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Reference No: E 053

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PRIME MINISTER

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Coal: MISC 101(84)12th Meeting

The Group has not met since 16 April; and there is likely to be more ground to cover than usual. Nevertheless, you will probably wish to stick to the usual format:

reports;

discussion;

any action.

Endurance and coal supplies

2. There are two factual points which it will be important to establish:

(i) the current level of deliveries to power stations (the figure for the week beginning 9 April was 485,000 tons);

(ii) whether maximum oil burn was achieved as planned at the end of last week.

3. The Group will no doubt also receive the usual reports on secondary action and supplies to steel making and other industries.

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Implications of Special Delegate Conference

4. You will wish to go thoroughly into the implications of the decisions of the Special Delegate Conference (SDC) of the NUM on 19 April.

(i) What is the practical significance of the reduction from 55 to 50 per cent in the majority required for a strike?

(ii) Is there now any better prospect of an early ballot? What are the likely tactics of the moderates within the NUM, and how effective are they likely to be?

(iii) What is the status under the NUM's rules of the strike call in areas which have voted to continue working?

(iv) Are there any indications, particularly in changed attendance figures, of the effects on the rank and file of the SDC's decisions?

NCB tactics

5. During discussions with representatives of two of the three mining unions last week (the NUM did not attend) Mr MacGregor said that the unions could come at any time to discuss the phasing of the planned pit closure programme. The press have represented this as a 'concession'. The Industrial Director of the NCB (Mr Smith) said today in an interview on the 'World at One' that the NCB were prepared to negotiate. Mr Scargill's reaction (on the same programme) was to refuse to discuss closing pits with technically workable reserves.

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6. The Group will wish to consider the following.

(i) What part does the 'concession', if such it is, play in the NCB's tactical planning? Until now the NCB have emphasised that some closures were inevitable, and that any strike to try to stop them would be both futile and very lengthy. Do they perhaps think that this line is regarded as too rigid by moderate opinion among coal miners? On the other side, is there a risk that the 'concession' may encourage the militants by seeming like the first signs of weakening resolve?

(ii) Do the NCB see any need to reconsider their tactics in the light of the decisions of the SDC?

Next Meeting

7. A further meeting of the Group has been provisionally arranged for Monday 30 April. Unless circumstances change, there seems to be no need for an earlier meeting.

M.S.B.

M S BUCKLEY  
Cabinet Office.

24 April 1984