



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY
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 From the Secretary of State for Social Services

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 Dini Minutes
 To note: DfSS
 management have
 sent home more
officials without
pay for refusing
to work normally.

see the minutes

The Rt Hon The Lord Soames GCMG GCVO
 The Lord President of the Council
 Civil Service Department
 Whitehall
 London SW1

MS

17 November 1979

DL
 24/11

Dear Christopher,

INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

I understand you wish to be informed of the current position on the management response in DHSS to industrial action by our staff and the effects this is having. The overwhelming majority of our 500 offices are unaffected by any action. Where there is trouble, my stance can best be summarised as ensuring that I and my colleagues here are quickly informed of industrial action, that we consider its nature and effects in each case, taking legal advice if appropriate, and then, if this analysis leads to the conclusion that staff should be temporarily relieved from duty until they are prepared to undertake their full range of duties, we take that course. I do take very seriously into account whether or not the action is affecting services and payments to the public. In effect, therefore, we are dealing with cases on their merits as they arise and trying to ensure that there is consistency of treatment.

You will of course have seen press reports recently of the latest instance of this kind, namely, the fact that we have relieved staff from duty at the supplementary benefits office at Kennington.

The details are as follows. Some of the staff at this office have been 'blacking' work undertaken by

- (a) those of their clerical colleagues who, contrary to a union "ban" have been substituting for officers of a higher grade; and
- (b) casuals (staff recently recruited to fill clerical assistant vacancies on a short term basis).

This 'blacking' resulted in payments of supplementary benefit to people in need being held up. All attempts by Management to persuade the staff concerned to call off their action having been rejected, I decided that staff who insisted

E.R.

on not doing work for which they were being paid should be sent home without pay. This led to two members of staff being sent home on 13 November, and to some 9,500 of their colleagues in local offices (less than 10 per cent of the total staff of this Department) walking out in protest. This was pretty much what we expected.

The following day (14 November) seven more staff were sent home from Kennington and another was 'suspended' yesterday making ten all told at this office. Supporting action at other offices was very limited on both days. A limited walk-out took place at Newcastle Central Office: but staff at the Child Benefit Centre at Washington decided to take no action.

Staff in the local office at Nuneaton have also been 'blacking' work done by a colleague who was substituting for an officer of higher grade. At this office a total of eight staff have been sent home. Supporting action in respect of this office has been limited to the West Midlands - usually the staff of two local offices walk out each day in that Region.

I think it more than likely that it will be necessary to send more staff home at both Nuneaton and Kennington. The industrial action at both offices has the full support of the CPSA at local, regional, departmental, and national levels: and of the SCPS at all levels in respect of Kennington. Since the action being taken is in furtherance of the Unions' campaign against the Government's plans to reduce civil service manpower, there seems little prospect of bringing it to an early end. This is bound to lead to some difficulties in maintaining the usual services to the public in both areas. Already claims for supplementary benefit are being seriously delayed and we are moving to the stage where, despite the co-operation at the local authorities, there could be hardship to some claimants. We are, of course, proceeding urgently with plans to keep this to the minimum.

You are already aware that we took similar action at a Liverpool office (Breckfield) where the staff eventually returned to work on our terms, following initial walkouts in other offices. All such walk-outs of course lead to loss of pay.

I repeat that there are over 500 local offices and that in the very great majority the Unions' campaign is having little or no effect. But where in the Breckfields, Nuneaton and Kenningtons of this world I judge that they have overstepped the line we are adopting the TRD approach.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister, colleagues on E(CS) and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Yours
Patel

20 NOV 1979

