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14/7

Willie Rickett Esq  
Private Secretary to  
the Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
LONDON  
SW1

14 July 1982

Dear Willie,

STATEMENT ON ASLEF STRIKE AND BRB RESPONSE

We have been told by Sir Peter Parker's office that BRB confirm they will be announcing at 13.00 hours today

- a. BR will be closed down from next Wednesday unless there is a substantial return to work by drivers;
- b. all those on strike the previous day will be dismissed.

I attach a copy of the statement my Secretary of State proposes to make to the House of Commons this afternoon.

I am copying this to the Private Secretaries of the members of MISC 80 and of Mr Biffen, Mr Jopling, Baroness Young, Lord Avon, Mr Sparrow and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours,

Anthony Mayer

R A J MAYER  
Private Secretary

STATEMENT 14 JULY

INDUSTRIAL ACTION ON THE RAILWAYS

With permission Mr Speaker I would like to make a statement about the current industrial action on the railways.

In the face of the strike imposed by the Executive of ASLEF against the new work rosters firmly recommended by Lord McCarthy's Tribunal, the British Railways Board have this afternoon announced that they will be forced to close the railway system down from next Wednesday unless there is a substantial return to work by the drivers.

All those on strike on the previous day will be dismissed. At the same time they will be offered re-employment on the same terms, provided only that they agree to work to the new rosters.



The decisions to which the British Railways Board have been driven are very grave. The strike which has caused them is a pointless one which should never have been called and should and could easily be lifted even now, by the ASLEF Executive.

The McCarthy Railway Tribunal has left no doubt that flexible rostering should now be adopted by ASLEF, with no less than 13 safeguards, as it has been by the rest of those working on the railways to their clear benefit. The British Railways Board has all along been willing to discuss details of how the new rosters should be brought in and ways of making the change as easy as possible for engine drivers.

Their proposals to this end were met with the blunt response by the ASLEF Executive of an all-out strike call, although having pulled this trigger the ASLEF Executive then suggested further talks, but still with no clear commitment whatsoever to any change in principle.

A further offer of constructive ways on which flexible rostering could be applied, once ASLEF have lifted their strike and accepted the principle, has again been rejected by the ASLEF Executive in the last 24 hours.

Mr Speaker, the path ahead for the railways of this country is now very dark. Vast resources are being bled away. Thousands of jobs could disappear for good. Travellers and holiday makers are being caused much bitter misery and suffering.



Those who called this unnecessary strike, as well as those who have given comfort and succour to the strike, carry an immense and direct responsibility for all this damage and all this suffering.

It remains in the hands of the ASLEF Executive to call a halt to the destruction. And it is the duty of all those who believe the public should be protected and the railways and those who work in them saved from disaster, to urge the Executive of ASLEF to desist from their futile course.



PRIME MINISTER

*MB*

Mr Howell's Statement on the Railway Dispute

Mr. Howell made a statement today reporting on the British Rail announcement that strikers would be dismissed next week and the rail network would be closed. He briefly reviewed the recent history of the dispute and concluded with one more appeal to the strikers to return to work before a disaster struck the railways. The Opposition reaction was somewhat embarrassed and in the Front Bench contributions, Mr. Booth and subsequently Mr. Robert Hughes withdrew from their previous commitment to the ASLEF cause concentrating instead on calls for greater Government involvement - as Anthony Beaumont-Dark put it "the beer and sandwiches approach". They contrasted what they presented as being Government indifference with their own efforts to get negotiations going. Outright opposition to ASLEF came from Leslie Spriggs (who is NUR sponsored) and partially hostile comment came from Gordon Bagier (also NUR) and Stan Cowen (an assessor on the McCarthy Tribunal). Outright support for ASLEF came only from the hard left - Bob Cryer, Leslie Huckfield, Sydney Bidwell and Martin Flannery, the latter two of whom threatened that other unions would become involved. Stephen Ross for the Liberals supported the British Rail Board unequivocally; Tom Bradley for the SDP (and the TSSA) condemned the strike but wanted greater Government involvement. All in all an equivocal Opposition response to contrast with firmness on the Government's side with an underlying theme of 'no surrender' articulated by Nigel Forman.

*Handwritten mark resembling a stylized 'A' or 'F' with a downward arrow.*

14 July 1982



AW

MCS

The BRB press release today. X overleaf  
reflects the determination of the  
railway managers on the Board to  
keep open the possibility of challenging  
the 10 hour week in the Courts.

59/82

Release: Immediate

J.  
14/7

BR TO CLOSE DOWN FROM 21 JULY

FOOTPLATE STAFF GIVEN ONE WEEK TO RETURN TO WORK  
OR FACE DISMISSAL

BR believes that in order to discharge its duty to the taxpayer it cannot go on running a partial railway service whilst incurring mounting losses resulting from a total of 28 days of strike action by ASLEF so far in 1982: it can do no less than take the decision to close down.

BR therefore announced today (14 July) that the railway system will be closed from 0001 hours on Wednesday, 21 July, unless there is a substantial return to work by drivers in the next week. This decision was taken by BR yesterday, but the announcement was delayed to allow ACAS to pursue their initiative to resolve the issue.

