

From: THE PRIVATE SECRETARY

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HOME OFFICE
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE
LONDON SW1H 9AT



Prime Minister

To note.

7 Aug. '81

✓ Mr Gattin
Mr Dupuis

Dear Tom,

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...
The Civil Contingencies Unit met yesterday at official level and has submitted to the Home Secretary the attached report on proposed industrial action by British Rail workers. Although the Home Secretary has not yet had an opportunity to see the report, I thought you would wish to have a copy without delay. You will see that the only Ministerial decision that would be required in advance of a strike is whether to put servicemen on notice to provide extra emergency car parking space in London, a decision that would need to be taken early in the week beginning 24th August if it was to be implemented from the start of the planned strike.

I am sending copies of this letter and the report also to the private offices of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Industry, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Paymaster General, the Lord President of the Council, the Secretaries of State for Employment and Defence, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Secretaries of State for Environment, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Trade, Energy and Transport, and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,

J. F. HALLIDAY

T. P. Lankester, Esq.

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PROPOSED INDUSTRIAL ACTION BY BRITISH RAIL WORKERS

Note by Officials

THE THREAT OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION

1. The Executives of the NUR and ASLEF have decided to give notice of an all out strike on British Rail (BR) starting on 31 August 1981. TSSA have decided not to strike and it is reported that members of TSSA will be expected to cross picket lines and report for work. On the whole they will probably do so but they are mainly in the managerial and clerical grades and would not, therefore, be able to keep train services running. The notice of a strike follows a breakdown in the negotiations on pay which have taken place in the light of the award by the Railways Staffs National Tribunal (RSNT) under Lord McCarthy. The award is not binding on the parties. The British Railways Board (BRB) have offered:

- (a) to implement an 8% increase in rates of pay with effect from 20 April 1981; as recommended by RSNT.
- (b) to apply a further increase of 3% in rates of pay from a date to be agreed, provided there is evidence of a commitment to specified initiatives to increase productivity; the RSNT recommended a further 3% from 1 August 1981.
- (c) to implement a proposal for an increase in the minimum earnings level; as recommended by RSNT.
- (d) to stage a return to an earlier method of calculating the London Allowance; largely as recommended by RSNT.

The Board's decision not to implement item (b) above with effect from 1 August 1981 in the absence of a commitment to productivity improvements is the reason for the breakdown in the negotiations and for the notice of a strike.

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2. The NUR strike notice also covers their members in BR hotels, workshops, hovercraft and Sealink services, but not those industries outside BR.

3. There are indications that efforts may be made to involve workers on the London Underground. In the light of the GLC's decision to authorise the LTE to pay these workers the rates recommended by the RSNT for BR workers there must be a real doubt whether they will join the industrial action. It is even more unlikely that London Transport bus workers will take sympathetic strike action.

4. It is, however, reported that the NUR will seek support from the NUM and ISTC, their partners in the "Triple Alliance". The NUM might well give support which would probably take the form of refusing to allow exceptional measures; they may try to stop the loading of coal, but are unlikely to stop the mining of it. The ISTC is most unlikely to take any sympathetic action. It is also reported that the rail unions may approach power unions, but the Department of Energy's judgment is that their support is unlikely to be forthcoming.

5. The unions' most likely tactic is an indefinite all out strike, although the possibility of a shorter all out strike to demonstrate the impact of a rail strike on the community cannot be ruled out. We do not think that the unions will now opt for selective action instead.

6. The assets of the two rail unions involved (as at 31 December 1979) are:

NUR	£18.4 million
ASLEF	£2.4 million

Not all of this could be made available quickly for strike pay purposes. The NUR are understood to pay strike pay at a rate of £1 a week day - a maximum of £5 per week. ASLEF are not known to have a stated strike pay rate, but the executive has a discretion to pay. However, we do not think that financial pressures are likely to lead to an early return to work. A partial unofficial return to work seems unlikely, but, in any case, a very large proportion of the workforce would have to return before rail services could be resumed.

