

SHORTS

Sir Philip Foreman CBE DL
Chairman & Managing Director

EMBARGO:

NOT TO BE QUOTED OR
PUBLISHED BEFORE 14.00HRS
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28 August 1986

TO: All Employees

Last Friday I issued a letter asking employees to remove from the factory the flags, bunting, political posters and emblems which have been increasingly in evidence there.

The response has been mixed. In some areas, there has been an improvement but in other areas even more flags and bunting have been put up in clear defiance of last week's letter. Additionally, about 1,000 of the workforce walked out on unofficial strike on Wednesday afternoon.

This creates a very serious situation for Shorts and for the whole community. Shorts employs 7,000 people and at least that many people again outside the Company are indirectly dependent on its existence and prosperity. If we cannot quickly resolve the flags and bunting issue, and if we have a series of stoppages because of it, it is inevitable that customer confidence will be lost and some sections of the business may eventually be closed down. This will have serious consequences for all of us because of the consequent loss of jobs both inside and outside the Company.

Because we are clearly at a critical time I think it is important to make the Company's position clear.

- The flags and bunting must be removed

I would appeal once again for all flags, bunting, political posters, emblems etc to be removed voluntarily from the workplace, in accordance with Company rules. Contrary to rumour, we are not asking for photographs of the Royal Family or Earl Haig poppies to be removed provided they are displayed in a sensible manner as they have been previously.

I should also emphasise that whilst the law gives everyone the right to fly the Union Flag on his own home if he wishes, what people can do at work is legally subject to the rules of their employers. Shorts' Company rules are that the unauthorised display of flags, bunting, posters, etc is not permitted.



It is Shorts' Decision

The directive to remove flags and bunting from the workplace is a Shorts' decision taken solely for business, not political, reasons.

There has been no discussion on this matter with the Northern Ireland Office or with the Fair Employment Agency, and no financial or other pressures have been applied to us by Government.

Our policy is Equal Opportunity

The stories which have been spread about this week about reverse discrimination by Shorts in favour of Roman Catholics are completely untrue. Our policy is to give equal opportunity to everyone, regardless of their religion or political beliefs and we will continue to select people entirely on their qualifications and on their competence to do the job.

There is no disrespect to the Union Flag

It has been alleged that Shorts' policy is directed at the Union Flag. That is utterly untrue. We are a British company owned by the British Government, the British Government is the Company's largest customer and we are proud to be British.

Like most major companies, we often fly the national flag on our headquarters building on national occasions. So that there is no misunderstanding on this issue, the Union Flag will henceforth be flown every day on our headquarters.

The Real Issues

The real issues for Shorts today are these

- (1) We have to obtain £1 million of orders every single working day to provide continuing employment for our 7,000 employees.
- (2) We have to recognise that how our customers and business partners see us is of prime importance in obtaining those orders.
- (3) We must have an atmosphere within the workplace where all employees feel comfortable and free from intimidation of any kind.

- (4) We cannot run an aerospace company efficiently if parts of the workplace are bedecked with flags and bunting. Furthermore, our customers and competitors will consider us to be utterly unprofessional if we permit the present situation to continue.

We have an aerospace company second to none, of which we can all be justly proud and I appeal to everyone to consider very carefully the consequences which would flow from any disruption of our operations. I would also ask for your support in helping us to run the factory in a professional way by removing all flags and bunting and accepting that the permanent flying of the Union Flag over the main building adequately demonstrates the Company's respect for the national flag.

We do not want to see the factory closed, and we will take any reasonable steps to address the legitimate concerns of all of our employees. However, when it comes to the basic questions as to what sort of factory we have, and who decides how it is to be run, the Company Board and Management cannot compromise and we must insist that the Company's rules are observed.

R. J. Inman