



Parliamentary under
Secretary of State

Department of Employment
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Prime Minister

To be aware of this experiment. The MSC
expect the Civil Service unions to picket
some of the jobcentres involved, including
the one in Finchley.

15 April 1983

Tim Flesher Esq
Private Secretary
10 Downing Street
LONDON
SW1

WM
15/4

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Dear Tim,

SATURDAY MORNING OPENING OF JOBCENTRES

As the Prime Minister is aware, the Manpower Services Commission is starting an experiment this weekend to test the cost-effectiveness of opening Jobcentres on Saturday mornings. Since it is possible that there may be some demonstrations by the Unions and some resulting publicity, Mr Morrison has asked me to make sure that some background information is available to the Prime Minister should it be required.

In all, 38 Jobcentres will open on Saturdays for an experimental period of 16 weeks. The Commission and Ministers in this Department consider the extension, which will be closely monitored, particularly valuable to employed people who find it difficult to visit jobcentres during normal weekly hours of opening. Jobcentres not only have their traditional function of bringing together those looking for work and employers, but have also developed a wider role as the main point of contact for members of the public wishing to find out about the whole range of the Commission's services - including training, services to disabled employees and information and advice on employment matters. Many of these services are appropriate to employed as well as unemployed people.

All of the staff working on Saturdays will be volunteers who will receive additional payments in accordance with normal Civil Service rules.

As the Prime Minister is aware, one of the jobcentres included in the experiment is Finchley. Indeed, you will recall that the Prime Minister was consulted before the final decision to include Finchley was taken because the Commission expected that

any industrial relations difficulties there might receive some press publicity.

The up-to-date position on the industrial relations front is that the experiment is strongly opposed by the trade unions (SCPS and CPSA) who see Saturday opening as an erosion of improvements in staff conditions of service which were secured about 20 years ago. The trade unions have therefore tried to discourage staff from volunteering, although they have had limited success. The CPSA will also be picketing or demonstrating at some jobcentres - they claim about half. The Commission's officials expect heavy picketing or demonstrations at 8 or 9 offices - including Finchley - and local police have been forewarned. However, local managers have been given instructions to avoid any confrontation with pickets or demonstrators and not to seek any intervention by police. Senior staff will be available at the Commission's headquarters in Sheffield on Saturday morning to advise managers on any problems which might arise and both the Secretary of State and Mr Morrison will be available should a Ministerial comment be called for during the day.

The trade unions have made a great deal of play of the fact that the recent Rayner Report on the General Employment Services recommended that opening hours should not be extended on a regular basis, although Lord Rayner himself privately favours Saturday opening as a means of making more effective use of well-sited premises, many of which are in shopping precincts which are busiest on Saturdays.

The trade unions are also suggesting that references to an experiment are a charade and that decisions to make Saturday opening a regular feature and to change staff conditions of service to require Saturday working have already been taken. This is untrue. The Commission is prepared to abandon the idea of Saturday opening if the number of people using the jobcentres on Saturdays is not sufficient to justify the costs. Changes in staff's working conditions cannot be made by management unilaterally and would have to be negotiated with the trade unions on a Civil Service wide basis.

I am copying this letter to Mary Brown in the Lord Privy Seal's Office.

Yours Sincerely
Richard Power

RICHARD POWER
Private Secretary



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Date: 30 March 1983

Political



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From The Chief Executive

Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
House of Commons
LONDON
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L3113

Dear Mrs Thatcher

SATURDAY MORNING OPENING OF JOBCENTRES

As part of our efforts to improve our services to the public we shall be opening a number of jobcentres on Saturday mornings for an experimental 16 week period starting on 16 April. We think this extension which we shall monitor closely will be particularly valuable to employed people who find it difficult to visit jobcentres during normal weekly hours opening. Finchley Jobcentre which, I understand, is in your constituency is one of those which is included in the experiment.

Jobcentres not only have their traditional broking function between jobseekers and employers but have developed a wider role as the main gateway to a wide range of MSC services including training, services for disabled employees and information and advice on employment matters. Many of these services are appropriate to employed as well as unemployed people.

On Saturdays we shall provide a reasonably comprehensive service but with the emphasis on providing information and advice to the public as this is where we expect the demand to be. The staff working on Saturdays will all be volunteers and will receive additional payments in accordance with normal Civil Service rules. The number of staff involved will be controlled to match the demands made on the service.

You may see something about the experiment in the press and we shall be advertising locally to let people know the office will be opening on Saturday mornings. I thought you would like to know about this initiative so that you can, where appropriate, draw it to the attention of constituents who attend your surgeries or seek your help in other ways.

If you would like any more information of the local arrangements or more generally about the work of the Jobcentre at 60 Ballards Lane the Jobcentre Manager, Mr B Trevette, would be very pleased to provide it. Needless to say I will gladly answer any more general questions you may have.

*Yours sincerely
Margaret Thatcher*

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Employment

18 April 1983

The Prime Minister has asked me to thank you for your letter of the 30 March about Saturday morning opening of Jobcentres. She would be grateful to know the result at the end of the experimental 16 week period, and is grateful to you for letting her know about this in view of the Jobcentre at 60 Ballards Lane, Finchley.

Miss Joy Robilliard
Constituency Secretary

B D Emmett Esq