



John Harris (FL)

About this booklet

This booklet is published by the Dover Port Committee of the National Union of Seamen. It explains why large numbers of seafarers in Dover have stood solid in defence of a principle – the safety of crews and passengers on board Cross-Channel ferries.

Despite sackings, a hostile media, harsh legal judgements, the seizure of union funds, the men and women on strike in Dover have held their heads high. Despite massive resources, P&O have been unable to defeat these men and women of principle.

After the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster, this is one cause that deserves the support of every other trade unionist – and every person who cares about safety at sea.

All proceeds from this booklet will go towards the seafarers and their families. Assistance with writing and research was provided by the Birmingham Trade Union Resource Centre.

HEROES THEN



SACKED NOW

Why the sacked P&O seafarers must win

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THE SHAMEFUL TIMETABLE

1987	
January	P&O acquires Townsend Thoresen
March	<i>Herald of Free Enterprise</i> capsizes
October	P&O tells unions that £6 million a year must be saved, and cuts will be phased in over five years
December	P&O changes mind and demands all savings at once
1988	
February	Secret ballot of Dover employees overwhelmingly rejects P&O plan on safety and other grounds. Strike starts.
March	P&O postpones date for implementing cuts because date is too close to anniversary of <i>Herald</i> capsizing
March	NUS tells ACAS it is willing to negotiate savings, and is willing to accept arbitration, but only on basis of phasing in of changes with safety foremost in any changes
March	P&O announce record profits including £51.7 million from P&O European Ferries
May	All union funds and assets sequestrated by High Court. Union fined £150,000
May	All P&O workers who refuse to sign new contracts sacked
June	All strikers struck off Merchant Navy establishment
July	P&O and Justice Davies continue to block union funds, despite Kent police stating picketing is legal
July	Private prosecution of P&O over <i>European Clearway</i> fire sought
August	P&O's insurers try to cut Zeebrugge compensation payments to heroes and heroines now on strike
September	Herald Families Association threaten to prosecute P&O, and Sir Jeffrey Sterling unless Attorney General does
October	P&O tell shareholders strike has cost £25 million up to June
October	Serious officer and ratings problems for P&O as turnover continues and staff morale drops
December	P&O to be prosecuted over <i>European Clearway</i> fire

INTRODUCTION

"Ever since men and women first went to sea, those who by choice or necessity earn their living afloat have lived with danger. Within minutes, the power of nature can transform a flat calm into a maelstrom of death and destruction, bringing sorrow to families ashore whose loved ones fail to return. Yet, tragically, seafarers are not only at risk from such Acts of God. Within living memory, the aptly-named 'coffin-ships', over-loaded, under-maintained and well-insured, were put to Sea by their cynical owners in the sure knowledge of a fat profit, regardless of whether their vessels sank with all hands or arrived with their cargoes.

It was the greed of such owners that prompted the National Union of Seamen from its foundation in 1887, to agitate for comprehensive safety laws which would forbid the owners to put profit before human life. Having won that battle, the NUS then sought to better a seafarer's status, wages and conditions. As recently as the 1960's, our members earned as little as £14 for a 56-hour week, were subject to a quasi-military code of discipline and faced jail for going on strike. It took a national dispute in 1966 before our members enjoyed anything like the rights and basic freedoms enjoyed by workers ashore. Then, as now, we are vilified by the media and the government as being 'politically motivated'. But profit-hungry employers never make peace with their workers – they only declare a truce. In December 1987, the mighty P&O group, who in 1986 had declared record profits of £274m, decreed that in the interests of yet more wealth, their cross-Channel ferries would be run with fewer crews working longer hours.

This company, slammed by a Court of Inquiry as "infected with the disease of sloppiness", following the deaths of nearly 200 passengers and crew at Zeebrugge, insisted that one in four of the workforce would lose his or her job. That those left should receive a pay cut of up to £20 per week. That an extra 28 x 24 hour shifts should be worked a year for no compensatory payment and that a man or woman should be on-duty for eighteen hours out of every twenty-four spent on-board.

For daring to resist, for refusing to order crews taking supportive strike action to return to work, our union was sequestrated, evicted from its offices and fined approximately one million pounds. A company that, in the opinion of many, should have been prosecuted for corporate manslaughter after the Zeebrugge tragedy, used the government's anti-trade union laws to criminalise a union and its members. Our crime?



Sam McCluskie

Standing up for safety at sea, our members' dignity and rights hard-won by British seafarers over a century of struggle.

Our members in Dover have become the standard bearers in the Trade Union Movement's fight against the most vicious set of anti-working class laws passed this century. They are fighting, not for higher pay or shorter hours, but to ensure *your* right to travel by Sea in safety. In buying this book you are helping them win."

SAM McCLUSKIE
General Secretary
National Union of Seamen

Chapter 1: ONE YEAR AFTER ZEEBRUGGE

On Friday March 6th 1987, the passenger ferry *HERALD OF FREE ENTERPRISE* capsized with the loss of 191 lives outside the port of Zeebrugge.

The ship sank in about one minute. It was a roll-on/roll-off ferry of a type that was to be heavily criticised by Justice Sheen at the official inquiry that followed.

The ship sank so fast that even the incredible heroism shown by passengers, crew and rescue services could not avoid a terrible disaster.

One crew survivor was Assistant Purser Steve Homewood.

"I have no doubt whatsoever that the last thing that some of the lads and lassies who died were doing, especially in the restaurant and cafeteria, was helping others before themselves."

HEROES DISMISSED

One year and seventy-one days after the Zeebrugge disaster, P&O European Ferries sacked the last remaining crew members of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*.

One of them was Tom Wilson, helmsman of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*, who was awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal for his part in the rescue. Both Tom Wilson and Phil Naisbitt, a quartermaster, had stuck with P&O even after the disaster.

Tom Wilson, aged 39, was first on the outside of the hull organising the rescue of passengers and the captain and officers from the smashed wheelhouse. He was one of four crewmen to receive Queen's Gallantry Medals. Tom Wilson told the *Guardian* (17th May 1988):

"I have never been sacked before in my life. I feel poleaxed and bitter. I had not got a blemish on my record."

This is no ordinary strike. The men and women standing outside the Eastern Docks at Dover are the very same men and women praised for their heroism at Zeebrugge. This booklet explains why they have gone for nearly ten months without wages or strike pay despite the efforts of a powerful multinational company to crush them.

6 HOME NEWS

Zeebrugge relatives threaten to prosecute

By James Dalrymple

UP TO 150 relatives of the people killed in the Zeebrugge ferry disaster will meet in Dover tomorrow and will publicly promise to ensure that certain former directors of the now defunct Townsend Thoresen ferry company are prosecuted for corporate manslaughter.

Yesterday Mr Maurice de Rohan, chairman of the Herald Families Association, said: "We are determined that if the Director of Public Prosecutions decides not to bring criminal charges we shall go ahead and bring a private prosecution."

Kent Police carried out a wide-ranging investigation, which took almost a year to complete, into the disaster, and the DPP received a preliminary report two months ago. When the full report is received, possibly within the next month, the decision on whether or not to bring charges will be announced.

"We have made no secret of the fact that we see it as an issue of corporate responsibility," Mr de Rohan, a civil engineer, said. "We feel that there are senior officials of the company who should face prosecution. The three crewmen who were blamed directly for the sinking were, we feel, acting in a corporate environment and we are not pushing to have their responsibility considered."

Tomorrow's meeting will include a short service then a discussion on outstanding issues surrounding the tragedy.

Apart from the matter of criminal prosecution, there will be a

resolution on the Government's refusal to tackle the issue of roll-on, roll-off ferries, and their insistence in protecting ferry companies' commercial interests.

Mr de Rohan, who lost his daughter and son-in-law in the disaster 18 months ago, said: "The government has ignored the verdict of the inquiry into the dangers of ro-ro ferries and simply introduced a whole series of small safety procedures and cosmetic improvements to the ships."

"But it is the basic design of these vessels that is dangerous. They have been told so repeatedly, not least by the Royal Institution of Naval Architects. Yet they let these ships sail on, hoping the matter of ferry safety will just go away."

The association, which was formed shortly after the disaster, which resulted in the loss of more than 190 lives in March 1987, has become a permanent self-help and pressure group for the victims' relatives.

Mr de Rohan said: "We have all found it a tremendous source of strength and comfort in the last year. Many of us found we could not talk even to our friends about our loss, but we could — and did — talk to each other."

"It is now our intention to make sure that no similar disaster is allowed to happen, and to make sure that those who were responsible for it should answer to the courts."

