

Mr P McCollum
Staff Side Secretary
Civil Service Central Whitley
Council
54 Wellington Park
BELFAST BT9 6DZ

C 168/72

February 1978

Dear Mr McCollum

I have not yet had your comments on the draft Circular on absences during "political" disturbances or dislocations of transport which I sent you on 9 November, and I am rather disturbed that Staff Side appear to have shelved consideration of this matter especially since there may be widespread dislocation of transport in the near future if the tanker drivers step up their industrial action. If there are any specific points which are delaying your agreement to the Circular I shall be happy to discuss them with you, or if your doubts are not about specific details but about the general tenor of the Circular I shall be pleased to consider your suggestions. The point is that time is passing and in view of the difficulties which we encountered during the last "political" stoppage we should like to have a revised procedure clearly established.

Yours sincerely

J D BLAIR
Official Side Secretary

MR BLAIR

DRAFT REPLY

The Northern Ireland Office was not in existence at the beginning of 1972 and the action taken against Northern Ireland civil servants who absented themselves from work as a protest against the events of "Bloody Sunday" was taken by the then Ministries of the Northern Ireland Government. The period of protest was from 31 January to 2 February and during this time 420 industrial and 174 non-industrial civil servants ^{in total} were absent from work without permission. While the majority of the absentees were in Londonderry ^{of the work locations} no precise figures are readily available.

In every case pay was withheld for the period of absence and in the case of non-industrial staff written reprimands were generally issued. A written reprimand, like any other disciplinary penalty, may have an adverse affect on an officer's promotion prospects for a limited period.

The gradings of the civil servants in Londonderry who took part in the protest, their present postings and details of promotion, if any, since that time are not readily obtainable without disproportionate cost.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON REPLY

1. No record of officers who took part in the "Bloody Sunday" protest is held centrally and the details which Mr Paisley seeks could only be obtained from individual Departments who would have to undertake considerable research to map the careers of the staff concerned over the intervening six years.

2. It may be that Mr Paisley is seeking to draw an unfavourable comparison between the treatment accorded to "Bloody Sunday" protesters and that meted out to officers who were absent during Loyalist-inspired stoppages such as the Vanguard Strike in 1972, the UWC Strike in 1974 and the UUAC Strike last year, but in fact our treatment of absentees who took part in political protests has been consistent throughout.

3. It is possible that the question has been inspired by information that someone who was absent during the "Bloody Sunday" protest has been promoted. A written reprimand is seen by any promotion board which interviews the reprimanded officer during the next three years, but promotion depends on so many other factors that it is not possible to draw valid comparisons between the subsequent careers of officers who have received written reprimands and the careers of officers who have not ^{been} reprimanded. Written reprimands are not generally issued to industrial staff, who have only very limited opportunities for promotion and who are not, as a rule, subject to promotion board procedures.