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Transport

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10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

11 June 1979

London Underground Strike

The Prime Minister has considered your letter of 8 June and the enclosed note by the Deputy Chairman of the Civil Contingencies Unit about the threatened London Underground strike.

The Prime Minister is content for Ministers to meet tomorrow afternoon to consider the conclusions in paragraph 14 of the note. A further report will, I understand, be sent to us in the light of that meeting; in view of the Prime Minister's summing-up of the pay discussion in E(79)(2nd) meeting, it would be highly desirable for this report to set out the effect on fares, local rates, etc. of L.T.E.'s conceding the N.U.R. claim - as well as covering the other points in Sir Clive Rose's note.

The Prime Minister has also read the Paymaster General's minute of 8 June, and is content with the approach to presentation of this issue by the G.L.C., London Transport and the Government contained therein.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to the Secretaries of State for Employment, Energy and the Environment, the Minister of Transport and the Paymaster General. Copies are also being sent to the Private Secretaries to the Secretary of State for Defence and Sir John Hunt, and to Sir Clive Rose.

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HOME OFFICE
QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT

8 June 1979

Prime Minister
of Mr. Wolfson
to Mr. James.

Ministers are now getting a grip
on this: two papers attached. (None there).

Dear Tim

1. Are you content for Ministers
to meet on Tuesday to consider the conclusions
in para. 14 of the C.U. paper?

LONDON UNDERGROUND STRIKE

2. Are you content with the GLC/LT/Govt
approach to presentation in the P.M.G's minutes?

Ken Stowe wrote to John Chilcot the day before yesterday in
connection with the London Underground strike which is threatened
from Monday 18 June.

8/vi

It has not been possible in the time available for the
Ministers concerned to meet to discuss this matter, but on the Home
Secretary's instructions officials from the relevant Departments
have met. A preliminary report covering the inter-action of the
strike and the current fuel shortage, possible developments arising
from them, measures to alleviate the situation and publicity
arrangements, is attached. All the Ministers concerned have
considered the report and concur in the assessments and conclusions
it contains. The situation will, of course, be kept under close
review. A meeting of the Ministers concerned will take place next
Tuesday afternoon and a further report will be sent to you
thereafter.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries
to the Secretaries of State for Employment and Energy and the
Environment, the Minister of Transport and the Paymaster General.
Copies are also being sent to the Private Secretaries to the
Secretary of State for Defence and Sir John Hunt, and to Sir Clive
Rose.

Yours sincerely

Tony Butler

Thanks - for notes
this in hand out.

(A J BUTLER)

T P Lankester Esq

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Interaction of London Underground Strike
and Fuel Shortages

Note by the Deputy Chairman of the Civil Contingencies Unit

Sir Clive Rose

This is a preliminary report on the interaction of these two problems and possible developments arising from them, with measures proposed to alleviate the situation. The situation will be kept under review and a further assessment will be prepared early next week in the light of developments in the meantime.

Industrial situation

2. Three unions are involved in manning the London Underground services. The N.U.R., with 15,000 members, contains 60 per cent of the motormen and all the signalmen. A.S.L.E.F. has 2,200 members consisting mainly of the balance of the motormen. T.S.S.A. has 3,000 members engaged on clerical, ticket collecting and similar duties. So far only the N.U.R. have announced a decision for an all out strike from 18th June. The other two unions are considering their positions over the next few days. But a strike by the N.U.R. alone would effectively halt the Underground.

3. A.C.A.S. had an ~~exploratory~~ meeting on 7th June with representatives of the N.U.R. and A.S.L.E.F. who are now informing T.S.S.A. (who were unable to attend) and consulting their Executive Committees about a possible joint meeting with London Transport management under A.C.A.S. auspices next week. It is not possible to forecast what the outcome will be. N.U.R. and A.S.L.E.F. were cool about a possible reference to the Wages Board, but did not entirely rule this out. At this stage there is no indication of the likely reaction of either side to such a proposal. Contingency planning must therefore take place on the basis that there is likely to be a complete shut-down of London Underground with effect from 18th June. There is nothing to indicate whether the shut-down would be of short duration i.e. a few days as a warning (on the lines of the British Rail strikes earlier in the year) or of indefinite duration until a settlement is reached.

4. There is no sign at present that sympathetic action by London busmen will be taken. The latter are members of the T.G.W.U. and there is no evidence as yet of any attempt on the part of the N.U.R. to get them to join in. Similarly, there is no indication that N.U.R. (or A.S.L.E.F.) are likely to consider spreading the strike to British Rail. One day strikes by A.S.L.E.F. on British Rail earlier in the year ended in a settlement and it is thought that the members of the unions in British Rail would be reluctant to take

sympathetic action in support of their colleagues in the London Underground. In the event of a prolonged Underground strike this situation might, of course change, and it will be necessary to keep the matter under review.

Passenger Problems

5. About one million people come into central London each day and of these about 40 per cent (400,000) end their journeys by Underground. The Underground is also the principal public service used for movement within central London during the day. Without the Underground there will be pressure on other forms of transport. There is little spare capacity in the London bus service, which is already fully stretched. In many cases commuters could make more use of British Rail from suburban stations where there are parallel services to those provided by the Underground, although their point of arrival in central London might not be so convenient in relation to their final destination. There is a limited number of private hire buses available in central London (around 400); as far as is known, nearly all these are already contracted on a contingency basis for use by private firms in an emergency of this kind. To the extent that they are used for this purpose they should relieve other forms of transport, and there would in any case be legal problems in the way of using them to supplement the London bus service for carrying fare paying passengers. The use of private cars is likely to increase and this would raise both traffic and fuel problems (see below). Within central London people are increasingly likely to turn to bicycles or walk.

