

PS/PUS (L & B)

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UUAC
LESSONS FROM THE STRIKE

Having received comments from many sources on the first draft attached to my minute of 19 May, I now submit a note on the active lessons to be learned in policy and organisational terms from the experience of combating the UUAC strike. I would not pretend that I have satisfied every representation that I have received; but any such shortcomings can be brought out in the course of the discussion which PUS has said he intends to hold early next week.

PWJ Buxton

PWJ BUXTON
25 May 1977

LESSONS FROM THE STRIKE

INTRODUCTION

This note deals with the following topics in some detail:

- I. Intelligence
- II. Security Forces
- III. MACM Planning
- IV. The Power Stations
- V. Petrol and Fuel Oil Supplies
- VI. Aldergrove
- VII. Harbours
- VIII. Management
- IX. Trade Unions
- X. Prisons
- XI. The Law
- XII. Intimidation
- XIII. Post Office
- XIV. Social Security
- XV. Food and Agriculture
- XVI. Public Relations
- XVII. Political Activity
- XVIII. Special Security Meetings
- XIX. Emergency Steering Committee
- XX. The Emergency Committee
- XXI. The NIO Operations Room

The lessons as such are scarcely a matter for generalisation. But some broad points can be made. We prepared for an intense crisis (level 3 in the categories established after the 1974 strike); but in the event it was quite mild (level 1). On the

other hand 11 days would have been a long time for a stoppage that built up at all quickly to a level 3 intensity. The chief importance of this is that the government's strategy was throughout applied primarily to preventing the stoppage from becoming more intense. It is likely that that will be the primary strategy in any other stoppage. The weapons in this battle are chiefly political; the elaborate plans that we lay for the worst case are the sanction against ever being pushed there (rather like nuclear weapons). This seems worth saying in case the gee-whizz school of thought, which becomes mesmerised by the subtlety and ramification of planning, should tend to get out of control. This is dangerous not only because it obscures the political objectives but because it ignores the detrimental effect which the introduction of one plan (admirable for its limited purpose) is likely to have on the rest of the spectrum. (Illustratively, in the present case, if we had had to take over the supply of petrol and oil, we could not have hoped to hold Ballylumford any longer, and industrial workers would have begun to fall away even faster than the loss of power to their factories). Such considerations must be in the forefront of our minds as we go about refining the MACM plans.

2. The second general point is that to the end we found no way of counteracting the intensive intimidation - of a moral rather than physical description - to which the Protestant working population was subjected. To the extent that this was a magnification of a prevailing condition of life in Northern Ireland, it is an evil that we have been wrestling with and will continue to. But that

will be a slow business, the disease having grown endemic, and we must give further thought to antidotes to this more virulent manifestation. Antidotes may be either psychological (through the media and by political exhortation) or physical (through the law). A complementary issue to that is whether means could not be found under the law to deter the organisers of such stoppages as this one from conspiring together to bring industry to a halt. The pre-stoppage UUAC press advertisements were considered from this point of view, but it was not thought that they made their promoters liable to prosecution. Perhaps this is too liberal a state of affairs. This aspect will assume the more importance if the extremists opposed to the government resort, as Paisley himself has threatened, to short-term 24 or 48 hour strikes, which will be no less damaging to the well-being of the economy for the fact that they will be too short-lived for us to implement any counter-action against them.

3. Most of the lessons noted in what follows are for absorption (if accepted) rather than specific action. But a number of points call for specific action now, and they are listed below:

Points for Action

1. MACM Plan for power stations to be studied with a view to obtaining a higher level of power generation & through prior training a higher standard of technical ability amongst the engineers concerned (IV. 3)

Div 1(B)/Commerce/HQNI

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2. Possibility of securing sensitive electrical installations that may be sabotaged (IV. 4)

Div 1(B)/Commerce/HQNI/RUC

3. Petrol and fuel supplies:

- (a) MACM plan to be further revised to permit a variety of possible supply alternatives, on a 'building block' principle (V. 1)

Div 1(B)/Commerce/HQNI

- (b) Army/Civil Service relationship at petrol stations to be clarified (V. 2)

Div 1(B)/Commerce/DOCS/HQNI

- (c) Locality of licensing centres and their security to be settled (V. 3)

Div 1(B)/Commerce/DOCS/HQNI/RUC

- (d) Plan for better security for tankers and drivers to be worked up (in the light of drivers' current attitude) (V. 4)

