
Mr Harrington
Miss Christopherson
Mr Burrows
Mr Fisher
Mr Bates

NIO

Mr Miller
Mr Jackson
Col Morton
Lt Col Bateman
Maj Hughes

Ministry of Defence

Mr Facer

Cabinet Office

Security

1. With the ending of the hunger strike, public disorder - which had already diminished - had virtually ceased. Terrorism continued, however, and was now focussed on attacks on the security forces, sectarian killings and a resumption of bomb attacks in Great Britain. On the positive side one group of sectarian killers had been caught and there had been examples of good and (equally important) well publicised co-operation between the RUC and the Garda over the Dunne kidnapping and the incident at Rosslea in which two men were arrested in the Republic, having planted a wire-controlled bomb across the border. The campaign against plastic baton rounds would probably continue, although their use had diminished greatly. No significant difference existed between the instructions relating to their use in England and Wales and those in

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Northern Ireland and the RUC were reviewing the specification of their/^{weapons.}
In two fatal cases under investigation, the Director of Public Prosecutions had found no grounds for prosecution; five other fatality cases were still being dealt with, 3 concerning children. It was pointed out that the IRA had a vested interest in these investigations proving inconclusive and that, therefore, they or their sympathisers put pressure on potential witnesses not to co-operate. Charges for rioting might be brought against some witnesses,^{and} it was being alleged that this was deliberately intended to deter witnesses/^{from} coming forward.

Prisons

2. Measures taken after the end of the hunger strike had been generally welcomed by Catholics but the Protestant response had not altogether been a helpful one. The issue of prisoners' own clothing was now virtually complete. There appeared to have been no attempt to adopt paramilitary uniform. Over the next two or three weeks each prisoner would be interviewed as part of an assessment programme and would, as far as possible, be offered a choice of work - although the final decision would remain in the Governor's hands. Brendan MacFarlane would be among the first to be so assessed. The last day of the 28-day moratorium would be Monday 2 November. The first prisoners to be adjudicated upon after that date would be subject to a revised, and less onerous, scale of loss of privileges.

3. The ICRC report had been received just before the end of the hunger strike, and the Government was committed to publishing it in full. Although it was no secret that the report had been received, there had been little or no outside interest in the Government's plans for publication. It was unlikely to cause a significant problem.

SECRET

Economy

4. Unemployment was unchanged from the previous month at 19.2%; while no large-scale closures were threatened in the immediate future, the longer term prospects did not give any grounds for optimism. The new Secretary of State's known belief in the importance of economic progress was a useful psychological factor, though there was also a risk that too high expectations would be aroused. On the subject of Kinsale gas, the price of the imported gas would be the crucial factor in the scheme's viability. It was hoped that, following the Anglo-Irish Summit, there would be a meeting of Energy Ministers from the North and the Republic to discuss pricing. A gas pipeline would be susceptible to attack, but it would be less vulnerable than the electricity interconnector, and might present a less attractive target to terrorists since its disruption would have a direct impact on the lives of both sections of the community in Northern Ireland. With regard to the alleged financial improprieties at the De Lorean Motor Company no evidence had been found of activities of a criminal nature, nor which might reflect on the way in which public money had been handled.

Constitutional and Political

5. The Secretary of State had announced his decision not to proceed with a Northern Ireland Council for the time being. He had had extensive talks with political leaders but he had not come to any positive decisions on political developments, though he had decided that a return to the old-style Stormont, or full scale integration with the United Kingdom, were not desirable. Earlier attempts at power-sharing had not succeeded. Amongst the possibilities he wished to look at further were the question of whether some powers could be

given to District Councils; and the possibility of an economic forum (on the basis that it might be less difficult for local politicians to work together fruitfully on economic matters than it currently was on political ones). A change in attitudes was needed.

Anglo-Irish Discussions

6. A Summit Meeting was to take place the following week and the Secretary of State had been to Dublin on 20 October for a preparatory meeting. The Irish were keen to set up some inter-Governmental structure, and some inter-Parliamentary grouping; and there was a wish on their part for the UK to put a positive gloss on the essentially negative formulation of the "guarantee". There was also pressure for an All-Ireland Court, and the Summit might remit this idea to the Attorneys General of the two countries. The Taoiseach was expected to press for the five joint studies to be published. The UK's initial view had been that the Summary Report only should be published, but sanitised versions of the 5 reports had been prepared. The meeting was likely to be fruitful.

SIL DIVISION

3 November 1981

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