Anchor over land

Independent, 9th September 1988

Chapter 2: SHIP SAFETY AND COMPANY PROFITS

The *Herald of Free Enterprise* was not the first roll-on/roll-off ferry to have a disastrous accident. Nor has it been the last.

Working at sea has always been a dangerous occupation. What makes working on roll-on/roll-off ferries different is that in addition to the dangers from the elements, *the design of the vessel itself is dangerous*.

★ ships of similar design to the *Herald of Free Enterprise* have sunk before. When the *European Gateway*, also owned by Townsend Thoresen, sank after a collision, the official technical investigation forecast that a similar accident could happen to a passenger ferry with catastrophic loss of life;

★ 60% of roll-on/roll-off ships lost after collisions sank or capsized within 10 minutes.

The reason that roll-on/roll-off vessels are uniquely dangerous is that they have design features which make them especially suitable for quick loading into the vehicle decks. Their high sides and lack of internal bulkheads make them top heavy and very vulnerable to a sudden inrush of water through the bow and stern doors, or other openings, as in collisions.

Just a couple of inches of water on the deck can cause a ship to capsize — as happened with the *Herald of Free Enterprise*.

EXPERTS WARN

The *Royal Institution of Naval Architects* condemned the design of roll-on/roll-off ferries in March 1988 because they were "unacceptably vulnerable" to rapid capsize.

THE INDEPENDENT Tuesday 22 March 1988

Naval architects urge new laws on 'vulnerable' ferries

By Mary Fagan, Technology Correspondent

FERRIES of the type involved in the Zeebrugge tragedy are unacceptably vulnerable in accidents and legislation is needed to improve safety, naval architects said yesterday.

Lord Caldecote, president of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects, said that while roll-on, roll-off ferries were "perfectly safe" if operated according to regulations, they were much more vulnerable in accidents such as collisions or groundings.

They could turn over and sink within five minutes, compared with about 30 minutes for a conventional ship — leaving little time for passengers to escape. "The degree of vulnerability is unacceptable and something needs to be done to put it right in both existing vessels and new designs."

The institute said in a statement yesterday: "Irrespective of statistics, a single accident to this type of vessel can lead to a catastrophic loss of life and the risk of such a consequence is too high."

The institute fears that the necessary design changes to new and existing vessels may not happen without government pressure on shipbuilders and operators. The Government should be prepared to legislate if necessary, it says. The institute met Lord Brabazon, Under-Secretary of State for Transport, yesterday to express concern.

Lord Caldecote said: "It is very urgent that we seek the best solutions, agree on them and implement them. We have offered help to do this as quickly as possible to reduce vulnerability in the case of accidents."

The institute said that it welcomed moves by the Department of Transport to improve operational practices and to carry out research on better design of "ro-ro" ships. But the institute is concerned about existing designs and the lack of legal instruments to force designers, operators and shipbuilders to apply technical solutions to the problem of rapid capsize.

The department said: "We have agreed to keep in touch. The RINA people and our marine directorate will make more formal contact as our research proceeds."

The institute's statement outlined particularly serious problems with existing designs. These include: ■ Dangers of flooding large areas of deck near the waterline; ■ High permeability in some compartments which can admit large volumes of

water; ■ The dangers of fire in the vehicle spaces and in accommodation areas immediately above;

■ The possibility that thousands of passengers may not be evacuated safely in a very short time.

Lord Caldecote said that there was an urgent need for a code of safe practice in the design of new ro-ro vessels, but that requirements must be agreed internationally, because of competition. The forum for such agreement is the International Maritime Organisation. "The trouble is that getting agreement there can be very long-winded," Lord Caldecote said.

The *Nautical Institute* agreed. It wrote:

"Commercial expediency cannot be given as an excuse to absolve governments of their responsibility to the public . . . Ro-Ro ferries are vulnerable to capsize should they be involved in a collision. This is incompatible with the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act."

THE COST OF SAFETY

The shipowners don't agree. On *World in Action* on April 27th 1987, ferry designer Jack Brown agreed that fitting watertight bulkheads would make ferries safer.

However, he added "At what price?". The proposal was "economically dubious" because it would make ferries "less competitive".

The owners of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* knew the design was unsafe. In 1986, after a series of warnings, ships designers British Maritime Technology asked every ferry operator for £10,000 to research Roll-on-Roll-off safety. Only one operator replied — Sally Line, one of the smallest.

Six years before the Zeebrugge disaster, in 1981, officers on the sister ship, the *Spirit of Free Enterprise*, threatened to strike if safety standards didn't improve on board.

They told Townsend Thoresen that they desperately needed a third officer to close the ship's bow doors. The owners insisted that only two officers were needed, despite the fact that three vital tasks had to be done at the same time — close the bow doors, let go the stern ropes, and assist the captain on the bridge.

The owners' reply to the officers was that to provide another officer would undo "the balance" between safety and economy.

The Herald of Free Enterprise

"From top to bottom the body corporate was infected with the disease of sloppiness."

That was how Mr Justice Sheen summed up the attitude of the owners of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* towards the running of their ships.

- ★ the ship had a permanent list ever since it was launched six years previously. Repeated complaints from the ship's captains were ignored. The company forced the ship to sail with a ballast tank permanently full of water to counteract the list – which lowered the ship's bow;
- ★ other ballast tanks were filled to allow cars at Zeebrugge's low dock to off-load. The time to empty the tanks was longer than the harbour turnaround time. The owners were warned to fit pumps to clear the tanks more quickly. They refused, claiming the £25,000 cost was too high.

The Court of Inquiry made two sorts of recommendations:

Immediate improvements. Bow door warning lights and closed circuit television should be installed. Steps and handrails that would allow passengers to reach the outside of the ship when it has capsized should be fitted. The owners complained that this idea could give foreign competition a cost advantage(!).

Fundamental changes. These should include compulsory watertight bulkheads, and vehicle decks higher above the water line, with the phasing out of older ships not built to these standards or incapable of conversion. Justice Sheen accepted these changes would increase turnaround times but said that safety demanded them.

The Herald capsized because the ship was designed with fast turnaround times and maximum capacity taking priority over ship safety. A couple of inches of water entering through the open bow doors was sufficient to sink the ship. Yet well after the dangers of ro-ro ferry design were known, P&O were commissioning even larger ships built to the same design.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS?

Some of the minor changes have been implemented. The major – and costly – changes have been put on ice thanks to Government Transport Secretary Paul Channon who has failed to implement the Inquiry recommendation about structural weaknesses. So structurally unsound ferries continue to sail.

Twelve months after the Zeebrugge disaster, the Swedish Roll-on/Roll-off ferry Vinca Gorthon sank and split in two in a gale off Holland, despite having implemented all the minor changes.



2,500 NUS members and families commemorate the Zeebrugge disaster.

Chapter 3: HAVE P&O LEARNED ANY LESSONS?

After the Zeebrugge disaster, P&O Chair Sir Jeffrey Sterling promised swift compensation to survivors and the families of those who died. He also promised a massive stepping up of safety measures throughout the company. What has actually happened?

August 1987 A BBC *Brass Tacks* programme revealed on Bank Holiday weekend the *Pride of Free Enterprise* was sailing so short of crew there was insufficient crew cover for fire-fighting.

October 1987 The Press Association reported that only four out of the surviving seafarers have jobs at sea. The company ordered all seafarers on board the *Herald* to take three weeks rest. This was then deducted from their annual holidays.

November 1987 The *Pride of Walmer* (formerly the *Free Enterprise VII*) was reported as having sailed with bow doors open, but the incident was hushed up.

December 1987 Chief and second officer of the *Pride of Canterbury* sent a memo to P&O's Safety Officer saying navigation safety was being jeopardised because of the long hours worked aboard ship.

December 1987 P&O demands massive staff cuts and longer hours in order to cut £6 million from wages bill. The proposed cuts would have meant 65 crew, not 80, on board the *Herald of Free Enterprise*, working longer hours.

March 1988 P&O *Nordic* engine room caught fire. Ship's captain sent lifeboats away because "they were upsetting the passengers". Ship stranded for several hours before towed to Felixstowe.

May 1988 House of Commons told that P&O European Ferries Chair, Mr Peter Ford tried to persuade Kent police to use company figures that showed a higher number of survivors.

May 1988 P&O shareholder tells company Annual General Meeting that "I hang my head in shame as a shareholder", but fails to get company back to negotiating table.

May 1988 P&O crews that refuse to accept new dangerous crewing proposals sacked – including rescue heroes from Zeebrugge.

May 1988 P&O *Viking Venturer* sails from Falmouth with seven unregistered crew recruited via a local travel agent.

June 1988 National Union of Seamen and Dover seafarers not invited to opening of memorial garden in Zeebrugge by P&O.