Dismissal of all staff on strike or taking industrial action on 20 July will be a direct consequence of closing the railway. Letters to footplate staff on strike, will point out that they are in breach of their contracts of employment; but each individual will be given the chance of immediate re-engagement on the basis of signing an undertaking to work flexible rosters.



X | If the railway closes down on 21 July, only staff necessary to safeguard the system will be required to report for work. All other staff, except those on strike, will receive only the basic minimum pay for one week, but during this period, BR will review the position including the question of suspending the guaranteed week. Closing down and paying only minimum wages will save BR £29m a week - £12m in pay and £17m in other operating costs.

- BR stress that the object of all their actions is to modernise working practices on the railway to safeguard the industry's future, which the grave damage caused by the ASLEF strikes is putting at risk, along with the jobs of thousands of railwaymen and women.

14 July 1982



## British Rail (Dispute)

3.32 pm

**The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Howell):** With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the current industrial action on the railways.

In the face of the continuing strike imposed by the executive of ASLEF against the new work rosters firmly recommended by Lord McCarthy's tribunal, the British Railways Board has within the last two hours announced that it will be forced to close the railway system down from next Wednesday unless there is a substantial return to work by the drivers.

All those on strike on the previous day will be dismissed. At the same time, they will be offered immediate re-employment on the same terms, provided only that they agree to work to the new rosters.

The decisions to which the British Railways Board has been driven are clearly very grave. The strike which has caused them is a pointless one that should never have been called and should and could easily be lifted even now by the ASLEF executive.

The McCarthy railway tribunal has left no doubt that flexible rostering should now be adopted by ASLEF, with no fewer than 13 safeguards, as it has been by the rest of those working on the railways to their clear benefit. The British Railways Board has all along been willing to discuss details of how the new rosters should be brought in and ways of making the change as easy as possible for the engine drivers. Its proposals to this end were met with the blunt response by the ASLEF executive of an all-out strike call, although having pulled this trigger the ASLEF executive then suggested further talks, but still with no clear commitment whatsoever to any change in principle.

The board has informed me that its further offer of constructive ways on which flexible rostering could be applied, once ASLEF has lifted its strike and accepted the principle, has again been rejected by the ASLEF executive in the last 24 hours.

The path ahead for the railways of this country is now very dark. Vast resources are being bled away. Thousands of jobs could disappear for good. Travellers and holiday makers are being caused much bitter misery and suffering.

Those who called this unnecessary strike, as well as those who have given comfort and succour to the strike, carry an immense and direct responsibility for all this damage and all this suffering.

It remains in the hands of the ASLEF executive to call a halt to the destruction; and it is the duty of all those who believe the public should be protected and the railways and those who work in them saved from disaster to urge the executive of ASLEF to desist from its futile course.

**Mr. Albert Booth (Barrow-in-Furness):** Will the Secretary of State tell the House why his statement makes no reference whatever to the ACAS initiative to resolve the dispute which has been running since last weekend? Will he belatedly join me in welcoming the initiative taken by Pat Lowry and his staff in an attempt to avert a continuation of the dispute and the shutting down of the railways that the Secretary of State has just announced? Will the Secretary of State also join me in expressing disappointment that the initiative has not succeeded? Will he tell the House whether he has studied the ASLEF

proposals to ACAS and say whether there is anything in those proposals that he thinks justifies their rejection by British Rail?

Why has there been no Government initiative to date in an attempt to resolve this dispute? Is the Secretary of State aware that there are those who have spared no effort in the last few days in an attempt to bring about a resolution of the dispute and that they look to him with increasing despair for some assistance in such efforts?

Does the Secretary of State appreciate that the threat of dismissing strikers will only serve to make the settlement more difficult and heighten hostility? What is needed is an attempt to de-escalate the dispute and reduce hostility.

Finally, will the Secretary of State recognise that the present railway crisis owes much to the policy of the Government in its making and that his role in the matter is an abrogation of his responsibility to try to get the railways running again?

**Mr. Howell:** Certainly I regret that the last-minute effort of the Arbitration, Conciliation and Advisory Service, as the right hon. Gentleman reminded the House, has not succeeded.

I have studied the proposals of the British Railways Board and ASLEF. There was no sign in the ASLEF proposals of a change of heart, or of a firm commitment to flexible rosters. If there had been a sign that it would lift the strike and accept the introduction of flexible rosters, I believe that the British Rail Board, and the Government, would have been extremely anxious to accept, and would have welcomed the consequent discussions that could have led peaceably to the introduction of flexible rosters.

However, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, that is not the position that ASLEF has taken. If there had been a genuine change of heart ASLEF would have lifted the strike and made a firm commitment to flexible rosters. It would have taken up that position before calling the strike on the railway system. It did none of those things, and the difficulty now is that under the shadow of the strike the ASLEF offer would postpone and delay again an issue that has been fudged and delayed for a long time. That would not be in the interests of the railway, the nation, or the vast majority of workers on the railways who have adopted the new practices and who want to get on with building a modern railway.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about an initiative. I believe that a good initiative by the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Labour Party would be for them to go back on their bizarre statement at the weekend and the announcement at Durham racecourse—which apparently was not given because the right hon. Gentleman ran out of time—which gave comfort and support to ASLEF and instead to listen to the wise words of Mr. Sidney Weighell, who urged the Leader of the Opposition to behave like a leader. When I hear the right hon. Gentleman apportioning blame for the railway crisis, I feel that we should all refer to the words of Mr. Sidney Weighell:

"We have grave doubts about you and Albert."

**Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing):** Does my right hon. Friend agree that the British Railways Board is absolutely right to take its decision, given that members of ASLEF and the Left-wing executive of Mr. Buckton have exploited to the full for more than a year the antiquated negotiating procedures in the railway industry? In those



**Mr. Hayhoe:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment is responsible for these matters. So far as I am aware, the report would not bear the interpretation that the hon. Gentleman seeks to place on it.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** When the Minister next meets the Civil Service unions, will he discuss the location of the Government Laboratory and direct their attention to the annual report, which shows that accommodation at Cornwall House is insufficient and, indeed, offends the terms of the health and safety legislation? Will he point out to them that there is still prime land in West Cumbria on which a Government laboratory could be built as that is what we understand they want?

**Mr. Hayhoe:** I have not seen such representations from the Civil Service unions, but if they are made to me I shall of course consider them.

**Mr. Woolmer:** I thank the Minister for confirming to me in writing that in the Civil Service the job release scheme is running into considerable difficulties and is thus frustrating the aim of taking people off the dole queue in return for others retiring early. What steps will he take to ensure that the scheme will work effectively, particularly in the Inland Revenue service?

**Mr. Hayhoe:** I know that there have been some changes in the rules for the scheme for the Civil Service. Again, the changes have been made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. I am certainly prepared to consider representations about difficulties in the Inland Revenue.

**Mr. Alan Williams:** When the Minister meets the Civil Service unions will he inform them of the timetable that he envisages for negotiations on the Megaw recommendations? Does he hope and expect that the new system will be operating by next April? If the Megaw proposals are accepted by the trade unions, does he expect the new system to begin with one of the major four-yearly comparison reviews to provide base figures for the future? If the negotiations and calculations are not completed by next April, will arbitration be assured for the 1983 pay round?

**Mr. Hayhoe:** As I said, the Government asked the Megaw committee to report this summer. The committee met that timetable and I hope that its recommendations can be considered in good time before the 1983 settlement. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear that the Government intend to begin discussions with the unions

as soon as both sides are ready, but it is too soon now to judge how much progress may be made towards reaching a new agreement that can be effective for the 1983 negotiations.

*Later—*

**Mr. Spriggs:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I believe that the Minister made an error when referring to the Rayner report. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Scotland Exchange (Mr. Parry) raised a question about jobcentres on Merseyside. The Minister inferred that the Rayner report did not deal with jobcentres, but it did and St. Helens—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The House will be grateful for that correction, if it is a correction. I do not know.

**Mr. Hayhoe:** Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Liverpool, Scotland Exchange (Mr. Parry) commented on the detail of the report. I fully accept that the committee referred to jobcentres, and that is why I said that it was a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment.

#### Management Information Systems

42. **Mr. Eggar** asked the Minister for Civil Service what progress is being made with the production of new management information systems throughout Departments.

**Mr. Hayhoe:** Each major Department has been asked to prepare a specific programme to improve its financial management. Departments are considering their requirements for management information systems in that context.

**Mr. Eggar:** My hon. Friend gives very encouraging news. Will he say by what date such schemes must be given to the Treasury? Will he confirm that in future more power will be given to the centre, particularly the Management and Personnel Office and the Treasury, to impose systems on other Departments?

**Mr. Hayhoe:** The Departments have been asked to submit to the Treasury and to the Management and Personnel Office early next year, their plans for improving their financial management. Further details will be included in the Government's response to the helpful and constructive report from the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee.



circumstances, British Rail was right to seek to impose flexible rostering. Will my right hon. Friend also note the contrast between the view expressed by the Leader of the Opposition and the right hon. Member for Barrow-in-Furness (Mr. Booth) and that expressed by Labour Back Benchers—for example, the hon. Member for St. Helens (Mr. Spriggs)—who realise that flexible rostering is essential if the railways are to survive?

**Mr. Howell:** My right hon. Friend is correct. I recognise that many people, regardless of party—I suspect on the Back Benches on both sides of the House—look with great sadness on the actions that have now been forced on those managing the rail system and on the consequences to the public by the calling of this strike. As I said in my statement, I believe that even now it is right that all who have influence on ASLEF and other trade unions should seek to exercise that influence to bring home the disastrous course upon which ASLEF is set. It will not help if further comfort and succor is given to the ASLEF executive, as appeared to be the case over the weekend, although I hope that that has now changed.

**Several Hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr. Speaker:** order. I propose to call first those hon. Members who deferred their supplementary questions at Question Time so that they could be called on the statement.

**Mr. Bob Cryer** (Keighley): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that four days before the strike began ASLEF offered to withhold the strike and was prepared to recall the ASLEF conference to embark on two experiments on flexible rostering? Is he aware that the British Railways Board rejected that, refused to withdraw its imposition of flexible rostering and that Parker and the board are now embarked on an unholy conspiracy with the Tory Government to smash ASLEF? Is not that confirmed by the fact that, even on its own figures, the British Railways Board will save only £1½ million in a full year as a result of flexible rostering, whereas the strike is costing £9 million a day?

