

MEMORANDUM FOR THE CABINET  
BY THE HONOURABLE PRIME MINISTER

Watchmen's Working Week

When the Government was faced with a claim for a reduction of the industrial working week from 44 hours to 40 hours, the General Workers' Union was told that the claim should have been made in the Joint Industrial Council, as acceptance of this claim would affect the Services' employees as well.

2. At first the Union was reluctant to table the claim in the Joint Industrial Council, but later they accepted the Government's invitation on condition that the Government watchmen, who are conditioned to a working week of 72 hours, should be made to work 48 hours only. The reason for this request was that, since the Government itself was aligning the conditions of its employees with those of the Services, it should start by improving the conditions of those of its own employees where these were inferior to those of the Services. The case of the Government watchmen who were working 72 hours per week was quoted as a case deserving immediate rectification.

3. An agreement was reached whereby the Union would table the 40-hour week motion in the Joint Industrial Council whilst the Government would give consideration to the claim for a 48-hour week for watchmen independently of the claim for a shorter working week for industrial employees.

4. The claim for reducing the watchmen's working week from 72 hours to 48 hours cannot be said to be unjustified. Although the watchmen's duties are definitely not strenuous, in a physical sense, yet 72 hours in a week are a long time compared to the 44 hours worked by other industrial employees.

5. The acceptance of this claim would result either in the increase in the number of watchmen by about 50%, or in the payment of considerable and continuous overtime to the existing number of watchmen. There is no doubt that, under all circumstances, the first alternative, that is employment of more watchmen, would be preferable. As there are about 400 watchmen in Government Service, the shortening of the watchmen's week to 48 hours would generate about 200 more posts, at an approximate cost of about £71,000 per year. This would be less expensive by about £35,000 per annum than paying overtime to the existing watchmen. (Overtime by industrials is paid at time and a half).

6. From the financial point of view, the problem does not appear to be insuperable. However, in the case of two other claims involving a reduction in the weekly working hours, viz: the General Workers' Union claim for a 40-hour week for all industrial employees, and the Malta Government Clerical Union claim for a 37½-hour week for the Government clerical staff, the Cabinet had taken the stand that any disturbance of

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the time/pay relation of any class of employees at this stage is bound to conflict with the Government policy of non-interference in the terms and conditions of work of Government employees before the findings of the Salaries (Anomalies) Commission were known (vide Cabinet decision 18. 7.68).

7. The same objection which applies to the two claims mentioned in the preceding paragraph, viz. the disturbance of the time/pay relationship, applies to the watchmen's claim as well. However, in view of the fact that watchmen are being made to suffer a social injustice by keeping them conditioned to a 72-hour working week, it is considered appropriate that this case should be given special consideration, even perhaps at the expense of some protests from other quarters. In this connection, it may be argued that Government has come to the conclusion that, in principle, the solution of this problem lies in the reduction of the working week from 72 hours to 48 hours together with a corresponding pay reduction which would maintain the same time/pay relativity. Unfortunately this solution cannot be applied in full because watchmen are already on the minimum wage scale, below which Government can not go. This obstacle should not, however, prevent the watchmen from being accorded more justifiable working conditions.

8. Hon. Ministers are requested to state whether they agree to the Union being informed that:-

- (a) Government agreed in principle to the reduction of the watchmen's working week from 72 hours to 48 hours, and
- (b) Government has instructed Official Side to work out the mechanics of the change, the Union being consulted as necessary.

3rd October, 1968.

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