June 1988 Belgian Red Cross still not paid £20,000 bill for heroic rescue services.

June 1988 P&O officer reveals P&O *European Trader* fire happened after ship converted from normal heavy oil marine fuel to diesel fuel to increase 13 year-old vessel's speed. Diesel fuel extremely inflammable in burst fuel line situation, unlike normal marine oil fuel. Officer also alleged TV monitoring system installed to compensate for reduction in crewing had broken down two days before the fire.

June 1988 P&O still forcing survivors' relatives to claim individually for compensation instead of making a generous offer to all.

June 1988 NUMAST (ship officers union) accuses P&O of deliberately shifting officers from ship to ship ahead of planned inspections by Department of Trade and Industry, to ensure that crew levels up to standard.

July 1988 P&O accused by National Union of Seamen of employing non-union labour unfit to be on board ships – including ratings discharged for various offences.

July 1988 Mr John Ball, sacked after leaking report of fire on P&O *European Trader* takes out private prosecution against P&O alleging serious breaches of the Merchant Shipping Act. Mr Ball, formerly a strike-breaker, was Shell UK Tankers Safety Sailor of the Year.

"The Peninsular and Oriental Steam Navigation Co has antagonised its shareholders, its employees and its insurance underwriters. There is only one group it cannot afford to antagonise any more than it has done already – its customers.

"The sight of former *Herald of Free Enterprise* crew members standing on the picket lines and refusing to sail under allegedly unsafe conditions cannot do P&O's public image much good."

Financial Weekly, 12th May 1988

Chapter 4: WHAT DID P&O PROPOSE?

P&O have offered three combinations of working conditions, jobs and pay during the dispute. All three have been similar, and all three aim to cut the crew costs by £6 million or 17%. The final offer – the so-called "Red Book" – looked like this:

1. **Jobs.** Each ferry used to have 3.6 crews, giving a total of 2,163 ratings employed by P&O in Dover. Under the Red Book, 459 jobs would disappear, with ships on the Zeebrugge and Boulogne routes having only 3.0 crews per ship.

So on these routes, each crew would be smaller, and the number of crews per ship would be cut.

On the Calais ships, the crews would be cut in size, but there would still be 3.6 crews per ship.

2. **Working hours.** Before the dispute, crews worked 94 24 hour shifts per year. Now crews are expected to work 122 24 hour shifts per year. These extra 28 shifts – or 672 hours – are to be worked without extra pay.

To give a comparison, the average industrial worker works 42 hours per week, with five weeks' holiday and clocks 2,000 per year.

Before the dispute, P&O workers did 2,200 hours per year. Now they are expected to work 2,900 hours per year (or 45% more than the average industrial worker).

3. **Shift patterns.** The P&O Red Book proposes longer hours with less breaks for rest, sleep and meals. Take the Zeebrugge route travelled by the *Herald of Free Enterprise*.

Old shift system		New shift system	
Week 1	24 hrs on/48 hrs off	24 hrs on/24 hrs off	
Week 2	24 hrs on/48 hrs off	24 hrs on/24 hrs off	
Week 3	24 hrs on/48 hrs off	Week off	

Plus annual leave	No annual leave
Allocated break of 8 hours (freight) or less (for passenger ships)	No minimum rest period

In fact, rest periods can be reduced by safety drills, sick cover or emergencies. Rest periods must be taken in shared bunks, often placed between the ships propellers and the vehicle decks.

4. **Fringe benefits.** Overtime payments disappear, but not overtime itself. By switching to a salary

structure, instead of an hourly paid system, the company hope to get extra overtime carried out without pay. Extra work done if the ship is delayed through bad weather, or mechanical problems will not be paid. Relief crews waiting to join delayed ships will not be paid until the ship can be joined.

There will be no annual holidays of longer than one week.

During time off, crews must live near the home port, and *must install at their own expense a telephone at their house. They can be recalled during their time off, and shifted to different ships.* Ratings must have no "outside interests" that might conflict with being recalled at short notice duty rest periods.

There are no extra payments for working weekends or Bank Holidays, nor any time off in lieu.

5. **Pay.** P&O have made much play of increased salaries for seafarers under the new system. This is simply not true. Take an experienced seaman Grade 1A:

	Old wage (allowances on top)	New wage (no allowances)
Dover-Calais	£287	£275
Dover-Zeebrugge	£254	£256
Dover-Boulogne	£251	£256

However, *all seafarers will also lose several allowances* – such as short-hand money, overlapping shift money, and the leave food allowance (itself worth between £6 and £10 per week).

Every single seafarer on every single route will take a wage cut under these company proposals.

So if the Herald of Free Enterprise had been sailing under these new crew levels, it would have had less crew, working longer hours, with shorter breaks, less holidays, a more intensive shift pattern and with less pay.

	Crew levels before	Crew levels proposed
(Herald of Free Enterprise)	80	65
Pride of Bruges		
(Pride of Free Enterprise)	69	54
Pride of Kent		
(Spirit of Free Enterprise)	69	54

Is it any wonder, seafarers were unhappy with the company plans?

Why are the new shifts a problem?

In January 1986, Townsend Thoresen, the previous owners of P&O's Channel ferries, gave evidence to ACAS during a dispute with the National Union of Seamen about working hours. They were asked what they thought about a system of 24 hours on, 24 hours off similar to that now introduced by P&O. Townsend Thoresen told ACAS: that under extended hours of this magnitude:

"the safety of the ship would be compromised . . . (and would) greatly impair the ability of the staff."

They are not the only ones to hold this opinion. A Sealink worker told health and safety experts:

"Such shifts take us to the limit of what's humanly possible"

In 1982, the Department of Transport expressed concern about the effects of fatigue amongst maritime watchkeepers of long hours.

A 1982 Dutch study of marine pilots found there were high levels of stress and sleep deprivation as a result of their irregular shift patterns.

As long ago as 1946, a detailed study noted the effects of sleep deprivation resulting from excessive hours, and a shift pattern resulting in broken sleep in noisy environments such as ships. The effects of such conditions can result in "night shift paralysis" amongst workers such as air traffic controllers, and seafarers.

Every single one of these studies recommend:

- ★ fixed hours with one long sleep period at the same time each day;
- ★ working two consecutive nights should be avoided;
- ★ improved rest periods, with guaranteed sleep period between shifts.

SHIFTWORKING ON BOARD P&O SHIPS

The proposed shift system on P&O ships combines the worst possible elements of shift-working. Amidst the vibration, noise, movement and tannoy of a ship, working hours 45% longer than the average industrial worker, conditions will be appalling.

These shifts will be worked by seafarers working the busiest sea lanes in the world.

It is no wonder that experienced seafarers like Zeebrugge hero Tom Wilson (awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal) opposes the new shifts:

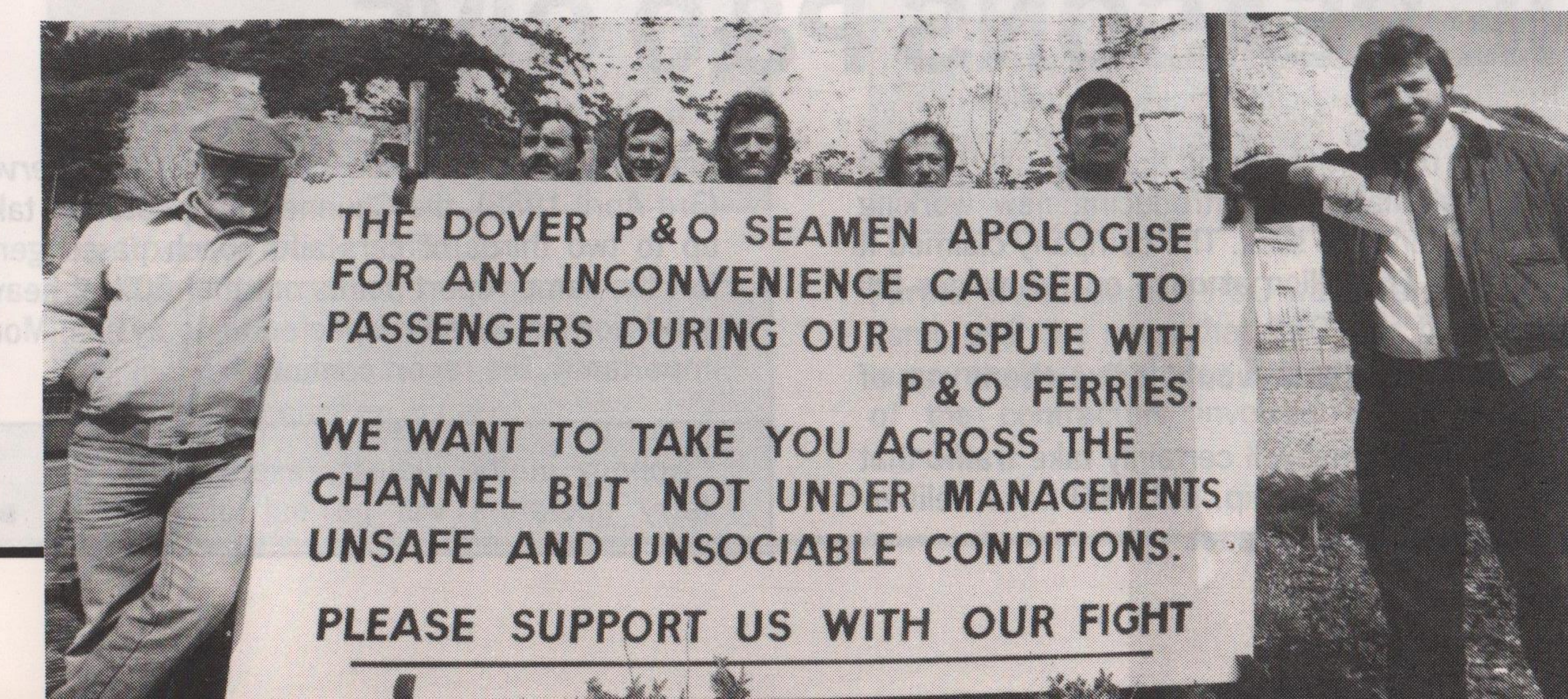
"I didn't sign the new contract because the Union's case is so right.

