

PRIME MINISTER

BRITISH RAIL: POSSIBLE INDUSTRIAL ACTION

Colleagues may like to have an assessment of the present industrial relations problems being faced by British Rail. I discussed them this afternoon with the Chairman, Sir Robert Reid. I have already written to you about BREL, where the NUR proposes a ballot in early September. This therefore deals with the potentially more serious threat posed by a ballot of NUR guards, to be held on 29 August, in opposition the Board's proposals for Driver Only Operation (DOO).

To deal with the facts first, the Board announced some time ago its intention to extend DOO, already in successful operation on passenger services from Bedford to St Pancras/Moorgate, to passenger services on the Great Northern Line out of Kings Cross, and services in the Strathclyde area, both in the autumn. As instructed by their union, drivers have so far refused to start training on the Great Northern Line, and are being sent home without pay. This, coupled with an overtime ban by guards, is resulting in the cancellation of some trains each day. Furthermore, unofficial action by 200 guards in Glasgow, who are refusing to work on trains already converted for DOO, has also resulted in cancellations in the Strathclyde area.

The Board also announced its intention to reintroduce the three earlier freight train trials of DOO, again on a trial basis, and to instruct local managers to identify other services which might be suitable for similar trials. The first trial which the Board attempted to reintroduce was between Immingham and Santon (BSC Scunthorpe). Drivers have refused to cooperate and are being sent home without pay, as are the guards for refusing alternative duties. The second trial, between BSC Port Talbot and BSC Llanwern, has met with similar resistance but in this instance guards at BR's Margam and Llanelli depots are also taking unofficial strike action. The third trial,

This could go wrong - if so we shall have to rely on the guards to deliver coal

Prime Minister: At least the NUR are holding a ballot. They would not ever have done that without the 1984 Act.

9/8

CC J. J. Jones
CC A. J. Jones
PM's views relayed
15 DTP. NUR 12/8

On Freightliner services from Willesden (London) to Garston (Liverpool), was attempted this Monday, but with only limited success. Further DOO trials scheduled to start by 2 September involve stone and some oil traffic on BR's Western Region, oil trains from their Ripple Lane oil terminal (Barking) and coal trains to West Burton and Cottam power stations in the East Midlands. In all cases the majority of drivers (ASLEF and NUR members) have refused training but, with the exception of the Western Region, scheduled (freight) services have been unaffected. Without trained drivers BR will of course be unable to bring their new DOO services into operation, and they should therefore continue to operate normally. In the weeks ahead the number of DOO services rostered on both the Immingham and Willesden routes will increase, so the number of men sent home is also likely to rise.

The Board has already embarked on a communications exercise in an attempt to sway the NUR ballot result, not least by pointing out that their plans will affect a maximum of 2,000 of the present 10,000 guards, where the age profile indicates a natural wastage of 4,000 in the next 4-5 years. The Board will thus remain net recruiters, and there should be no need for redundancies, compulsory or voluntary.

Sir Robert is hopeful that the NUR may not achieve the necessary majority for either industrial or strike action (the wording of the ballot question is still under debate by the NUR). Whatever the result, the NUR Executive is in a difficult position, faced as it is with a conference resolution forbidding it to discuss productivity with the Board. It has thus been impossible for the Board to seek agreement for its new proposals on DOO, and the Union is powerless to intervene on behalf of its members who are on unofficial strike or being sent home without pay. Sir Robert's judgement is that the NUR will have to reconsider its position, perhaps by calling a special delegate conference in October in an attempt to overturn the earlier embargo, as a precursor to fresh talks. ASLEF, in the meantime, sits on the fence. It is broadly receptive to DOO, as its drivers receive bonus payments for operating trains without guards. Nevertheless, its members are refusing to be trained for DOO, and are being sent home without pay.

C O N F I D E N T I A L

Given the very clear objectives we have set him, I am sure that Sir Robert Reid has no option but to push forward with the productivity changes that the Railways need. The existing NUR conference resolution may well mean that he cannot do this without being prepared to risk some disruption of rail services. I doubt very much whether any national stoppage would prove to be at all lengthy. Sir Robert Reid will handle what is bound to be a series of difficult decisions in the way best calculated to minimise the damage. Meanwhile I think it would be prudent for the Cabinet Office to arrange for a small group of Officials from the Departments most concerned to keep developments under review and to be ready to report on any major potential problems with coal stocks or elsewhere.

I will keep you informed of any developments for the worse. Copies go to Nigel Lawson, Peter Walker, George Younger, Nicholas Edwards, Norman Tebitt, Tom King and Sir Robert Armstrong.

R.A. Allan.
(Private Secretary)

for NICHOLAS RIDLEY

(approved by the Secretary of State
+ signed in his absence.)

8 August 1985



10 DOWNING STREET

After I had conveyed the
PM's reactions to Transport,
Tony Budd (CO) sat a touch
to explain that the point about
a working group of officials
should already be covered by:

- the Civil Contingencies Group
who keeps working brief
on matters of this kind

- A Misc group or coord,
which should cover the points
about delivery by lorry.

There seemed no need

for a further group. MENT 13/8

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AT 31/7
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From: J B UNWIN
31 July 1985

MR TURNBULL - No 10

cc Mr Hatfield
Brig Budd

POSSIBLE INDUSTRIAL ACTION ON BRITISH RAILWAYS (BR)

I thought that, under my CCU hat, I should let you know that there are some slightly more worrying signs of trouble ahead on BR.

2. As you probably know, the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) is currently conducting a ballot of all members on the future of their Political Fund and is also considering a ballot of all members about industrial action in support of their opposition to the forthcoming closure of certain railway workshops. In addition, they already have authority from the Executive to ballot their guards about industrial action in support of their opposition to one person operation (OPO) of trains. A strike by guards would almost certainly result in total closure of BR.

3. The present assessment of officials in Department of Transport is that:

(a) the NUR are unlikely to arrange any other ballots (ie including the ballot of guards) until the Political Fund result is known - probably by about the end of August;

(b) industrial action is in any case unlikely until after the TUC Conference is over ie not before Monday 9 September;

(c) there is a possibility that the NUR might coordinate industrial action with their members in London Regional Transport if pay negotiations currently in progress are not completed beforehand;

(d) there is still, however, considerable scope for further talks between the NUR and BR Board, which are expected to take place;

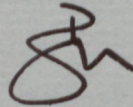
(e) there is also a possibility of an inter union quarrel between the NUR and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF) who, unlike the NUR, are in favour of OPO as it could mean more money for their members.

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4. This is still all very uncertain, and I understand that the Transport Secretary does not propose to write to the Prime Minister at this stage. He will, however, do so when the picture is clearer, though this may take some little time. In the meantime we shall be keeping a close watch on developments in view of the implications for the movement of coal to power stations as well as for commuter travel, and will keep you informed as necessary. Brigadier Budd will be here during my absence on holiday in August and if you have any queries, I suggest you have a word with him or with Mr Ridley's office if need be.



J B UNWIN

Cabinet Office

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