

Prime Minister

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RAILWAY PRODUCTIVITY

We face a very tense situation on the railways over the next few weeks.

The British Railways Board have been fighting hard in the detailed negotiations to pin the Unions to the changes in working agreements that they committed themselves to in August. The Transport Salaried Staffs Association has delivered on some items, so has the National Union of Railwaymen. Though it is not yet wholly certain that the NUR will finally accept the detailed agreement on the very important matter of variable rostering (that is, new arrangements to allow the Board to roster a man for seven hours one day and nine or ten hours another, instead of the present rigid eight-hour day). What is clear however, is that ASLEF have refused entirely to honour their commitments on variable rostering and so there is no progress with them on that or the associated commitment on train manning. The Board have therefore asked ACAS to call the parties together again to secure that the commitments are carried out. ASLEF will come under very strong pressure from all those in the trade unions who want to support the authority of ACAS.

At some stage, and probably before next weekend, the Board will have to make it clear that so far as the unions fail to deliver their commitments, the Board will not be bound by their agreement to pay the additional three per cent in January. It is too early to guess whether this will lead to disruptions of rail services, and if so on what scale, and whether

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that will arise on the 4 January or later. But we must reckon that early and possibly substantial trouble on the railway is now a distinct possibility.

As it happens, I have a longstanding engagement tomorrow to meet Sir Peter Parker and his Board with the leaders of the rail unions, in the Rail Council. I shall use this opportunity to the full to explain to the unions the very substantial help we have given to the railway, and the further commitments we have made. At the same time I shall make it absolutely clear that the dispute on the productivity negotiations is one between the Board and the unions. We must very firmly discourage any attempt to present these issues as ones between the Unions and the Government.

It is a great strength to our position here that I have secured the full commitment of Sir Peter Parker and his Board to working to the very tough EFL we have set them for next year.

I will report further to you when the prospects are clearer.

I am sending copies of this to the other members of "E" Committee and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

DH.

DAIVD HOWELL
16 December 1981

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From the Private Secretary

18 December 1981

Railway productivity

The Prime Minister was grateful for your minute of 16 December about the situation on the railways over the next few weeks.

She looks forward to a further report, as promised by your Secretary of State.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the other members of E Committee and to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M. C. SCHOLAR

Anthony Mayer, Esq.,
Department of Transport.

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