It's crazy and unsafe for P&O to ask crews to work 24 hours on, 24 hours off for two weeks at a time."

Workers in similar occupations have legal restrictions on hours worked. Lorry drivers have tachographs to enforce their legal hours. Underground miners' hours are restricted by law. Why not those of seafarers whose actions can place entire ships at risk?

"Unless you live with someone working these shifts you just can't imagine what it's like. My husband is permanently tired, always recovering from the last shift. It makes him bad-tempered, liable to fly off the handle over nothing at all. I know it's the same in all families. It's as if the company even owns the time he's at home."

*Wife of ferry worker
on previous shift system.*



What those shifts really mean

"The idea that you get anything that a normal human being would call sleep on board a ferry, well, frankly, it's a bad joke."

John Childs was one of two assistant storemen on board the *Pride of Bruges*, a 1,400 passenger ship on the Dover-Zeebrugge run. The two storemen loaded and distributed the ship's stores, crew's stores and passenger stores, including duty free sales and all food for 1,400 people. A typical 24 hour shift looked like this:

07.30 am Ship disembarks. Clock on. Load stores. Duty free stores alone in high season could include 18 trolleys with 32 cases of spirits, plus cigarettes. All ship's stores, crew's stores, etc.
08.30 am Ship sails. Stores have to be distributed around ship to all shops, catering, crew areas, continuously. Clear up.
13.00 pm Ship disembarks Zeebrugge. Load stores again and distribute.
15.00 pm Ship sails.
17.30 pm Ship disembarks Dover. Load stores again and distribute.
18.30 pm Ship sails.
01.00 pm Ship disembarks Zeebrugge. Load stores again and distribute.
03.00 pm Ship sails.
07.30 am Ship disembarks Dover. Clock off.

Under the old, exhausting shift system, John then slept for about twelve hours, in a break of 48 hours. Under the new shifts, John would only get a 24 hour break and then sail again. He would do

two continuous weeks of this, and then get a one week break.

"You're so tired, you often forget which way you're going across the Channel. Sleeping is a joke. There are two bunks between six of us. No one takes their clothes off, for safety reasons. You just doze for a bit.

"If you try to kip, there's a constant barrage of tannoy announcements, noise from the ship's engines, especially when there is a bow thrust to reverse engines on disembarking. In rough seas the ship is constantly moving, and in port there is constant noise. On the older ships, to cap it all, the crew quarters are between the ship's engines and the vehicle deck.

"I can't imagine Jeffrey Sterling agreeing to work under such conditions."

In addition, if there is bad weather or mechanical problems, the ship can be delayed.

"Things are bad enough under the present system where at least you get 48 hours off between each shift, with holidays on top. Under the new proposed system, it would simply be impossible. Even now, in high season, you're lucky to get your meal breaks, never mind a lie down."

Chapter 5: THE REASONS P&O GIVE

P&O gave four reasons for giving the National Union of Seamen the ultimatum of introducing new working practices or getting the sack. The company claimed it needed to save £6 million at once on the wages bill because:

1. The Channel Tunnel would drive them out of business

The Channel Tunnel will certainly take traffic that would have gone by ship. But P&O have deliberately exaggerated its impact.

According to a detailed report in the *Observer* (3rd April 1988), the Chunnel is expected to take up to two thirds of cars and coach passengers. But the same report points out that 60% of heavy goods lorries are still expected to go by sea. More importantly, the report continues:

"Nobody in the industry expects that the ferry operators will go out of business. ▶

◀ Demand on the cross-Channel routes is expected to double by the end of the century and the Department of Transport calculates that shipping capacity will be half as great again by the year 2003."

2. VAT may be introduced on ticket sales, fuel and ship's stores

There is simply no evidence that the Treasury has any plans to introduce VAT on these items. Even if they did, VAT would undoubtedly apply to Chunnel tickets as well.

3. Duty free sales may be abolished in 1992

The relevant EEC Commissioner, Stanley Clinton Davies is on record as saying this is very unlikely. In any case the proposal could be vetoed by any one government within the EEC. Any ban on duty free sales would equally affect P&O's competitors, the Hovercraft and the Chunnel.

4. Wages are going up too fast

According to P&O itself, average crew wages have risen by 24% in the last five years – at a time when official figures show inflation at 21%. So wages have really been cut in spending power.

The company's accounts for 1987 show that every employee made £5,860 each in profit for P&O – an increase of nearly 17% over 1986.

According to SNCF, the French ferry company, British ferry crews cost £500 to £700 a month less to employ per worker (letter to employees seeking job and wage cuts).

According to the independent Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, a *British able seaman, grade 1 is already (before the cuts) cheaper to employ than French, Belgian, Danish, Norwegian, West German and Dutch counterparts. No country with a Channel or North Sea coastline has cheaper shipping workers.*

House of Commons, May 11th 1988

Behind the Channel Tunnel

The Channel Tunnel is not simply another way to cross to France. It is a gravy train for the companies involved. And its industrial relations will be a step backwards to the nineteenth century.

Who's behind the Chunnel? The original firms in the Channel Tunnel Group who won the contract include major backers of the Conservative Party. Costain, Tarmac, Taylor Woodrow, George Wimpey and Co are all major donors. In the year before the Chunnel Treaty was signed, the firms in the Channel Tunnel Group gave political donations of £193,000 to the Tory Party and its allies.

What about industrial relations? Eurotunnel is quite clear about what sort of trade unionism and working practices it wants. Alastair Dick, their Planning Adviser told the *Observer* (3rd April 1988) that:

"It will be state of the art labour force on a greenfield site with the whole range of possibilities of modern industrial relations practice from which to choose."

The *Observer* article continues:

"This probably means, at best, a single union no-strike deal with a moderate union; at worst it means no union at all."

Doubts swept aside. Serious doubts, especially from fire experts, about safety within the tunnel, have been swept aside in the Government inspired euphoria.

P&O HEDGE THEIR BETS

Whilst P&O's public face is that it must get into shape to fight the threat of the Chunnel, privately it is preparing deals to cash in on it.

The *Financial Times* (3rd May 1988) reported that the company is considering a joint venture with Eurotunnel on a joint service. The report continues:

"the rationale for this is that P&O has skills in areas where Eurotunnel will have no experience such as ticketing, loading and scheduling. Moreover a large proportion of Cross Channel traffic will be unable or unwilling to use the tunnel."

Further evidence that P&O was hedging its bets came with the news that P&O was buying very large numbers of shares in Taylor Woodrow, one of the contractors involved in the Channel Tunnel.

Chapter 6: P&O's STRATEGY

P&O may have dithered over implementing all the recommendations of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* Court of Inquiry.

They have been totally ruthless, however, in their determination to break the National Union of Seamen. No stone has been left unturned.

1. The company refuses to negotiate

When P&O took over Townsend Thoresen three months before the *Herald* disaster, they promised to stick to existing agreements with the workforce.

In October 1987, Sir Jeffrey Sterling told the National Union of Seamen that cost savings would be needed in Dover to compete with the Channel Tunnel. At that October meeting, the Dover Port Committee accepted the need for some cost savings.

The company promised then that any cost savings would be phased in over a five year period to coincide with the opening of the Channel Tunnel in 1993.

