



Soc Services

cc Mr Wolfson 2

PRIME MINISTER

Here are the answers to
your questions.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY
Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY

Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Secretary of State for Social Services

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25/9

Nick Sanders Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
London SW1

25 September 1979

Dear Nick,

ARRANGEMENTS FOR PAYMENT OF SUPPLEMENTARY BENEFIT TO STRIKERS

Thank you for your letter of 24 September confirming that the Prime Minister had agreed to the proposition in my Secretary of State's note to her that there should be some urgent discussion with the Secretary of State for Employment and the Home Secretary about the arrangements for handling payment of benefit during the current engineering strikes. A meeting took place yesterday morning, and the Secretary of State for Employment has minuted the Prime Minister about the outcome.

The Prime Minister raised also a number of questions about the detailed arrangements for payment which I deal with below.

First, she had enquired why benefit could not be paid direct to dependants. The short answer to this is that the law does not permit it. The normal rules for supplementary benefit are that a family is assessed as a whole; that only the head of the family can claim for the whole group; and that the benefit has to be paid to him. So in the case of a striker's family, even though benefit is only payable in respect of the dependants, it is necessary to deal with the striker himself. Enquiry has to be made into his resources, before it can be determined how much benefit - if any - is payable to his dependants. And the benefit payment has in the end to be made to him. (There is a legal let-out for paying the benefit to someone other than the claimant in exceptional circumstances; but this could not be applied as a general rule to all strikers).

The Prime Minister also asked to see the forms that are handed to strikers. They are given a special leaflet (SB2), and a claim form: I enclose copies of each of these. The leaflet is designed to clarify who can claim and, more particularly, who can not (in order to avoid hopeless claims). The claim form is specially designed so that the claimant can do a major part of the work for us by setting down all the relevant facts himself. In normal cases, a supplementary benefit claim is taken by one of our officers, who interviews the claimant and elicits the relevant particulars from him, entering them on a form which the claimant is then asked to sign. This process takes far too long, and would be unmanageable in a strike, when quite exceptionally large numbers of claims have to be taken in a short period. The claimant is therefore given this form for completion himself. But as you will see, he is required to present it with supporting documents like last pay slips. (See also paragraph 14 of the leaflet).

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Finally the Prime Minister asked what were the circumstances in which a striker himself could receive benefit - ie as opposed to his dependants.

The particulars are given in paragraphs 6 and 7 of the leaflet. The rules are very stringent. The striker has to demonstrate that he is in urgent need, and cannot look to anyone else for support (eg a parent or relative). He is expected to make any resources from his employment last at the rate of £14 a week before a claim can be considered. And then, if benefit is awarded, it will not bring his resources above a figure of £10.50. These rules are so tightly drawn that few qualify. In 1978, for example, only 230 strikers received payments, whereas payments for dependants amounted to nearly 45,000.

I hope this information is helpful.

Yours ever

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25 SEP 1979

