

from: The Right Rev. David Sheppard, Bishop  
of Liverpool; and  
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21st March 1981.

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R3/3

*Dear Prime Minister,*

Some weeks ago we were both approached by the shop stewards of the Tate and Lyle Sugar Refinery in Liverpool and asked for help in trying to avert the then anticipated announcement of its impending closure. Subsequently we were invited by the civic authorities to attend a Town Hall meeting of representatives of the Merseyside community and of all political parties, the Chamber of Commerce, Trade Unions, etc. On that occasion it was decided that the situation was sufficiently grave that a direct approach be made to yourself and we were asked to join a representative delegation for that purpose.

You will know that nearly two weeks ago we were kindly received by the Minister of Agriculture, who listened patiently to the many points laid before him, explained why he felt unable to take any further initiative in the matter himself but undertook to report fully to the Cabinet and yourself. We know that you have also yourself received the local Member, Mr. Bob Parry, M.P. We understand that the Leader of the City Council, Sir Trevor Jones, has again written to you to seek your intervention. Numerous interests have been received by Earl Jellicoe, Chairman of Tate and Lyle. We ourselves accepted his invitation and spent some time with him last Thursday.

In spite of all these approaches which have been directed to your colleagues and yourself, we are confident that you will understand our writing to you personally now, not only because of the gravity of the situation, but because we are convinced that only through your personal intervention can the disastrous consequences of this closure be averted and a way out of the present impasse be found.

We know of the various alternative proposals which have been advanced by the Trade Unions. After all our conversations it is clear that the Minister of Agriculture feels that there can be no further reduction in the quota of beet sugar, and Tate and Lyle see no possibility of continuing their use of the Liverpool refinery unless there can be a possibility of increased export of sugar. Clearly there are many

The Rt. Hon. Mrs Margaret Thatcher, M.P.,  
Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury.

cc Press  
MAFF



difficulties arising from E.E.C. regulations, yet we have been assured that such export would not, as is sometimes suggested, be regarded as an unfriendly act by the A.C.P. countries.

Mr. Peter Walker has said that there is no initiative which he can take. Earl Jellicoe, who clearly shares our distress at the closure of the Liverpool refinery, sees no initiative available to him unless something can be done to open up the prospect of exporting more sugar. The Liverpool refinery has been losing money, the firm has not been investing in the up-dating of the plant, and the request from Liverpool that the closure be delayed for another 18 months to 2 years is regarded by Tate and Lyle as unrealistic in present circumstances.

Yet this Government and its predecessor have generously sustained the Partnership scheme, with which from its earliest days we have both in some measure been associated. We understand that the Urban Development Corporation and the Enterprise Zone - to both of which projects we have given public support - are despite some difficulties near realisation. We know, therefore, that you will share our sense of tragedy that this further and significant closure of the refinery is to produce further redundancies before any alternative employment can be provided through these new measures. (These last two months have produced 7,000 redundancies in Liverpool, whereas the annual average for the last three years has been 9000).

Earl Jellicoe has himself attributed high praise to the refinery work-force which will soon be redundant. It is understood that the closure will also produce other related redundancies, including some in the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. The area from which the labour force is drawn is highly concentrated. The City Planning Officer's estimate of unemployment in that district of Liverpool (Vauxhall) was even last November 46%. In some of our Inner City parishes scarcely a family will be unaffected. Because of the family employment tradition of this century-old firm, the threat of closure is most damaging to morale and accentuates the general impression that each closure by a multi-national prepares the way for the next closure.

We fully recognise the help which H.M. Government is bringing to this area through various schemes. The greatest service would in our opinion be the boost to morale if some step could be taken to make it possible for the Tate and Lyle closure decision to be reversed. We believe that it may well lie only in your power that such an initiative could be taken.

We are sorry to inflict this long letter upon you but the matter is urgent. We feel that we would be failing in our duty to the community and indeed to the Government were we not to make this direct appeal to you. We ask your kind and patient further consideration of this matter.

*Yours very sincerely*

*+ David Liverpool*

(Right Rev. David Sheppard)  
Bishop of Liverpool.

*+ Paul Narah*

(Most Rev. Derek Worlock)  
Archbishop of Liverpool.