Just six weeks later, on December 4th, P&O changed its tune. It announced that £6 million, or 17%, would have to be cut from its annual wages bill of £35 million.

On February 2nd, 1988 crews from all 11 ships of P&O European Ferries held a secret ballot on the proposals and decided that the proposals were not acceptable for safety and other reasons. The vote was overwhelming.

From that point on, the company refused to budge. It shuffled the figures around – offering a little more money in return for even more jobs lost – but never shifted from demanding immediate acceptance of the £6 million cut in the wages bill. It refused to accept independent arbitration – and still does.

2. P&O sacks its workforce

In February, P&O sent letters to office staff who lived with striking seafarers asking them "to use all your powers of persuasion and influence to get your household to go back to work".

A mass meeting immediately afterwards voted 1,500–2 to reject a reshuffled offer.

P&O then set March 4th as the date when anyone not accepting new working conditions would be sacked. This plan was dropped for a few weeks when their Public Relations Department realised that this date was almost the exact anniversary of the sinking of the *Herald of Free Enterprise*.

On May 17th the company finally carried out its threat and sacked everyone who had not signed the new contract of employment. It sent named acceptance forms to everyone on strike.

After 14 weeks on strike, without wages or strike pay, some – a minority – of the workforce signed on the dotted line. This was what the company was later to call its "secret ballot".

Of those who signed, some crept back to work. Others went sick and hoped for early medical severance.

Those sacked included the last crew members of the *Herald of Free Enterprise* still working for P&O.

3. The company hires a new workforce

Faced with the refusal of the majority of its Dover workforce to sail under the new conditions, P&O set about hiring new, non-union crews.

They hit a problem. With three million unemployed, they had no difficulty finding people willing to work as cooks, cleaners, and shop assistants.

It was far less easy to find cooks, cleaners and shop assistants who were trained in lifeboat drills, fire precautions, emergency procedures. After all, such staff had been key to rescue work at Zeebrugge.

Even worse, P&O had a desperate problem finding skilled deckhands and engine-room ratings. Despite scouring the entire country, they have failed to this day, to find enough of these key personnel.

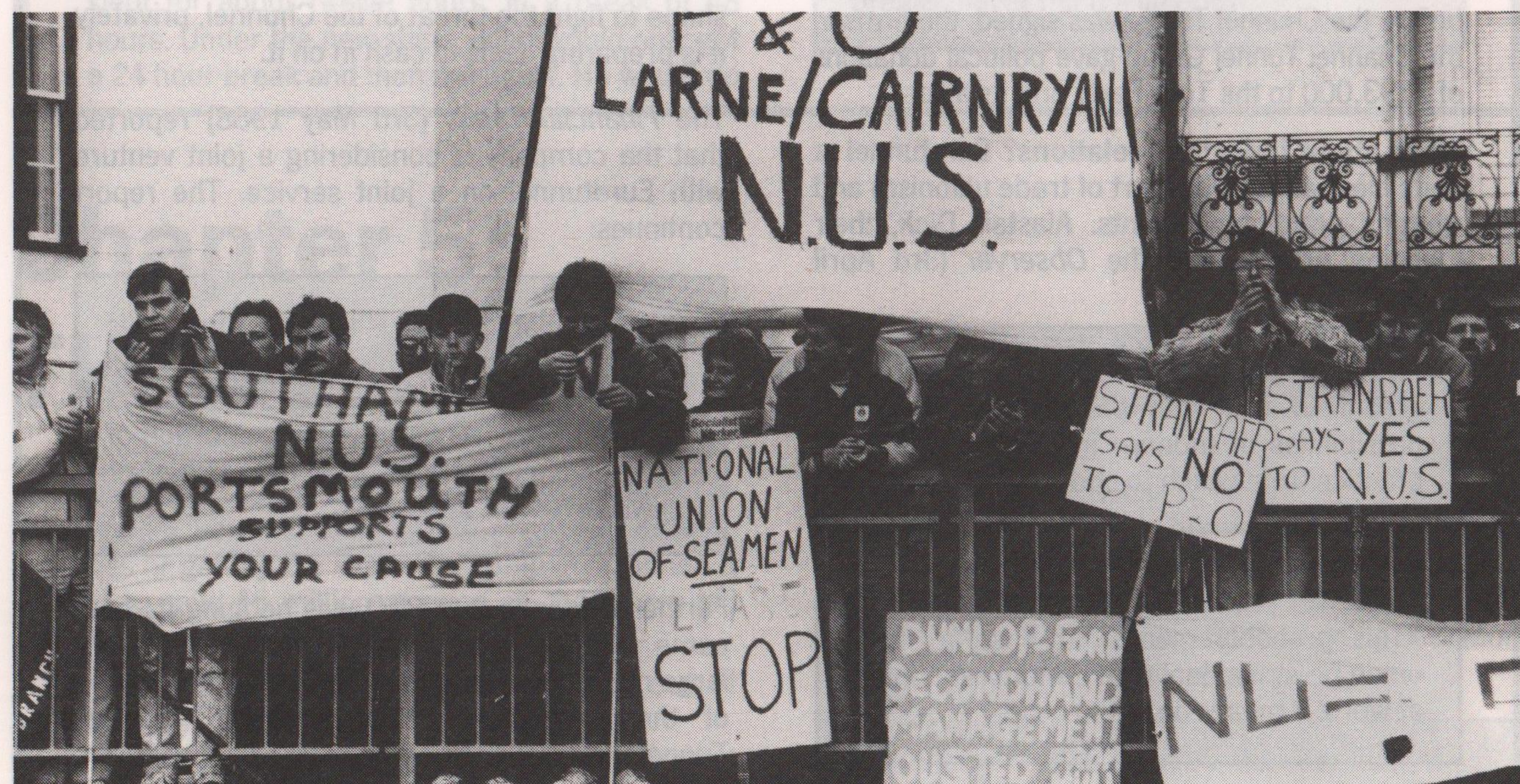
Moreover, the effect of working under the new conditions with inexperienced crews, was wrecking morale amongst the officers. Repeated com-

plaints by officers about safety culminated in the infamous letter from their union NUMAST about officers being shipped from vessel to vessel to meet DTI inspection levels.



Scabs

Andrew Ward



NUS banners

Andrew Ward

The curious ballot

Great play was made by P&O of the "ballot" on a return to work. The ballot had some unusual features:

- ★ it was held under duress – those who voted to reject the "new terms and conditions proposed by ACAS" were sacked;
- ★ it later turned out that the workforce was being asked to vote on "new terms and conditions proposed by ACAS" that ACAS itself did not regard as an ACAS "decision" or "arbitration" at all. In fact, a letter from Mr Boyd, the ACAS Chief Conciliation Officer (April 8th 1988) goes to great pains to make this point clear.

Even under threat of dismissal and under ballot wording at best confusing and at worst misleading, less than half the workforce voted to accept, even after ten weeks on strike without any money. Whereas Justice Davies happily granted an injunction to halt the count on a ballot for strike action against crew cuts, no Judge moved to halt this curious "ballot".

I SEE NO NEED TO MODERNISE UNREALISTIC WORKING PRACTICES THAT ARE CRIPPLING THE COMPANY.

I SEE NO THREAT FROM FOREIGN COMPETITORS WHO DON'T SUFFER FROM THE SAME OUTDATED WORK PRACTICES THAT WE DO.

I SEE NO CHALLENGE FROM A CHANNEL TUNNEL THAT WILL OFFER CUSTOMERS AN ALTERNATIVE TO SEA TRAVEL.

'I SEE NO SHIPS'

When Nelson turned a blind eye to the dangers ahead there was something heroic about it.

When a trade union does so, it's plain madness.

Because the realities of trying to run a business won't just disappear.

Time and again we explained this to the NUS leadership but they wouldn't see it.

Fortunately, the majority of our workforce did. 65% accepted our offer of between £10,000 and £12,000 per year with up to 243 days off.

An offer that experienced seamen are currently queuing up to accept.

At some stage the talking had to stop and we had to get on with running a ferry business.

If we hadn't, a few years from now, there'd have been no ships to see.

At least, not British ones.

P&O
European Ferries

4. The company uses the law

Even legal experts have been astonished at the use of the law against the National Union of Seamen this year.

- (i) *National strike banned.* In February, a joint operation by P&O and Sealink slapped an injunction on the NUS to prevent a national strike of members in support of sacked seafarers on the Isle of Man ferry *Tynwald*.

The Judge decided the strike was secondary action even though the *Tynwald* is owned by a Sealink company, and P&O had told Dover employees of its intention to cut jobs and conditions on an even more drastic scale than on the *Tynwald*.

