



Letter from Mr. Christopher
on the miners' strike at flag B.

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Ref. A085/58

MR BUTLER

You asked for a brief on the Civil Service trade unions, before the Prime Minister sees Mr Tony Christopher on 10 January.

2. Mr Christopher is now one of the longest standing General Secretaries in the Civil Service trade union movement. He has been General Secretary of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation since 1976. He has served on the TUC General Council and various TUC committees. He has also taken a keen interest in penal matters, as a member of the Council of the National Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders and of the Home Secretary's Advisory Council for Probation and After Care.

3. Mr Christopher is a sensible and moderate trade union leader, who is now deeply pessimistic about the way he sees his own union and other Civil Service trade unions going. In this respect he may be described as the cassandra of the Civil Service trade union movement, though other trade union leaders share at any rate some of his pessimism. He has had trouble with left-wing extremists in his own union, and he can see the way in which other Civil Service unions - notably the Society of Civil and Public Servants and the Civil and Public Service Association - have become dominated by left-wing groups. The latest manifestation of that has been the long running dispute in the Department of Health and Social Security at Newcastle, which has been kept going by Militant Tendency people at Newcastle despite the attempts of national leaders of the CPSA (notably Mr Alistair Graham) to persuade CPSA members in Newcastle to accept a reasonable settlement.

4. I expect that Mr Christopher will argue that, unless the Government can show some degree of flexibility in the 1985 pay claim for the Civil Service, there is a great danger that moderate trade union leaders will become even more powerless and the influence of left-wing extremists will grow still further.

Latest note
on activities
of the left in
CPSA at
flag A



5. The wounds in the Civil Service trade union movement created by the decision to deunionise GCHQ have by no means healed. None of them like losing members, and the subscription income that they bring. They keep referring to the Prime Minister's statement, at one of her meetings with the trade unions, that the gap between them and the Government was unbridgeable by words; and they feel that the Government's unwillingness to reach an agreement with them reflects a lack of trust in the union leadership which they resent. That being said, however, they recognise that they have exhausted all the steps open to them to challenge the Government's decision in the British courts. They will be doing their best to keep the issue alive, in the hope of reversing the decision if and when there is eventually a change of Government. But none of them expects GCHQ to be a major issue in Civil Service industrial relations, unless the Government has to dismiss anybody at GCHQ: in that event there could be calls for industrial action in support of the unions, a fight to protect the rights of those dismissed, though it would probably not amount to very much.

6. The Civil Service trade union movement is deeply divided on the 1985 pay claim, and it seems likely that the Government will have to negotiate separately with several groups of the unions. The CPSA has decided to go for a claim for a flat rate increase of £15 a week all round; other unions will be looking for a percentage increase, though there may be differences between them as to how it should be distributed. This fragmentation of the union side will certainly complicate the negotiation of the 1985 pay claim. I do not think that union leaders foresee industrial action on the scale of 1981, but they do foresee spasmodic bouts of industrial action in different Departments and different parts of the country, some of it outside the control of national trade union leaders, and some of it possibly ahead of negotiations, by way of "warning" to the Government.

7. Mr Christopher may well argue that the biggest single thing that the Government could do to defuse discontent and industrial action would be to promise the right to go to arbitration on the



1985 pay claim. The refusal of the right to arbitration was one of the principal causes of trouble in 1984. Clearly the Prime Minister will wish to do no more than listen and take note, if Mr Christopher makes that point.

8. Mr Christopher may refer to the general problem of morale in the Civil Service. As the Prime Minister knows, there are signs of increasing wastage in some key grades, including some of the younger and brighter administrators, based on three factors:

1. the deterioration of promotion prospects;
2. the belief that Civil Service pay has declined over the last few years in relation to the pay of comparable people outside;
3. the feeling that the Civil Service lacks public esteem and respect for its work, and in particular that Ministers do not value the work of the Civil Service and have been too ready to denigrate the Service in public.

9. On the question of promotion prospects, the Prime Minister could recognise that one of the effects of the reductions in the Civil Service has been to damage promotion prospects for those who were recruited in the 1970s. We recognise it is a serious problem, and one that is not easy to remedy; but we are thinking about it hard, and are doing what we can (within limits) to remedy or offset it. In that context, the introduction of performance-related bonuses may serve to provide some of the incentive which would otherwise have been provided by the prospects of promotion; but the trade unions do not welcome performance-related pay, since they fear that a minority of civil servants will benefit at the expense of the majority of their members.

10. On pay, the Prime Minister will not want to say very much ahead of the forthcoming negotiations. In theory, the 3 per cent



is a cash limit, not a limit of pay-increases, and does not preclude the negotiations of pay increases at a higher figure if they can be paid for by reductions of staff numbers. But that is not an argument designed to appeal to the trade unions.

11. As to the Civil Service image, I think that it would be very helpful if the Prime Minister could acknowledge her appreciation of the fact that the target for the reduction of Civil Service numbers from 730,000 to 630,000 by 1 April 1984 was met, and her recognition that the Civil Service have accepted the need for improvements in efficiency and the changes associated with that. Anything that the Prime Minister can say to record her appreciation of the way in which those changes have been accepted, and of the continuing devotion and integrity of the great majority of civil servants, will do a disproportionate amount of good.

R
Approved by
ROBERT ARMSTRONG
and signed in his absence

8 January 1985



Handwritten initials: J. B.

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Principal Private Secretary

Sir Robert Armstrong

You may remember that I mentioned to you the suggestion from Emma Nicholson that the Prime Minister might see privately Mr. Tony Christopher of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation.

This meeting has been arranged for Thursday, 10 January, at 1800. The Prime Minister would not wish the fact of this meeting to be at all widely known, but, subject to this, it would be helpful to have any briefing which you may think it useful to provide on relations with the Civil Service unions in general and Mr. Christopher in particular.

Handwritten initials: F.R.B.

24 December, 1984.

Handwritten mark: KC

D. R.

MR. BUTLER

cc Mr. Sherbourne

I have arranged for Tony Christopher of the Inland Revenue Staff Federation to come on Thursday 10 January at 1800 hours. You will remember that this request came through Emma Nicholson. I have explained to her that she will not be able to attend the meeting herself. But it is possible that she will actually bring Mr. Christopher to Downing Street. She will let you have a short background note a couple of days before the meeting. I gather you have kindly agreed to sit in on this meeting.

CR

19 December 1984