Div 1(B)/Commerce/HQNI/RUC

4. Aldergrove: understanding regarding limits of RAF assistance to civil airports to be clarified (VI)

Div 1(B)/DOE/HQNI

5. Possibility of Army assistance in running RO-RO harbour installations to be investigated (VII)

Div 1(B)/Commerce/DOE/HQNI

6. Effectiveness of the law, especially against intimidation, to be further studied (XI)
Div 9(B)/Div 3(L)/Legal Advisers/EUC
7. Possibilities of deterring intimidation by telephone to be further pursued with GPO (XII. 3)
Div. 1(B)
8. Intimidation issues generally to be taken up by Steering Group on Economic Activities of Paramilitaries (XII. 4)
DUS(B)/Div 1(B)
9. Difficulties in post office, affecting pensions, etc, to be pursued with GPO (XIII)
Div 1(B)
10. Plans for emergency benefit scheme to be further refined (XIV. 1)
Div 2(L)/DHSS
11. Problems of strain to the service to be looked at in the light of experience (XIV. 2)
Div. 2(L)/DHSS
12. Plans for modification of milk distribution scheme to be considered (XV. 1)
Div. 2(L)/MAFF/DANI
13. Arrangements to safeguard bulk food depots to be defined (XV. 2)
Div. 2(L)/MAFF/DANI
14. Adequacy of departmental and agency information arrangements in conditions of intense crisis, to be examined (XVI. 3)
Inf. Serv./Commerce/DOE/DHSS/DANI

15. Plan for Public Information Centre to be properly developed (XVI. 4)

Inf.Serv./Div 1(B)

16. Departmental emergency plans, including draft regulations, to be studied again for present-day adequacy (XX. 2)

Emergency Committee

17. Role of NIO Ops Room in relation to a still fully functioning government machine to be looked at (XXI. 3)

Div. 1(B)

I. INTELLIGENCE

On 19 April when the UUAC was presumably still debating its timetable, we had warning that action was likely at a somewhat more distant date: after the 18 May election. We were also informed almost immediately after the UUAC had taken its decision to start the stoppage on 3 May. This hard information gave us seven days in which to plan; this enabled us to get all the MACM troops into position only 24 hours after the action had begun. If it had begun with a bang, that would have cut it very fine. On the evidence we had, the army could not have speeded up the arrival of the MACM troops, especially the most crucial ones (those for the power stations). But the converse of this is that the short time scale carried its own penalty for the UUAC: they were not sufficiently prepared to start with a bang; and the intelligence showed that it was not their intention to do so.

2. Throughout the stoppage, insofar as the NIO was concerned, intelligence was full - and adequate - in respect of paramilitary and political intentions. There was also some intelligence about industrial situations although this is not really an intelligence target and we relied more on information from the managements concerned, conspicuously the NI electricity service. The intelligence did however cover the aims of the UUAC in regard to industrial stoppages. SB and Army intelligence also provided a full and detailed service of operational intelligence to commanders at all levels.

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3. Information about the state of given industries, and in particular the degree of UUAC infiltration of work force 'representative' delegations, was sometimes lacking to an extent that put us at a disadvantage in negotiation. Though not a proper intelligence target, this is an area where better coverage seems desirable from whatever sources are available at the time.

II. THE SECURITY FORCES

In the preparatory period, we were concerned that the army build-up, while conspicuous enough to comfort the faithful, should not be so large as to offend the wavering. We were probably not far off the mark. The internal security battalions arrived soon enough to prepare themselves for any action that might be immediately necessary, but no sooner. None of this can be a precise guide for the future - except as a warning.

2. The principle was established early that the troops should keep a low profile, and be treated accordingly by the Information Services; and should be kept in reserve for use only if the RUC should need support.

3. The MACM troops were accommodated as follows:

Lisburn HQ

Moscow Barracks, Belfast 379

Palace Barracks, Holywood 228

St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena 144

Shackleton Barracks, Ballykelly 131

Maze 326

After a few days conditions allowed them to be sent out more widely, and they accomplished a number of useful tasks eg speeding up mortar-protection construction in a number of unit bases, building a squash court and additional dog kennels at Maze, a Bailey bridge in the Belfast Dock area, and repairs to the RNR ship HMS Caroline. It is clear that if morale is not to suffer, occupations must be found for the troops while they are waiting to take on their specialist tasks.

4. The point was made firmly at an early stage, both to the forces themselves and at large, that the Government expected the roads of the Province to be kept clear and people enabled to get to work. It was admirably met, and over the whole ten days it was only intimidation that held people back. We had some grounds for believing that in the first day or two the RUC were pulling their punches in responding to overt threats to those going to work; but these suspicions did not last. Later on, the RUC explicitly changed course in their attitude to the farmers' tractor blocks, which they began by treating quite gently on the grounds that most of the drivers were decent fellows misled, but on whom they later bore down more heavily (having established that some of them were not farmers, but had 'borrowed' the tractors more or less forcibly).

