

SECRET AND PERSONAL

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Note for the record: Enduring a coal strike

Sir Robert Armstrong and Mr. Gregson came to brief the Prime Minister today for the meeting on Tuesday on enduring a coal strike.

Mr. Gregson said that the current overtime ban would have very little effect on endurance this winter. Power stations already had more coal than they were supposed to be able to stockpile, and the ban would cut deliveries by only 10%. Nor would it affect next year, as any shortfall in deliveries could be made up during the course of next summer. It was more likely that the NUM were hoping that miners would tire of the ban by Christmas, and would seek a ballot on what to do next; and that this would create an atmosphere more favourable to a strike ballot being carried.

At his meeting with the NUM last Wednesday, Mr. MacGregor had made it clear that the 5.2% offer was a final one, but there did not at present appear to be a strong groundswell of opinion against the pay offer.

Mr. Gregson thought that a strike on closures was unlikely this winter. For the time being it was possible to achieve the required redundancies by voluntary means; by the middle of next year when most of the older miners had gone, compulsory redundancies would be necessary. Furthermore, increasing closures would mean moving further and further away from the concept of exhaustion.

On the measures for increasing endurance, the Prime Minister noted that dual firing was very expensive and gave no protection during the next two years when the risk was greatest. Indeed, the need to take stations out of service while they were being converted reduced endurance. The main benefit of high stocks was the

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deterrent which might not be greatly increased by an extra two or three weeks. The key to success was to ensure that stocks were used to the full, and that the miners did not pressurise the power workers. The Prime Minister noted that the coming on stream of the AGRs would automatically increase endurance over the next year or so. It was, however, worth considering whether some land could be bought or leased by the CEGB as increased power stations stocks could be presented as advantageous to the NCB.

It was agreed that at the meeting Mr. Walker should be invited to give only the barest background on closures, merely indicating that there was a real risk of a strike during the next two years.

31 October, 1983.

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