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OIL CONTINGENCY PLANNING

PAPER BY MINISTRY OF COMMERCE

1. The Ministry of Commerce, in conjunction with the Oil Industry Emergency Committee (OIEC), and after consultation with other Departments and with Northern Ireland Command, has developed a contingency plan against a possible major disruption of oil industry operations in Northern Ireland. The circumstances which might give rise to such a disruption are discussed below. It is stressed that the plan does not purport to introduce rationing in the commonly accepted sense of the term. It must be seen rather as an attempt to provide for the continued availability of sufficient oil products to ensure the short-term survival and health of the community, perhaps in a condition of widespread civil disorder. There would inevitably be anomalies and some hardship. An oil emergency might well arise from the present security situation, and possible courses of action are circumscribed by security considerations.
2. The plan would come into operation in the event of circumstances arising which would cripple oil industry operation beyond the industry's considerable capacity for improvisation. Until recently, IRA sabotage of vital installations has been seen as the major threat. Security of installations has been increased and the OIEC has prepared plans for the restoration of damaged facilities (if necessary with assistance and specialised equipment from Service sources) and for alternative supply arrangements. The oil companies would in such circumstances pool their resources and would act in concert. The Ministry of Commerce has come to an agreement with the Ministry of Defence to pay for the retention on a standby basis of a self-contained underground oil storage complex which is surplus to Ministry of Defence requirements.
3. Withdrawal of labour by oil industry employees should now probably be seen as the main threat to the industry's operations. Such a withdrawal could result from:-
 - a. industrial action, e.g. a strike by road tanker vehicle drivers
 - b. failure of employees to report for duty in the event of serious civil disturbances
 - c. politically-motivated action

Although there is some present possibility of an industrial dispute involving tanker drivers on a United Kingdom wide basis, a withdrawal of labour in

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support of political objectives is considered to be a more probable cause of difficulty in the medium term. Such withdrawal might be confined to the oil industry, or might be general. It is relevant that the events of 27 and 28 March caused a near-total cessation of oil distribution.

4. The oil industry could be expected to display considerable resources and flexibility in overcoming difficulties, and its recovery from the consequences of the stoppage of 27 and 28 March was completed within a week without inconvenience to consumers. In an interruption of more than two days, the industry's distribution difficulties would, however, escalate rapidly, and in the event of a complete stoppage of distribution for more than three or four days Government intervention would probably become necessary. An emergency occasioned by sabotage of vital installations is unlikely to last for a longer period than three weeks. It is impossible to predict the duration of a strike or a 'political' situation, but the economic pressures for settlement after one or two weeks would presumably be great.
5. The basic assumption of the contingency plan is that in an emergency the overriding need would be to ensure that the remaining capability of the oil industry could be directed to supplying the most essential services. This would be achieved by means of very severe restrictions on the supply of oil products. Restrictive Orders already drafted would prohibit the supply of oil products (generally or individually as circumstances might require) to the great majority of industrial, commercial and private consumers.
 - a. bulk deliveries of fuel oils and motor fuels would continue to be made, insofar as circumstances permit, to essential users, e.g., hospitals, the protective services, food distribution, public transport, secondary fuels, e.g. gas;
 - b. only 20 filling stations would continue to be supplied with motor fuel. These stations would meet the requirements of the small number of persons permitted to purchase petrol or derv.
6. The list of processes and services exempted from the prohibition which would continue to receive bulk supplies of oil products has been compiled in agreement with Departmental representatives and the delivery points required to maintain them have been identified by the oil companies.
7. Manufacturing industry would not be supplied. Northern Ireland industry is heavily dependent on oil, but as most firms have storage capacity for up to several weeks' consumption there would not be immediate, general industrial

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paralysis. Deliveries for agricultural purposes would be maintained as far as possible.

8. No attempt would be made to supply the private motorist. Supplies of motor fuel would be confined to 20 licensed filling stations located throughout Northern Ireland and selected on the basis of their size and accessibility. These stations would be identified as Government Authorised Filling Stations. It is assumed that they would become potential targets for terrorist attack and NI Command has undertaken to afford them key point status. The Army is unable to guarantee protection to more than 20 stations. In the event of a crisis of some duration, consideration could be given to the issue of licences for the purchase of motor fuel to offset severe personal hardship. Such licences would not be an entitlement to a regular "ration" and could only be considered in the light of prevailing circumstances.
9. From these 20 Government Authorised Filling Stations some 6,500 persons would be permitted to purchase motor fuel. These are persons who provide services essential to the community even in the short term and who are dependent on private transport to perform those services. Many other persons who must be kept mobile, e.g. field engineers of the electricity undertakings, normally draw fuel from their parent organisations' bulk storage rather than from filling stations. The categories of person who must be allowed to purchase from filling stations have been notified by Departments. The largest group is composed of doctors and other Health Service personnel, and there are limited numbers of veterinary surgeons, water engineers and persons essential to the administration of justice and the prison service. The pattern of fuel distribution from wholesaler to retailer is such that provision has been made for a large number of grocers who would possibly need a token allowance of petrol to enable them to continue to fetch in supplies of food for retail sale.
10. It is the intention that the persons permitted to purchase motor fuel would receive cards of authority for presentation at Government Authorised Filling Stations. The basic entitlement is 10 gallons per week, but general practitioners and veterinary surgeons would be allowed 20 gallons. There is also a token entitlement of two gallons per week. Cards of authority have already been printed and are at present held in the Ministry of Commerce. At the outset of an emergency they would be passed to Departments which would be responsible for distribution to the individuals whom they have sponsored, e.g. Ministry of Health and Social Services would undertake distribution of cards to doctors, etc. It is assumed that all recipients would be in possession of their cards within 48 hours of a decision to implement the plan. The exception is food retailers, who would make application to the Regional

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Food Defence Officer of Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. As a contingency measure, an issue of 100 cards would be made to each Department to help cope with unforeseen requirements.

11. It is recognised that such drastic restrictions would inevitably cause much social and economic dislocation. It is however entirely necessary to accept a minimum commitment which even in the worst circumstances there would be a good prospect of fulfilling. This 'worst circumstances' could be a total withdrawal of labour without any agreement on maintenance of supplies to essential services. Oil company management staffs could not be expected to make up the deficiency, and in the absence of volunteers military assistance would be required. Discussions have already taken place with NI Command and the military manpower and skills required to operate oil terminals and to deliver product to the essential services have already been established. In the event of the use of troops to operate terminals and to drive road tankers an escort commitment might be necessary in addition to the protection of the Government Authorised Filling Stations. The use of troops for other than purely protective purposes would of course be determined by the authorities in London and their commitment in an industrial dispute as opposed to a 'political' or civil disorder context would be a matter of political judgment.
12. Contingency planning is proceeding in Great Britain to cope with a short-term situation for which full-scale rationing, with its lengthy run-up period, would be inappropriate. Discussions are taking place with London Departments and the basic approach to the problem is similar. The circumstances in which an oil emergency could arise in Great Britain could, however, differ significantly from those in Northern Ireland (e.g. a rail strike could have an impact on the regional availability of oil products in Great Britain) and London planning is likely to provide for a wider availability of oil products than security considerations at present permit here.

18 April 1972

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