III. MACM PLANNING

MACM troops for the petrol, fuel and water plans were available in Northern Ireland by the end of the first day of the strike. Advance command groups arrived some days earlier and covert liaison with management continued throughout the emergency. At no time, however, was any open familiarisation training allowed as it was anticipated that this could only prove counter-productive to attempts to persuade workers to remain at their posts. It was made quite clear, for example, by power workers in both manual and technical grades that they would not continue to work alongside service personnel.

2. Had MACM troops been committed, therefore, the activation of the plans would inevitably have been delayed by up to 24 hours while technicians familiarised themselves with plant and machinery. However, given the likely continuing attitude of workers in the industries concerned this is not a problem which could be overcome on any formal basis and the best method of approach in future would seem to be the continuation of a flexible and more or less covert liaison system which maintains the full co-operation of management.

3. If one general lesson for MACM intervention can be said to have been learnt during the emergency it is that plans designed for one set of circumstances will not necessarily be most appropriate to another. As far as electrical power is concerned the inadequacy of a MACM plan which can supply little more than half normal springtime demand is manifest in a situation where industry is attempting to keep going. On the fuel side more can and indeed has been done to adapt the MACM plan to circum-

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stances similar to those which applied in the UUAC strike, and to permit flexibility of response.

4. The water and fire plans were hardly involved in dealing with the strike. In the event, while troops to cover the water supply plan were deployed to Northern Ireland and MACM contact was made with management, there was never any indication that the plan would need to be activated before matters had deteriorated towards a virtual breakdown of industrial and commercial life. Troops for the fire plan were maintained outside the Province at 24 hours notice (subsequently extended to 48 and then 72 hours).

IV. THE POWER STATIONS

We started, in the pre-strike period, with the assumption that we should not be able to hold Ballylumford, ie that the UUAC would bring the workers out and that its operation could only be maintained with the help of MACM troops. Fortunately we were wrong: the power stations were not on the UUAC's initial list of workers to be brought out, and the workers themselves took the initial view that their attitude should be influenced by the response of industry: if factories continued work and needed power, they would be there to supply it. Our responses were conditioned throughout by this attitude: in effect to maintain conditions in which the power station workers could reasonably be expected to go on working. In detail, this required an elaborate complex of responses from many parties: from the police, a sophisticated and many-sided operation to minimise the effects of the widespread intimidation of individuals and groups; from NIES the ability to make the best use of the shifting numbers and types of staff available; from the information services, measures to keep the spotlight off the power workers while satisfying the essence of public concern about available power; from the Government itself, a willingness to show understanding for the power workers' general concern about the security of the Province without yielding to the demands of the UUAC, and on the other side a readiness to give NIES broad directives on the policy for the maintenance of power without seeking to interfere in the hour-to-hour decisions.

2. In a short space, a close-knit control structure evolved de facto, composed of NIO, Dept of Commerce, Management, some

Trade Union leaders and workers, and the police. It responded flexibly to the challenges, and it worked. It would be futile to set up such a structure on any formal basis for future situations which may be quite different. What is worth noting is the numbers of centres of influence that need to be brought to bear if the position is to be held.

3. MACM specialists were available throughout, but we were careful that they should not obtrude or ruffle feathers in the power stations. It was right, and would be right in any foreseeable situation, that we should do everything possible to avoid the need to commit them for one over-riding reason: that this would have a domino effect on every other industry and service in the Province. This is unavoidable. There are subsidiary reasons for non-commitment of troops which by better planning we might be able to eliminate. They are the expectation that MACM troops could not achieve more than a very modest level of power generation, and that without the co-operation of senior management in the power stations they could not do the job at all. We shall have to look again at our MACM plans, with Dept of Commerce and NIES in the first instance, and thereafter with MOD, to determine whether there are ways of improving performance here, eg by 'on the job' training, perhaps at suitable power stations in Great Britain, or by prior preparation of operating manuals or mock-ups to assist those who would otherwise be unable to master the task in the absence of a technical adviser. It will be useful in the first instance to study Commander MACM's report on the experience gained by his force in the stoppage. But whatever plans we make, we should be most unwise to act on

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any other principle than that the senior NIES management is crucial to the running of the power stations and by proper handling can be kept on our side, and that it is doubtful that full output could be maintained if the power workers stopped work, even if they left all the generating equipment unharmed.

4. One separate area of concern came to the fore in the course of the stoppage: the ability of supporters of the UUAC to sabotage installations in electrical sub-stations around the Province with apparent inside knowledge of their working. These installations are numerous and are for the most part unguarded. The threat did not increase to the point where we felt it necessary to pre-empt further attacks. Guarding all points would be a heavy burden on the security forces; but we shall need to consider whether a selective commitment would need to be made in a future case.

