



Prime Minister

CONFIDENTIAL

*Mr Fowler's explanation
of today's events in
Green Goddesses.*

PRIME MINISTER

MF

MP 14/11

GREEN GODDESSES

You will want to know how I have acted on the discussion in CCU yesterday, following the ruling from the Law Officers, also yesterday, on the state of the law relating to Service drivers.

The general purpose is to make sure that Service drivers who may have to drive heavy goods vehicles in an emergency for civilian purposes are not put in a false position under the law. We are, of course, only considering Service drivers who are competent to drive heavy vehicles. We have a duty to protect their position if we ask them to drive heavy vehicles on civilian duty. Many service drivers are already suitably licensed and of the right age (over 21) for the civilian rules. But a substantial number are aged between 18 and 21. Our predecessors used such drivers in 1977, but were apparently unaware that they had left these Service drivers without legal cover in the event of accidents.

I was given to understand in the CCU yesterday, and have since confirmed, that military drivers might need to be used at any time from tomorrow onwards. The Defense Council has now made a resolution enabling them to be so used. I have therefore carried through my statutory consultation this morning. They showed that there is no objection on safety grounds from the AA, the RAC or the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, or from the trade or the Local Authorities. The Unions - TGWU and URTU - objected, as I expected. Their complaint is about short notice, threat to road

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safety (which is odd, since these servicemen drive heavy military vehicles anyway) and the effects of general Government policy on the firemens' dispute.

I concluded that I could not accept these objections and, after considering them, I have made and laid the required legislation. This enables heavy goods vehicles, including Green Goddesses, to be driven in this country by Service drivers, including those aged between 18 and 21.

I have issued a simple press notice explaining this legal point, and that it has arisen overnight.

I am sending copies of this minute to the Home Secretary, and other colleagues who took part in the CCU discussions, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

NORMAN FOWLER
14 November 1980

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17 November 1980

The Prime Minister has seen and noted Mr. Fowler's minute of 14 November, about the steps he took on that day arising from the discussions in CCU on 13 November.

I am sending a copy of this letter to David Wright (Cabinet Office).

M A PATTISON

Anthony Mayer, Esq.,
Department of Transport.

