



GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR

Ministry for Trade, Industry, Employment and Communications
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PRESS RELEASE

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CAMMELL LAIRD DISPUTE: "GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO SISARELLO STATEMENTS"

The Government cannot understand why Mr Charles Sisarello should be focusing the Cammell Laird union recognition dispute on the Government. The Government is not a party to the dispute, and it is not the function of the Government to operate as if it were the District Officer of a Trade Union. Despite this, the Government responded positively to Mr Sisarello's plea to the Government for help.

At Mr Sisarello's request Employment Minister Joe Holliday intervened with Cammell Laird senior management to bring the two sides together. Several meetings were held between the Minister and Mr Sisarello and the Minister and Cammell Laird Management. Throughout this process the Minister cautioned Mr Sisarello that making unnecessarily provocative public statements would hamper the Government's mediation efforts.

On Friday 9th March Mr Sisarello requested a meeting with Mr Holliday for himself and his shop stewards. This was agreed and fixed for Monday 19 March. Mr Holliday also scheduled a meeting with Cammell Laird on Friday 16th March. Despite this, on Wednesday 14th March Mr Sisarello published a press advertisement convening a meeting of all shop stewards for Thursday 15th (a day before Minister Holliday's scheduled meeting with Cammell Laird, and shortly before the union's meeting with Mr Holliday that Monday). In response to Mr Holliday's expression of surprise Mr Sisarello admitted that such a meeting of all shop stewards would not be helpful but that he could not now stop it. He nevertheless agreed that he would make no public statement following the meeting of all shop stewards.

Despite that undertaking, on the very evening of that meeting between the shop stewards Mr Sisarello was interviewed on GBC and issued threats of escalating industrial action if the meeting with Minister Holliday (the following Monday) did not produce results.

This totally unacceptable way of doing business by Mr Sisarello has completely undermined the Government's mediation efforts as has his totally unnecessary and counter productive public threat to bring the shipyard "to its knees".

Bringing the Cammell Laird shipyard “to its knees” hardly seems in the best interests of its employees who still vividly remember the effect on their livelihoods of the last (successful) attempt to bring the Kvaerner Shipyard to its knees.”

In relation to the substance of the dispute itself, the Government believes that Mr Sisarello is manipulating and distorting the issues. Individual workers clearly have a right to join and be members of a Trade Union. But that is not disputed here. Cammell Laird employees are free to be members of any trade union of their choice. A wholly different issue (which Mr Sisarello is mixing up) is whether a particular Trade Union has a right to demand to be recognised by a particular company as having collective negotiating and representational rights for the employees of that Company. There is no such human or legal right. This is an invention of Mr Sisarello.

The Government’s view is that employers should recognise the role of trade unions when a majority of its employees clearly wish to be represented by that union. This does not appear to be the case at Cammell Laird where a sizeable part of the workforce appears to have chosen the equally legitimate method of forming their own workers association.

The Government is convening a meeting with the Gibraltar Trades Council to propose to them that the Government and the Gibraltar Trades Council jointly organise a secret ballot among Cammell Laird employees to establish whether a majority wishes to be represented by a trade union, if so, which trade union, or whether they prefer to be represented by their own staff association, and also to consider any other issues affecting Cammell Laird staff.

Commenting, Minister Holliday said: -

“When Government’s mediation effort (at the Unions’ request) were going well, apparently I was not an anti-worker ex Chamber of Commerce President. The fact that my mediation efforts were sabotaged at the very last minute by Mr Sisarello’s own irresponsible actions and breach of undertaking is a reflection on him and not on me. I am proud to have been part of a Government that since 1996 has demonstrated its commitment to the defence and promotion of worker rights and interests and improved pay and conditions, to an extent greater than any Government before.”