- (ii) *National ballot banned.* In March, the same judge granted another injunction – this time banning the National Union of Seamen from counting a national ballot after Sealink had said they would copy P&O's new working conditions, if P&O succeeded in forcing them onto their workforce.

- (iii) *Assets seized.* In May, the entire assets of the NUS were seized by the Courts, and the union fined £150,000 when sympathy action by NUS members at Sealink was regarded as a breach of the March injunction.

- (iv) *Picketing rules changed.* Faced with bankruptcy, the National Union of Seamen ordered its members at Sealink back to work. It then applied for its funds and assets back.

The judge refused on the grounds that the picketing at Dover Docks by sacked P&O employees was illegal.

At Dover Docks, only employees of P&O European Ferries are picketing. Only six pickets take part, in line with the 1980 Code of Practice on picketing. Away from the picket line, other sacked seafarers gather to show support for the pickets. This is what the *Guardian* wrote on May 27th:

"It has been almost back to the 19th century for the trade unions this week... the startling implication of the decision by Justice Michael Davies is that trade unions take strike action at their peril.

"The police have never noticeably complained about the picketing at Dover where people are understandably incensed because they have been summarily dismissed.

"The P&O dispute has been reduced again to a straightforward argument between management and labour in which the company has been allowed to hold all the cards.

"In so far as there are strict laws on picketing, which there are not, the NUS has observed them to the full.

"Picketing is not a criminal offence and the law does not impose a specific limit on the number of people who may picket in one place.

"If the police have to deal with trouble on picket lines, then they have to take action under criminal law.

"In Dover this plainly has not happened. After such a lengthy dispute, the number of arrests can almost be counted on one hand. The disturbing implications of the Dover picketing story are new limits on unions to prevent them pursuing a primary dispute with their employer."

When Superintendent Mountford of the Kent Police told BBC *Newsnight* on July 22nd that "the strikers have been, in our opinion, within the law", Justice Davies threatened to punish him for contempt of court until he got a grovelling apology from Superintendent Mountford's superiors.

P & O plans legal action against strike ballot

THE FERRY firm P & O last night announced that it would take court action to stop a seamen's union ballot on a national strike which could cause Easter holiday travel chaos.

The company, embroiled in a dispute with members of the National Union of Seamen on its Dover-based ferries, said it would launch contempt of court proceedings against the union.

A company spokesman said the ballot decision – announced yesterday by the National Union of Seamen – related "to existing injunctions taken out by the company four weeks ago against illegal action by the union".

The company said its four ferry-operating firms would also apply for High Court injunctions to prevent the union holding the bal-

By Barrie C
Labour Correspondent

fices of the conciliator Acas.

P & O officials said that they were anticipative discussions "to end week strike at Dover".

The strike ballot, involves workers on the North Sea oil start within the next the result is due on Easter holidays. Cr the QE2 and the C be affected.

Sam McCluskie, general secretary, told a meeting at the union's headquarters yesterday that the union was confident of a

Judge rebukes police officer for possible contempt

Refusal to release assets angers NUS

Simon Beavis
Labour Correspondent

A HIGH Court judge yesterday extended for three weeks the sequestration order covering the dwindling assets of the National Union of Seamen in a move which was attacked by the union and by the Labour

telling them a load of bullshit," he said.

Mr John Prescott, the Labour energy spokesman, said that the ruling showed the court's partiality and added that it had transferred effective control of the union's assets to P&O, the ferry company at the heart of the six-month-old dispute.

The judge said that comments by Superintendent Gra-

add their support to the work being done by the six legal pickets permitted under guidelines to employment legislation.

But in his 45-minute judgment, Mr Justice Davies said that the officer had made "a very serious error indeed" and had done it in the name of the police force. He said that it was regrettable that at times the illegal mass picket had recently been very close to the legal

One law for the rich?

The long arm of the law has been more lenient on the shipping owners.

- ★ P&O has still not been prosecuted for its role in the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster;
- ★ P&O has had none of its assets seized to ensure immediate compensation for survivors and relatives of that disaster;
- ★ P&O has not been fined for failing to pay the expenses of the Belgian Red Cross;
- ★ P&O has not had one single prosecution for the numerous breaches of ship safety alleged in the months since the *Herald* disaster;
- ★ P&O, Sealink and SNCF (the French ferry operator) have not been fined for taking secondary action in support of each other. This is despite the fact that, at the same time, all three companies have been seeking cuts in jobs and working conditions;

- ★ No lorry drivers or their employers were prosecuted or arrested when their blockade paralysed the Ports of Dover and Calais in May;
- ★ No Judge ordered the funds of the General Council of British Shipping to be frozen for taking secondary action in support of P&O when that body told striking seafarers they would be struck off the Merchant Navy Establishment in June – thereby imperiling their chances of ever working in the industry again;
- ★ No court injunctions were used against P&O back in December when it ripped up solemn assurances given to employees that it would keep to agreements reached with Townsend Thoresen.



John Harris (IFL)

Chapter 7: P&O: THE COMPANY BEHIND THE STRIKE

P&O is an extremely wealthy company. 1987 was a year of "record profits" in which:

- ★ turnover rose by 47%;
- ★ operating profit rose by 55%;

which itself was a continuation of a five year trend in which:

- ★ turnover rose by 94%;
- ★ profit before tax rose by 285%;
- ★ dividends rose by 410%.

Over the last five years, the rate of profit has doubled, and dividend payouts to shareholders have increased four times faster than turnover.

As well as being a ferry and shipping company, P&O owns a massive building firm, Bovis (formerly Sir Keith Joseph's family company), and Sutcliffe Catering (a major private catering firm chasing privatisation contracts in hospitals and local government).

According to the company report to shareholders, passenger shipping showed operating profits up by 111% (more than doubled) including £51.7 million generated by the European Ferries Group.

No figure for the Dover operations is given, but these are reliably estimated to be at least £10 million per year.

Future profit estimates are high. Pre-tax profits of £282 million are expected by stockbrokers Hoare, Govett to grow to £351 million by next year.

NOT EVERYBODY'S HAPPY

"P&O must be getting used to it by now. On Friday the company was accused of intimidating the workforce, being used as the militant wing of the Conservative Party and neglecting safety. The chairman, Sir Jeffrey Sterling was urged to resign unless he went back to the negotiating table, and was even accused of doing more moonlighting than some of the employees he had criticised.

"The only difference this time was that it was not striking seamen who were saying all this. It was a vocal minority of shareholders at P&O's annual meeting. They own the company. An emergency resolution instructing P&O to reinstate dismissed

workers and reopen negotiations was ruled out of order. (Shouldn't there have been a secret ballot of shareholders?)"

One shareholder accused Sir Jeffrey of being a "covert member of the Government" whilst another told the meeting that the apparent lack of concern over the Zeebrugge disaster meant:

"I hang my head in shame as a shareholder."

Stockbrokers journal the *Financial Weekly* went further. Pointing out that after Zeebrugge, P&O's share of cross-Channel traffic fell, the journal accused the company of having "an uncompromising strategy that could soon backfire" with serious long-term financial effects on the firm.

Warning of the serious impact on the company's prestige of possible court cases claiming damages for victim's relatives and of any future prosecution for corporate manslaughter, *Financial Weekly* said (May 12th):

"mounting costs could severely diminish the profitability of P&O's passenger shipping business, no matter how strike costs are accounted for."

With P&O having very serious ferry booking problems – many travel agents offer P&O as last choice to customers – strike losses are rising. The losses have risen from £500,000 per week in the off-season period to well over £1 million per week in actual losses in summer – with total losses of up to £40 million so far.

These union estimates match private company ones, and those of shipping experts. They are simply not costs that the company's major shareholders will want to keep quiet about forever.

The man behind the strike



Sir Jeffrey Sterling is no ordinary company Chairman.

For one thing, he is a personal friend of the Prime Minister. He has been a paid adviser to the Department of Trade and Industry for six years. He has advised the Government on anti-trade union legislation, and on privatisation. He chairs the Downing Street Committee on the future of broadcasting.

He is extremely wealthy.

Whilst he was seeking to cut the wages bill on his Dover ferries by 17%, he himself had a wage increase of 17.6%. His salary from P&O rose to £220,900 last year.

In addition, along with other shareholders, he saw his dividends rise by 31%, giving him a further income of £111,258. On top of that he holds 187,500 option shares which have given him a tax-free capital gain of at least £320,000 since 1985.

His income *increase* in the last year alone is as follows:

Salary increase	£35,030
Dividend increase	£15,427
Tax cut in Budget	£38,000
Total increase	£88,427

His income from P&O alone – before any other income – rose by £1,701 per week or 27%. This figure excludes Option Share profits, and fringe benefits.

