



File

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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Principal Private Secretary*

SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG

MACHINERY FOR HANDLING CURRENT INDUSTRIAL DISPUTES

The Prime Minister has seen your minute A08805 of 25 June 1982 about the machinery for handling the current industrial disputes in the National Health Service and the railways, and as I told Mr. Wright earlier this afternoon, she has approved your proposals, subject to 2 charges. First, she would like the Chancellor of the Duchy added to the membership of the Ministerial Group. Second, she thinks that the terms of reference should be amended to read "... to consider and coordinate the Government's policy regarding those disputes, including the public relations aspects ...".

JMW

25 June 1982

JSC



Ref. A08805

PRIME MINISTER

*Agree - see  
amendments  
over page  
ms.*

Machinery for Handling Current Industrial Disputes

The question of the machinery for handling the railway and National Health Service disputes came up at Cabinet this morning. As the discussion showed, this needs to be pulled together. You have had a few ad hoc meetings, both on the National Health Service (NHS) disputes and on the railway disputes; the Chancellor has had a few ad hoc meetings with particular Ministers on particular aspects of each dispute, and the Home Secretary has chaired a meeting of the Civil Contingencies Unit on the railways.

2. With a major rail strike now virtually unavoidable next week, there is a pressing need for more systematic arrangements. The proposals which are set out below are based on the following assumptions:

- (a) You would prefer to put a senior Minister in charge from day to day, reserving the right to take meetings yourself when major issues are involved.
- (b) There would be merit in the same group of Ministers keeping an eye on both the rail and NHS disputes.
- (c) The Group must inevitably be concerned not only with strategic and policy issues relating to the disputes but also with practical steps which can be taken to mitigate their effects.
- (d) The standing membership of the Group should be kept as small as possible, on the understanding that other Ministers may often need to be brought in for particular discussions.

3. On these assumptions I would propose the setting-up, in the MISC series, of a Ministerial Group on Current Industrial Disputes composed as follows:

Chairman	-	Chancellor of the Exchequer
Members	-	Secretary of State for Transport
		Secretary of State for Social Services
		Secretary of State for Employment
		Mr Sparrow



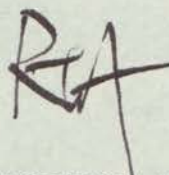
The Home Secretary would be invited to attend for "CCU type" issues. The Secretary of State for Energy would need to be brought in whenever coal stocks or action by the miners was likely to be raised, and the Secretary of State for Industry whenever effects on industry were an issue; the Secretary of State for Scotland may need to be brought in if there are particular problems in Scotland; and the Attorney General will need to come in when there are questions requiring legal advice.

4. As terms of reference, I suggest:

"To keep under review the current industrial disputes in the National Health Service and the railways; to consider and co-ordinate the Government's policy regarding those disputes <sup>including public relations</sup> and to consider measures, other than those falling within the terms of reference of the Civil Contingencies Unit, to mitigate their effects."

5. I also wish to propose some changes in the machinery at official level. At present we have a Group on Railway Policy (MISC 72) under the chairmanship of a Department of Transport Under Secretary, Mr Palmer. I think, and Sir Peter Baldwin agrees, that the point has now been reached where it would be desirable to set up a new and higher-level Official Group on Industrial Action on the Railways under Cabinet Office chairmanship (Mr Gregson) reflecting the composition of the Ministerial Group and with participation from the No 10 Policy Unit as well as the CPRS. This arrangement would have the advantage of achieving the necessary co-ordination with the work of the Official Group on Coal (MISC 57) whose chairmanship Mr Gregson has taken over from Mr Wade-Gery.

6. If you agree, I shall put in hand the necessary arrangements as soon as possible.



ROBERT ARMSTRONG

25 June 1982