**Mr. Howell:** The hon. Gentleman's figures are wholly wrong. In fact, flexible rosters are the direct key to £35 million of benefits a year and are the gateway to the working of a modern and efficient railway. Unless movement on flexible rosters is achieved, it in effect puts a bar on all advance into the modern technology of an efficient railway system.

I understand that at no time did ASLEF give any evidence that it was ready to commit itself to the introduction of flexible rosters as set out in National Railways Staff Tribunal decision No. 77. Indeed, when British Rail made proposals by which the rosters could be introduced sensitively, carefully and in line with all the safeguards, the response after 24 hours or more was a blunt refusal and the calling of the strike. As I said in my statement, it appears that after that ASLEF had some second thoughts and suggested some talks about talks that might further raise the issue. Had ASLEF been serious, and had there been a genuine change of heart—which I and the British Railways Board would like to see—it would have lifted the strike and made a firm commitment to the introduction of flexible rosters. It could then talk with the British Railways Board about how they should be introduced.

**Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd** (Morecambe and Lonsdale): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, unless this strike ended quickly, a closure of the railway system was always inevitable? Does he further agree that ASLEF's so-called offer to end the strike is nonsense because it is dependent, not upon the ASLEF leaders, but upon reference to a delegate conference of the ASLEF members who over the last year have demonstrated that they are incapable of reaching agreement on measures that are necessary to modernise the railway system?

**Mr. Howell:** I believe that to be the position. As many people warned, there were bound to be grave difficulties for the railway system if the ASLEF executive persisted in its strike call. As I have said many times, I believe the strike to be unnecessary. It could now easily be lifted and the ASLEF executive could enter into talks about the introduction of flexible rosters. The opportunity for it to do so still exists. That would save the threat to many of its fellow railway workers and the future of the system.

**Mr. Sydney Bidwell** (Ealing, Southall): Why cannot the right hon. Gentleman step aside from his lengthy brief and apply his mind to the country's transport needs? The train men are proud craft workers, and his task is to get them and the British Railways Board around the table as quickly as he possibly can. He should understand that the Transport and General Workers Union, with its giant membership, will not stand idly by while he tries to destroy ASLEF.

**Mr. Howell:** Neither the hon. Gentleman nor many of his hon. Friends needs any brief to be reminded that the National Union of Railwaymen has accepted the principle of flexible rosters; that following an inquiry, a promise and an undertaking that they would be introduced, the railway tribunal recommended that ASLEF should also accept flexible rosters; and that they can be introduced in ways that will be compatible with the operation of sensible hours for engine drivers. All that can be done. All it requires is for the ASLEF executive to lift its strike action and enter into the discussions on introduction. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman should use his influence, which is considerable in the trade union movement, to ensure that common sense prevails with the ASLEF executive before great damage is done to people in many other unions as well.

**Sir Albert Costain** (Folkestone and Hythe): Does my right hon. Friend see any similarity between this small group of persons who are stopping the future development of the British Rail system and the landowners who, 100 years ago, prevented the development of the railways because they thought that it would upset their own selfish ends? At that time public opinion took over and convinced them that they were wrong. What steps can my right hon. Friend take to ensure that public opinion takes over in this instance?

**Mr. Howell:** It is regrettable that the decision of the executive of this union—and it was only the executive—to call the strike appears to have been taken without any regard to public or union opinion. I share the views of those who counsel against trade unions charging into industrial action irresponsibly without any regard to the understanding of public opinion or the real issues at stake.

**Mr. Leslie Spriggs** (St. Helens): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many hon. Members who are now



[Mr. Leslie Spriggs]

opposed to the flexible rosters do not know the first thing about them? As a railway man of many years standing, I have examined the new flexible rosters, and I believe that they will be of real service to every railway man in the country.

**Mr. Howell:** I very much hope that the hon. Gentleman's practical wisdom, based on hard and real experience, will be listened to closely by his more theoretical colleagues around him who seem all too eager to plunge the industry into grave dangers for no good reason at all.

**Mr. John Major** (Huntingdonshire): Does my right hon. Friend share my fear that if the rail network closes for a reasonable period many lines may never reopen? Will he ask the British Railways Board to confirm that? Will he also ask it to advise railmen of that fact? Will he further ask it to publish a list of the likely casualties so that both the public and the railway men can be in no doubt about the likely result of ASLEF's unreasonable action?

**Mr. Howell:** No one in the industry, in the Government or in the unions has disguised the fact that every day the strike proceeds the goal of a comprehensive, modern and efficient railway system recedes. That is a very great danger, and there can be no doubt that in reviewing the future of the railway system, as the Serpell committee is now doing, the impact of the present dispute is bound to lead to a revision of views about the kind of railway system that can be run.

**Mr. Stephen Ross** (Isle of Wight): Is the Secretary of State aware that the Liberal Party thinks that his attitude, and that of his Government, to public transport, and the railways in particular, needs to be greatly enlightened? It would help enormously if investment could be promised now for genuine productivity. [HON MEMBERS: "It has."] It has not been promised by the Secretary of State. Nevertheless, the Liberal Party supports the British Railways Board in the announcement that it has unfortunately had to make today. Like the Secretary of State, we urge on the members of ASLEF a return to work without further delay and the calling-off of this pointless strike.