Long-term plan to break union

The Dover dispute is only the latest phase of a plan by P&O to break the National Union of Seamen.

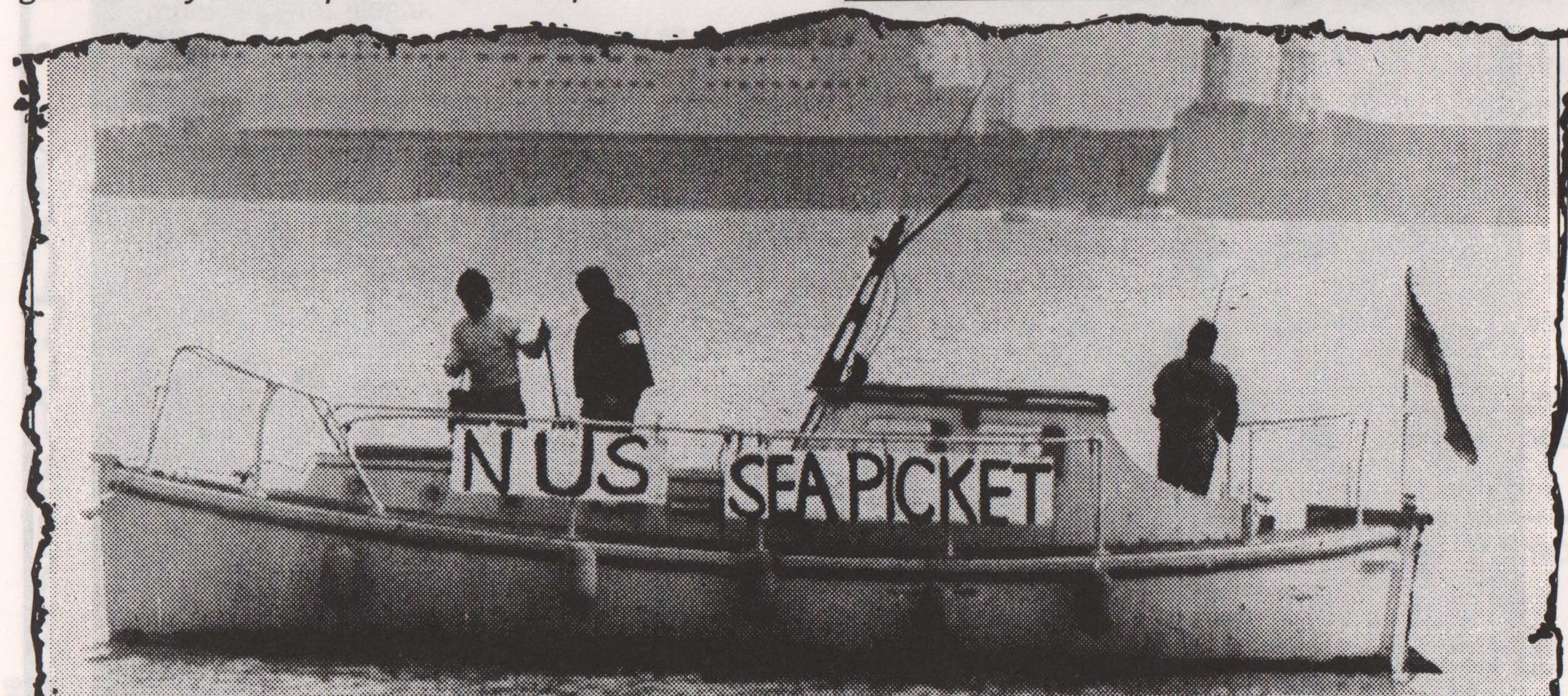
Union membership has plummeted in all companies as ship owners have re-registered ships under flags of convenience in exotic places like the Cayman Islands and Liberia. The ships are then re-crewed with cheaper non-union agency crews.

P&O has led the way in this policy. In 1985 the

company registered nine of its gas tankers under the Bermudan flag.

In the same year, the company tried another wheeze. It tried to sack all its catering staff on the North Atlantic cruise ships and then re-hire them on much lower rates of pay, with the workers making up their wages through tips.

The company claimed that stiff competition forced it to cut costs. But industrial action by NUS members forced the company to back off.



All at sea: a floating picket at Dover during the six-month seamen's dispute which has taken its toll on P & O

Dispute sinks P & O profits

Andrew Cornelius and Simon Beavis

P & O is expected to confirm the six-month long seamen's dispute at Dover has cost the company between £20 million

against pre-tax profits of £101 million at the same stage last year.

The escalating costs of the dispute mean it could take P & O up to five years to claw back the costs it has incurred because of a strike which was triggered by the company's in-

stage, cost the company £25 million. These figures, which were put forward by a group of marine economic consultants commissioned by the union, were considered at least £10 million too high by City analysts at the time.

The NUS now claims the costs of the dispute have risen

companies make almost all their profits for the year.

The unexpected high costs of the dispute mean the company could be hard pushed, under current circumstances, to get its Dover operation into shape to meet the competition of the Channel Tunnel after 1992.

During the dispute the com-

Chapter 8: DISASTERS WAITING TO HAPPEN

The ruthless pursuit of profit whatever the expense in safety is not confined to Cross Channel ferries. In the case of the Cross Channel ferries:

- ★ they have built-in design shortcomings, notably the failure to have watertight bulkheads installed because these would interfere with speed of ferry operations during loading and off-loading;
- ★ Government inspection procedures are hopelessly inadequate, as the Surveyor General of the Department of Transport admitted one year after the Zeebrugge tragedy when he told the *Observer* that his Marine Inspectorate "was not really designed for operating these ferries";
- ★ the ferry companies are hell-bent on cutting operating costs, despite the fact that previous staff cuts on ferries had been identified as a key reason for the high death toll on the *Herald of Free Enterprise*.

Very similar problems existed with the Piper-Alpha oil rig and Kings Cross underground station. And exist with air traffic control, coal mining and major building sites — where future disasters will happen for the very same reasons.

Take the Piper-Alpha oil rig. Its problems parallel those of the *Herald*:

- ★ the design shortcomings on Alpha Piper were so serious that the former chief loss prevention manager for Occidental Oil in the North Sea told the *Observer* (July 10th 1988) that the platform was "disastrously designed and overloaded to the point of collapse. Mr Jack Donaldson told that paper that the rig had "a long history of safety lapses and faced commercial pressure to operate at maximum output". Before the fire, Piper Alpha alone was expected to make £1.7 billion profit by 1998.

'Deficiency' of living quarters above gas chamber

Oil rig chief lays blame on design faults

Peter Hetherington
and Owen Bowcott

DESIGN re-appraisal of some older offshore oil installations was in prospect last night when a sombre meeting between Mrs Thatcher and Dr Ar-Hammar, chairman of Occidental Oil, the operators of the stricken Piper Alpha, began at Occidental's

hospital before his talks with Mrs Thatcher. He was candid about his company's responsibility and about the possible future.

He said that men were left in darkness after the first explosion rocked the platform. "They were groping around the alleys and everything failed... there was such a tremendous explosion everything went out."

Confirming that the disaster followed a leak of gas in the compression module, he said that the cause of the explosion

occurred in an attempt to cap the fire — and possibly make the Piper oilfield fit for production again in the foreseeable future. But with the temporary closure of the 128-mile pipeline from Piper to the Flotta terminal, in the Orkney Islands — six other fields feed into the system — Britain has lost 12 per cent of its North Sea production at a stroke. The pipeline has been closed to avoid oil and gas being driven back to Piper and into the North Sea.

Chelsea Bridge House, Queenstown Road, London SW8 4NN. 01-627 0700

The scandal that links three British disasters

ZEEBRUGGE, King's Cross, Piper Alpha — the names are like a tolling bell. It has been a terrible 16 months. But the three disasters have more in common than their closeness and the horror brought to innocent families. Possibly coincidentally, possibly not, they have taken place in three industries that still escape properly independent scrutiny for safety.

Oil platforms, rail transport and ships are all policed by special inspectorates, responsible to the same Government departments that promote the industry's interests. The Marine Inspectorate and the Railways Inspectorate are both part of the Department of Transport. The safety of oil platforms is patrolled by a branch of the Department of Energy, the Petroleum Engineering Directorate. This situation is fundamentally wrong. It is outrageous that the safety of the men on Piper Alpha — and the tens of thousands of others

leads to less stringent control, it is nothing short of scandalous. Unfortunately, there are grounds for believing that this may be so. On the first anniversary of the Zeebrugge disaster earlier this year, Dr Jim Cowley, then — as Surveyor General at the Department of Transport — in charge of the Marine Inspectorate, admitted to *The Observer* that his system "was not really designed for operating these ferries"; he added that very few notices requiring safety improvements were served on shipping companies.

