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*Prudential*

*Let's hope none of this is needed but I thought you HOME OFFICE should see non-strike*

QUEEN ANNE'S GATE LONDON SW1H 9AT



*Dear Tim,*

*[Handwritten initials]*

*17 September 1980*

*17/5*

THREAT OF NATIONAL DOCK STRIKE

In the light of your letter of 15th September to Richard Dykes at the Department of Employment, officials of the Civil Contingencies Unit met on 16th September to consider contingency arrangements in relation to essential supplies and services in the event of a national dock strike.

ASSUMPTIONS

The Unit agreed a set of planning assumptions on which to base contingency arrangements and estimations of endurance. However, Ministers will be aware that there is little hard evidence to support some of these assumptions at this stage and they may wish to indicate changes as the situation develops. The assumptions are:

- a. All major cargo handling ports will be shut from 22nd September.
- b. Non cargo handling, roll-on-roll-off ports will continue to operate at normal rates of activity. Owner drivers will be allowed freedom of movement to and from such ports.
- c. Minor ports not affected by the strike are unlikely to make any significant contribution to the overall national import or export situation.
- d. Senior docks managerial staff will remain on duty but the response of junior management and supervisory staff to strike calls cannot be predicted with accuracy.
- e. The attitude of foreign dock workers to a United Kingdom docks strike cannot be predicted.
- f. Picket lines will be set up at dock entrances of all affected ports. They will be effective in dissuading union members from moving cargo out of the ports by road or rail.
- g. Non T.G.W.U. members employed in the docks (e.g. N.U.R. members at British Transport Docks Board ports) will continue to work.
- h. No interruption in oil imports.

ENDURANCE

This report ignores discomforts and inconveniences arising from shortages of non-essential items, and economic/social damage caused by the disruption of industry. It concentrates only on C.C.U's proper remit, i.e. supplies and services essential to the life of the nation.

T. P. Lankester, Esq.

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On that basis, the area of concern is confined to supplies of food and animal feeding-stuffs. On the offshore islands there may be other commodities, such as aviation fuel, in short supply; but quantities are relatively small and emergency deliveries by air freight could bridge the gap.

Annex A shows how long present commercial stocks of key commodities would last; and how far these periods could probably be extended by using war reserve stocks. In addition, stocks already on-the-shelf at retail outlets would probably extend endurance of non-perishable items by about one to two weeks. Experience in the 1978/79 road haulage disputes shows that the food and agriculture industry has considerable flexibility and can meet critical shortages which may develop out of phase. Animal feeding-stuffs look like being the earliest point of difficulty.

Ministers will wish to consider in the event of a strike what publicity to give to these estimates and will wish to balance the benefits of extending endurance by appeals for restraint against the risk of causing panic buying.

## SERVICE ASSISTANCE

There is a military plan (HALBERD) for unloading essential cargoes from ships. In view of the increasing mechanisation of the ports in recent years, it is now thought that about 4000 servicemen would be needed (compared to some 12,000 allowed for in earlier plans). They would need to operate sophisticated equipment, and so their effectiveness would depend critically on adequate instruction from management. Troops have not been deployed in the ports in recent times, and the full scale of the contribution that they could make can only be determined by detailed consultations with the port managements.

In view of the likelihood that transport from the ports will be blocked by picketing, the service plan will only assist in increasing national endurance if the goods can be moved from the quayside to the users. This could involve the use of the additional military plan (BEANSTALK) involving the provision of some 2000 four ton vehicles and drivers. If Emergency Powers are available, specialist vehicles could also be requisitioned. But Ministers will recognise that the use of troops in road transport may risk spreading the disturbance to road haulage generally.

A working group of officials from the Departments concerned, under Department of Transport lead, is urgently examining the extent to which the implementation of HALBERD, with or without BEANSTALK, could be expected to extend normal endurance in relation to critical food and feeding-stuff supplies.

If Ministers do decide to use troops, a period of ten days' notice would be required, covering deployment and training. This timetable would not be affected by the large N.A.T.O. exercise (CRUSADER) currently in progress.

/DECLARATION

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#### DECLARATION OF STATE OF EMERGENCY

Although troops could in theory be used in a limited way without a State of Emergency, in practice Emergency Powers would be needed to allow the direction of ship movements within the ports. The two decisions would therefore have to be considered in parallel. Emergency Powers are proclaimed following a Privy Council meeting, and this would involve about 24 hours' delay following a decision to proceed. Within five calendar days of such a proclamation Parliament must be recalled, and within seven days must pass affirmative resolutions to confirm the Emergency Regulations.