V. PETROL AND FUEL SUPPLIES

The original plan provided for the supply of essential users only in an anticipated situation (similar to that which occurred in 1974) where industry had come to a virtual standstill. There was, however, sufficient spare distribution capacity within this plan for the provision of bulk supplies to the 50 largest industrial users and this option will in future be specifically included in the plan. In addition the Army are now considering the practicality of an extension of the scheme which, by the employment of two additional transport troops, would enable MACM distribution to increase supply from around $\frac{1}{4}$ to about $\frac{1}{3}$ of normal requirements - an amount which could meet the needs of some $\frac{2}{3}$ of manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland.

2. Desire to alter the existing plans was manifested as contingency meetings progressed, notably in regard to the distribution arrangements through requisitioned petrol stations. There were two issues here. One concerned the manning of the petrol stations - the original MACM plan provided for this to be entirely an Army operation, but it became clear at the beginning of planning discussions that the Army were unhappy at the prospect of soldiers handling cash. The plan was consequently revised and volunteer civil service staff were earmarked to look after the financial side. We must be absolutely clear for the future which jobs the Army is willing to undertake, and which not.

3. The other problem lay in the location of the licensing centres which would issue petrol coupons. About half the designated centres were originally to have been in the same building as

DHSS offices which would themselves be extremely busy (and possible centres of conflict) during an emergency. The list was consequently revised and in doing so specific account was taken of the need to safeguard these vulnerable points by locating them near RUC stations or within a short reaction time of Army/UDR patrols.

4. Aside from the planning for a MACM takeover, the strike gave us valuable experience in the problems of maintaining an essential service without military assistance, in the face of strong pressure from the strike leaders. The main factor in our favour was the commercial self-interest and competitiveness of the oil companies themselves. This kept supplies moving - though probably more sporadically than we had at first supposed - until a tanker driver was injured when paramilitaries shot out his windscreen on the Donegall Road. This gave the strike leaders a chance, and we were still negotiating, and indeed stalling with the representatives of the tanker drivers when the strike was called off. One can only guess whether the plan for their better security (through a co-ordinating centre within the RUC) would have been enough to get them back to work. But it is a ploy that we shall have to pursue further, even if as seems quite likely the drivers themselves do not in post-strike conditions want to have any such security plan imposed upon them. In that case, we ought at least to work the plan up on a contingency basis with the security forces, to be ready in the event of another emergency (the point here is that the tanker drivers are much less keen on protection from the security forces against hijackings etc that are PIRA's way, than in the case of the road blocks etc which are characteristic of a strike).

VI. ALDERGROVE

Aldergrove airport continued to operate normally throughout the strike. However in the pre-strike period there was some confusion over the extent to which the RAF could provide assistance to allow the continuation of some civil flights should the normal airport staff be unable or unwilling to continue working. There were no formal plans for SRAFONI, who was responsible only for the maintenance of the military airfield, to extend his interest to civil aircraft; and no purpose was seen in his attempting to do so unless there were civil resources to handle the multifarious ground activities of a civil airport, since the RAF could not spare the men for these jobs. Nevertheless it was eventually agreed that in advanced emergency SRAFONI would take over air-traffic control of the airport and that the RAF air traffic controllers and fire service which would be required to maintain military flying would be able to cover some civil flights. All other arrangements for turning round aircraft and handling passengers and baggage would be the responsibility of the airlines, their staff and such airport staff as remained on duty. This understanding (particularly the matter of SRAFONI assuming air-traffic control of the Airport) needs to be refined and formalised, so that in future there is no doubt about who is capable of doing what and prepared to do it.

VII. HARBOURS

The continued flow of cargo through the ports of Northern Ireland was not one of the major areas of vulnerability identified by the Emergency Steering Committee when planning for the strike began, but its importance became apparent as industry attempted to keep going despite UUAC action. Although Larne was the only port to close down, the effect of this on the supply of raw materials in particular was noticeable; shippers of perishable goods out of the province also suffered. There is no plan to keep ports open during an emergency and the main weapon in our armoury was that of exhortation coupled with behind the scenes activity with unions and management. Departments were able to help some importers and exporters to find alternative routes eg DANI managed to get some farm produce out through other ports. Larne did eventually reopen on a restricted basis with a skeleton staff, but consideration should be given to the possibility of army assistance in any future emergency to maintain basic port facilities, of the roll-on roll-off description which requires only the minimum of labour (assuming that hauliers and operators of the ships would accept the arrangement).

