

Authority of Government Policy Group

Minutes of the meeting held in Lord Carrington's room at the House of Lords on Wednesday, 22nd October 1975.

Present: Lord Carrington (in the Chair)
 Lord Jellicoe, Mr. Ian Gilmour,
 Hon. George Younger, Mr. David Hardy,
 Hon. William Waldegrave, Mr. Jonathan Sumption,
 and Mr. Nigel Forman (Secretary)

1. Preparation for defence of Government policy

Mr. Waldegrave introduced his paper on this subject by saying that it would be most useful to discuss the ideas in section (1) on continuing "peace-time" preparation. Above all, there was a need for a senior figure to be given responsibility for it. In order to keep a minimum service going indefinitely, it would be necessary to diversify sources of electricity supply and preserve the available coal only for essential purposes.

Mr. Younger said he supported Mr. Waldegrave's approach and favoured the designation of a senior Minister to take charge of the preparations.

Mr. Gilmour said that the real problem was to avoid escalation of the dispute and the best hope was to avoid serious disputes in the first place.

It was generally agreed that the Government of the day needed to be able to show convincingly that it had public opinion on its side and that the public for its part needed to have confidence in the Government's ability to cope with the crisis.

Lord Carrington thought that there might be advantages in saying in our report that the Government cannot win a miners' strike, but it can make sure that everyone else suffers from it. In that respect nothing had changed since the winter of 1974.

Lord Jellicoe agreed, but added that there could be a period of time in the future after about 1980 when the country would be much less vulnerable to a miners' strike than now, because of North Sea oil, dual firing, nuclear developments, etc.

There was some discussion of the possibilities in the electricity supply industry. Mr. Younger underlined the need to secure the key switch-gear staff. Lord Jellicoe

/doubted

doubted whether they were really replaceable by people from private industry as Mr. Waldegrave suggested. Mr. Hardy spoke of the need for better leadership in the Generating Boards.

Lord Carrington summed up this part of the discussion by saying that while it was obviously necessary to make preparations for a crisis situation, it was equally necessary to acknowledge that if you could not win, then you should not try.

For key posts in the electricity supply industry, it was generally agreed that security screening, coupled with special conditions of service, would be worthwhile. This might prevent Communists, like John Lyons - General Secretary of the Power Engineers - from getting into such key positions.

It was also agreed that private industry should be offered Government incentives to install their own stand-by generation systems, as dairy farms, cold storage plants and hospitals had already done.

As regards special training for the army, it was generally agreed that teaching the army to drive articulated lorries was the best and least provocative preparatory move. Mr. Gilmour pointed out that the introduction of troops had been very effective during the Glasgow firemen and garbage strikes.

2. Pre-conflict preparation

On the need to prepare and rally public opinion, Mr. Hardy felt that the nationalised industries themselves should be encouraged to do more to explain clearly their offers on wage rates etc.

Lord Carrington said that Governments did not make sufficient use of the material which was already available with chapter and verse on Communists and other subversives. He recalled Mr. Wilson's effective reference to "a tightly knit group of politically motivated men" in the 1966 seamen's strike. It was generally agreed that more use should be made of such information, not just when strikes were on.

3. Organisation of public activity during the strike

Mr. Waldegrave pointed to the impact of the pro-Government Gaullist demonstration in May 1968 and he wondered whether Central Office would be capable of organising something similar in crisis circumstances.

/Mr. Younger

Mr. Younger suggested the need for someone who could organise volunteer activity in a crisis. Lord Jellicoe observed that volunteers could be very useful in a hospital strike and that there was a case for undertaking a continuing study of the role of volunteers in a crisis situation.

Mr. Younger said that if Government could secure the electricity supply, then it was 75 per cent of the way towards solving the problem.

Mr. Waldegrave suggested that in any and every plan for new plant, equipment or administrative procedures, planners should consider vulnerability to strike action as one of their criteria.

Lord Jellicoe stressed the importance of considering how broadcasting was to be maintained in a crisis.

4. Next meeting

This was set for Wednesday, 11th November at 6.15 p.m. in Lord Carrington's room at the House of Lords. It was agreed that Mr. Younger would invite the former Chairman of the South Scotland Electricity Board, Mr. Lewis Allan, to talk to the group on that occasion.