

Ref. A084/1313

PRIME MINISTER

Cabinet: Industrial Affairs: Coal

You will wish to ask for reports from:

- FLAGA
- i. the Secretary of State for Energy:
 - on the number of pits and miners working;
 - on power station endurance;
(as requested by you at last Monday's meeting of MISC 101)
 - on the NCB's position about talks with the NUM;
 - ii. from the Home Secretary:
 - on law and order;
 - iii. from the Secretary of State for Transport:
 - on coal movements;
 - iv. from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry:
 - on the effects of the strike on coal burning industry.

Pits and miners working

2. Apart from the dislocation caused by holidays, maintenance and yesterday's rally in Nottinghamshire, the number of pits in full production appears to have stabilised at around 46 with another eight or so partially in operation. The number of pits totally strike bound appears to have remained constant at 121. The Secretary of State for Energy might be asked whether he sees any prospect of a crumbling of support for the strike at any of those pits in the near future.

Power station endurance

3. The Secretary of State for Energy will report to Cabinet the latest on endurance. Assuming continuation of maximum oilburn, but no further coal movements from now on, power station coal stocks are expected to last until early October. Assuming continued deliveries to power stations at current average levels of about 300,000 tonnes a week, power station coal stocks would probably last until well into December.

Talks with NUM

4. It would be useful for the Secretary of State for Energy to give the Cabinet generally a clearer understanding of the NCB's position on talks with the NUM. In the light of what he said at the last meeting of MISC 101 this is presumably that (despite press speculation) the NCB's position has not changed, that the NCB stands ready to continue the discussions on the closure programme following on the meeting which took place on 6 March (from which the NUM walked out to call a strike) and that closure proposals affecting particular pits can be discussed at area level under the existing procedures.

Law and order

5. Efforts to stop miners working by mass picketing are bound to be intensified, particularly in Nottinghamshire. The Home Secretary will no doubt wish to assure the Cabinet that the police have made adequate preparations.

Coal movements

6. After the good experience in the latter part of last week (58 trains on Thursday and 56 on Friday) there has been some reduction in the early part of this week. British Rail attribute this to the accident of which particular railwaymen happened to be rostered for duty. Coal deliveries appear to have settled down on average at close on 500,000 tonnes a week (both to power stations and industrial users and by both rail and road); this is not far short of the amount of coal still being produced.

Effects in industry

7. Mr Scargill has threatened to "tighten the knot" on industrial users. The major evidence of this at present is the continuing argument about whether Ravenscraig should receive one or two train loads a day. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry should be asked about the latest prospects for the British Steel Corporation, and whether he has any evidence of "dispensations" (eg for coke-burning foundries) being withdrawn. The Secretary of State for Energy might also be asked whether the NUM is likely to agree to allow stores of coke to be withdrawn to fulfil the American order just announced.

SECRET



Further meetings

8. A meeting of MISC 101 is planned for next Tuesday, 8 May, at 11.45 am.

RA

ROBERT ARMSTRONG

2 May 1984

CONQUEROR