2. The desirability of switching from one closed harbour to another that remains open, or to harbours in the south, is fundamentally (as it was on this occasion) a matter of political (or individual commercial) judgment that can only be settled at the time.

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VIII. MANAGEMENT

The attitude of management in industry varied enormously. At one extreme, commercial considerations evidently prevailed over all else; we had rumours of a readiness to accommodate to the UUAC's wishes in some quite major firms in the first day or two before the government's own determination was fully apparent, and we were brought face to face with the attitude in respect of one oil company during our efforts to keep the tanker drivers out of the hands of the UUAC. At the other extreme, in the conduct of our operations to keep the power stations working, the NIES chief executive could be regarded as a full member of our team. (Incidentally he combined this status with a very practical disinclination to overload his government collaborators with an unnecessarily detailed amount of information about the state of affairs within the power stations; this policy worked well and should be encouraged again - assuming of course, that the chief executive has our full trust).

2. The CBI supported the Government. Through them and the Chambers of Industry and of Trade, we did about all we could to stiffen the weaker members of the industrial and commercial community. But these bodies themselves are less than powerful (at least if set up against an oil company set on commercial advantage). The Engineering Employers Federation was anxious to help and should be put to full use in the government's cause. The outstanding contrast was between industry and commerce in the mass, including the oil companies, and those sectors under a unified control, noticeably the bus companies and the electricity service. Both happened to have strong leaders, and the

advantage that this gave us was immense. The UUAC stood no chance of making headway against Mr Heubeck; he knew which concessions he needed to make in the face of the busmen's emotion, and made them decisively; after that they were back at work. Nor could the UUAC get round behind Mr Jim Smith, since from his central position he could call on the resources of trade unions, government, police, etc. With the oil companies it was very different; if the UUAC faltered, management had no trouble in rallying the workforce on a sensible course (as happened on 6 May when they went back to work), but when the UUAC gained the initiative through the shooting up of a tanker, some managers were only too happy to settle with them and others lacked the incentive to stand with the Government. The moral of this may be that a point comes when time is no longer on the government's side, and it is prone to pressure from several quarters to get industry back to normal, whatever the long-term political and other consequences one must be carefully on guard for that watershed.

IX. THE TRADE UNIONS

The NIC/ICTU, and conspicuously its secretary Terry Carlin, was strongly behind the Government and maintained very close touch throughout the stoppage. Along with some other senior trade union officials, he was used at a ministerial level (Mr Concannon generally) to convey a line or an attitude to a given workforce. He himself was assiduous in reporting to the NI Ops room rumours, worries and points where he believed the Government might be acting. These were generally routed to the Department concerned; it is hard to assess whether due attention was paid to them.

2. All in all, we were able to make better use of the Trade Union movement than in 1974 - largely because it was operating against a much more sympathetic backdrop than then. The majority of the workforce rejected the stoppage, and in these circumstances the NIC was a valid spokesman for that majority. To any workers susceptible to UUAC influence, it was a thing of suspicion or scorn (and even among some workers anti-pathetic to UUAC, eg those in the power stations). On this occasion the UUAC was conspicuously less well organised in the key industries than the UWC had been in 1974, and this left more room for the NIC to move in. We cannot be confident that this would necessarily be the case in a future confrontation with Loyalist opinion. In any event, the UUAC could grab more than adequate representation on any delegation finding its way to negotiation with the Government (eg the Ballylumford workers on 5 May, the petrol tanker drivers on 13 May).

3. We made adequate use of individual trade union officials as emissaries or pleaders of the Government cause: Jack Curliss and Jim Cosby with the power workers, John Freeman with the busmen and the tanker drivers, Sandy Scott in the shipyard, etc. They were invaluable (Freeman especially so). But the operation was a hand to mouth one, and it would be possible to prepare the ground more carefully, knowing in advance the areas in which such help would be required.

4. John Lyons of the Electrical Power Engineers Association was a special case. Learning from the mistakes of 1974, we gave him very special attention from several days before the action began. This paid off: while the technical staff of the power stations was no doubt not solid for the Government throughout, it was very largely so, in the face of massive intimidation and a requirement for unusual methods and hours of work; much of this may have been due to Lyons' influence.

X. PRISONS

Some thought was given to the likelihood of a temporary increase in the prison population. The police believed that the additional figure could be as high as 1000. The prisons found that they could accommodate up to 480; another 500 could be put into empty compounds at Maze and Magilligan, but there would be no staff to man these compounds, and this shortage of 200 officers could only be made up by the army (which would of course mean less men for other tasks). Bedding and other equipment would also have to be found for these compounds. The RUC agreed to settle for an increase no larger than 400/500 (dealing with anything above that by means of remand on bail.)