#### PORT EMERGENCY COMMITTEES AND CONSULTATIONS

If Emergency Powers are implemented, and troops are used, the Minister of Transport can establish Port Emergency Committees under the chairmanship of the Chief Executive of the port concerned. In view of the untried nature of the military plans, and the changes in port technology in recent years, the Ministry of Defence recommend that if the strike materialises there should be the earliest possible consultations between the military, the police and the employers as represented by the potential chairmen of Port Emergency Committees, before a firm decision to introduce troops is taken. The authorisation of such consultation is a matter for the Minister of Transport.

#### CENTRAL PRESS UNIT

Advice from the Paymaster General's office is that the handling of Press relations should remain with the Departments of Transport and Employment for the time being. If it becomes clear that the strike is certain to proceed, the Central Press Unit should be activated to co-ordinate Press briefing.

Yours,  
Stephen

S. W. BOYS SMITH

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Essential foods and animal feedingstuff endurance

(subject to further consideration by MAFF officials)

<u>Item</u>	<u>Estimated endurance</u>	<u>Remarks</u>
North American wheat and flour for bread	2-4 weeks stocks at mills	5 weeks war reserve. Additional stocks in grain holders at ports
Home grown flour	4 weeks	Not used for bread in normal circumstances
Oils and fats	4 weeks raw materials 2 weeks finished products	
Sugar	2-3 weeks	3 weeks war reserve Home grown beet harvest about to be processed
Animal feeding stuffs	3-4 weeks	



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Ind. Prod.

PRIME MINISTER

Industrial Affairs: Possible National Dock Strike  
(To be raised orally)

BACKGROUND

By the time that Cabinet meets you will be up to date on the state of play but most of your colleagues will not. The Industrial Affairs item is on the agenda partly to enable the Chancellor to report to colleagues on the general state of the economy and to set the scene for next month's Public Expenditure discussions, but it will provide an opportunity for discussion of the Docks situation should this be required.

HANDLING

2. You might begin by inviting the Secretary of State for Employment and the Minister of Transport to report on the situation as it now stands. Unless it is certain that the threat of a Docks strike has been averted, you might also invite the Home Secretary to report on the state of readiness of the Government's contingency arrangements in relation to essential supplies and services in the event of a strike (the Home Secretary's Private Secretary wrote to Mr. Lankester, with copies to all Cabinet colleagues, on 17th September setting out the position, but the Home Secretary would, I am sure, also wish to report orally). Attention is likely to focus on the timing of Government action - declaration of a state of emergency, recall of Parliament etc. - should a strike occur.

CONCLUSIONS

3. Subject to discussion, conclusions may need to be recorded on:-
- (i) any further steps to be taken in an attempt to avert a strike;
  - (ii) the timing of action, in the event of a strike, particularly as it affects Parliament;
  - (iii) publicity for the Government's attitude.

RA

(Robert Armstrong)

17th September 1980

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Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food  
Whitehall Place London SW1A 2HH

From the  
Minister of State

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The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1

17 September 1980

*Dear Prime Minister,*

THE THREATENED NATIONAL DOCK STRIKE .

As you know the Minister will not be able to attend Cabinet tomorrow because of his official visit to South America. It might be helpful therefore if I gave an assessment of the effects of a dock strike on food and animal feedingstuffs, on the assumption that this may be discussed under industrial affairs.

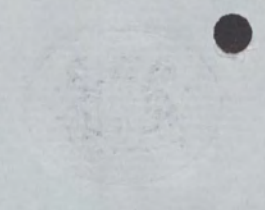
While there would be bound to be problems, there appears to be no immediate cause for concern and significant difficulties should be avoided for three or four weeks at least. At this time of year, with a record cereal harvest now in store and processing of the sugar beet harvest soon to begin, the situation on essential foods is better than at the time of the 1972 dock strike and probably better also than during the road haulage dispute of January 1979. There is considerable scope for coping with the difficulties which may arise, for example by adjusting formulations for animal feed and by increasing the proportion of home grown wheat used for breadmaking flour. Measures like these are available before it might become necessary to consider the use of any of the strategic reserves. In addition, there are cereal stocks in intervention and the EC reserve stocks of sugar, which could be drawn on after reference to the Commission.

As to publicity, the Department has been responding in a low key to press enquiries which have not been especially numerous. Naturally we shall work closely with the Central Press Unit if it should be activated.

Copies go to Members of the Cabinet and Sir Robert Armstrong.

*Yours ever  
Alick*

Alick Buchanan-Smith



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