

SUBJECT

23

C. MASTER SET, SECRET

NOTE FOR THE RECORD - NOT FOR CIRCULATION

COALMINING DISPUTE

The Prime Minister held a meeting today with the Secretary of State for Energy and Mr. MacGregor, Chairman of the National Coal Board.

Mr. MacGregor said he had applied for and won an injunction in the High Court against the Executive of the Yorkshire Mineworkers' Union to restrain the use of flying pickets. His aim was that if pickets were not withdrawn the Yorkshire Mineworkers' Union would find itself in contempt of Court and the funds which were being used to finance the expenses and transportation of pickets would be sequestrated. While he had taken action under the civil law he was concerned that the criminal law was not being upheld. It appeared that no arrests had been made and that militants were not only preventing miners who wanted to work from doing so, but were preventing ballots from taking place. The Lancashire area had been forced to postpone the ballot due today.

The Secretary of State for Energy said that Police were interpreting their role as ensuring that anyone who expressed a wish to go to work would be enabled to do so. In practice, however, this was insufficient to ensure that pits were kept working as many miners were, understandably, reluctant to expose themselves to the hostility of picket lines. On Monday there were 71 pits where miners were not working and 93 where miners wished to work. During the course of Monday 10 of these were stopped from working and there were now 133 pits which were closed.

He was concerned that failure to uphold the law would rebound on the Government and call into question its commitment to the rule of law and its employment legislation. The Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire areas were due to vote on Thursday but there was a danger that the vote would be /frustrated.



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- 2 -

frustrated. Even where a vote took place it was likely that miners who opposed the strike would be frightened into staying at home. He was also worried that the Executive of the Yorkshire Mineworkers' Union would publicly disavow any responsibility for organising flying pickets while continuing to do so behind the scenes.

The Prime Minister said she was deeply disturbed at these reports. The events at Saltley cokeworks were being repeated. It was vital that criminal law on picketing be upheld. Helping those who volunteered to go to work was not sufficient; intimidation had to be ended and people had to be free to go about their business without fear. It was essential to stiffen the resolve of Chief Constables to ensure that they fulfilled their duty to uphold the law. The Police were now well paid and well equipped and individual forces had good arrangements for mutual support.

Mr. MacGregor said he would investigate the possibility of a postal ballot organised by the NCB and carried out under the auspices of the Election Reform Society. This technique had been successfully implemented at British Leyland and BSC.

The meeting ended at this point and discussion was continued in a wider group of Ministers which is recorded separately.

AT

ANDREW TURNBULL

14 March 1984