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PRIME MINISTER

28

REPORT ON COAL DISPUTE(i) Picketing

Following the vote by Nottinghamshire miners at the weekend in favour of a return to work, the police mounted a major operation on Monday morning. 7,200 men were available (though not all were deployed). Out of 174 pits, 44, mainly in Notts, Staffs, Warwick and Leicestershire, were working compared with 11 on Friday. No pits were closed by an excessive number of pickets, though there may have been one or two pits in the "yes" areas where insufficient men turned up. The Executive of the Derbyshire miners "re-interpreted" what was a very narrow margin in favour of a return to work and declared it as a vote against. Their pits are now closed. There is no working in Scotland, Wales, Yorkshire or Kent. No incidents, apart from a minor scuffle outside the Yorkshire NUM headquarters were reported. On Tuesday, 42 pits were working and picketing was again very light.

* Later reports suggest 38

The police have been extremely successful in intercepting and turning back pickets. Kent miners, who were stopped at the Dartford Tunnel, sought an injunction in the High Court, but the case was dismissed this afternoon.

(ii) NCB Civil Action

With almost everyone willing to work being able to do so, NCB decided to suspend its action to seek a fine and sequestration from the Yorkshire Executive. The case has been adjourned and NCB have to give two days' notice to reactivate it. Mr. Scargill has claimed this as a climb down, but he is probably disappointed that an issue which could have united

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miners in favour of a strike has been snatched from him. It seems clear that Yorkshire miners were preparing for a major showdown at their headquarters should bailiffs have arrived.

(iii) National Ballot

Mr. Scargill's tactics seem to be to avoid a meeting of the Executive, as there might now be a majority in favour of a national ballot. He may be able to hold off such a meeting for some time, hoping that in the meanwhile an issue to unify miners will turn up, e.g. sequestration, a violent clash with police or a slip up in Government handling which has so far been very measured. The Department of Energy advise that a ballot held now would be a close-run thing. The earliest a ballot could take place would be Thursday week, with the result the following weekend.

(iv) Endurance

MISC 101 decided against any action on oil-burn ahead of a ballot, as this would be regarded as provocative, but they felt that this issue might need to be addressed before too long. The Department of Energy are producing an assessment of how much coal being mined in the pits that are open is getting through to power stations.

(v) Cost of Policing

Under existing rules, a police force requesting mutual aid under S.14 of the Police Act 1964 is charged for the full cost of the men by the parent force, not just the additional costs from

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overtime, transport, etc. (This may seem harsh, but it has the benefit that it maximises the incentive to cooperate and minimises haggling over conditions). The exercise is costing about £½ million a day. Half of the cost is borne by the Government through Exchequer grant and the rest falls on the police authority, and thence by precept on to the counties. In the absence of action by the Government, counties such as Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire could find themselves paying not only extra costs but incurring hold-back, thereby multiplying the cost to ratepayers. Ministers agreed that the counties were entitled to some relief from this. They felt the right response was not a specific grant, as was done in the case of Greenham Common, as this would strengthen an already dangerous precedent. They agreed to allow a disregard so that the additional expenditure incurred under the mutual support arrangements would not incur hold-back. The Notts. Council have been informed of this, though the details are still being worked out.

(vi) Presentation

The Government has been successful in presenting anti-picketing measures as police action to maintain law and order. The appearance of Mr. David Hall of the National Recording Centre on television discussing the police organisation has reinforced this. The Home Secretary has been able to stay in the background. On the dispute itself, Ministers have been able to maintain a low profile and the facts of the case have been getting across successfully to the press.

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-4-

(vii) Further Action

There are opportunities to discuss the dispute at Cabinet and, if necessary, first thing on Friday morning.

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