



SCOTTISH OFFICE
WHITEHALL, LONDON SW1A 2AU

Prime Minister (4)

13 September 1983

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The Rt Hon Norman Tebbit MP
Secretary of State for Employment
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London SW1H 9NP

Dear Norman,

HIGHLAND FABRICATORS, NIGG

In my letter of 9 September, I promised to write to you again when I had received a detailed report from the Chief Constable of Northern Constabulary about the picketing at Highland Fabricators' Off-shore Construction Yard at Nigg.

I am now satisfied that there is no question of pickets at the site having flouted the law; and there is an entirely reasonable explanation for the problem which arose briefly on the first day of the unofficial strike. In view of your understandable concern, it may be helpful to set out the circumstances more fully.

In discussions prior to the start of the unofficial action, the Convener of the Local Committee of Shop-stewards, Mr Wilson was advised by the police that the number of official pickets should be no more than six. Mr Wilson accepted this and also agreed to comply with the law on picketing and to allow any one wishing to work to do so. He has not gone back on this agreement. On 29 August, 62 officers were detailed for duty at Nigg from 6.30 am. Crowd control barriers were erected by the police at both sides of the main gate and on the footpath opposite the main entrance. There were only six official pickets on duty at the main gate but soon afterwards about 200 strikers gathered behind the crowd control barriers, shouting at workers and vehicles passing into the Yard. Other strikers had gathered in the large private car-park some hundred yards from the main road. About 7.40 am this second group (by now about 500 strong) suddenly surged forward on to the main road at a point about 300 yards from the main gate. About six police officers were

left at the main gate and the remainder of those on duty were directed to clear the main road, which they did within about five minutes. From then onwards, the roadway was kept open and any vehicle wishing to pass through to the Yard entrance was able to do so, as were a considerable number of workers on foot.

On 30 August, the police presence was increased to 118 officers including a contingent of 28 from Grampian Police; and the roadway was again kept open. The same has been true on each succeeding day of action; and the police have been able to reduce the number of personnel on duty progressively in line with the decrease in the number of strikers in attendance near the gates. Thus, yesterday, when 430 vehicles entered the site, there were 24 police personnel on duty and approximately 50 strikers in attendance near to but forming no part of the official picket line.

During the duration of the strike, no one has complained to the police of being prevented from getting to work. Some publicity was given to the fact that, at the beginning of the strike, buses hired by the management did not in fact enter the site. This, however, was because the drivers had been instructed by their firm's manager not to cross the picket line; and, as a result, with a single exception, none of the drivers made a genuine or positive attempt to reach the main entrance of the Yard.

One striker was arrested on 30 August for kicking a vehicle entering the Yard, but there have been no complaints of damage to property. Nor have there been complaints about intimidation of workers, though the police are making inquiries into a threatening 'phone call made to the wife of one employee.

I hope that you will have found this further information reassuring. Our joint hope now must be that normal working at the site can be resumed quickly.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Energy.

Yours sincerely,
George Younger.

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HIGHLAND FABRICATORS, NIGG

Thank you for your letter dated 2 September which was delivered to Dover House yesterday morning.

I agree that the unofficial dispute at Nigg has attracted a considerable amount of publicity. I too have been concerned and I have called for a detailed report from the Chief Constable.

From information immediately available, however, I can say that police officers have been deployed at the site in sufficient numbers to permit large numbers of vehicles (between 200 and 300) to enter the site each day; and that apart from a very brief period on 29 August, the first day of the action, the highway has not been obstructed. When necessary, the Chief Constable of Northern Constabulary has called on mutual aid from the neighbouring Grampian Police.

I shall write to you further when I have received the Chief Constable's report.

I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Energy.

Approved by the
Secretary of State and
signed in his absence.

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