The King's Cross inquiry, just completed, revealed horrific safety shortcomings on the London Underground. And, despite the claim in Parliament last week by the Energy Secretary, Mr Cecil Parkinson, that his inspectorate is "recognised worldwide as technically one of the most qualified in the world," Whitehall sources privately admitted last week that it was "administratively incompetent."

- ★ the Government inspectorate for the North Sea oil rigs is hopelessly understaffed and weakened. The *Observer*, hardly a trade union mouthpiece wrote that "it is outrageous that the safety of the men on Piper Alpha — and the tens of thousands of others still perched on potentially explosive structures suspended between the sky and the deep cold sea — should be in the hands of the same Ministry that is charged with seeing that North Sea oil is exploited as rapidly and as profitably as possible."

- ★ the oil companies have cut costs in every conceivable manner, notably with excessive use of contractors, an 84 hour week system very similar to that proposed by P&O, and cracking down on union opposition to dangerous practices.

In the Norwegian sector of the North Sea, trade unionists simply can't believe that workers have to strike for better safety conditions. But the refusal to have proper safety committees, to fully recognise trade unions have been key factors in the poor safety standards in the North Sea. Why aren't senior managers held personally responsible?

It is time that trade unions were guaranteed the right to stop dangerous working practices by law. Without trade unions, for example, who takes part in safety committees on board ships? Without trade unions, as strikebreakers on board P&O's ferries are finding, there are no foolproof procedures for reporting dangerous conditions.

Ironically, two of the alternative methods of crossing the Channel, being used to justify staff cuts at P&O, have similar problems. Air traffic controllers are terribly understaffed working unsafe systems, whilst

the Channel Tunnel has been referred to by the Fire Brigades Union as the "longest crematorium in the world".

As George Higgins of the Port Committee put it:

"If multinational companies continue to put profits before safety it can only lead to more catastrophic disasters. After the *Herald*, Kings Cross, and Piper Alpha, surely any fair-minded person can see the justice of our cause."

3 Executives Convicted of Murder For Unsafe Workplace Conditions

By STEVEN GREENHOUSE
Special to The New York Times

CHICAGO, June 14 — In what many lawyers called a landmark decision, three company officials were found guilty of murder today in an employee's death from cyanide poisoning.

In a nonjury trial, Judge Ronald J. P. Banks of Cook County Circuit Court found that the three executives of Film Recovery Systems Inc. were responsible for workplace conditions so unsafe that they led to the poisoning of Stefan Golab, a 59-year-old Polish immigrant. "It's the first case we know of where executives have been found guilty of murder in an industrially related death," said Jay C. Magnuson, one of the state's prosecutors in the case.

Daniel Rodriguez, the plant foreman. They face prison sentences ranging from 20 years to 40 years.

In addition, Film Recovery Systems, a defunct company that was based in Elk Grove Village, a suburb north of Chicago, was convicted of involuntary manslaughter. It faces a fine of up to \$10,000.

Saying he was "very disturbed" by the verdict, Thomas Royce, one of the attorneys for the defendants, said he planned to appeal. The defendants argued that Mr. Golab died of a heart attack.

Mr. Royce said the case was messy.

If it's good enough in the USA...

Government policy on ferry safety

"The Government has policies which are in the best interests of our employees and shareholders."

So said Sir Jeffrey Sterling at the P&O shareholders' meeting in May when questioned about the company's donation of £100,000 to the Tory Party.

Certainly Government policy towards P&O has been remarkably generous.

- ★ P&O has not been prosecuted following the Zeebrugge disaster, despite admitting responsibility;
- ★ The Government has failed to enforce the key recommendation of Justice Sheen at the Court of Inquiry after Zeebrugge — that Roll-on/Roll-off ferries should be fitted with watertight bulkheads, and that ships not meeting 1980 design criteria should be phased out.
- ★ The Department of Trade and Industry are trying to shift responsibility for ship safety

NUMAST bulletin

TO NUMAST MEMBERS P&O EUROPEAN FERRIES DOVER

During the present shortage of certificated Officers available for service on P&O Ferries at Dover, it is vitally important that those certificated Officers who have been ordered by the management to join ships for the purpose of the Department of Transport inspection should inform the Inspector of the temporary nature of their joining.

It is particularly important that such Officers provide that information in writing when they are being counted as being members of the crew of more than one vessel. Those Officers who have already been counted as being on more than one vessel should protest in writing to the management.

Any Officer found to have been counted twice who does not have evidence of his own protest could be found guilty of a number of criminal offences.

Any Officer threatened with dismissal as a result of complying with this advice should immediately inform NUMAST Legal Department giving as much detail as possible.

ERIC NEVIN
General Secretary

from the company to the captain. But it is the company, not the captain who control crew levels, ship design and equipment purchase;

- ★ The Department of Trade and Industry has failed to increase the number of inspectors to ensure that spot-checks are possible on an adequate scale;
- ★ The Ministry of Transport secretly admitted that eight out of ten British cross-channel ferries have failed proposed new international stability and capsizing standards. The new standards are proposed by the International Maritime Organisation. The Government admission came in a private report criticising aspects of the new standards. But as one report said in May 1988:

"Some shipping experts warn that... by faulting the proposed new international regulations, the Government could delay their implementation."

Chapter 9: HOW THE SACKED SEAFARERS FEEL

For eleven months, the sacked seafarers have stood solid despite not receiving any wages or strike pay.

Despite the generosity of tens of thousands of people up and down the country, the promised £1 million in hardship donations is far from being met.

The Port Committee has always been honest with the membership. At the beginning of the dispute, we made clear it could be a very long strike.

Throughout the regular mass meetings, the Port Committee has sought to encourage the membership without sowing illusions that victory was round the corner.

The job has been made harder by the complete disinterest shown by most of the media, unless there's the possibility of violence on the picket line.

Our anger is mixed with determination.

Dick Smith was a bosun on Cross-Channel ferries for over twenty years:

"We are defending what we have represented all our lives. We built up this company - P&O are outsiders. Now they are threatening our com- ▶

◀ munity. After 20 years of loyal service all I get is a P45 through the post."

Felicity used to sell perfume on the *Pride of Calais*:

"I'll not go back. Our lives wouldn't be worth living. It would be like we belonged to P&O body and soul."

At mass meeting after mass meeting, despite the might of the law being thrown at the sacked workforce, we have stood solid. Every time the votes, despite all the difficulties, have been overwhelming or unanimous.

Our husbands and wives have stood loyally by us, despite all the pressures and hardships. Many women, in particular have played a tremendous role in setting up food kitchens and support committees.

But above all, this strike is over principles. We are simply not prepared to hang on to our jobs if it means placing ourselves and passengers at risk.

Women play vital role

Women seafarers and members of the Women's Support Groups have been vital in the dispute. The days when women were expected to take a backseat role in strikes like the P&O one have gone. Whether it's on the picket line, on speaking tours, or in the day to day running of the strike, it has been the role of women which has helped to keep the striking community solid.

Sue Haynes of the Deal Support Group is sure this is so:

"I think we've played a really good and strong part, women are good at organising . . . We've all had to face many changes in ▶

◀ the last six months. Whole lives have been turned upside down. I think it proves the strength of character of women . . . I think if the women hadn't been taking an important role within the support groups, the men wouldn't have stayed out so long. All credit to the wives. When you see some of them who've got young children. We've got one lady who's just had twins for goodness sake and she's got another child who's only three. I mean that's marvellous isn't it . . . it's things like that. When you're on a downer I can look at Maria and think there she is, with three tiny ones. I think it's marvellous."

As Port Committee spokesperson John Woods told a mass meeting on June 17th:

"Please listen to me. I appreciate everything you're doing. It makes me cry. When I stand up and see you, please, no, please listen to me. It is hard to stand up week after week, meeting after meeting and say to you, this is what the outcome is going to be for your faithfulness, your resoluteness, your solidarity and your principles.

"No I can't say that. But please listen, please listen, without each and every one of you people here, without support from all around the country, any one person would be nothing. Each individual member of you is as important as the next one.

"What I will tell you is don't lose bloody heart, you're not forgotten.

"I thought all the other crew would be in the hospital too. As soon as I could, I got up to walk round to find them, and that's when I realised that many had died . . .

"I tried to work out how many of the catering crew I hadn't seen or heard of. I got to over 20 and just couldn't count anymore. The thing is they probably died helping other people."

Gail Cook, NUS member, stewardess on the *Herald of Free Enterprise*, and dismissed by P&O during the current dispute.



Food kitchen

Andrew Ward