**Mr. Howell:** If I heard aright, the hon. Gentleman in the end came down in support of the British Railways Board and its determination to obtain higher productivity and a modern railway system. That is what it is after, and that is what everyone interested in the future of the railways should be after. That is why he, his colleagues, and many hon. Members in the Labour Party as well should support the British Railways Board and try to bring home to ASLEF the futility of the course on which it is set.

**Mr. Gordon A. T. Bagier** (Sunderland, South): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there are many hon. Members who have been doing their utmost to find a solution to the problem? Does he understand that, although there is a genuine difference of opinion between the NUR and ASLEF as to the approach to flexible rostering, they have nevertheless tried to find a peaceful solution to the confrontation? When will the right hon. Gentleman and his right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State allegedly responsible for employment, do something about getting people round the table to talk about this problem?

Does he not appreciate that many people believe that the Secretaries of State have abdicated their responsibility, and that hurling abuse at my right hon. Friend the Member for Barrow-in-Furness (Mr. Booth) and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition does nothing but exacerbate the problem?

Does the right hon. Gentleman further agree that, although there may be a case for turning off the money tap and closing the railway from next Wednesday, there is no excuse for putting a sacking notice on the drivers, which will only exacerbate the position and unite the trade union movement behind ASLEF?

**Mr. Howell:** The hon. Gentleman, who is experienced in the railways, will know that time and again there have been attempts to bring the ASLEF executive round the table to accept the principle of flexible rostering and to discuss how to introduce it.

**Mr. Ted Graham** (Edmonton): Not by the Secretary of State.

**Mr. Howell:** He knows, too, that the response of ASLEF was not to agree to the talks but to call a strike. I am sure that he will accept that the need is for ASLEF to lift the strike and to agree to the discussions about the introduction of flexible rostering, and then there will be progress on the railways. That is the aim, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman will share.

**Sir Raymond Gower** (Barry): Has my right hon. Friend noted the description by the general secretary of the NUR that this has been a selfish and sectional action by ASLEF? Is it not true that the action taken by ASLEF will inflict much suffering on members of the NUR and the TSSA.

**Mr. Howell:** My hon. Friend is right. The strike is not in the interests of railway men and does not even represent the interests of the vast majority of railway men. The action is wholly against their interests and may greatly damage the future for all of them.

**Mr. Les Huckfield** (Nuneaton): Cannot the right hon. Gentleman accept that it is factually correct that it was the British Railways Board which refused to negotiate when the ASLEF executive offered two weeks ago precisely what the board had been seeking? It was the board who refused to negotiate. Does he accept that this week the local management of British Railways Board has been using threats, bullying and intimidation against members of ASLEF? Such tactics only confirm what many of us believe—that both he and the board have been seeking throughout a deliberate confrontation with the union. Does he accept that he as much as anyone else is responsible for the dispute, and should do something about resolving it?

**Mr. Howell:** The hon. Gentleman talks about correct facts, but staring him in the face is the fact that he cannot escape, and which no rewriting of history can change. The board has bent over backwards to provide ways by which flexible rosters, as recommended by the Lord McCarthy tribunal, can be introduced, but the blunt response of the ASLEF executive, on the evening of 29 June, was to call the strike. The facts cannot be put aside, rewritten or changed by the hon. Gentleman.

If the hon. Gentleman believes that there is now a change of heart by ASLEF, that will be welcome to the British Railways Board. In that case, let him recommend to ASLEF that it lifts the strike, agrees to the introduction,



in principle and in practice, of flexible rosters and gets down to discussing how it can be done for the benefit of everyone, including ASLEF members.

**Mr. Robert Adley** (Christchurch and Lymington): Does my right hon. Friend agree that en route from Nuneaton to Wigan the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Huckfield) would be well advised to stop off at St. Helens, where the view of the hon. Member for St. Helens (Mr. Spriggs) represent those of many ASLEF men that I know—that the new flexible rosters will bring them benefits, not disadvantages?

Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to point out to the Opposition and to the country that we are dealing not with a private sector employer in the nineteenth century trying to grind the faces of the poor, but with a management doing its damnest in difficult circumstances to run a major nationalised industry as best it can for the benefit of the customer and the nation? Does he agree—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I said that I would call four more hon. Gentlemen from either side of the House. I shall be able to call only two if we have long questions.

**Mr. Howell:** I agree that we are dealing with the management of a major nationalised industry aiming for good productivity and good services as the basis for good investment, modern equipment and a good railway for the future. That is what the British Railways Board is trying to achieve, and it should be supported. All this talk about union smashing, or any of the other fanciful suggestions, is a distraction from the basic aim that should be backed by all those who have the railways' interests truly at heart.

**Mr. Tom Bradley** (Leicester, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that his statement condemning this disastrous strike is very much in line with what the leaders of the two other rail unions—the TSSA and the NUR—are saying? With that advantage behind him, why does the right hon. Gentleman still continue to shrug his shoulders? It is not inconceivable that the Government have responsibility in this matter and, therefore, why will the Secretary of State not take an initiative, as his predecessors have done on many post-war occasions, in bringing the parties together round the table to negotiate and resolve this unsatisfactory position? What does he intend to do?

