



Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG  
01-233 3000

12 September 1979

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*Dear Christopher*

INDUSTRIAL ACTION DHSS : MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

I have seen a copy of the letter on this subject which Lynda Chalker sent to you on 5th September in Patrick Jenkin's absence.

We must not undervalue the importance of management judgments on the spot about the degrees of disruption of important work likely to flow from different responses to union threats. But I am worried by wider implications of what is proposed.

The behaviour and attitude of the unions in this case - and I refer particularly to the Child Benefit Centre in Newcastle - is disgraceful. It disregards the expressed wishes of a majority of the members affected and would, I am sure, be roundly condemned by a great majority of public opinion. Union tactics of this kind are becoming increasingly common, however, precisely because they are thought likely to be effective.

I am sure we would all agree that we cannot go on being held to ransom in this way, but I am also persuaded that we shall not halt the process by general speeches and exhortations alone: we shall have to take the risks in fighting individual cases on the ground. The risks include the effects of disruption of work, and we must face the fact that public opinion, however strong in support of our attitude in general, may in individual cases spread its criticism over management and government, as well as unions.

This may mean that we have to be selective. But even on that basis, my reaction to Lynda's account of the position at the Child Benefit Centre was that this would make a very good subject for full exposure to the public,

/that it

The Rt. Hon. The Lord Soames, GCMG, GCVO, CBE





that it would illustrate the general messages we are trying to get across about the unrealism and irresponsibility of much union behaviour, and indeed that if we are not prepared to fight on this kind of ground, it is difficult to see where we shall be able to fight.

I am copying this to other Members of Cabinet and to Lynda Chalker.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Geoffrey Howe".

(GEOFFREY HOWE)