



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT  
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MANAGEMENT IN CONFIDENCE

The Rt Hon Lord Soames CGMG GCVO CH CBE  
Lord President of the Council  
Civil Service Department  
Whitehall  
LONDON  
SW1

~~Brain~~ MB/AM  
See in particular  
x over the page 2/5

7 May 1981

*on the rocks*

*John Chubb*

TL  
2/5

CIVIL SERVICE INDUSTRIAL ACTION: DVLC, SWANSEA

My officials have been keeping yours informed of the developing situation at Swansea. In the last few days the Civil Service Unions have begun to interfere with the operation of my large computer-based organisation there which deals with the licensing of drivers and vehicles. They have obviously tried to apply their tactic of calling out very few people whose absence then stops the flow of work to a very much larger number who, because they have not refused to work, cannot be sent home without pay.

The local director is to meet the unions tomorrow to see if they are prepared to change course. I intend to take strong counter-action if the meeting does not produce results. I am considering how far the action taken by my staff opens them to suspension. The circumstances were that initially CCSU removed 12 non-industrials on the staff of the PSA whose job is to maintain the air-conditioning plant which is essential for the working of the computers. To counter this the PSA - after several frustrated attempts - succeeded in bringing in six cylinders of nitrogen which is essential for pressurising the air-conditioning system. It was driven past the pickets at the gate by three senior

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PSA staff. But before it reached the plant about 100 of my DVLC staff formed a picket inside the premises, effectively round the vehicle containing the cylinders, so that it could not be put to use. I understand that the time spent by the DVLC staff in forming this picket or cordon was found by recording it as private time outside the flexi-time hours of official duty. The police were called in but were unable to take effective action.

X | I regard the action of the DVLC staff, however, as something quite different from forming a picket outside the gate and as action amounting to obstruction of the performance of Government business. As such, it seems to me to fall into a different category of industrial action, and to entitle me to suspend those who have taken part in it without pay during whatever indefinite period work on the premises continues to be obstructed.

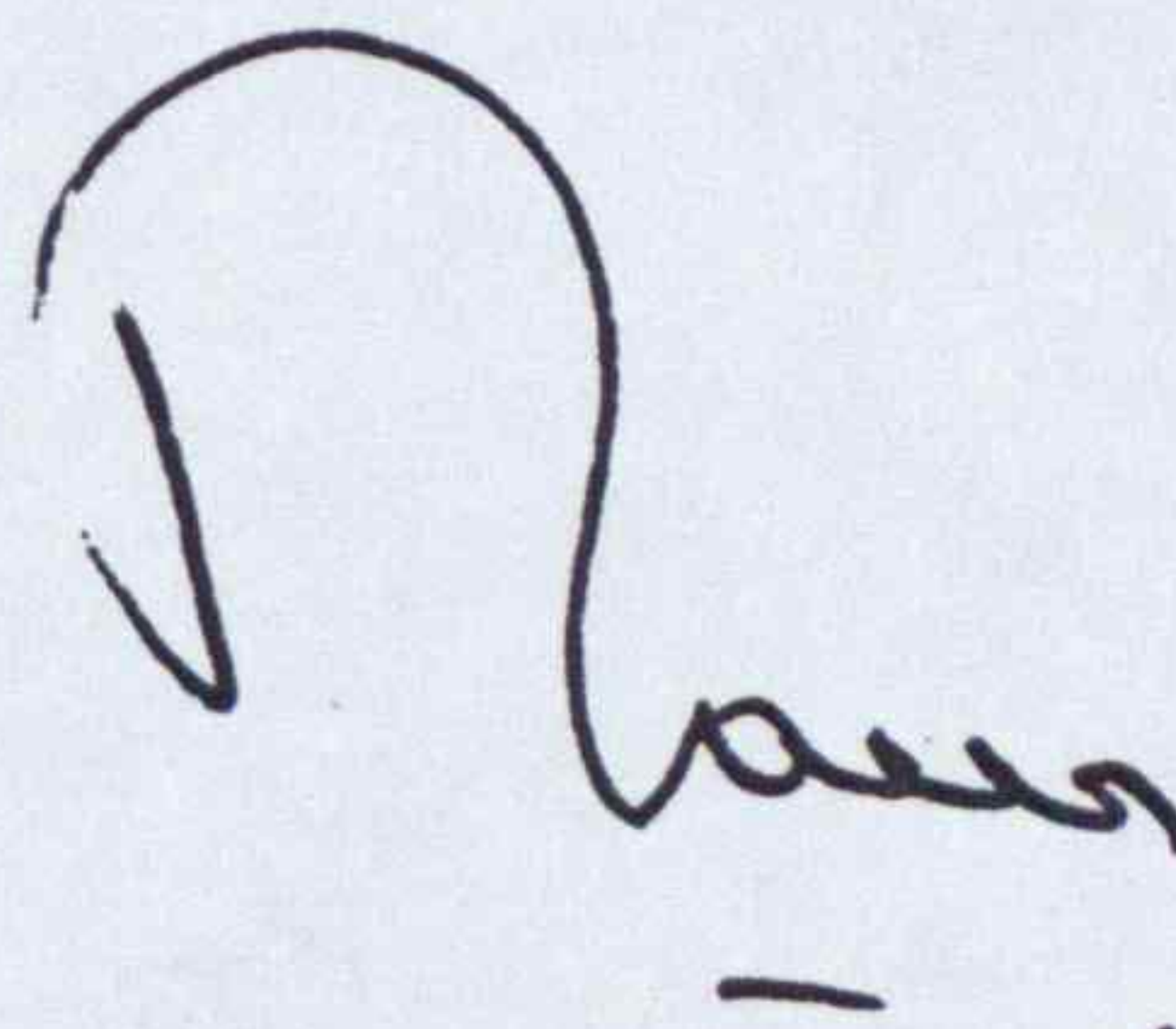
I am taking advice on this matter in order to decide what action to take.

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Law of  
conscience  
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But over and above these immediate problems I think we are all finding we are handicapped by the legal position enjoyed by non-industrial staff. The Civil Service Unions are clearly following a course which has been slowly - and perhaps now not so slowly - escalating at low cost to themselves. Are you envisaging making a move at some stage to warn them that their privileged position before the law lasts only so long as the Government refrains from introducing legislation to remove that privilege? I feel that I need guidance on this point in order to deal with the escalation which is clearly being attempted among my staff at Swansea.

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I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister and Cabinet colleagues and I should be content for it to be shown also to the Law Officers if you feel that that would be necessary.

*Yours ever*  


NORMAN FOWLER

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