**Mr. Howell:** I am sure that the hon. Member will be the first to accept that as long as there is the fact of the strike hanging over the issue—which is what has happened—it is difficult for anyone to see how sensible discussions can take place about the introduction of flexible rosters. It would be highly desirable, and the board and the Government would welcome it, if the ASLEF executive now took steps to accept the Lord McCarthy tribunal recommendation, lift the strike, and enter into discussions on how to introduce flexible rosters. That must be the first step. It is a sensible step and one that all the other unions, anybody interested in the railway industry and the general public wish to see taken. That is where the change of heart is required so that the railways' future can be secured.

**Mr. Nigel Forman** (Carshalton): Is my right hon. Friend aware that thousands of regular commuters in my constituency are fed up to the back teeth with Mr. Buckton and the ASLEF executive, and the one thing that they would not understand would be the Government or the

Board, which are involved directly or indirectly in the dispute, backing down on the sensible way forward that has been suggested?

**Mr. Howell:** I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. That view is shared by the vast majority of those concerned—the travelling public, the other railway unions and the staff and management of the industry. It is also shared by the Government. It seems that everyone except the ASLEF executive shares that view. Members of the executive should quickly change their stance, as they could, to save themselves and many others in the industry grave difficulties in the future.

**Mr. Stanley Cohen** (Leeds, South-East): As one of the four assessors on the McCarthy tribunal, I can make one or two points. The first question is whether the right hon. Gentleman believes that consultation is preferable to confrontation. The second question is whether the Government have faced up to their responsibilities or passed them on to the board. Sir Peter Parker and the BRB will find themselves in an extremely difficult position.

When will the Government intervene to try to resolve what is obviously a difficult problem? The majority of railway employees do not want to be involved in a dispute, but the Government must accept their responsibility and take action.

**Mr. Howell:** Of course, consultation is always better than confrontation. When the hon. Gentleman says that it is a very difficult problem, he is right as far as ASLEF is concerned. However, the NUR did not find flexible rosters a difficult problem. It was able to undertake to introduce them and its members received a pay increase for that change in working practices and for others which, unfortunately, they have not been able to deliver. The NUR was able to go forward on the basis of higher pay and better social conditions for the guards involved. There was no difficulty for the NUR, and it is, therefore, necessary to get over to ASLEF—I believe that it is getting across to many ASLEF members—that there is no real difficulty in that union also accepting flexible rosters. The sooner that message gets over, the sooner we shall be able to avoid the grave damage that is taking place.

**Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the problems that we face in the dispute is that many Labour Members believe that beer and sandwiches at No. 10 will solve every problem? Is not the damaging intervention by the Leader of the Opposition part of the syndrome that if we meet together as Government and unions the give has to come in the middle? Let us all realise that the give has come already. 1919 is dead. Will my right hon. Friend agree that if the unions agree to realistic rostering they will have a good living, a good future and a high employment level? We all want that, but giving in, as the Leader of the Opposition wants to do, will ruin the railways and the whole country.

**Mr. Howell:** I agree with my hon. Friend. Frankly, I do not know what the Leader of the Opposition wants to do at this stage. I hope that, no matter what position the right hon. Gentleman and the right hon. Member for Barrow-in-Furness (Mr. Booth) adopted at the weekend, they will use their influence and authority to do what I understood the whole trade union movement was trying to do earlier in the year, which is to get the ASLEF executive



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to agree to the implementation of the McCarthy tribunal's recommendation that flexible rosters should be introduced.

**Mr. David Stoddart** (Swindon): Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that his lack of commitment to the railways for some time, his threats and the use of the mailed fist instead of negotiation have led to the lack of morale and industrial unrest that we have witnessed on the railways recently? Will he accept that the railways are the responsibility of him and of Parliament and not only of British Rail? It is no good the right hon. Gentleman believing that he can wash his hands of the situation, as if he were a latter-day Pontius Pilate. He will have to intervene eventually, particularly if the capital comes to a standstill. Why does he not intervene now?

**Mr. Howell:** When one considers the extra hundreds of millions of pounds that have gone into British Rail in recent times—the vast increase in the social grants, the investment programmes and many other resources—it is difficult to recognise the hon. Gentleman's description of recent events as accurate. I urge that, instead of using that sort of description, which is a distortion of the facts, the hon. Gentleman should try to bring home to the industry and its workers, and particularly to the ASLEF executive, that the Government have supported British Rail with substantial investment. Even now, new equipment that ought to be in operation is not running because the appropriate work practices have not been agreed. There is no question of a lack of synchronisation on that side.

The essential precondition for a successful future for the industry is that the ASLEF executive accepts what the vast majority of workers in the industry have already accepted, which is that the practice of more flexible rosters is the right one for our industry, as it is for almost every other railway industry in Europe that has made progress.

**Mr. John Peyton** (Yeovil): Is my right hon. Friend aware that accusations that he has been excessively tough and has resorted to the mailed fist are about as wide of the mark as are the suggestions that the British Railways Board is packed full of tough Tory politicians and that Lord McCarthy, who has not been mentioned often in these exchanges, has Conservative leanings.

