

CONFIDENTIAL

*Original filed
Transport May '79 (Tubeline)*



*Transport Govt
Defense Machinery
8/6/79*

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

6 June 1979

Dear John.

*2
1/6*

Civil Contingencies Unit

The Prime Minister has decided to reactivate the Civil Contingencies Unit in the Cabinet Office and she would be very grateful if the Home Secretary would take on the role of Ministerial Chairman of the Unit.

The Prime Minister would like the Home Secretary in this capacity to bring together the Ministers concerned with the impending London Underground strike. She is particularly concerned about the inter-action of such a strike with a sympathetic or parallel strike on London buses and a concurrent shortage of petrol and diesel oil which would stand in the way of private transport filling the gap. She is also aware that the direct responsibility for London Transport rests with the GLC, and that if the Underground employees' claims were met without compensating savings on manning, there would have to be rises in either fares or rates or both. It would be appropriate, therefore, for Mr. Whitelaw to convene a Contingency Unit meeting with the Minister of Transport, the Secretaries of State for Energy, Environment and Employment present, to assess the situation and its possible development and consider how the Government should deal with it both operationally and in terms of presentation of the case to the general public. In this connection, she would like the Paymaster General also to be involved.

The Prime Minister would be glad to have a report from the Home Secretary by the evening of Friday 8 June.

I am copying this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Minister of Transport, the Secretaries of State for Energy, Environment and Employment, the Paymaster General and to Sir John Hunt.

You will already have received a copy of Tim Lankester's letter to Mrs. Flanagan (Ministry of Transport) of 4 June asking for a report by the end of this week. The arrangements set out in this letter supersede those in the earlier letter.

*Yours ever,
Ken Stone*

Liby

John Chilcot, Esq.,
Home Office.

CONFIDENTIAL

me

9/8/79

Best work
KRS 1/11

Prime Minister.

1.

Ref: A09643

Deal with
in letter to
Civ. to HO
P.A.

PRIME MINISTER

KRS
12/11

The CU is a piece of machinery with which No 10 has to keep in closest touch: all disasters end up on the P.M.'s table! In my experience it is invaluable - providing it is not asked to do the impossible.

KRS
30/11

Civil Contingencies Unit

This minute seeks your instructions about the future of the Civil Contingencies Unit (CU). The CU was established in 1972 to co-ordinate the preparation of plans for ensuring in emergency the supplies and services essential to the life of the community and, in specific emergencies, to supervise the implementation of the plans. It was very active in the winter of 1973-74 (under Mr. Prior's chairmanship) in the winter of 1977-78 (particularly over the firemen's strike) and throughout the whole of last winter. Its remit covers natural disasters as well as the consequences of industrial disputes.

2. As hitherto constituted, the Chairman of CU has always been a senior Minister, but his Deputy Chairman has been the Deputy Secretary on the Defence side of the Cabinet Office (Sir Clive Rose) and the members are representatives of the main functional Departments concerned with the provision of essential supplies and services, including the Ministry of Defence. Much of the work consists of detailed discussion of contingency plans and in particular sorting out the priorities to be accorded to the requirements of different Departments. Although much of this can be done by officials, it is important that the work should have political oversight. This arrangement (i.e. a group of officials chaired by a senior Minister) also has the advantage that in the event of an emergency, there is one Minister who is in a position to speak authoritatively in Cabinet or the appropriate Cabinet Committee about contingency arrangements. Although, as I say, the other members of CU are normally officials it has always been accepted that other Ministers may attend when the Chairman considers this desirable.

3. There is no specific emergency in prospect for which we foresee a need to activate contingency plans, although natural disasters can occur at any time without warning. We cannot however afford to be complacent about what may happen in the next pay round and in any case at this time of year a general review is undertaken of our plans, so that any changes which need to



be made can be brought into effect by the autumn. This is especially important this year so that we can take account of the practical experience gained last winter in implementing plans and operating the regional organisation

4. I hope you will agree to maintain the CU on the present basis: and if you have any doubts I should welcome the chance of discussing the matter with you. Assuming you agree, I recommend that the Home Secretary should be asked to take on the chairmanship. He is the Minister responsible if action is needed to introduce Emergency Powers and I understand that Mr. Whitelaw is indeed expecting that he will be given this role.

(John Hunt)

*Will discuss
and*

29th May 1979