

PERSONAL

DS



Home Affairs

10 DOWNING STREET

From the Private Secretary

17 July 1979

BF 24/7/79

You will recall that, after careful consideration by Ministers, your Secretary of State approved a reply for the Prime Minister to send to the Castle Point Refineries Resistance Group. Andrew Hardman's letter of 9 July refers.

The Prime Minister has now seen a letter from Sir Bernard Braine, M.P., to her PPS, Ian Gow. I enclose a copy. She is disturbed to hear that Sir Bernard feels that he has received high-handed treatment from the new Administration, and she has written him a personal note of apology about this.

It may well be that your Ministers take an entirely different view of the conversation between Mr. Mayhew and Sir Bernard on 21 June, referred to in Sir Bernard's letter. I would be grateful if you could let me have your Secretary of State's reactions to Sir Bernard's letter by 24 July.

M. A. PATTISON

Ian Fair, Esq.,  
Department of Employment.

lu

na (Canvey Island)

MA



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

Monday evening.

My dear Bernard,

16/7/79

I have just read your letter and for the first time realise the whole history of this desperately important matter. My most sincere & deep apologies that the matter was handled in that way. I am enquiring into it myself.

Yours ever

Harold

From Sir Bernard Braine, D.L. M.P.



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

16th July, 1979

Ian Gow, Esq., M.P.,  
HOUSE OF COMMONS.

Dear Ian —

re: Safety of Canvey Island

I was astonished to receive the enclosed copy of a letter the Prime Minister wrote last week to Mr. Philip Haslam, a leading Labour supporter in my constituency and secretary of the Castle Point Refineries Resistance Group.

Mr. Haslam, then a Labour Councillor, wrote to Mrs. Thatcher before the General Election but after the Labour Government had indicated its policy in regard to Canvey's Safety in Albert Booth's written answer on 4th April to a P.Q.

Canvey's safety was a major issue in my election campaign. Because I was convinced that departmental Ministers had not understood the problem I appealed direct to Prime Minister Callaghan and he thought the matter was of sufficient importance to ask Booth to write to me direct on 18th April, setting out the Government's views. Incidentally, those views were rejected, not only by me, but by all political parties in South East Essex, Mr. Haslam's Resistance Group and the Local Authorities. I enclose copies of the relevant communications for ease of reference.

Now, three months after Mr. Haslam wrote, the Prime Minister has sent a reply which might have been drafted for Mr. Callaghan himself to sign. No warning was given to me and there has been no consultation. The reference in the letter to British Gas decommissioning the in-ground gas storage is complete news to me and both Mr. Haslam and I know that it is meaningless at this stage because such decommissioning is not possible until much more is known about the dangers of an operation of this kind conducted close to a large residential population. On the other hand to convey to a Labour constituent the Government's decision not to close the Methane Terminal when Ministers knew that I have asked for this to be done and am currently preparing a submission in conjunction with the local authorities passes all belief.

Indeed, Patrick Mayhew invited me to talk to him about the matter in detail and I did so on 21st June. He listened carefully, but gave no indication that Conservative Ministers had decided that the Methane Terminal was not to be closed down or that such a decision was shortly to be taken. On the contrary he gave me the distinct impression that he was genuinely seeking views and the matter was certainly not decided. Moreover, I told him that I would be making my submission as soon as the Essex County Council and the Castle Point and Thurrock District Councils had had a meeting to discuss a joint strategy. That meeting did not take place until 11th July.

I would only add that I had no reason to believe that Conservative Ministers would slavishly follow the line taken by their predecessors. Before the Election Michael Heseltine, Tom King and Jim Prior were all seemingly sympathetic and were sent copies of correspondence I had had with Labour Ministers.

You will readily see from all this that the Prime Minister's letter cuts the ground completely from under my feet. Mr. Haslam has known throughout what I was doing. If he now concludes, as well he might, that I must have known that the new Government never had any intention of listening to our representations, and publishes the Prime Minister's letter, I shall be put in an impossible and humiliating position.

I do not blame the Prime Minister, she has many weighty matters to deal with, but the letter must have been drafted after consultation with the Departments of Employment and the Environment. However, it is so much in line with the statements Booth made to me three months ago that it may have been drafted by officials and neither Jim Prior nor Michael Heseltine ever saw it. I am sure that Patrick Mayhew must have been kept in complete ignorance of what was afoot otherwise he would have alerted me. If this is so then there is something gravely wrong with the Government machine and I would like to have an explanation.

I feel so strongly about the matter that I do not think that I can continue to support the Government. It is not so much that I feel badly let down by my friends, but that I have a clear duty to my constituents. You will appreciate that grave risks have been and are still being taken with their safety. Since the beginning of the year we have had five incidents at the installations in Thurrock/Canvey requiring the Essex Fire Brigade to be called out and sooner or later there will be one which leads to a major disaster. Then only a fortnight ago we had confirmation from Norman Tebbit that if anything went wrong with an LNG tanker in the Thames there are no facilities for off-loading its 12,000 ton liquefied gas cargo (the equivalent of six Nagasaki-type atom bombs) save by bringing it into Canvey for off-loading close to the homes of 34,000 people.