7. The length of notice given could mean that the unions are hopeful that a settlement can still be reached and the strike called off. Or it could mean, as the NUR suggests, that it provides time for "the mobilisation of forces to ensure that the stoppage is total". Over the next three weeks the British Railways Board will be trying to find ways to get the two unions back to the negotiating table, and will be publicising to their workers both the consequences of a strike and the precise changes in working practices that they are seeking. A strike may therefore yet be averted but it remains a strong possibility.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION

8. ASLEF has 90 per cent of train drivers on British Rail. NUR has 10 per cent of train drivers and virtually all signalmen. The all out strike threatened by these two unions would stop all railway services. This would affect in particular London commuters, power station fuel stocks, freight services, some industries and other services, and shipping. These are examined below. Steps which the Government could take would have only marginal mitigatory effects on the first two of these (London commuters and power station stocks) which are the key areas in withstanding a long strike.

LONDON COMMUTERS

9. London is the only part of the country where a rail strike would seriously disrupt commuter services. Of the one million who come into London daily from outside the GLC area 400,000 are transported by British Rail. The severity of the consequences of a strike would depend on whether or not London Transport Underground remained in operation (which we think it will). If the London Underground services were withdrawn for a lengthy period the road system in central London would have difficulty in coping with the additional traffic, even with all available measures. Some means of limiting the number of commuters, probably by voluntary action by employers, would be essential. Compulsory restrictions laid down by Government would be unenforceable and it would be better to rely on exhortation and self-interest.

POWER STATION FUEL STOCKS

10. Coal fired power stations are largely dependent on rail movement, and there is little scope for supplying coal to them by other methods. With present stocks they could last some 7 to 8 weeks. But there is considerable surplus oil fired capacity which could increase endurance by some 2 weeks if ordered at the start of the strike; the cost would be up to about £200 million.

11. However even if power station coal stocks last out, any strike will affect the build up to autumn peak stocks.

FREIGHT

12. Freight movements by rail are less of a pressure point. Only about 10 per cent of freight is moved by rail, although this includes the great majority of bulk movements of coal for power stations, and of steel. Apart from coal for power stations (dealt with above) there are virtually no choke points in the movement of freight to maintain essential supplies and services. There are a number of cases where different arrangements will need to be made, but none to cause concern. Such cases are the movement of spent nuclear fuel from power stations to Windscale - their endurance is about three months - and the supply of aviation fuel to Gatwick, which could be tankered by road.

INDUSTRIES AND SERVICES

13. Industries depending on oil will begin to be affected after about 2 weeks, unless alternative road transport could be arranged for critical oil supplies. Industries depending on coal are likely to be affected only after several weeks, and those depending on gas should not be affected in the short term. Apart from the effects of fuel supply problems, industry generally is not likely to be seriously affected by the absence of rail freight, with the exceptions of steel, glass, chemicals and vehicles. The cumulative effect of shortages of raw materials, such as chemicals and steels, would gradually permeate other industries, including those concerned with the provision of essential supplies such as medical supplies etc.

14. Usually the Post Office would expect to be able to deal with three-quarters of all mail by employing alternative transport in the event of a withdrawal of rail services. The position at present however is less certain since pay negotiations between the Post Office and the Communications Management Association (CMA) are currently deadlocked, and the CMA (who represent first and second line supervisors) may not therefore be prepared to cooperate with emergency measures.

SHIPPING

15. British Rail shipping services to the Continent, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Isle of Wight will be affected, but there are private firms who should still be able to operate. This will mean delays for private travellers and freight, ranging from some, not too severe, dislocation on cross channel services to severe disruption to the Isle of Wight services.

16. Sealink services to the Channel Islands sail from Weymouth but dock staff there are NUR members who will be on strike. However the Channel Island docks are not staffed by NUR members, and it might therefore be possible for private operators to set up a Channel Island service. In addition there are the normal air services. There should therefore be no threat to the essential supplies and services of the Channel Islands.

STEPS TO ALLEVIATE THE EFFECTS OF A STRIKE

17. To mitigate the effect on London commuters the Metropolitan Police have contingency plans to:

- (a) direct police and wardens from other work to traffic duties;
- (b) open emergency car parks;
- (c) introduce emergency clearways on all radial routes with very strict enforcement of all waiting restrictions;
- (d) arrange with all business frontages on all radial routes not to receive deliveries between 7-10 am and 4-7 pm;

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- (e) suspend enforcement of bus lanes;
- (f) stop all possible road works except emergency repairs;
- (g) ban movement of abnormal loads;
- (h) arrange boarding and alighting points for coaches to bring in key staff.