2. We also looked tentatively at the possibility of holding men temporarily by means of interim custody orders. This was not pursued.

3. The army prepared temporary holding accommodation for up to 900 arrested persons, as follows:

Ballykinler	300
Omagh	150
Armagh	100
Maze	100
St Angelo	100
Ballymena	50
Lurgan	50

The units concerned were responsible only for secure accommodation, latrine and cooking facilities. The RUC would have taken on the direct control and administration of prisoners.

XI. THE LAW

The Chief Constable rather belatedly, on the eve of the stoppage, raised the possibility of strengthening the law, especially against cases of intimidation. The Attorney General saw merit in this, and following urgent consideration by legal advisers and officials, a possible new Regulation was drafted, although this covered a slightly different field from that originally envisaged. Doubts remain about the effectiveness of this, its political acceptability, and our powers to introduce a Regulation under existing legislation, and the Secretary of State decided not to take the proposal further. All of these aspects will require further study in the light of the RUC's actual experiences during the strike. The NI Legislation Draftsmen should be involved as well as Home Office legal advisers.

XII. INTIMIDATION

We found no adequate answer to this. We have of course no adequate answer in the "normal" (non-strike) conditions of Northern Ireland to-day. However it was carried on both more openly and more intensively by telephone than we have been aware of hitherto.

2. The RUC largely got the measure of the former problem after they had been able to size it up in the first day or two. The gangs who were earlier roaming from factory to factory, or intimidating milk floats leaving dairies etc, then melted away. But the more insidious activity continued.

3. Apart from legal measures (dealt with elsewhere), we need to give further thought to methods of dealing with intimidation by telephone as the most intractable of all, because of its anonymity. The Post Office were not enthusiastic about publicising measures which they might be able to take to help the threatened, and we need to pursue this further with them. Provided that they are assured that their staff are not to be involved directly in anti-terrorist measures, and that any arrangements made will not swamp the telephone system beyond their control, they are likely to collaborate - at least to the extent of responding to requests for assistance, which the Government can ensure are made in crucial cases.

4. Several aspects of the problem are currently under consideration in the Steering Committee on the Economic Activities of Paramilitaries, and this may well be the best place for the continued search for means to beat intimidation.

XIII. THE POST OFFICE

Few serious problems were encountered. The telephone service was scarcely interrupted, and postal services were generally maintained. There were persistent problems only in one or two areas, eg Lisburn, where chiefly owing to intimidation the service broke down. After some days this led to difficulties for DHSS, whose giro cheques were not reaching pensioners, etc. Since the same men were responsible for sorting and delivery, it was impossible even to call and pick up mail at the Post Office. It would be well to discuss with the GPO whether they can ameliorate these difficulties in future.

XIV. SOCIAL SECURITY

Learning from 1974, we refrained from saying anything in public about the possibility of some form of emergency benefit if the system should break down through mass inability to get to work, and this undoubtedly provided a disincentive to those who might otherwise have made any excuse to stay off work. Plans were however confidentially prepared against this possibility, although they were not agreed in respect of some important details. Arrangements are in hand to refine these plans. It seems desirable that planning should be developed to provide draft legislation in advance for more than one option: emergency benefit unconditionally, or on a more restrictive, hard-line or even punitive basis. The decision which to apply would only be taken in the light of prevailing circumstances. We are still a long way from finding an answer that will ease the hardship on the innocent without weakening the whole community's will to resist. Any emergency arrangements on this occasion would have set up tensions between government and industry, which we cannot yet see how to avoid.

2. In a few districts, the system was greatly strained, simply by the much increased numbers applying for benefit. As a merely practical matter (leaving aside, that is, the possibility of emergency benefit, and granted the application of the normal criteria for admission of benefits), this overloading might have been anticipated earlier, and measures worked out to alleviate it. The offices serving Larne and the Shankill were for instance scarcely able to cope. There are evidently limits in terms of staff and accommodation, and there was good reason

for sticking to a show of normality; but the issue might be looked at in planning for future emergencies, especially if a solution to the dilemma of emergency benefit continues to elude us.

XV. FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

A minor but complex problem arose between NIO, MAFF, DANI, and the Milk Marketing Board, over the obligation of the latter to make payments to farmers for milk produced even if it could not be collected. The Board has the power which it has used in the past and which was considered again during the present stoppage to licence farmers to sell their milk retail; but then the problem arises of how much they have sold and for how much the Board should still make payments to them. Moreover, there are evidently circumstances in which one could regard the Board's obligation as nullified by the behaviour of the farmers themselves (eg by joining in the blocking of roads). However one would need legislation to bring that about. This is a case, like that of social security benefits, for the preparation of contingency plans, and possibly legislation, in advance.

