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Reference No: E 055

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PRIME MINISTER

Coal: MISC 101(84)13th Meeting

This week has been relatively quiet. After the usual reports, and subject to any developments over the weekend, you will probably wish to concentrate on three aspects.

(i) The reports commissioned from the Secretary of State for Energy at the Group's previous meeting;

(ii) the reported agreement of the 'Triple Alliance' of coal, steel and railway unions to limit deliveries of coal to Ravenscraig;

(iii) the exchanges between the NCB and the NUM on possible discussions of the phasing of pit closures.

Reports commissioned at last meeting

2. At the Group's last meeting, on 25 April, the Secretary of State for Energy was asked to report on:

(a) whether there were any obstacles to moving coal to the power stations from stock and pits which remained open; and

(b) whether it was possible to increase supplies from open-cast workings.



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Ravenscraig.

3. It is reported that the trade unions concerned have agreed that coal deliveries to Ravenscraig should be limited. Further details are not available (and the steel union representatives refused to comment to the press after the meeting which took the decision); but it seems likely that the NUM want to limit deliveries to the minimum needed to avoid damage to the steel plants without allowing significant production.

4. You will wish to establish the facts, and in particular:

(i) whether similar action is likely at other steel plants;

(ii) what counter-action, if any, can be taken.

Discussions between NCB and NUM

5. As you know, there have been rather obscure exchanges between the NUM and the NCB on possible discussion of the phasing of the pit closure programme, what would be the forum for such discussions, and what the agenda should be. After establishing the latest position, it would be useful to discuss the following.

(i) What are the NCB's tactical objectives, both immediately and for the continuing conduct of the dispute, in proposing discussions? How do they intend to ensure that their willingness to talk is not taken as the first sign of weakness?

(ii) There is a suggestion in today's 'Guardian' and FT that the Government may be invited to join in tripartite talks with the NCB and NUM. Has this any foundation? No



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Next Meeting

6. We have not yet arranged another meeting of the Group: you are, of course, engaged in the Anglo-German Summit on Wednesday. There will be the occasion for a further report on the situation at Thursday's Cabinet meeting. If events should make an earlier meeting necessary, you will presumably wish to ask the Lord President or the Home Secretary to take the chair.

M.S.B.

M S BUCKLEY
Cabinet Office.
27 April 1984