I discussed the matter with my constituency Chairman over the weekend who not only agrees unreservedly with my reaction, but assures me that I shall have the full support of my Association in any action I choose to take. He added that he is convinced that our community in South East Essex will support me too.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Chief Whip and also to Patrick Mayhew since I have referred to the meeting I had with him last month.

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Blw.



H. Affairs  
file 1/10  
re Ian Gow

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

26 July 1979

Thank you for your letter of 24 July, confirming that your Secretary of State approved Mr. Mayhew's letter to Ian Gow about Sir Bernard Braine's representations over Canvey Island.

Ian Gow has reported these exchanges to the Prime Minister, who is content to learn that the temperature has now been suitably lowered.

Andrew Hardman, Esq.,  
Department of Employment.

M. A. PATTISON

AS



10 DOWNING STREET

MIKE

MR GOW

You will already have received the original of Patrick Mayhew's letter to you, a copy of which is enclosed with this one to me from Mr. Prior's Private Secretary. He confirms that Mr. Prior had approved Mr. Mayhew's letter to you.

Do you feel it necessary to show this correspondence to the Prime Minister?

MAP

1. That is.

2. No - I have referred the

25 July 1979

reduction in temperature to be

P.M. We need to talk to further

25/7/79



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M Pattison Esq  
Private Secretary  
Prime Minister's Office  
10 Downing Street  
LONDON SW1

24 July 1979

*Dear Mike*

You wrote to Ian Fair on 17 July asking for my Secretary of State's reactions to the letter from Sir Bernard Braine to Ian Gow about Canvey Island and the correspondence with the Castle Point Refineries Resistance Group.

... Patrick Mayhew has written to Ian Gow about Sir Bernard's complaints, and I enclose a copy of his letter. Mr Prior has asked me to let you know that he has approved Mr Mayhew's letter, and it represents his own reactions and advice.

*Yours Sincerely,*

ANDREW HARDMAN  
Private Secretary





Parliamentary Under Secretary  
of State

Ian Gow Esq MP  
10 Downing Street  
LONDON SW1

*Ian Gow*

Bernard Braine copied to me his letter to you of 16 July about Canvey Island and you and I spoke about it on Tuesday.

I thought you might find it helpful to have a brief timetable of events which led up to the letter which was sent by the Prime Minister to the Castle Point Refineries Resistance Group, which in turn has led Bernard to write to you.

I have also attached a summary of his complaints together with points that arise from them.

Bernard subsequently sent me a copy of his letter also dated 16 July to Michael Heseltine: copy attached. Its burden is the need for compensation if the Canvey installations are permitted to continue.

Our officials tell me that this is the nature of the joint submission they are led to expect from the local councils. It relates not to the issue of acceptance of the report but to the consequences of acceptance.

I know nothing of any forthcoming joint assault on the merits of the report, and the letter to Michael Heseltine is all that even now has been supplied.

I have written very fully to Bernard setting out the essence of what happened, and why, expressing my deep distress that he should have been upset, and suggesting a talk; and happily when we met last Friday all was cleared up. He said that he had at no time thought that I had treated him in bad faith, as I had supposed, but that he still thought that before the letter was sent to Mr Haslam he ought to have been notified of the Government's decision. He still thinks the Government ought to take "independent" advice about the recommendations of the Health & Safety Executive, but I understood from him that the common front with the Councils is primarily directed to the question of compensation, if the installations on Canvey are permitted to continue, or are enlarged.

I am copying this letter to Michael Heseltine.

Department of Employment  
8 St. James's Square London SW1Y 4JB  
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*SJS*  
*To see*  
*IAWF*

*MR Braine*  
*MR Fair*  
*MR Taylor*  
*MR Shepherd*  
*MR Hodgkin*  
*MR Fowlett*  
*(Colm)*  
*MR Robs*

23 July 1979

*You've awn,*  
*Patrick*

PATRICK MAYHEW

TIMETABLE OF EVENTS (leading to reply to Castle Point Refineries Resistance Group letter)

