

PRIME MINISTER

Seen by the PM
NW.

Steel Dispute: Sheerness

Solly Gross rang. The important things about Sheerness today were:-

1. Production was normal throughout the day and night.
2. There was no lorry traffic in or out during the period of picketing.
3. The pickets left at 1610 and from 1630 onwards all the necessary raw material was brought in and all the steel produced shipped out.

Sheerness intend to continue to operate 24 hours a day.

S. J. Pike

DUTY CLERK

20 February 1980



Iron & Steel Division

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With the Compliments of

S J Gross

CS 281

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NOTE FOR RECORD

cc PS/Secretary of State
 PS/Mr Butler
 PS/Mr Marshall
 PS/Sir Peter Carey
 Mr Ridley Dep Sec
 Mr Long IS(Tech)
 Mr Murray IS3
 Mr D Smith DEm

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 MW

STEEL STRIKE: SHEERNESS PICKETING

Mr Schueppert telephoned me this evening to say that everything had gone much better than he had feared.

2 About 1,000-1,500 pickets had turned up at about 5 am to be met by 1,000 police. He had brought the early morning shift into work at 4 am, had brought the office staff from outer buildings to the main works and had stopped all incoming and outgoing traffic to avoid incidents. The morning had been very quiet with the pickets well behaved. Some of the pickets drank a fair amount of beer at lunchtime so there was a little more roughness in the afternoon but nothing very serious. The behaviour of the police had been first class throughout.

3 By 3.30 pm the pickets began to drift away and by 4.10 pm they had all left. The afternoon shift had been brought into the works through back entrances; the morning shift left immediately after 4.10 pm. Incoming and outgoing traffic was restarted after 4.30 pm and Mr Schueppert hoped to complete the full movement of incoming raw materials and outgoing steel during the course of the evening. Production had not been affected; indeed, he had not lost a single shift during the whole course of the strike. The works were continuing on a 24 hour basis (4 crews working 7 days a week).



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 20 February 1980

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Sheerness situation at 4 p.m.

As you know, there were about 1,000 pickets at Sheerness earlier today. But the first shift started at 4 a.m., and the employees had no difficulty in getting in. Later in the morning, the number of pickets outside the factory had fallen to 3-400, and the rest went back into the town. At 2 o'clock, three coaches had already left Sheerness, and we have now heard that "several hundred" of the pickets have left. In short, they seem to be drifting away.

There have been 29 arrests during the day - mainly for obstructing the police. There has been no obstruction of vehicles as such because the company decided not to have any deliveries today.

R.

20 February 1980

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PS/Secretary of State

cc PS/Mr Butler
PS/Mr Marshall
Sir Peter Carey
Mr Ridley Dep Sec
Mrs Cohen IS1
Mr Long IS(Tech)
Mr Woodrow Inf
Mr Smith DEm
Mr Chilcot HO

STEEL STRIKE: PRIVATE SECTOR AND SHEERNESS

Mr Mortimer believes that yesterday's meeting between the ISTC office holders and representatives of the private sector steelworkers, while not successful in obtaining a dispensation for the private sector, nevertheless was helpful in getting across to the ISTC that the private sector workers wanted to go back to work. BISPA are now considering with their members the possibility of all trying to start up again together; this would no doubt incur some failures but there should be several survivors. Round Oak in the Midlands are thinking anyhow of trying to start up again today or tomorrow.

2 As you know, Mr Schueppert rang me last night with the following information. Mass picketing or demonstration was being planned to start at Sheerness at 5 am tomorrow, Wednesday. He was expecting between 1-2,000 pickets and already had information about the following contingents all planned to arrive at about that time:

- a 3 coach loads from the Kent coalfields (about 150)
- b 4 coach loads from London (about 200)
- c 10 coach loads from Sheffield (about 500)
- d Large contingents from Corby and South Wales.

To reduce the danger of direct confrontation, Mr Schueppert had initially moved the time for shift change from 6 am to 5 am; he had now advanced the shift changeover time to 4 am.

3 Mr Schueppert said he was in constant touch with the Kent County Constabulary and was very satisfied with their help and co-operation. However, he was concerned whether there was sufficient national back-up for the County Constabulary and felt there was need for nationwide intelligence to be provided to him and to the County Constabulary because of the danger of quite serious violence from Wednesday onwards.

4 This violence was likely to arise from direct confrontation between the local townspeople and the pickets. Thus, the local

Handwritten notes: "Clive - to see", "Reference", "19/12", "NBM", "I missed the PM after information last night".

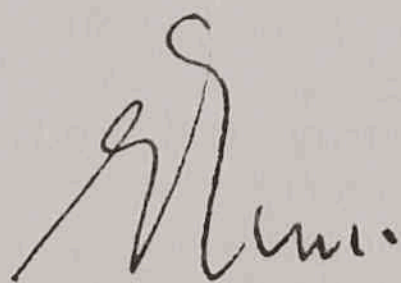
Handwritten initials: "T", "19/12".

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Transport and General workers had given a vote of confidence to the Sheerness steelworkers and there was a serious risk that the local dockworkers, steelmen and others would physically attack the pickets. This could easily lead to a build up of steam and, quite possibly, violent rampage by the pickets through the town of Sheerness as a whole. Therefore, he was very anxious to be assured by the Home Office that there would be sufficient national police back-up for the local Kent Constabulary.

5 With your agreement I spoke to Mr John Chilcot and Mr ~~Hayes~~ Phillips at the Home Office who had had much of this information through their own contacts with the Kent County Constabulary. Mr Chilcot has now kindly arranged for Mr Schueppert, accompanied by his local MP, Mr Roger Moate, to see the Home Secretary at 6.30 pm this evening.

6 I spoke to Mr Sirs last night on a purely personal basis and warned him that he was getting into very bad company on the Sheerness issue. I accepted that he himself wanted picketing to remain peaceful but the kind of mass picketing from distant areas that, according to the media, was being planned for Sheerness seemed to me very likely to result in ugly violence. This must react to the discredit of himself and of his Union. Mr Sirs sounded a little depressed* but said he would make enquiries today to see what he could do to reduce the risk of violence. He claimed that it was not only the BSC workers who were angry with Sheerness but also many private sector steelworkers who felt that Sheerness was taking up some of their business. I very much doubt whether this is so but Mr Sirs was probably referring to the fairly successful efforts by the private steel companies to switch steel of different specifications amongst themselves to help maintain their own rerolling activities.



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** but no doubt revived by today's press!*