2. We considered before the strike whether steps should be taken to safeguard wholesale food depots, in case the para-militaries might take them over. A take-over, under a state of emergency, would require a formal authorisation from MAFF to DANI to act on their behalf (since the emergency regulations only grant powers to NI Departments); DANI could empower the security forces to act for them. We should ensure that these measures are properly planned in advance (though the threat is not such that we need plan in detail for the security forces to take the depots over).

3. The departments and agencies were left to deal with enquiries of a local or particular nature, and appeared to have dealt with these problems quite adequately. A serious crisis would have taxed them more heavily; we might look at whether the public services would then be capable by themselves of coping with the flood of enquiries.

4. The Public Information Centre set up in Stormont House in the first days of the stoppage was a useful adjunct. It worked well within its limitations. These were first that it was insufficiently known about until its inception (for the good reason that we did not want to publicise it before ^{strike} we could see how the ~~the~~ was going; but this carried the drawback that many calls which should have come straight to it kept on coming to the NI Ops Room to the end of the stoppage); and secondly that for similar reasons its communications were primitive. If it is to be used in another emergency (as seems desirable), it may need some of the facilities of an Ops Room (direct lines to the Ops Room itself, if not to departments, etc).

5. The occasional forthright appearances of the Secretary of State on radio and television contributed enormously to the credibility of the Government's stand in opposition to the stoppage.

XVI. PUBLIC RELATIONS

The lessons learned from 1974 were that the opposition must not be permitted to take over the air waves and must be answered, if not anticipated, on every point; and that information bearing on policy must be controlled from the centre, and not left to departments and other agencies to give out on their own initiative. The organisation built up to achieve these objectives worked well. The Central Press Office, with its links to departments etc, and to the NI Ops Room, was a duplicate of the Ops Room system itself, ensuring that information at every level was properly co-ordinated. Such agencies as the NI electricity service understood and accepted that assessments of the likely performance of the power stations for the next day were not in their area. The schedule of four sit reps during the day, especially the early morning one (and all timed to be available for the major news broadcasts), held the initiative in the public mind against the efforts of the opposition to spread alarm. To a high degree, the NIO story seems to have been believed, which is most of the battle. In the most sensitive areas, such as the numbers going to work or the amount of power being generated, the Press Office took care not to claim too much and not to be too specific, thus avoiding a damaging rebuttal or embarrassing questions on detail. Special care is needed in releasing staff attendance statistics for individual firms.

2. Considering the conditions in which all concerned were operating, there were remarkably few leaks of embarrassing information, and none that had any serious effects.

XVII. POLITICAL ACTIVITY

Because Paisley and Baird were isolated as the only two political leaders supporting the strike, there was plenty of room for Ministers and officials to encourage other political leaders in their opposition to it. On various occasions throughout the strike it was possible to inspire statements from political parties helpful to the Secretary of State's aims at the time. Also, political parties were encouraged to keep in close touch with officials and Ministers in order to highlight any problems of fact or presentation. This proved invaluable in a tactical situation and it seems highly desirable in any future situation (although the exact circumstances will not be duplicated) that sufficient official strength should be left uncommitted to other tasks to promote this kind of liaison and encouragement to operate.

XVIII. SPECIAL SECURITY MEETINGS

Overall control of government policy and action was exercised through a series of special security meetings, held on a daily basis with rare exceptions, from the day when the stoppage seemed to be almost a certainty (25 April). These were chaired by the Secretary of State, and attended by the GOC, the Chief Constable, and interested members of the NIO and NI Departments (Mr Kidd attended regularly, as did Dr Quigley from the moment that the situation in the power stations became a predominant concern). Prior to the strike, the meeting considered a series of contingency action reports, presented by Mr Pritchard as chairman of the Emergency Steering Committee. When the strike began (by which time contingency planning on most essential issues was complete), the meeting was given a situation report (based on the daily NICR sit reps), an intelligence forecast, and ad hoc reports from the security forces and others concerned. In the light of these meetings, occasional minutes were drafted for the Secretary of State to send to the Prime Minister summarising the course of the stoppage.

2. For most of the stoppage Mr Kidd held daily meetings with NI Permanent Secretaries or their deputies. This enabled all to be kept in touch and daily problems to be brought to attention quickly at top Departmental level.

XIX. EMERGENCY STEERING COMMITTEE

The Emergency Steering Committee met early each morning (with the exception of one Sunday) from 26 April to 12 May. It was chaired by Mr Pritchard (DUS(B)) and had as the nucleus of its membership the Permanent Secretaries of the Departments of Commerce, Environment, Civil Service and Health and Social Services and the Chairman of the Emergency Committee together with representatives from the RUC (at DCC or ACC level) and the Army (the Chief of Staff). Other interested parties attended as necessary. The Commander of MACM forces and a member of the Central Secretariat was regularly present.

