



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD
WHITEHALL PLACE, LONDON SW1A 2HH

From the Minister

PRIME MINISTER

24 February 1982

THAMES BARRIER

We are to discuss in E Committee tomorrow my paper E(82)17 on the effects of the Tees-side docks dispute on the delivery of gates for the Thames Barrier. My colleagues will wish to see the attached letter I have received today from the Leader of the Greater London Council.

I have had a word with Len Murray about the possibility of the TGWU's intervening to allow the gates to be moved. His first reactions were encouraging. He proposes to speak to Moss Evans and then to come back to me. I will report the outcome when we meet tomorrow.

I am sending copies of this minute to other members of E Committee and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

Robert House

for PETER WALKER
(Approved by the Minister
and signed in his absence)

From: Ken Livingstone
Member of the Greater London Council
for Paddington
Leader of the Council

1. cc Private Offices
Mr Smith Dr Dexter
Mr. Leach
Mr Langworth - for advice
please
Mr A. Bailey

17/23/2

MEMBERS' LOBBY
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2. Ministers

cc. h.c. office / Billings
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23-2-82

Dear Secretary of State.

You will be aware from your officials of the threat to London posed by the continued dispute at Teesside, between the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority and the TGWU. The situation is now becoming sufficiently serious that I feel it right to draw it to the attention directly to yourself and your colleagues in Government, and for this reason I have written to the Secretary of State for Transport in the terms of this letter, with copies to the Secretaries of State for Employment and the Environment.

By way of background, I should explain that the installation of the operating machinery and main gates at the Thames Barrier by the Davy Cleveland Barrier Consortium (DCBC) is being carried out in accordance with a programme agreed by the Council and approved by MAFF. The gates are being manufactured and stored by the Consortium at the Port Clarence yard on the north bank of the Tees.

The industrial dispute, involving Teesside dockers and the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority has prevented the loading out of the gates and their shipment to the Barrier site. (Existing dockside agreements mean that dockers' presence is required during the loading out operation even if, as in this case, the loading is carried out by specialist contractors)

Re-arrangement of the Barrier programme has so far succeeded in keeping work up to schedule for a mid-November operational date, but the revised programme still requires the last of four remaining gates, the gate arms and other machinery still at Teesside to be shipped to the Barrier by the end of March 1982; preparations for shipment should begin before the end of this month.

The consequences of a major flood on the capital are incalculable and well known. The situation will be worsened by the on-time completion of the downstream bank-raising works which will effectively funnel a surge tide into Central London. The importance of the November operational date is that this is the beginning of the 1982-83 flood season. Significant financial incentives have been and will be paid to contractors in an effort to meet this date.

DCBC have attempted, without success, to negotiate an agreement with the dockers' union (TGWU) and the employers, the Port Authority, to load the gates without the presence of dockers.

Attempts to settle the dispute, based on recommendations made by the conciliation panel of the National Joint Council for the Port Industry appear to have failed, with the dockers rejecting any offer which links part of the pay increase to productivity measures and revised working practices.

Council officers have been in touch throughout the dispute with the Contractor, the Consulting Engineer and with your own officials, who have been most helpful, as well with officials at the Department of Employment. A meeting has also been held with the Thames Barrier Advisory Team, whose suggestions were investigated but produced, unfortunately, no result. It is also understood that ACAS initiatives have come to nothing so far.

In the circumstances, I am writing to you in view of your responsibilities in connection with the Thames Barrier to see if there is any way in which you could persuade your colleagues in Government to intervene constructively. Any initiative could prove valuable in achieving the urgent release of the Barrier gates. It has been also suggested that a relaxation of current financial constraints might possibly be helpful in resolving the overall dispute. With male adult unemployment of the order of 20% on Teesside, the reluctance of the dockers to accept any settlement which might lead to a loss of still more jobs, is understandable.

I must stress again the urgency of the situation and the threat to London. Whilst any hope of settlement remains, we must continue to maintain Gate mobilisation plans at a cost of perhaps many hundreds of thousands of pounds - which will fall to the Council and Government to fund.

I would appreciate an urgent reply because of the critical nature of this problem facing London.

If it will help, I am happy to meet with you.

yours sincerely
Ken Hunt

The Rt. Hon. Peter Walker, MP
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