



Secretary of State for Trade and Industry

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Prime Minister  
to note  
Asst Secy Clerk  
6/8/84  
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6 August 1984

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MBE MP  
Secretary of State for Energy  
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D. Peter.

HUNTERSTON

I am writing to let you and colleagues know the difficult situation that is developing at Hunterston, where we may on Wednesday be called to make important decisions.

2 Hunterston is the deep-water port supplying Ravenscraig. An important load of coal is aboard the bulk carrier "Ostia", presently moored in Belfast Lough. It is of a blend necessary for the operation of the Ravenscraig coke ovens. If it is not landed at Hunterston this Wednesday, BSC tell me that they will have no option but to start a rundown of Ravenscraig activities from 20 August.

3 The normal operation at Hunterston for BSC-destined cargo is divided between ship operations, carried out by registered TGWU dockers employed by the Clyde Port Authority and shore operations, carried out by ISTC non-registered employees of BSC. Basically, the TGWU members comprise tugmen, boatmen who moor the ships, and dockers who trim the cargo; the ISTC BSC employees operate the grabs which remove the coal. Without the dockers trimming the coal, something like 90% of the contents of any ship can be unloaded. It is therefore possible for a ship to be brought in without tugs, for the crew of the ship to take off the hatches, and for above 90% of the cargo to be removed without any involvement of TGWU members. BSC are keen, if the TGWU continues to refuse to co-operate, to operate in this way. They believe that this can be done without infringing the agreement reached governing the operations at Hunterston. There must, however, be a danger that any action of this sort could lead to a claim by the TGWU that what

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is being done is contrary to the NDLB agreement, and provides the basis for a resumed dock dispute.

4 I have explored this carefully with the BSC Chairman. He has assured me that they will take things carefully, with full use of the consultative procedure, starting at local level. If appropriate, BSC would seek to put the matter to the arbitration of the NDLS. They are clear that they have the right to proceed as they intend; and they are adamant that they must test this, or else face the prospect of Ravenscraig being rundown. If a dispute does arise, and if it does not prove amenable to settlement through normal consultative procedures, they would be prepared to seek an injunction against the TGWU to combat what they would in those circumstances regard as clearly politically motivated action.

5 In the meantime, BSC are taking pains to avoid any comparable dispute arising at Immingham, so as to avoid fighting on two fronts simultaneously.

6 I am copying this letter to members of MISC 101, and to Sir Robert Armstrong.

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