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DA

bc BG

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

22 May 1986

PICKETING AT HUYTON LOCAL OFFICE, LIVERPOOL

The Prime Minister has seen your Secretary of State's letter of 18 May to the Secretary of State for Employment about TGWU picketing of the social security Local Office at Huyton.

The Prime Minister agrees with your Secretary of State that action has to be taken. She believes the Government cannot let a small business be extinguished by such thuggish behaviour.

I am copying this letter to Rachel Lomax (HM Treasury), Stephen Boys Smith (Home Office), Robin Young (Department of the Environment) and Michael Saunders (Law Officers' Department).

(David Norgrove)

Giles Denham, Esq.,
Department of Health and Social Security.

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10 DOWNING STREET

Prime Minister 1

This looks potentially
very nasty. Do you wish
to offer views?

DBS

21/5.

I think Norman
Junker is right. We
can't let a small
business be
entrusted by
things.
no



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY

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From the Secretary of State for Social Services

The Rt Hon the Lord Young of Graffham
 Secretary of State for Employment
 Department of Employment
 Caxton House
 Tothill Street
 LONDON
 SW1H 9NF

1. Gardner room-15 code
 about the convergence of
 'X'

2. DN - Joachim

MEAT 19/5

18 May 1986

Sean David

PICKETING AT HUYTON LOCAL OFFICE, LIVERPOOL

I am much concerned about a developing problem involving the TGWU in the North West. It is centred on the social security Local Office (LO) at Huyton, which has experienced mass picketing during which DHSS staff (who are not directly involved in the dispute) have been subjected to abuse, harassment and intimidation.

Briefly, the problem arose over a recent change of cleaning contractor at the office, which has had private sector cleaners for many years. This time the new firm, Donway Building Maintenance, who won the contract by competitive tender, did not engage the people who had been employed by their predecessors. They also chose to offer an hourly rate which is less than the local TGWU expects. The employees of the previous contractor, members of the TGWU, then began picketing the Local Office. At first the picketing was fairly peaceful, with only about a dozen present who were adequately contained by the police. But on 16 April a mass picket was organised by the Union. The pickets numbered around 100 and were of course mainly secondary pickets. These were mostly people from the Kirkby Unemployed Resources Centre, who arrived by the busload. The police had difficulty in containing the situation and the Local Office staff were harassed, and abused.

Since then picketing has continued. It has generally been peaceful, but on 23 and 24 April and again on 2 May there were mass pickets, again using people from Local Unemployment Resource Centres. The police have been present throughout, but have not always been able to contain the pressure on the Local Office staff. In an attempt to

reduce its impact, the cleaners have been arriving later and the office staff have, where necessary, been sent home early. This seems to have been keeping the temperature down, but at a cost to the services the office should be providing. The initiative remains with those organising the mass pickets.

Meanwhile, Donway (a small family firm) and their solicitor have written to the Prime Minister appealing for help. Their letters describe the mass picketing and vandalism to their property, and the pressures which are being brought by the TGWU on other firms in the area with whom Donway have cleaning contracts. Some of these firms may be forced to terminate the contracts. The letters suggest that we are seeing the destruction of a small business which has committed no infringement in law but which cannot afford to mount the legal action necessary to restrain the TGWU.

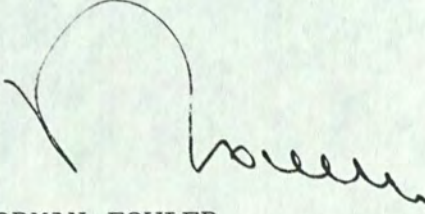
It now seems that the TGWU locally are seeking to escalate the dispute. Rubbish collection in the Wirral Borough Council area was privatised almost 3 years ago. The TGWU, through the district organiser who has been orchestrating the campaign at Huyton, have threatened the waste disposal contractor with industrial action throughout the Wirral if he continues to collect refuse from DHSS offices in the area (there are 3 - at Wallasey, Birkenhead North and Birkenhead South). The contractor has said that he is not willing to run this risk, and my Department has now been forced to engage a private contractor who was willing to clear the rubbish from these offices. This may well provoke further trouble from the TGWU.

Although Government employees are not directly involved in the dispute I do not think we can stand aside any longer. Picketing is continuous, with occasional increases in numbers. If there is more mass picketing I think we should make clear to the TGWU nationally that we cannot tolerate the behaviour of their local organiser and his supporters. I believe we might best achieve this by moving towards an injunction on Notice, which has the advantage over an ex parte injunction that it would provide the TGWU with an opportunity to make a considered response. Even so, it is not to be taken in hand lightly, and in the event of another mass picket I should want first to warn the TGWU of our intention to seek an injunction by getting solicitors to write an appropriate letter before action. If the situation subsequently turns sour, because the Union ignored an injunction, we could then argue that we had not proceeded hastily, but had approached the problem carefully, giving the TGWU every opportunity to back off. But if we eventually obtain an injunction and the TGWU commits contempt by refusing to obey we could find the Court and the Government in confrontation with the Union. This is not a situation any of us would wish to contemplate. But frankly, I see no alternative to the measured response I have proposed if the TGWU in the North West continues its action against DHSS offices.

E. R.

Before I take any action on this I should be glad to have your concurrence in the approach I have outlined.

I am copying this letter to Nigel Lawson, Douglas Hurd, Kenneth Baker, Michael Havers and to the Prime Minister, since she has been involved in the issue by the contractor.

Yours ever


NORMAN FOWLER