In addition, as a further measure to be brought in later, the Metropolitan Police could allow free meter parking. None of these measures require collective Ministerial decision; the Metropolitan Police would implement them as necessary following consultations with the Department of Transport. Publicity about these traffic and parking measures might best be given in the week beginning 24 August.

18. In the same week the Department of Transport might set up its emergency transport organisation (to be ready to make best coordinated use of road transport) and might arrange extra publicity to encourage people to:

- (a) avoid unnecessary journeys into and through London;
- (b) arrange deliveries of goods to avoid peak traffic;
- (c) urge drivers obliged to bring their cars into London to give lifts - there are now no insurance limitations on this, whether passengers are carried free or share the cost of the journey;
- (d) provide accommodation in London for essential staff;
- (e) stagger working hours wherever possible.

19. There are already press reports of major companies in London examining plans for ensuring that staff could get to work by hiring coaches, for example.

Private operators may also introduce special bus services and whereas recent legislation has made this possible in principle, there are still some controls which may make this difficult in practice in this strike. The Department of Transport are investigating this further. Government Departments will need to issue the usual instructions to staff about staggered hours, taking work home, lift giving, and the Civil Service Department will issue guidance to Departments two weeks before the strike is due to start.

20. In addition to what the Metropolitan Police can do (paragraph 17(b) above) to provide emergency car parks (8,000 spaces), there is a military plan (Op PUFFER) to lay tracking in London parks to provide a further 6,000 spaces. On operational grounds it would not be required immediately, but Ministers will wish to consider whether to do so on wider grounds. The plan requires a lead time of 5 days. A collective decision by the Home Secretary, Transport and Defence Ministers and, if the Home Secretary thought necessary, the Prime Minister, would therefore be required early in the week beginning 24 August.

21. Ministers may wish to consider the increased use of power station oil fired capacity to conserve coal stocks (see paragraph 10 above). A decision on this could be left until the strike starts. In view of the costs involved we do not think that Ministers will wish this step to be taken before a strike begins.

22. Ministers will also need to consider whether, and at what point, a State of Emergency should be declared and whether Emergency Regulations need to be made. There is no need to make the Regulations at the start of the strike, but if it goes on for any length of time Regulations might be needed to relieve British Rail of statutory and contractual commitments and to overcome any obstacles to private bus services. The Department of Transport are investigating both these points. Even if this did not prove necessary the proclamation of a State of Emergency could be a psychological weapon which Ministers might wish to deploy. On the other hand Ministers might prefer to emphasise that the importance of rail transport to the economy had diminished and that a strike on the railways was no longer a matter of grave concern.

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23. The lead on Government publicity will be taken by the Department of Transport keeping in close touch with the Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary, who will himself keep in close touch with the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Paymaster General.

MINISTERIAL DECISIONS

24. We recommend that overt action by the Government is delayed as long as possible. On that basis there is only one area where a collective Ministerial decision will be needed in advance of a strike, and that is if Ministers wanted to put servicemen at notice to produce extra emergency car parking space in London (Op PUFFER - paragraph 20 above).

25. Once the strike has begun, early Ministerial decisions may be required on the following.

- (a) Op PUFFER (if not already ordered);
- (b) increased use of power station oil fired capacity (paragraph 21);
- (c) the possibility of proclaiming a State of Emergency (paragraph 22).

CONCLUSION

26. The stance taken by the NUR and ASLEF and the apparent determination of the BRB to make no fresh offers without a commitment to improved productivity indicate that a strike is likely. At this stage the possibility of moves to break the deadlock can only be speculation. An all out strike will quickly affect commuters, particularly in London, and bulk movements of coal to power stations. Some form of short-time or staggered working for businesses in London would be required, after say one week, if London Transport services continue in operation, or sooner if the London Underground is affected. The loss of freight services at this stage of the year would be less important than the effect on passengers but if prolonged it could undermine the hoped-for build up of coal stocks by the end of the autumn. Officials should continue to review all aspects of the contingency plans. Only one Ministerial decision

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is required in advance of a strike; whether to put servicemen at notice to provide extra car parking space in London (Op PUFFER). Once a strike has begun, early Ministerial decisions may also be required on whether to increase oil burn in power stations, and the possibility of proclaiming a State of Emergency.