- MAY 3 - Conservatives win election
- MAY 11 - Letter from CPRRG to PM
- MAY 15 - Letter copied to DE for advice as to reply
- MAY 15 - Acknowledgement sent from No 10 to CPRRG
- MAY 18 - Internal advice from DE officials suggesting an acknowledgement to CPRRG, and preparation of brief for Ministerial consideration
- MAY 23 - Secretary of State agrees
- MAY 24 - No 10 seeks more substantive interim reply than had been suggested
- MAY 30 - DE ask No 10 not to send fuller interim reply
- JUNE 1 - No 10 agree. Ask DE for draft reply by 14 June.
- JUNE 8 - Draft note prepared by officials submitted to DE Ministers. The note proposed acceptance of the recommendation in the HSE report.
- JUNE 13 - Meeting with S of S, PUSS (Mr Mayhew) and officials to consider content of note. Provisional acceptance of general line proposed. Decision for PUSS to meet Sir Bernard Braine to hear his views on Canvey Island. Decision to put issue to E(EA).
- JUNE 14 - Reply to written PQ tabled by Dr Oonagh McDonald saying Government hopes to complete consideration of HSE Report at an early date.
- JUNE 19 - No 10 informed that paper being prepared for E(EA) for Ministerial decision
- JUNE 21 - Mr Mayhew meets Sir Bernard Braine
- JUNE 25 - Final draft submitted to Ministers.
- JUNE 26 - Approved paper on Canvey Island distributed to E(EA) members.
- JUNE 28 - E(EA) agreed with recommendations of the SoS. Agreed that Secretary of State for Employment should arrange for a reply to be sent to CPRRG.
- JULY 3 - Secretary of State and Mr Mayhew agree that reply should go from No 10, on ground that Mr Callaghan had directly interested himself on the matter in March.

JULY 9 - Draft substantive reply sent to No. 10 for consideration to go either from PM or PS. To be copied to Sir Bernard Brain and Dr Oonagh McDonald.

JULY 12 - Reply sent.

Briefing on Letter from Sir Bernard Braine MP to Ian Gow MP

Summary

Sir Bernard Braine has written to Ian Gow (the PM's PPS) following receipt of a copy of the PM's reply to the Castle Point Refineries Resistance Group which sets out the Government's views on the HSE report on Canvey Island.

He complains in his letter that,

- Mr Haslam is a labour supporter
- No warning was given to him of the announcement to CPRRG
- He was not aware of the decision to decommission the British Gas Methane terminal
- He was given no indication that the question of Canvey was about to be considered by Ministers.
- His position has been undermined in that the present Government has not listened to his representations.
- That because the decision follows that of the previous administration the letter must have been drafted by officials and that Ministers, in particular Messrs Prior, Heseltine and Mayhew, did not see it.
- decisions had been taken before consideration could be given to a submission which he is preparing in conjunction with the Local Authorities
- additionally he says that
- safety was a major issue in his election campaign
- the views of the previous administration were widely rejected in S E Essex
- there are continuing problems of safety on the island

There are various points that could be made in any response to Sir Bernard Braine.

1. Although the letter from the CPRRG was dated 11 April this was almost certainly an error and should read 11 May. It was received in No 10 on 15 May and is addressed to Mrs Thatcher in her capacity as Prime Minister
2. Sir Bernard makes reference to Mr Haslam as a Labour supporter.

The reply was sent to Mr Haslam in his capacity as Secretary of the CPRRG and as signatory to the letter. The original letter referred to Sir Bernard three times and it was assumed that Sir Bernard knew of its existence, particularly as they conclude their letter by saying that "Sir Bernard Braine has we feel sure kept you informed and would be only too happy to provide additional information".

3. The Department holds a copy of a letter to Sir Bernard from the Secretary of State of British Gas dated 11.2.75 which informs him of their intention to decommission the in - ground storage of LNG. Then, as now, there was no indication of timing.

4. There is a difference in recollection between Sir Bernard and Mr Mayhew as to whether he said he was preparing a further submission together with the Local Authorities. Mr Mayhew recalls no reference to this at their meeting on 21 June, nor does the note taken by his PS make any reference to such a statement.

~~T~~There was a telephone conversation with Mr Mayhew the previous evening when Sir Bernard, as noted by the Private Secretary, said that his main concern was the failure of the previous administration to grasp the financial implications of the HSE's report. He suggested that central Government must pay the price. Also, Sir Bernard had said at an earlier chance encounter that the two concerned MPs were now presenting a common front, with the local authorities, and they would urge that the Government should provide compensation if the installations on Canvey were to continue<sup>3</sup>.

5. It is true that at the meeting on 21 June with Sir Bernard Mr Mayhew did not say in terms that a decision on the HSE report was not to be taken; he regarded it as implicit, and in a written answer to Dr Oonagh McDonald on 14.6.79 he had said "My rt hon Friend has not yet completed consideration of the HSE Report but hopes to do so at an early date".

The purpose of Mr Mayhew inviting Sir Bernard to a meeting was to enable any fresh views to be taken into account before final decisions were taken on what recommendation should go to E(EA).

6. Sir Bernard wrote to Patrick Mayhew on 26 June on a personal basis with copies of previous correspondence from Professor Rasbash, dated March 1979 (which had already been considered). The letter makes no reference to any forthcoming submission but states that "There is no question that I am going to soften my line on this. Governments have no right to expose people to unacceptable risks when they know the facts".

7. The Department's recommendations with regard to the HSE report contained in the E(EA) paper were approved by the committee of which Mr Hescitine and Mr Prior are members. Mr Mayhew introduced the paper at the meeting.