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Prime Minister

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PRIME MINISTER

RAILWAY PRODUCTIVITY

Unless there is some last minute change, the two-day strike called by ASLEF will now take place on 13 and 14 January, with a complete stoppage of British Rail's services, and consequential effects on the following days. On the other hand, efforts by some elements to secure a one-day stoppage on the London underground at the same time have failed.

I expect this dispute to drag on. ASLEF seem more and more isolated, embittered and entrenched. But - despite what Mr Buckton said in his "open letter" to The Times yesterday - the fact is that ASLEF last August accepted the principle of negotiating an agreement on variable rostering and have ever since rejected that. For the Board to knuckle under to that, and pay the extra three per cent agreed last August without anything in return, would severely undermine all their plans for the future of the business.

I doubt whether ASLEF will move to an all out strike, though there will be those who will urge that. They would have no support from the other railway unions. While the NUR have to try to defend the interests of the small number of footplatemen who belong to the NUR (though ASLEF dominate their negotiations) the NUR Executive cannot possibly support ASLEF in denouncing the commitments, which all the unions met, to the specific productivity changes, and which NUR have honoured.

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For the strike this week, the Metropolitan Police will be opening emergency car parks in the Royal and other parks (except for hardstanding on Clapham Common where Lambeth have refused facilities which are normally available) and will give extra effort to traffic control to keep the traffic moving. I have urged people to share their cars and stagger hours, if weather conditions allow use of the roads.

If later there is more prolonged disruption, there are further measures we can take. I shall then formally ask both Lambeth Council and the GLC to allow more extended facilities for parking on Clapham Common and in Battersea Park, though I expect they will be much disposed to refuse.

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

DAVID HOWELL
12 January 1982

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