2. The Steering Committee's initial function was to identify areas of particular vulnerability during a Loyalist strike and ensure that appropriate contingency planning was set in hand. Subsequently the Committee concentrated on the oversight of plans for the key areas of power supply and oil distribution and during the strike continued to monitor developments in these fields and to deal with ad hoc problems on these and other aspects of the emergency as they arose. Each morning the Committee received a report of the previous evening's Special Security Meeting chaired by the Secretary of State and instigated such follow-up action (such as the preparation of papers) as was required.

3. As the strike progressed without acquiring any great impetus and contingency planning arrangements were completed, the 'steering' function of the Committee declined and there was some tendency for it to consider matters of detail which would have been more appropriate to the forum of the Emergency Committee. However this was more a function of the relative 'non-emergency' created by the lack of UUAC success than a fault in the operation of the Steering Committee. There was sufficient happening in the strategic areas of power, fuel and, latterly, Larne to justify a continued daily meeting,

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XX. THE EMERGENCY COMMITTEE

The Emergency Committee which consists of representatives of all Northern Ireland Departments under the chairmanship of Mr Jamieson (NI) met as required from 26 April onwards. In the months before the strike its main functions were to ensure that departments had made contingency plans, and to organise a communications system including operations rooms. As the strike approached, the Committee's task was to check that the contingency plans were ready, to arrange for activation of the operation rooms, and to ensure that Emergency Regulations were ready for signature, if required, by the Secretary of State. The only problem arose on this last point when one or two departments proposed amendments to the regulations (which had remained substantially unchanged since they were promulgated during the 1974 strike) despite the fact that the draft version had been circulated at regular intervals for precisely that purpose and had been returned unchanged.

2. While this problem was hardly critical (and the regulations were not in any event needed), it does raise a query as to how seriously departments have taken other aspects of their contingency planning since the initial bout of enthusiasm which produced the plans during the course of 1975. As the strike had no great success, the bulk of these plans remain untested. Unfortunately, there is little that can be done here apart from ensuring that the Emergency Committee continues to keep a close eye on contingency arrangements and to stress the importance (hopefully given added impetus over the past few weeks) of keeping plans up to date.

3. During the strike itself, the Emergency Committee met on the instructions of the Steering Committee to consider any problems (outside the key strategic areas) as they arose. This is in contrast to the prior plans, under which the Emergency Committee would have given way to the Steering Committee once the strike began; that it was practical to have it meet was perhaps a reflection of the relatively leisurely and mild nature of the emergency. In particular the Emergency Committee was asked to monitor and if possible take action to minimise the development of any shortages of essential materials. Industrial gases were identified as a critical resource for which the possibility of devising contingency plans were explored. Cement and tin-plate were also reported as in short supply, though not critically in the event.

XXI. THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE OPERATIONS ROOM

The Operations Room in Stormont Castle was activated at 1800 on 2 May and remained fully manned on a 24 hour basis until after the UUAC called off the strike. Liaison Officers from the RUC and the Army were present (also on a 24 hour basis) as was an Information Officer to provide a link with the Central Press Office.

2. The Castle Operations Room was one of a network set up in every Northern Ireland Department (although only those in Commerce and Environment were on a similar 24 hour manning arrangement) and information from these formed the basis of regular situation reports which were circulated 3 times a day by the Operations Room to Ministers and senior officials. The primary function of the Castle Operations Room, therefore, was to serve as a focal point for the receipt of all information on the emergency and take action or disseminate it as required. This function it performed well despite some initial teething troubles over the format and content of situation reports which were later standardised as the line of development of the strike became clearer and key issues more readily identified.

3. The other function for which the Operations Room was designed, that of acting as the machinery through which central government would exercise control of an emergency, was only used for a limited period on Saturday 7 May when the situation at Ballylumford reached a critical stage involving very close contact between NIO, Dept of Commerce, and NIES. However the fact that the Operations Room was in effect merely superimposed on top of the normal

administrative machinery had two significant implications. Firstly it meant that there was a danger that the Operations Room itself could remain ignorant of developments in connection with the emergency which had a bearing on its own activities, particularly in answering queries from other departments. This did not in fact happen to any noticeable extent but it is worth considering whether any action should be taken in future to reduce this risk. Secondly, staffing the Operations Room was made somewhat more difficult and indeed arduous for those concerned in that few could be entirely relieved of their normal duties. This problem was eased somewhat by bringing in additional staff from other sections of the NIO and from the London Office. NICS resources could also have been tapped through DOCS.