Fuel supplies

6. There is an overall shortfall of supply of petrol and diesel over demand of about 5 per cent. This has resulted in delivery times being stretched and a reduction in the amount delivered to filling stations. On average deliveries are running at about 95 per cent of normal throughout the country, although the pattern varies according to the supplier (e.g. BP is still delivering 100 per cent but ESSO only 93 per cent) and the area. This overall shortfall is expected to persist at about the current level and is broadly consistent with what is needed to fulfil obligations agreed in the I.E.A. and E.E.C. in relation to demand restraint.

7. Whatever warnings are issued, a London Underground strike is bound to result in an increase in the number of private cars coming to London daily. To some extent this may be constrained by the availability of petrol, but this form of indiscriminate constraint could have a very disrupting effect on activities in London of all kinds. Unless therefore the consequences of this disruption are to be accepted, it will be desirable to arrange for some diversion of fuel supplies to the London area so as to ensure that there is a reasonable amount of petrol available to cope with the expected increased flow of cars.

8. The oil companies are not able to discriminate between one customer and another since to do so would risk putting them in breach of their legal obligations. It is possible however that the Oil Industry Emergency Committee (O.I.E.C.), consisting of the Chairmen of the major oil companies (with a Department of Energy representative in attendance) might take voluntary action to divert supplies on the basis that this was in the companies' own (as well as the national) interest. If the O.I.E.C. were prepared to do this they would not wish knowledge of their action to become publicly known for fear of the legal problems it might create, and because oil tanker drivers might attempt to block the action if they felt it was a form of strike breaking.

9. If the O.I.E.C. were not prepared to act in this way, an alternative possibility would be for the Secretary of State for Energy to declare a fuel emergency under the 1976 Energy Act so as to give statutory backing to formal instructions to the oil companies. Such an emergency would require an Order in Council and the action taken under it would therefore be liable to become public and the subject of debate in Parliament. It is nevertheless a possibility which, in extreme circumstances, it may be necessary to consider.

Parking arrangements

10. To cope with increased traffic in central London there are two possible measures which could be taken. The first is to open the Royal Parks for car parking. This would provide space for up to 8,000 cars, and would in the view of the Metropolitan Police be a sensible precaution if it is judged that the strike will last more than one or two days. The second is to waive parking regulations, i.e. suspend meter charges. The provisional view of the Metropolitan Police is that it would not be desirable to do this initially since the result would be severely to restrict the movement of traffic within London during the day; however, there are clearly public relations difficulties here, which all need careful consideration. A further measure would be to try to make emergency parking arrangements in the neighbourhood of British Rail suburban stations: the possibilities of this are under examination by the Metropolitan Police.

Publicity

11. An immediate requirement is likely to arise on the reassembly of Parliament for information about what steps are being taken to resolve the dispute and prevent the strike from taking place. This will be for the Minister to of Transport to handle in answer to questions which may be expected early next week.

12. Assuming that no progress is made towards a settlement it will be necessary for the Government to issue guidance sufficiently in advance of a strike to enable the guidance to be acted on - i.e. not later than the afternoon of Thursday, 14th June. Points to be covered in a Government statement should be:

- Defeatist!*
- (a) Other forms of public transport should be used as far as possible, e.g. British Rail and buses;
 - (b) Offices and firms should consider the extent to which non-essential staff living outside London can be advised ~~to stay~~ at home for the duration of the strike, or, possibly, to stagger days or hours of travel into London.
 - (c) Those who find it unavoidable to use a private car to travel in to London should ensure that they have enough petrol to reach their destination and/or make the return journey. So far as possible, journeys should be made outside normal rush hours;
 - (d) Drivers should be encouraged to carry passengers to the capacity of their cars. If desired, passengers can be asked to make an equitable contribution to the cost of the journey;
 - (e) Cars may be parked in the Royal Parks while the strike continues.

Emergency powers

13. It is doubtful whether the introduction of emergency regulations would be justified under the terms of the 1920 Emergency Powers Act. Legal advice would be needed on this point in the light of the development of the dispute. In any case no powers which would be authorised under the emergency regulations are needed. This question would only arise if the situation seriously deteriorated and the dispute spread to other services. At this stage there is no reason to consider any contingency action by the armed services, nor indeed any role they could usefully play.

Conclusions

14. The following conclusions relate to action required as indicated in the above paragraphs. They do not concern the tactics for handling of the industrial dispute nor the likely course it might take.

- (i) The Minister of Transport should deal with any questions raised Parliament early next week about the industrial dispute and measures being taken to deal with it.
- (ii) The Department of Energy should consult the major oil companies informally and confidentially about their reaction to the idea of diverting petrol supplies to the London area in the event of an Underground strike.

- (iii) The Department of Energy should consider next week whether to recommend that the O.I.E.C. should meet on Wednesday, 13th June, to consider taking decisions on (ii) above, and make such other arrangements as are needed to deal with the interaction of the petrol shortage and an Underground strike.
- (iv) If the oil company representatives on the O.I.E.C. are unwilling to take action as at (ii) above, Ministers will need to consider the possibility of taking powers under the 1976 Energy Act so as to enable directions to be issued to the oil companies.
- (v) If there is no sign of the strike being called off by the afternoon of Thursday, 14th June, a Government statement should be issued incorporating the points in paragraph 12 above.
- (vi) It would probably be appropriate for this statement to be issued by the Minister of Transport, but this would need further consideration nearer the time in the light of information about the G.L.C.'s attitude.
- (vii) The Department of the Environment, in consultation with the Department of Transport, should maintain contact with the G.L.C. and ensure that the Contingencies Unit is kept fully informed of their attitude and the action they are taking.

8th June 1979