7 August 1981

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cc A Duguid
J Vereker
A Walters

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT
2 MARSHAM STREET LONDON SW1P 1EB

Transport

The Rt Hon William Whitelaw CH, MC, MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Home Office
50 Queen Anne's Gate
SW1H 9AT

11 August 1981

Dear Willie .

Thurs

RAIL STRIKE

I have now seen the report by the Civil Contingencies Unit, at official level, which your office put forward to the Prime Minister's office on 7 August. This identified the need for a decision, in the week beginning 24 August, whether to implement the contingency plan for the Ministry of Defence to put tracking in certain London parks to provide a further six thousand parking spaces (operation Puffer).

I think I should let you know straightaway my view that we will need to activate this plan, if it seems reasonably certain that the strike will go ahead. It will be a vital part of our position that we are doing everything to ease the situation of the London commuters who will be hard hit. It will at the same time show resolution in face of the union threats. Nothing could do this better than visible preparations in the week before the strike starts.

I discussed this earlier today with Mr Barker, Assistant Deputy Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. He agreed that there were advantages in activating operation Puffer for the

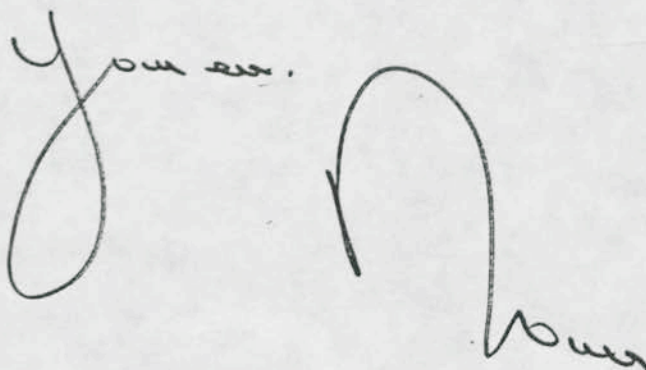
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first week of a strike. The extra parking spaces provided would ease parking pressures elsewhere. And any publicity given to any empty spaces on the sites provided would defuse pressures for unjustifiable relaxation of parking regulations in other parts of the capital.

While the instructions to set up operation Puffer need not be given until the 24 August, in my view the Army should now assume that this work will be required in that week, and should make whatever preliminary preparations are necessary for that. I hope you will agree.

I am sending copies of this to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Defence, and the Secretary of State for the Environment, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

You see.


NORMAN FOWLER

12 AUG 1981

12 AUG 1981

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QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

*cc A Walters
A Duguid
J Vereker*

14 August 1981

JMP

Dear Norman

RAIL STRIKE

Thank you for your letter of 11 August. As you know, the use of servicemen during industrial disputes is normally a last resort, but there is clearly no other means by which we could provide the extra car parking spaces afforded by Operation Puffer. I recognise that there would be some advantage in having these extra car parking spaces available as soon as a rail strike begins, and I would therefore be content in principle for Operation Puffer to be implemented during the course of the week beginning 24 August. However, I do not think that we can settle at this early stage the precise time during that week when the implementation of Operation Puffer should begin. I should therefore prefer that servicemen should be put on standby from Monday 24 August and that we should consider nearer the time, in consultation with John Nott, exactly when to implement Operation Puffer, in the light of the prospects at that time for a settlement before a rail strike begins. Meanwhile, perhaps officials from your Department and from the Ministry of Defence could consider the details and make whatever preliminary preparations are necessary for the implementation of Operation Puffer.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Prime Minister, the Secretaries of State for Defence, Environment and Employment and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

John Nott
Walter

The Rt Hon Norman Fowler MP

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17 AUG 1981

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Transport

17 August 1981

The Prime Minister has seen and noted your letter of 7 August, covering a CCU Report on proposed industrial action by British Rail Workers.

MAP

J.F. Halliday, Esq.,
Home Office.

NM