



cc Mr James
Mr Wilson

Pami hristu

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16/70

[Handwritten signature]

A note from Mr Prior
is attached
MS

THE PRIME MINISTER

TIMES NEWSPAPERS DISPUTE

You will be aware of the distinct possibility that closure of Times Newspapers could happen this week. Officials in my Department have been kept closely in touch with developments and it appears that the company is not bluffing when it speaks of closure.

Unless agreement with the National Graphical Association (NGA) can be reached by Wednesday night, the Boards of Times Newspapers Limited and its parent company - the International Thomson Organisation - at their meetings on Thursday will discuss the future of the company including closure of all Times titles. The other printing unions in the dispute have now reached agreement with Times Newspapers and it is only NGA that is proving intransigent.

There will be widespread distress, of course, if the Times close, but in my view the Government should not intervene. It is conceivable we may be criticised for not having, at least, attempted to save a "great British institution", but this does not change my view. We should not be associated with, condone or propose any capitulation by Times management on the over manning, new technology, disputes procedures and wages issues central to the dispute. Moreover we ought not to be seen to be giving any moral or other encouragement to the unions in their expectations. Government interference in Fleet Street would do nothing to resolve the important issues at stake within the newspaper industry and would merely strengthen the hands of the militants.



I am sending copies of this minute to our Cabinet colleagues
and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

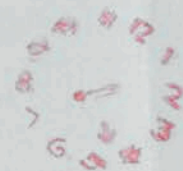
Department of Trade
1 Victoria Street
London, SW1

16 October 1979

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be the initials 'J.N.'.

J.N.

16 OCT 1979





10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

18 October 1979

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V/S.

cc Mr Wofson
Mr Tanel
Cabinet
D. T. T. Co.

Mr Stuart.

Times Newspapers Dispute

The Prime Minister was grateful for your Secretary of State's minute of 16 October about the Times Newspapers dispute, and also for Mr. Prior's minute of the same date.

The Prime Minister accepts that it would be wrong for the Government to intervene in this dispute. On the basis that the Board of Times Newspapers and the Thomson Organisation may decide to terminate the publication of all Times titles, no doubt your Secretary of State is considering whether it would be right to make a statement immediately after the decision is announced regretting what has happened, and in particular the intransigence of the trade unions.

I am sending copies of this letter to the Private Secretaries to members of the Cabinet and to Martin Vile (Cabinet Office).

Yours,
w.

T. L. L.

Stuart Hampson, Esq.,
Department of Trade.

61/2



~~cc~~ Mr James
Mr Thomson

PRIME MINISTER

TIMES NEWSPAPERS DISPUTE

I have seen John Nott's minute of today.

I am sure he is right in saying that the Government should not seek to intervene in this dispute. There is no prospect whatever that such intervention could in any way assist towards achieving a settlement. The major problems in securing agreement on management's proposals have all along been at Chapel level. It is most unlikely that opinion in the Chapels would be favourably influenced by Government intervention; indeed, it seems more likely that those concerned would only be encouraged to hold out for further improvements. I agree with John Nott that there is no advantage to us in being associated with any further concessions which management might have to make or with the lamentable state of industrial relations in Fleet Street generally.

I share the view that it will be a serious loss if the Thomson Organisation decides on Thursday to close all Times titles. This is however a decision for them to take and I do not think that we either can or should seek to relieve them of this responsibility. They are not in fact asking us to do so.

I am sending copies of this minute to John Nott, to other members of the Cabinet and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

J P
16 October 1979

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