

PA

PRIME MINISTER

cc: Mr James

London Underground Strike

We have had some further information this morning:

- (i) Sid Weighell has stated that the NUR will not call a strike of British Rail in sympathy. The suggestion that there would be a strike of BR came from ~~one of his assistants~~ ^{the President of the NUR}, and was simply wrong. However, if there is an underground strike, the BR line from Amersham to Marylebone will be closed because the signals on this line are operated by LT signalmen. Part of the North London line running from Old Street to Hampstead will also be closed for the same reason.
- (ii) ACAS have persuaded the employers and the unions to meet with them tonight to discuss the possibility of arbitration. The Department of Transport think there is now a 50/50 chance of the dispute going to arbitration. This will depend on the position of the unions: LT have made it clear that they will definitely agree to arbitration if the unions will. (Mr. Fowler will be mentioning the ACAS initiative in his statement this afternoon.) However, even if the unions do agree to go to arbitration, there is a real possibility that the strike will go ahead for 2-3 days: for the sake of their machismo, they would find it hard to call it off at this late stage.

7.

14 June 1979

I wonder if my private office (Mrs Flanagan) could
be given the following message :-

We should consider adding in the
first sentence of my statement to
make it read —

" I very much hope that handbags
and those who work in London
will not be subjected to the
widespread inconvenience etc.

Thus adding the words undertimed * The
point of course is to include commuters *

Norman Fowler

Transcript
Done

✓ RC
14/6
11.15am



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

14 June 1979

This is to confirm that the Prime Minister is content with the draft of the statement which your Minister intends to make this afternoon on the underground strike, as enclosed with his letter of 13 June to the Home Secretary.

I am sending a copy of this letter to John Chilcot (Home Office), John Stevens (Office of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster), Roger Facer (Ministry of Defence), Ian Fair (Department of Employment), David Edmonds (Department of the Environment), Bill Burroughs (Department of Energy), Richard Prescott (Office of the Paymaster General), Geoffrey Green (Civil Service Department), Murdo Maclean (Chief Whip's Office), and to Martin Vile and Sir Clive Rose (Cabinet Office).

J. P. LANKESTER

Mrs. E.C. Flanagan,
Department of Transport.

CONFIDENTIAL

Prime Minister PA 2

C. M. James



To note. A further meeting of CCU will take place on Friday to review the situation. At Flag C is Horace Cutler's latest report.

IL

13/6

PRIME MINISTER

LONDON UNDERGROUND STRIKE

I undertook to report to you following the meeting of Ministers in the Civil Contingencies Unit under my chairmanship. We have reviewed the likely developments, and considered what contingency and public relations action should be taken.

Our first conclusion was that there is little prospect of averting the strike. ACAS are still engaged in discussion with the parties, but there is no sign of a breakthrough. It seems probable that the main union concerned (the NUR) is determined to test the Government's firmness. In this case it must be assumed that the strike will begin at midnight on 17 June and will involve a complete shutdown of the Underground service. Our assessment is that it will not affect the London bus service.

The handling of the dispute is primarily the responsibility of the GLC in conjunction with the employers, the London Transport Executive. But it is clear that whatever the formal position, it is the Government who will be under fire for the consequences and held to blame if things go badly wrong. It will therefore be important for us to keep in close touch with the GLC so as to ensure that we know what they plan to do with a view to finding a basis for settlement. I do not for one moment suggest that we should seek to intervene directly or that we should press the GLC to make concessions which would be unacceptably costly in both political and financial terms. But our objective must be to keep vital activities in London going. If we fail in this our case will be lost. At the meeting we were all conscious of the need to avoid as far as possible a confrontation situation developing in which neither side had a means of escape. This means, for example, that we should not at this stage rule out, and ensure that the GLC does not rule out, the possibility of arbitration for which I understand there is provision in the Joint Agreement.

a note on arbitration proceedings in a Flag A

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It is equally for the GLC to give publicity for the merits of their case and generally to handle the public relations side of the dispute. But this again will need watching and the Minister of Transport, in conjunction with the Paymaster General, will keep closely in touch with what the GLC are doing. The Minister of Transport has detailed information about the financial implications of the NUR claim and since this is not strictly a matter for the Civil Contingencies Unit I have asked him to send this to you direct in response to the request in your Private Secretary's letter of 11 June.

See
Flag B

As regards contingency action, we concluded that:

(i) it would not be appropriate to activate the Oil Industry Emergency Committee at this stage. The Secretary of State for Energy is opposed to this on the ground that any official or public attempt to divert supplies would be widely resented and could provoke reactions from tanker drivers. He therefore prefers to rely on his contacts with the Oil Industry Advisory Committee and foresees no problem at present over ensuring that adequate fuel is available for buses and British Rail commuter trains;

(ii) parking facilities should be made available from midnight on 17 June in the Royal Parks. This will provide space for some 8,000 cars. We agreed on balance to accept the advice of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner that meter fees and other parking restrictions should not be waived, at least at the outset. But we shall keep this under review. We also agreed that the possibility of finding emergency parking space near suburban British Rail stations should be pursued urgently. I have asked for a report on progress made over this by Thursday;

(iii) The Minister of State, Civil Service Department, will issue instructions to all Government Departments to take all possible steps to stagger the working hours of

staff who live outside London. The Secretary of State for the Environment will do what he can to persuade the London Boroughs Association to take similar action. As regards industry and the City, we decided that rather than approach the CBI and other organisations, it would be better to cover this point in a Government statement;

(iv) the Minister of Transport intends to make a statement in the House on Thursday, 14 June on the Government's attitude towards the dispute, contingency arrangements and guidance for commuters. He will avoid getting involved in details of the dispute or its handling so as not to cross wires with the GLC, or prejudice the activities of ACAS. As well as the various contingency points mentioned above, the statement will urge people not to come to or through central London unless absolutely necessary and will encourage those who do come by car to give lifts to others. The statement will be discussed with the GLC so as to ensure that it is not inconsistent with the line they are taking or likely to be challenged by them. I have asked to be informed immediately if there is any indication that the GLC disagree with what the Minister of Transport intends to say. He will circulate the text to the Ministers directly concerned.

I have arranged for a further meeting of the Civil Contingencies Unit on the morning of Friday, 15 June to take stock of the situation and of the contingency action. I have also provisionally arranged for a meeting on the morning of 19 June to review the position in the light of the experience of the first day of the strike.

I am sending copies of this minute to the Secretaries of State for Defence, Employment, Environment and Energy, and to the Paymaster General, the Minister of Transport and the Minister of State, Civil Service Department. I am also sending copies to Sir John Hunt and Sir Clive Rose.

WILW

13 June 1979

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