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Prime Minister
You could discuss
with the Northern
Ireland Security
Committee.

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PRIME MINISTER

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29/4.

CONTINGENCY PLANNING

minutes -
checked.

Following our discussion in OD(I) on 4 March, I was invited to review our contingency planning against the possibility of further industrial disruption for political purposes in Northern Ireland. I thought that you and colleagues would find it helpful to be aware of our plans, particularly the MACM element, and I attach a memorandum which briefly summarises the position. Although the current Unionist plans do not involve such action, it is always possible that the Co-ordinating Committee may revert to this tactic.

2. Covert planning has been taken as far as possible, but it would be unwise to go outside the Government machine until we have some real prospect of trouble of this kind. Any approach to outside bodies is likely to leak, and its purpose would be distorted in the province. Despite the present security situation, and the recent vicious campaign by Protestants against the RUC, there are no definite signs at this stage of any further day of action on the lines of 3 March, and still less of any longer stoppage which the plans are designed to confront.

3. In the last resort, the MACM plans could be vital to demonstrate the Government's determination, and I am grateful to MOD and HQNI for the time and effort they have devoted to them. Colleagues may note that our arrangements differ slightly from those in GB. We do not have MACM plans for the Health Service, or for the distribution throughout the province of essential supplies. In the first case, the largest health facilities have standby generators, and maintain reserve of fuel and other supplies; non-essential service can be readily reduced; and past experience indicates that a good staff turnout can be expected. In the second, the movement of supplies province-wide would represent

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an enormous additional MACM bill, and bring an equally difficult security and escort problem with it. We have concluded therefore that while troops would move supplies from the docks to distribution centres, it would then be for private industry to undertake local distribution or for the population to come to the centres to collect essential items.

4. At the same time colleagues should be aware both of the limitations of MACM and of the heavy reinforcements they would entail. The availability of senior and technical management is critical, since even technically qualified troops could do little in a sophisticated plant such as power stations without their direction; there will always be a fine line to be drawn between using troops to maintain a basic service, and provoking the closure of the service we are seeking to protect. A careful judgement has to be made that we neither antagonise management, particularly its technical arm, so that they withdraw from supervision, nor provoke the workforce to sabotage installations as they leave. Within these constraints, MACM can provide sufficient to keep life going on, albeit at a spartan level, although it is unlikely that the effort could be maintained from more than 3 weeks. The cost in terms of military manpower would be heavy: some 7000 extra men if all the contingency plans had to be implemented together. This total is additional to any further reinforcement which might be required for the RUC in performing public order duties. I am very conscious of the difficulties which demands of this order would create for the Ministry of Defence.

5. MACM alone can never be enough in the face of widespread opposition, disorder, and intimidation. The key issues therefore remain those which Douglas Hurd identified last year, of public order and information. In both fields we have to seize and hold the initiative. I have of course discussed the lessons of 3 March in general terms with the Chief Constable and GOC. I think that they accept that their approach to a longer-term stoppage would need to be different from the containment policy which might be appropriate for a 24-hour strike, and I shall reinforce that message if at any time it appears that longer term disruption is possible. Key routes, for example, will have to be held open, but we must be under no illusion of the difficulties. The events of 3 March showed that while many people wished to go about their normal business, there were many others prepared to take extreme measures to stop them. The outcome then, and the further disturbances on Easter Monday and subsequently have certainly given some of the population cause to stop and think, but we should be unwise to rely on this factor alone in the face of widespread harassment and intimidation which the security forces will never be able to curtail everywhere simultaneously.

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6. This adds point to the need for a planned and sustained information effort before and during any prolonged disruption. I would only add that the day of action on 3 March revealed some gaps in our arrangements to collect, evaluate, distribute and use information quickly and accurately. We have overhauled our machine and made improvements where necessary.

