

SECRET

and Personal

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MISC 101(84) 13th Meeting

COPY NO 18

CABINET

MINISTERIAL GROUP ON COAL

MINUTES of a Meeting held at
10 Downing Street on
MONDAY 30 APRIL at 10.00 am

PRESENT

The Rt Hon Margaret Thatcher MP
Prime Minister

The Rt Hon Nigel Lawson MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer

The Rt Hon Peter Walker MP
Secretary of State for Energy

The Rt Hon Norman Tebbit MP
Secretary of State for Trade and
Industry

The Rt Hon Nicholas Ridley MP
Secretary of State for Transport

The Rt Hon Sir Michael Havers QC MP
Attorney General

The Rt Hon Douglas Hurd MP
Minister of State, Home Office

The Rt Hon Lord Gray of Contin
Minister of State, Scottish Office

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

The Rt Hon Alan Clark MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State, Department of
Employment

SECRETARIAT

Sir Robert Armstrong
Mr P L Gregson
Mr J F Stoker

SUBJECT

INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

SECRET

and Personal

SECRET

INDUSTRIAL ACTION IN THE COAL INDUSTRY

The Group received a number of oral reports.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY said that great union pressure continued to be applied both in public and in private to those union members who opposed the strike. A number of arrests on picket lines that morning might possibly reflect efforts by the national leadership of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to raise the temperature of the dispute. Nevertheless, roughly the same number of pits was operating that morning as the previous week. In Nottinghamshire, a NUM branch meeting had been held at each pit at the weekend and a vote to continue to work passed in each case. A rally in favour of returning to work was expected the following day outside the Nottinghamshire Headquarters of the NUM. The Lancashire branch of the NUM was holding a delegate conference that day, the expected outcome of which was a call in favour of the strike in principle, but against tactics aimed at forcing out without a further ballot those who had voted to work.

Limited amounts of imported coal, most of it of special grades, continued to be landed at small ports and some slight reduction during the previous week had been reported in the picketing of open cast sites.

Media coverage of the dispute over the weekend had included an interview with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, some of whose statements had sat ill with the record of previous Labour Governments on closures, pay and investment in the coal industry. "Panorama" that evening would include an item on the dispute including a recorded interview with Mr Scargill and an interview with Mr Ned Smith, Industrial Relations Director of the National Coal Board (NCB). He himself had been invited to appear, but had declined. Reports in the press of "compromise proposals" allegedly in preparation by the NCB for the resolution of the dispute were speculative and unfounded, as were reports that tripartite discussions were pending between the NCB, the NUM and the Government. A procedure for such talks did exist, but he had made it clear well in advance of the beginning of the strike that there was no prospect that he would agree to its use while no agreement existed between the NCB and the NUM to provide a basis for discussion. The NCB were considering, however, whether it might be desirable to make some gesture in favour of those miners who had continued

SECRET

to work, perhaps by paying them the wage increase currently on offer. The Board were aware that any such move would require the most careful handling.

He proposed shortly to provide a paper for discussion in a small sub-Group of means of rebuilding coal stocks for the winter of 1984/85.

THE MINISTER OF STATE, HOME OFFICE said that, in response to the threat by the President of the NUM to increase numbers of pickets in Nottinghamshire, 12 new Police Support Units (about 300 men) had been moved into the county, and more were available if needed. In spite of an increase in the numbers of pickets in Nottinghamshire that morning, and of the arrests which had taken place, those miners who wished to enter their places of work had been able to do so.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT said that the high levels of rail deliveries achieved at the end of the previous week were being maintained, with about 50 coal trains expected to run that day. The scale of the problem with rail movements had been reduced and currently concerned a single railman operating 1 signal box.

THE MINISTER OF STATE, SCOTTISH OFFICE said that 27 pickets were reported that morning at the steel works at Ravenscraig, where striking miners and the rail unions were still permitting only 1 coal train per day. Further discussions were due later that day between representatives of the steel workers and of the NUM and National Union of Railwaymen in an attempt to resolve the continuing inter-union disagreement.

THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY said that, Ravenscraig apart, there were no reports of major difficulties for industry, though he understood that the NCB were themselves beginning to feel some concern over the supplies of industrial coal available.

THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up the discussion, said that the maintenance of the number of pits working in the face of strong pressures to strike was encouraging. There was no sign, however, of an early ballot which might lead to an end to the dispute: indeed, it was possible that an early national ballot might not in current circumstances lead to a return to work. The Government should continue to leave the conduct of the dispute strictly to the NCB, whose

handling of it the Group commended. The Government should continue to make clear, in spite of any speculation to the contrary in the media, that it was united both in its approach to the strike and in its determination to continue to refrain from becoming a party to the dispute whether in tripartite talks or otherwise. In the meantime, it was vital to maximise endurance both by achieving the maximum possible levels of coal deliveries and by exploiting to the full all alternative means of power generation. The Secretary of State for Energy should give a full report to Cabinet on 3 May on these matters, including the current attrition rate and details of any net effect from Bank Holidays. Discussion of possible means of rebuilding stocks for the winter of 1984/85 should take place as proposed by the Secretary of State for Energy in a smaller Group.

The Group -

1. Took note, with approval, of the Prime Minister's summing up of their discussion.
2. Invited the Secretary of State for Energy to report on endurance to Cabinet on 3 May on the basis described by the Prime Minister in her summing up.
3. Invited the Secretary of State for Energy to provide for discussion in a smaller Group a paper on possible means of rebuilding coal stocks for the winter of 1984/85.

Cabinet Office
30 April 1984