

SUBJECT  
cc Master.

file



10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

6 March 1984

Dear Nigel,

PROTESTERS AT GREENHAM COMMON

The Prime Minister held a meeting on 5 March to consider the Home Secretary's minute of 21 February about protesters at Greenham Common. The Secretary of State for Transport's minute of 29 February was also before the meeting. In addition to your Secretary of State, those present were the Lord President, the Lord Chancellor, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, the Secretary of State for Defence, the Secretary of State for the Environment, the Attorney General, the Minister of State for Transport and Sir Robert Armstrong.

Your Secretary of State said that officials had been examining the prospects for concerted civil action against the Greenham Common protesters, in the light of the earlier conclusion that the criminal law could not provide a comprehensive solution. Counsels' opinion had been obtained. It seemed that there would be little difficulty in commencing action to remove the women, but that once the necessary court orders had been obtained, enforcement could be a real problem. Although the names of the trespassers were not required for the purpose of obtaining a possession order under Order 113 of the Supreme Court, they would be required if an injunction had to be sought or if an action had to be brought for contempt of court.

Your Secretary of State added that, since his minute had been written, some further developments had occurred, and some further information had come to light. At the latest count, there were 67 people in six camps, though the total varied from day-to-day in the range 40-80. Officers employed by Newbury District Council were regularly removing structures erected by the women, both from common land, using their powers under the byelaws, and more recently from land owned by Berkshire County Council, acting as the County's agents. Thus, if the Government decided against concerted civil action, something at least was being done.

The Minister of State for Transport said that the Department of Transport was proposing to advertise on 13 March their intention to remove protesters from land in their ownership.

/ This would

059

This would enable work on the highway improvement scheme to start at the beginning of April. If this deadline were not met, a delay of three months would ensue.

In discussion, concern was expressed about the chances of concerted civil action failing, with a consequent loss of credibility for the Government. There was some evidence that the Greenham women were demoralised, and that the press were losing interest. It would be a mistake for the Government to offer them the cause they were seeking by adopting a higher profile than was strictly necessary. The more effective approach would be gradually to make occupation of the land more inconvenient. This could be achieved by action at a local level, and without concerted recourse to the courts, if the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Transport authorised the Newbury officers to act on their behalf. It would also be sensible for the Ministry of Defence land to be extended slightly to adjoin the highway, with a compensating grant of common land elsewhere.

Improvements to the perimeter fence were not the answer: no fence was entirely proof against incursions, and the more difficulties that were placed in the way of the women, the more it would add to their sense of adventure.

Difficulties would inevitably arise when the missiles were deployed off base. The Secretary of State for Defence planned that the convoys would be protected by civil police, accompanied by RAF police. It was an offence to obstruct a British serviceman in the course of his duty, and this, together with the offence of obstructing the highway, should allow the police to act. Nevertheless, vehicular obstruction, as so effectively demonstrated in the French lorry drivers' strike, was a real risk. The Secretary of State said that he was opposed to any extension of the Army Act to cover the obstruction of visiting servicemen, at least at present.

Summing up, the Prime Minister said that the possibility of concerted civil action through the courts should not be pursued at present, although an order for possession might need to be sought at a later stage. The various public authorities involved, including the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Transport, should exercise their rights to remove trespassers, using the Newbury officers where possible. The proposals in the Secretary of State for Transport's minute of 29 February were agreed. The resolution sent by the Thames Valley Police Authority to Sir Robert Armstrong should be noted, and copies sent to the appropriate Government Departments.

/ I am sending

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to those Ministers who attended the meeting, and to Dinah Nicols (Department of Transport), John Lyon (Northern Ireland Office), John Graham (Scottish Office), Colin Jones (Welsh Office), Christine Duncan (Lord Advocate's Department) and Richard Hatfield (Cabinet Office).

*Yours ever,*

*David*

(DAVID BARCLAY)

Nigel Pantling, Esq.,  
Home Office.