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PRIME MINISTER

Coal Mining Dispute

Mr. Walker phoned this morning to report on his discussion yesterday evening with Mr. MacGregor. The latter is in good heart and considers that there is an enormous turmoil within the NUM. As a result of contacts that have been made with leaders of the union, Mr. MacGregor believes that a majority of the executive would now vote against strike action. Strong pressure is growing for a meeting of the executive next week and the majority in favour of this are expected to band together shortly to state publicly that they want such a meeting urgently. They may even go so far as to indicate that there is already a majority against the strike.

The information from the management is that the majority of miners will this weekend be without pay for the first time. This is expected to increase hostility to the strike and the way it has been brought about.

The NCB's immediate objective is to keep the 38 or so pits now working open on Monday and Tuesday. They will be briefing the media over the weekend not just on the number of pits working but on the number of pits that would work if they were not picketed out. This would indicate that a majority of pits would be working.

NCB will be reconsidering its tactics on Monday and Tuesday and it has not ruled out a return to the court, but if by Wednesday the moderate group on the executive was prevailing, NCB would stay its hand.

AT

ANDREW TURNBULL

23 March, 1984

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