7. Copies of this minute go to the other members of OD(I) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

NJWand
(Private Secretary)

for TK

(Approved by the Secretary
of State and signed in
his absence in Northern
Ireland)

29 April 1986

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CONTINGENCY PLANNING

1. This note summarises the contingency plans which exist to combat the impact of withdrawal of labour from various industrial services in Northern Ireland arising from opposition to the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Electricity Service

2. The Department of Economic Development's plan covers four phases. Phase 1 includes setting up control and information centres, maintaining close liaison with the Northern Ireland Electricity Service, alerting HQNI and the police to the situation, reviewing draft Emergency Regulations, up-dating information on industries which are particularly vulnerable to supply disruptions and keeping them informed of the supply situation. Phase 2 comprises a continuous evaluation of the supply and demand position and a PR exercise on supply conservation. Phase 3 includes deciding whether and how far to implement progressive restrictions, which would involve adoption of Emergency Powers. Phase 4 means requesting Ministers via the Northern Ireland Emergency Committee (NIEC) to introduce Emergency Powers covering:-

- a. prohibition of use of electricity for advertising;
- b. restrictions on use for water and space heating by domestic and commercial users;
- c. restrictions on use for industrial purposes.

3. The Department would keep HQNI informed continuously of the situation via the NIEC network so that a review of the need for the introduction of MACM support could be begun at the earliest opportunity. Full scale introduction of the MACM requirements would involve 455 specialist servicemen and

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550 ordinary servicemen and a lead in time of 14 days. In essence the MACM plan will only operate if sufficient technical and managerial staff remain to operate the control and switching equipment.

Fuel and Oil Supplies

4. The Department of Economic Development's objective would be to maintain supplies of petrol and oil to previously identified essential bulk users, individual users under a permit scheme and other individual users with genuine needs. This objective would be attained in the first instance by retaining in use for as long as possible the commercial system. The Department would however expect to have to move swiftly to requisition the oil storage depots, the road tanker fleet and 24 petrol filling stations around the province, and to set up permit centres for essential users.

5. The requisitioning would take place under the Emergency Regulations and it would be under this legislation that the MACM plan would be introduced should it prove necessary. The introduction of the MACM plan would involve 473 specialist servicemen and 1144 ordinary servicemen and a lead in time of 14 days. Their main tasks would be to man a storage depot(s) and to deliver to distribution centres. Servicemen would operate the gantry pumping equipment, the distribution tankers and the petrol stations.

Water and Sewage Services

6. The Department of Environment (Northern Ireland) has a direct responsibility for these service, which may be threatened by lack of electricity, and/or oil supplies, and by withdrawal of labour. The objective of the Department would be to maintain supplies as long as possible depending upon the circumstances pertaining at the time.



7. The Department would set up a control room for monitoring the situation. Services would not be seriously affected for a few days unless electricity supplies were cut completely and also staff were totally unavailable. Electricity is essential to the pumping of many water supplies, but the majority of major water abstraction plants have standby generation equipment. Nevertheless, the loss of electrical power, coupled with bad weather, could lead to sewage flooding, the severity of which would vary according to the conditions. Remedial action would be taken where possible.

8. Previous experience shows that the water and sewage services could be maintained for an extended period provided some technically qualified staff and some electricity and fuel supplies were available. At the same time the Department would keep HQNI informed via the NIEC machinery and thus would be in a position to recommend a call for MACM assistance should it prove necessary. Widescale use of the MACM arrangements would involve 171 specialist servicemen and 240 ordinary servicemen and would involve a lead in time of 14 days. They would man the essential water pumping stations and sewage treatment plant. The servicemen would operate alongside management in the water treatment plants and sewage pumping stations.

Docks

9. The Department of Economic Development is responsible for implementation of plans for the Docks. Phase 1 of their plan includes setting up control and information centres, checking the validity of existing lists and stock position of priority supplies in conjunction with MAFF, the fuel industry, and the Area Health Boards, and reviewing the draft Emergency Regulations. Phase 2 includes monitoring the supply and demand situation and mounting a publicity campaign on conservation of food stocks. Phase 3 includes considering with the appropriate authorities and the NIEC



whether supplies need to be controlled. Phase 4 covers the possible introduction of the Emergency Regulations and subsequently the possible use of the MACM arrangements. Full scale MACM arrangements would involve 194 specialist servicemen and 70 ordinary servicemen and a lead in time of 14 days. Their function would be to unload cargo and deliver it to a distribution point or points.

