

PRIME MINISTER'S QUESTIONS: 14 APRIL

INDUSTRIAL ACTION AT GCHQ

Line to Take

1. GCHQ, like other Government departments, was affected by the one-day strike of civil servants on 9 March. About 28% of all members of GCHQ, taking the headquarters and the outstations together, stayed away from work; the most serious effect was the closure of the Headquarters communications centre for 24 hours. However, the level of absence in those parts of GCHQ directly and immediately concerned with current work was in fact only 18%, and the effectiveness of the Department in its most critical functions was maintained.
2. There have subsequently been three periods of industrial action at outstations, and a fourth is in progress. The impact of these occurrences has varied. Whilst the action has been serious, it has not prevented GCHQ from fulfilling its main tasks.
3. Finally I should like to put it on record that, for some months past, GCHQ staff have been called upon to work unusually long hours, including over weekends. With the exceptions I have noted, the staff have responded loyally to the heavy demands thus placed on them.