**Mr. Howell:** I am grateful for what I think is my right hon. Friend's recognition of reason, balance and a fair-minded attitude when he sees them. It is not for me to comment on the other directions in which he cast his views, but I believe that the board has gone a long way to try to introduce the rosters recommended by the McCarthy tribunal sensitively and carefully and to recognise all the problems raised by the fears expressed by engine drivers and, on their behalf, by the ASLEF executive. A great deal of reason has been shown and the response has been this cruel strike. If we are to see a change of heart, an intervention or a movement to change the situation, that is where the change should begin.

**Mr. Martin Flannery** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does not the right hon. Gentleman realise that his statement will intensify and deepen the problem? Does he not also realise that the struggle is long past flexible rostering and has become a major struggle between the entire trade union movement and this dictatorial Conservative Government?

Will not the right hon. Gentleman accept that railway men have had flexible rostering for many years and that the Government are trying to impose on them inflexible rosters which they will not accept and which they say will cause serious difficulties for them in their daily lives? When will he make a proper intervention and call all the parties round a table to get them to examine the offer made by ASLEF, which has proposed that the two systems should run in parallel before a decision is taken on which is better? Why did the right hon. Gentleman refuse to accept that offer?

**Mr. Howell:** The hon. Gentleman may wish to see this as a struggle by the entire trade union movement, but if he consults many of his colleagues he will find that it is not that at all. If there are struggles and arguments, they are between members of the Labour movement about common sense practices that should have been adopted in our railway system long ago and have now been adopted by four-fifths of railway workers. That is what the hon. Gentleman will find if he listens and talks to those who are trying to ensure that the railways have a better future.

The only struggle for the board is its attempt to get new productivity methods introduced. That is a sensible way forward. It is recognised as such by the majority of trade union leaders and objected to only by the ASLEF executive.

The dispute is about higher productivity, better wages and better conditions on the railways, not about smashing the unions or the struggles of organised labour against capitalism. That is fanciful talk that has nothing to do with the present problem.

**Mr. Robert Hughes** (Aberdeen, North): Will the Secretary of State accept that he is under a genuine misapprehension that the strike can be called off only by the ASLEF conference? Has he studied the proposals that were discussed late last night, when it was clear that there was some movement on both sides and that the ASLEF executive was prepared to call off the strike today? As he is so seriously mistaken, does not that expose his difficulty in not having met the parties personally to discuss the issues? Instead he has relied on second or third-hand reports, however genuine they may be.

Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that many hon. Members—not only among the Opposition—have tried seriously to sustain the negotiations for as long as possible to enable a return to work on the railways and an end to the damage that will be done to the British economy? Surely he must understand that he cannot stand aside and allow the railways to be closed for a prolonged period without accepting his share of the responsibility, which will be a major share if he does not at least attempt to live up to the stature of the office that he holds.

**Mr. Howell:** There is no misapprehension. The board and the Government have been anxious for the ASLEF executive to change its attitude, call off the strike and accept the principle of flexible rostering as outlined in the National Railway Staff Tribunal's decision No. 77. That has been recommended by the tribunal and by successive inquiries and that is what was promised by the general secretary of ASLEF last August in return for higher wages. They were duly taken, although the promise was not delivered.

There is no misapprehension among the vast majority of railway workers. There is a realisation that the ASLEF



executive has called the strike and refused to accept the flexible rostering recommended by the tribunal. The executive is not prepared to move from that position. The vast majority of hon. Members, including many Labour Members, believe that the position should be changed by ASLEF realising that it is running itself, the industry and the future of the railways into a disastrous cul-de-sac. It is essential for Labour Members and all who are worried about the future of the railways to bring home to ASLEF the need to lift the strike and to accept flexible rosters before disastrous and permanent damage is done to the railway system.

## London Airport (Redundancies)

4.13 pm

**Mr. Russell Kerr (Feltham and Heston):** I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 9, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"the recently announced redundancies at London airport involving 7,000 British Airways staff and their effect on the employment situation in the area."

The matter is specific because it refers to a report in *The Guardian* on 12 July quoting British Airways management as announcing 7,000 redundancies in addition to the 10,000 announced last year. It has thrown a deep depression over that part of West Middlesex and elsewhere. It affects my constituents, many of whom are employed by British Airways, which is the largest employer in the area.

As the latest victim of the Government's ill-judged monetarist policies, the flag-carrying British airline feels especially bitter because, as one of Britain's high technology industries with a distinguished record as a leading international carrier, British Airways has been a mobile shop window for British skill and technology and has been of enormous benefit to British industry in its relations with other countries.

The rundown of British Airways is tied to the sale of the airline to private interests—the privatisation about which we hear so much today from people whose ignorance of the industry is matched only by their capacity to talk through their pockets. It should not blind us to the fact that the dismantling of British Airways is equivalent to the sabotage by stealth of one of Britain's major economic assets, on which we are told that our future will depend increasingly and in which the skill and inventiveness of the British workman is as nothing compared with the thirst for profit exhibited by the entrepreneurs.

No one will deny that, whoever ultimately owns the airline, it is important not only to my constituents, many thousands of whom gain their livelihoods as British Airways employees, but because aviation is the industry in which Britain leads the world, although any British breakthrough must cross the Atlantic to achieve proper recognition. Few, if any, of the world's aviation observers would doubt British skills in this industry.

