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Prime Minister 2

Board Room
HM Customs and Excise
King's Beam House
Mark Lane London EC3R 7HE

CONFIDENTIAL

3 April 1985

MINISTER OF STATE

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cc PS/Chancellor of the
Exchequer
PS/Chief Secretary
PS/Financial Secretary
PS/Economic Secretary
Sir P Middleton
- Mr Butler No 10

X Ref

THREATENED "WORK TO RULE" - CLEARANCE OF PASSENGERS/
ACCOMPANIED CARS

The unions have, as you know, chosen to single out this Department for media scare stories about disruption to Easter travel. They are indeed seeking to whip up support for a "work to rule". (A more accurate description would be "policy of maximum disruption".)

We think we have the situation under control. Over the past several days we have, as a contingency measure, been issuing reminders to our managers at ports and airports about the standard responses to industrial action, supplemented by detailed (secret) instructions advising them that:-

- (i) there should be a senior management presence at ports and airports over the entire holiday period;
- (ii) should any delays occur, contingent arrangements for increased duty free allowances may be introduced - if this is insufficient authority has been given to Collectors to open up the red and green channels if necessary and simply wave all passengers through;
- (iii) as a last resort if, in spite of (ii), staff should still continue to disrupt the movement of passengers, then a greatly accelerated TRD procedure would be used.

I should mention that the same tactics were utilised by the unions at Easter during the 1981 pay dispute. Despite a considerable amount of advance press publicity no problems were in practice encountered.

When the unions' story broke on the news this morning the attached Press Statement was issued which was carried on the BBC Radio 4 8 am news. I attach additional briefing covering some points for supplementaries.

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A M FRASER

POINTS FOR SUPPLEMENTARIES

Q. If Customs officers are working to rule why should passengers be delayed?

A. If officers apply their instructions passengers will not be delayed. Delays could only be caused by customs officers interpreting some rules in a quite unreasonable way and by totally ignoring others.

Q. How would passengers be delayed?

A. The red/green system of passenger clearance is designed to ensure that there is no undue delay to passengers. If officers apply their instructions then Customs do not expect there to be any disruption to passengers. If delays do occur, special measures will be introduced to minimise the inconvenience.

Q. What are these special measures?

A. I am not prepared to discuss these special measures. Customs have contingency plans that will be brought into use if delays are caused by staff not applying controls in a reasonable manner. Senior managers will be in attendance locally over the Easter holiday period and they will ensure that passengers are not unduly delayed.

PRESS NOTICE

3 APRIL 1985

INDUSTRIAL ACTION BY CUSTOMS STAFF AT PORTS AND AIRPORTS

Civil Service Unions have announced that they will take action that is intended to create delays to passengers.

Industrial action by Customs staff should not affect passengers leaving the country.

INWARD CLEARANCE

HM Customs and Excise wish to make it clear that the red/green system of inward passenger clearance and the instructions to their staff are designed to ensure that there is no undue delay to passengers who only have goods within the duty free allowances and are therefore entitled to use the "green" channel. Should abnormal delays occur in the "red" channel, special measures will be introduced as necessary to minimise the inconvenience. Passengers will be informed on any special arrangements in force but drivers of vehicles are reminded that they should exhibit a red or green sticker to facilitate movement.

Senior staff will be in attendance to see that there is no undue delay to the travelling public.

PRESS ENQUIRIES TO EXTENSIONS 5469, 5470 and 5471



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9 April 1985

PS/MINISTER OF STATE

cc PS/Chancellor of
the Exchequer
PS/Chief Secretary
PS/Financial Secretary
PS/Economic Secretary
Sir Peter Middleton
Mr Butler No 10 ✓

THREATENED "WORK TO RULE"

The Minister will wish to know that the threatened "work to rule" by Customs staff had no apparent effect on passenger traffic over the Easter weekend and there were no delays to passengers at any port or airport. Senior management intervention was therefore not necessary.

Alison French
ALISON FRENCH
Private Secretary

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