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MR. LANKESTER

cc: Mr. Wolfson  
Mr. Gaffin  
Mr. Duguid

CIVIL SERVICE INDUSTRIAL ACTION: DVLC SWANSEA

There was a good deal of discussion at Mr. Heyhoe's meeting this morning about how to deal with the now rather serious industrial situation at the DVLC at Swansea, which Mr. Fowler reported to the Prime Minister in his minute of 8 May, and on which you recorded the Lord President's view that those sent home should be suspended.

The DOE reported the advice from the Chief Constable to the effect that:

- (i) It would be necessary to have a 2:1 ratio of police to demonstrators in order to ensure that the mail could get in and the nitrogen could be unloaded and installed. It is expected that there would be about 300 demonstrators, which implies 600 police. Amazement at this advice was expressed on all sides, not least by Sir John Herbecq, who pointed out that the majority of the staff at the DVLC were young married women, who were scarcely likely to pose a massive threat to law and order.
- (ii) Although they would be willing to maintain right of passage on the public highway, and thus to ensure access to the DVLC, the police were most unwilling to take management's side in unblocking the unloading of the nitrogen from the lorry which is already on DVLC premises. To do that they would need a court injunction against those who were blockading the lorry. Such an injunction would probably not be available until tomorrow afternoon.

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It was agreed that it was up to local management and the local Chief Constable to decide what could be done and what was necessary, but that the Home Office would be asked whether the assessment of the number of police required was realistic.

As for sending the staff home, the DOE's proposal is to clear the site on Tuesday and Wednesday so as to make it easier to install the nitrogen and run up the computer again. But Sir John Herbecq pointed out that since the staff could not be sent home without pay, and since there was probably no way of keeping them off the premises anyway, the effect of the proposed action might be to have a lot of demonstrators milling around on Government pay instead of on union strike pay. This will be looked at again.

In general, it appears that the situation at the DVLC is somewhat tense. There is a history of militancy - 85% came out on strike on 9 March - and it must be at least possible that even if the computer is started up and the mail is run in, the whole place will come out on strike.

J.

11 May 1981

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