

**SECRET**

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MISC 101(84) 11th Meeting

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CABINET

MINISTERIAL GROUP ON COAL

MINUTES of a Meeting held at  
10 Downing Street on  
MONDAY 16 APRIL 1984 at 3.30 pm

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP  
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP  
Secretary of State for the  
Home Department

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP  
Attorney General

Mr Norman Lamont MP  
Minister of State, Department of  
Trade and Industry

Mr John Gummer MP  
Minister of State, Department of  
of Employment

Mr Giles Shaw MP  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of  
State, Department of Energy

Lord Trefgarne  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary  
of State for the Armed Forces  
Ministry of Defence

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong  
Mr P L Gregson  
Brigadier J A J Budd

SUBJECT

INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

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## INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

The Group considered a number of oral reports.

THE PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY, said that 45 collieries had been in full production that day (one more than on the previous Friday morning and three more than on the previous Friday afternoon); 6 more were producing some coal and some men were at work at 3 others; 121 pits were idle. In spite of a number of rallies during the preceding weekend more miners had reported for work than on the previous Monday morning, particularly in Lancashire and the South Midlands, although the prospect of qualifying for the Easter holiday pay might have influenced some men. Picketing had resumed that morning and there had been more than 100 pickets at 6 pits. No picketing had been reported at power stations.

It seemed likely that fewer coal trains would run that day - British Rail (BR) estimated just over 40. Non co-operation by members of two railway unions had been responsible for a reduction of about one third in the total amount of coal now being moved by train by comparison with the early days of the strike; during the previous week some 485000 tonnes of coal had been moved by road and rail. Oil burn had now reached 75 per cent of maximum and should reach maximum by the end of the current week. It was not yet clear exactly how matters would develop at the Special Delegate Conference (SDC) of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) on 19 April. It was possible that moderates would challenge the constitutional propriety of any attempt to change the rules concerning the majority required for a successful national strike ballot from 55 to 50 per cent. Any vote on such a motion at the SDC would be likely to provide the required majority of two thirds in favour of the proposed change but that did not necessarily mean that a national strike ballot would be called soon thereafter. The National Coal Board (NCB) would be maintaining their campaign to ensure that members of the NUM remained fully acquainted with the facts relevant to pit closures etc. It would also be useful for the NCB to point out to their workforce that once they had voted to give their union's National Executive Committee the power to call a strike they would have no right to a vote to end it.



THE HOME SECRETARY said that once again policing arrangements had ensured that all miners who wanted to work had been able to enter their place of work. A disturbing new development over the past few days had been three separate incidents of damage to colliery equipment; at Silverdale colliery repairs to a conveyor belt were likely to cost some £50,000. The incidents were being investigated. An opposition MP had been arrested earlier that day during picket line disturbances at Deerness private colliery in County Durham.

THE MINISTER OF STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY confirmed a previous report that steel production had been reduced by only 10 per cent and the British Steel Corporation (BSC) expected to meet all domestic requirements until at least the end of May. Steel supplies from Europe were likely to be affected by industrial action in a number of EEC countries. Coal and coke supplies were getting through to BSC's major steelworks at Teeside, Port Talbot and Llanwern; 2 trains per day were currently running to Ravenscraig but a further 600 plus tonnes of coal per week would be required if a reduction in production was to be avoided; despite an agreement with the NUM adequate supplies were not yet reaching Scunthorpe, but it was hoped to overcome the problem before a shutdown became necessary. No difficulties over supplies had been reported by privately owned foundries.

THE PRIME MINISTER summing up a short discussion said that the NCB should receive every encouragement in their continuing campaign to ensure that miners were clear about the issues involved; it would be particularly important during the period leading up to any national strike ballot that might be called for miners to know that a 'Yes' vote would effectively hand over absolute control of a strike, including the decision on when to end it, to Mr Scargill and that the high level of coal stocks would mean the certainty of a long strike. Government Ministers and spokesmen must continue to maintain a low profile and care must continue to be exercised to ensure that action by management outside the coal industry did not imperil deliveries of oil or unnecessarily risk widening industrial action being taken by other unions. No additional arrangements should be made at present for more direct approaches to employers in order to improve the quality of information about the effects of the dispute on industry. Some information ought in



any case to be available through the NCB's management concerned with sales and marketing. Any comment made as a result of current press speculation about the possible use of servicemen to move pithead coal stocks should be based on a written answer given on 9 April to a question by Mr Nellist about whether the Ministry of Defence had "made specific preparations for military aid to the civil power in connection with the current dispute in the coal mining industry". The Minister of State for the Armed Forces had replied that no such preparations had been made. The Group would meet again on Wednesday 25 April unless events required a meeting later in the current week, in which case the Home Secretary would take the chair.

The Group -

Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion.

Cabinet Office

17 April 1984