

C. A. Whitmore

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HOME OFFICE

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14 November 1980

Dear Clive,

*ms.**Prime Minister
content with these
contingency plans?*POSSIBLE FIREMEN'S STRIKE: CONTINGENCY MEASURES*MRP 14/11*

At the Home Secretary's request, I am reporting in this letter on the contingency measures that have been put in train in preparation for the possibility of a firemen's strike. The plans are based on the use of the armed forces to provide a skeleton fire service using the Green Goddess fire appliances held by Home Departments for civil defence purposes. (The normal fire-service "red" appliances are too complex for use by servicemen who will inevitably have only limited training.) The full military plan (S.C.A.R.A.B.) was used in the 1977-78 firemen's strike. It would take 14 days for full implementation, although some response would be available well before that.

The Fire Brigades Union have called a delegate conference on 21st November, and unless the employers have meanwhile given some indication of their readiness to honour the pay agreement the Executive's recommendation to the conference will be that after that date there should be a series of one day strikes - which might be national in coverage, and which after the first strike might take place without warning.

Home Department Ministers authorised on 11th November "four wise men" consultations between local authority chief executives, chief fire officers, and police and military commanders. C.C.U. met at Ministerial level last night and agreed the following additional measures.

- a) M.O.D. should forthwith shorten servicemen's notice and should plan to implement the full S.C.A.R.A.B. plan as soon as possible.
- b) The Home Departments should press ahead as urgently as possible, with assistance from the M.O.D., in making Green Goddesses ready for service.
- c) The M.O.D. should start training as soon as servicemen are available (on Monday of next week) and in preparation for that, the Ministry of Transport should make a Regulation to take effect from midnight on Sunday permitting the driving of Green Goddesses by soldiers under the age of 21.
- d) Since full S.C.A.R.A.B. would not be available at the time of the delegate conference in a week's time, M.O.D. would initially deploy, if it seemed desirable, a more

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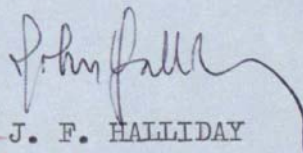
limited variant (S.C.A.R.A.B. Minor), which would keep the available vehicles and men in a number of regional locations so as to allow a fairly wide geographical coverage at a few hours' notice of localised strikes. This would give at least some capacity to cope with immediate strike action following the firemen's delegate conference. The full deployment would become available by the end of the following week.

- e) Troops, where available, could be committed to firefighting in response to a fire authority's request, at any time from now on, under an authorisation from the Home Minister concerned.
- f) No special announcement would be made about these measures. They would undoubtedly leak out and would be justified as being sensible precautions in the light of the firemen's declared intentions.
- g) If a strike did occur Home Departments' press offices should handle any press relations, in consultation with the Paymaster General, and there would be no need to activate the Central Press Unit.
- h) The necessary guidance to the local authorities would need, among other things, to make clear that the costs of providing emergency fire cover would fall on them, even though it was recognised that this might encourage an obstructive attitude in some cases. With intermittent one-day strikes there might be a need to provide double-banked cover for an extended period, and C.C.U. recognised that the financial arrangements for that might need further consideration with the local authorities in due course.
- i) There would need to be financial provision, on a contingency basis, for publicity to inform the public about any emergency arrangements. Beyond that it was decided that the Paymaster General should consider, in the light of experience in the last strike, whether a campaign of "fire prevention publicity" would be worthwhile.

Finally the Unit noted that the circumstances of this strike would be more difficult than last time because the Fire Officers were expected to side with the men. The tactic of intermittent one-day strikes would also be more troublesome to handle. Together with the prison dispute this would represent a major call on military manpower.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Private Secretaries of C.C.U. Ministers and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours ever,


J. F. HALLIDAY

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17 November 1980

The Prime Minister has seen your letter of 14 November, about contingency measures against the possibility of a firemen's strike. She has noted the plans agreed in CCU.

I am sending a copy of this letter to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M A PATTISON

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

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