

*7. I should be repelled Prime Minister
collaboration throughout
of course humanity.*

*Mr Jenkin's statement. On x, I am assured
that there could be no criticism of the police for
not intervening - i.e. it is a "peaceful" picket. But
another tanker got through this morning. T.*

Mr. Patrick Jenkin (Secretary of State for Social Services) in a speech to the TUC Conference this morning urged the Trade Union Movement, in the interests of its own reputation, to deal firmly with wreckers like the Charing Cross Hospital pickets.

Yesterday's scenes outside the Hospital must be as dismaying to you as they were to me. Television brought them into millions of homes and the wrath of the people is intense.

Until the Trade Unions themselves exercise discipline over their members who refuse to abide by procedure agreements, it is the unions who, in the eyes of the public, will be held responsible for these episodes.

The right or wrongs of the precise cause of this dispute pale into utter insignificance beside the sheer horror of seeing cancer-sufferers standing in the rain with blankets across their shoulders, pleading with these men to allow their treatment to continue.

This is not an official dispute - the AEWU Executive has so far refused to make the dispute official.

But, with the greatest respect - that is not enough.

These pickets are bringing the whole movement into disrepute. It is up to you - who represent the huge majority of decent citizens who utterly deplore their action - to say to these men "enough is enough".

I made it clear last night that if the siege is not lifted swiftly I will be prepared to authorise whatever action is necessary to ensure that supplies reach the Hospital.

It is of course for the management on the spot to decide when to call for help.

I have let it be known that I am ready to support them in any reasonable steps needed to restore services to patients at this Hospital.

CONFIDENTIAL



Prime Minister National

Health

CCU have concluded
but we should not
try to step up our
capability to deliver heavy
oil to hospitals.

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PRIME MINISTER

SPECIALISED OIL TANKER VEHICLES

At Cabinet on 28 November 1979 (CC(79)23rd Conclusions, Minute 4d), in the context of the strike at the Charing Cross Hospital where pickets had prevented deliveries of heavy fuel for its furnaces, we noted the importance of specialised oil tanker vehicles able to carry heated oil and that the Ministry of Defence did not possess tankers of this type.

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Officials of the Civil Contingencies Unit have been following up this apparent weakness in contingency arrangements. You and other colleagues principally concerned may like to know where the matter now stands.

The size of the problem. There are over 400 hospitals in Britain using heavy oil, which is about 66 per cent of the total. On average, each hospital receives more than one delivery a week. The viscosity of the oil means it has to be pre-heated at distribution depots and transported in specially insulated tankers; but if the depots are within three hours of the delivery point, ordinary tankers can be used.

Conversion. It is technically feasible to convert heavy oil furnaces to use light oil (which would not need to be heated). However, for all but the most modern installations, this is a major engineering task which would be costly, time-consuming and disruptive. In addition to conversion of burners, light oil would require separate storage, fuel lines, etc, and the total cost per unit is estimated at £3,000 - £80,000 according to size. Light oil is in itself a more expensive type of fuel to burn.

Hiring. Specialised tanker vehicles can be hired from the private sector. If they were required at, say, 40 hours' notice to respond in an emergency, dormant contracts at £5,000 per vehicle per annum would be demanded. The hire charge whilst in use is £300 - £400 per vehicle per week. Finance apart, there is the major snag that oil company depots could (and probably would) refuse to load hired tankers engaged on strike-breaking tasks. Neither the Department of Energy nor the Ministry of Defence hold sufficient stocks from which hired tankers might load.

Acquisition by MOD. There is no military requirement for the Services to acquire specialised tankers for carrying heated oil. To date, successive Governments have taken the view that the Services should not be required to acquire equipment or skills for civil contingencies. I do not think we would want to breach that principle. Even if the Government decided to acquire a limited number of specialised tankers, access to stocks of heavy fuel oil could still be denied by oil company employees. If emergency powers were taken, of course, stocks could be requisitioned. But at that stage private sector specialised tankers could also be requisitioned, and nothing would have been gained by the Government owning them.

/Pre-heating

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Pre-heating. Where a hospital was within three hours drive of a depot, (which under present contracts most are) the Ministry of Defence could in theory help by loading pre-heated oil into the non-specialised tankers they already possess. In practice, however, driving time would have to be significantly less than three hours, to allow for possible delay in getting through picket lines; so that quite a number of hospitals might turn out to be out of range of this delivery method. Moreover, access to stocks at depots could still present a problem, as noted in the preceding paragraph, unless emergency powers were taken. A further complication is that only tankers of the Royal Navy are technically suitable for this task. The RN own 40, driven by civilians who might be in sympathy with commercial drivers; RN drivers could take over but this could jeopardise deliveries of other fuel oils to naval establishments. Diversion of RN tanker vehicles to this task would incur penalties for the Services. Before and after use, the tankers would need to be steam cleaned; the RN does not have equipment for this purpose and the job would have to be done commercially. Nevertheless, officials are now studying the feasibility of drawing up a specific contingency plan to cover pre-heated delivery in appropriate cases.

General. Even if a plan had existed, I doubt if we would have wanted to use military resources in a case like Charing Cross where only a single hospital was involved. In cases involving no more than a handful of hospitals, it would probably be right to think in terms of other expedients, such as evacuating all patients who could not temporarily be sent home. This would of course be a matter on which the Secretary of State for Social Services would want to advise his colleagues at the time. But I am sure that military intervention should continue to be regarded as very much a last resort, to be contemplated only when all other measures have been exhausted.

Union agreement. The DHSS have considered, as a separate issue, whether it might be possible to persuade the oil companies to negotiate with their unions an agreement to safeguard hospitals' supplies during industrial action. They have concluded that this would not be practicable.

I am sending copies of this minute to the Chancellor of the Exchequer; to the Secretaries of State for Defence, Employment, the Environment, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Social Services and Energy; to the Minister of Transport; and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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May 1980

Prime Minister, ²

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To note

MS

ABJ

Duty Clerk

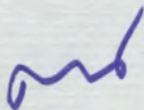
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MR. SANDERS

Charing Cross Hospital

The position at this hospital is that a small delivery of oil was made earlier today and it is hoped that a further delivery will be made tonight or early tomorrow morning to enable services to be maintained. The Regional Health Authority is currently talking with local management. Without further supplies, the hospital would be forced to shut down and transfer all patients - including the most seriously ill - to other hospitals. This would place the patients at risk and against that contingency we are in touch with the Ministry of Defence to provide for emergency delivery using troops if this is the only way to maintain basic services.

I will keep you in touch with further developments.



Don Brereton

Secretary of State for Social
Services' Office

26 November 1979