

Ref. A08374

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Minister

Agree to a MLSC group being set up to plan how to withstand a dock strike?

Study of Industrial Action in the Docks

Mus 11/5

I sent to you with my minute of 4 May a report by officials recommending that the next group of studies on withstanding strikes in key sectors of the economy should be into the electricity and gas industries, oil distribution, the ports and industrial gas production, in that order of priority. Mr Scholar's minute of 5 May recorded your approval of this programme.

2. After that report was prepared, the threat emerged of a national dock strike starting on 10 May. As the Secretary of State for Employment has reported, the threat is now being suspended in the light of an undertaking that the Government would be prepared to discuss and consider any specific and detailed proposals for extending the National Dock Labour Scheme to particular ports or wharves, whilst giving no encouragement to think that an extension of the scheme was likely to be justified. There could, however, come a time later this year when the TGWU will press for a decision on specific proposals and a refusal by the Government to meet their wishes will be met with a renewed threat of industrial action. There may also be some other issues arising out of the run down of particular ports, or inter union rivalries, which could increase the risk of industrial action in the docks over the next year or so.

3. In the light of these developments there seems to be a strong case for putting in hand a study relating to industrial action in the docks immediately. The other studies listed in the programme which you have approved would be undertaken as soon as that has been completed.

4. Previous studies of this sort have concentrated almost exclusively on the measures which might be taken both before and during a strike to prolong endurance. In the case of the docks, however, we shall need to take into account the review of ports policy and the future of the Port of London Authority and the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company which will shortly be under discussion in the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Economic Affairs. It would be useful if the study considered whether, consistently with our policy objectives, there are



strategies and tactics which might be pursued in the future which would lessen the risk of major industrial action in the industry.

5. I should be grateful for your agreement to the setting up of an official group in the MISC series, under Cabinet Office chairmanship, to carry out a study relating to industrial action in the docks, on the lines proposed, as soon as possible.

6. I am sending a copy of this minute to the Home Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretaries of State for Defence, Scotland, Industry, Energy and Employment and to Mr Sparrow in the CPRS.

RIA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

11 May 1982



10 DOWNING STREET

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From the Private Secretary

MR. WRIGHT
CABINET OFFICE

STUDY OF INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE DOCKS

The Prime Minister was grateful for Sir Robert Armstrong's minute of 11 May.

She agrees to your setting up an official group in the MISC series under Cabinet Office Chairmanship to carry out a study relating to industrial action in the docks, as proposed in Sir Robert's minute.

I am sending a copy of this minute to the Private Secretaries to the Home Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretaries of State for Defence, Scotland, Industry, Energy and Employment and to Mr. Sparrow in the CPRS.

MCs

12 May 1982

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SECRET

PA
MR. SCHOLAR

Study of industrial action in the docks

I support the recommendation in Robert Armstrong's note to the Prime Minister today, that the first of the next group of studies on withstanding strikes be done on the docks, thus relegating electricity and gas to second and third places respectively. And I am sure it is right for the study to range quite widely into the questions of the strategies and tactics in dealing with the docks industry. The recent industrial action scare has I think brought home to us all the need to have a clear view of how we are going to handle the docks over the next few years, and what the risks are if industrial action does take place.

J.V.

John Vereker

11 May 1982

SECRET