The problem demands urgent consideration and arithmetic of the proposals argues the case most eloquently. Although the series of redundancies, totalling about 10,000 during the past year, has in many cases resulted in a fairly thick cushion being provided to soften the discomfort of job loss, at least temporarily, thousands of British Airways' highly skilled workers are being slung unceremoniously on to the labour market at a time when economic prospects, according to almost every economist except the Chancellor of the Exchequer, have hit rock bottom.

If we do not succumb to the Chancellor's gloom, in a year or two we may, with luck have a Labour Government and some adult economic policies in place of the juvenile monetarism that is the best that we can manage at the moment.

It is important that we realise that the profit entrepreneurs, who are not interested in the industry but



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in its money-making opportunities, now have the scent of victory in their nostrils and are being encouraged greatly by the Government in their hunt for quick profits from the exploitation of Government assets. When the full extent of the "steal" being operated by those highwaymen is understood by the public, the position will probably correct itself, so great will be public revulsion. In the meantime, those of us privileged to see the pattern from long association with the industry are seized of the idea of urgent action being taken by the House of Commons to protect the people's interests and their property before it is too late.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member for Feltham and Heston (Mr. Kerr) gave me notice before noon today that he would seek leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing "the recently announced redundancies at London airport involving 7,000 British Airways staff and their effect on the employment situation in the area".

The House listened with concern as the hon. Gentleman outlined his anxieties. He knows that I am instructed to give no reason for my decision. I must rule that the hon. Gentleman's submission does not fall within the provisions of the Standing Order and, therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.

## "Atlantic Conveyor" (Replacement)

4.19 pm

**Mr. Don Dixon** (Jarrow): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 9, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

"The building by British Shipbuilders of a replacement to the Atlantic Conveyor".

The importance of this order being placed in this country is evident from the fact that no fewer than three early-day motions about it appear on the Order Paper—541, signed by 123 right hon. and hon. Members, 545, signed by 59 right hon. and hon. Members, and 602, signed by 31 right hon. and hon. Members.

The importance of the order being placed with British Shipbuilders was stressed only this morning by a deputation which was led by my hon. Friends the Members for Whitehaven (Dr. Cunningham) and Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cowan), together with the leader of the Tyne and Wear county council, Michael Campbell, and senior shop stewards from the Tyne shipbuilding yards.

On the river Tyne, almost 10,000 men work directly for British Shipbuilders and many more thousands work in the supporting industries. Whole communities depend on British Shipbuilders for their livelihood. The order would save not only many hundreds of jobs, but would give an important boost to the British shipbuilding industry throughout the world.

It is important for the House to have an urgent debate, because there has been talk that the order may go to Japan or Korea. It is no good Lord Matthews, the chairman of Cunard, telling the British people through his newspapers during the Falklands dispute that they should be patriotic, and then giving an order for the replacement of a ship that was sunk during the war to a shipyard outside this country. That would seem to be a betrayal of all the relatives of people who were killed and injured and who fought in the Falklands war.

The debate would also give us an opportunity to stress the importance of the British shipbuilding industry to this country, and to pay tribute to the men and women who worked so hard to put the task force to sea.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Dixon) gave me notice before noon today that he would seek leave to move the Adjournment of the House for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that he believes should have urgent consideration, namely,

"The building by British Shipbuilders of a replacement to the 'Atlantic Conveyor'."

The House will have listened with anxious concern to the hon. Gentleman as he brought undoubtedly important matters to our notice. However, he and the House are aware that I decide not whether the matter should be discussed, but solely whether there should be an emergency debate of three hours.

The House has instructed me to give no reasons for my decision.

I have given careful consideration to the hon. Gentleman's representations, but I must rule that his submission does not fall within the provisions of the Standing Order. Therefore, I cannot submit his application to the House.





PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE  
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT

Michael Scholast

NO 10

Here is the ACAS  
"3rd package". You  
have to BR +  
ASHEF "packages".

Give me a ring when  
convenient after 10.45,  
+ I'll explain!

NTM

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1. During the period of negotiation provided for below BRB agree not to proceed further with the process of unilateral implementation of the new rosters.
2. During the same period ASLEF agree to suspend their industrial action and to instruct their members to return to work.
3. Both parties agree to enter into urgent negotiations in the RSNC to agree the introduction of a 39 hour week and more efficient rosters on the basis of all the recommendations and safeguards proposed by the Railway Staff National Tribunal subject to such variations as may be jointly agreed in these negotiations and taking into consideration the concern of ASLEF regarding the need for practicable arrangements. [As an alternative to a specific reference to the RSNT, it might be possible to refer to and list the principles on which the negotiations would be based e.g. a weekly guaranteed payment in place of the daily 8 hour guarantee, the possibility of having rosters varying around the 8 hour day by up to an hour either way and rosters up to 9 hours to be single manned, plus any other elements that ASLEF regard as important.] These negotiations must be completed by 19 July 1982.
4. The Executive Committee of ASLEF undertakes to recall the Union's Annual Delegate Conference within the period of negotiation to secure such negotiating authority as may be required to enable an agreement to be concluded.