The Fire Service

10. Fire Service operations depend on the availability of manpower, fuel and water supplies. Minor outbreaks of fire can be extinguished from tender storage; larger conflagrations require mains water or river/sewer access. Should staff fail to report locally a degree of cover can be provided by adjacent stations; however, if this occurred on a significant scale it would be necessary to introduce the MACM arrangements. This would involve the use of the "yellow goddesses" rather than existing equipment. The MACM arrangements would involve 810 specialist servicemen and 550 ordinary servicemen and would require a lead in time of 14 days.

Roads Service

11. The Roads Service in Northern Ireland is directly under the control of the Department of Environment (NI). The Department through its Roads Services has plans for clearing roads under normal emergency situations - storms, snow, flooding, oil spillage, etc. In civil contingency situations these plans are dependent upon the willingness or otherwise of staff to act in particular circumstances.

12. In the light of certain difficulties which emerged on 3 March, local contingency plans have been made for the Army to assist in road clearance.



Other Important Services

13. The essential arrangements in the Health Service rest in the hands of the Area Health Boards. There are no MACM plans in this area, since -

- a) all facilities with a significant residential population are equipped with standby generators, and reserves of fuel, supplies and consumables are maintained;
- b) non-essential services can be readily reduced; and
- c) past experience, including that on 3 March, indicates that a good turn-out of staff, particularly on the ambulance side, can be expected.

The Department of Health and Social Services (NI) has arrangements to monitor the situation, and formal arrangements exist for voluntary ambulance organisations and the police to offer assistance.

14. Transport is in the hands of private operators and is dependent upon manpower and on the longer term fuel supplies. The Department of Environment (NI) monitors the situation via its control room and provides information to the public as to the availability of services.

15. Air transport is dependent upon air traffic controllers and fire cover. (Neither were withdrawn on 3 March). The RAF have contingency plans to bring in service control and fire staff to maintain military fixed wing aircraft operations, and even if necessary to operate from RAF Bishopscourt.

16. The difficulties on 3 March arose from the action of the airlines in suspending their services because of a combination of shortage of tarmac staff and low passenger demand. DOE(NI) has already held a meeting with the airlines and NIO to ensure better



communication and consultation, and a more co-ordinated response. The RUC are now fully conscious of the need to keep open the single access road to Aldergrove airport.

MACM Arrangements

17. There are as identified earlier six MACM plans appropriate to the Province and in total these would involve 2103 specialist servicemen and 3116 ordinary servicemen. In present circumstances, the overall requirement would be of the order of 7000 men, since the present security situation is such that HQNI would not themselves be able to make the contribution implicit in the plans. The overall lead in time would be dependent upon which plans were invoked first and the extent of the plans adopted.

18. The availability of senior civilian manpower is critical. Senior and technical management can do a surprising amount towards maintaining a degree of normality - though not a normal service - but defections from their ranks would leave us critically exposed. There will always be a political balance to be struck between using troops to maintain a basic service and provoking full closure of the service we are trying to protect. The introduction of troops might even lead to sabotage by the outgoing workforce.

19. Within these constraints, MACM can provide sufficient to keep life going on, albeit at a spartan level. But it is expensive in numbers, and the cumulative effect of more than one plan at the same time is serious. It is unlikely that the MACM effort could be maintained for more than 3 weeks.

Prisons

20. One further point should be borne in mind. Should the POA withdraw their labour in circumstances of political disruption, when

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the RUC would be unable to offer assistance, military manpower would be the only answer. This would represent the biggest single call on military resources, and would be in addition to the MACM demands. At present, however, there are no signs that Prison Officers would associate themselves with a political stoppage, and indeed their turnout on 3 March was virtually complete.

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