

CONFIDENTIAL

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PRIME MINISTER

COAL: SITUATION REPORT

The number of pits working normally today remains at 38, with a few more in partial production. Picketing at mines has been light except for Bolsover, and while 20 power stations have been picketed, there has been no serious interference to deliveries. Thus the situation on the ground is adequate and the immediate objective is to get as many men and pits back to work on Monday.

On the further industrial action by other unions, the position varies:

- the ASLEF Executive has now met and endorsed the blacking of coal movements;
- both the NUS and T&G say their officers have an open mandate and do not need an Executive meeting before instructing members to begin blacking;
- the NUR Executive meets on Monday;
- the ISTC meets on Wednesday.

The Department of Energy were surprised at the outcome of yesterday's meeting which went further than expected, and they feel it is a development to be taken seriously. Similar action did take place in 1972 and 1974. There is some doubt as to whether blacking of coal movements by sea and rail unions is secondary action of a kind which involves loss of immunities. This hinges on whether the contracts to move coal are by a first supplier. It is possible that, under the 1980 Employment Act, a union not involved in the dispute can still enjoy immunity.

A coke ship is due to arrive at Redcar on Sunday. If it is not unloaded, and this will be the first major test of the new concerted policy, the plant may need to close on Tuesday.

/ Mr. Walker

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Mr. Walker has commented that he hopes the Chairman of BR will indeed act with a light touch in dealing with refusals by train drivers. He feels it would be foolish to act too harshly against some drivers if it were the case that coal was still moving in significant quantities elsewhere. I have asked his Office to ensure that the Chairmen of British Rail and NCB keep in close contact.

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30 March 1984